

Good afternoon. Welcome special guests.

Uncle Larry, on this historic day it means the world to have you introduce me. My dad died when I was just 28 and Uncle Larry has been like a father to me. His laugh is just like my dad's and a reminder that we're all connected.

My great great grandfather Jacob Hazouri brought our clan to Jacksonville from Lebanon just after the great fire and became the first in a long line of small business owners in our family.

Food is love in big Arabic families. That and arguing politics over the kibbeh and grape leaves at the dinner table. Eat, argue, rest, repeat.

Uncle Larry is the best cook in our family and it's a shame that will never be passed down because while he always says he's going teach us how, he conveniently leaves out key ingredients of his famous recipes. We see you Uncle Larry.

For more than 50 years he has owned a landmark restaurant in downtown Jacksonville. The Desert Rider on Hogan Street is the longest standing business in downtown.

Before that, he and my grandfather Rufus ran the Roosevelt Grill at the corner of Ashley and Davis Streets. It was frequented by the likes of Hank Aaron and Ray Charles.

I could fill this speech with stories about the Grill and what it meant to many in the Black community. Like Willie Frank Lyons, who told me he would have never been appointed Jacksonville's first Black Fire Chief had my grandfather not hired him to blanch the potatoes for the Grill's famous fries - and made staying in school a condition of his employment.

And do you know who appointed Mr. Lyons to that post? My cousin Tommy, the 3rd Mayor of Consolidated Jacksonville.

My dad, Don Hazouri, was an attorney in our general counsel's office and sang opera. I spent my childhood listening to Arias from La Boheme to Pagliacci.

But it was a song made famous by Mario Lanza called Be My Love, and its signature high C, that pierced my soul every time he sang it. Beyond those memories, all I have of his beautiful tenor voice is an old cassette tape but in it you can hear the audience swoon, or maybe that was just my mother. I'm sure my dad is leading quite the choir in heaven today.

Jacksonville is in my DNA. My family, my ancestors are my guides. They've instilled in me a deep reverence for our history, a strong work ethic, and love for every corner of this beautiful, diverse mosaic we call Jacksonville.

I want my children and all our children to live in a Jacksonville that fully sees them, loves them, and gives them every opportunity to thrive, to reach their full potential.

Potential is a word that is often used when describing our city. Too often, that potential has been left unrealized because we've placed the politics of fear over the bonds that unite us.

As we celebrated on election night, I was overwhelmed by the convergence of people from across the political spectrum, who with one voice rejected fear and claimed love as our way back.

As much as I wanted to stand here before you today as your mayor, more than that, I wanted love to win. Unity to be your choice.

Conventional wisdom missed all the signs. The people were wide awake and ready for a new day.

This truly is a new day in Jacksonville.

A new day where we demand transparency, inspire optimism, and embrace opportunities for everyone.

A new day where creativity, commitment and collaboration will define our city government.

And on this new day, while I know I will be far from perfect, I promise I will do everything in my power to live up to your faith in me, in us.

I can't do it alone. I'll need you with me.

As I said often on the campaign trail, we've lived a shared life. You have always had my back, with prayers as I faced three bouts with cancer, and with hard truths that have kept me striving to serve in deeper ways.

It's my honor to have your back as we enter an exciting time in our history.

A time, when like the days after the Great Fire, we are poised to rise.

To borrow a phrase from Black suffragists during the push for women's voting rights - we will "lift as we climb" -creating a city that ultimately works for all of us.

For so long we have talked about our critical infrastructure needs: roads, bridges, bulkheads, drainage, septic tanks.

It's time for us to stop merely talking and make the investments to fix what's long been broken. We owe it to our children and grandchildren.

We will lead on resiliency. It will inform our development and pave the way for smart growth. It is the issue of our time and essential to our success.

We will fully fund riverfront parks and complete the Emerald Trail. Those projects will add to our quality of life and along with a focus on arts and culture they will help ignite downtown so people will want to invest, live, and play there.

And make no mistake. We will invest dollars into our neglected neighborhoods and bring long ignored residents into our partnership for Jacksonville's future.

Jacksonville has often left federal dollars on the table for other cities instead of bringing them home to make our city stronger and improve the lives of our citizens.

That's over.

Those are our tax dollars. We will be strategic and aggressive to bring back our share from Washington.

I want Jacksonville to be a healthier city. Health, both physical and mental, is key to our economic prosperity.

We have one of the best medical communities in America. Despite that, our maternal and infant mortality rates are the worst in Florida and some of the worst in the nation. That's not acceptable.

We must and will do better. We have already fulfilled a major campaign promise with the appointment of our city's chief health officer.

Health and safety go hand in hand. Seventy percent of the young people in our prisons struggle with literacy. I am committed to lifting literacy as a priority of my administration.

As I've met with small business owners, the entrepreneurs who create jobs and drive 80 percent of our economy, I've heard two things again and again.

First, it takes way too long and it's too difficult to get a permit.

It's a new day.

We won't have people waiting two and three years to get a permit to open a business in Jacksonville.

Same with procurement. We make it too hard for people to do business in Jacksonville.

We will fix permitting and procurement by streamlining the process, adding technology and people if needed.

We will create a system that's accessible quicker and easier.

Our goal is to become the small business capital of the southeast during my time in office.

We can create small business ladders to connect them to things they don't know about like façade grants and incubator programs.

You must care enough to educate people about what's out there and help them lift themselves up.

It's not about giving anybody anything. It's about making them aware.

This is the Jacksonville we can become together.

How do I know?

Because in a time of great political division, in a world that so often gives in to cynicism, despite the pundits and the proclamations that money and entrenched power are the inevitable victors, you chose love, the highest power of all. God's grace has repeatedly shown me that.

As French theologian, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin so elegantly wrote:

“The day will come when after harnessing space, the winds, the tides, and gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, man shall have discovered fire.”

From today forward, I will use every ounce of my energy to harness the power of love we share for our city to take down the walls that divide us and remove the obstacles between us. Mindful that in those most stubborn places, the only way around is through.

We will build bridges to the people, open wide the doors of city hall, and invite everyone inside.

We will meet you where you are, in your neighborhoods, in your community centers, and during town halls.

We will remain curious – something I remind myself to do every day when I'm fortunate enough to wake up. I first thank God for

opening my eyes and then proceed to give thanks for all the good things that happened to me the day before.

It's a practice I started during my cancer journey at the urging of my dear friend Father Greg Fay. He told me if I started each day with gratitude, I'd see everything in my life through a different lens. I always end my gratitude list the same way. Thank you for everything.

As the philosopher Henry David Thoreau observed "It's not what you look at the matters. It's what you see."

As long as we stay curious about what's next, we will see the good, the opportunity even the obstacles.

I truly believe in the people of this city.

It doesn't matter if you live in Brooklyn, Brentwood, in Baldwin or the beaches. Whether you are in San Jose, Springfield, or San Marco – Arlington or Avondale, Durkeeville or Deerwood, Downtown or New Town, Ortega or Oceanway, Lavilla or Lakeshore.

It doesn't matter if you grew up on Myrtle Avenue or went to grade school in Mandarin. Played on the docks at Mayport, on the basketball courts of Murray Hill, or rode on the horse farms of Marietta.

It doesn't matter if you are new to town or have been in Jacksonville all your life.

I believe in you.

I believe in us.

If we work together, lift as we climb, choose love over fear, and see each other's humanity, I'm optimistic our beautiful mosaic called Jacksonville will become the Masterpiece we all desire.

Our new day has arrived and as Bono says "It's a beautiful day. Don't let it get away."

Thank you!