



2015 State of the City Address

As Prepared for Delivery

Mitchell J. Landrieu, Mayor

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Carver Theater, New Orleans, LA

Thank you Councilmembers, faith leaders and community leaders, the First Lady and all of you for coming.

I love New Orleans with all my heart and all my soul. Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to serve you.

Being your Mayor is the greatest honor of my life. It is a sacred trust. I promise to work hard every day and never take anything for granted.

My main goal at all times – create a city at peace, a city of opportunity and responsibility for all people, a stronger more resilient New Orleans - a city for the ages.

But no one said it was going to be easy.

New Orleans has been through a lot and through it all, I have often thought back to something first said in the 1850s by abolitionist Theodore Parker and then paraphrased by Dr. Martin Luther King and later President Obama. You've heard it before:

The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.

And although “our eyes reach but a little way...” each generation gets a chance, just one chance, to grip that arc for a moment, and to bend it... one way or another. But it does not bend on its own.

This is our moment.

Three years from now, New Orleans will celebrate our 300th anniversary and believe it or not, this August we will mark 10 years since Hurricane Katrina.

When the federal levees broke 10 years ago, we and the world gasped at the possibility that in the blink of an eye New Orleans as we knew it could be gone.

Across the Gulf Coast - 1800 of our brothers and sisters killed, over a million Americans displaced, a million housing units damaged.

Let us never forget all that we lost and the people from all over the world who rushed to our aid.

And ten years later/we've got to tell our incredible story – warts and all.

We shouldn't be surprised that some are going to say that because there is a long way to go that nothing has changed since the water receded.

That of course is a lie, but like all great lies there is a small kernel of truth, and it speaks to a much larger fact about America in general.

We all still have a long way to go.

And for New Orleans, even though it has been 10 years – none of us will ever be the same.

The trauma will never fully heal, but Katrina didn't create all our problems. They have been generations in the making and over the last ten years our progress has been anything but a straight line.

There have been many fits and starts, big sacrifices and incredible successes.

Indeed, when we took office in 2010 we inherited a mess.

Simply put, five years after the storm, we were still struggling to make it.

But then a remarkable thing happened.

The people of New Orleans rose from our knees, defiantly stood up and said: we've been through hell and high water, Katrina, Rita, Ike, Gustav, the BP oil spill, the national recession, all of it, but we won't bow down, don't know how.

We can fix this. We've got to find a way or make one.

And together that is what we have done. It has been nonstop work since we took office five years ago.

Five years ago, we may not have still been underwater, but our people were scattered across the state, region and country. Today we are one of the fastest growing cities in America.

Five years ago, we were divided, fighting with each other, unable to find common ground.

Five years ago, many of our businesses were still had not made it back. In many neighborhoods there was virtually nowhere to shop or eat. Today, our economy is growing, 9,100 jobs in five years, and we are in the midst of a retail and restaurant building boom.

Five years ago, we were like Detroit, on the verge of bankruptcy. Now, we've gone from a massive budget deficit to a surplus.

Five years ago, we were either the number one or number two murder capital in America. In 2014, we hit a 43 year low for murder, even though for us one murder in this city is too many, we have to keep at it.

Five years ago, in New Orleans nearly 10,000 people were homeless. Now, we are at just over 1,700 and have also become the first city in America to essentially end veteran homelessness.

Five years ago, our school system was still struggling to stand back up. Now, over 90% of our kids are in public charter schools and we're America's best example of what works in education.

Before Katrina, the achievement gap between New Orleans and the rest of the state was over 25 points. Now we've nearly closed that wide gap with the state.

Before Katrina, the graduation rate was just over 50 percent. Now our young citizens are graduating 73% of the time and overall, we are improving faster here than nearly anywhere else in America.

This is the most important development since Katrina because the pathway to prosperity goes through the school house doors and the future of New Orleans will truly be decided not at City Hall or in downtown corporate board rooms, but in the classrooms of this great city.

Five years ago, our police department teetered on collapse. Now, we are executing the most comprehensive police reform in American history.

For generations, in New Orleans and across the country there have been problems between the police and community. These issues must be dealt with honestly and immediately.

Everyone deserves to be treated fairly with respect – both citizens and police. At all times, we should judge all people by their actions, not by what they look like, not by the color of their skin, or not by the uniform they wear.

We should never forget that every day; the overwhelming majority of our police officers do the right thing, the right way for the right reasons.

And the streets can be a dangerous place. Since 2011, 8 of our officers have been shot in the line of duty.

And let us not only remember NOPD Officer Rodney Thomas, taken from us two years ago, but also Housing Authority of New Orleans Officer James Bennett Jr. who just a few days ago was assassinated as he sat in his patrol car.

The loss and pain is searing. Let us bow our heads in a moment of silence.

<MOMENT OF SILENCE>

We owe law enforcement a deep debt of gratitude for their sacrifice and service. And I believe it is possible to be tough on crime and protect and honor law abiding citizens.

When we get this right, the police and community really become one – an unbreakable united front against criminals who seek to do us harm.

But you know and I know that the police are just one aspect of the criminal justice system that must be reformed.

Before the storm, Orleans Parish Prison could hold 7,500 inmates; it was a national example of mass incarceration at its worst. Because of our work together over at Tulane and Broad over the last five years, we have cut that to about 1,800 inmates in OPP on any given day.

We have to be tough and smart on crime. Lock up the violent bad guys who threaten everybody, but make fewer unnecessary arrests, provide pretrial services, improve case processing times, offer wrap around services to those citizens returning home and above all treat all New Orleans residents with respect. And yesterday we announced New Orleans' selection as one of the jurisdictions the MacArthur Foundation will fund to create a fairer, more effective local criminal justice system.

Five years ago, the recovery was in disarray, stalled. Our neighborhoods were still barely coming back. Streetlights were dark and many of our homes, parks, libraries, community centers were either vacant or gone.

Now, more than \$1 billion in new affordable public housing is available or coming online. There is now a stock of 14,430 affordable rental units for low income families. Take a ride, look around and see the new and growing 'big four' housing developments – Faubourg Lafitte, Marrerro Commons, Columbia Parc and the Harmony Oaks.

And while you are at it, check out the school buildings coming out of the ground in every neighborhood. \$1.8 billion investment in school facilities means modern, safe, healthy places for our kids to learn and grow. Look at Lake Area High School, Arthur Ashe at Bienville in Gentilly, and Wilson in Broadmoor, KIPP Central City Academy at Woodson and Crocker Elementary in Central City, Fannie C Williams and Dolores T. Aaron in the East. And there are many many more yet to come.

In five years, we've torn down or fixed up 13,000 blighted units, faster than anywhere else in America. And we've gone from 34% of our streetlights being out in 2010 to just about 2% today, which is way better than many other cities.

Before, if a child had an ear ache, the whole family was often stuck waiting 13 hours at the Charity Hospital ER just to get it checked out. Now, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure and we've got over 70 primary care neighborhood health clinics serving 59,000 patients across the region every year.

Plus, we're investing another \$1.63 billion for new parks, playgrounds, libraries, streets, and community centers.

Just look around the city at the Rosa Keller Library in Broadmoor, Sam Bonart Park in Lower 9, Wesley Barrow Stadium in Pontchartrain Park, Comiskey Park in Mid City, Algiers Regional Library, Norwood Thompson Playground in Gert Town, Gernon Brown Gym in Lakeview, Lyons Center uptown, and Joe Brown Park in the East just to name a few, and there is more on the way.

Here is the bottom line: we have been through more than most but we survived it because we were together. And while we still have work left to do ours is a story of strength and resilience, and it's a story we must share.

So in order to tell this story as only we can, today we are launching "Katrina 10" to commemorate the lives lost, honor those who helped us survive, acknowledge the work that has been done in our unprecedented recovery, and ensure that we continue to build on our progress.

In the coming months, our K10 commemoration-- "Resilient New Orleans"-- will showcase our growth, recovery, and the long-term resilience plan we have developed over the last ten years. With our partners, we will also lay out the facts of our recovery in areas from economic development to flood protection to housing.

I hope each of you will visit Katrina10.org. Share your story with us on social media, learn about events being held across our city in the lead up to the anniversary, and help us show the country, and world that we are building our future the same way we survived and recovered from Hurricane Katrina: together.

New Orleans - we are getting things done and in many cases we have gone from worst to first. It is a big deal and people are taking notice.

The Wall Street Journal's Market Watch ranked us #1 for most improved city for business in 2011 and Forbes says that New Orleans is America's biggest brain magnet. Bloomberg News wrote that we are a top American 'boomtown', Travel and Leisure Magazine said we were one of the best cities in the world'.

And there are many, many other signs of our progress.

I am also so thankful for the people's recent approval of the library and sheriff swap millages. This support shows that confidence in government is on the rise and that the people believe we can deliver.

Also, after many years, earlier this month we finalized plans for a \$364 million redevelopment of the old World Trade Center site at the base of Canal Street on the river. This is a big deal - 1,600 construction jobs, 450 permanent jobs, and with substantial minority representation we've set aggressive DBE goals. This is proof positive that New Orleans is on a roll.

I want to thank the world class Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts and their local partners for investing in our great city.

If that was not enough, after decades of false starts, our new world class airport is finally on the way, spurring economic growth for the region and creating thousands of new jobs - all in time for our 300th anniversary in 2018.

Your city changing before your eyes.

Here is another great recent sign of progress.

In 2010, everywhere I went people said they just wanted a place in New Orleans to buy their socks and drawers; we call that retail and we got on it with over 80 new retail and restaurant openings in the last 5 years.

Before Katrina it already seemed like every other store front in New Orleans was a restaurant. And no other place in the world would lose 100,000 people, but gain about 600 more restaurants than we had before Katrina. Only in New Orleans.

As a result of all this new business, in 2013 and 2014, New Orleans sales tax revenue grew by over 9% each year. This is unprecedented in our history.

Compare our 9% growth to the 2% sales tax growth at the state level.

And we're double the growth of most other cities. Meanwhile, we expect another 5% jump this year.

But it didn't happen by accident. We launched new engines of growth like the One Stop Shop for permitting and our public-private NOLA Business Alliance for economic development – many of our leaders from NOLA BA are here with us today.

It is all part of our larger approach to government – cut, reorganize and then invest the savings in what matters most so we can grow.

And in short, that is what we have done over the last five years - pull the city out of a fiscal death spiral and simultaneously start a new virtuous cycle where success breeds success - more revenue to invest in top citizen priorities.

And there is no higher priority than making this city safe. So we're growing the police department, and our police officers are getting a 15% pay raise.

Now the NOPD is the highest paid department in the region, if not the whole state, and with the pay bump we will match State Police salaries.

This is good. Higher pay will help keep the officers we have and attract the best and bravest to join the department.

We have already put 5 NOPD recruit classes on the street. One class graduated this year, another is in session now, and another will start in June.

I want to thank all the recruits with us here today. Please stand and be recognized.

So, if you think you've got what it takes - get behind the badge. We need leaders to step up, especially young people from the community.

Despite all of our remarkable progress, we aren't out of the woods yet at City Hall. Not by a long shot. Big time financial threats still hang over us in the form of the sheriff consent decree and the fire fighter pension fund – two long standing issues, many generations in the making, but the bill is coming due right now.

Here is the basic fact of the matter. If a judge orders the city to pay \$26 million to the fire fighters pension fund that money needs to come from somewhere.

Let me tell you where else that money could go. We could fully reconstruct 60 blocks of streets, double NORD's budget and then some, pay for nearly ten years of streetlight repairs, fill 650,000 potholes, or fund over 400 new NOPD recruits.

This is the broader point, the people of New Orleans are counting on us to do it all because we are not just rebuilding the city that we once were, but are creating the city that we always should have been.

That is more than just a slogan – it is the new/New Orleans way.

Our new way means we are reorganizing the way government works, doing the tough things today so the next generation can do better.

But you can also see the new/New Orleans way in our NORD coaches and school teachers – working hard to help our kids.

You can see the new/New Orleans way in remarkable young people like Trombone Shorty, Dee-1, and Brandan ‘BMike’ Odums, the local artist behind ExhibitBe on the West Bank.

You can see it in the Mardi Gras Indians and our bigger than ever second lines.

You can see it in our cooks and chefs as they lead a new American culinary revolution.

The new/New Orleans way is half a million people for Jazz Fest, thousands of sailors, soldiers and Marines for Navy Week, and thousands more visitors for the Zurich Classic - all at the same time.

The new/New Orleans way is 35,000 donors giving over \$4 million to local nonprofits on Give NOLA Day.

That’s what I am talking about!

And there are physical manifestations of the new/New Orleans way - shining symbols of our rebirth and resilience. And there is perhaps no better example than the newly reopened St. Roch Market.

Built in 1875, it was one of our first city markets. I remember going there as a teenager, picking up crawfish for my mama by the back door, near where Mr. and Mrs. Lama used to sit.

It was really nice, but over the years, we had let that building dilapidate.

Katrina finished the job. And there it sat - a sad symbol of faded glory. A once proud neighborhood touchstone shuttered, blighted.

Then we grabbed hold of it and began the multi-million dollar renovation, but it wasn't about putting the St. Roch Market back to what it used to be, it was about making it something even more. Now, the community and economic impact is nothing short of unbelievable.

The market supports nearly 100 new jobs mostly held by people living in the St. Roch neighborhood. It is home to 19 small businesses building generational wealth.

Kristopher Doll is one of these young entrepreneurs.

It is amazing; he has already outgrown his lunch stall at the market. So he is opening up another storefront across the street. This reveals the power of a place like the St. Roch Market that reaches back to our history, but leaps forward too - connecting the future and the past to create something truly special and unique.

But the story of New Orleans entrepreneurs overcoming the odds to succeed is hardly just about the St. Roch Market.

We already mentioned Goldman Sachs' 10,000 Small Business Initiative and many of our small business owners are here.

There is also Burnell Cotlon, another young man with a dream to open his own grocery in Lower Nine. Now he has done it, Galvez Goodies at Caffin and Galvez.

And across town, Idea Village works day in and day out to support thousands of local entrepreneurs like St. Aug grads Jon and Jomarque Renthrope, Paul Taylor, and Adam Dawson, who along with Franklin grad Courtney Wilson-Renthrope run the Cajun Fire Brewing Company, the only African American owned craft brewery in the country.

This team is on the cusp of something big and beat out over a dozen other start-ups to win \$50,000 at last year's Entrepreneur Week's Big Idea contest.

Thank you to all the great entrepreneurs and small businesses with us here today who make this city great. All of you - please stand and be recognized

It is in places like St. Roch Market and in people like our striving entrepreneurs where we can truly see what it means to become a better version of ourselves, what it means to create the New Orleans we always should have been.

But at the very core of this vision is progress and it is change.

Change is hard, but change is going to come.

Think about the criminals who in the dark of night with hammers and paint vandalized the St. Roch Market, trying to destroy what we created. This is what we are up against, those who prefer to curse the darkness rather than light a candle.

But we're not afraid and we're not slowing down. There is a lot to do and the St. Roch Market is just one of 501 projects worth \$1.36 billion spread across the whole city – just one piece of a larger whole.

In fact, I want you to think about the market as a bookend, directly linked to where we sit here today - the historic Carver Theatre, part of a neighborhood, part of a place.

In that 2-mile stretch across St. Roch, the 7th Ward, Iberville, and the Treme, you can see the bigger picture taking shape.

This is the place where President Obama, comes to get gumbo and wisdom from Ms. Leah Chase - right in the same building at Dooky Chase where the Freedom Riders gathered in 1961.

This is the space where Willie Mae's Scotch House makes their world famous fried chicken and where the Mardi Gras Indians gather at the overpass.

Three blocks down the street, the University Medical Center and VA Hospital are nearly done. Billions invested for world-class care and thousands of new jobs for people in the neighborhood - everything from doctors and technicians to nurses and administrators.

But more is needed. A healthy community also has good affordable housing – so just up the street, the Faubourg Lafitte Development is online with more coming at the Iberville.

A healthy community has schools – so now little kids in the neighborhood can walk to either the brand new Craig Elementary or Dibert at Phillis Wheatley and then go to the beautifully redone Colton School on St. Claude Avenue. A little further towards the Industrial Canal, Douglass High School and Drew Elementary are getting fixed up, and in the same neighborhood the historic William Frantz Elementary is open again.

A healthy community has quality public transportation – so soon a new streetcar will run along Rampart Street and St Claude Avenue from Canal to Elysian Fields. Thousands of people will be connected like never before.

A healthy community has great places for our kids to play – Armstrong Park is open and soon the Lafitte Greenway will take you from Congo Square to City Park. There is also the new Stallings St. Claude Center which will open soon. And tomorrow at 10AM we cut the ribbon on the new \$20.5 million Sanchez Center in the historic Lower 9th Ward. I hope you all can join me.

So it should be obvious - we are not slowing down, we are speeding up. Our brightest days are ahead of us.

And we remain committed to the principle that we can only move forward/if we move forward/together as one team, one fight, one voice, one city.

After all, it is all connected and we can't address our problems on a piecemeal basis. Everything must be part of the larger whole.

That is why we started our comprehensive murder reduction strategy NOLA FOR LIFE/which connects to the Welcome Table for racial reconciliation which/connects to our economic opportunity strategy.

We want to get to the root of the problem, and lord knows our problems go deep. 52% of African American men in New Orleans are not working. Thousands don't have the skills and education to get a good job. And we have employers who are looking for skilled workers.

So the overall goal is to design programs that can create a pathway to prosperity. That way anyone who works hard and takes responsibility can get a good job which supports a family and creates generational wealth. Then we will stand on the shoulders of those who came before us.

To do it means aligning resources on every level – federal, state, and local government, nonprofits, the private sector, philanthropy and the faith based community.

For example, over the last five years, in partnership with Delgado Community College and Hope Enterprise, Goldman Sachs' 10,000 Small Businesses Initiative has invested \$20 million to help grow and create jobs at 402 local small businesses.

And the Department of Labor is making big time investments along with Wells Fargo, the GE Foundation, the WK Kellogg Foundation, and the Ford Foundation.

At the same time, we're working closely with major employers and anchor institutions like Ochsner, the University Medical Center, the new VA Hospital, the Sewerage and Water Board and Louis Armstrong International Airport.

And we could not do it without our many committed community partners. Many thanks to the Urban League, Café Reconcile, Covenant House, Goodwill Industries, TCA, JOB1 and, of course, STRIVE.

STRIVE is one of our new intensive job readiness programs and is a cornerstone of our efforts to expand the circle of prosperity for all people.

STRIVE doesn't guarantee a job, but it helps anyone who wants a chance at a better life. That means case management and supportive services, resume development, mock interviews and generally a crash course in what it takes to be a professional.

And today I am so happy to have our STRIVE graduates and current enrollees with us today along with many other participants in our economic opportunity strategy. Please stand and be recognized.

STRIVE's goal is simple – recruit, train and connect people to good jobs.

One of these individuals is Adam. He spent time in prison and used to sell drugs.

But after he became a father, things changed for Adam. He got his GED, went to Delgado for a welding certification and now he is interviewing at the Sewerage and Water Board.

This is great news for Adam and great news for the Sewerage and Water Board because by 2018 one out of every three of their employees will be retiring.

As it has been said - the race is not given to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, but to those who endure to the end.

In New Orleans, we should think of that often.

Look at Monique. She spent over a decade in prison and last year applied for a job at City Hall. Before we 'banned the box'/she would have been required to reveal her criminal record on the written application. She likely would have been rejected immediately, no interview, not even a second thought given about who she is or what she could offer.

Instead, because we 'banned the box', she got an interview, and had the chance to explain herself. It turns out; she had a lot to offer. She had expertise with plumbing and while she was interviewing even got a commercial driver's license.

Monique got a second chance and started in December as a senior maintenance worker. She has already been promoted.

Monique please stand and be recognized.

The race is not given to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, but to those who endure to the end.

Look at Brandon. He was 17 years old when he first got arrested. For over 10 years he was in and out of jail. But then he got connected to NOLA FOR LIFE and our service providers.

Now he says the streets seem different. He used to look over his shoulder, but now he comes home from work, no fear in his heart. Through another one of our programs JOB1 he found a job and is taking care of his son.

Brandon please stand and be recognized.

These New Orleanians didn't give up and showed us their big time potential.

We've got unbelievable raw talent in this city – you can see it at STRIVE or in the hundreds of New Orleans high school seniors who recently crowded into Champions Square for our Senior Shout Out Day.

All told, over \$75 million in scholarships for 300 different colleges and universities.

One young man in particular is truly remarkable. Just a couple of years ago Jairron wasn't sure if he was going to pass the 10th grade at Cohen High School, let alone go to college.

His mom and dad had sold drugs and went to prison. He struggled at school, but at some point he made the decision to go in a different direction. As he said earlier this month: "In life you have two choices, to be defeated or to conquer. I choose to conquer." Jairron is graduating from high school tonight and next fall he is going to Morehouse College and he is with us here today.

This is what New Orleans talent looks like and to win, all we've got to do is tap it and connect people to opportunity.

So as we look forward towards 2018 and our 300th anniversary as a city I am optimistic, but we've got to FINISH STRONG.

We have three years to build on the work done to create a city of peace, opportunity and responsibility for all people.

And although we have made a lot of progress towards this aspirational vision, there is big time unfinished business on issues including public safety, economic development, and housing affordability and infrastructure.

So for public safety – we will continue down the road we are on - reform the jail, reform the NOPD, grow the police department, and redouble our efforts to improve the administration of justice.

For economic development – we can't leave anyone behind. We as a city need every ounce of ingenuity, every scrap of hard work, every bit of our talent firing on all cylinders. We have another class of STRIVE in session now and when they graduate we will be working hard to connect them with jobs.

For housing affordability – in part because of key strategic investments, our neighborhoods are coming back strong. In the midst of this great economic boom, we must be ever mindful to ensure that New Orleans remains a city that is welcoming to all.

Diversity is our great strength and our proud neighborhoods should be a rich blend of young and old, culture bearers, police officers, teachers, nurses, workers in the tourism industry and persons with special needs.

So, moving forward, we've got to keep this diversity by ramping up affordable housing production.

The recently passed Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance both encourages and requires affordable housing development in 'hot' neighborhoods and earlier this year we awarded \$5 million in federal funds to leverage another \$124 million for 500 units of mixed income housing.

Furthermore, we also want to help low-income households build assets, like we did for nearly 900 first-time homebuyers who received assistance through our \$52 million Soft Seconds Program.

Through these efforts we will continue to ensure that we make room in all our neighborhoods for all kinds of neighbors.

And just like we've done throughout the last five years, for the next three years every part of our efforts will be aligned with and amplified by partners.

Moving forward, one of our key partnerships is through the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities Initiative, which by 2018 will help New Orleans become a global model for resilience in the 21st century.

Our focus will be in four areas - ensuring opportunity, preparing for climate change, making government smarter, and community awareness.

The point is that just as we build up our levees against a hurricane or change how we live with water, we also must continue to build new solutions to combat other chronic stresses like violence, poverty, and inequality.

New Orleans - that takes us to the other major issue we must tackle in the coming three years – racial reconciliation.

Indeed, when you think about the unrest in Ferguson and Baltimore, or when you think back to what happened in Jena, Louisiana. There is a common thread that runs through all these things - race.

All of us living today inherited this country's difficult history and as Mayor and citizen I feel the burden of the past, and know that the only way we can move forward is if we can acknowledge our nation's original sin and try to make amends.

Because although we recently celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington and we have an African American President, the big message we should hear from the streets of Baltimore and Ferguson is that we are not done; we have more work to do.

A house divided against itself cannot stand, but to heal our divisions we must be able to hear each other, see each other, understand each other and feel each other.

And once we start to listen rather than speak, see rather than look away we will realize a simple truth. We are all the same. We all want the same thing – peace, prosperity and economic opportunity. And for our kids to have a better life than us.

There are many who are cynical and believe we cannot change, that our divisions are somehow part of the natural order of things.

But in New Orleans, we are proving them wrong – as Americans there is nothing we can't do, but only if we make the commitment and stay united as one.

And as is so often the case throughout our history, it is our young people who show the way.

Indeed, as the school year comes to an end, this is a moment of great happiness and reflection. There is so much to celebrate, especially at one of our city's best public high schools Landry-Walker.

From academics and athletics to art and music, Landry – Walker's students are setting the standard for excellence.

Y'all are bearing witness to this fact. What an incredible choir!

It is hard to believe that just a couple years ago there were some who thought that bringing together these two historic schools from different neighborhoods was impossible, wouldn't work and would end in violence. As a matter of fact, the adults went at it to try and stop the whole thing from happening.

But these young people set a great example for all of us. They focused on what really matters - not what you look like or where you came from or where you might have gone to school, but the quality of your character, what you bring to the table and whether you are a team player.

That was how Landry-Walker won a second straight boys basketball state championship.

That is how the Landry-Walker Brass Band won this year's Class Got Brass Competition.

That is how the choir you see today won first place at OrlandoFest at Universal Studios.

It was a relentless focus on results and team work.

If New Orleans wants to keep winning, let's follow the example set by these young people from Landry-Walker.

From many, we must become one.

We are ready. Nearly 10 years after Katrina, we are no longer recovering, no longer rebuilding. Now we are creating.

We've come a long way, have a long way to go and now as we march towards 2018 and our 300th Anniversary as a city we've got to finish strong together.

The world deserves a better New Orleans.

It's time for us to claim it, to own it, to accept the awesome responsibility that history has laid at our doorstep.

We got up off the ground. Rose from our knees and took that step. The first step, the hardest step. Now the path at our backs is long and we are on our way to a stronger more resilient New Orleans.

So New Orleans, be unbowed and unbroken New Orleans. Be proud. Our best days are ahead of us. We just need to keep on going.

May God bless the people of New Orleans.

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