

## **2019 SOTC – Washington, D.C.; 03/18/2019**

Good evening, everybody!

How about Little Vannae! Let's give her a big round of applause. I want to thank her for that fantastic introduction. I was blown away at last year's Blacks in Wax, where I got to see Vannae perform for the first time, and I'm so glad that you all got a chance to see just a glimpse of how talented our young people are. She nailed it – and all the kids nail it each and every year at Blacks in Wax. Please give her another round of applause.

It is good to be back here at the University of the District of Columbia isn't it?

I want to start by recognizing my colleagues on the Council of the District of Columbia who are here tonight. And, of course, I also want to acknowledge our Warrior on the Hill, Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton.

It's been certainly a few years now that the Congresswoman, the Council, Attorney General Karl Racine and I have been working together to keep the District of Columbia moving forward in this challenging political environment.

In 2016, I know DC was really hoping for – and expecting – a different outcome.

We came out and made our voices heard. You came out strong for DC Statehood, a new constitution, and boundaries that define a federal enclave. But things at the top of the ticket didn't quite go as we had hoped...and so here we are.

Two years ago, at my State of the District address, I called on the President to work with DC on a range of issues that would make our city and our nation stronger. But for progress on revitalizing Franklin Park, I could stand here and recite the exact same list.

Over these past two years, instead of investments in infrastructure, housing, and schools, we've gotten tweets, parade plans, and shutdowns.

Locally, though, we've stood by our DC values.

When the President pushed and passed a tax plan that was designed to help the rich get richer while diverting funding from critical programs, locally, we went in a different direction. Together, our community has made big investments in protecting our most vulnerable neighbors and giving more Washingtonians a fair shot at a pathway to the middle class.

In my upcoming budget, we continue these investments.

I want you to know that I have tried in good faith to work with the current federal Administration, and I will continue to do so. Sometimes it means sitting across from the President himself and telling him who we are, what we believe, and where we are heading as a city. Like I have said before: I will sit across from the President so you don't have to.

Just last week, I was at the White House to meet with the President's team about how the District's backlog of judges is holding up some of our efforts to build a safer, stronger DC, to construct more housing, and to revitalize more neighborhoods.

Chief Judge Blacksburne-Rigsby and Chief Judge Morin are the best, but they can't do it all by themselves. They can't fill those seats by themselves.

While I was at the White House, I had a chance to drop into the Oval Office. I took the opportunity to reframe how the President thinks about honoring our service women and men and our veterans.

There are more than one million veterans who live in this region. You may have heard that the President has considered a military parade to honor them.

I see another way. I see another way to show them that we care – by building a new world-class medical facility that provides the services, opportunities, and health care that our soldiers deserve. Congresswoman Norton will tell you: our VA Hospital needs immediate attention.

A military parade would last a day while a new veterans hospital would make lasting change.

The truth is – I will work with anyone who wants to help us give more Washingtonians a fair shot. And while I will continue working with this Administration, it is time to think about our collective future. We've got to start looking ahead at the national debate in 2020.

Right now, the District is slated to vote dead last on the 2020 presidential primary schedule. We know what the Bible says, "the first shall be last, and the last shall be first." But in presidential primaries, the last, well, they're just last.

And so, tonight, I call on the Council to help us get DC in the game by moving our 2020 primary up from June to April.

Voting last sends the wrong message. It reinforces the incorrect notion that since DC isn't a state therefore we don't matter, that we shouldn't be taken seriously. It reinforces the notion that we can be taken for granted or discarded.

We've seen what happens when Americans are dismissed, discounted, and forgotten.

For the next year, my plan is to plant both feet on the floor and I know you'll be with me, set our shoulders straight, and tell this Administration and those who want to lead the next one, that the 702,000 men, women, and children who call DC home—we will have a voice, and you will hear us.

You will hear us tell you about how we are an urban jurisdiction getting it right.

You will hear us tell you that our policies are improving education, reducing crime, increasing employment, greening our infrastructure, welcoming diversity, and creating a city where everyone has a pathway to the middle class.

But you will also hear us demand more of the White House and, in this crowded field of candidates, those who want to be in the White House in the next term.

There is no doubt about it: In 2019, the state of the District is strong.

But with a friend in the White House and a president who believes in the promise of a strong middle class – we can be even stronger.

I look forward to engaging candidates on how their policy platforms will help America's cities.

We've made huge investments in the neighborhoods that need them most.

We funded, built, and cut the ribbon at the Entertainment and Sports Arena in Congress Heights.

We funded and cut the ribbon on the new Busboys and Poets in Anacostia.

But because we believe that Ward 8 should have every opportunity to rise, we aren't stopping there.

Last fall, I introduced the very first TIF in Ward 8. That means a \$60 million investment for the new home of a 200-person government agency, a hotel, and other amenities – right on Martin Luther King Avenue. With each investment: more jobs and new opportunities for residents of Ward 8 and beyond.

And if we're going to ensure residents in the East End have what residents enjoy in the West End, we need to realize every tool we can.

Former Newark Mayor and now U.S. Senator and now presidential candidate Cory Booker has been a leader on creating one such tool: and that tool is Opportunity Zones. The Senator is right when he says that "genius in this country is equally distributed" but opportunity is not.

By implementing Opportunity Zones, we can grow our housing, jobs, and amenities in areas of DC have been too often overlooked. That's why I established 18 out of our 25 Opportunity Zones in Wards 7 and 8.

I also look forward to engaging candidates like Mayor Pete from South Bend, Indiana. I know I'm biased as a fellow mayor, but I quite like the idea of having a president who understands the importance of not just talking about infrastructure, but actually investing in infrastructure.

And Senator Kamala Harris who, like us, is looking at how we can use tax credits and cash payments to recognize and reduce the financial strain middle class families in our nation are feeling.

What we want to know is how these candidates will work for Washingtonians?

Of course, our values did not change on Election Day 2016, nor did the fact that Washington, DC can manage our jurisdiction as well as any jurisdiction in the nation.

It was, after all, through our own fiscal responsibility, our commitment to good government, and the responsible leadership of public servants like Councilmember Jack Evans and Chief Financial Officer Jeff DeWitt that in less than two decades, our city went from a federal Control Board to a Aaa bond rating.

As Chairman Phil Mendelson will tell you, our financial prudence is the envy of state legislatures and city councils around the country.

But as I have said before: We are resilient but we are not financially tsunami-proof. And as we continue through budget season, we must resist the temptation to write checks now that we cannot cash in recessionary times.

And while we look ahead to 2020, we cannot wait for a president to solve our most pressing challenges.

We are going to keep building on our successes and pushing for what we believe in.

Twenty years ago, a lot of families – even families who had lived here for generations – fled when it was time to send their children to school.

Now, it's quite the opposite. Our pre-k program is attracting families to our city and a much-improved school system is keeping them here.

As more families continue to enroll in our public schools, with Chancellor Lewis Ferebee at the helm, and with steady oversight of our public charter schools, we will work with Councilmember David Grosso and our partners on the Council, our school communities and our school board, to ensure that residents in all eight wards have access to a high-quality public school.

We know it starts with a quality teacher in every classroom, but they too need the latest tools to capture our students' attention and instill a lifelong love of learning.

So with this budget, we will make a big down payment on what our community has asked for – one device for every student. With \$4.6 million for new technology in our schools, we will ensure that each third, sixth, and ninth grader has a new laptop or tablet.

We're also going to reshape vocational offerings at our high schools so that more students graduate prepared for good paying jobs that allow them to stay and raise their families right here in the District.

And as our students prepare for college, President Mason will tell you, as he reminded us, that UDC should be the first choice 2-year and 4-year institution for DC's best and brightest.

And to build on our increased UDC investment in the last budget, we are providing funding for UDC to acquire 4250 Connecticut Avenue and to begin to revitalize its student-centered campus right here in Van Ness.

But as we are solving the problem of keeping families in the city, we are confronted with the challenge of making it affordable to do so.

Over the past four years, we've continued the work of making child care both more affordable and accessible by expanding the number of seats available.

A few years back, I visited about 20 schools before I finalized my capital budget. One of the schools I visited was the shuttered and it was the hope to reopen the old Randle Highlands Schools in Ward 7.

That year, I was disappointed that we could not move forward with re-opening the school as an early childhood center. This year, though, with Hillcrest and Penn Branch bustling with young families, we can and we will.

And, Councilmember Charles Allen, we will do the same for the babies and children in Rosedale and Capitol Hill at the old Miner School.

And, Councilmember Kenyan McDuffie, we heard loud and clear from communities in Ward 5, that we will be able to do the same at the old Thurgood Marshall School.

Last year, I also created the Early Learning Tax Credit, which many families found out this tax season and provides families with a credit of up to \$1,000 per child enrolled in a licensed DC child care center.

This was created as a one-time credit, but in the budget I'm sending to Council this week, we will make the Early Learning Tax Credit permanent.

We know that policies that support working families benefit our entire community.

That's why I'm hopeful to see Julian Castro and Senator Elizabeth Warren talking about expanding pre-K universally and child care too.

Here in DC, we are going to keep building on our successes and pushing for what we believe in other ways, too. We are looking for a 2020 candidate who will take up the fight for a national Paid Family Leave policy – a national policy is a solution that ensures that all who fund it benefit from it, and that keeps cities like ours in DC from bearing the costs for the whole region.

These are the ways we make DC a place where families are able to stay and thrive.

And there are other ways we're making DC more affordable families:

Coming into office, one of the first things I did was expand a program I created when I was on the Council – Kids Ride Free. By including trains as well as buses, every year, we are able to put hundreds of dollars back in the pockets of DC families.

Out of school time is a major concern for parents. So we've made big investments in our summer camp programs to make them both more affordable and accessible by adding 1,000 new slots at eight new sites this summer.

We've upgraded our rec centers. And the renaissance of our library system is nearly complete, and certainly in 2020 with the reopening of Martin Luther King library is an accomplishment we all can be very proud of.

As you heard from Vannae, coming into office I expanded the Summer Youth Employment Program to include youth ages 22 to 24. And in the coming budget, I'm proud to raise their wage, and I know that we can work with Councilmember Elissa Silverman to make sure this gets done in this budget season.

And speaking of raising wages, on July 1, we will see the minimum wage rise to \$14 an hour in Washington, DC. And in one more year, together, we will win the Fight for 15, as the minimum wage rises to \$15 per hour. Something we can all be proud of.

Last year, with help from Councilmember Anita Bonds, we put more money back into the pockets of Washingtonians by eliminating the pink tax, you know the pink tax on menstrual hygiene products—it's gone. In 2019, we're going to do the same for diapers.

We know that those baby costs, diaper costs, after school costs, child care costs, summer camp costs, pre-school, after-school costs, they add up, don't they? So eliminating the diaper tax is one more way we can make it more affordable to raise children right in DC – one pack of diapers at a time.

For Fair Shot February, we made the DC Circulator free. You liked it so much we did it again in March.

Over these past few weeks, workers at hotels, restaurants, and shops have stopped me at the checkout counters, at the diners, telling me how much they appreciate the free Circulator. We may not think about it, because it's just \$1 each way, \$2 a day, but for a working person it adds up. And so we went back to our budget books to see what else we could do, and I'm proud to say that we will make the DC Circulator free from now on.

But, as much as we love the Circulator, Streetcar, and Capital Bikeshare, we also know that they are no replacement for Metro.

We have always prioritized safety, reliability and building the capacity for Metro. So now – we need a commitment from Metro that they will return to late-night hours and that they will not become a system that only caters to white-collar workers commuting from the suburbs.

We're not going to replace Metro with Uber and Lyft because we can't move our region forward by further clogging our roads.

need a Metro system that works as hard as our workforce and stays open as late as our region.

DC led the region in getting dedicated funding for Metro, and in the coming budget we will double-down on our commitment to public transportation with a \$122 million investment in a new K Street Northwest Transit Way. This infrastructure investment will ensure that buses, bikes, and cars can safely share the road and move through downtown DC.

We know: a resilient and sustainable public transportation system is the key to building a resilient and sustainable city.

So, as the 2020 candidates ask for our support, these are the details we're looking for in DC – a candidate who knows how much work cities like ours have put in to remain affordable, but who also knows that we can't do it alone.

We need a candidate who understands, for example, that the national housing crisis is not a Democratic or a Republican issue – it's an American issue, and we must act with urgency to solve it.

We know the number one issue on the minds of Washingtonians is affordable housing.

Rising housing costs have created new challenges for homeowners and renters alike, particularly for those on a fixed income and those who are struggling to make ends meet.

One reason that people are struggling is that with higher property values come higher property taxes.

And I hear it from our seniors all the time. They tell me: “Mayor, my grandkids – they hear how much my house is worth and they think I’m rich. But I’m not, and I need help.”

You know how the saying goes: I’m house-rich, but I’m cash-poor.

And one way we’ve helped seniors is through our Safe at Home program. Through Safe at Home we’ve made modifications and adaptations to the homes of more than 1,200 seniors in our city.

It’s a successful program, and I’m proud that in my coming budget we’re increasing our investment in Safe at Home by \$2 million.

And, last year, for example, we put a cap on the amount property taxes can go up for eligible seniors – slashing the 10 percent increase cap to 5 percent.

And I know that Councilmember Brandon Todd had the right idea with the legislation he introduced this year to provide relief to more middle-income residents on their property taxes.

And if the federal government shutdown didn’t cost us \$47 million, we could have funded this important relief this year. But we should come back to it soon – because our families who are feeling the pinch on their property taxes are feeling the pinch in ways that may prevent them from living out their older years in their homes.

It’s not just homeowners who are feeling the affordability pinch, though; it’s also low- and moderate-income renters.

So, this budget season, I charged my team with finding solutions that work for everyone – homeowners and renters alike.

At the urging of Councilmember Evans, we’re expanding the Schedule H tax credits to provide more relief for low- and moderate-income renters and homeowners to offset rising property taxes.

We’ll do this by both increasing the income ceiling and, at the same time, increasing the maximum credit by nearly \$200.

Again, this is how we help families stay in DC. But as I said last week at the National League of Cities: places like DC can’t do this alone and we need the federal government to be our partner.

Which is why I’m hopeful to see Senators Harris and Booker putting forth plans that create credits for renters who pay more than 30 percent of their income toward housing.

And Senator Warren who has a plan to use a down-payment assistance program that doesn’t just acknowledge racist redlining policies of the past, but actually takes steps to address and correct their long-term impacts.

The types of plans they've introduced will complement the work we're doing locally to both end homelessness and create more affordable housing.

As many of you already know, three years ago, we implemented Homeward DC – our plan to make homelessness in the District rare, brief, and nonrecurring. While there is more work to do, we have made tremendous progress.

We've driven down homelessness across the city by 17 percent, including a nearly 40 percent reduction in family homelessness.

Over 4,600 families have exited shelter to permanent housing, and nearly 4,900 single adults have exited the streets or shelter to homes of their own.

Imagine what that actually means for people who have experienced significant trauma in their life: it means that they have a door of their own that they can lock and a space to call their own. Things many of us take for granted each and every day.

And tonight, Relisha may rest in our hearts and minds because together we closed DC General once and for all.

But I want to thank Councilmember Brianne Nadeau, and she reminds us daily that we have more to do.

And with a new \$26 million investment in Homeward DC and a new \$11 million investment in our short-term family housing programs, we will move more of our most vulnerable residents into safe, permanent, and dignified housing.

Affordable housing isn't just a problem for our most vulnerable residents, though—it affects our entire community.

What we're talking about today is how we share that prosperity.

I pledged, coming into office, that I would spend \$100 million annually—more per capita than any other jurisdiction in the nation—to create and preserve affordable housing. And that's exactly what we did—every single year. And it paid off to the tune of 7,200 affordable units.

Affordable housing units like those that we built at Plaza West – the District's first-ever affordable housing for grandparents raising their grandchildren. Like Ms. Olivia Chase. Ms. Chase helped us cut the ribbon on Plaza West and was one of the first grandparents to move in.

But I want to talk about somebody else: Ms. Chase's grandson, Richard. Richard is always by his grandmother's side. He's also very active in making his city a better place – from testifying in front of the Council to joining us at parades.

He may be young and Olivia may be seasoned, but they are the heart of why we are here tonight. We're lucky to have him and his grandma in our city, and that's why we fight so hard for families like hers.

When I started my second term, I said that we have to think and act bigger and bolder.



I challenged us to ask ourselves: what would you do if you weren't afraid to fail?

In a city as prosperous as ours, it is our responsibility to decide how and when we adjust our policies to ensure that everyone living and doing business in the District is giving and getting their fair share.

These have been and continue to be very good times for Washington, DC. But in a city that works for both residents and businesses, in the coming fiscal year, we're asking our commercial property owners to share some of the upside.

With this budget, we will capture more from commercial real estate transactions and, therefore, be able to invest more in affordable housing.

First and foremost, we will increase our investment in the Housing Production Trust Fund by 30 percent to increase it to \$130 million.

Next, we will increase our annual investment in the Housing Preservation Fund from \$10 million to \$15 million, which will yield an additional \$45 million in private investment.

This means, in the coming budget, we can and will invest nearly \$200 million in the production and preservation of affordable housing.

I also said, though, that we won't reach our ambitious housing goals – 36,000 new units by 2025 – with our existing tools.

So, we've created a new tool: a \$20 million Workforce Housing Fund that will leverage private sector investment of nearly \$200 million—all of which will be spent to create and preserve housing for teachers, police officers, firefighters, janitors, social workers, and everyone else who has a good job but also needs to be able to find an affordable home.

The hardest part of the housing crisis is that it is not totally within our control. Right now, for example, 2,000 units of affordable housing are stuck in frivolous litigation.

And the truth is: we cannot afford to let any untapped land in our city go to waste.

That includes the campus at the shuttered RFK Stadium, which now, as most of you know, is nothing more than a vast and desolate parking lot.

It may be the only national park dedicated to asphalt.

I'm pleased to announce tonight that, in the coming days, Congresswoman Norton will introduce legislation to fully convey the RFK Stadium Campus to the District of Columbia at fair market value.

We have shown that we have the ability, the desire, and the need to reimagine and reinvigorate transferred federal land – much like we are doing at Walter Reed, Hill East, and St. Elizabeths.

To be clear, there is no deal to bring a professional sports team to that site. Whether a stadium or sports arena is included in the reimagined RFK Campus is a debate for a future date, which we as a city must decide for ourselves.

But the transfer of the RFK Campus is not my only legislative priority for this Congress.

We also need Congress to ensure DC TAG gets fully funded so that we can continue providing families up to \$10,000 per year to put towards a college education. And to reauthorize SOAR as we continue making historic investments in our elementary, middle, and high schools.

Last week, the House Democrats introduced H.R. 6, the Dream and Promise Act. The bill would give pathways to citizenship for Dreamers and those who live here under Temporary Protected Status. This matters for many, many of our Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Haitian neighbors and so it should matter to our 2020 candidates.

When this President came into office, I created the Immigrant Justice Legal Services grant program which helps protect and advance the rights of immigrants in our city.

At the budget engagement forums last month, I was moved by the residents who came out consistently and asked us to do more for our neighbors. So in this budget, together we will increase funding for the IJLS grant program from \$900,000 to \$2.5 million.

And by moving the Dream and Promise Act forward, Congress can ensure that taxpayer dollars are building on our local efforts and being used to tackle real national emergencies, not trumped up ones.

Real emergencies like climate change – which we're tackling head-on here in DC with Councilmember Mary Cheh's groundbreaking clean energy legislation.

And emergencies that hit even closer to home like the nationwide opioid crisis. Or the fact that, last year, nearly 40,000 people in our nation died of gun violence – more than 100 of those people lived right here in DC.

As we know, over the past year, our city has experienced a tragic spike in fatal violence.

While overall crime has decreased, the number of people shot in our city has stayed frustratingly steady for several years. And, over time, these shootings have become more fatal.

People are getting shot at closer range, there have been more shots fired, and it's still much too easy for people – including our youngest – to get their hands on powerful firearms.

We know that to end this violence we have to be good at both policing and healing.

My upcoming budget addresses both by continuing to fund efforts to get our police force up to 4,000 officers, including an innovative new partnership between MPD and UDC, while also making big investments in programs that prevent violence, reduce recidivism, and address trauma.

Congress's bipartisan First Step Act has already started moving our criminal justice system in a new and better direction. But we must, at both the federal and local level, build on these reforms.

Tonight, I call on the DC Council to move forward with legislation to reform the District's record sealing process and give more Washingtonians the fair shot they need.

I share Councilmember Robert White's concern, and we know that a fair shot means often means providing a second chance.

By passing the Second Chance Amendment Act of 2019, we can remove barriers to housing, education, and employment for some residents and build a safer, stronger city for all.

We know that Councilmembers Trayon White and Vincent Gray have introduced an expungement measure. Our returning citizens and their families deserve a vote on these bills.

To paraphrase Councilmember White: we can no longer just stand here; we must all do something to give our returning citizens a fair shot.

Congress, too, must do better and more to protect America from gun violence. Guns travel across state lines and so do those who use them. We need federal action, and we need it now.

Perhaps, in DC, one of the most frustrating aspects of the gun control debate – or lack of debate – is how powerless we are to make our voices heard.

When Congress votes on common-sense gun reforms, we have not a single vote representing DC values.

So, tonight, I close out by urging every single person in this room and every single person watching to continue our fight for DC statehood.

Momentum for DC statehood is at an all-time high:

Our Congresswoman has secured over 200 cosponsors for our statehood bill.

And, this month, Congress endorsed DC statehood for the first time ever.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer have formally endorsed DC statehood.

Every Democrat in the DMV region, save one, has endorsed DC statehood.

We know that the crowded field of candidates for 2020 have also put DC statehood on the tops of their lists.

In 2016, we secured the inclusion of DC statehood in the Democratic platform. Now, I will continue to encourage the DC GOP to work with us to ensure that DC is treated exactly like Puerto Rico in the Republican platform, too.

Working with Congresswoman Norton, Chairman Mendelson, our shadow delegation, and the DC statehood coalition, we will continue to demand our fundamental rights as American citizens.

When I traveled to Selma earlier this month, I was reminded of the fighting spirit of the great American Congressman John Lewis – the spirit that has compelled generations of civil rights leaders, even in the face of great adversity, to press on, to demand better of our country, and to believe that anything is possible.

By channeling this courage in this fight, we will, once and for all, fix the great American injustice happening right here in the nation's capital.

DC, it is my great honor to get to be mayor of my hometown – to come before you each year to update you on our progress and to make clear our expectations and hopes for the future.

Together, we will press on, and because we will stick together, the state of the District will remain strong.

Thank you, and may God bless the District of Columbia.