Happy 2024, New Haven!

Greetings, elected representatives, distinguished guests, and fellow residents.

I want to start off with a special thank you to Wilbur Cross High School for hosting us today as well as all the artists, performers, individuals, and groups who have shared their time and talent to help commemorate this special occasion – in particular, our emcees, Miriam and Xavier, and other New Haven Public School students.

On a personal note, I also want to thank my family – my beautiful wife Natalie, our wonderful children Molly and April, and my mom and dad, Joan and Gordon Elicker – who continue to make sacrifices to support me as a mayor, as a son, as a husband, and as a father, as we collectively serve the city we love together.

Today, we come together as a city to celebrate a new year – and, consistent with our traditions, we also come together to swear in and begin a new government.

City clerk, Board of Education member, Board of Alders, and mayor.

Congratulations to all of you on your elections and I look forward to the work we’ll accomplish together.

We have some old faces – and some new faces too. We all hail from different neighborhoods, different races, different ethnicities, different cultures, different faiths, and different walks of life – reflecting the rich diversity and beauty that is the Elm City.

Despite our differences, we have all come together in unity and common purpose – and we have each sworn an oath to faithfully and impartially perform our duties to the best of our abilities and at all times strive to use the power entrusted to us for the best interest of the City.

Like all of you, other than the vow I’ve made to my wife and children, there is no oath that I consider more solemn or scared that the oath I’ve taken to serve the residents of New Haven.

As a colony that was first settled on the indigenous lands of the Quinnipiack, Paugussett, and Wappinger peoples in 1638, and as a city that was first incorporated in 1784, we have been doing these swearing-in ceremonies for quite a long time.
Every new government is charged with confronting their own set of challenges – some unique and reflective of the times and some similar that span generations.

Today, likes cities across the nation, we are once again confronting our own set of historic challenges.

A **pandemic** that has tragically claimed the lives of 321 New Haven residents and over 1.1 million Americans – and its aftereffects that have impacted virtually every facet of our lives and shined a brighter light on glaring weaknesses within society.

An **epidemic** of opioid use and addition that claimed the lives of 127 New Haveners in 2022 – and over 110,000 Americans that same year as well. We still await the sobering final count from 2023.

A scourge of **illegal guns and gun violence** that has claimed the lives of twenty-three individuals in 2023 in New Haven – and, like the COVID-19 pandemic and the opioid epidemic, has resulted in lifelong voids in families and in our communities.

A **crisis of affordability** in housing and stubborn inflation that has made it much harder for many families to find a place they can call home or to make ends meet.

A **state educational system** that has shortchanged our schools and historically not done right by too many of our young people or our educators for far too long.

A society impacted by the legacy and continued existence of **systemic racism** that has left out entire communities from our economy and the ability to build generational wealth for them and their families.

A **warming climate** that is wreaking havoc on our environment and our lives.

The challenges are indeed great and many. And, of course, there are others too.

**And while our challenges are great, so is our collective commitment and capacity to confront these challenges head on and to meet the moment before us.**

**While we have a lot of work to do** – and I’ll be sharing more details next month in my State of the City address on our progress and additional policy proposals that will help us further confront our challenges – the steady progress we’ve made together over the last few years has been extraordinary.

New Haven is a place where more and more people want to continue to live, relocate to, work, visit, start a business, and raise a family.

New Haven has led the way in Connecticut in the post-pandemic recovery – and we’ve done so with a commitment to inclusive growth and building an inclusive economy.

And while Connecticut is often referred to as “The Land of Steady Habits,” New Haven is a city where innovation is embraced, new ideas are explored, and policy prescriptions are tested.

Some ideas work. Some ideas don’t. But what never waivers is our resolve to keep at it and to keep trying.
And what undergirds and guides all our proposals and efforts are our values as a people and as a city – and that’s what I’d really like to focus on today.

Our people. Our values. The commitment to build a city where every resident has the opportunity to thrive. Those are our greatest strengths.

When I think about my fellow residents and our city, here are some of the values and character qualities that come to mind.

**Inclusion.**

New Haven is a city that welcomes everyone. Regardless of your race, ethnicity, immigration or documentation status, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, or general station in life, you are welcome in New Haven.

When I think about inclusion, I think about our clergy like Imam Bajwa and Rabbi Woodward, who modeled today that no matter your faith or world events, we can come together in common purpose and unity to advance the greater good. Thank you, Imam and thank you, Rabbi.

I also think about the New Haven Pride Center and A Place to Nourish Your Health who are working every day to ensure we are a city of belonging for our LGBTQ+ residents and others who face stigma and challenges.

When other places pass anti-LGBTQ bills or target trans youth, we proudly say our queer and trans residents make our city stronger, richer, and more beautiful.

**Compassion.**

When I think about compassion, I think about IRIS – the Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services – who regularly welcome and help resettle refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented immigrants, and migrants.

Or Junta who, for over 50 years, has been providing no-cost social services, legal services, immigration services, adult education, and youth programs to low-income residents.

I also think about the many nonprofit organizations that are serving individuals struggling with homelessness like Upon This Rock Ministries and Pastor Valarie Washington who will give today’s benediction.

When other places do very little to support the unhoused, we say we will extend compassion, care, and emergency housing to those who need it and also connect individuals to substance use treatment, mental health treatment, and other supports so that they can begin to rebuild their lives.

**Justice.**

When I think about justice, I think about New Haven Rising who are fighting for economic, racial, and social justice through grassroots activism and advocacy and collective action.

I also think about our city’s tenants’ unions, who are bringing tenants together to organize against unfair rent increases and to ensure safe, healthy, and high-quality housing for their neighbors and fellow residents.
When other places are advancing union-busting practices, we’re working to expand union membership – including earlier this month when Local 33 UNITE HERE, the graduate and professional student union at Yale University, voted to ratify its first ever contract. Or, the previous month, when the City of New Haven recognized our fourth tenants’ union in the Elm City.

**Courage.**

When I think about courage, I think about our **first responders** – our police officers, firefighters, emergency services personnel – who run into harm’s way to serve and protect our residents and to keep our streets and neighborhoods safe.

When other places say you can’t do policing differently, we embrace a model of community policing and the task of reimagining the work of public safety with programs like Elm City C.O.M.P.A.S.S. and the P.R.E.S.S. gun violence prevention and interruption initiative.

**Persistence.**

When I think about persistence, I think about **Dr. Ann Garrett Robinson** who, joined by other volunteers, engaged in a 25-year long effort to recognize and honor New Haven’s first black resident, Lucretia, who was enslaved by the first governor of the New Haven Colony. Now, at the intersection of Orange and Elm Streets where the former governor’s mansion once stood, we have “Lucretia’s Corner,” so that we can reflect on her life and her contributions and acknowledge New Haven’s past and history with slavery.

I also think about our **educators**, who are in their classrooms everyday teaching, investing, and pouring into our children and the next generation of leaders in our city.

When other places say, “it is what it is” and we can’t move the needle when it comes to certain children and academic achievement, we say “no,” we embrace the Science of Reading, and we commit ourselves to make New Haven the city that reads.

**Innovation.**

When I think about innovation, I think about **NXTHVN** and **ClimateHaven**, two new incubators for emerging artists and climate tech entrepreneurs, respectively.

When other places ignore, dismiss, or deny our changing climate and its impacts, we follow the science, we commit to doing our part to reduce our carbon emissions, and we engage in resiliency efforts that will prepare us for the future.

**Partnership.**

When I think about partnership, I think about **all of us in this room.**

Individuals who are different and don’t always agree, but who are united in common purpose and who are committed to working together and finding common ground to advance the common good.

When our nation seems more divided than ever, we say it doesn’t have to be that way. We can have differences and we can strongly disagree, but we can also be civil and we can treat each other with humanity and with dignity and respect.
Our values – inclusion, compassion, justice, courage, persistence, innovation, partnership – these will drive us forward and inform and animate the work we do as we build a city where every resident has the opportunity to thrive.

Finally, as we conclude our time today, I invite everyone to join me in a thought exercise and to consider the following.

Ten years from now, in 2034, New Haven will be celebrating its 250th anniversary as an incorporated city. 250 years.

Such a milestone invites reflection and begs us to ask the question: what type of city do we want to live in a decade from now in 2034? What type of city do we want our children to live in and inherit?

Take a few seconds. What comes to mind?

Where do we want to make our biggest investments? Where do we want to invest most of our energy and focus? What do we want to be known for as a community and as a city?

Let our values be our compass and let the vision of what we can make New Haven be on its 250th birthday drive our work as we continue this journey together toward a city where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

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