



2019 State of the City Address
Delivered by Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms
Text as Prepared
Thursday, March 14, 2019
7:30 a.m.

Good Morning!

As the 60th Mayor of Atlanta, it's my honor to welcome you to the 2019 State of the City at the Georgia World Congress Center, on the very land where my Great Grandmother and my Great Great Grandmother once lived!

I want to thank James Quincey, Jim Dinkins and the entire Coca-Cola Company for sponsoring this breakfast and for sharing the exciting announcement about the new Recycling Partnership and grant with Atlanta.

Last May, I'd been in office only four months when I delivered my first State of the City address and I told you then that the State of our City was strong.

Today, after 14 months in office, -- a Major League Soccer Championship, a Super bowl and one knee surgery later -- I'm proud to say that Atlanta is a stronger city -- and that the best is yet to come.

Many of you here this morning have been an important part of our success, and I'd like to start by recognizing those in attendance today...beginning with my kindergarten teacher Miss Hall from Collier Heights Elementary school.

Governor Brian Kemp was with us earlier this morning, and I also want to welcome Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensberger

We are honored to have you with us today.

I'd like to thank our former mayors who have joined us today:

Mayor Sam Massell and Ambassador Andrew Young.

I'd like to thank our partners on the Atlanta City Council and ask them to please stand so that they can also be recognized.

I'd also like to acknowledge our Municipal Court judges, our Consular Corps, and all current and former elected officials and ask them to please stand.

I could not do what I do as Mayor without the help of great leaders, advisers and staff.

Will the members of my senior leadership team, please stand and be recognized?

I also want to give special thanks to the women and men who serve this city on the front lines each and every day – our police officers, our firefighters, our corrections staff, our sanitation workers, our volunteers and all employees of the City of Atlanta here with us today.

Please stand and be recognized.

Each and every day you bring this great city to life and I'm thankful for your dedication and your partnership.

There are two people I want to single out for their incredible service that they have provided to the city over the last year, our Chief of Staff, Marva Lewis, and our Chief Operating officer Richard Cox.

Marva and Richard will be leaving city hall soon.

Thank you to Cox Enterprises for allowing Richard Cox to join our team as Chief Operating Officer.

If you think the Super Bowl went well for Atlanta, be sure to thank Richard for his leadership.

I have known Richard since 8th grade, and he often says that I shoot him looks in meetings that are reminiscent of Lunchtime in the Douglass High School cafeteria.

Although I had not spoken with Richard more than perhaps three times in the last 30 years, when I called, and said the City of Atlanta needed help, without hesitation, he suspended a very successful career...and even his life....to give back to the city that he so dearly loves.

That is the epitome of Servant leadership and we are grateful for you.

And to Marva Lewis, a fearless woman, who was willing to take the chance and join our campaign for Mayor, I am also grateful for the professional and personal sacrifices you have made to help guide our Administration through a very quick and often challenging transition as Chief of Staff.

If the walls could talk, they'd tell the stories of difficult decisions, painful conversations, gut punches, long days and even longer nights....but at each turn....you have helped wisely and courageously guide our team.

While I will personally miss your daily presence in City Hall, know that your leadership has helped solidify the impactful work that our Administration has and will continue to do on behalf of the people of Atlanta.

And to my family.....public service is a calling that few outside of our loved ones can truly appreciate the physical and emotional toll that this 24-hour, 7-day a week service can take.

I remain thankful to my husband Derek for his love, friendship, support, and ever-growing patience with me.

To my mother and the rest of my family, thank you for your continued love and support.

And to Lance, Langston, Lennox and Lincoln, who are thankfully all in school today,

I could not ask for more understanding and selfless children.

As we continue to build on our vision for One Atlanta, I want to thank everyone here today for all you've done to build our city's prosperity and for supporting our inclusive mission to bring equity to every neighborhood in Atlanta.

Our transformation is well under way.

If you read the newspapers, watch TV news, or have a social media account, you know that Atlanta is a magnet for attention.

Even my Mac and Cheese, lovely and delicious, was trending on Twitter.

But in our Atlanta way, we turned our haters into our motivators.

With our More Than Mac campaign with Kroger, we raised more than \$37,000 dollars and will provide more than 148,000 meals to those in need through the Atlanta Community Food Bank.

I've spoken often about our mission to be One Atlanta – to be a safe, efficient, transparent and resilient city.

Equity is the cornerstone of all we do.

Last year, we celebrated Atlanta's highest score ever on the Human Rights Campaign's Municipal Equality Index.

This measures a city's laws, policies and services for the protection of its LGBTQ community, and we are proud that Atlanta remains a National leader.

Our goal to become One Atlanta is the filter through which we make every decision.

That includes working hard, and long in advance, to prepare for the 2020 Census.

As we head toward National Census Day April 1, we are enlisting our resources to make sure that everyone counts, by making sure that we count everyone.

We've identified nearly 80,000 previously excluded addresses.

By counting these Atlantans, we will potentially add \$100 million dollars in Federal funding for public services each year.

I'm proud to say that there are two other major cities in our country who are working to replicate our One Atlanta office of equity, diversity and inclusion.

Atlanta continues to set trends not follow them.

Public safety remains a top priority.

Last year, overall crime in Atlanta was down by two percent.

Violent crime was down 15 percent, and we took more than 1,500 guns off the streets.

But we can and must do better.

We took the bold and necessary step to raise police officer salaries by 30 percent.

That represents the largest pay increase for officers in the department's 146-year history.

With continued support from the Atlanta Police Department, we are committed to leveraging a multi-jurisdictional approach to achieve a further reduction in crime in 2019.

We also look forward to providing additional training for our officers, so they can have more understanding of the communities they serve.

Atlanta is a national model for community policing.

We've forged community partnerships to help reduce crime. We have one of the most diverse police forces in the country.

We're always looking for cutting-edge ways to train our officers.

As we know, you cannot protect without cultivating mutual respect.

In the spirit of One Atlanta, our administration has ushered in the most sweeping ethics and transparency reforms in the City's history.

And people have taken notice: As a result of our reforms, we have been honored for our open-government policies by the Georgia First Amendment Foundation.

We launched the Open Checkbook online portal, which allows the public easy access to information about City spending.

Open Checkbook now includes more than two billion dollars in spending and more than 100,000 individual expenditures online.

We knew it was a success when the press published stories based on information found on Open Checkbook.

In the coming months, we look forward to expanding our ethics oversight.

We have already passed credit-card legislation, which adds new restrictions for cardholders, as well as legislation restricting bonuses.

We have also established the Task Force for the Promotion of Public Trust to take a holistic view of our ethics code and make recommendations for the city to consider.

During our campaign, I pledged that we would leverage \$1 billion dollars towards housing affordability.

We have appointed Atlanta's first Chief Housing Officer, to coordinate our ambitious efforts around affordable housing.

In our first year, with the help of our partners, already \$100 million dollars in public funds have been invested to create thousands of units of affordable housing.

By 2026, our goal is to produce and preserve 20,000 units of affordable housing within the city of Atlanta.

One of our top priorities is ensuring that longtime residents can remain in their neighborhoods.

Let me give you a few examples:

Ariane Barco is a single mother.

When she fell on hard times, she and her four children – ages two to 15 – were forced into the street and lived in shelters for a year.

Through our partner agency Atlanta Housing, the family secured a rental home and the children have improved their grades in school because they now have stable housing and now have their own space where they are able to grow and thrive.

Edward Pearson is a Marine Corps veteran who moved between shelters, became ill, was hospitalized, and ultimately lost his job.

Through our strong community partner, Quest Communities, Mr. Pearson was able to find housing with affordable rent.

He has now renewed his relationship with his family and was even able to meet his grandson for the first time, a young man who attends Morehouse College.

Mr. Pearson's advice to people in his situation is simple:

“Don't be afraid to ask for help. And never give up.”

Gentrification is no justification for pushing people out of neighborhoods who've been there for decades – people like Carolyn Jackson.

Mrs. Jackson has lived in her home in Southwest Atlanta for 42 years.

She lost her husband when he was just 33 years old.

She raised two children on her own, working at Grady Hospital as a Certified Nursing Assistant for 30 years.

She is currently caring for her 15-year-old grandson.

Like many seniors, she's found it challenging to keep up with major home repairs.

Last year, Invest Atlanta established the Owner-Occupied Rehab Program to help people like Mrs. Jackson.

Through forgivable loans, Mrs. Jackson fixed her roof and repaired leaks throughout her house.

Thanks to the Owner-Occupied Rehab Program, Mrs. Jackson will now be able to remain in the house she has called home for more than four decades.

She has not quit on Atlanta, and the City of Atlanta has not quit on her.

All these residents are here with us today, and I would like them to stand and be recognized.

We've listened, and we've responded with laser focus when our neighbors tell us about the things that frustrate them on a daily basis.

Through our “Fight the Blight” program we achieved the city's largest demolition of dilapidated structures in recent history with the tearing down of three abandoned buildings on Bolton Road in Northwest Atlanta.

Cheering us on, were the seniors in the community and the children in the daycare across the street.

We hear about potholes all the time.

Whether sitting in a meeting with a billionaire in Buckhead, or shopping on the cereal aisle at the Cascade Kroger, potholes unite us.

As of today, we have repaired 18,408 potholes during my term in office, that's 16,000 MORE than in all of 2017!

Last October, we launched our ATL 311 App and we will continue to fix potholes as we now expand our focus on beautifying our public spaces.

While our residents deserve and expect a beautiful Atlanta, symbolism is important, as well:

We define who we are when we rename Confederate Avenue as United Avenue.

We tell the world what we value and who we treasure when we change the name of Freedom Parkway to honor of one of our greatest heroes -- John Lewis.

And as a reminder to communities that we will never forget, we are organizing the Atlanta Children's Memorial Task Force to explore a lasting and appropriate way to remember the victims of the Atlanta Child Murders.

The pain never goes away, but by acknowledging their lives in a permanent setting we pay tribute to them now, and for generations to come.

In the spirit of One Atlanta, we look forward to converting our city jail from a building designed for mass incarceration to one that will provide access to opportunity for those who need it.

We are One Atlanta.

Our elimination of cash bail bonds sent a message that poverty was no longer a crime in the City of Atlanta.

Now cities and governments across the country are following our example.

When I signed an executive order closing our doors to ICE, we said that Atlanta would no longer be complicit in the federal policy of family separation at the border.

To paraphrase, Audre Lorde, "Our silence will not protect us"

Because we are One Atlanta, we will not be silent in the face of injustice.

For the first time ever, we've set aside money in the budget to combat the high rate of HIV/AIDS in our city.

We're also hiring a Chief Health Officer who will create strategies that will drive down the rate of new infections.

With the partnership of the Elton John Foundation, we will take the fight against HIV to another level.

I'm excited about that partnership, obviously, for its impact, but it also allowed me a groupie moment when I recently met with Sir Elton in Atlanta:

Sir Elton shared with me that my dad gave him his first professional music job.

At the end of their tour of Europe, Sir Elton described the tie that my father took from his neck and gave to him.

He then began to sing my dad's hit "Um, um, um."

Because my mother's genes were far stronger than my dad's, I can't sing or dance, but I'd like to think I make a pretty good Mayor.

Because we are One Atlanta, we must expand mobility options to connect all of our neighborhoods.

I've publicly spoken about my grandmother, who rode MARTA to work every day for 30 years to Davison's and Macy's at Lenox Square Mall.

I've spoken about the generational impact her ability to simply get to and from work has had on my family.

Like my grandmother there are many working families who rely on public transportation.

But the importance of transportation extends beyond buses and trains.

Atlanta has a Public Works department that fixes our roads.

We have a Planning department that thinks about ways those roads can better serve more people.

-And we have TSPLOST/Renew Atlanta, which as has been entrusted with making long-term investments in Atlanta's transportation future.

These departments do a good job, but to do a great job they need to operate from the same playbook.

So today, I'm proud to announce that I am creating Atlanta's first dedicated Department of Transportation, a one-stop-shop, combining the work of many of these departments, to better deliver for Atlanta's mobility future.

Thank you to our staff and our key community partners who've worked for months to make this major announcement possible.

We look forward to introducing legislation to the Atlanta City Council next week to formally begin the establishment of this department.

Transportation is the lifeblood of our city.

Atlanta has owned and operated the world's busiest airport for 21 consecutive years and the world's most efficient airport for the last 16 years in a row.

With Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International airport operating at peak proficiency, we are more confident than ever in the power of Atlanta...

You can't "BEST" the "BEST".

We've enjoyed a strong working relationship with the state and look forward to that continuing.

One great example of the strength of our collaboration was the execution of the Gulch deal which represents the single largest development in Atlanta in nearly 50 years.

The redevelopment of the Gulch will introduce a new era of prosperity, energy and connectivity around Downtown and the West side of Atlanta.

It will bring in millions of dollars in investment, thousands of job opportunities, money for workforce training and affordable housing units.

I want to again thank the Atlanta City Council, the Atlanta Board of Education and all of our partners who helped make this transformational deal a reality.

In the spirit of creating One Atlanta, just a few months ago, I joined with the Atlanta Committee for Progress and CEO's of several Atlanta-based companies to announce the launch of the Center for Workforce Innovation.

This center will prepare students at Atlanta Technical College for well-paying, high demand jobs.

Everything from airline mechanics to plumbers to engineers to coding professionals.

The Center for Workforce Innovation will build a pipeline for the local talent needed to strengthen our business community and attract future economic investment to our city.

I'm also proud to say that this initiative has given us inspiration inside of city hall.

Just this year, The Atlanta Fire and Rescue department launched an initiative at Therrell High School to train students to become firefighters.

Upon graduation, these students will be immediately eligible for fulltime employment as firefighters in the city of Atlanta.

We look forward to expanding this program to all of our Atlanta High Schools.

In the spirit of One Atlanta, we remain committed to fulfilling the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. by helping our brothers and sisters in need.

As Atlanta's international connectivity grows, challenges such as Human Trafficking continue to present themselves.

Last year, we appointed a Senior Fellow to develop and implement a comprehensive blueprint to end human trafficking in our city.

We have adopted pro-active strategies, and working with our community partner WellSpring Living, created a training program allowing human trafficking survivors opportunities for employment with the City of Atlanta.

We've also trained our first responders and more than 10,000 volunteers on ways to recognize and report suspected human trafficking.

As we build awareness about Human Trafficking, we will continue to help victims break free from this form of modern-day slavery.

Atlanta is also proud to be a Welcoming City and a city of second chances.

In partnership with the State, our PAT3 ReEntry Program trains eligible, non-violent adult offenders for jobs during the last 18 months of their sentences.

Upon release, these men -- all fathers with children -- are transitioned into fulltime employment with the City of Atlanta, with full health benefits.

Let me give you two recent examples of how this program works:

Shaun Harris is 30 years old.

While serving out a reduced five-year sentence for a drug offense, Mr. Harris received training and employment as a Water Service Worker in the Department of Watershed Management.

He now uses the earnings from that job to care for himself and his seven-year-old son, MJ.

Another example is Tommy Vaughns:

Mr. Vaughns has been working for Watershed while serving the remainder of his sentence.

He's now saved enough money to secure a lease on a house for his family of five children – a house they will move into when he is officially released from custody just two days from now.

Mr. Harris and Mr. Vaughns, please stand so you can be recognized.

Also joining us today, are officials from Boston, who are working with our corrections and watershed departments in researching this innovative program for replication in their community. --Welcome to Atlanta.

In case you're wondering what's on my shirt today, in celebration of Women's History month, it reads, "She believed she could, and so she did."

While I claim this as a personal mantra, it truly speaks to the spirit of One Atlanta.

In the words of Benjamin E. Mays; "Not Failure, but low aim, is sin."

In the spirit of Lonnie King, we believe that small movements can change the world.

In the deeds of Rosalynn Carter, we believe in being a voice for the voiceless.

In the memory of Ivory Lee Young Jr., we believe in fighting for our neighborhoods.

In the tradition of Ivan Allen, who testified before Congress in support of equal rights, we believe Southern mayors can inspire a nation.

In the example of Carolyn Long Banks, who is here with us today, we believe that if there must be a first, then why not it be us!

In tribute of my Aunt Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, we believe that our courage is our birthright.

In the dream of Maynard Jackson, we believe Atlanta will continue to soar...

And in the belief of One Atlanta, we will continue to work to build a more affordable, a more resilient, and a more equitable city.

Atlanta, I believe we can, and so we will.

The best is yet to come!

Thank you and God Bless.