

Mayor Chris Coleman
2010 State of the City Address
Como Park Zoo and Conservatory

Remarks as prepared for delivery

Thank you for a great introduction Kathy.

This is my fifth state of the City, and in these speeches, many things have stayed the same – we always talk about the Central Corridor and education, and I'm always introduced by friend and colleague Kathy Lantry.

Her role as my opening act doesn't do justice to her leadership of this City, or her stature as a partner in all the progress we have made – and I want to thank her for her help along the way.

Welcome to the Como Park Zoo and Conservatory. We are here today because Como represents the jewel of our City's parks system and the best of what Saint Paul has to offer.

We also chose this place because Como is going through a great time of change – with the opening of the Polar Bear Odyssey, a new capital campaign, and the soon to be built Gorilla Forest.

But if you look a little deeper, you can see that this is a special place, and anyone who has watched the delight in a child's eyes as she enters these grounds, coming face to face with a friendly gorilla or bashful wolf knows why we work so hard to preserve this landmark. We are here today to celebrate a great place, but also to send a message.

- A message to hard working parents and grandparents that there will always be a destination in Saint Paul where they can take their children for a special day without worrying about the cost.
- A message to children and young people that there are extraordinary opportunities for learning around every corner.
- A message to future generations yet to come that we kept faith with those who, in founding this city, set aside public land for the common good; and

- A message to all that in Saint Paul that we care about the people who call our city home.

People matter and we work hard to support them. It is the Saint Paul way.

Across Saint Paul –we’ve seen a lot of changes – changes that would have been hard won - even in ordinary times.

But I don’t have to tell you, these are not ordinary times.

Our values have been tested by devastating budget cuts, record mortgage foreclosures, and an economy that teetered on the brink of collapse.

Many questioned whether Saint Paul could remain true to its values as we faced the challenges. They said we couldn’t possibly keep everyone at the table when times got tough. We come together today to say that we have withstood the test. And Saint Paul is moving forward.

We are safer than ever. There are more cops on the street and violent crime is down. Our “Super Medic” unit has enabled our firefighters and EMS workers to respond faster while the EMS academy is opening the doors of opportunity to those who never imagined putting on a uniform and being part of a life-saving team.

In spite of the struggling economy, we saw a \$400 million expansion in our health care sector, retained 400 jobs at Rock Tenn; Xcel Energy opened their High Bridge plant; IBS, Cray and Microsoft brought new jobs and economic vitality to Saint Paul; and First the National Bank Building received a \$20 million upgrades.

We made progress together because we worked together. Our ever changing cast of community groups, residents, businesses and elected officials stood with us and found new solutions to old problems.

Our legislative delegation helped us win \$11 million for Como and \$16 million for the Ordway, and worked with Councilmember Harris to secure funds for the future of the Ford site.

Leaders like Councilmember Dan Bostrom who, working with Arlington Hills Lutheran Church and Jim Bradshaw, will soon make the dream of the Payne Maryland Project a reality.

John Harrington and John Choi who – though they are moving on to bigger and better things – served their city with tremendous strength and courage. Tom Kingston, with over 20 years of leadership at Wilder, has made a difference by serving the most vulnerable in our community.

Our dear friend Katie McWatt – who stood up for what was right challenged us to do better, and left a legacy for us all.

To each of them, and to the rest who number far too large to spell out, I offer my thanks and the thanks of a grateful city for everything you've done to help us move Saint Paul forward.

It is true that these are no ordinary times. But that phrase itself suggests a sea of troubles and challenges. We should instead understand that we are in **extraordinary** times with endless opportunities to seize.

We have led the way out the recession by aligning our policies with the knowledge that Saint Paul is not an island.

Regionalism is more than a just think tank buzzword – it helps us see that our fate is tied just as closely with Minneapolis or Eagan or Woodbury as theirs are with us.

Through the lens of regionalism, we now understand that Central Corridor is not a Saint Paul project, but a critical link in a transportation network stretching from St. Cloud to Winona – and even on to Chicago via high speed rail.

If I need to talk to you one more time about Central Corridor, you haven't been listening these last four years

Despite all the challenges, our partners at the Metropolitan Council and the Federal Transit Administration have kept this project on schedule, due in large part to the work of Ramsey County Regional Rail Chair Jim McDonough, Hennepin County Commissioner Peter McLaughlin, and Met Council Chair Peter Bell. As we speak, utilities are being moved downtown and in a matter of weeks we will begin reconstructing the street and laying track east of the Capitol.

Next year, we will complete major construction on University Avenue between Westgate Drive and Hamline Avenue, with the stretch between Hamline and the Capitol slated for 2012.

Those simple statements belie years of design, engineering, community engagement and construction phasing. They don't give sufficient credit to all those, such as Councilmembers Stark and Carter, who are working to ensure that small businesses receive the support they deserve during construction, and that the most critical parking issues are resolved.

When we began this process four years ago, we knew that constructing a transit line was only the beginning of the story. We made a pledge to the community that as we built a rail line, we would also build the community around it.

That challenge has both shaped our work and defined a new regional conversation.

In St. Paul, we have taken on the lion's share of the responsibility for the additional investment required for effective community development:

- We've allocated \$17 million to improve the streetscape and add stations that will be the platform for new and existing businesses to grow;
- \$2 million to mitigate the loss of on street parking; and
- We've secured \$2 million from the state to bank land for affordable housing.

As LRT rolls along a revitalized University Avenue – it will roll into the heart of a neighborhood that has found new life in recent years.

Lowertown is a solid entertainment district featuring some of the best events in the city like Concrete and Grass, the Jazz Festival and Music in Mears. New bars like Bin will soon be joined by Lenny Russo, famed chef and Heartland owner, who is bringing a restaurant, wine-bar and food market to Lowertown.

Heartland has been a Saint Paul institution – and we hope that Lenny will soon be joined in that neighborhood by another – the Saint Paul Saints.

With my new 'regional' hat, I can admit how much I like the new Twins Stadium – and I particularly like their 11-3 start.

While we don't aspire to be as large, loud or costly as Target Field, our vision is for a regional ballpark that will do for Lowertown what Xcel did for 7 Corners.

It will be a new home for families who will still be able to get a ticket for less than 10 bucks – and a new home for high school players to fulfill their dreams of a state championship.

We will continue to fight for a new facility that will also mean a new chapter for the Saint Paul Saints. The hundreds of thousands of new visitors to Lowertown will extend the vitality that the Wild and the Xcel brings to Seven Corners. And while we all have celebrated the success of the X, we can not afford to stay static.

Therefore, we will continue our push to build the Pond, a facility that will complement the activities at the X, while, at the same time, fight to ensure the economic vitality of the Rivercentre complex. I want to thank Craig Leipold, our new champion of Saint Paul, for his efforts on behalf of our city.

This is no ordinary time, but we have made extraordinary progress. We have built it together - piece by piece, brick by brick on a foundation of wise investments, calculated risks and opportunities seized.

To continue our momentum - we must seize the opportunity before us to move forward on the Penfield.

Shifting economic sands have led to long delays and many changes to this project. But with 216 housing units and a full service grocery store, this project will put millions of dollars into our economy and get hundreds of workers off the bench and back on the job.

We have a unique opportunity to build this project by using Build America Bonds. This partnership with the Federal Government will get this project moving forward, put hundreds of folks back to work and bring new residents and vitality down town.

It's time to act on Penfield, and I want to thank Councilmember Thune for his partnership on this project. I encourage my colleagues on the HRA to stand with us and invest in an opportunity that will benefit Saint Paul for years to come. **(Applause)**

Today is the 40th anniversary of Earth Day – and a great time to reflect on the incredible progress we have made over the last four years in sustainability.

We've increased the use of bio-fuels, purchased more fuel-efficient vehicles and light-duty trucks.

We built new, Green, police and fire stations, converted a coal-burning power plant to natural gas, and installed new light fixtures on our parking ramps at Rivercentre, cutting energy costs in half.

We partnered with District Energy to reduce its carbon dioxide emission by nearly one million tons, and soon, we will partner with Xcel and a host of community partners to launch the Energy Innovation Corridor – which will be a national model for planning and energy efficiency.

Saint Paul is no longer catching up to other cities on our sustainability efforts – we are leading the way – And I want to thank Councilman Lee Helgen and the city's first sustainability coordinator, Anne Hunt for their leadership on the environment.

From the very first days of my administration, we made education our number one priority. I need not reiterate the importance of these efforts.

Simply put, education is my crime fighting strategy, my economic development strategy, and my neighborhood revitalization strategy. In spite of dwindling resources, we have continued to expand opportunities for children to learn outside the classroom and engage in positive activities that will prepare them to participate in a 21st century workforce. But as our efforts on out-of school activities have increased, the challenges facing our schools have grown.

Facing a \$28 million deficit this year, and no prospect for relief in the future, the Saint Paul Public Schools will go through a period of unprecedented change. These will be difficult decisions that will cause heartache and sadness. Closing schools and changing programs that so many have come to rely on is not easy, and it's a terrible thing to tell a high school sophomore that their school won't exist in the future.

But these changes must be made. It is not acceptable to simply erode the quality of classroom instruction because we are afraid to make hard choices.

I want to thank our superintendent, Valeria Silva, for her courage and her commitment. I have known, since I first met Valeria when she was principal of Adams Spanish Immersion, that she always put children first. Our focus has to remain on students, not buildings.

While the District struggles with its budget challenges, we will find new ways to partner with them: finding ways to save money and provide better coordinated services. On the operations side, we will look at everything from how we mow grass to how we run human resources. More importantly, we will make sure that our work on out-of-school time programs will be closely aligned with what is happening in the classroom.

With this new level of partnership, we can design new ways of providing important opportunities for music programs, art instruction and a host of important activities that often get eliminated when the budget gets lean.

When the stakes are this high, the responsibility for educating our children must not rest solely with the schools, but with our entire community - And failure is not an option.

There is a debate taking place in Minnesota and across America.

This debate is too often marred by incivility and an unwillingness to listen to each other.

But, at its core, it asks big—and important--questions about our priorities - about the size and scope of government, about the role of government in fostering community and about how we should best use extremely limited resources as a catalyst for economic growth.

While cable tv and Twitter may change how the debate is conducted, we've been here before.

It was 1873 and the debate was about establishing Como Park. It was aggravated by the state of America's economy - which was in a crisis of historic proportions. On the heels of a war and the collapse of the nation's largest financial firms - states and cities across the country found themselves struggling with huge job losses, a sinking credit market, and a foreclosure crisis which at the time was the most severe in the country's history.

Campaigns were fought and won, based on the rhetoric of gentrification and over taxation – seizing on what would come to be known as the Panic of 1873.

As public discourse came to a peak it was the vision of a prominent civic leader that ultimately won the day.

He appealed to the residents of Saint Paul that “we are destined to be the expanding and prosperous city to which our cherished faith and best endeavors point.”

At the time, it was a bold statement and it was a risky investment to put public money into what we call Como Park.

And those leaders, those men and women who invested in seeing our city and state grow and who succeeded in building a lasting reputation that brought us here today. It was on their shoulders we built a reputation as:

As a place that fosters innovation

As a place that will make the necessary investments to grow and prosper; and

As a place that will put our children ahead of all else.

As we face up to the challenges of today, all too similar to those of a century ago - we cannot afford to live off of our reputation, we need to live up to it.

And just as we did then, we refuse to be paralyzed by the fear of the future, nor will be afraid to take risks when the vitality our city is at stake.

We know that government cannot be, and should not be, all things to all people.

But we will continue to move forward, around a table that brings together the rich resources of our community. We will turn our challenges into opportunities - inspired by our past, informed by our present, and dreaming of a future, to make Saint Paul better every day.

Thank You.

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