

**Mayor Muriel Bowser's
2015 State of the District Address
3/31/15**

Good evening, fellow Washingtonians. I'm here **tonight**, humble and proud to be your Mayor.

It is an honor to have the opportunity to deliver the 2015 State of the District Address.

Today, I am pleased to report, that the District is strong... and growing stronger.

We are one of the strongest economies in the country. We are the economic engine of the region accounting for one quarter of the job market, and in the last year, over two-thirds of its private sector job growth;

We are the number one tech hot spot and among the top ten cities for venture capital investment. Forbes Magazine even says we're the coolest; Wall Street knows our city finances are strong, and this year, increased our bond rating;

We are a Top 5 U.S. Cities for New Construction; Top 10 Most Walkable City in the U.S.; #2 Fittest City (we'll catch you, Minneapolis/St-Paul!); #1 in U.S. for attracting entrepreneurial founders of companies; and the #2 Best paying U.S. City for Women;

We are home to the best new restaurant in America, and we are a Top 5 Best U.S. City for a Vacation;

No wonder we're also one of the fastest growing cities in the

country.

Big cities – like the District of Columbia – have world-class schools, parks, and libraries. They are home to vibrant cultural institutions that highlight the arts and entertainment. We are making strides in these areas too.

But we all know that there is room to improve.

We face historic economic inequality with tragic rates of homelessness;

Too many of our residents can't afford to continue to live in their own neighborhoods;

Our schools are not yet good enough and our transit system isn't reliable and safe enough;

And as good as our finances are, heading into the next fiscal year, we face a \$200 million budget gap.

We know that it's tougher and tougher for many people to start down and stay on the pathway to the middle class.

When my parents bought a simple 3-bedroom home in 1960 in North Michigan Park, they could afford to do so on two modest government salaries.

Growing up in that middle class household meant that we had food in the fridge, new clothes to start the school year, and a bit of pocket money to go to the movies.

Growing up middle class meant that my siblings and I didn't always get everything we wanted but we had everything we needed.

Back in 1960, when Joan and Joe bought their home, the average home in DC cost about \$15,000. That was only three times the average family income.

Today, the median home value tops half a million dollars. That's six times the average family income.

If we are going to remain a city that keeps and welcomes families, we must do more to create opportunity for them.

Creating opportunity means taking steps every day to improve the quality of life for the residents of the District of Columbia.

Creating opportunity means economic development that makes life easier, and more convenient while preserving the rich heritage that makes DC so unique.

And it means promoting the arts and those cultural institutions that will continue to make it so.

It means being able to take a walk or wait for a bus without concern for your safety. It also means access to modes of transportation that fit your needs.

And, it means neighborhoods that welcome all District residents, whether they have been here for five minutes or five generations.

Sometimes it means just getting out of the way so that small businesses can get to work.

But it always means creating pathways to the middle class.

Now, you may have heard me say the following two words, once or twice over the last year: “Fresh Start.”

Some have called it a catchy slogan while others have embraced it on social media. No matter what you think of it, I can assure you it is a promise I will fulfill.

I believe it is critical that we walk forward together proud of what we have accomplished and where we stand; yet step away from the shadows that haunt our past.

We achieve this and uphold the public’s trust by doing what we say we will do, being responsive to what residents need and always striving to be more transparent.

You have my commitment that my Administration understands that integrity is paramount, and we are forever grateful to those who came before us and committed to the residents who rely on us not just [today](#) but every day.

On the campaign trail last year, I told you that a Bowser administration would reflect your values and beliefs.

I told you that we—the 660,000 residents of District of Columbia—believe in education reforms that guarantee every child a quality seat—no matter her zip code or her parent’s tax bracket.

We believe in housing that is safe, clean, and affordable.

We believe in healthcare for all, in marriage equality, a sustainable DC, a level playing field for women, African-Americans, Latinos,

and DC residents of every background and belief.

We believe that taxation without representation is fundamentally undemocratic. And that corruption at any level is unacceptable. And we believe that the government has a duty to ensure a fair and equal pathway to the middle class.

Last year I promised you that as mayor I would wake up every day humbled, energized, and motivated to do the little things and the big things needed to pursue our shared beliefs and make the District the greatest city it can be.

To put it another way, what I promised you is that ours would be a government that would create opportunity and do so decisively.

And for the last 89 days, this government has been working doggedly to deliver on that promise.

I have walked the halls of Congress and the White House.

I entered into an agreement with the Prince George's and Montgomery County Executives to focus on regional housing affordability and an end to homelessness.

I've travelled to Austin, Texas to sell our tech community and to New York City to achieve a better bond rating.

I've hosted the Mayors of Mexico City and Paris.

I've made BIG ASKS of billionaires and hosted foreign investors.

I've met with BIG LABOR, BIG UTILITIES, and BIG BUSINESS to make the pitch for DC JOBS for DC residents.

And as the Sports Capital, we will continue to meet with THE BIGGEST SPORTS GUYS (Right, Councilmember Evans?). They know that DC is Ready to host the 2018 MLB All Star game, and perhaps a Super Bowl one **Sunday**.

We will do all of this while keeping in mind that this is your city, and it is your government. We work for you.

You do not just get a seat at the table --- it is your table. John Dewey said “the cobbler may know how to fix the shoe, but only the wearer knows where it pinches.”

So when it came to cobbling together my first budget, I wanted to hear from you on the front end.

That is why we have hosted hundreds of residents from all 8 wards at our budget engagement forums.

More than 2,300 residents and employees gave us fresh ideas about how to spend their tax dollars to create opportunity. The budget I will submit to our friends at the Council will reflect your input and your priorities.

It will also reflect the looming \$200 million budget gap that will require some tough decisions in order to pave the way to the middle class and allow those who need us most, to prosper.

Dr. King challenged us to develop: “a kind of dangerous unselfishness.”

We will do that by giving a little more to create and preserve affordable housing, to care for our homeless neighbors and to invest in a safe and reliable transportation system to get our

residents to work and school and to keep the visitors coming.

We will do that by making “black lives matter” more than just a hashtag by taking concrete steps like investing in, and creating opportunity for, those students who are falling behind.

Creating opportunity, in particular for our youngest residents, is a driving focus of this administration.

That starts with our infants and toddlers and is why we launched the Early Learning Quality Improvement Network to ensure that those who care for our babies meet national standards.

We have the fastest improving urban school district in the nation. But, we need to increase the pace of reform.

Nowhere is that more necessary than in our middle schools. That is why in next year’s DCPS budget, we will spend \$15 million to support our middle school students with more extracurricular activities, summer programming, and international travel. And, we will create a state of the art middle-school in Petworth at McFarland.

Also, next fall, the school building that I attended as a kindergartner will re-open as Brookland Middle School.

And whether you go to McFarland, Murch or Maya Angelou, your child will ride free on the bus or rail because of our commitment to make it just a little easier on our families.

That’s also why beginning in school year 2015-2016, parents will have predictability and consistency, and a clear path from pre-K to graduation thanks to long-overdue boundary realignments. We take

these steps because we know that when children succeed, we all succeed.

For our older students, we have to turn the corner at UDC and align our Community College with the careers that will yield pathways to the middle class.

Last week I announced the creation of the LEAP Academy. The Academy is borne from a simple idea: train District residents to work in the District government.

The District employs hundreds of workers to maintain our buildings and keep our fleet vehicles road-ready. The Academy will serve as a conduit for motivated District residents to enter the workforce in a good, steady job and begin down the pathway to the middle class all the while providing you with first-class services.

Exposing youth to work prepares them for jobs as adults. That's why I announced an additional \$5 million in funding to expand the Mayor Marion S. Barry Summer Youth Employment Program to serve District youth ages 22 to 24.

Creating employment opportunities means rethinking our workforce development investments. Did you know that our creative economy generates over \$19 billion to the local economy annually? We should be more creative in how we think about investing in the arts so that we are retaining and developing a creative work force that not only provides revenue and jobs, but sustains the District as a cultural capital.

We all know that the Streetcar has been long on promises but short on results. That changes now.

I promise you that we will get the Street Car along H Street and Benning Road line up and running.

Then we will extend the line to downtown Ward 7 so that Councilmember Alexander's constituents along Benning Road can ride to Union Station and eventually all the way to Georgetown.

Earlier this month, we announced a new technology partnership with Howard University that will bolster efforts to support our growing technology and innovation sectors by addressing the needs of startups and entrepreneurs in the District.

We have also brokered a Labor Peace agreement between UNITE HERE, Local 25 and DC United that, when coupled with the related project labor agreements, will ensure that employees at the new soccer stadium will have jobs that put them on the path to the middle class.

Because we all know that when we stand with our brothers and sisters in labor so that they can succeed, we all will succeed.

You may not know this, John Boardman, but meeting Juanita King changed my life. I caught the bus with her. I cleaned rooms at the Marriott Marquis with her. It cemented within me the notion that every economic development dollar this government spends must lead to good-paying jobs.

In the coming year, we are committed to this goal: We will look for new opportunities to get DC residents, including returning citizens, on the job. Whether it is by way of our largest infrastructure projects or by creating incentives to attract and retain

businesses.

We will make first-time capital investments to reinvigorate upper Georgia Avenue at Walter Reed and to spur development at Hill East.

We will experiment with OUR RFP, a new endeavor to give the community the first opportunity to shape development. We will try it first right down the street at Parcel 42 in Shaw.

We will support vibrancy in historic Anacostia by reimagining and redeveloping the Gateway at MLK and Good Hope Road. Just this week, I announced our intention to redevelop a huge government owned parcel there.

And, we will ensure that our small businesses are given a fair shot to compete for work on all of this development.

Your government is hard at work to give everyone a fair shot.

We are active participants in President Obama's "My Brother's Keeper" initiative to narrow the achievement gap that is all too pervasive in America [today](#).

Late last year, I invited a group of 100 boys to take the Audacity of Hope Challenge.

The participants were challenged to read President Obama's book and to examine how they can each improve themselves by improving their communities.

Each time I meet with the participants, I am struck by their tenderness and desire to be engaged. They are not as tough as

they think or as some others make them out to be. None of the participants are looking for a hand out; they are looking for a hand up.

And, earlier [today](#) I announced a partnership that will guarantee those 100 students year-round internships in businesses throughout the city.

Now that's what I call a fresh start.

And [tomorrow](#), I am excited to say that I will announce the first-ever Deputy Mayor for Greater Economic Opportunity.

The Deputy Mayor will be charged with creating solutions to improve outcomes for residents who face challenges to entering the workforce or starting their own venture.

Because we know that when they succeed, we all succeed.

Being Mayor of my hometown is the greatest job in the world. We are a city on the move and we have great challenges. But some decisions have been easy:

Like standing up for marriage equality as we did by urging the Supreme Court to end marriage discrimination nationwide.

Like deciding not to send any District employees to Indiana.

Because we ALWAYS stand with the LGBT community, we won't sit by as discrimination is veiled in misguided belief.

Just as we stand with DREAMers who deserve a chance to succeed.

We join hands with Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton to

stand up to bullies – like Congressman Andy Harris of Maryland’s 1st District – who seek to undermine the will of District voters.

And Eleanor and I won’t stop standing shoulder to shoulder until we achieve statehood.

We will stand together for the District’s right to spend its dollars. As a Councilmember, I supported Phil Mendelson’s efforts for budget autonomy.

And as Mayor, I stand with him, the Council, and the 83% of voters who approved the referendum.

Because when we all stand together, we all succeed.

I am proud of what we have been able to accomplish together, and I am excited about what more we will do together to create opportunity for all 8 wards.

In one way or another, much of what we will do will be linked to my first budget, which I will deliver to the Council this week.

I’ve already mentioned that we are facing a budget deficit.

Simply put, we came into office with an estimated quarter billion dollar budget deficit for the next fiscal year. That deficit means that we will have to make tough decisions about which programs to fund, which to cut back, and whether to raise taxes.

I challenged my budget team to look for savings, to trim only those programs that could withstand it, and I tasked them to do more with less.

This is what we have in store.

This year, we are adding an additional \$32 million for DCPS and Charter schools to keep pace with growing demand. Our public school system will enroll 2,000 more students this year than last.

We are also making capital investments in our DCPS schools so students can be comfortable, engaged, and inspired.

These investments will do much to improve educational outcomes for our students.

Unfortunately, the prospects of success for many students are poor. For instance, by fourth grade, nearly 50 percent of Black and Latino males are reading below grade level.

We know we have to do a better job at engaging these students and accelerating the pace of academic achievement so they have an equal chance of being successful in college, career and life. They aren't failing themselves. We are failing them.

To address this failing, in my first month in office, Chancellor Kaya Henderson and I announced a \$20 million initiative to empower young boys and men of color.

We will also launch an all-male public high school that will focus on the academic success of these young men.

Councilmembers David Grosso and Kenyan McDuffie were bold, courageous and right to recognize that eight years of education reform has moved our boys of color too slowly.

And Attorney General Karl Racine knows the importance of this

effort and has those students' backs – regardless of whether the challenge comes from within or beyond.

We need you involved as well. That's why we launched 500 for 500 – an effort to recruit 500 residents to volunteer as a mentor through the DCPS Empowering Males of Color Initiative.

We are proud to say that 2/3 of the students have been matched with a mentor to improve their literacy skills and enhance their sense of self-efficacy.

And there is more we can and will do.

Last year, the Council approved—unanimously—the creation of the At-Risk student funding formula. Not an equal student funding formula, but a formula to give the schools with the most kids facing the most challenges the resources necessary so that they can succeed.

This year, Chancellor Henderson fully implemented the Council's plan and the budget reflects that. If we are going to move the needle, we cannot poke holes in this funding.

Last year I introduced legislation that allows students to ride MetroBus for free which saves families with two kids \$720 a year.

Those savings goes a long way to helping those families make rent, pay for a field trip, or even buy a family computer.

More families could benefit from Kids Ride Free if it were extended to Metro Rail and WE WILL CHANGE THAT.

Because when families succeed, we all succeed.

We know, too, that creating opportunities to attain pathways to the middle class means that we have to invest more in affordable housing.

The Housing Production Trust Fund is the District's primary tool for creating and preserving affordable housing at a variety of income levels. I made a commitment last year that if elected mayor the Housing Production Trust Fund would be budgeted at \$100 million each year. I am proud to say that we will deliver on that promise.

I know we will because the At Large Councilmember for Housing Anita Bonds is going to fight for it.

NKOTB – you know, the New Kids on the Block – Elissa Silverman, Brianne Nadeau, and Charles Allen are going to stand up for the \$100 million for affordable housing.

Part of that effort will entail a genuine commitment to the New Communities Initiative. I spent a great deal of time as a Councilmember shining a light on the failings of that program; my focus is redoubled.

[Today](#), the District's Interagency Council on Homelessness finalized a plan to end homelessness by making it rare, brief, and non-recurring.

And, with the Council's support of our homeless funding plan, we will deliver on another promise: ending family homelessness by 2018 and all homelessness by 2025. And we will close DC general once and for all.

But Brenda, Laura, Kristy and I cannot end homelessness alone.

We need your help. Closing DC General means producing small, safe, attractive transitional housing throughout the District.

Long-time Boston Mayor Tom Menino used to say that “the true privilege of being Mayor is that I have the opportunity to be everyone’s neighbor.”

Tonight, I extend that privilege to each and every one of you, and I challenge you to be more inclusive of those who need a hand up. Because we know that when they succeed, we all succeed.

We succeed, too when we take steps to ensure a healthy population. The way the District has embraced President Obama’s health care law is a model for the nation. **Today**, more than 93% of District residents are covered.

Thanks Obama.

Despite the coverage success, residents can be healthier. We succumb to heart disease, cancer, and diabetes at rates higher than the national average. I believe we can do better.

Preventative health should be a focus, too. So I am dedicating funds for the joyful food markets; a partnership with nonprofits and schools that distributes free fresh vegetables at pop-up markets in schools at the end of each month.

And when a resident needs a hospital – one should be close to their community. That’s why I am committed to investing in the only hospital East of the River. You should have access to a state of the art hospital that is close to where you live and work.

We want residents to lead active lifestyles. I am committed to

investing more in the Met Branch Trail, in recreation facilities, and in open spaces so that District residents of all ages have opportunities to pursue a healthy lifestyle in ways that are convenient for them.

To create opportunity requires us to make our streets safer.

The safety and well-being of District residents is my top priority and FEMS is at the frontlines of this effort.

Our fire and emergency services are not up to par.

We are undertaking a top to bottom review of FEMS and found that more calls were going unanswered, more than half of our ambulances were out of service, and equipment was rolled out without much training for our first responders. With the right leadership, we will change all that.

So, we searched across this country and found a professional, collaborative leader from Seattle, Washington who led a department with an international reputation for its fire-based EMS performance. I am certain that Chief Gregory Dean will work with our brave men and women who are our first responders to move the department forward in ways that will give you confidence, and comfort.

Chief Cathy Lanier and her team at MPD are working hard to do just that. In the early 1990s, the number of homicides in the District regularly topped 400 a year. Street gangs and open air drug markets seemed to consume entire neighborhoods and the violence grew to epidemic proportions. This was the era when the District was known as the “Murder Capital of the World.”

From 2008 to 2012, we reduced homicides by more than half, to a level the District had not seen in nearly 50 years (88 homicides in 2012 vs. 186 homicides in 2008).

And for the past two years, the annual number has remained around 100, an almost unimaginable notion when compared to the 482 lives lost in 1991.

Since 2008, we have reduced overall violent crime (homicide, assault w/dangerous weapon, sex assault & robbery) by more than 18 percent. When comparing the most recent four years to the first four years of the 1990s, we have had 1,446 fewer homicides. That's not just a number. That represents 1,446 lives saved and innumerable families and loved ones spared unnecessary tragedy and loss. But that's not enough. On homicide is too many.

This progress did not occur overnight. It took several years and a concerted effort to implement an effective policing strategy for combating violent crime and rebuilding the relationship between the police and members of the community.

Our progress on this front must continue, even in the face of the looming "retirement bubble" that will see us lose more officers each year than we can reasonably hire and train.

We will increase the number of officers on the streets this year by making sure that more officers are retained and the maximum numbers of officers are out on the streets, not sitting behind a desk.

Last October, the MPD launched a pilot program to test the use of body cameras. [Today](#) I'm here to say that the pilot is over and we will expand the use of body cameras to all MPD patrol officers in the next 18 months.

It's the right thing to do for our officers and our residents. Accountability is embedded in everything this administration does.

Accountability is why we are re-launching CapStat, a data driven approach to improving government efficiency and, ultimately, service delivery. It's a model that we once employed to great success; it's time to return to it.

We've already measured snow and trash removal efforts, and we know we need to make adjustments for next winter.

Since becoming mayor, I still haven't found a way to make the snow not hit the ground, but after 24 deployments and 58,000 tons of salt spread, we have the frontline workers to thank for clearing the roads and hauling our waste in hazardous conditions.

When it became apparent that the weather made us fall too far behind on collections, I called in the leadership in management and labor and charted a path forward. We declared "All Hands on Deck" and with the help of our frontline workers – and a few private contractors – we hauled 1,090 tons of trash in a matter of days.

My commitment for the next season is that we will find efficiencies and borrow a few best practices and communicate with residents better about what we as a government will do and what we will rely on residents to do.

Our Office of the Chief Technology Officer will soon launch "OpenDC" a web-based portal that will permit third-party developers access to government data.

By doing so we encourage not just transparency, but also the development of innovative solutions to pressing District problems. Stay tuned for our first Hackathon in May.

We will celebrate innovation – not just the type that rewards you with love by swiping right or delivers a ride with a few taps. We will seek out innovation that makes life a little easier for a working mother trying to find social services or use public transit.

That's the same reason why we are building out an office dedicated to public private partnerships that will lower the time and cost for procurements and give the District expertise and oversight of these complex projects so that public resources are used wisely.

These programs represent a modern, results-oriented approach to good government.

I'm convinced that by leveraging technology and business management strategies we can improve service delivery, and save money.

We know that we can do more to advance positive outcomes to those that are economically disadvantaged, especially east of the river.

Because when they succeed, we succeed.

Finally, before we close [tonight](#), we must acknowledge that the job of keeping our streets safe is a shared responsibility.

When it comes to snow response, we gather nearly 20 agencies on calls at all hours of the night to devise our plan of attack, communicate about how we will work together and decide whether schools and government can operate.

For too long, when an act of violence occurs that we know could

lead to further acts, we have looked solely to the brave women and men of MPD to end the cycle of violence.

In my Administration, that approach will get a fresh start: the Community Stabilization Protocol.

The Protocol harnesses the energy and bandwidth of over a dozen agencies – from the MOCRS to the Department of Behavioral Health – to provide support to the families of victims – and sometimes suspects – and to engage the community in finding a solution.

In the hours after an incident, a multi-agency call is convened. Within 12 hours, a member of the Deputy City Administrator's visits the family, and within 24 hours, a multi-agency team visits the family and neighbors. When necessary, a community meeting is held with 48 hours.

This approach is too new to hold up as a success but we are pleased with its progress thus far. Families of those affected by violence have been open to assistance, communities have been engaged in the solution, and law enforcement has been able to interrupt the cycle of violence.

I cannot stand before you **tonight** and claim to have all of the answers to eradicate our toughest problems like senseless violence, but I can commit to you that we as a government and as a city will experiment with new approaches to face them head on. And we will always seek solutions that engage and empower residents.

Tonight I have spoken about the work we have done already to fulfill promises made. And I've detailed how we will continue to

create opportunity in the coming months.

And I've spoken about how this administration strives every day to be responsive, inclusive, and decisive.

I've spoken about how this government belongs to you, and about how we are opening its doors to allow you better access.

I want to come back to that point now as I conclude my remarks [tonight](#).

Given our presence here at the historic Lincoln Theatre, and on the 150th anniversary of his assassination, it struck me as appropriate to:

1. Invite you all to join Councilmember Vincent Orange and me on Freedom Plaza on [April 16](#) for Emancipation Day
2. Quote from the nation's 16th President.

Abraham Lincoln once said "The legitimate object of government is to do for a community of people whatever they need to have done, but cannot do at all, or cannot so well do, for themselves."

You elected me to do what needs to be done to create opportunity for you and your family, to blaze a path to the middle class, to improve schools, make our streets safer, and our population healthier.

I cannot do it alone. We want your help – we need your help. We want you to engage and to make demands of us. We want to be

held accountable.

I began [tonight](#)'s speech by recalling some other promises I previously made to each of you. I will conclude now by making one more.

Every day I wake up humbled and grateful that you have placed in me your trust to guide this great city into the future. I promise to live up to your expectations, to make yours a government that is open, accessible, transparent, and responsive to your needs and to create more pathways to the middle class.

Because when you succeed, we all succeed.

Thank you for being here [tonight](#). And may God continue to bless the District of Columbia.