

Kickoff speech at El Mercado 2/8/18

Starts by recognizing warmup speakers:

Nuria Zaragoza

Ruby Roa

Sandra Kirk

Kathie Tovo:

...serve us here on the community, all three of you, and so I really appreciate your kind words, but I also appreciate all the work you've done on behalf of Austin.

It has really been an honor and a privilege to serve as Mayor pro tem and to represent City Council District 9 on the Austin City Council and I want to say, you know I have a very unique experience of serving on the last at-large council and [then] and being [on the] first female Majority Council in Austin's history.

I have a few colleagues here this evening. Thank you, colleagues, for being here and other elected officials thank you for being here and most of all, really thank you all for taking time. I know it was very challenging to get here with the traffic and everything else and people have flu and what not, so thank you for taking time to be here.

Many of you, as I look around, volunteered for my first two campaigns and you know those were very challenging campaigns and I never, never would have been elected to the Austin City Council without your tireless work calling people, knocking on doors, so thank you. I love my job and I really look forward to your support and I hope with your support I hope to be able to do it for another four years.

And as I look around the room I also see people who I have the opportunity and the good fortune to work with over the last several years, the last...since the time I've been on Council and together we've really worked well to build a better Austin. We have succeeded in really listening to...making sure that more voices are heard at City Hall and in city offices and I want to give you a few examples.

A few years ago we listened to our workforce and to the voices of some brave city staff who shared their stories with us and then we worked with AFSCME and others to create better rules and new alternatives for employees at the city who are experiencing discrimination, harassment, and retaliation in our city workplace.

We formed a new [College] Student Commission recently to insure that the City Council will have new opportunities to hear and to learn from the voices of UT students and those at Huston-Tillotson and other area college students.

We initiated a shift. Took a few years, but we initiated a shift in how the city is going to use hotel occupancy taxes so that more of these will, in the future, go to historic preservation rather than [inaudible due to applause] and so this shift is going to make sure that more of those dollars go to supporting our historic preservation and our city facilities rather than year after year seeing it flow, primarily, to the Austin Convention &

Visitors Bureau and just in this last year alone almost a million dollars of it went to help support the renovation of places like Oakwood Cemetery and the Elisabet Ney Museum and the O. Henry Museum.

So often one of the great parts of my job is that often as a council member I get to support and help move forward the great ideas of other people and one of the most recent and one of the biggest community successes on that front has really been the Sobering Center. As many of you know Judge [Nancy] Hohengarten and others had a vision about 15 years ago to have a sobriety center here in the City of Austin and the City Council back in about 2001 passed a resolution to create that Sobering Center and then progress really slowed until just a few years ago.

And so one of the great things in my second...one of the great projects I've gotten a chance to work on in my second term has been to help, along with the other community leaders and the other elected officials, help move that project forward and I'm just so delighted to report that after the long wait The Sobriety Center, The Sobering Center as it's now called, is going to open up later this year in August. It now has a location, an executive director, and it's going to open later this year.

And so that's a little bit of what I've been working on. It's been a very busy four years. Anyone who's been around City Hall knows that you can't get that much done without a really stellar staff and I am so blessed at City Hall to have a really stellar group of staff and many of them are here tonight and I'm going to introduce those to you. Joi Harden, Nici Huff, Ashley Richardson, and Eunice Ko. And somewhere in this crowd I believe is Shannon Halley, a former staffer who's also...there she is. You're all amazing and thank you so much for all the work that you do on behalf of Austin and we have a lot left to do.

We have a new City Manager as all of you know. He starts next week. We have Mobility Bond dollars to invest in new sidewalk improvements and traffic mitigation. We have an upcoming bond program that I hope is going to have lots of new funding for affordable housing, which is desperately needed and parks and other important programs, and of course, we're still navigating our way through CodeNEXT.

And our city generally is just facing very significant changes. District 9 is really the epicenter of many of those changes. In the words of former President Jimmy Carter, we must adjust to changing times and still hold to unchanging principles. Around the room, you may see signs from my previous campaigns signaling my promise to create a City Hall that listens. That was in 2011, and to be a progressive voice on the council, and I'm here tonight to recommit to all of those promises.

I will continue to work to make City Hall a place that provides a space for the diverse voices in our city and incorporate those voices into the decision making and also to seek out voices outside of City Hall and throughout the community knowing that many people with an idea or a concern or a question don't always make their way down to City Hall, and I'll continue to support a City Hall that works on behalf of every day Austinites and I know that you share those values as well.

I believe that we can welcome new companies to our city without providing huge tax incentives. We can embrace visitors and use the taxes they generate not just to attract more and more visitors, but rather to reinvest in our city's really precious assets like Barton Springs. We can be a vibrant city of festivals and events on our weekends, but we need to strike a balance between protecting our parkland and lessening the impact on people who live nearby and we cannot blame use rules that accommodate growth and change in appropriate places but don't override neighborhood plans and land use patterns and they don't result in widespread redevelopment and the displacement of residents who are living there and we can foster development and protect our environmentally sensitive lands.

And we must do a better job of reaching out to our neighbors in need and to move closer to a day where Austin's prosperity is enjoyed by all. And some of the most important work that I believe we have ahead relates to homelessness, and when I say we have ahead it's not just the work that my office is going to do along with my colleagues, but it's really the work that I hope we, as a community, will do.

You know, hundreds of my District 9 constituents are experiencing homelessness and those of you who know Ann Howard potentially. Those of you who know Ann Howard, who serves as the Executive Director of the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition and is a fierce advocate for housing, you will have heard her say that we end homelessness with housing and she is absolutely right, and to do that we need to expand our successful programs like the Homelessness Outreach Street Team. We need to try innovative social investment models to create more housing and most of all we really need to engage more people in the effort to raise money so that no one in the city has to sleep in the alleys, in the doorways, or shelters of our city.

I know several of you in this room are deeply committed to this work and deeply involved in this work and I really look forward to the progress that I know we'll make together over the next four years. And if you aren't involved please consider the way in which you might support these efforts. We have good organizations and lots of individuals in this city working hard, but ending homelessness in this community is going to take lots more of us working together.

So we have great challenges and great opportunities ahead of us in this beloved city and I'm eager, really eager, to continue working with all of you to make Austin, Texas an even better place to live for all of its residents. Not just in District 9 but throughout the city.

And then some...that really I would never have been elected to City Council without a tremendous volunteer base and I'm really fortunate that, that volunteer base has come together again to support this next campaign, which is going to be really important and Joe Pinnelli is going to talk...he was right over there. Joe Pinnelli is going to talk a little bit more about that element, but I want to thank a few folks that really stepped up so far to help with the campaign. Joi Harden, on her volunteer time, has done a great job

helping organize this along with some others. Jolene, likewise. Jolene Kiolbassa has been around a long time helping and she's [inaudible due to applause] couldn't do it without her. Jim [inaudible due to applause] has built a great digital platform and website and I appreciate that and of course, my consultants who took a chance back in 2011 on an uphill fight, David Butts, Matt Hersh. Well, let me recognize them individually. David Butts, Matt Hersh, Dean Rindy. I appreciate all of you.

And I mentioned that I have a couple colleagues here. I'm going to recognize them. I hope more having come in because I may miss them. Council Member Leslie Pool, Council Member Ann Kitchen, former colleague Laura Morrison, and I neglected to mention a former staff member on my team who is also now a candidate and that's Bobby Levinski. [Inaudible due to applause] others were here earlier and I appreciate and I apologize if I've missed anybody out there.

So thanks again to all the volunteers. We had a great petition. The window for petitions opened up about two weeks ago and we've already had several great teams of people knocking on doors and collecting signatures at community events and it is really off to a great effort, so thank you. Joe Pinnelli is going to talk a little bit about how you can help, but before he does I just want to also thank my family for their support through this time of mine on City Hall and I want to say a special thanks to my two daughters.

They have now spent just about two-thirds of their life in or around City Hall and I once described them as my most important constituents. And of course, they still are and as they've become more informed constituents they've also gotten a little bit tougher and so now for example, I hear about why our neighborhood pool was closed last summer and when one day my youngest asked me, when we passed a man sleeping on the bench around the corner from our house, why I wasn't doing more to help him.

So, girls, I am so grateful, not just for your support, but also for the hard questions because they help me strive to do even better and I also want to say they have a great sense of humor. For example, you've been able to maintain your good humor when someone at school asked why your mom was on TV talking about public toilets, so thanks again.

All of you coming thank you for your support. Thank you for all the work that you do on behalf of Austin and its future and now Joe Pinnelli, who has been my campaign treasurer since 2011 and most of you know he and Janice Pinnelli do wonderful things on behalf of Austin and I'm so honored to have him as my campaign treasurer. Thank you.