

Mayor Sam Liccardo

Inaugural Address

January 6, 2015

Neighbors and friends, I'm thrilled to be with you this evening. Thank you for your patience with the change of tonight's venue. We'd reached capacity at the California Theater, and we didn't want to turn anyone away, particularly since about half of you are my own family members. I'm grateful that we're all now able to participate in this celebration, here, at this Center for the Performing Arts. Of course, I might have slept better on Election Night if we could have persuaded this many people to actually show up at the polls in November.

In my first days on the job, I've already learned that there are several things that Mayors can't control: the size of venues, Larry Stone's wardrobe, and the weather at the Washington-Dulles airport.

As you know, as a result of bad weather on the East Coast, Norm Mineta's flight to the Bay Area was cancelled, and he can't join us, but we are blessed to be joined tonight by several other past San Jose mayors who have inspired many by their exemplary leadership:

- The inimitable Mayor Tom McEnery, who aroused our passion for a vibrant city,
- Mayor Susan Hammer, who united us, included us, and celebrated our creativity,
- Mayor Ron Gonzales, who emboldened us to invest in our children, our infrastructure, and our future,
- Mayor Chuck Reed, who instilled a vision of an environmentally and fiscally sustainable city, one responsible to its future generations

To each of the Mayors present—and let me add Mayors Ron James and Norm Mineta, who could not join us this evening—we owe you our gratitude for your service. As to each of you, I've also benefitted personally from your advice. For example, just yesterday Tom McEnery told me that if I didn't keep it short tonight, he'd jump on stage to deliver a five-minute rebuttal.

I also want to thank the love of my life, Jessica, and my parents, Sal and Laura, who joined me on stage. I owe them, and all of my many family members here, much for their support, their good humor, and for their patient love.

Here we are, gathered in an auditorium where audiences come to venerate the power of the human voice. It is here that many have been entertained by the voices of legendary crooners like Ray Charles and Bing Crosby, amused by Bob Hope and Dana Carvey, inspired by the cast of *Les Miserables*, or profoundly offended by "The Book of Mormon."

Regardless, voice provides context to our communication. In a world in which billions of conversations are increasingly transmitted by emails, texts, tweets, posts, and—yes, even "emoji," voice carries meaning that is far deeper, far broader, and far more human. Voice

punctuates, enlivens, and inspires. Voice gives us our identity—as individuals, and as a community.

As I take office, I reflect on the voices that I hear from San Jose’s past and present. Typically, an incoming mayor doesn’t inspire confidence in a city by revealing that he hears voices, but they’re there.

I recall particularly the voice of a wonderful leader who just recently passed, former Mayor Janet Gray Hayes. A decade ago, Mayor Hayes offered me the best political advice I’ve ever received. “Sam,” she said, “If you’re going to get into politics, there are two things you’ll need to survive. First, you gotta have a sense of humor, because you’ll go batty without one. And second, you’ll need a large bladder, because those long council meetings can be brutal.”

Of course, we also hear less inspired voices. How often have we heard from pundits who lament San Jose’s purported identity crisis? “What is San Jose’s identity?” they ask.

To this self-flagellation, I invoke the distinctive voice of Opera San Jose’s founder, the incomparable Irene Dalis, who we also lost only a few weeks ago.

A renowned diva in her performing days, Irene didn’t suffer fools, and had little patience for anyone who disparaged her hometown. Scott Herhold recently recounted that when Irene made her debut as a mezzo soprano at New York City’s Metropolitan Opera House in 1957, the announcer asked how she wanted to be introduced to a global broadcast audience who would be hearing her voice for the first time. Irene insisted, “**Well, you’ll have to tell them that I’m from San Jose.**”

Indeed she was—growing up a few houses away from my grandfather’s home, Irene Dalis knew San Jose’s identity well. She knew it, because she shaped it.

Today, we can stop the lamenting. **We’re from San Jose.** Let’s embrace our city’s distinctive identity, one characterized by our diversity, our openness, and our culture of innovation.

We are diverse. Almost 40% of us were born in another country. We were a majority-minority city before California became a majority-minority state, and decades ahead of the nation. Our diversity has become a linchpin to our economic success, in a Valley where one of every two venture-backed technology companies has a foreign-born founder. With bold leadership, we can position San Jose to become a global gateway to the U.S., and an American gateway to the world.

But we’re not simply diverse; we’re accessible. Newcomers do not experience the hierarchical or pretentious social landscape of other cities here. San Jose is open-source—the place where every person can have an impact—indeed, the grandson of a small shopkeeper and a water boiler repairman just took the oath of office to serve you as your mayor. San Jose uniquely provides a path to power for its “firsts”: ushering in our nation’s first female big-city mayor in Janet Gray Hayes, America’s first Asian-American major-city mayor in Norm Mineta, and quite possibly America’s first Hispanic mayor, Ygnacio Archuleta, in 1783. In San Jose, uniquely home-grown

organizations—ranging from Somos Mayfair to CommUniverCity to PACT to Sacred Heart—embolden residents to speak truth to power, and they get results. Anyone with *ganas* -- a desire to make a difference—can do so in San Jose.

And we're innovative. Our dynamic social landscape has become the perfect breeding ground for the world's most innovative community. San Jose routinely produces more U.S. patents—over 5,000 annually—than any other city on the planet. As Connie Martinez eloquently puts it, “let's face it, we're geeks.” San Jose has provided the launching pad for the geekiest and greatest of ideas, from the disk drive to high-efficiency photovoltaics, from commercial radio to e-commerce, from even fruit cocktail to the Eggo waffle. We are instinctively creative, and our creativity manifests itself in every homegrown source of pride: from bicycle art to Bike Party, from San Jose Taiko to the Taco Festival of Innovation.

“We are from San Jose.” Our unique identity has been forged –and we should abide no doubts about who and what we are.

So much for our remarkable past and present. What of our future?

What voices will our progeny hear? What narrative, what song, what story, will we leave our children as our collective legacy?

For a start, let's hear a bit of the vision of my new colleagues--who represent the future leadership of our city. Councilmember Charles “Chappie” Jones committed in his campaign to ensure that “every resident who wants to be involved in our city will have that opportunity.” Councilmember Raul Peralez, who has served our city as a police officer and educator, promised to promote San Jose's, “healthy growth” by “working respectfully together for the collective good.” Councilmember Magdalena Carrasco reminds us of our roots, urging that “San Jose allowed my family to pursue the American Dream. I want to make sure that San Jose continues to offer that opportunity to today's families and beyond.” Finally, Councilmember Tam Nguyen expresses deep concern about San Jose's “poverty and growing inequality,” advocating for a city that is “more accessible to the public.”

Each of these voices provides a hint of what is to come for our city.

But “to whom does the future belong?”

That question was famously posed by renowned playwright and San Jose native Luis Valdez, who has joined us this evening with his wife. “To whom does the future belong?” Valdez asked. His answer: “The future belongs to those who can imagine it.”

“The future belongs to those who can imagine it.”

Friends, this is **our moment** to imagine San Jose's future.

It is in this moment, in the depths of winter, eagerly awaiting a new Spring, when we can dream anew, and stretch our imaginations around a different song, a narrative distinct from that of the familiar, predictable voices around us.

In my first weeks in public office in 2007, I read of a significant milestone for our planet: for the first time in history, more human beings lived in cities than not.

The pace of urbanization is only accelerating. As a result, cities have become the focal point for new thinking about the world's problems, for everything from poverty to crime to climate change.

In the meantime, Congress and state legislatures remain mired in bureaucratic gridlock and partisan bickering. So the torch has passed to urban communities and to creative local leaders to confront the world's great maladies. Across the country, we see cities employing novel approaches to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Portland, boost immigrant-entrepreneurship in Minneapolis, and cut teen dropout rates in Boston.

But we're from San Jose—how will we tackle these challenges? Particularly in this time when San Jose—like so many California cities, bears the burden of billions of dollars of unfunded pension debts, backlogged maintenance, and infrastructure needs—how can San Jose demonstrate its leadership in addressing these challenges in this time of scarcity?

We need to continue Mayor Reed's legacy of fiscal responsibility, to be sure. But we'll also need to think differently about how we govern, and how we serve our residents.

We'll build new partnerships, leveraging the resources and expertise of non-profit organizations and private-sector leaders ready to join us in tackling homelessness or in boosting a 6th grader's reading skills.

We'll engage collaboratively in regional approaches to problem-solving for those issues—like rising housing costs, crime, traffic congestion, and drought—that do not respect city limits.

Above all, however, we will innovate.

In a time of public-sector scarcity, we can only flourish by creating a City Hall as innovative as our extraordinary community. I'm not speaking of innovation in familiar, popularly consumed forms – of ever-larger smartphones or ever-faster data connections. Instead, we will embark on a **wave of civic innovation with a human face**. What do I mean?

- Our state faces chronic droughts. **But we're from San Jose.** We can replenish our underground aquifers with highly purified recycled water, creating a sustainable water supply for generations.
- A growing income gap nationally divides our rich and poor. **But we're from San Jose.** We can help to close the skills gap by transforming every city library computer into a career training center to help job-seekers learn English as a Second Language, or accounting, or coding.
- We face severe shortages in police staffing—and make no mistake, we will compensate our police officers well and fairly for their critically important work, and we will rebuild

America's finest department. **But we're from San Jose**, and we recognize that an effective crime-reduction strategy should also include a summer job for a troubled 17-year-old.

- Our commutes are crippled by traffic. **But we're from San Jose**. We'll show the world how to retrofit an auto-centric city into a city built for people – by creating a world-class transit network, re-designing our streetscapes, and by finishing—once and for all-- BART to San Jose.
- We face a crisis of homelessness. **But we're from San Jose**. We can and we must leverage the Valley's incomparable innovative spirit and resources to end homelessness in our lifetimes.
- Throughout our nation, people vote less, volunteer less, and participate less. **But we're from San Jose**. Though novel forms of civic engagement like participatory budgeting and open data initiatives, we can re-connect our city to city hall. Even if only half of the voters felt they prevailed in the last election, our entire city will participate in San Jose's victories in the decade ahead.

Innovation, of course, doesn't come easy. Innovation takes risk, and risk requires courage. Collectively, we must muster the courage:

- to try what has been untried;
- to open our city's workings to public scrutiny;
- to allow volunteer energy to loosen City Hall's grip on every task;
- to collaborate with resolute adversaries;
- and, above all, to fail, to learn, and to endeavor again.

This, then, is our moment, our courageous moment, to imagine our future. Together, we can chart a new path, and re-imagine our city.

I conclude by extending an invitation to each of you: Join me in re-imagining San Jose. In the weeks ahead, we'll be forming public working groups to shape key initiatives to better support our kids' learning, to broaden economic opportunity, and to improve safety in our neighborhoods. Please join us, and participate in these conversations. We are many voices, but we are one city.

Through our imagining and re-imagining, we can create a bold future for our city, and bequeath a great civic gift to a world whose progress desperately depends upon urban leadership -- our leadership.

And on that global stage, they'll hear our voice—and we'll tell the world that **we're from San Jose**.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless San Jose.