



Mayor Kasim Reed
2017 Annual State of the City Address
February 2, 2017
Atlanta Marriott Marquis
City of Atlanta, Georgia

Remarks as prepared

Good morning, and thank you. Thank you, Sandy Douglas, for that warm introduction. Please give Sandy a huge round of applause.

I want to give my personal thanks to you, Sandy, and the Coca-Cola Company for your partnership and for sponsoring this event for eight years.

It is my high honor to be here, as it is every year, to celebrate our progress and reaffirm our commitments to our residents, to our city, and to one another.

This may be my last year as Mayor, but I also believe that it will be my most fulfilling. My best. That feeling has much to do with the work that many of us in this room did together in 2016, and over the last seven years.

During the toughest economy in 80 years, we leaned on each other and our City is so much better because of it.

I want to thank some of my partners for the essential roles they played in this success, beginning with the Atlanta City Council and its President Cesar Mitchell.

I also want to thank Governor Nathan Deal and his Chief of Staff, Chris Riley, for their partnership and cooperation in bringing jobs to Georgia, deepening the Port of Savannah, and making the expansion of MARTA real.

I want to thank the members of the Atlanta Municipal Court and Chief Judge Calvin S. Graves.

I'm delighted to recognize the City's Consular Corps; John Dyer, President and CEO of Cox Enterprises and Chairman of the Atlanta Committee for Progress; and all the local elected officials with us this morning, including Mayor Sam Massell and Ambassador Andrew Young. Last but not least I want to recognize the members of my cabinet and senior team. I cannot thank you enough for all you have done for me and the City of Atlanta. Thank you for taking this journey with me.

I also want to thank each and every employee of the City of Atlanta. Thank you for your dedication and hard work.

I want to recognize my wife, Sarah-Elizabeth; Sarah, please stand so everyone can see you.

I want to recognize my parents, Junius and Sylvia Reed; my stepmother, Dr. Ragsbert Phillips-Reed; my mother-in-law, Susan Pease Langford; and my brothers and their better halves: Charles, Carlton and Joyce, and Tracy and Crystal. My family's support makes all the difference in the world to me. All that we have done, we dreamed together. I also want to send my love to my daughter, Maria Kristan. You changed my life and made me a better man.

I believe that 2017 will be the culmination of everything we have built over the last seven years. Every February for the last seven years I have shared with you the ways that the City of Atlanta was doing bigger and bolder things, the way that we were taking on challenges.

But I believe this year is going to be the best, because I believe in Atlanta.

My belief is rooted in the fact that all around the city you see the extraordinary progress, smart growth and economic opportunity that we have built together.

Our forward momentum is at the heart of what makes Atlanta so special.

You may recall that this past summer we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Centennial Olympic Games in our City. I was thinking about the extraordinary leadership of Ambassador Andrew Young, Billy Payne, and so many others who taught our City that we could achieve great things together.

Imagine, for a moment, the audacity of their hopes, and the path-breaking scale of their achievement.

But it raises the fair question of what are we doing to be worthy of that legacy, right here, in our time, right now.

The most enduring legacy of the Centennial Olympics, in my judgment, is the gift of belief, believing in ourselves, the gift of confidence that we could literally do anything.

That confidence never left.

In that spirit, here in our time, we made decisions of consequence in the City of Atlanta. We built upon that legacy, understanding as Dr. C.T. Vivian once shared that every achievement demands an even greater achievement.

We made choices that added to this body of work, and put us firmly on a course to be one of the leading cities in the world.

And when the people of Atlanta look back on what we did together, what we started together, they will see that this was a turning point for our City in so many ways. They will see that we earned the right to continue our City's legacy, that we made decisions that will guide and galvanize our progress for the next 40 years.

By almost any measure, your capital city is better off than when we started our journey seven years ago.

We see an unemployment rate that has been cut in half.

We see 10,000 new jobs added in 2016 alone, and a crime rate reduced by 27 points since we took office, and at near 40-year lows.

We have attracted to our city the most new corporate and regional headquarters in a generation - 17 relocations in the last 42 months alone.

We have inspired the largest net employment shift into the city in 50 years, led by Bill Nuti and NCR, which is bringing 5,000 employees into Midtown Atlanta.

Together, we see Fortune 500 companies, exciting start-ups like Kabbage, which I visited two weeks ago, and people of all ages moving into our city at a record pace.

We see longtime residents doubling down on the dynamic new urbanism that is energizing Atlanta.

Today, we see the highest level of construction activity in the history of our City -- \$2.9 billion in new construction in the year 2015 alone.

In the first 11 months of 2016, the City of Atlanta issued more than double the number of residential building permits (7,568) in Gwinnett (3,753), in Forsyth (3,369) and in Cobb (3,357) county, our fastest-growing suburban counties.

Because of our efforts, Atlanta is in the strongest financial condition in more than a generation.

We have built our cash reserves from \$7.4 million when we walked in the door to \$153 million today.

Together, we have balanced our budgets for seven consecutive years, without once turning to a property tax increase.

We have moved our credit rating eight positions, to AA+, the second highest credit rating that a City can have.

Atlanta has also earned an ISO insurance rating of 1, the highest possible, and the best it's been in 50 years.

We will reduce by more than half our \$900 million backlog of infrastructure projects, thanks to the people of Atlanta's support through the TSPLOST vote in November and the Renew Atlanta bond program.

We have kicked off a \$2.6 billion expansion of MARTA, the largest expansion of the system since Mayor Sam Massell launched the system, and now it seems that others will soon follow. We will connect our neighborhoods and workers to our job centers in ways that we did not think possible just 24 months ago.

And we have signed an agreement with Delta Air Lines to keep its headquarters here for another 20 years, with an option for 10 more years, keeping Hartsfield-Jackson the #1 airport in the world.

Our partnership with Delta has allowed us to embark upon a \$6 billion capital expansion and renovation program at Hartsfield-Jackson that will employ thousands of people, supporting thousands of families.

I am proud to announce today that the latest numbers are in and Hartsfield-Jackson remains the busiest airport in the world, for 18 consecutive years. Last year, it handled more than 104 million passengers.

I think that deserves a round of applause.

We steadfastly focused on public safety, reducing major crime by 27 percent since 2010 and hiring more police officers than ever before.

We also championed the environment and have been recognized as one of the most sustainable cities in the country. The City of Atlanta was honored to be named one of the 100 Resilient Cities in the world last year by the Rockefeller Foundation. This global network of cities has

been handpicked to share resources and formulate strategies that will meet the environmental and social challenges of the 21st century.

I would like to thank and recognize RC 100 leader Otis Rolley (ROLE-EE), of the Rockefeller Foundation, who is here with us today. Please give him a round of applause.

In partnership with Governor Deal and the State of Georgia, the City of Atlanta has become the third largest TV and film production center in the United States of America, and the fifth-largest in the world. And I believe that with hard work that we can surpass New York for second place next year.

We are boosting our stature as the cultural capital of the Southeast with the largest expansion in Zoo Atlanta's history, and the largest expansion of the Atlanta History Center with the relocation of the Cyclorama.

The Woodruff Arts Center just raised \$110 million in its transformation campaign. Woodruff leaders surpassed their goal by \$10 million because they dared to dream bigger. And the City of Atlanta responded. *You* responded.

With support from the Georgia General Assembly, my administration will pursue a one-tenth of a penny sales tax to fund a permanent and dedicated source of funding for the arts in the City of Atlanta.

Today – right now – I am asking for your help and your support in November to ensure the arts community always thrives in Atlanta.

This is important – listen up.

Organizations like the Woodruff Arts Center are thriving, but our small and medium-sized groups, our young and emerging artists, need additional support. We need to give back to the creative community that gives so much to our City.

These are the things, all of the things, that we could not have predicted at the time of the Centennial Olympics just 20 years ago.

Could we have predicted that next year we will host the College Football Championship? And the year after that, the Super Bowl? And in 2020, the NCAA Final Four? And be the *only* city to have done so?

It's encouraging to pause for a moment and think about everything we have done together, the progress everybody in this room has been such an essential part of.

But we could not have done it without the confidence of the people of Atlanta and their belief in us.

Every time we've asked for their support, the people of Atlanta said "Yes." They never wavered. They responded in overwhelming fashion: "Yes," they said. "We want to be in the future business. We want to lead in the 21st century."

The people of Atlanta have given us the gift of public trust, and for this we are grateful. But gratitude is not enough. Gratitude must be backed up with action, relentless, tireless action. Because at the end of the day, when it's all said and done, people elect you to win for them, to make their lives better, to care more about their future than you care about your own, and to keep your promise to come back for them, even when they weren't with you, or fought you every step of the way.

The faith that they have in us means we have so much more to finish, so many reasons to run through the finish line. Now we must execute. We have an instruction to deliver.

With each vote, the people have given us the blueprint for the future of Atlanta, and that future now rests in our hands. That future is a City that will grow from 500,000 people to 1.3 million people by the year 2050.

We must shape this growth. We must mold it. We must honor it.

The \$6 billion expansion of Hartsfield-Jackson – new runway, new concourse, new four-star hotel – it's in our hands;

The sale of Turner Field to Georgia State for a world-class campus and neighborhood revitalization – it's in our hands;

So is the renovation of Philips Arena, which will keep the Hawks and the NBA Downtown for decades to come. All of this will ensure that Philips remains one of the premier sports and entertainment venues in the country. And, by the way, we own it.

Philips Arena represents a tremendous investment in our convention and tourism industry, which brings 51 million visitors to Atlanta each year, and makes us one of the four most-visited cities in America, an industry that supports more than 200,000 jobs, and generates \$15 billion in spending in our hotels, in our restaurants and in our local businesses.

It also ensures that people will go to work and be able to support their families – all of this in our hands.

We don't do these things lightly. We are steady and careful and precise. We are an intentional city.

Ponce City Market didn't just happen. Buckhead Atlanta didn't just happen. They were made to happen. We intended for them to happen – just as we intend to improve the lives of folks who want a fair shot at life, not a guarantee of an equal outcome.

We're not just talking about big, flashy projects, either – we're talking about our community-focused developments, too.

We worked hand-in-hand with our partners at the Atlanta Housing Authority to build the Mechanicsville Cityside affordable housing development – the first of its kind in the Southeast. This is single-family housing with public support, and it represents a new approach for our city.

At this very hour, life-changing work is also being done on the Westside to bring jobs and meaningful work opportunities into those historic communities with new parks, the extension of the Atlanta BeltLine and job-training programs like those at the City of Refuge.

We're embarking on a \$30 million renovation of the entire Martin Luther King Jr. Drive corridor, spanning 7.2 miles from the new Mercedes-Benz Stadium to our western border.

I believe that here in the City of Atlanta, Dr. King's birthplace, the street that bears his name should be worthy of his legacy. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive in Atlanta should not only be one of the most attractive and important streets in our City, but in any city in America.

In my first Inaugural Address, I spoke about the four responsibilities: The responsibility to our past, to our present, to our future, and to one another.

We have worked hard to keep those responsibilities not only in our minds, but to make sure that they have a handprint on our heart.

We have continued to cultivate a culture of business opportunity and job growth, which have become hallmarks of the City of Atlanta. But we're always working to make sure that that opportunity and that prosperity is shared by people who have come to Atlanta, or were raised in Atlanta.

In 2010, we started out with our heaviest lift – pension reform. Our solution, approved with unanimous support, has become a model for other cities in America.

Along the way, we have looked out for one another, realizing that Atlanta is at its best when it is a City for everyone.

We have a City that is 131 square miles. You can fit the city of San Francisco and the city of Boston in our City limits and still have room for part of Manhattan.

Accordingly, there is no excuse for us not to have adequate affordable housing for any teacher, any student, any senior, any Millennial, any mother or father with a family that wants to live inside the City of Atlanta.

Last year, when I stood on this stage, no government – not even our own, had a policy for affordable housing. Today, as I stand here before you, the City of Atlanta has a policy, Fulton County has a policy and the Atlanta Public Schools has a policy.

In 2016, the Atlanta City Council demonstrated true leadership and passed an ordinance that requires developers who accept incentives from taxpayers to make 10 to 15 percent of residential units affordable to people with incomes below 60 or 80 percent of the area’s median income.

Is more needed? Yes.

Can we do more? Yes.

But it’s a start. We are focused on doing more and getting it right.

When we launch new developments, we must demand that since this success came from the community, that you give these new opportunities to people in the community and from our neighborhoods. And in doing so, you will be doing yourself a favor.

So we’re having this healthy conversation about equity and affordability, and how we keep revitalization from turning into gentrification and isolation, which weakens us all.

How do we make sure that people who have been in Atlanta all of their lives aren’t forced to push their noses up against the glass to look into a window of success and prosperity, but remain locked out of it themselves.

When you leave today, I want you to drive two blocks to the World of Coca-Cola. If you look directly across the street from the World of Coca-Cola, you will see a new, \$100 million development by Post Properties, the largest in the company’s history. It has 444 units in it.

Because we worked with Dave Stockert at Post, because they are a forward-leaning company, 43 of those units in that building are going to be for working families.

In a development where average rents are \$2,400 a month, these units will be home to residents paying as low as \$900 to \$1,200 a month.

As a result, working families will be living side by side with some of the most affluent people in the City of Atlanta; all of them waking up in the morning and crossing the street to enjoy Centennial Olympic Park; or walking two blocks to get on MARTA at Five Points Station and get to their jobs.

This is what the fabric of Atlanta should look like. That is the business of a City. That's what we should be about. And we are going to be about it.

Homelessness is another challenge that we are meeting head on. Last year, the Atlanta Continuum of Care saw a six percent decrease in our homeless population.

We've seen success stories like Benjamin Graham, who was homeless for five years in the City of Atlanta. Mr. Graham suffered through a series of tough moments in his life. He experienced childhood trauma. He spiraled into addiction. He lost everything. He slept under a bridge not far from here.

After receiving assistance from our partners, he got sober and eventually started his own business. He now has a convenience store on Auburn Avenue. He's a small business owner. He sits on the board of Partners for H.O.M.E. He's one more individual success story in the City of Atlanta, proof again that Atlanta is a City of second chances.

Benjamin Graham is with us this morning. Please let's recognize him and give him a big round of applause.

Our push to give people a chance and eliminate homelessness is not new.

Since the year 2013, we have seen a 52 percent decrease in the number of unsheltered homeless individuals; a 61 percent decrease in the number of chronically homeless individuals; and a 62 percent decrease in the number of homeless veterans in our City.

We accepted President Obama's challenge to end homelessness for veterans, because we believe that if you have served our country – put your life on the line for this country – you deserve a place to call home that's yours.

I'm proud to tell you today that we have permanently housed more than 1,000 veterans who have put their lives on the line for the United States of America. We have reduced homelessness for our veterans to functional zero in the City of Atlanta.

We've still got a ways to go, but we're moving the needle, and we're going to keep going. Today, I'm proud to announce that the United Way of Greater Atlanta will match the City of Atlanta's contribution of \$25 million in our biggest effort yet to make homelessness brief and rare in the City of Atlanta.

Together, today, we are making a \$50 million commitment that will reinforce Atlanta as a place where opportunity and human dignity come first, a City that's not only too busy hate, but one that is not too busy to love.

Please join me in giving the United Way of Greater Atlanta and the Regional Commission on Homelessness and all of our partners in this effort a huge round of applause.

We're working to improve lives right now, but we're also taking the long view.

Throughout our communities, we are fulfilling the pledge we made to give our young people the tools they need to lead successful lives.

We have worked to engage at-risk young people by reopening all the recreation centers in the City of Atlanta, as promised, and reopen every single pool in the City of Atlanta. Promise made, promise kept.

We established our Centers of Hope, which provide kids with educational opportunities, mentorship and 65,000 hot meals each year – because we know dreaming dreams and setting goals for yourself are much easier when you have a full stomach and a safe, supportive environment.

I've seen the impact firsthand. When we opened the new Atlanta Hawks basketball court at Bessie Branham Center of Hope this past summer, a little girl named Meyonna (ME-yana) – just seven years old – got up and made a speech to a gym filled with people.

She told us about how participating in the programs at the Center of Hope helped her with her schoolwork and helped her mom out.

I was so impressed with Meyonna that I asked her to sign the piece of paper she wrote her speech on and let me keep it. I've still got it on my desk as a reminder of the things a City can do day in and day out to help build the next generation.

With every ribbon cutting and groundbreaking we've done at our parks and recreation centers, I have seen kids just like her. They have that same spark which can now burn brighter because we supported them.

I believe that cities are best when we see them through the eyes of people who need help the most.

Last year I met a woman in Chicago who told me how hard it is to keep a steady job while getting her daughter the lifesaving medical care she needs. There was a clinic close to home but it wasn't a good place. It didn't provide quality care for her daughter and eventually it was closed down.

Now she takes a \$15 dollar trip to the University of Chicago Hospital. She's eligible for a discount through Obamacare. This sounds good – like she has good options.

But standing there in the train station, she asked me, “what happens when you don't have enough, even with the discount?”

What do you do when you don't have enough cash in your pocket to cover the discounted price?

This is the kind of person I think about when I come to work every day. Sometimes it's not enough to offer a discount. We must make sure the person who has the will to do better can do better.

I can't do this alone, but it is something that Atlanta can do. When we someone falling through the cracks, we must reach out and take their hand.

Now, more than ever, we must embrace the responsibility we have to each other. We must transcend that which divides us, and respect what makes each of us valuable and unique.

Today, more than ever, we must continue to be a Welcoming City for immigrants and refugees of all faiths – Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, everyone.

No Administration has invested more in public safety than ours. We have cut crime by 27 percent, and I believe in keeping our city safe. At the same time, I believe that it is wrong to cherry-pick which refugees are allowed to find safe harbor in the United States.

And unless you are Native American, there was a time when you were “them.”

As a city that rose from the ashes after the Civil War, Atlanta saw first-hand the destruction that comes with blind prejudice and hate. We need to keep our arms open to the kind of folks who came here and built this country.

Whether you know it or not, Metro Atlanta has the second-fastest growing foreign-born population in America. With our Welcoming Atlanta initiative, we embrace the hopes and dreams of people from all around the world.

The result of that is plain to see: In the last decade alone, our international community grew by almost 70 percent.

We must continue to push for equality for women and our cabinet, which is 50 percent women, reflects that belief.

In 2015, the City of Atlanta adopted the most aggressive paid family-leave policy of any government in the state.

Last year I stood on this stage and announced the Women's Entrepreneurship Initiative to give promising new businesswomen a chance to build their companies surrounded by best-in-class technology and access to capital and mentors.

What are the results? Since then, nine out of the 15 entrepreneurs have hired their first full-time employee. And eight of the 15 have hired one another for their business needs. And three of out the 15 entrepreneurs have become certified WBEs.

Despite the importance of women to the economy, there is no other city-backed initiative of this kind in the country. But there should be. And as these 15 women entrepreneurs grow their businesses, and become home-grown success stories, people are going to look at what we have done, right here in Atlanta.

Let me make one other thing clear: We will not hesitate to stand up for our LGBT community.

I could not be more proud to be mayor of the first city in the Deep South to achieve a perfect score on the Human Rights Campaign's Municipal Equality Index, not once but three years in a row.

We're going to keep at it. The LGBT community is an essential part of Atlanta's diversity, and this diversity is our greatest asset, one that should bring us together now more than ever.

Seven years ago, I said that we were on the lookout for a brighter future, and that we were all emissaries of our collective destiny. Today, we are realizing that destiny. The days ahead look more promising in Atlanta, and in Georgia, than ever before.

Atlanta is the most vibrant, culturally significant and international city in the Southeast, the anchor of the ninth-largest metropolitan area in America, centered in the eighth biggest state in the union. We are an emerging global force with a GDP of more than \$305 billion – bigger than 30 states.

This is the city that you have built. You have made Atlanta ascendant. Do not fear what's next. The broader future in our country may be uncertain. But one thing is sure. One thing is certain. Atlanta will lead the way.

That's the Atlanta that I know. That's the tradition of the Atlanta Way.

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to spend time with the former Prime Minister of Israel, Shimon Peres, at a dinner hosted by Muhtar Kent.

He talked about a conversation he once had with his mentor, David Ben Gurion, the father of the State of Israel.

He shared this memory of once, when they were walking, Ben Gurion said that he could never have dreamed of everything that Israel had become. All of his dreams for Israel came true.

But the lesson that he took from this was that they had not dreamed big enough.

Peres continued, saying, “when you close your eyes, when you take stock, if your list of accomplishments is longer than your list of dreams, then there is still work for you to do.”

And unless you are Native American, there was a time when you were “them.”

We have the power to shape our future, to choose our path for Atlanta.

This is our collective destiny. This is our moment.

Let us never be accused of not dreaming big enough.

Because what we dream, we can do. And what we do, we will do together.

Let's believe it will happen, and it will. It should be so and it will be so.

Rise Up, Atlanta!

God bless.

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