



**Mayor Dwight Jones
2012 State of the City Address
January 31, 2012**

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for being here tonight.

Greeting to those members of the General Assembly who are here tonight, members of the Richmond City Council and the School Board of the City of Richmond.

My special thanks to Principal Tanya Roane and Assistant Principal William Andrews of Thomas Jefferson High School for accommodating this event here this evening. Give another round of applause to the Let's Move" cheerleaders.

Investing in our young people is vitally important.

Recognizing the importance of developing our young people led me to start the Mayor's Youth Academy and the Future Leaders Council.

I want to thank Youth Mayor, Ms. Zenobia Cardwell for that awesome introduction.

I'm proud that Richmond is a part of the national Let's Move campaign – one of over 700 Let's Move communities.

It's so important that we focus on becoming a healthier city and it's important that we instill this in young people early on.

I believe that everything we do has to be with an eye toward the future. And that's what I'm here to talk to you about tonight, **our future**.

Richmond is a place of great opportunity. It's a place of history and innovation...a place of creativity and purpose.

The city we know today began 275 years ago and we have a deep and rich history.

And in many ways we are healing and repairing the ghosts of the past.

It's a proud moment for me when I think about being Mayor of this city at a time when we were able to reclaim the African Burial Ground and to begin the restoration of that site. Also, the unveiling of the historical markers with the Richmond Slave Trail Commission...that was a proud day.

And as we continue to work on those things that need to be healed in our city we will do so in a way that brings us together and not divide us.

Today we have vibrant, modern city with beautiful neighborhoods, striking architecture, cultural heritage, first class museums and prominent universities.

The five million visitors to our City each year can attest that we are both a city rich in history and a city on the move.

Richmond's got what the young people on stage with me would call "swagger!"

It's clear that we have a growing future with endless possibilities. That's what I found when I came here in 1965 to attend Virginia Union ...they call it the *Promise of a Limitless Future*.

So as I talk with you today about the State of the City, I will do so remembering and learning from the past, embracing the present, but reaching for the future.

When I took office at the start of 2009, I knew that the work we had to do could not be accomplished in a few months or even a few years.

It's like history...though it's written every day; the story takes shape over a span of time.

I've led the work of this Administration knowing that what we are involved in is a marathon, not a sprint.

As a society, we've become accustomed to instant gratification; but that's not how we should position the future of our city.

We are all on this journey together.

Our journey thus far has given us a great story to tell.

We are a community moving forward, defining and shaping the success that WE want for our City.

We've saved the city millions in our efforts to establish a well-managed government.

We've strengthened the city's financial position and improved how the city's cash flow is managed. Our actions have been affirmed by Wall Street with continuous upgrades in our bond ratings.

During these lean economic times, we've continued to invest in capital projects. We've broken ground on a new fire station, two new elementary schools, a middle school and a high school. We've renovated many of our libraries and we continue to invest in our infrastructure, paving roads, installing access ramps and environmentally friendly street lights.

Two examples serve as strong indicators that we have begun to right wrongs of yesterday to propel us to a better tomorrow.

First, we have finally reached the point where the discussion about a new justice center can stop. We have actually moved dirt and started building a new justice center.

Importantly, we are building a new jail with an eye to the future; a future where our jail only houses those who actually belong there. A future where our alternatives to incarceration rehabilitate and reclaim those who suffer from drug addiction or mental illness.

Secondly, we have collected a debt that has been outstanding for a long time. Just a few short months ago, we were able to secure repayment of a \$62 million debt owed by the Richmond Metropolitan Authority. As I said at my first State of the City address, we are putting the city first and pushing our agenda aggressively and strategically.

We've gotten things done that have been sitting on the shelf for years here. And when I reflect on the RMA debt repayment and the building of a new jail, those two things in particular caused lots of debate and discussion. But I say we've been doing the right things for Richmond and it's about time.

We've been about the business of Building a Better Richmond, and I'm here to tell you today that the state of the city is getting stronger.

We are the state capital... we are a center of creativity and innovation...an urban core of a dynamic region!

Yes, we do have our challenges, but we are facing those challenges and overcoming them every day – step by step. But we have also positioned the city over the last three years for recovery and growth. We've been working to address our challenges from a position of strength.

And yes, there have been some mistakes along the way. But more importantly for the future of our city, we have learned from those mistakes.

You know, I started talking about our City becoming a Tier One City when I first took office.

And many people wonder or ask, "What is a Tier One City?"

A Tier One City is a city that offers a safe, supportive, and culturally diverse environment – with world-class education; a well-trained workforce; multi-modal transportation; high-performance government; equitable access to health care, thriving economic development; and inclusive, healthy and unique neighborhoods.

I say we can achieve that vision, but we've got to reach for it.

I see our City as it can be, as it is striving to be. I see our potential and all that we can be.

We simply have to harness the power of our potential.

On the stage with me today, as well as in the audience, are some of our everyday heroes...young people, who are being productive, reaching new heights, breaking barriers.

You've already met our Youth Mayor, Zenobia. Please also acknowledge the Youth Council President, Ms. Toni Simms; the Council Vice President, Ms. Ashley March; the

CAO, Mr. Gabriel Hernandez, and the youth Commonwealth Attorney, Ms. Dariene Hairston.

Our Future Leaders Council has been doing great things...they held a mock City Council meeting last week. They've undertaken any number of programs designed to promote leadership, civic engagement and higher education. They are required to complete 40 hours of community service, and they are busy completing a youth agenda that will involve them bringing their recommendations to me and the Richmond City Council this spring.

Thank you for being here and for working to develop your leadership skills.

Stanley Rayfield is also on stage with us. At the age of 23, Stanley recently had his first solo exhibit at the Glave Kocen Gallery on Main Street. Stanley won 2nd place in a National Portrait Gallery competition out of over 3,000 entries nationwide. He has a painting in the permanent collection of the United States Pentagon Air Force Art Program.

Stanley is also a prior participant in the Mayor's Youth Academy. Remember that young man's name.

We have members of our Department of Parks & Recreation and Community Facilities competitive youth swim team, the Richmond Racers, on stage and in the audience. They won the State Championship last year! What's more, the Richmond Racers have dominated the Championships every year since it was founded in 1992. They have never placed lower than second!

Chris Mason, from Armstrong High, is on the stage with us...he is Richmond's first inner-city youth to complete 100 miles (in one day) in a bike ride that took place in Philadelphia. Chris is from Fairfield Court and part of the Richmond Cycling Corps. I want you to understand, the race that he completed started out with over 5,000 cyclists...by the end less than half remained. Chris made it to the finish line! This was an amazing feat and sets this young man up to know that he can reach for and achieve new heights! He has already gotten his first college acceptance and he has four more applications in the queue.

Nigel Richardson...an honors student at Richmond Community High School...ranks in the top ten of his class and carries a 4.35 grade point average. Nigel had the honor of introducing President Barack Obama in Richmond this past September. And he handled the responsibility masterfully.

There are members of the Young Adult Police Commissioners here. These young people have a 100% high school graduation rate and 100% college acceptance rate. Shellie Scott and April Johnson are on stage with us and others are in the audience.

Members of our Youth Tennis Team are here (please stand). Our Department of Parks and Recreation received the Community Outreach of the Year Award from the United States Tennis Association's Virginia District for its tennis program. We are extremely proud of this recognition and proud of these young people and their accomplishments.

Members of our PAL Boxing League are here (please stand). Ray Robinson, who was recently featured in the Richmond Free Press, is on stage along with Eli Green. Our PAL Boxers have won various titles throughout the east coast region, including Ray who has won a Most Outstanding Boxer award. The program instills discipline, self confidence, concentration and physical fitness.

And this is only a snapshot of the talent, drive and determination that is embodied in the young people in our city.

Tell me the future is not ours for the taking!

I think it's time for us all to see all that our city can be. It's time.

Our future really is bright. But so much depends on what we do NOW to prepare for our future.

As the dynamic urban core of the region, we have begun to harness the competitive advantages and attributes that will continue to serve us well as we become an economic powerhouse; one that not only effectively competes with our jurisdictional neighbors and other U.S. cities, but also with communities across the globe.

Indeed, one of our clear and unique advantages is our bio-tech and life sciences sector. As home to vital institutions like VCU'S Health Center of Virginia and Pfizer Pharmaceuticals' domestic research and development operation, the City of Richmond is presently facilitating the expansion Health Diagnostics Labs (HDL).

Last November, we announced the expansion of HDL in the Biotech Research Park. With that announcement alone came more than 650 new jobs in our city and more than \$68 million in private capital investment.

This is one of the largest expansions of a Richmond based life sciences company in recent years. And this is one of the largest job expansion announcements, not just in the city, but in the State.

Another competitive advantage is the area of logistics. Our city is not only located in the center of a dynamic region, but at the center of a logistics area that will lead to greater growth and greater success.

Within a 50 mile radius, there are 21 distribution sites and Richmond sits at the center of it all.

Our regional logistics assets include distribution sites like Hewlett Packard, Performance Food Group, Netflix, GlaxoSmithKline, Defense Supply Center, Rolls Royce, Owens & Minor...for example...and Amazon is on the horizon.

We are within a day's drive of almost half of the United States' population and we've got two Interstates, railroads, an airport and a deepwater port.

Being at the center of all of these assets has implications for how we develop and maintain our business community and workforce. It has implications for how we attract economic development and grow our city, and implications for how we develop our transportation infrastructure.

We've also got to begin viewing our 'region' through a lens similar to the one through which our emerging economics are viewed.

Yesterday the conventional wisdom was that our region meant Richmond, Henrico, and Chesterfield. Today experts suggest we need to include Hanover. As I said at the outset, everything we do must be with an eye to the future. Thinking about our region is no different. Tomorrow our region must include the Tri Cities and Fort Lee. Our future requires we be progressive and forward thinking on these issues.

There really is no reason that we should not have a world-class industrial park sitting right off of Interstate 95 at our fingertips. We are in a strong position to establish a first-rate industrial park just maximizing the assets we already have. We should be the most competitive game in town, paving the way for manufacturing to come back to the city as we capitalize on the developing trend of manufacturing returning to the United States.

We are destined for great things.

As we look to the future, we must position ourselves for that opportunity. The city's Department of Economic and Community development is already looking at some land assembly strategies that can help us leverage our assets for this opportunity.

Everything we do is with an eye toward the future.

With our focus **not** just on the next project, but on the next generation, we embraced economic development as a core function...we've been very deliberate about that.

And the good news is that it's working for us.

Last year we were named the Best Small American City of the Future by Foreign Direct Investment Magazine.

We're on the right track.

We've made known our focus on specific industries...life sciences, financial services, manufacturing and professional services.

And over the past year we've created or retained over 1000 jobs in Richmond.

I mentioned HDL...by providing the incentives for them to stay here and expand their business; we kept those new high-paying jobs in Richmond!

We continue to look for every opportunity to leverage investment opportunity. We are keeping our eyes open.

Last month we were successful in securing funds to support the renovation of the Leigh Street Armory. Leigh Street Armory has been vacant and in disrepair for decades.

The \$600,000 State grant will help us move forward with restoring that property and further advance our revitalization efforts in Jackson Ward and the emerging arts district.

We are working to pave the way for change.

And we've identified that property as the new home of our cherished Black History Museum; another way we can expand tourism interest in our city.

We are forging ahead with the implementation of our Shockoe Revitalization Plan; embracing the innovation and creativity centered on this neighborhood, while creating a gateway for tourism in our city.

The Train Shed at Main Street Station has not been in use for almost two decades. But work will begin soon, transforming this landmark into a bright new example of the positive change that our city is experiencing.

The renovations will make Main Street Station a multi-modal transportation hub and increase its visibility along the most traveled interstate on the East Coast. It is already the most recognized building to the 45 million cars that pass each year.

The planned renovations represent \$26.9 million in investment and we have all the funding in place. That's major!

Our vision for the area includes an indoor market place at Main Street Station.

We can also take the area around the flood wall, which is largely not developable, and create a promenade that will serve as a public square in Shockoe.

Opening up Franklin Street and linking Cathedral Walk to a Shockoe Promenade will position our 17th Street market as a thriving urban market place.

As a striving city we need to make use of the valuable assets that we have.

All along Broad Street, new businesses and housing are breathing life into dormant historic buildings.

On the south banks of the James River, our outdated, vacant industrial facilities are finding new life with high tech companies and creative art spaces.

What was old is new. What was dark is again seeing light and activity. We have the foundation upon which we are building a bright future.

Presently, our city has over a half billion dollars in recently completed, active or planned development projects that we've been tracking.

And all of this means more jobs for our residents.

We're on the right track.

And as we are moving forward, we've been very deliberate in underscoring an inclusive agenda.

We all succeed when everyone gets a fair shot.

That's why we've paved the way for meaningful minority and small business participation in opportunities being generated by the city.

As we change the business environment, we ultimately change the jobs environment.

We have a goal of 40% minority business participation for our new schools projects and received proposals meeting those goals and even exceeding that goal on the city jail project.

This level of inclusion for minority businesses is a game changer.

This type of inclusive agenda – this type of economic justice - will do so much to help address our poverty challenges by creating jobs and focusing on strengthening our local businesses.

Re-circulating and reinvesting our own taxpayer dollars within the city is a necessary strategy, and we will continue to do so where we can.

Our focus on local hiring initiatives first began with the Hippodrome Project where we made an investment and then leveraged that investment. That project is thriving and hitting all of its performance measures. And we are taking our focus on local hiring to the General Assembly as a major part of our legislative agenda.

We will continue to push this localized agenda as one of the key ways we will be able to combat the high poverty rates in our city.

Poverty reduction is the single biggest issue that we face.

More than twenty-two percent of our neighbors live at or below the poverty line.

A key component of changing the dynamics of poverty is neighborhood revitalization.

Unfortunately, some of our neighborhoods face seemingly insurmountable challenges-- abject poverty, dilapidated single family homes, vacant lots, and run down public housing.

These conditions significantly impact our efforts to become a Tier One City.

Most importantly, the children and young people that reside in these neighborhoods face an even greater disadvantage.

These neighborhoods are a far cry from the neighborhoods I grew up in or the neighborhoods many of you grew up in.

My neighborhood was made up of people from all walks of life.

One neighbor may have been a doctor; another may have been a principal at the local elementary school. Across the street, a janitor; up the block there were school teachers and bus drivers.

What is important is not what the people did for a living.

What is important is that there was a mix of incomes, backgrounds and stories. It is what makes truly vibrant and thriving neighborhoods buzz with that deep sense of community.

This cohesiveness and diversity provided me and my siblings and our friends with different ideas about who we could be and what we could do in life.

Our neighbors and neighborhoods were foundational. They provided us with models of success.

For many, the American Dream is just that simple—a good job and a decent place to live.

Unfortunately, many of our neighborhoods are in trouble. Not necessarily by anything we have directly done. But decisions made some fifty years ago.

Some did argue, and some may still argue, that concentrating all of the poor people in one area of the city or part of a community is good policy.

I DISAGREE. Concentrating our impoverished neighbors in one or two places doesn't make sense.

Now at the outset of my speech tonight I committed to talking about the future—understanding that what we do now will prepare our city for the next generation.

But those decisions that were made many years ago are at the root of our poverty and housing challenges today.

This issue is one that we have to get right. It is in our best interest to do so—economically and socially.

We have to get this right.

Last year I announced that for the first time in decades our city was growing. We are now up to over 200,000 residents. That's the good news.

The troubling news when you start to dig deeper into the numbers is that 19,000 of our residents reside in public and Section 8 subsidized housing. Many of those residents have a household income of between \$5-10,000 a year.

Until our public and low income housing is substantially improved, the City will continue to struggle to make significant progress in redevelopment and revitalization in these most blighted neighborhoods.

Last month I led a delegation on a trip to Atlanta to see firsthand how they transformed their low income and public housing neighborhoods into thriving mixed income enclaves.

Our delegation—city officials, RRHA staff and board members, public school officials and the business community got to look at how they have turned the corner on creating truly mixed income neighborhoods.

What we saw was inspirational. But more importantly what we saw was DOABLE.

There are examples out there that prove that public housing projects and unsafe neighborhoods don't necessarily go hand-in-hand.

As in Atlanta, Richmond's low income and public housing situation needs change—it needs REAL CHANGE.

To achieve that change, we need ingenuity and innovation. We need new ideas and new approaches. We need new partnerships and new paradigms.

That is why we are building new homes and establishing model blocks in the East End. Our efforts have been toured and visited by the U.S. Secretary of Housing and what we are doing with those model blocks is being lifted up as a national model.

That is why it is critical that we keep pushing our East View and Nine Mile Road Redevelopment plan.

We launched our East End transformation initiative, for example, and our vision for the East End is moving forward.

And we will be launching this coming weekend a public transportation initiative that helps provide access for those living in public housing to healthy food options and shopping opportunities that don't exist in their own neighborhoods.

This was a recommendation of my Food Policy Task Force that I'm acting on right away. It's a model I deployed after Hurricane Irene when power was out for an extended period. It worked well then and it is a service that I want to launch as a pilot project to continue to support the mobility needs of our public housing residents.

These are good things to do...in fact they are things we must do...but they are not enough.

The first order of business is shifting the existing paradigm. Although we clearly have much work to be done in this area, we've taken a major step in the right direction by initiating the redevelopment of the former Dove Street public housing in North Richmond. This spring our development partner will break ground on the first 80 units of this three hundred-unit complex.

But to fulfill the overall vision we have for change, we must have a strong and technically proficient housing authority.

RRHA is one of the city's biggest landowners, and for us to be successful, they have to be a strong partner. We need a top flight housing authority to walk arm-in-arm with the City, the school board, the business and philanthropic communities; much in the way that we saw things working in Atlanta.

We are committed to working collaboratively with the RRHA board as well as our friends at HUD to ensure that our housing authority has the necessary financial and technical wherewithal to take its game to the next level.

Together, we can de-concentrate and reduce poverty by creating mixed-income communities.

I know that we can do better than to allow concentrated pockets of poverty to persist and to treat people as though they have no options.

My vision is to replace the outmoded public housing complexes—which presently locates our most vulnerable residents in a few defined areas and severely limits the potential of our young people. I want to replace that model with vibrant, mixed-income neighborhoods that offer a rich diversity of amenities and experiences.

In addition to new housing, these communities must provide the things that many of us take for granted: retail and shopping that satisfies the need for basic goods and services as well as employment opportunities; and high-performing schools that can also serve as youth and family-centric community centers.

By forging ahead strategically and aggressively with the partnerships that we are building between the business community, the public school system, and the housing authority, we can change the face of public housing in our city as we know it today.

I want to put us on the path to accomplish that in the foreseeable future.

Conventional wisdom suggests that it takes a generation to bring about this kind of change. If we can form the right partnerships – the Mayor, City Council and Administration working together - I think it can be done sooner.

People have positive options available to them when they have jobs. So we are working to integrate our development efforts around our neighborhood and housing revitalization efforts.

Our Workforce Development program has continued a steady trend in helping employers and job seekers.

We opened a new share site this past year – our first joint Workforce Development Center in the city of Richmond -- and we are offering resources to City residents to better prepare and search for jobs. We must continue helping people improve their skill sets based on what employers are searching for.

Last year at this time I told you about our Workforce Development Pipeline.

In the past 12 months 153 new participants entered the Pipeline and 48 businesses have worked with us, resulting in 105 individuals getting jobs.

Each of these 105 has their own individual success story – let me tell you about one. We worked with a new company from California that was moving into this area. It's a big box electronics and appliance store, Paul's TV – The King of Big Screens. Today they are now located in both the Hull Street and Broad Street location of Haynes Furniture. Paul's worked with our Pipeline to find a home installation specialist. The individual they found through our program previously worked for Circuit City. When Circuit City closed and he lost his job and he had not been able to find steady employment. Our Pipeline matched that individual with the installation company. The company was so pleased with his abilities and drive that they made him their lead installation technician.

That's the kind of success story that I want to keep bringing to you. And we have other examples of such successes...people getting the jobs that they need through our Pipeline.

Those are the stories that warm my heart when I think about what an honor it is being Mayor of this city at this time.

As we look to the future, building our city as a sustainable city is extremely important.

Building communities where people can live, work and play within walkable distances is at the heart of most sustainable strategies in urban communities.

Sustainability is a roadmap for improving the overall quality of life. But sustainability is also about job creation and economic growth...a key to our becoming a Tier One city.

And I'm looking at sustainability through the lens of social justice, efficiency and affordability.

So we are building our schools and municipal buildings smarter. Our buildings will have intelligent lighting and smart building controls. They will be more energy efficient and provide healthier learning environments.

We are on the right track.

I issued a Green Government Order calling on city government to be more sustainable and we are moving forward with RVA Green: A Roadmap to Sustainability. RVA Green is the very first sustainability plan for the city of Richmond and our draft plan is to be presented next month.

And all of this will make the lives of those who come after us even better than our own.

We must work together to promote innovation and to make progress toward a greener, greater city.

And our efforts thus far have been recognized by others; including the Brookings Institution and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Our greatest natural resource is the river flowing through our city. How we harness the potential of that resource will have significant economic impact on our future.

We are developing a plan to guide the future direction of the downtown Richmond riverfront - on **both** sides of the James.

Focusing on the River as the center of our city can give us a competitive edge. Getting this right means we can boost revenue, attract jobs and residents downtown, create a national attraction and provide social benefits.

We will be sharing with you the draft plan in a few weeks - which has grown out of community input sessions.

But tonight, I want you to catch a little of the vision for what we can create around our river.

Just creating riverfront access and terraces around the riverfront can do so much to enhance the quality of life in our city.

The river can be a focus of the community, adding to our quality open spaces and recreational opportunities while strengthening linkages between the river and surrounding neighborhoods.

We see this as a huge, yet unrealized opportunity thus far. And we are moving the ball forward by highlighting the opportunity so that our city can realize the maximum benefit of having the James River as an asset.

I want to develop the Riverfront and I'm hoping that the City Council will join me in moving this vision forward into reality.

All of these things will lead us to becoming a Tier One City!

As I've said, we must do everything with an eye toward the future.

We are working to make our city safer for our children.

Public safety is always a great concern in any urban center.

Earlier this month we announced a 10% reduction in homicides and 5% reduction in violent crime. The year before, we realized an historic low rate of violent crimes, so to again have a drop in violent crime is incredible!

Crime is down in Richmond because the residents and police officers have joined forces to combat the criminal element.

The stakeholders are working together, and that's what it takes for success.

But I also want to see more effort poured into what we can do to prevent crime to begin with...to stop people from entering a life of crime.

We all know that education is empowering.

And the fact is that everything we are doing to create a bright economic future will not be sustained until we, here in Richmond, upgrade our educational system.

Whether we are speaking of the recruitment of new businesses, or the expansion of existing ones, a key deciding factor will always be the quality of the workforce.

I've spoken about the schools that we are building, and we are proud of that. And we are also proud that we are investing in community schools that will provide wrap-around services to improve learning outcomes for our youth.

But buildings speak only to the bricks and mortar. We are using the same bricks and mortar to also build a jail.

Our challenge is making sure that the jail is not the structure that ends up getting used the most.

I applaud the progress that has been made by the school system under the leadership of Dr. Brandon and the Richmond City School Board. We have come a very long way.

But I must point out that the future of our children, the future of our city, demands more of us.

A tier one city is one where we stop celebrating the decreases in our negatives.

For example, a tier one city does not celebrate a decrease in our drop out and truancy rates.

A tier one city does not celebrate getting more education money from the State because we are poor or have more kids getting free lunch.

A tier one city does not celebrate when our schools are labeled "accredited" based on archaic minimum standards.

And I must admit that I myself have participated in these celebrations of mediocrity. But we need to stop.

A tier one city stops at nothing short of excellence in education.

We have to let go of mediocrity and embrace excellence.

Our children are crying out for help.

When many of children have already made the decision to drop out – either consciously or unconsciously – during the middle school years, more is required of us.

When anticipated incarceration rates are said to be estimated based on a child's performance in as early as the 3rd grade, more is required of us.

And that's not an indictment on the prison system if they can do their estimates based on 3rd grade data; that is an indictment on us if we have not changed that paradigm.

I refuse to accept that a child is lost at 3rd grade or that we can't succeed at achieving successful outcomes during the middle school years.

I don't believe that the child's mind is already made up, and I know my mind is not already made up.

The State Constitution vests the operation of our schools with the school board.

But we all have a stake in what happens to our children and youth, and as Mayor I have to call for an educational system that prepares our young people to win.

I will not settle for a system that works just for some, while others are left behind.

My starting place is the conviction that all children can learn and that all children can succeed.

I believe it is time for a radical restructuring and retooling of how we provide public education in our city.

And I'm going to fuel that discussion and push that agenda in every way that I can as we move forward.

Knowing that the middle grades may be the most important years in a child's education; let's find a way to empower those middle school educators.

Recognizing that we've got to keep supporting innovative strategies like charter schools and lab schools, let's find the courage to try something different.

What I know for sure is that we won't rest until we put behind us the educational stigma of "Two Richmond's." We will find the way to create successful models that will chart a winning direction for all of Richmond's youth.

I want you to remember the young people whom you see on stage with me and in the audience tonight. I want you to remember that it is for them that we've got to get things right.

I want you to realize that every child in our City can have a similar story to the success stories that you heard about with these young people today. Our youth are counting on us to pave the way for that success.

Our city is a great city; all 62 square miles. And many of you already know how much there is to love about Richmond.

Just a few short months ago, VCU and the University of Richmond increased the size of our star on the map and on the horizon. There was Ramdamonium and Spider frenzy all around. We were Hoopstown USA!

And then we harnessed our potential and were successful in bringing the UCI 2015 Road World Cycling Championships to RVA. In a few short years, we are going to be on display for the world to see. An estimated 450,000 visitors and another 300 million worldwide television viewers will get a good look at our city.

This is our time to shine and so many more people are going to come to know all there is to love about RVA.

Many are already coming here to see our beautiful city.

Over the last year, let me just remind you about a few who have visited!

The U.S. Secretary of Housing and Community Development, Shaun Donovan came here and walked with me through our communities. Secretary Tom Vilsak of the USDA was here, Janet Napolitano, Secretary of Homeland Security and David Agnew, Director of White House Inter-Governmental Affairs. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood was also just here.

Richard Branson, of Virgin Records and Virgin Airlines, was here. Steven Spielberg and Daniel Day Lewis as well!

Michelle Obama and the President himself – all visited Richmond this past year.

(Story about meeting him on the tarmac alone...)

We are playing on a great stage, ladies and gentlemen, here in Richmond, Virginia!

And we've got to work harmoniously together in the common interest, with an unselfish purpose.

If we can do that, nothing will be too large for us to accomplish.

I invite you to join me in looking ahead and reaching, striving for all that we can be.

I say it's time.

Thank you. God Bless.