

## Adler Launch Remarks 5-4-14

Good Afternoon!

Thank you for coming to join Diane, the girls and me.

I'm Steve Adler and I'm running for mayor.

### **WHO I AM**

I love Austin, its culture, its energy. We are innovators and artists, hard workers and risk takers. No other city in the world is as vibrant, creative *and* informal as Austin. We've built an incredible city, a strong economy, a great quality of life, and a city with a special soul.

I've been lucky to call Austin my home for 36 years.

I was born in Washington, DC, and my parents worked hard so that my brother, sister, and I could be the first in our family to go to college. They wanted us to have more opportunities than they had. My dad died when I was 21; my mother followed him six years later. But they are with me today, everyday, and they have always served as my motivation to make sure others have the opportunities they gave me.

I went to Princeton and UT Law School on scholarships and part time jobs. (I'll be honest, I came to UT because it was the cheapest law school in the country.) Within 45 minutes of first arriving, I was swimming in Barton Springs. I knew I had found my home.

After law school, I devoted much of my practice to civil rights law. I defended workers and women facing discrimination and sexual harassment – hard workers who were being denied equal pay for equal work. When I won in court for Hispanic construction workers, they won the chance to operate the heavy equipment. That meant they could earn the higher pay and promotions they deserved.

Later, I became chief of staff and general counsel for state Senator Eliot Shapleigh doing public policy and learning governance, fighting for increased public school funding, higher teacher salaries, and greater environmental protections. We worked to fuel economic growth in eager but poor communities.

For over twenty years, I have worked with and chaired many of Austin's large civic and non-profit boards. I have fought discrimination and promoted the benefits of diversity as chair of the Anti-Defamation League. As board chair of the Texas Tribune, I helped build a business model for the thoughtful, factual, independent media Texas needs. I have worked to expand opportunity for girls, women and first-generation college students as a board member of GEN-Austin and Breakthrough. At the Long Center and as chair of Ballet Austin, I have helped ensure that all our communities have access to the arts.

Throughout my career, I have defended renters and landowners when the government or big corporations were unfairly taking their property. I've defended families in the Blacklands neighborhood on the east side of IH 35 when the University of Texas was expanding. I've defended small and large businesses of all kinds across the state, over a dozen churches, and the Texas Nature Conservancy — and I've seen that the government doesn't always work for everyone. That's why I'll work hard every day to ensure that our city government works for all of us in Austin.

All of this to say, I've spent a lifetime fighting for equity, access, fairness and opportunity. I've protected working families, small businesses and women from discrimination and abuse.

## **WHERE WE ARE**

I've spent most of my life in Austin, and this City has been very good to me and my family. It's a city with a strong economy and a special soul — and people from across the country are moving here to be part of it.

We must continue the forward progress of the great things that are happening!

But, this rapid growth also brings many challenges. Traffic congestion is out of control. Our environment needs more continued protection. Our kids' classrooms need more resources.

Our neighborhoods are threatened. Too many seniors and long-time residents are getting priced out of their homes, along with our artists, musicians. Our children can't afford to live in the Austin where they grew up, when they graduate and leave home.

Did you know our poverty rate has increased 150% in ten years and the divide between rich and poor widens.

You've heard 110 people move to Central Texas every day.

But the truth is more complicated. To understand Austin today, you need to go deeper. 150 people move here every day.

But 40 people leave.

We talk about the cost of so many people coming, but we don't talk about the reasons and the cost of losing those who move away. If we lose our economic and ~~cultural~~ <sup>social</sup> diversity, Austin will lose its soul.

## **HOW WE GOT HERE**

Mayor Leffingwell promised to jumpstart the economy and create jobs. He did. And we owe him a debt of gratitude. But now we must deal with the challenges that growth brings.

With our fast growing population, we could have predicted ten years ago the challenges we face today – traffic congestion and increased poverty are not surprises. Too often, the City government has been as gridlocked, as the traffic on our streets. Too often, we have let disputes distract us from looming threats to our quality of life. We've let divisions hold up long-term solutions that prevent us from getting things done.

We have been reactive. It's only after a drunk driver kills attendees that we study the sustainability of our festivals. Only after another flood takes lives and destroys homes do we move aggressively to buy out flood prone properties. And now, only after we're trapped in traffic for hours do we finally focus on comprehensive transportation congestion solutions.

To meet our challenges, we're going to need a New Way Forward. That's why I am running for Mayor.

Austin is at a tipping point. Saving the soul of our fast-growing city means we have to apply some of our famous creativity and innovation to our big challenges like traffic, education, affordability and protecting our

environment and our neighborhoods.

We have to work together with new energy and new urgency to protect the Austin we love — and this is the time to do it. If we don't build a solid foundation for future growth when our economy is booming, when will we do it?

## **THE ISSUES**

### **Traffic Congestion**

Let me see a show of hands... How many of you here today lose too much time trapped in Austin traffic?

It's time to get Austin moving. It's time to stop talking and start acting. We have 2 million people in the Austin metropolitan area and we'll have 4 million people in 25 to 30 years. When that day comes, I can't imagine an Austin without an integrated transportation plan that reaches all across the city and includes urban rail, roads, transit, bikes and sidewalks.

But we need to do more because the studies say that we can't build our way out of congestion. We need to focus on where and how we're going to live in 30 years. We must encourage more opportunities for folks to live closer to where they work, learn and play. Right now, there are things we can do to provide immediate relief like redesigning intersections for continuous traffic flow. We also must widely implement staggered work hours, car-pooling, telecommuting and other alternatives. Traffic congestion is a crisis and we must act now!

### **Education**

Education is the key to Austin's continued success. We have a moral imperative to give our children the tools they need to succeed.

Helping Austin to have the best schools must be part of the Mayor's job — especially when those in charge in the State Capitol fail to make it a priority. Great leaders like Mayor Julian Castro in San Antonio have shown us what a focused city can do. We must provide and protect quality pre-K for our 3 and 4 year olds.

AISD is currently sending over \$100 Million in taxpayer's dollars to the State. We should be getting most of that back. We don't. We need to change unfair and discriminatory state funding formula that don't fairly recognize our disproportionately high poverty rate and our need for bi-lingual education. That is wrong. As Mayor I will work with our school districts, legislative delegation, and other Texas cities to get our fair share of resources. All kids of all families deserve the same, great opportunities.

### **Affordability**

And there is no opportunity without affordability. We need to make sure that our families that want to keep living here can afford to do so. Austin, a great place to live, is powered by a vibrant creative community, multiple races, ethnicities, and cultures. We are richer for our seniors and our students.

But all this is threatened by skyrocketing housing costs, a lack of middle class jobs, rising taxes and fees. Even during a time of historic job growth, 57% of the jobs created this year do not pay a living wage.

Austin has a “jobs hole” attracting and filling both high paying jobs and lower paying jobs, but not jobs for the middle class that live here, or for our neighbors to move up the economic ladder. That is not sustainable. We need to leverage Austin’s popularity to bring in jobs that bolster the middle class.

We must streamline our planning and permitting process to cut time and costs and help increase the supply of homes and apartments and to help rents and prices to come down. We need to buy and save property now for housing that is affordable tomorrow. We must hold the line on property taxes and utility rates, join forces to seek a fairer tax system that doesn’t disproportionately rely on the value of our homes, and avoid unneeded large capital expenditures like the \$2.3 billion wood burning power plant the city bought a just a few years ago but barely uses today.

Finally, we need to do a better job of making sure that growth pays for itself.

### **Environment and Water**

Our environment, Barton Springs, and Lady Bird Lake define Austin and water is the critical issue on our horizon. We must recommit to elevate Austin as a national leader on conservation and sustainability. We must launch a massive effort to reuse and conserve existing water supplies before we’re asked to spend millions or billions of dollars to find new water.

We must expand open space by thousands of acres all across our City and we need to green that city in a drought resistant manner. We must be better prepared to deal with the threat of wildfires to protect Austin from the catastrophes experienced in Oak Hill, Steiner Ranch, and Bastrop. We must expand our commitment to renewable energy. We must enforce already-approved initiatives like zero waste.

### **Neighborhoods**

That measure code enforcement, and predictable outcomes, is key also to our neighborhoods. Austin’s character comes alive in those vibrant and unique neighborhoods. We must control and require that the land development code re-write project, now underway, be transparent, open, inclusive and that it protects that the character and provides for the city we want in thirty years. We must reject the false choice that such protection cannot co-exist with affordability and neighborhood centers. We have to work harder and together. Importantly, we must provide increased tools and support to strengthen all neighborhoods throughout our City so they are best able to be full and responsible partners.

### **Government**

And did you know that City of Austin today is 300 square miles big. We have 13,000 city employees and they need the resources to do their jobs in an efficient, transparent, consistent, and responsive manner. Citizens dealing with the City should receive great customer service. Austin should recognize that many of its issues are regional and work more closely with other neighboring jurisdictions. And here in Austin, the layers of government (the City, the County, ACC, school districts, others) must work harder to work together.

### **THE CHOICE**

Austin is at a crossroads. Austinites have a choice to make. The decisions we make today will set the course for decades to come.

They'll determine whether our kids can afford to live on their own in the city we love.

They'll determine whether traffic chokes us off from the world.

They'll determine whether we protect and pass down our natural resources.

Ultimately, they'll determine whether we manage our growth or let growth manage us.

It is time for the old battle lines to be put aside. It is time to be proactive and to execute long-term solutions. It is time to be bold and not timid.

Others have had the chance over the last eight years, to address the very same challenges we face today. It is time for new leadership. We don't want experience in how things have been done in the past; we need a new and broader experience and a vision for how things should be done tomorrow.

It is appropriate that today we meet in front of City Hall. Soon, the whole city takes over this building. Today marks the beginning of the citizens' council. We will have new communities and new leaders sitting at the council table in that building for the first time.

Together, we'll chart a New Way Forward. One that brings together all of Austin, as One Austin. We will focus on common goals rather than on what divides us.

I am ready to do this job. I've tackled challenges as an advocate, at the legislature, as a 35-year small business owner, and as a community leader.

I am asking for your support. But more than that, I'm asking for your help, your creativity, your involvement and your passion. We do this together.

Austin is now an international city. We must think big. We must think new. We must think long-term. We must use and share our growing economy to finally tackle our long-term challenges. This is a new day. This is a new beginning.

That is why I'm standing here today. My name is Steve Adler and I am running to be your next Mayor of Austin. Together, we can chart a New Way Forward.

Thank you for being here today. I would be honored to have your support. Before I stop, I wanted you to meet my beautiful wife, Diane Land. She is my partner in this endeavor as in all things; we do this together. I wouldn't be here without her love, encouragement, support, and hard work.