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# ‘One Seattle’: Mayor Harrell’s First Address to the City

Liam Lawless , Staff Reporter

“One Seattle’ means a renewed focus on good governance and tangible progress, on nuance and conversation, I believe this group, right here, can and will set a new tone and a new example for what can be achieved when we hit reset and chart a shared agenda for our City together,” --Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell, State of the City Address, Feb. 15, 2022.

In his first address to the city as mayor, Bruce Harrell expressed a desire to dispel many of the social and economic boundaries between the people of Seattle. After two years away from the Emerald City’s civic circuit, Mayor Harrell aspires to develop his ‘middle of the road’ reputation into a platform for uniting Seattle’s opposing subpopulations under a common initiative.

The immense range of communities showing their support for Harrell became evident when he garnered 61.9% of the general election votes to earn his new position. Despite his optimistic tone and promises for betterment, Harrell’s statement left some Seattle University professors feeling more skeptical than hopeful.

Patrick Schoettmer, a political science instructor at Seattle U, argues that there were bureaucratic maneuvers embedded in Harrell’s speech.

“The most distinctive aspect of it is the triage effort he feels he needs to do between the Mayor’s Office and City Council,” Schoettmer said. “He went out of the way, especially at the end, to single out each and every member of the council, but all throughout, he was re-emphasizing his support of [Deborah] Juarez or [Alex] Pederson’s efforts. His praise for council activities in the past stands as a notable tonal shift from the Mayor’s Office.”

Having represented District 2 in the City Council from 2008-2020, which included a two-month stint as Interim Mayor in 2017, Seattle’s 54th mayor is no stranger to local politics. Schoettmer noted that past mayors did not have Harrell’s pre-established relationships in the office.

“I think he’s trying to leverage that experience on the council and that familiarity with people on the council to try to build a more cooperative relationship between the Mayor’s Office and the City Council Room, and that really shown through for me in his State of the City Address,” Schoettmer said.

Seattle U political science lecturer Andrew Johnson observed a harsh disparity between Harrell’s sentiments and his own lived reality.



Rachel Bentfield

“Honestly, [the address] was very disturbing, and I believe we stand at the precipice of a dangerous moment in local politics,” Johnson said. “Mayor Harrell’s invocation of ‘One Seattle’ mobilizes a public relations-friendly slogan to distract from police harassment of the local houseless population. The first actions of Harrell’s ‘One Seattle’ involve sweeps and police raids. These actions target the most vulnerable and precarious members of our community.”

Johnson points to a recent firsthand experience he underscores as out of line with the Harrell administration’s ‘One Seattle’ message. In the wake of a nearby shooting, a squad of police SUVs surrounded Johnson and others at the 3rd and Bell bus stop. After aiming their assault weapons directly at Johnson, he alleges they harassed and assaulted someone else waiting for their bus.

“They had no probable cause and violated this person’s civil rights. The nearly dozen or so cops offered no apology to those of us waiting at the bus stop and will surely never be held accountable for their aggressiveness by city officials,” Johnson said. “A million dollars worth of municipal funds were employed to terrorize those of us waiting at the bus stop is a harbinger of terrible times to come. The past week, Seattle Police have been conducting an all-out offensive, this has included; sweeps of local houseless encampments, and raids in the area known as Little Saigon. A Seattle patrolled by overly aggressive militarized police is coming to a street corner near you!”

Poor encounters with the SPD have spurred local advocates to advocate for more structural changes than those offered by the Harrell administration. However, Harrell’s message of strong community safety measures resonated with voters and homeowners. Johnson is skeptical of moderate reforms.

“I think we can all agree that mass houselessness is a serious issue,” Johnson shared. “However, the causes are structural and social in nature. Criminalizing poverty is not an effective solution to social problems. Police are not an effective solution to social problems. Making sure that every Seattleite has their basic needs met, including housing and food, is the real solution that Seattle desperately needs.”

While ‘One Seattle’ boasts widely agreed-upon ideals, Johnson asserts that Harrell’s plans for implementation seemingly disregard the root causes of several issues the city still faces.

“Budgets are moral documents,” Johnson said. “Mayor Harrell is planning to increase funding for a new wave of police officers to help launch his ‘One Seattle’ offensive. Obviously, Mayor Harrell has learned nothing from the George Floyd uprising and Black Lives Matter movement. Mayor Harrell’s war on the houseless cannot go contested. Surely and soon, all of Seattle will be caught up in a long hot summer of police terror.”

Zachary Wood, an assistant professor at Seattle U’s Institute of Public Service, also contests Harrell’s strategy for the housing crisis. Wood argues that market-focused developments favor high-income newcomers to existing residents of a lower socioeconomic status. Thus, many who reside in the neighborhoods surrounding Seattle U risk being pushed out of their communities by an initiative meant to increase the amount of space available to Seattleites.

“Capitol Hill is legendary,” Wood said. “It’s iconic nationally and probably internationally: whether it’s the art scene, the queer scene, [or] the music scene, so much of what was happening in Capitol Hill over a long period of time was new, vibrant and different. I think that there is fear among many folks in and around Capitol Hill, or that used to call Capitol Hill home, that that’s already gone, that it could potentially be dead.”

Wood is concerned that Harrell’s vision of housing accessibility and public safety could have detrimental effects on the neighborhood.

“I hope that Seattle U students begin to pay close attention to the pressing state and local issues that affect our campus community and our neighbors. Students have the power to make a profound difference and the time to do so is now,” Johnson said.

By maintaining an intersectional consciousness and compassion in their actions, this university has the power to confront their community’s issues head-on as One Seattle U.