



2018 State of the City Address
Delivered by
Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms
(Text as prepared)
Wednesday, May 2, 2018
7:30 a.m.

Good morning.

As the 60th Mayor of Atlanta, it is my honor to welcome you to the 2018 State of the City.

Thank you to the Coca-Cola company and its President of Coca-Cola North America, Jim Dinkins, for sponsoring this breakfast.

2018 has already proven to be an eventful year for my administration, but we have conquered every challenge and maximized every opportunity.

Days in government sometimes feel like dog years, but because of the diligence and commitment of all the people who serve Atlanta, I am proud to say this morning that the State of our City is strong.

At this time, I would like to ask all the members of the Atlanta City Council, our municipal court judges and our consular corps to please stand, so we can acknowledge you.

I am grateful to every member of my transition team, especially for the leadership of Larry Gellerstedt and Vicki Palmer.

At this time, will all members of my transition team please stand.

Vicki, Larry and all my advisors have helped us get immediately to work on issues such as economic development, affordability and equity; issues that were the cornerstone of my campaign and remain at the forefront of all that we do.

To my entire senior leadership team, thank you for your passion, hard work and commitment to our city.

As we have dealt with monumental challenges such as cyber security, Atlanta is in the midst of a phenomenal transformation and our residents and employees are fortunate to have your leadership and service.

Will all members of my senior leadership team and all employees of the City of Atlanta, please stand and be recognized.

I am grateful for your leadership and your partnership. It is so very important to our city.

I would also like to recognize all other elected officials who have joined us this morning. Would you please stand?

And to the former mayors that are here -- Mayor Massell, Ambassador Young, Mayor Franklin, and the family of Maynard Jackson -- Valerie Jackson is with us -- thank you for building the foundation upon which I stand today as the 60th mayor of Atlanta.

To my family, whose unwavering love and support makes it possible for me to be Wife-Mommy and Mayor, words cannot begin to express how grateful I am for each of you.

To my husband, Derek, who is my best friend and my rock; my mother, Sylvia, who is my inspiration; to my brother and sister, and my children – Lance, Langston, Lincoln and Lennox- who are my everything, my reasons why – I say thank you.

We are here this morning, united by our shared interest in the continued growth and prosperity of Atlanta.

As I look forward to sharing my vision for the City and our progress and accomplishments to date, I want to take this opportunity to thank every person here today for your individual and collective contributions towards making Atlanta the greatest city in the world.

Atlanta may have been known as the crown jewel of the South, but today, I declare it as the crown jewel of our nation.

There are many reasons, but chief among them is the unique spirit of cooperation that exists between our business and civic communities.

Atlanta thrives in the face of adversity because our leaders, stakeholders, communities and residents have long recognized that we are stronger when we are together.

The desire to protect and preserve, that spirit of togetherness, is what inspired me to run for Mayor, and it is what compels and guides me as I serve our great city each and every day.

As Atlanta continues to grow, it is important that we remember to look back and pull forward residents, communities and businesses that are being left behind.

This is paramount to our continued ability to remain a leader on the regional, national, and international stage.

What has drawn people and organizations to Atlanta in droves is our warm weather and our warm hearts.

While we can certainly join together in prayer for continued sunny summers and forgiving winters, we have the most immediate power to preserve the warmth of Atlanta's spirit.

Our city must find ways to protect and advance its most vulnerable residents by preserving affordable housing for our families, improving education for our children, providing job training and placement opportunities for our residents, expanding transportation options for our workforce, and protecting the safety and welfare of our communities.

Together, that is how we will propel Atlanta.

While too many cities across America grapple with the erosion that comes with the division of the haves and the have nots, I am committed to bringing Atlanta together so that every person and every community is empowered to contribute and share in the prosperity our city has to offer.

We will succeed because the spirit of Atlanta is inclusive. It is uplifting. It is the spirit of One.

This morning we come together, not as Business Atlanta or Civic Atlanta, not as a White Atlanta or a Black Atlanta, but rather as One Atlanta.

And it is as One Atlanta that we must leave this room and continue to work together for the benefit of all who call Atlanta home.

Over the past several months, I have had the privilege of speaking with people across our City.

I have spoken with people in North Atlanta, in South Atlanta, on the East side of Atlanta and on the West side of Atlanta.

And as your Mayor, I can unequivocally state today that all of our challenges are Atlanta's challenges, and all of our opportunities are Atlanta's opportunities.

Our lives as Atlantans are inextricably linked.

This morning I say to you, it is a new day, Atlanta.

From my very first day in office, my Administration and I went to work, addressing some of the challenges facing our City.

And we have achieved some notable wins in a relatively short period time:

On January 8th, we hosted the College Football Playoff Championship, an event that included a surprise visit from the President of the United States.

Mother Nature did not cooperate that week, but thanks to the men and women who plan for Atlanta's safety and logistics, City operations were safe, and secure, as promised.

In that same spirit, we are gearing up to welcome the NFL and the world to Atlanta in 2019 for Super Bowl 53.

We know that we can handle it, because we are an Olympic city with Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International airport once again named the busiest and most efficient airport in the world, and where a world-class hospitality industry welcomes more than 52 million visitors a year.

Also, in January, we announced the transfer of deeds for 31 properties to the Atlanta Public Schools, ending a year's long discussion on this issue.

We will continue along the path in forging a productive, renewed partnership with APS that will benefit public education and Atlanta's children for generations to come.

As many of you know, I have a special place in my heart for APS, as I am a proud graduate of Frederick Douglass High School.

When I was 4 years old, I started kindergarten at Collier Heights Elementary School.

I amazed my teachers and classmates when I came in one morning and read an entire book to the class!

My teacher was so impressed that she came to my home to tell my parents how brilliant I was.

My mother was the original truth-o-meter, and she told my teacher that I was indeed smart, but that I could not read...I had memorized the entire book.

That kindergarten teacher is here today, Mrs. Hall, please raise your hand.

Oh, and by the way, Mrs. Hall really DID teach me how to read.

Also joining Mrs. Hall is my 6th grade teacher from Bunche Middle School, Mrs. Georgia Mack, who would throw my work in the trash can when I didn't do my best, but she also taught me how to stand before a room and project my voice.

Mrs. Mack, I hope I'm still making you and Mrs. Hall both proud.

Let's give a round of applause for Atlanta Public Schools!

Our progressive agenda commissions are meeting and generating public policy initiatives to positively impact the city.

We have more than 100 people participating who have volunteered over 1,000 hours to this cause.

With their help, we have eliminated cash bail for minor offenders in the Atlanta Detention center.

No longer is poverty a criminal offense punishable by jail time in Atlanta.

We have an opportunity to set a new course in criminal-justice reform for our City, and to once again lead the nation in the protection of human rights.

My dad is no longer with us, but I think of him and his life story every day, which is why one of my proudest moments as Mayor was announcing our Re-Entry Program for minor offenders.

One of the many great partnerships we've been able to foster with the state this year was through work with our Department of Corrections, the Department of Watershed Management, and the Georgia Department of Corrections.

We are training inmates for life after incarceration and providing them with jobs and career paths upon their release.

These are jobs with full health benefits that will provide a pathway for men and women to rejoin society in a meaningful way, provide for their families, and lower our city's recidivism rate.

On March 15th, the City of Atlanta purchased the largest single tract of land remaining to complete the Atlanta BeltLine.

The Southside Trail will connect the Eastside and Westside trails and provide 14 contiguous miles of trail, running from Piedmont Park in midtown to Washington Park on the West side.

This historic transaction represents our ongoing commitment to building equity and affordability for all 45 neighborhoods connected by the Atlanta BeltLine.

In order for us to truly become One Atlanta, we need expansive transportation options that reach all of our neighborhoods.

Multiple public-transportation options, much like education, serve as a great equalizer for all of our residents, no matter their zip code, and no matter their income.

That is why I was proud to announce that the City of Atlanta and MARTA were recently awarded a \$12.6 million dollar TIGER grant to build our first Bus Rapid Transit line.

This Bus Rapid Transit line will connect Midtown and Downtown to the historic neighborhood of Summerhill and the planned mixed-use development around Georgia State University.

It will provide high-speed transit access for working families and students to our job centers, and to MARTA stations.

During my campaign, I committed to a \$1 billion dollar affordable housing plan in Atlanta.

Many eye brows were raised at the magnitude of this goal.

But I believed then, as I believe today, that Atlanta's audacious pursuit of equality is what kept our city together during the Civil Rights Movement.

And it is our relentless pursuit of equity that will keep us together as other cities falter when basic necessities such as housing become luxuries.

My team and I have prioritized this pledge and we are working through multiple platforms and partnerships to secure leverage to reach our goal.

We are committed to increasing the inventory of affordable housing in our city, so longtime residents and working families will not be displaced as Atlanta continues to grow and thrive.

One shining example is our partnership with the Westside Future Fund, and the purchase and renovation of a blighted apartment complex that will provide 51 new units of affordable housing in one of Atlanta's most underserved communities.

On March 9th, the City introduced our Heritage Owner-Occupied Rehab program in partnership with Invest Atlanta, the Atlanta housing Authority, and Choice Atlanta.

This program will allow eligible homeowners to apply for forgivable loans, so that they can make critical health and safety repairs to their homes.

We also announced a \$5 Million Dollar partnership with Wells Fargo to support sustainable homeownership and advance the stability of neighborhoods through the NeighborhoodLIFT program – which gives would-be homeowners down payment assistance and financial education.

Working with our partners at the State we were also able to reauthorize the municipal options sales tax which will help keep water rates down for our residents and businesses.

It is also true that sometimes you must tear down in order to build up.

That is why, On April 5th, we launched our “Fight the Blight” program.

The City of Atlanta demolished six dilapidated single-family houses on kick-off day in our continuing effort to improve public safety and economic development in our neighborhoods.

We will continue to eliminate vacant and blighted structures around the City, to further secure our neighborhoods and to enable residents to join the rising tide of progress in Atlanta.

If this were the end of the list of things we have done to improve the quality of life in Atlanta, one might say that this is a good list.

But as I have shared on many occasions, I believe good is the enemy of great.

I am not striving to just be a good mayor. I am working towards becoming a great mayor, because Atlanta deserves nothing less.

And so, for that reason, the work must continue.

The City of Atlanta has expanded our Bank On initiative, ensuring that everyone in Atlanta can access a safe and affordable bank account or credit union account.

We recently signed an agreement for the City to join the Department of Labor's Employment, Education, and Outreach coalition to address the concerns of recent immigrants who are not familiar with their workplace rights.

We also expanded service hours at ATL311, in an effort to improve the overall customer service the City delivers to our constituents.

And this past Winter, we expanded the hours for our City's warming centers to maximize care for our seniors and vulnerable populations during inclement weather.

The City also opened the brand-new Thomasville Community Enhancement Resource Center providing residents a place where they can access technology, STEAM programs, and resources for youth and seniors.

At the C.T. Martin Recreational Center, we launched a solar energy program that will enhance our resilience and increase our efficiency.

And we released our first Atlanta Bicycle Report, which details our rise to becoming a top-tier City for cycling.

Still, that's not all.

In January, NCR opened the doors on its new world headquarters in Midtown, which will be home to 5,000 skilled professionals.

Later that month, we announced that PSA Group, the parent company of Peugeot and Citroen, will build its North American headquarters in Atlanta.

In February, we broke ground on Anthem's new technology center in Midtown, which will house 3,000 IT workers.

Atlanta is the anchor of the third-largest concentration of Fortune 500 companies in the country, and additions like this continue to raise our profile.

We also remain one of the most sought-after technology hubs in the country.

Last month, we were proud to be named one of 22 cities chosen to participate in Transportation for America's Smart Cities Collaborative.

This will help us explore new mobility options for Atlanta using the latest emerging technologies.

We are already doing groundbreaking work in this space:

In February, our North Avenue Smart Corridor was recognized for its excellence by the American Council of Engineering Companies.

In partnership with Invest Atlanta and WorkSource Atlanta, we also announced our Students2Startups initiative, which will support high-achieving students from under-represented communities, so they can pursue careers in the technology field.

This will help us create our next generation of innovators as we continue to build our skilled labor pipeline.

And tomorrow, with the leadership of Starbucks and many other corporate partners in the city, we will host the "100,000 Opportunities Youth Initiative," giving nearly 2,000 youths in our city a chance to work for some of the world's leading companies.

As our international profile continues to grow, challenges such as Human Trafficking present themselves.

That is why I am proud to announce this morning that we've added a senior member to my team whose sole focus is on eliminating Human Trafficking in Atlanta.

Thanks to a generous funding grant from Partnership for Freedom, our new leader will help us create a blueprint for how the City approaches the prevention of this modern day form of slavery and extends support to trafficking survivors.

The City of Atlanta has secured much needed resources for several other critical areas, including \$60 million dollars in New Markets Tax Credit from the U.S. Treasury, which will help spur economic development in parts of our city where it is needed the most.

We also won a \$12.9 million-dollar Environmental Impact Bond Challenge, sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, which will enable us to fund Green infrastructure projects through innovative financing along the Proctor Creek Greenway.

Last and certainly not least, there is the work that my administration is doing to bolster trust in our government.

I have spoken a lot about improving transparency in City Hall.

Government cannot function for the people without the trust of the people.

What has been broken must be fixed, and we will repair the trust between the people who help make Atlanta work and the people for whom work is being done.

My leadership style has been characterized as many things -- and some descriptions I dare not say today - - but if you heard the words diligent, resolute, methodical, transformative and steadfast, I would agree with you.

Just as I have been thoughtful and meticulous about the leadership of my senior team, I am equally deliberative about the policies my administration sets forth on behalf of our city.

We are charging full steam ahead with enacting changes to our ethics policies in the City of Atlanta.

Some would say they heard similar ideas from others; To the others, I say, Thank you.

A wise man once said, It's amazing what you can accomplish if you don't care who gets the credit.

We are reviewing numerous policy proposals and researching best practices from other major cities.

We are consulting with various leaders and experts on the best way to not only address the challenges, but to position Atlanta as a model city for open government and public trust.

Transformation takes time, but I believe that when we get to the other side of this mountain, it will have been worth the journey.

Just shy of my 100th day in office, I announced the first step in Atlanta's transparency plan.

Atlanta's new online portal, "Open Checkbook," will allow the public and members of the press unprecedented access to information about City budgets, expenditures, and contracts with vendors.

It will give residents and taxpayers a seamless way to see how and where their money is spent.

In that spirit, I have also announced a new Open Records policy that will implement best-in-class practices for compliance with the Georgia Open Records law.

The City of Atlanta will have an Open Records custodian who will be responsible for managing the fulfillment of requests we receive for numerous public records.

I will also require training for employees on the proper way to handle open records requests.

We will continue to work towards finding the right solutions that will change the course of how Atlanta openly and transparently conducts business for years to come.

I am also proud to announce that we have created the City's first-ever, fully staffed Mayor's Office of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion, also known as One Atlanta.

One Atlanta will work to ensure equitable, open and inclusive practices across all city departments and functions.

This office is also working to shine light on our forgotten communities and build a bridge towards inclusiveness.

We will soon announce the formation of the Mayor's LGBTQ Advisory Board, which is composed of a diverse group of leaders and advocates, who will help guide the City's engagement with our LGBTQ residents, neighbors, and friends.

It is indeed a new day, Atlanta.

A day where fairness energizes our City and trust comforts our souls.

Atlanta, we are one.

As you leave here this morning, I would like each of you to ask yourselves what you can do to build on Atlanta's legacy?

What can you do to enhance our city and make our prosperity real for all of Atlanta?

In the words of Audre Lorde, "Our visions begin with our desires."

My vision for Atlanta is One Atlanta -- an affordable, resilient, and equitable Atlanta;

A safe and welcoming city;

A city with world-class employees, infrastructure and services; an ethical, transparent, and fiscally responsible government; thriving neighborhoods, communities and businesses; and residents who are equipped for success.

I am honored to be your 60th Mayor, and I look forward to working with each of you to build the Atlanta that we all desire and the Atlanta that we all deserve.

Thank you.