

Remarks by Councilmember Tim Burgess, Seattle City Council
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Reflections of a Career Hopper

I really appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today. For better or worse, my image at City Hall has been defined as serious, perhaps even too serious. Some of you may know me only by name or perhaps from a photograph.

Like the one on the front page of *The Seattle Times* last August 17, the day after our great victory on the viaduct vote.

I've been told I need to lighten up, smile more, kiss babies.

I've recently had a lot of practice kissing a baby. I'm a proud grandfather for the first time. Our daughter, Kim, gave birth last month to a beautiful baby girl.

Joleen and I were there; it was a wonderful experience. Holding little Noelle for the first time, just minutes after she was born, I thought: Who will she grow up to be? What career will she pursue?

As I prepared for today, I knew that I wanted to reflect with you on who I grew up to become, my values and my vision for our good city.

It's true for all of us: our career and life experiences influence and inform our decisions. So I'd like to tell you about some of the experiences that shaped my life and core beliefs.

I grew up on Capitol Hill, the youngest of three brothers. My family was steeped in deeply conservative politics, religious fundamentalism, and, from my father, an unswerving belief that some people were good and others were bad.

After high school, I worked as a journalist for KJR Radio and my world began to change. I realized that the people my father thought were bad weren't really bad. They were just different—with different religious views, different political perspectives, different skin colors and ethnicities. It took me a long time to understand the value of these differences and to shed the dogmas of my childhood.

I worked as a journalist during a time of massive social change and conflict. I reported on the political corruption trials in Seattle in the early 1970s. It was a tough time for local government. Bribery was widespread. Seattle and King County officials were under indictment; federal prosecutors named a Seattle City Council member as an unindicted co-conspirator.

I remember the day I stood in the lobby of the old Public Safety Building as the acting chief of police returned to his office; his shoulders slumped over, his head down. He was white as a sheet. He had just taken the Fifth Amendment in front of a federal grand jury investigating police bribery. A couple of hours later, the Mayor fired him.

Those years as a journalist were my introduction to public corruption and its power to destroy careers. But that corruption did more than wreck the lives of some officials and their families. That

corruption, especially in the Police Department, led to other forms of misconduct, including the violation of Constitutional rights and mistreatment of prisoners. It fed a culture that came to believe it was above the law.

That experience from over 40 years ago is the seedbed of my conviction that integrity in government matters. It's something we must carefully safeguard.

Frankly, one of our biggest challenges today is how to restore public trust and confidence in government. What government says and how it acts matters.

One step we can take at City Hall to restore the public's trust—your trust—is to change how we set our budget. We need to focus more on measurable performance, specific outcomes and explicit accountability. Doing so will help us show you that we are using your tax dollars wisely and effectively.

But, trust me, that will be a lot harder than you would think.

Two years ago I asked for an assessment of our crime prevention programs. We found more than 60 programs spread across 11 city departments using 109 full time positions and costing about \$22 million each year. Unfortunately, we couldn't tell you what most of these programs accomplish and we still can't.

There was another assessment completed last year on all of the city's investments in children, youth and families. We found 130 programs in nine different city agencies. In total, they cost taxpayers about \$85 million each year. Except for the meticulously managed Families & Education Levy, we found the same dismal results as the crime prevention programs. No outcome measures. No way to know if or how the lives of children and families were being improved. This should be simply unacceptable.

In any economy, but particularly in these lean times, we shouldn't be spending tax dollars in such a reckless manner. That's something I'm trying to change as we move more towards outcome-based budgeting.

But let's go back to the 1970s. If you remember, 1971 was a low point for the Seattle Police Department. Morale was terrible. Dozens of officers were fired; some were sent to prison. So, I decided to join up. Which might prompt you to ask: "Where was Tim's career counselor?"

Despite that civic turmoil, there was a sense that history was moving in the right direction, and I didn't want to just write about it from the sidelines. I wanted to be on the inside. We had elected Chris Bayley, a reform-minded County prosecutor, and Wes Uhlman, a young, hard-charging, reform-driven Mayor. Things were going to change.

Plus, police work was similar to my job as a journalist—responding to crime scenes, recording information, gathering facts and, most of all, talking to people—all kinds of people. But police work was different from journalism; at the end of the day, we didn't just report problems, we solved problems.

I spent eight years as a patrol officer in West Seattle and on Capitol Hill, and later as a detective. And I saw lots of problems—the grinding effects of chronic poverty; the terrible, terrible damage of chronic alcohol and drug abuse; the discrimination and overt racism practiced against people of color. I also saw the debilitating impact of persistent crime and the fear that goes with it.

Likely none of us in this room have slept with our children just so we could hold them down when the bullets started flying in our housing project, or been afraid to walk late at night to the corner store for a carton of milk. That was reality in the 1970s for the people living in the Highpoint Housing

Project of West Seattle. It remains a reality for others today.

In my time in the Police Department, I saw the heroic work of hundreds of officers—officers who helped those in distress, counseled young people, officers who believed in restorative justice. They believed in redemption and healing the wounds inflicted by persistent crime and poverty.

I saw officers who demanded high standards of behavior; officers who knew what was right and wanted to fundamentally reform their department. Police officers who stopped being silent after decades of corruption. Police officers who told the truth to federal prosecutors against their fellow officers and the cabal that ran the corruption rackets in Seattle.

Today, the facts and circumstances are very different, but we have a similar opportunity to transform policing in Seattle. It's an opportunity to embrace the science of policing and evidence-based practices. To focus on the policing of specific places and those persistent, high frequency offenders who cause the most harm.

Most importantly, we can stop believing the crazy notion that a certain level of crime is to be expected, and even tolerated, in a large city. This attitude is wrongheaded and it is an excuse for inaction.

The evidence is absolutely clear and calls us to act. Crime is geographically concentrated in our city. Half of Seattle's crime occurs at just a tiny fraction of our street segments. Those areas don't change much over time, which means that crime is essentially anchored in place.

We could achieve dramatic reductions in street crime and disorder if we engaged in focused interventions led by the police but including a wide variety of actions such as social services, education and training, and alcohol and drug abuse treatment.

There is no reason we should have to live with the level of street crime and disorder we experience currently on our downtown streets and in some of our neighborhoods.

What makes this even more troubling is that some of our neighborhoods have suffered for decades from persistent crime. The people living and working in these places deserve to be safe just as much as you and me.

So, let's introduce evidence-based crime policies. Let's shift from *reacting* to crime to *preventing* crime as many progressive police departments are now doing.

In 1978, I left the Police Department and went to work for an anti-poverty organization in the developing world. I thought I was going to solve global poverty. I didn't.

My biggest takeaway from those years was the realization that famine and hunger are not caused by a lack of food. They are caused by corrupt systems that deny food to certain areas or regions, making even the basics impossibly expensive in the local market.

This reality struck home as I stood in a village in southern India and looked at a mountain of grain perhaps 30 or 40 feet high surrounded by armed guards. As I talked to the village elders I learned that the grain was intended for export; the armed guards were there to keep the hungry away.

These systems created benefits for some, but very real harm for others.

My experiences in the developing world taught me that access to good, family-wage jobs, a quality education, a safety net for food and shelter and the rule of law are essential ingredients for any

successful community. When people are provided protection and opportunity, they thrive.

That's why paying attention to values like equality and fairness are so important. We want a city where every individual is treated justly and has the chance to realize their full potential. That's the kind of city I want and I know that's the kind of city you want, too.

Like some of you, I also started my own business. It was 1985 and I decided that my experiences as a journalist, a police officer and an aid worker had prepared me to be an entrepreneur. That's what every former reporter, cop and humanitarian does, right? I thought that made sense.

I started an advertising agency dedicated to serving nonprofit organizations in the United States and Europe with their marketing and fundraising. The agency grew to 160 employees with offices here in Seattle and in Atlanta, London and Paris.

My experience with the agency taught me the importance of hard work, focus and the value of our employees. One of my greatest privileges as an employer was helping others grow and discover their talents. If our employees needed training, we paid for it. If they needed encouragement to step out and lead, we provided it. If they needed correction, we made sure that happened as well. We treated our employees with respect, and they responded in amazing ways.

That's why today I cringe when public employees are ridiculed or undervalued. The people I work with at the City of Seattle—about 10,000 of them—are decent, hard-working, dedicated public servants. You would be proud to have them working in your organizations.

When I sold the ad agency after 20 years, I was fortunate to have the freedom and opportunity to shift careers one more time. That's when I decided to run for elected office as a member of the Seattle City Council; my fifth career change.

I can tell you that my current job is the most fulfilling and rewarding of my entire life. And everything I have done before joining the Council inspired me and prepared me for this important work.

As I look back over my work life, there are consistent themes from all my experiences that have shaped my values and worldview.

As a journalist, I reported on public officials and I saw the complications of social change as the antiwar and civil rights movements swept across the country. I saw the havoc caused by public corruption. I saw good people stand up and demand to be heard as they advocated for change in the corrupt system that gripped City Hall.

Overseas I saw what happens when systemic injustice goes unchecked and when those with power use it ruthlessly to remain in power.

Last month when I held my granddaughter, I was reminded of another little girl I met long ago. In the early 1980s, I stood on the Thai-Cambodian border and held a toddler in my arms; her mother told me she was two years old. So malnourished, she was the size of a newborn baby. A doctor who was standing beside me said she wouldn't live much longer.

We could hear artillery across the border in Cambodia. Pol Pot's soldiers were shelling villages that harbored freedom fighters. Refugees were streaming across the border to safety in Thailand.

The little girl? She died that morning, yet another victim of injustice.

As a police officer I saw how a city works and how it doesn't work. I saw the good intentions and deep, deep desire of the moms and dads in the projects who wanted what you and I want—their children to be safe and receive a high quality education. I saw the power and influence of good police officers who provided protection and gentle guidance to kids; police officers who loved their city and its people.

As an entrepreneur, I figured out how to sustain a business and grow it. I know what it's like to worry about the next payroll and whether we would win the next client. And I know what it's like when it all comes together and there's more success than failure; when you can finally tell the creative director: "Yes, let's go ahead and hire another copywriter."

Talking to people, walking the beat, seeing how the world really works in the poorest places on Earth have made me who am I today. And these experiences drive my passion for public service and the greater good.

It's an amazing privilege to serve the people of Seattle.

Over the past few months, I've been going around the city and asking people about their vision for Seattle. Where should we be going? What should we be doing? What's next?

This is a good time to ask such questions. It was 50 years ago in April that we opened the World's Fair. It put Seattle on the worldwide stage. The vision for that started with just a few individuals who wanted to make a difference and help jumpstart economic growth. The idea for the Space Needle first took form as a scribble on a paper napkin.

So, Seattle, let's grab a pencil and another napkin. Let's ask big questions that summon us to craft bold promises:

- What if we fulfill the promise that all of our children will receive a high quality education, and graduate from high school prepared for college or for vocational training in a specialized field?
- What if our public schools were so effective that parents kept their kids in the public schools instead of moving to private schools or, worse, moving out of the city? (And don't let anyone tell you that the schools aren't our responsibility. High quality public schools are extremely important institutional anchors in our neighborhoods; they are essential for the long-term strength of our city.)
- What if we could so effectively prevent crime in neighborhoods that have suffered through it for decades that children could play on the sidewalks without fear?
- What if we combined Seattle's brains—our geeky tech communities—with Seattle's heart to analyze demographic data and develop solutions that reverse downward cycles of poverty and social disintegration?
- What if we became known as the city that governed itself based on science and the evidence of what works best? A mindset that would allow us to spend your tax dollars more effectively.
- What if we truly get our land use and transportation systems working effectively together so housing stock and jobs grow hand in hand?
- What if we create a city that provides such a broad spectrum of amenities that even our younger, more mobile generations feel they can and *want* to make Seattle their permanent home?

City government cannot alone answer these questions. But if we all put aside division and diversion, unite around a common vision, and work together, Seattle's incredible potential will be realized. We *can* ensure the Emerald City's future as a wonderful place for this generation, and for those that follow, including my granddaughter, Noelle.

