

2018 Inaugural Address: Mayor-elect Melvin Carter

Thank you all for coming out today. I am so grateful.

I'm grateful to God, whose love and grace are the reason I am here today.

To Sakeena, thank you so much for your incredible love and support. You are my best friend and in every way my life partner. I'm blessed to have you as my wife.

To Jasmine, Sean, Maylena, Myles & Naomi; mom, dad and our entire family who traveled from near and far to be here today, thank you for your love and support. You are the true foundation and motivation for my life and work.

Mayor Coleman, thank you for your leadership these past twelve years. You have left our city so much stronger than you found it and we all owe you a debt of gratitude.

To Governor Dayton, members of the Saint Paul City Council and legislative delegation, and all the officials gathered here, thank you for your vision and leadership.

I also want to thank my fellow candidates for mayor, not just for your presence here today but for our spirited debate over the past year. The lessons I've learned from you will make me a better mayor.

To the Saint Paul Public Schools, Principal Mary Mackbee, and the entire Central High family, thank you for hosting us today.

And finally, to all the volunteers and staff who've worked so hard for so long to make this day possible, from the bottom of my heart, I thank you.

My love for Saint Paul goes back 100 years to when my great-grandparents fled here from the hatred and violence of the Deep South.

They couldn't have imagined the opportunity this city has shown me. I'm the son of a policeman and a teacher; a product of our public schools & rec centers who grew up to be a City Council Member, advisor to Governor Dayton, and now Mayor of the greatest city in the world.

Now is an exciting time for Saint Paul. We have more places than ever to enjoy art and music and eat a great meal; we have big development opportunities ahead; and our population will soon reach an all-time high. Saint Paul is a city with momentum.

But we're also a place of deep inequity. And I live that too.

I know firsthand how it feels to live on a block devastated by foreclosures; to long for a teacher who looks like my child; and to be stopped by police, over and over again.

We have work to do to fulfill Saint Paul's promise for every person in every part of our city. That work will center around three pillars: Public Safety, Education, and Economic Justice.

To keep our city safe, we will protect and strengthen the sacred trust between our police and our neighbors; and offer a supportive, nurturing community for individuals returning from incarceration.

To prepare our children for the future, we will build stronger partnerships between our schools, libraries and rec centers; provide jobs and summer programs for youth; ensure a strong start for our youngest children and help families meet their goals.

And we will invest – to create jobs and opportunity in all of our neighborhoods; to ensure dignified housing; and to equip families with tools to turn income into wealth.

This work cannot wait.

Starting right away, I will work with Chief Axtell to review and revise our police department's use of force policies.

I will propose a partnership between business, philanthropy and nonprofit leaders to start every child born in Saint Paul with \$50 in a college savings account.

And because no one who works full time should ever be stuck living in poverty, I will work closely with the City Council to raise the minimum wage to \$15/ hour for every worker in our city as soon as possible.

These are important initiatives and they will move Saint Paul forward. But the real change; the lasting transformative change we seek will take much more than new policy.

We need a new *way* at City Hall.

History has shown that real, transformative change doesn't come from the decisions of leaders, but from the resolve of regular people:

A woman refusing to give up her seat on the bus;

Students sitting-in at a lunch counter;

Factory workers, janitors, security guards and nurses demanding fair wages.

When regular people like you and me stand up, that's how change happens. That's how change endures.

I'm honored to have Saint Paul's own Grammy nominated Stokely Williams join us today to sing the National Anthem, but we cannot ignore the painful reminder, written into our Anthem's third verse, of just how deeply injustice is rooted in the American tradition:

*No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight, or the gloom of the grave:*

*And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!*

Our national freedom song is an ode to slavery.

This is the American paradox, passed from generation to generation, dating back to the noble group of rich white straight male landowners who embedded into our founding principles a yearning for a set of God-given rights they sought to secure for only themselves.

Over the last year, many politicians have declined to answer when America was great; here's my answer: we prove our greatness, again and again, with every generation that redeems the value of those powerful words that launched our democracy – “We the People” – by fighting to ensure that “we” truly means all of us.

Fifteen years ago, I graduated from college intent on making a difference.

I never thought I'd be a mayor or even work in local politics at all – issues like garbage collection felt too small.

But then I learned what cities do. See, at City Hall, we don't have time for prolonged debate or partisan gridlock, because the moment always demands action:

When our families are snowed in, city workers plow us out.

When our children get out of school, city help them with their homework.

And in our most horrific moments, when everyone else runs away, city workers race to help.

We care for each other, at the most local and intimate level, through cities. And that care sets the course for our entire community.

I have been proud to see Saint Paul's care in action over the past year.

From the Women's March at the Capitol to this incredible crowd today, we have stood together to reject hate, bigotry and racism and prove Senator Paul Wellstone's words: *“We all do better when we all do better.”*

I'm excited for the future. Not just because of my new role, but because of our collective spirit; our collective willingness to reimagine Saint Paul; our collective drive to build a city that works for all of us.

We have a lot of work to do.

Right here in Minnesota, we face some of the worst disparities in the country due to decades of policy and resource decisions that, by excluding whole communities from the table, too often serve to weaken or even weaponize the public systems we look to for help.

We don't have to look far for a vivid reminder of that truth.

My grandfather, Melvin Carter Sr, owned over a half-dozen properties in our historic Rondo neighborhood, which was destroyed to build the freeway just below us.

It was his parents who fled here from Texas, and no one would have been prouder than my namesake to say the words, *“Mayor Melvin Carter”*. If I regret anything about this past year, it's that Grampa isn't here with us today.

He was a special man; a jazz musician who played with all the greats and entertained four U.S. Presidents. My grandmother always said he loved his trumpet most, but despite every opportunity to travel the world, he stayed home. Raised his family, taught lessons, and worked 28 years as a custodian at Humboldt High School, before finally retiring at a wage of \$15 per hour.

We've changed a lot since then, and we're transforming again now. In neighborhood after neighborhood I hear that as excited as we are about our future, we're also afraid of what it might bring:

- We're afraid equity means turning our back on those who are doing well;
- That bikes, density and transit will change our neighborhoods;
- That supporting workers will hurt business, and supporting teachers will hurt students.

We're afraid of having to choose – between preserving the traditions our parents loved and building the city our children deserve.

I understand those fears. That freeway cost my family everything, so I'll be first to admit change can be scary.

But we all exist in a long line of immigrants and refugees who've conquered incredible odds to find hope in Saint Paul. This beautiful diverse city they built for us is our ticket to the future:

Imagine the city we'll be when we start celebrating instead of accepting our diversity;

When we see children not as English Learners but as Language Teachers; and invite companies to invest not with big tax breaks, but with the richness of our strong schools; multilingual workforce; and 21st century infrastructure.

We can honor our past and build our future – at the same time – by betting on the limitless potential in our children & families; our workers and entrepreneurs. That's what reimagining Saint Paul is all about.

This work is more urgent than ever, so I need your help. A Mayor can draft a budget and sign policy into law, but the power to transform our city still belongs to all of us.

In a city where a child's life outcomes can still be better predicted by her race than by her work ethic, we need a new approach to city-building;

We must examine every law, every system, every policy and process to eliminate structural inequity and give every child born in Saint Paul the opportunity to achieve her full potential.

Building a city that works for everyone can only happen if everyone gets to build.

This can't just be the work of the mayor and city council, it has to be all of us.

Many of you have joined over the past 2 years in Imagine Saint Paul, our initiative to convene people across neighborhoods and build a big vision for our city.

Three hundred of you stepped forward last month to help our community hiring process build our leadership team.

Your words and actions have said loud and clear that you want to help; that you have more to offer, so our City Hall won't be designed to simply lift my voice, but to lift *every* voice, starting with those who have gone ignored for far too long.

We'll expand Imagine Saint Paul into Serve Saint Paul, and invite you to build sweat equity in our city through service.

We'll invite you to help build the vision; to help advance our values through policy proposals; and to help advocate for the lasting, transformative change we seek.

We'll invite you to serve on task forces, commissions, district councils and nonprofit boards; and as volunteers in our schools, libraries and rec centers.

Building a city that works for all of us will require all of us to do the work.

I am honored to accept this great responsibility as Mayor of the City of Saint Paul.

I am humbled by the enormous work ahead; and ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with you to guide this city forward.

We the people, will build a city that works for all of us.

We the people, are the ones we've been waiting for.

And we, the people, ain't gonna let nobody turn us around.

Thank you & God Bless.