
Here is the Text of Mayor Bowser's State of the District Speech



*This is the text of Mayor **Muriel Bowser**'s State of the District speech, as prepared.*

Thank you, Khidar. Thank you so much.

It is wonderful to be here at the fabulous Arena Stage, isn't it?

I am honored to deliver the 2016 State of the District Address.

Before I begin, I would like to take a moment of silence for the people of Brussels.

Tonight, we all stand in solidarity with our family and friends across the Atlantic.

My fellow Washingtonians, I am so proud to stand before you as Mayor of my hometown.

People ask me all the time: "What surprises you about being Mayor?" If I had a dollar for every time someone asked me that, we could build the rest of the streetcar line!

The thing about being Mayor is that — on any given day, you don't always set your agenda. You don't get to pick the issue, the call, or the emergency that requires your attention, or requires you to make a decision, one that could affect hundreds of thousands of people.

You don't know if a Presidential candidate will try to tread on DC by attacking our reasonable gun restrictions. You don't know if a Congressman will try to attack our marijuana laws, access to women's healthcare, public school funding, or simply by making fun of our streetcar.

Now, we can make fun of streetcar, but we're not gonna take it from a Senator from Kentucky!

Despite these challenges, every morning when I wake up, until I lay my head down at night, I am laser-focused on the things that Mayors do — that I can do to create opportunity that is equal, and fair, and blind to age, gender, zip code, race, or religion.

I am focused on delivering the fresh start we promised for every single Washingtonian, making sure that no one is left behind, and making sure that hard working, goodhearted Washingtonians like Khidar, will get a fair shot and a pathway to the middle class.

I will go to China, to Cuba, or just out to Fairfax County, if it will drive our economic engine and your prospects at a better future. I will recruit, retain and support the best team of professionals — who share my commitment to all corners of the District, and my belief that we are stewards of our government. I will set a bold agenda and deliver on it, because that's what you elected me to do.

I have learned that if the issues are tough, the politics are hard. As an ANC Commissioner, Ward Councilmember, and now Mayor, I know firsthand that nothing stays the same.

And I believe we have three choices.

1. We can reject growth and accept our decline
2. We can grow without regard to our roots, and risk losing what makes DC great
3. Or we can take a third way.....to balance change with preservation and with growth... and do it together across all 8 wards.

I choose the third way. And I know we can do it together, by making smart and equitable investments in:

- Schools
- Public Safety
- Infrastructure
- And most importantly, in our people!

Now, I would like to change gears for a minute, for what we'll call the 'lightning round.' Just consider how far our city has come in the past decade since I first reported to the Wilson Building as the Ward 4 Councilmember.

Let's start with our schools.

- School reform that equals an accountable mayor & DCPS rising
- 6.5 billion dollars to modernize DCPS schools, with \$2.5 billion more to go
- 500 mentors for our boys who need it most
- \$720 a year saved by parents, thanks to Kids Ride Free
- 8,200 families reading with 'Books from Birth,' thanks to Councilmember Allen
- Cornerstone, Common Core, and Career Academies
- The best conditions for charter schools in the country
- More time for learning through an extended school year
- Pre-K 3 and 4
- And our soon-to-open, all boys school in Ward 7

We've done a lot. And we have the results to show for it.

We have one of our shining students here tonight. Akilah Johnson is a 10th grader at Eastern High School, and she recently made DC proud by winning the National Google Doodle competition! Akilah included the DC flag in her beautiful doodle, because, as she says:

"I'm a Washingtonian at heart, and I love my city with everything in me!"

Well Washington loves you too, Akilah!

There are 15,000 more students in public schools than 2007 – that's more than a 20% increase.

And student achievement is rising. DC has the fastest improving urban school District in the nation!

Last month, I hosted three budget engagement forums — where you can speak up about your priorities, before we finalize the budget. And you won't be surprised. Folks come with their own ideas – some specific and some broad. But there is one priority everyone seems to agree on.

In order to do all the other things we want to do as a city, we have to get education right. So with this budget, we will make the largest investment in public education in our history – with a 75 million dollar increase over last year!

That means more funding for instruction, and focused programming in both our traditional public schools and our public charter schools.

I have also called on Congress to renew the SOAR Act, which provides \$225 million in education funding over the next 5 years.

Last year, you told me we weren't modernizing schools fast enough – so we're going to fix that.

Under the leadership of Councilmember Grosso, we took a closer look at modernization and established a criteria to ensure modernization spending is equitable and right-sized.

Because residents asked for a greater investment, my upcoming budget will include an additional \$220 million dollars for the capital budget.

We will no longer do half modernizations or half step the truth on when we will deliver for our students and parents. Instead, starting in 2017, we will give each school that hasn't been modernized a full renovation.

That means there will be some schools that get done sooner and more completely... and others will take a little longer. But most importantly, all of the schools that

remain will be done, and all of them will be done right.

We will complete modernization of our middle schools as I promised I would do, and we will even complete comprehensive and selective within this six-year capital plan. And only 12 schools that have not been renovated will need to be modernized after 2022. Just 12 out of 111.

We will then make those schools our top priority. And I will work with our friends on the Council to find the \$470 million to get the job done!

At the end of the day, we have to maximize the limited resources we have. So much so, that we will dedicate every dollar of our borrowing capacity, as mandated by DC law, and we will invest that in our schools. We are putting all our chips on education – and we are betting big on our children's future!

Now, let's look at the progress made since 2007 in another pillar of a strong community – public safety.

- 10 years of nationally recognized Chief of Police Cathy Lanier
- The Rosenbaum Task Force established the framework for EMS reform
- Crime rates heading in the right direction
- Fire Chief Gregory Dean lured from Seattle
- \$500,000 for security camera rebates, to keep you safe
- Working toward 4,000 police – a force that looks like the community they serve
- Community grants and strong neighborhood partnerships
- And an unwavering commitment to those we serve

As a result of all this – and the thousands of first responders who work so hard every single day – we are a safer and stronger city. But like many big cities, we had some challenges this past year..... too many homicides, and too many robberies.

So we're approaching the challenge in a number of ways. And I want to be very clear about something. I believe the best way to fight crime is to give people a fighting chance.

I have met so many young men and women who feel left out of our prosperity. They're not looking for a handout. They're just looking for a hand up. So we are extending our hands.

Whether it's the LEAP Academy.....Career Connections.....or the Marion Barry Summer Youth Employment Program, we are giving our most vulnerable residents a path they never knew existed.

And that includes returning citizens. Next year, my Administration will take over operations of the DC Jail, including the Correctional Treatment Center. This will allow us to bring back more of our federal prisoners sooner – so we can give them extra support and services before they head home.

We will enhance job training and mental health services. We will do more to reconnect family members and loved ones. Addressing those root causes of crime is our starting point.

We are also keeping our Metropolitan Police Department on the cutting edge – with tools and best practices – that prevent crime, and help us solve crimes when they happen. We are growing our police force to protect our growing city.....thanks to the support of Councilmember McDuffie, we will make it easier for those experienced officers from military and other police departments to join our ranks.

And this year, you will see a public safety academy at our very own Anacostia High School!

We will continue to put in place the policies and practices that keep the trust between our residents and law enforcement.

And that includes implementing the most progressive – and most transparent – Body Worn Camera program in the country! Because we believe that transparency and accountability strengthen our community.

By the end of this month, more than 650 more police officers will be equipped with a Body Worn Camera. And by the end of this year, every single patrol officer will be wearing one!

That means Brianne Nadeau will see them in Ward 1, and Yvette Alexander will know all of the officers in Ward 7 wear them too.

A strong MPD is fundamental to our safety, and so are our fire department and emergency services. Thanks to a new law spearheaded by Councilmember Cheh, we now have more safety and health protections for our firefighters.

But there is more we can do — more we must do — to strengthen our emergency services. And you will soon start to see tangible signs of EMS reform

Between 2002 and 2015, despite our growing city, the District put out the same number of ambulances on the street each and every day.

The city grew, but the number of ambulances didn't. So we increased that number by 10 last spring. And starting next week, we will put as many as 30 more ambulances on the street during peak times.

But that's not all. Over the next few months, we will put in place more than 30 more 911 call takers and dispatchers!

Just as public safety is foundational to a strong community, so is the infrastructure that supports us.

Here's a look back on some of what we achieved since I joined the Council in 2007:

- Hundreds of millions for recreation centers and our libraries
- Three spans of the 11th Street Bridge
- We endured one derecho, too many power outages to count, and created a plan to underground our power lines so it doesn't happen again
- #1 in the nation in green buildings and green roofs
- 2 Bald Eaglets right here in the District!
- The largest wind power deal ever for a US city
- The things Mayors need to do: Potholepalooza, then AlleyPalooza — which gave us 8 new alleys, in 8 wards, in 8 weeks
- And the things Mayors should do: \$100 million investment in affordable housing — with a renewed commitment every year that I'm your Mayor!

As a result, we have a city that is built not for the past, but one that is building for the future.

We will continue to invest in schools, and parks, and libraries to benefit our residents today, while setting us up for success tomorrow. We will keep investing — along with Maryland and Virginia — in our public transit network, to make sure that metro is safe and reliable.....And I know I can count on Jack Evans, the 'Mayor of Metro' to make good use of DC taxpayer dollars.

We will keep investing in smart and clean energy. And while it is ultimately the job of the Public Service Commission to hold the utility accountable, I promise to keep fighting for a public utility that is affordable, reliable and sustainable!

And most importantly, we will keep investing in our neighborhoods.

Look what happened in this very place. Arena Stage made their home in Ward 6 more than sixty years ago. In 2010, with 10 million dollars of direct investment from the city, they renewed their commitment to Southwest with this beautiful theater.

Check out the signs of progress across the street — with hotels, and homes, and retail popping up at the Wharf. I appreciate the leadership of Molly, Edgar, Beth and the team here at Arena.

We want to bring that same commitment and investment to every part of this city. We saw it with huge investments in Columbia Heights and City Center. This year, you'll see progress at the new DC United Stadium and at Walter Reed.

And thanks to the tenacity and hard work of Councilmember LaRuby May and Ward 8 Advocate Mary Cuthbert, in the next three years, you will see people working, living, shopping and playing at St. Elizabeths!

Let's give them both a hand!

And just like she held job fair here last February and October, Councilmember Elissa Silverman will be able to do the same at the Sports & Entertainment Arena at St Elizabeths in 2018.

Working together, we are bringing jobs to the neighborhoods where people need them most.

Right now, when you look across the District, we have projects in all 8 wards that will lead to 32,000 new jobs. While some may see cranes in the air, I see 32,000 pathways to the middle class in the near future.

Since day one, this is what I've said to my team. Anytime someone wants to do business with DC government, you ask them — what can they do for DC residents?

That means jobs, and revenue for our city, and affordable housing! Just ask councilmember at-large for affordable housing, Anita Bonds.

Today, there are 5,300 units of affordable housing in the pipeline – which will house nearly 12,000 DC residents – more than we’ve ever had in the history of Washington, DC!

Places like Plaza West at Mt. Vernon Triangle, for grandparents raising grandchildren. And the old Phyllis Wheatley YWCA – all for people who make below 30% of the area median income.

As DC continues to grow, we want to make our city affordable and accessible for everyone – whether you’ve been here for five minutes, or five generations. Councilmember Todd will tell you that our seniors should be able to live in their hometown, in their own homes, on their own terms

This year, we launched ‘Safe at Home’ to offer small home modification grants for seniors and people with disabilities. 160 people have already enrolled.....people like Mr. Sidney Glee.

After multiple hip surgeries, Mr. Glee has a hard time climbing stairs in his 3-level house. He saw an ad for ‘Safe at Home’ and called right away. 18 days after a consultation with an occupational therapist, the DC Office on Aging installed a stair lift and grab bars.

And Mr. Glee now has peace of mind that his house will always be his home, and his piece of mind fills each of us with glee.

Our vision is that no matter your age, no matter your income, you can always make a good life for yourself in the District of Columbia.

So we’ve got schools. And public safety. And infrastructure. But at the end of the day, our success rises or falls on our people. Washingtonians are the reason DC is rising.

So we are investing in YOU. Folks celebrating their first birthday, or their one hundred and seventh. No matter the color of your skin, how you worship, who you love, your natural given abilities, or your native tongue. Every Washingtonian deserves a fair shot, and a pathway to the middle class

Anywhere I go – whether it’s Cleveland Park or Anacostia – parents tell me how hard it is to get their kids into childcare. This year, we will make a new investment: an additional 3.6 million dollars to improve childcare. But that still isn’t enough.

I have charged the Deputy Mayor for Education and the Deputy Mayor for Health & Human Services to convene a working group to come up with recommendations to expand childcare and early childhood opportunities, so we can give every child, and every family, a strong start!

As our city grows and more families choose DC, we’re working hard to create and attract good-paying jobs for Washingtonians. In the past year, our unemployment was driven down by a full percentage point!

It didn’t happen by accident. I often tell people I don’t walk around with a big bag of jobs....trust me, I wish I could. The job of the Mayor is to make sure we have the environment where businesses can grow.

So we are doing everything in our power to retain and attract jobs in the District. We fought to keep Blackboard, and we won. We fought to keep Advisory Board, and we won.

Between those two companies, we protected 1,300 jobs.....and paved the way for 1,000 new ones.

We will create several thousand jobs at St. Elizabeths too.

We’re going after the big prizes. And we’re looking out for our small businesses and startups, too. Look at the success of Dan Berger.

In less than four years, Dan turned an idea created in an English basement into Social Tables – a global company with 3,000 clients and 120 employees!

We want to see more success stories like that. So we’re working to give DC’s own a fair shot

We have our CEO Growth Academy, the Inclusive Innovation Hub at Howard University, led by Luma Labs, Great Streets grants, the expansion of our apprenticeship programs. And with the leadership of Councilmember Orange, we are connecting small businesses with unprecedented opportunity to do business with the District government.

We need a thriving private sector to put people on the path to opportunity. And we rely on wonderful folks like Stacy Smith to pave those pathways. Stacy is very open about her story – that she didn’t make it through high school, and she faced some challenges as a young adult. But in 1993, she found someone willing to take a chance on her. Today, more than 20 years later, Stacy is the general manager at Hyatt Place Hotel just up the street.

Someone gave Stacy an opportunity when she was starting out, so now she’s paying

it forward.

Stacy and Hyatt Place have hired 8 people who signed up with DOES, including several 22 – 24 year olds.

Stacy will make this opportunity available each summer, but the question remains: will we?

And tonight, I call on the Council to permanently extend our summer youth employment program – because opportunity should not have an expiration date!

When our residents fall on hard times, I believe we should be there to help them back up.

Last year, we made unprecedented investments to end homelessness in the District of Columbia.....to make it rare, brief and non-recurring. Even though we're just one year in, I have good news to share. In 2015 alone, we helped 1,000 families exit homelessness – 33% more than 2014! We helped nearly 1,500 individuals, including 760 veterans, find a permanent home!

But we know we can be even more effective – and make better use of taxpayer dollars – when we prevent families from falling into homelessness in the first place. And here's the number I'm most proud of – In the past six months, we prevented 900 families from becoming homeless!

But sometimes the barriers are really high, and families will end up in our care – until they get back on their feet.

When I was elected, I promised you that we would close DC General. Let me not mince words: DC General is too old, too big, and not safe enough. Hundreds of families live in conditions you wouldn't tolerate for your neighbors, let alone your own family.

So we're going to close DC General by opening up small, short-term family housing across the District. Beautiful and dignified places where families can thrive, and where little children can be little children.

But we cannot do it alone. The Council paved the way with a vote last fall, and we need your next vote to move us forward again.

I urge us not to be distracted by arguments based on fear.....or convenience....or apples and oranges comparisons that falsely represent the cost of lifting families out of homelessness.

Because make no mistake. If we fail to act – or if we do not move forward with one of the sites – we will not be able to close DC General. Not now, not any time soon, and maybe never.

I am asking the Council to stand with me and keep our commitment – to our city, and to our families. And in September 2018, when we close DC General once and for all, I am asking our community to welcome families in need with open arms. And to see them not so different from us in their spirit and aspirations, but as neighbors who share a common humanity – who share the same hopes and dreams for a brighter future.

People ask me all the time why I took this on. Let's be honest, it presents political challenges.

People have said vicious things – they clouded the mission and they have threatened those trying to carry it out.....Because sadly sometimes people fight from a place of fear. And sadly, sometimes leaders retreat to that place, too.

But there is nothing to fear. All we are trying to give to families who find themselves at DC General is hope. You see: what will happen in these short-term housing facilities is the same thing that happens in homes across the city. Parents will get up every day, and get their kids ready for school....and try to find a better path forward.

Closing DC General is the right thing to do. I believe it, and you do too. We heard from 12,000 people across the District who support our plan.

DC's families deserve better than DC General. Five year old Dwayne deserves better. Two year old Crystal deserves better. And little Relisha deserved better.

Ladies and gentlemen, you and I believe that hope should conquer fear, so I ask: will you stand with me and together close DC General once and for all?

That's a big ask, I know. But I have one more.

With grocery bills, childcare and eldercare, transportation costs.....and the other expenses of everyday life....an hourly minimum wage of eleven dollars and fifty cents will only stretch so far. Low wages create an invisible ceiling that prevents working families from truly getting a fair shot.

A report issued just last month showed that lowest-income residents in the District are overwhelmingly people of color and that nearly half of those earners were born in DC.

In a city as prosperous as ours, we can level the playing field and we can make sure our residents are paid a good wage so fewer families are forced to leave.

When the Council returns from its break early next month, I will send legislation to the Council to increase our minimum wage to fifteen dollars by 2020! Answering President Obama's call to raise the wage, cities and states across the country are proving that decent wages and strong business climates are not mutually exclusive. We are Washington, DC, and we can do it, too!

And as we raise the wage, I will also assemble a task force of leaders – from workers, to organized labor and the business community – to spend six months looking at how we work together to create a worker and business friendly environment in which we maintain our regional competitiveness.

From paid family leave, to identifying new ways to help our residents start small businesses – the task force will present a report in six months that recommends what we can do to stay competitive and continue to prosper.

I welcome the Council to join in that deliberation. But the raise cannot wait, and I ask the Council for swift consideration in our fight for 15.

We can continue to invest in those most in need. We can continue to invest \$100 million in affordable, and we will. We can reform TANF to keep families who are working their plans from falling off the cliff, and we will.

We can improve how we do job training, and we will.

But we cannot do it alone. If a fair wage is not at the end of that cliff or the job training program, our families will be forced out. So we must fight for 15, and I will.

Later this week, I will put forward my 2017 budget.

It will be the District's first local budget since Chairman Mendelson and I won the court battle for Budget Autonomy. I want to acknowledge Phil and DC Appleseed for their advocacy on this.

I was glad to break from my predecessor and stand on the side that stood up for the District manifesting its own destiny. Unlike the previous administration, I believe that when 83% of DC voters cast a ballot in favor of budget autonomy, the Mayor ought to back them up.

In fact, one of my first decisions as Mayor was to stop suing the Council and to join them in their quest for budget autonomy.

So what does Budget Autonomy mean? It means YOUR elected leaders decide how to spend YOUR money. For example, six councilmembers want to revisit the TANF cliff, our budget will give them the time to do it.

You see budget autonomy means that when you tell me to protect TANF, I will. It also means when you ask me to spend more on education, I do it. And Budget Autonomy means we are one big step closer toward statehood.

How is that for change you can believe in, Eleanor?

Budget autonomy is not the last step I will take to gain full democracy. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 guaranteed us protection against discrimination based on race, color, religion gender, and national origin. What it did not do, however, is protect us against discrimination based on our residency in the Nation's Capital.

154 years after President Lincoln abolished slavery in the District of Columbia, we remain at the mercy of those we did not elect to office. It is just not right, and we must stand together until our rights are recognized.

In our budget, we will make those investments in education.....in public safety.....in infrastructure.....and most importantly, in our people.

We will work to make life better for Washingtonians today. And we will work to make sure our children and their children inherit a strong, healthy and prosperous Washington.

And I know we can do it, because I believe in DC.

Over the past year, I have seen the compassion, the resilience, and the determination of Washingtonians. I have admired the fearless Girls Who Code. I met a returning citizen who got a second chance through Project Empowerment.....a man who touched my heart when he said: "Mayor Bowser, you have one less person to worry about." I watched a 106 year old DC resident enjoy a dance with our President. And I saw a cop use her funky dance skills to prove there is more that unites us than divides us

I came together with our entire community to mourn fallen heroes. And tonight, we all remember and honor firefighter Kevin McRae, Prince George's police officer Jacai Colson and Prince William officer Ashley Guindon.

And I see firsthand the passion, dedication and hard work of more than 35,000 District government workers. We've done a lot of good this year, but we couldn't do

it without this wonderful team. Please give them a warm round of applause!

Ladies and gentlemen, we had a great year. But we have so much more to do. I pledge to you that we will continue to create those pathways. We will work hard on your behalf, and fulfill the promises you entrusted to us. We will do everything we can to preserve DC's rich history, as lay the groundwork for a better tomorrow. And we will make sure – in a city as prosperous as ours – that everyone gets a fair shot.

My fellow Washingtonians, the state of the District is strong. These days are bright. And I believe our brightest days are yet to come. Thank you so much

God bless you all. And may God continue to bless the District of Columbia.