



Mayor Lee Brand's State Of The City 2019

Thank you, everyone! And thanks to Nathan Ahle and the Greater Fresno Area Chamber of Commerce for inviting me back to deliver the State of the City. And to everyone here at the State of the City luncheon and those watching on CMAC including my father-in-law, Curt Anderson - Good Afternoon!

The greatest blessing in my life is being a husband, a father, and a grandfather. And not far behind has been the opportunity to serve you as mayor these past 2 ½ years. I'm fortunate to have found my place and my purpose in the City that I grew up in, and the City that made me who I am today. All things I have done in my life have led me to this moment.

My story mirrors the stories of many of our residents. It started in a small two-bedroom house on McKenzie Street. I grew up poor, struggled to succeed at first, but kept battling and scrapping all the way from the military to the business world to the Mayor's office. Along the way there were many cherished memories over the past 70 years and friendships that last a lifetime.

But when you reach the age of 70, you begin to take stock of where you've been, where you are, and where you want to go in the time you have left. That self-reflection led me to the realization that I would not run for a 2nd term. Rather than spending precious time and energy on the campaign trail, I choose to work on my vision for Fresno forward by continuing to create economic prosperity for our City, improving public safety and the quality of life for all, and ultimately bringing Fresno together.

We've all heard the gossip and I'm here to admit there was a nefarious force working behind the scenes that shaped my decision. This was a strong, commanding

presence who made it clear to me that I had no other choice but to drop out of the mayor's race. It was my wife, Trish.

Standing behind her were her co-conspirators, including Phillip, Suzy, Tommy, Emily, Charity, Kylie, Elsie, Adelyn, and Arista, who all coincidentally have the same last name of Brand. Believe me, you don't know pressure until you've stood in front of my wife when she's holding travel plans.

Trish, thank you for your support, your wisdom, and putting up with me for 40 years. I love you. And I love Fresno. This has been my home for over 60 years and I love all of the people in this great City.

For the remainder of the 18 months I have left in office, I will be focused every day on finishing strong. I will keep the "pedal to the metal" until December 31, 2020. In the days ahead, as we work to make Fresno a better place to live, work and play, let's remember the words of President George Herbert Walker Bush from his first Inaugural Address:

"I take as my guide the hope of a saint: In crucial things, unity, in important things, diversity, in all things, generosity."

Now more than ever, we need a spirit of collaboration that includes understanding and respecting everyone's needs, goals and values. Today we examine the state of our City, celebrate our shared achievements over the past year, and look ahead to the future. I ask you to join me in my vision to finish strong together. Just look how far we've come in just the past year!

Nowhere was collaboration more important - or more successful - than in the process to determine which projects would receive funding from the \$66.5 million Transformative Climate Communities grant. Representatives from Southwest Fresno, Chinatown and Downtown Fresno shared their ideas at dozens of public meetings, creating a historic collaboration between City and citizen.

Its success speaks to the residents who spent countless hours identifying and analyzing projects that will ultimately transform our most vulnerable communities. This TCC grant will lead to triple the investment in economic development, and that will mean more jobs and better services for everyone. It will not only transform communities, it will transform lives and I can't thank our residents enough.

That approach, using unprecedented public feedback through accountability and transparency, has provided us with a template for success that we are using in the

search for Fresno's next police chief. We created a comprehensive citizen-based public outreach campaign because this decision impacts everyone in Fresno, and that means that everyone in Fresno should have a say.

Six public meetings, one in each policing district and one at the Fresno Center, combined with an online survey in English, Spanish and Hmong produced over 2,000 responses describing the qualities, priorities, and issues our residents would like us to consider in our selection. The process is designed to find the best-qualified candidate for the job through a nationwide search, and also to ensure that both community leaders and Fresno residents will have substantial input to help guide our selection.

Whoever steps into that role will have big shoes to fill. Public safety has made tremendous strides in ensuring long-term safety and stability in our neighborhoods.

We purchased the Fire Headquarters at Tulare and H Street in Downtown Fresno in order to make their home permanent - and save money. Our fire department, under the able leadership of Chief Kerri Donis, has performed courageously over the past 12 months, responding to over 45,000 incidents with an improved response time. They always deserve our thanks.

Our police department led by Chief Dyer also continues to shine under increasingly difficult circumstances. Homicides were reduced by 43% in 2018 with significant reductions in violent and property crime. We also broke ground on the long-awaited Southeast District Police Station at Tulare and Argyle to fulfill a promise to a neighborhood that has been waiting too long. And we made a commitment to hire more dispatchers to reduce the response time for 911 callers, which frankly was at dangerous levels and that is totally unacceptable.

Reducing our 911 response times will reduce the workload on our dispatchers, which is why the launch of our Fresno 311 system was so important. It's the universally recognized three-digit non-emergency phone number that's more accessible, transparent, and user-friendly. When cities use a 311 system for non-emergencies and integrate that system with a mobile app where people can report problems without picking up a phone, people quickly take notice.

Fresno residents have embraced innovation like the FresGO mobile app, now with over 25,000 users, making service requests immediately from their smartphones. Technology continues to streamline our departments and make our services more accessible than ever before. Our new online business planning and permit portal has

helped process almost 5,000 approvals, an increase of 25 percent, with an on-time application processing rate of over 90 percent.

We've also created an interactive online tool for our Operation Clean Up schedule that will allow customers to look up the exact day that our trucks will pick up bulky items in front of their home.

And I've saved the best tech news for last. We launched the online Rental Housing Registry after a year of development from scratch by a talented local team. As of today, our Rental Housing Registry has registered over 85,000 units! Our dream of having an accurate, comprehensive registry of Fresno's rental units is now a reality. It's now the gold standard for cities around California that want to safeguard and improve their housing stock to provide decent, safe and sanitary residential rental units for our community.

Whether it's by phone, online or mobile app, we all benefit from increased choices thanks to the transparency and accountability these new systems bring.

There's another success story that flies in the face of the national trend. Public transit ridership in Fresno increased by over 750,000 trips, in large part because of the launch of Bus Rapid Transit in February of 2018. Overall ridership is up 9% from last year, reversing a nine-year declining trend. Few cities can make that claim.

And it wouldn't be a State of the City address without a mention of the continued growth in our downtown. Just look at how far we've come since Fulton Street opened for business! We've seen many new restaurants and businesses with more on the way! Back in March, we had FresYes Fest bringing 18,000 fans to Fulton Street, another 8,000 fans were at Chukchansi Park for the season opener for the Fresno Foxes soccer team, and two sold out shows at the Saroyan Theatre for the popular musical "Wicked". Downtown Fresno has the energy we all hoped for and there is important news coming in the months ahead! Here's a hint - smart parking meters.

But as much as we celebrate what's happening downtown, it's just as important to understand what's happening down the street. Neighborhood revitalization has been a major part of the City's investment in our community for many years now to focus on the southern part of our City. We've increased the number of neighborhoods in our "Restore Fresno" program to 15 with tremendous results, thanks to our Neighborhood Revitalization Team.

Our team used its proactive work in the Leavenworth neighborhood where they discovered the home of Mrs. Cates and her daughter. They found a blue tarp covering its roof to keep the rain out. The team assisted the Cates' family in filling out a HUD application that allowed them to hire contractors, and as a result, they now

have a new carport, a roof that doesn't leak, and a newly painted home. There are other great stories happening in our neighborhoods every day.

My favorite story is what the motel owners along Parkway Drive are doing to change the narrative and the reputation of a part of town that historically has suffered from significant blight, crime, and human trafficking. NRT helped develop a Motel Owners Association comprised of the owners of each property located on Parkway Drive. Since creating this association, owners have invested tens of thousands of dollars in exterior improvements and have been working to establish a new reputation as an attractive, short-stay motel option for tourists. And violent crime is down 25% on Parkway Drive since this work began a few months ago! Let's congratulate the Motel Owners and encourage them to continue their good work!

Part of that success is directly attributed to the "Light Up Fresno" project that is retrofitting Fresno's streetlights with new energy-efficient LED lights. We've already replaced 8,500 of the 36,000 traditional streetlights in Fresno. Thanks to our partnership with PG&E, these new LED bulbs will provide better visibility and increased safety along our streets. Believe me – they're really bright.

For those reasons, and for so many more, I can honestly say this is about the state of the City that we all love: Fresno has momentum! We have momentum in our economy, momentum in our downtown, momentum in our neighborhoods, and most of all, momentum in our attitude. We can say with pride – Fresno is a great city! We have momentum in how we're handling our challenges, too.

Homelessness continues to be a crisis in California, and while Fresno has lower numbers than other big cities, it's still a constant struggle. Last year, we started the process to partner with County officials to form "Street 2 Home Fresno County" that includes local agencies in the Fresno Madera Continuum of Care engaged in providing services for the homeless in our community. Let's all thank our County Supervisors for their commitment to this program!

We have already received \$13 million in State funding and after meeting with the other big city mayors in California earlier this year, the Governor has promised more resources in his budget to help us with this crisis. We are creating small low-barrier shelters strategically located in our community rather than warehousing the poor in one huge shelter with few exits to housing. We are providing proactive resources to prevent homelessness in households on the edge through diversion programs. And we are providing housing with existing landlords offering assistance to reduce their risk in renting to folks fresh off the streets.

Actual projects have started building a path from the streets to shelters to bridge housing to permanent housing. In short, the collaboration with Fresno County, the Continuum of Care, my fellow Mayors, the Governor and many others are all helping folks find their own way home.

I told you last year that I will not be a caretaker Mayor, that I will set the bar high. That hasn't changed. I'm still focused like a laser on job creation and economic development. And you can't deny our success so far. We have seen unprecedented growth during my tenure as Mayor – almost 5,000 new jobs - that has translated to historically low unemployment numbers for Fresno. It's currently 5.3% - a record for April - and during the past year it has been consistently lower than any 12-month period in Fresno's history!

Just last month, I had the honor of standing with the CEO of Ulta Beauty and over 500 employees celebrating their 1-year anniversary in Fresno. When Ulta Beauty got ready to start hiring last spring, I worked with Ulta, Fresno EOC and Fresno EDC to make sure the first 50 people hired came from the welfare to work program.

I want to thank Luis Santana and his staff at Reading and Beyond for their help and their service in identifying those potential employees. One of those employees whose life has been transformed is Rosa Flandez. And her story is very compelling. Let's watch.

Rosa's story is one of hundreds that proves when it comes to adding new jobs, we need to go beyond statistics and look at the human side. These people have names, they have hopes, they have dreams, they have families that depend upon them. We need to provide the building blocks to attract business that can offer them good jobs and steady income to transform their lives and liberate them from the shackles of poverty, and put to an end to the cycle of generational poverty that has burdened us for far too long.

If you want to change the trajectory of someone's life; if you want to give a family hope; there are only two things that have any chance of fundamentally changing someone's future: education and employment. That's why I still have a lofty goal of bringing 10,000 new jobs to Fresno by the end of 2020, and despite the fact I only have 18 months to go, I stand by my promise.

Before I announce my new initiative for the coming year, let me acknowledge our City Council members for their hard work in governing the City of Fresno. Would Council President Paul Caprioglio, Council members Esmeralda Soria, Garry Bredefeld, Luis

Chavez, Miguel Arias and Nelson Esparza please stand? Please give them a big hand.

I would also like to acknowledge our department directors and the more than 3,000 employees of the City of Fresno. From our first responders to our call center and everywhere in between, we have great people working for a great City.

As leaders, we should begin with the issues we need to address rather than the policies we want to create. Nowhere is that more evident than in the biggest challenge our city faces: the on-going struggle to find the resources to rebuild the infrastructure, operational and personnel resources for public safety, parks and public works. This is Fresno's financial reality. We simply don't have the property tax, sales tax and other revenues necessary to deliver City core services.

In looking for solutions, the idea of a tax initiative quickly became the talk of the town. And Measure P was born. The results of the election were bittersweet for me, but I made a promise to the community that I would invite leaders from both sides of Measure P to join me in developing a compromise solution. We've held meetings this year and I feel that we're making progress to find a compromise tax measure with sufficient funding for parks, for public safety, and other needs that our City needs to identify.

The goal is a broad-based approach to address all of our city's priorities reasonably and fairly, and hopefully, we'll put this on the ballot in 2020. Rebuilding our police and fire staffing and improving the quality of our streets, sidewalks, and parks is always worthy of our attention, but we can and should do more.

One of the most frequent complaints I get from residents and visitors is the unattractive amount of trash that everyone sees on our streets and highways. It's ugly and we all can do something about it. That means a community-wide effort to clean up Fresno's streets, alleys and highways.

I'm announcing today that we are officially launching a new initiative called Keep Fresno Beautiful that will develop and support public and private partnerships with the goal of establishing sustainable programs to effectively tackle trash in Fresno.

The City can do the big stuff by beefing up staffing, services and enforcement and cracking down on illegal dumping. Our Public Works Department is already working on a new Litter Abatement Pilot Program to issue clean up contracts to agencies that

that hire individuals who are transitioning into the workforce, including veterans, homeless, and people in recovery programs.

We will also offer one-time clean up assistance to property owners under the condition that they assume future responsibility to maintain the property. Our Keep Fresno Beautiful initiative will also work with nonprofit partners to start and maintain clean-up projects across the city. The goal is to host cleanup events in all seven Council districts during the year and provide trash bags to residents who organize their own neighborhood cleanups through a new Adopt-A-Block program. I'm happy to say that there are groups out there already taking this initiative to heart.

Just last month, the Fresno Grizzlies and the Fresno Rescue Mission teamed up to clean up around G Street. Nearly 100 people showed up on a Saturday morning to help. I want to thank Derek Franks and Matt Dildine for their energy and their leadership. Please stand up!

There's a group called the West Shaw Neighborhood Association that regularly picks up trash and debris along that busy corridor to beautify Shaw Avenue. Jim Jakobs is the driving force behind this group. Thank you, Jim!

Councilmember Luis Chavez, in conjunction with the developers of the Fancher Creek Town Center, have organized two cleanups in this area and a new non-profit called Clean Fresno is already working on a continuous litter removal program for Fresno's freeways and major streets. Steve Hernandez is here representing Clean Fresno – thank you Steve and Kit Hannah for making a difference. This a big step forward and we need your help to keep Fresno clean and beautiful.

I'm inviting service clubs, churches, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, professional organizations, anyone who wants to lend a hand, please consider hosting a clean-up event whether it's on your street or a neighborhood that you've never visited. The more people who will commit to cleaning up, the better life will be for everyone in Fresno. We will have information on the Keep Fresno Beautiful initiative on our website and social media soon.

Being the Mayor of Fresno has been an education. Earlier this year, I went to the Orange School near the new e-commerce centers in the Reverse Triangle and spoke with local residents about their concerns. We talked about air quality, water quality, traffic problems, and a number of other important issues, and I walked away with a new perspective. Some of these people have lived in this industrial area for decades,

have valid concerns about their quality of life and I promised them that we would listen. We will learn and we will deliver.

This is how we continue our growth — our momentum – by committing ourselves to the quiet daily work of improving how we serve citizens day in and day out. This is how we keep the “pedal to the metal,” not by shouting and tweeting but by sitting down with each other, by listening, and by compromising and collaborating.

Abraham Lincoln endured challenges most of us cannot imagine and he made our nation’s purpose clear:

“We are not enemies but friends, though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection when again touched as surely they will be by the better angels of our nature.”

The state of our city is still strong but our strength is being threatened by forces that seek to create the disease in order to sell the remedy. I seek the better angels of our nature. I seek grace in the middle of outrage. I seek the sustainable solution when the mob calls for impulsive action, and I seek the light through the darkness. What keeps me going every day, in good times and bad, is this simple premise: What unites us is stronger than what divides us. And when the truth is threatened, we work together to defeat it. I ask you all to reach out to the other side. This is how we finish strong — together.

Thank you again for giving me the privilege and honor of being the Mayor of this great City! God bless you and may God bless the City of Fresno!