

2021 STATE OF THE CITY

Part 1: Thank you.

Good evening and thank you for joining me today for the 2021 State of the City address. Thank you City Manager Cronk and to my colleagues, who I will list by name because I don't think there has ever been a council drawn to such a level of work as we have faced these past years -- Mayor Pro Tem Harper-Madison, Council Members Renteria, Fuentes, Casar, Kitchen, Kelly, Pool, Ellis, Tovo and Alter – thank you for your leadership and unparalleled commitment to Austin. Thank you to our city executives, department heads, and the entire city staff, including my own staff in the Mayor's office and the others on the second floor of City Hall, for never wavering in your service to this community. You have all kept our city moving forward.

A special thanks to the city's First Responders, the police, firefighters and emergency paramedics who put themselves at risk to protect us all. Let's remember four of our finest that have passed away in the line of duty just this past month: Sr. Sgt. Urias, Officer Boyd, Officer Traylor and Firefighter Rodney Kelley.

And to our Health Authority, Dr. Walkes (and her predecessor Dr. Escott), Austin Public Health, formerly led by Stephanie Hayden-Howard and now Director Adrienne Sturup.

They and their staff at APH have helped keep Austin's Covid death rate at less than half that in the State of Texas. Work that was only possible together with County Judge Andy Brown (and County Judge, now Senator, Sarah Eckhardt before him) and the County Commissioners, Constables (esp. Constable Morales), Fire Chiefs (especially Chief Bailey), the hardworking and wonderful staff at Travis County, and our critical partnerships with Black, Latino and AAPI community organizations, as well as the close collaboration with our major hospital networks (Ascension; Baylor, Scott & White; and St. David's), Dell Medical School, and our modeler, Dr. Lauren Ancel Meyers.

If the State had the same Covid death rate as Austin-Travis County, more than 25,000 Texans would not have died of this virus. More than 25,000 lives would not have been lost.

Thank you to our teachers and school administrators who have taught us all by finding ways to teach and care for our children against all odds. Education "first responders" who, even today, are battling at the front lines, under confusing

and contradictory rules and community sentiments, all with the singular focus on helping our kids.

Thank you to our medical first responders -- nurses, doctors, respiratory therapists, technicians and other healthcare workers. I simply don't have the words. You look death in the face, you stand up to our worst nightmares, you're exhausted and emotionally spent. You assume the grave responsibility of saying "good-bye" for us all. And the most amazing thing to me is that tomorrow, you'll come back and be there again.

I recently had the privilege of making the rounds at an ICU. We were with a pregnant woman whose blood was being pumped outside her body so that an ECMO machine could re-oxygenate it. A resolute technician nearby, nurses coming and going focused on the hope of her and her baby's recovery. I don't know if I could do this.

Thank you, too, to those who had to go to work, when many of us were staying home, to keep the power on and the water running, the phones working, and the news coming.

Thank you to our musicians, artists and those in the hospitality industry who are not only the lifeblood of our culture and economy, but have been among those hit the hardest.

And there are so many more.

Thank you to the grocery store clerks, restaurant workers and cooks in kitchens across the city that have made sure that we've all been able to eat.

To the transit workers at CapMETRO that have continuously (this whole time) operated to ensure that everyone could get around. And, I note here that CapMETRO, like other front line public agencies and private employers, have had workers fall victim to this virus while serving our community. We thank them, though it doesn't seem to be enough.

Thank you to those that, in this Covid world, have reached out to neighbors and friends to make sure they're okay, volunteers who brought food to those who might be hungry, water when the faucets weren't running, and warmth when the power wasn't on.

Thank you to those who figured out how to do their jobs in such taxing and stressful times, often at home, many times nearly alone, keeping our economy working at the highest possible levels -- levels that will help us set the speed and reach of our recovery at the end of this nightmare.

Thank you to our parents who have been stretched to their limits managing multiple roles and modeling resilience for their kids. And to our children, some of whom can barely remember a time when we weren't wearing masks and didn't fear being around too many other people, yet have found a way still to embody joy and hope.

Thank you to those that have not given up, that have not laid down, that despite all that has been thrown our way have demonstrated the will and spirit to overcome, and who have by their example given strength to others to do the same.

And for those struggling with their mental health during this time - I want you to know that you are not alone, and it's absolutely okay to get the help you need and deserve - thank you for recognizing that self-care is an act of courage.

Thank you to those that have gotten vaccinated and those that struggle with the decision and are still willing to listen and learn with an open mind. Thank you for saving our economy, but more importantly many lives, perhaps even including your own.

Thank you to those willing to put back on their masks, often among a group of folks who are unmasked, because doing what's right isn't always easy, and the rewards are often those you realize in your heart.

If there was nothing else accomplished in my words this evening, then let it be that we recognize that we should look at everyone around us and say “thank you.” We have shared and survived incredible odds. All of us. Together. We have, each of us, earned the appreciation of the entire community, and we have, each of us, incurred a debt and an obligation to appreciate what those around us have weathered and done for us. Together. This is what “community” is all about.

Let us all remember to say “thank you” to everyone we encounter.

Almost fifty years ago, I was passing through Austin, but I stayed. I often joke that it was the breakfast tacos. Sometimes I half-joke and say it was the live music and Barton Springs. In truth, it has always been about the people that have chosen to live here. We are a city where people genuinely care.

This is what is so magical about our city.

In Austin, people walk down the streets and actually make eye contact, and smile. People open and hold doors for others.

Newly arrived tech entrepreneurs in Austin are suspicious when Austinites open up and share their contact lists. And a year later, they find themselves doing the same thing.

Remember how it felt when we pulled together in response to a bomber delivering explosives to random porches. While we were a community gripped with fear, we all did our part to be more vigilant about watching for anything or anyone out of place. We increased our efforts to get to know our neighbors and offered support to anyone who might feel alone and isolated. We acted quickly to raise funds to support grieving survivors.

In recent weeks, still in the midst of reacting to the Delta virus and our overwhelmed ICUs, Austinites got word that Afghans might be seeking refuge in our city. Austin did not blink. Our City Council issued a resolution to welcome Afghans in need of safety, and service organizations have been flooded with offers of groceries, gift cards, and furniture.

It reminds me of one of my favorite memories as Mayor. A few years ago, Diane and I made a public call for essential supplies for Hurricane Harvey evacuees coming into Austin. Thousands stopped what they were doing and literally emptied the shelves at every Walmart and Target in town to make welcome baskets. Because that's who we are, at our core.

“Keeping Austin Weird” means welcoming, caring for and respecting one another for who they are -- even when they are different, even when that means some pedal through downtown in a thong.

Everything that goes well in this city begins with our people.

And, today we can say: “The state of our city is the strongest in the country.”

Part 2: The State of our City is the strongest in the country.

a. Generally

By just about every traditional and frequently used measure, Austin is the envy of cities across the country.

Austin has added jobs in 14 of the last 15 months. In fact, Austin has regained most of the pandemic-related jobs lost during the Spring of last year.

Austin’s unemployment rate of 4.2% (anticipated to be a seasonally adjusted rate of 4.0%) is the lowest among the 25 largest cities in the country.

Austin ranks as the 2nd best performing major job market since the beginning of the pandemic.

Austin is the safest of the four biggest cities in Texas and is among the five safest big cities in the entire country.

As of July, more than 16,500 jobs had been announced from roughly 60 companies moving to the region and nearly 70 expansions of companies already in the Austin area. This is yet another reflection of how much is going well here and how desirable a city we are.

We've attracted new, clean manufacturing that will bring much-needed middle-skill jobs (jobs that don't require a degree) to a city where that is our most significant employment need.

The water in Barton Springs remains clean and cool.

Completion of the city-wide "all ages and abilities" bicycle network is well ahead of schedule.

Substantial first steps are being taken to address long-term safety and security needs associated with wildfires and technology attacks.

I am particularly proud of our accomplishments in transportation, which has been a key priority for me and the entire City Council. We're well on our way to a new mass public transit system with subway rail downtown, a tunnel underneath Lake Austin, and crossing it, soon a new pedestrian/transit-only bridge. A preliminary complete system design is now being brought to the community for comment and input.

Even while designs are being debated, monies have been designated for a multi-billion dollar IH-35 project that should lower the freeway and stitch back together the east and west while providing transit lanes to encourage people to get out of their daily auto commutes.

Our city government and our utilities enjoy high bond ratings and the confidence of the financial markets.

Because we have such a strong economy, the Austin City Council was able to lower the city portion of the typical homeowner's property tax bill (for only the second time in recent memory) by doubling the homestead exemption and dramatically increasing exemptions for seniors and those with disabilities.

And Austin maintains our position as one of the international leaders in climate change mitigation, with new initiatives in electrification, sustainable energy, and battery technology.

The State of our City is not only strong but the strongest in the country. We should pause and celebrate this achievement.

b. Those not equitably participating - disparities.

And at the same time, we are here today, with our eyes wide open to the racial and ethnic disparities that exist for our Black and brown communities. Our work is not done until all Austinites share access and opportunity equally. ***While we have so much work ahead, we are taking greater action to effect justice and equity than ever before in the history of our city.***

Austin's Equity Office is leading the review, measurement, and implementation of new equity initiatives in city departments and city spending.

Thousands of private sector community leaders and connectors have given their time to go through focused, multi-day training to understand the shortcomings and opportunities that exist with racial equity and then turned that learning into practice.

Tens of millions of dollars have been devoted to creating thousands of units of deeply affordable and permanent supportive housing units, many already on the ground and 15,667 others, planned and under development will soon appear on properties such as the St. John's and Ryan Drive sites. In fact, over just the last few years, our city has produced and set into motion significantly more deeply affordable and permanent supportive housing than ever before.

Austin has one of the lowest pandemic eviction rates among US cities in part because of orders, from me and the County Judge, as well as the actions of the City Council and the Commissioners Court and over \$50 million in federal rental assistance has gone to tenants and landlords -- efforts that have kept people in their homes.

First-ever regional workforce development plan programs, including trainings, childcare, apprenticeships, and job fairs are operating to continue to move thousands out of poverty and into living-wage jobs.

We're making transformational investments in providing quality childcare investing over \$6 million in CARES funding, over \$11 million in American Rescue Plan funding, and we've brought childcare services to over 500 Austin children with hundreds still to be served.

Austin leads nationally for actually re-imagining how to do public safety in a way that will help make our already safe city even safer, and for all. We are ending disparities in arrests and prosecutions for low-level offenses, increasing community oversight of policing, restructuring the academy, training new police officers, increasing investment in mental health first response and EMS coverage and response, and increasing sheltering capacity for victims seeking protection from domestic violence. We initiated new programs to fight increased violence, including the illegal gun initiative of Interim Police Chief Chacon, participation as one of a 15-city, White House convened cohort to drive community violence intervention, and new investments in gun safety and violence intervention.

We should be proud to be part of a community when voters approved, as part of Project Connect, a \$300 Million anti-displacement and affordability component, the largest such equity investment of any transit program in the country.

Led by Black and brown community activists and organizers, our city has taken meaningful first steps toward addressing race-related, generational wealth disparities through restitution and atonement, preserving Black culture, history, and economic opportunity, and planning for a Black Embassy just east of IH-35. Austin is among the first cities in the country to make a substantial investment in developing a guaranteed income tool as a more efficient and effective way to deal with poverty.

Despite the significant disparities we face across race and ethnicity in Austin, our Covid death rate for Hispanics and for African Americans is also lower than the State's, and lower than urban counties like Houston and San Antonio. Whether you are white, Black, Asian or Hispanic, this has been a tragic and difficult year, but your life was safer here in Austin than in other cities, thanks to our community's effort.

There is still much work to be done for Austin to truly be a fair and just city for everyone. Nonetheless, we should still stop and take measure of all that is being done to achieve greater equity and on an accelerated schedule. And, we need to recognize that it is the strength, opportunity, and resources that come with having such a successful economy that provide the promise, tools, and ability to realize our ideals.

Part 3: A Community in trouble.

I wish that was all there was to talk about this evening. As I said before, the state of our city is so strong. ***At the same time, however, our sense of community is at risk.***

Despite all that is good around us, there are some who want to polarize and divide our community with misinformation. While we should be celebrating our shared successes, there are those who seem to seek out ways to foster fear and engender hate. It's almost as if creating a climate and a movement that seek to separate and divide us from one another has become a pastime or a sport. The proliferation of bad information, some unknowing and some intended to misinform results in the successes of our city often being lost, twisted, turned, hidden, and drowned out by calls for divisiveness and self-doubt.

Often, our days seem harder and meaner and far too many of us feel overcome with weariness and emotional fatigue. We're tired and we've had enough. And most regrettably for a city that takes its strength from the community, too frequently we've had enough of each other.

No longer do we find ourselves just disagreeing with others, it seems correspondingly inherent to also dislike, distrust and even demonize those with whom we disagree and just because we disagree. No longer can we civilly dispute what might be the best policy to deal with the real challenges we face. First, civil discourse is becoming increasingly rare. Second, too many feel they are entitled not only to their own opinions but also to their own, alternative facts. How do we make sound policy decisions as a community, without a shared sense of reality?

The rise of hyper-partisan media outlets and right-wing alternative news sites, disinformation campaigns on social media platforms, and contempt for experts' opinion pose a danger for Austin, and for our country.

This phenomenon isn't unique to the City of Austin, it's happening nationally but it feels more strange and foreign to an Austinite because of our strong local history and what has been the powerful interconnectivity of those that choose to call Austin home.

I want to touch on three issues in our community as examples of this challenge: how we respond to the Delta variant surge; public safety and policing; and homelessness. The test of how we move forward as a community will be found in how we respond to these three challenges.

a. Issue: Covid Vaccinations and Masking

Our city's most immediate challenge is to stop the Delta COVID-19 variant. It is killing too many of our neighbors and putting an even larger number at risk. It is filling our hospitals and ICUs and crowding out not only other COVID patients but also endangering any of us who might be in an accident or have a heart attack.

This strain on our emergency response now requires the closing down of events and gatherings, not just because of the risk of viral spread, but because gatherings in the best of times result in a small number of EMS calls and hospital visits and the Delta variant is robbing us of the capacity to handle even this.

In 2020, the virus and the lack of tools to fight off its spread was our common enemy. Yet despite the challenges associated with the pandemic, Austin's economy grew while maintaining some of the lowest infection rates and unemployment numbers in the entire state because of our ability to remain safe as a community through masking and social distance practices.

The current surge is similarly preventable and so it is our clearest illustration of the harm caused by disinformation and the polarization it helps create. What makes our current situation so frustrating is that we are our own worst enemy.

There are certain and undeniable truths:

The only way to stop this virus is with vaccines and, in the interim, with masking. Our city successfully lowered every prior surge every time we have implemented a masking mandate.

The vaccines are safe and effective. Far safer than experimental treatments. And far safer than getting the Delta variant. But you don't have to take my word for it- just look at our ICUs.

Ninety percent of the people in our ICUs are unvaccinated.

You know what these ICUs are not filled with? People experiencing vaccine side effects.

Our hospitals are now using the word “dangerous” to describe the overcrowding situation they are now experiencing, on account of unvaccinated individuals.

Surely the reason we require a vaccination for measles, as we do for school children, is no more important than the need for their protections against Covid.

It is so hard for me to understand how we can be facing such risks, know exactly what we need to do, and have our Governor affirmatively trying to stop local school boards from doing what all the experts say is best to keep our

children safe. Parents across the state should be outraged and make their anger known.

It is shameful that a private business gets threatened with the loss of a state operating license because it chose to protect its employees and customers by setting rules for their own private property.

It is not enough merely to recommend vaccines and masking. People who choose not to take these time-proven public health mitigation measures are not just putting themselves at risk.

That is why as Mayor, I will do everything I can do, together with the County Judge and my colleagues on the Council, to use every power we have, for however long we can, to fight to keep our children safe, our workplaces safe for our employees, and our businesses and events open. I will continue to work toward a vaccine mandate for city employees or, alternatively, a testing mandate that allows waivers for those that voluntarily choose to get vaccinated. I believe the city should lead by example.

I do not know the answer to the great harm caused by the misinformation casting its shadow over Austin. But I know, in the end, it's up to you. We should each seek out and be guided by the truth.

In the end, regardless of what the courts say can or cannot be ordered or mandated by law, each of us in the solitude of our own conscience will have the absolute power to make for ourselves and our families those choices that best protect our neighbors and their families, too. It's what it means to be a part of a strong community.

b. Issue: Policing

As Austin Interim Police Chief Chacon recently shared at a public meeting, Austin is one of the five safest big cities in the country. Again, our community should pause for a moment and celebrate this achievement.

Yet, there are some in the city working really hard to convince you otherwise. And their efforts, following the national political debate and the use of yet another “law and order” frame to organize politically, have left our community polarized and divided. There is a political advantage being sought by those creating the false perception that Austin is unsafe.

Even one life lost is too many. And Austin has seen a significant increase in the number of murders this year versus last year. We should, and we are, working to take illegal guns off the streets with initiatives to fight gun and other types of violence in our city. But the same data that shows the number of homicides in Austin rising also shows that the rate of homicides in Austin is the lowest among the four biggest cities in Texas and among the lowest in such cities in the country.

We are not dealing with a city that is unsafe, but with those working hard to create the perception that we are unsafe.

Those who wish to divide our community use misinformation as a tool for this work. A piece of misinformation that I believe is particularly harmful and personally offensive, is the suggestion that the Austin City Council does not respect nor support our police force. Associated with this misinformation is the claim that the Council defunded and took \$150 Million or a third of the police budget away from the police functions to which it was being put. None of this is true.

Let me clearly speak for myself, and I believe for everyone on the council, I respect and support the officers of the Austin Police Department. I believe they are among the best officers in the country, which is why I have always supported paying them at the very top of the comparable salary scales. Every individual officer I have come to know personally is a credit to their profession, someone I trust and believe has the ability to help keep our community safe in a just and fair way, each is someone I respect. I believe that in today's world there is a need for cities like Austin to have strong, professional, and well-supported police forces. I do not believe that all our officers are out to do harm.

Nothing about what I believe is inconsistent with also believing that we expect too much of our officers and that this can cause harm to officers and community members alike. Cities should not rely on their officers for how they intersect with poverty, and our officers should not be responsible for how we intervene with and support those with mental health challenges.

I can support and honor our police and still confront institutional racism, and support changing a warrior culture to one that leads with a guardian mindset. Doing this requires us, in part, to change how we teach new cadets and ultimately meant pausing three cadet classes while the changes, over twenty recommended by the Austin Police Department itself, could be put into place.

I deservedly get criticism when I make mistakes and I have made them. This is also true of our institutions and our officers. We can support our police officers while also being critical of the harm done to peaceful demonstrators at the George Floyd and Mike Ramos protests. We can admire the heroism of police officers while also disapproving of inappropriate police interactions on video.

It is not right that so many in our community, especially many of those of color, do not feel as safe with our police as do other parts of the community. The hard fact is, me being stopped by the police when I'm driving does not evoke the same anxiety felt by many in the Black community. And I never got a lecture from my mother about what I needed to do to stay alive in such an encounter. This is neither right nor just and we must correct it. George Floyd, Sandra Bland, and countless others cannot have died in vain. We don't get to say "never again," and forget their names, and then do nothing because it's uncomfortable or disruptive.

I believe we need more police officers and that's why I supported starting the cadet classes earlier this year and supported, with my colleagues, at least two additional classes next year as approved in the recent budget. I believe we will make a safe city even safer with a comprehensive approach to public safety staffing that is data-driven, is able to adapt to changing needs, and considers the collective efforts of our police, our firefighters, EMS responders, mental health support professionals and violence prevention personnel.

It is true that we are experiencing police staffing shortages. A significant amount of this is not the direct result of Austin City Council action, but rather is consistent with national trends -- being experienced by cities across the country - of increased police retirements and resignations over the last several years, especially most recently. And I do recognize that for some officers, their duties have changed.

Some of this attrition has been exacerbated by the perception within our police force that they are neither respected, valued nor supported in this community. My experience tells me that such a perception is not true. I spend a lot of time in the community and my personal beliefs, as I outlined a moment ago, are shared by most people in this city.

Regardless of what you see on social media.

An APD officer reached out to me a few weeks ago because they believed I had not spoken up to recognize and thank the officers for their heroic actions in saving lives at the mass shooting on Sixth Street. I was so grateful for the opportunity to share with them the ways I had actually done this, both with local and national media, beginning within hours of the event, just as I've done in the past. It also gave me a chance to hear their concerns. Being able to communicate directly with this officer was a privilege and opportunity I value. Maybe there's a

path forward in this experience, where we find ways to personally connect, correct misinformation and meaningfully communicate again.

We will all be safer by appropriately staffing and by reforming policing to 21st century standards. But we are more unsafe if we are divided by misinformation.

c. Issue: Homelessness

No discussion about divisions in our community would be complete without a discussion about homelessness. Except, again, the lack of accurate information results in increased divisions in our city.

Our community is united in wanting to help people experiencing homelessness get off the streets, out of tents, and back into general society or safely situated in stable homes. We don't want to see tent encampments under highways or along our roads. We want those with mental health challenges to receive the care and support they need.

The truth is that we know how to get this done. We reached equilibrium with veterans experiencing homelessness whereby we can get them housing and services at the same rate that we find them on our streets. We're getting close to getting most of the children experiencing homelessness off our streets.

Recently, we closed encampments at the library on Cesar Chavez just east of IH-35, at the Menchaca intersection with Ben White, and from around City Hall and on Cesar Chavez near Congress Avenue. We've been able to buy and put hotels under contract for conversion into permanently supportive apartments or other types of housing at a significantly lower cost and with greater speed than past alternatives.

Many in the community, including the City Council, have adopted the goal of housing 3,000 people chronically experiencing homelessness in the next three years and are doing the work to get this done. Those advocating for the building and sustaining of a permanent and integrated system are seeking additional partners. Such a system will have all stakeholders pulling in the same direction in a coordinated fashion -- rather than merely seeking to fund and execute needed projects one at a time as one-off efforts. This will take investment and time, but it will deliver to our city the chance to meet the challenge of homelessness indefinitely by creating the infrastructure to make homelessness brief, rare and non-recurring.

Voters in May passed Proposition B that returned our city to the camping ordinances in effect two summers ago and I expect the City Manager to enforce it. This means that many people currently in tents will return to places where they are not seen and where they are moved around with nowhere really to go. We

cannot be satisfied leaving these people in this situation so the efforts I mentioned before become even more important, and more important to be done quickly.

There's much to be done as we have about 1,500 people sleeping unsheltered on our streets on any given evening.

Some are calling for everyone currently in a tent to be immediately housed. Unfortunately, these proponents do not come with resources to accomplish this and they are not able to propose any specific location that would be supported and accepted.

Even if we could find an acceptable location for sanctioned camp areas for over a thousand people, we have learned hard lessons from other cities. Cities that have tried to deal with the challenge of homelessness with such camp areas find the strategy alone does not work. Many people will only go to encampments if they believe they will ultimately be moved into something more permanent and private. And the wrap-around services so integral to recovery are many times more successful for people living in homes than in encampments.

We need to learn from the cities that have tried this approach, spent too much of their dollars on immediate and temporary answers, only to find there are insufficient resources left to build the permanent system and its physical and service capacity necessary to meet the challenge long-term.

We see success by getting hundreds out of tents and into homes with services, rather than moving people from one camp area in one neighborhood to another camp area in another neighborhood.

I believe most people in this city agree that we need to meet this challenge, remove the tents, house and support the people, and accomplish this in a way that invests our dollars in long-term solutions.

While this takes time, we are already seeing success and already lowering the polarization. And in this action and result, we are finding another path toward community cohesion.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the City Council has purchased hotels in Districts 3, 4, 6, and 7, along with new partnerships with Caritas and Foundation Communities and others, to create over 600 homes for those coming out of homelessness. By comparison, in our first two years on the dais, colleagues, that number was just 46 homes in total for those experiencing homelessness. Our community is making unprecedented and truly promising efforts to meet the challenge of homelessness.

CONCLUSION

By almost all traditional measures of success, Austin is the strongest major city in the country. This is no small feat. It means that for most, there is a great opportunity and an exceptional quality of life.

This positions our city to do more than any other to focus on and improve the disparities that we and every other major city face. In fact, our success makes that our duty and responsibility. And we are a city that is stepping up to that challenge.

I share with most everyone in Austin an immense thankfulness and appreciation for the privilege and opportunity to live in this city.

Austin is a magical place.

This is why we need to fight so hard to hold onto what makes us special.

This requires us to do better to mitigate the impact that unaffordability is having on our ability to help people to continue to live here and preserve the diversity that is the fabric of our city. These issues are our next biggest challenge.

But the immediate challenges we need to overcome together, the Delta variant, policing, and homelessness, are ones we've identified and are pursuing the path forward to success. We cannot let ourselves be distracted or consumed

by misinformation or the desire by some to divide us to gain a political or rhetorical advantage.

We need to reach deep into the reservoir that is our community, our common culture, our core values, all the elements that make Austin special -- and fight for our community. Fight fear with facts, and misinformation with listening and truth. If we do, we will find the strength and the power to realize the promise and potential of Austin.

Austin is an exceptional city with very real challenges. The state of our city is strong and our future is boundless. Through my work and interactions with mayors nationally and even globally -- I can attest that every mayor wants to serve a city like Austin.

We also recognize and clearly see the most significant challenges confronting us.

We must stay true to who we are. We must fight against the forces that would divide us, discredit objective data, and make us scared of and demonize one another. We must commit to seek out and share only real and truthful information. And we must listen, talk to and try to understand one another. Now is the moment for us to show the world and ourselves -- we are still Austin.

Stay safe - and let's keep taking care of each other.