I. Intro

I am thankful for the chance to join you here today.

Let me just start by insisting that my name, Buttigieg, is easier to pronounce than you would think, but most people back home call me Mayor Pete.

Or just call me Pete.

Not a lot of things could have got me out of South Bend today, especially with Georgia playing at Notre Dame stadium this weekend.

But the chance to join you this afternoon is something I did not want to miss.

II. South Bend

I wanted to be with you today because this gathering is part of something bigger, in what might be the most important season for progressives in our lifetime.

And so much of what has to happen—so much of what has to change—starts right here in the middle of the country. So much of the next chapter in the American story will be written in the places where you and I come from.

If you get on I-80 here in Des Moines and drive east for about six and a half hours, make a right turn, and another right turn, you'll come to my home in South Bend, Indiana.

And if you keep driving past my neighborhood into the city, you'll see right away that it's not a typical college town.

Once we were a great industry center, headquarters of Studebaker and a dozen other major companies that powered us into the twentieth century.

But that was then. When Studebaker fell, it pulled us down with it.

Factories that used to throb with activity fell quiet, and for decades they sat abandoned, festering, collapsing.

Houses, once filled with life and love and hope, stood crumbling and vacant.

Growing up, on my way to school, these buildings loomed over us, hovering on either side of the road like ghosts of a better day that ended before my classmates and I were even born.

There's a lot of America that shares some version of that story.

By 2011, around the time I got in to the race for mayor, *Newsweek* ran a feature on the ten "dying cities" in America, and my hometown was one of them.

It hurt. That article could have finished us off. But instead it shook us up.

We didn't try to wish it away or ignore it. I talked about it every day on the campaign, and insisted that it was a call to action. That our hometown was ready for a comeback.

And now: we're coming back.

I am now in my sixth year as mayor, and I am proud to report that we have experienced the fastest population growth in a quarter of a century.

We addressed over a thousand vacant and abandoned homes in a thousand days, and new houses are rising in areas that haven't seen fresh growth in decades.

Former factory districts are adding jobs in data centers and turbomachinery research, industries that didn't even exist when the last Studebaker rolled off the line.

And we still make things. Our advanced manufacturing workers are sending their products to Asia, not their jobs.

The South Bend story is the story of how American workers can play a role in a modern, global economy—and not just the role of victim.

We haven't solved all the issues in our city—especially when it comes to making sure everyone gets a share of the growing prosperity—but it hasn't been this good in my lifetime.

III. Our Purpose

Guided by our progressive values, we found solutions with roots in what we already had and who we already were.

Often the answers come from right around us—in our cities and our counties, often right here in the American heartland.

Politically, it's hard these days to talk about local solutions—or any solutions—because of the mesmerizing horror show going on in the capital.

Every day he is in office, Donald Trump yanks out threads from the very fabric of what it means to be an American.

He says, 'you don't belong here,' and he pulls out a thread.

He says, 'you can't serve your country,' and he pulls out a thread.

He says, 'your hatred is justified,' and he pulls out a thread.

One thread at a time, he is unraveling our republic. And he'll keep pulling until the American dream is a tangled mess of yarn in his hands.

When you see that happening to our country, it's hard to think of anything else.

But I'm not here to make the case against Donald Trump. That case is already well known. Even his supporters understand it…most of them.

Americans already know that lying is wrong, that racism is wrong. That denigrating women is wrong. They know about Russia.

They know all about Trump, all about *him*. We all know all about *him*. Americans are waiting to see who will be talking about *them*.

Our party is never going to recapture the faith and imagination of the American people if all we have to offer is a litany of this president's many sins.

Our message should hold true at every level, everywhere, and every year.

And it does.

I am not one of those lamenting that Democrats don't have a message. Don't let anyone tell you Democrats don't have a message. Of course we do.

Here's our message: We support and protect people going about their everyday lives.

That's it. That's why we're here.

IV. Freedom

And the way we support people is by defending their freedom. Now—as a party—we cannot yield the mantle of freedom to our opponents.

This has been Democratic bedrock ever since FDR saved the nation and the free world. Freedom – freedom from want, freedom from fear – is our guiding purpose.

And all that's very different from what our Republican friends think.

They use the word "freedom" all the time. But freedom from government is the only freedom they can imagine.

They say they're all about freedom, but I say you're not free if you can't change jobs or start a business because you're afraid of losing your health coverage.

You're not free if a credit card company can stick you with an arbitration clause that means you can't sue them, even if they get caught ripping you off.

And you are most certainly not free if some county clerk you've never met can tell you who you ought to marry.

Republicans seem to yearn for a land where government doesn't do anything for anyone.

But that's not real freedom. I can tell you first hand – such places already exist in this world.

Places where government doesn't get involved in health care, because there is barely a national government to begin with.

Where laws can be ignored, because there are no pesky regulators to enforce them.

And any problem you have with self-defense can be solved by whoever has the bigger firearm.

To them that might sound like a mystical paradise, but to me it sounds an awful lot like what I saw for myself in Somalia. It didn't make anyone free.

Iowa is one place that has opened its arms to Somali refugees; one reason they have come to America is that this is a place where better government means more freedom.

V. Politics of the Everyday

Conservative talk sounds good on TV, but when you play it out in real life, it stops making any sense. Which is why we need to get back to talking about real life again.

One reason good things can happen at the local level is that there are no alternative facts when it comes to people's everyday experiences. People know whether I've filled in a hole in the road or picked up the trash.

We need to bring that same clarity back to state and national politics.

That's why I've launched a new political project. It's called Hitting Home.

Our purpose is to move the center of gravity of American politics back to the kitchen table. Back to real lives that are shaped by policies, good and bad.

So we're going to go around the country, gather stories from people affected in real ways, and put those stories on the air in swing districts to remind voters what's at stake.

Nothing about politics is theoretical for me.

I've sat with loved ones facing cancer and tried to figure out what we would do if Congress kicks them off Obamacare.

I've looked into the eyes of an 8-year old American boy who lost his father to deportation and tried to tell him things were going to be okay.

I've called 911 for a young man on a front lawn having an overdose, and rolled him over so he wouldn't choke to death.

I've stood in a basement flooded by extreme rainfall hitting South Bend in just the way scientists have warned us about for decades.

And I've carried a weapon in a foreign land on the orders of an American president.

See, when Donald Trump and his sons were working on Season 7 of Celebrity Apprentice, I was driving and guarding convoys outside the wire in Afghanistan.

I had a lot of different responsibilities, but the job that mattered most was to make sure the men and women in my vehicle got where they were going, alive.

And when they got in my vehicle, they didn't care if I was a Democrat or a Republican.

They cared about whether I had selected the route with the fewest IED threats, not where my father immigrated from and whether he was documented or undocumented.

They cared about whether my M-4 was locked and loaded and whether I knew how to use it, not whether I was going home to a girlfriend or a boyfriend.

They just wanted to get home safe, like I did.

Whatever divides us, the most important things bring us together. Taking care of the people we love, having a shot at building a better life. Coming home safe.

These are the things that move us.

Whether you're a blue-collar worker looking to keep his job at a tool and die shop,

> or a parent of an African-American teen having "the talk" about what to do if you get pulled over by law enforcement,
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> or a DREAMer looking for a chance to go to college,
>
> or the spouse of a police officer kissing them goodbye on their way to work,
>
> or a transgender kid in high school in South Bend who just has to use the bathroom like everyone else.

It's about everyday life.

And that's where our part of the country, in particular, has something to offer right now.

Not so long ago, the Midwest was mostly ignored by political experts and coastal elites. Now it feels like the other extreme. I'm sure you've noticed.

We are being studied with exotic fascination by people who used to ignore us. It's almost like we're fashionable. And that might be a good thing.

I hope they study the places I've been to. Places that doesn't fit peoples' expectations. Places with stories as surprising and complicated as the people who fill them. I think about those places all the time.

There's a deer blind in a woods outside Traverse City, Michigan, where I spent Thanksgiving morning hunting—with my boyfriend's father.

There's a front porch in Creston, Iowa, where I turned up about a decade ago knocking on doors for Barack Obama, talked to a kid who was missing the caucus because he had to go to basic training, and walked away starting to realize it was my turn to serve.

There's a middle school in South Bend, Indiana, where a senior citizen walked into her polling place and decided to take a chance on a rookie mayor talking about a fresh start for our hometown.

These places don't always fit the narratives, so they get on cable TV very often, but they are the real places where we live and work every day.

When we hold these places and people in our hearts, it leads us on a better path. Away from the politics of resentment, the politics of fear, and the politics of celebrity. And back to the politics of the everyday.

VI. We stand up

In the name of the places we know and the people we love, we'll stand up to those who do wrong.

We'll stand up to Congressmen who draw the maps so they get to pick their voters instead of the other way around.

We'll stand up to Senators who think a billionaire's tax cut is worth more than a family's health care.

We'll stand up to a president who cheapens the most respected office in our land with the heart of a miser, the mind of a cheater, and the soul of a schoolyard bully.

We'll stand up to them because we've always stood up to bullies. But it's not only about who we stand up *to*. It's what we stand up *for*.

We stand up for every American who ever worked a job.

We stand up for every American who ever needed a doctor,

ever borrowed a dollar,

ever hoped for more.

We stand up for that America that welcomes your tired, your poor, your huddled masses,

For an America where equal work gets equal pay,

Where love is love and facts are facts,

Where hate has no home and everyone gets the same fair shot.

We stand for the better America we know we can be.

That's our message. It's not so complicated.

We stand proud, for our values, our Party, our country. Every single day.

Thank you.