



FULTON STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS 2017

CHAIRMAN JOHN H. EAVES

Good afternoon everyone. It is certainly my honor and pleasure to be here. I would like to thank everyone for joining me as we unveil the exciting days ahead in 2017.

Special thanks to:

- The Council for Quality Growth for hosting this wonderful event
- The Atlanta Homeward Choir for the beautiful presentation of the National Anthem
- My Rabbi – Peter Berg -- of The Temple for the invocation
- Reverend Eyre from the One World Spiritual Center who will give the benediction
- And of course, thanks to all our sponsors, County Manager Dick Anderson, our department heads and our New Vice Chairman, Commissioner Joan Garner, who I'm excited to work with hand-in-hand

Less than a year ago, I stood before you and reviewed all that Fulton County had accomplished in 2015 and what we hoped to tackle in 2016.

I can say with firm conviction and pride that Fulton is Moving Forward on so many fronts.

My friends, with the November election now behind us, we know it's a time to build bridges in our country and get excited about the future. To set goals on what we can accomplish. To travel new roads together. This is what Fulton County will continue to do.

So, how has Fulton County arrived in the great place that we are today?

The keys: Strong leadership and collaboration among everyone involved. The dedicated Board of Commissioners, County Manager Dick Anderson, the talented department heads, the 5,000 county employees who give their all every day. They all deserve credit for our tangible results.

I want to share a story of when I was a young boy. My friends, I would run around and catch butterflies. Their beauty fascinated me. But I have to admit, I would also run around and stomp and kill caterpillars. I thought they were ugly and useless.

“Hello John?” someone said. “Do you know caterpillars become butterflies?”

When I was young, I never made the connection. Never saw the common denominator. And that’s what it’s all about if you want to accomplish something. Find the common denominator.

We have done that here in Fulton County. Black, White, Republican, Democrat, Jew, Christian, gay and straight. I’ve said it before. We have come together to sit side-by-side and tackle the tough issues: Transportation, economic development, criminal justice reform and the start of a new city.

I know I’m certainly excited about the future. We’re not only on the right track but going full-steam ahead to Move Fulton Forward.

EARLY VOTING

Let’s start with something that you all helped make a huge success: Voting.

In November, Fulton County had 24 early voting sites, the most in the state of Georgia, some open seven days a week. It was unheard of. And we turned out to shatter records. More than 441-thousand went to the polls. That’s nearly 75 percent of registered voters.

It couldn’t happen without our Elections Director Rick Barron and poll workers like George Pilkington, a retired resident who’s been the poll manager at Mountain Park for years now.

He admits 2016 was crazy with so many people turning out, but he loves being involved and we thank him and all the other poll workers.

Let’s give Rick and George a round of applause.

TSPLOST

One of the things you voted for, one of the things I'm most proud of, one of the things that's going to have tremendous impact on all of us: the TSPLOST. Three-quarters of a penny sales tax for transportation improvements. Without a doubt, it will Move Fulton Forward.

Let me tell you, it wasn't always easy. But through collaboration and relationship building, we did it.

We put aside our differences and found the common denominator. We agreed that we can't sit back and wait for our transportation headaches to get worse.

I'd like to recognize the mayors who are here and thank them for working so hard to make transportation a number one priority. Mayors, please stand up.

The TSPLOST can raise some 655 million dollars over the next five years. The best part: You picked the projects, the ones that will make a difference in your own backyard. Sidewalks in Hapeville, bike paths in Sandy Springs, bridge repairs in College Park.

MARTA

Now comes the next step in 2017. Fulton County is looking at what role MARTA can play in our transportation future. In Atlanta, a MARTA funding measure passed overwhelmingly last November and we want to see if we can capture that momentum as we Move Fulton Forward.

We have already started studying transit options. In fact, we went to Dallas, Texas last week. More than 40 of us got an up-close look at their transit system.

Special thanks to Commissioner Liz Hausmann for coordinating this important trip. We now have some great ideas on how transit can work here in Fulton County.

We expect some productive and spirited discussions in the days ahead.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Well, talk about spirited. Imagine our criminal justice partners in one room! No, that wasn't easy either.

But like the mayors, the justice team came together. Superior court leaders, the District Attorney, the Sheriff, the Public Defender, the Clerk of Courts. The list goes on. We hammered out an ambitious plan to Move Fulton Forward.

In 2016, we committed 2-point-5 million dollars to make major changes in the justice system. This year, we'll triple that figure and invest almost 7-and-a-half million dollars.

The money will allow us to reduce the number of inmates in jail by up to 700. It will pay for mental health treatment for those in need. Did you know up to 70 percent in our jail have mental health issues?

And the funds will erase the county's massive backlog in the courts. In the Solicitor's office alone, we plan to process 29,000 cases!

All of our actions can potentially save us up to 8 million dollars. That's right 8 million dollars of your tax money. That money can then be pumped back into the justice system and reduce our jail numbers even further.

EXPUNGEMENT

As part of our justice overhaul, we held the county's first ever expungement summit last October and what an incredible success.

It took a lot of coordination and a shout out to all who invested hours and hours of time and effort.

We reviewed some 400 records and cleared nearly 70 percent of them.

Just ask Terralynn King who is here with us today. She's a grandmother who was walked off the job when her employer found out she had a past record. Stand up Ms. King. Today your name is cleared!

There are thousands, like Terralynn, who were never convicted but their records have dogged them in the job market, in housing and in education. We want to give them a second chance in life!

The success of October's event has us Moving Fulton Forward, planning the largest expungement summit ever on April 29.

Not sure they have a category for it in the Guinness Book of World Records, but we'll see if they can add one because we are certainly planning to break records.

In short, we want our justice reform effort to not only be a model for Fulton County and the southeast, but for the entire country.

I want you to know that our efforts to keep all people safe ramped up in 2016 and will continue this year.

The county invested 6-and-a-half million dollars to modernize our 911 system. We beefed up our police and fire fleet, and equipped police officers with state-of-the-art body cameras and dash cams. We are investing in our juvenile justice system to keep repeat offenders off the street.

CITY OF SOUTH FULTON

And to the people of South Fulton, as you establish your new city, Fulton will Move You Forward. We promise to provide you police and fire protection and all the services that you have come to expect and deserve.

We are here for you. Your success is the county's success.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

And South Fulton is just one area of the county that is booming with economic development.

UPS announced in November it will open a 400-million dollar package facility that will create more than 12-hundred new jobs. Mercedes Benz broke ground on their new headquarters in sandy springs that will open in 2018. Anthem is locating a tech center in midtown and bringing a thousand jobs. And did you know that there are some 400 film and entertainment-related companies operating in our county?

Our new development arm, Select Fulton, is the county's economic engine that is working to attract even more companies in 2017.

I want to share a few numbers that paint a real picture of how we are Moving Fulton Forward.

Fulton County has nearly 820-thousand workers, the most in the state of Georgia. Our annual wage is now 67-thousand dollars, the highest in the state.

Since I took office in 2007, Fulton County's property values have grown by almost 7 billion dollars. Our total value now exceeds 49 billion dollars, nearly double that of Cobb County that holds the number 2 spot in the state of Georgia.

CYBER SECURITY

And like the state, we are focused on cyber security.

We formed a task force last year and their work continues today. It includes key players from the US Attorney's office, Georgia Tech, the Atlanta Regional Commission and key companies like Home Depot and IBM.

We are also investing 6 million dollars to Move Fulton Forward on a path to digital government. We're upgrading the county's IT infrastructure and information technology department to ensure your cyber safety.

HIV/AIDS

On the health front, I am so proud of our effort to tackle the HIV/AIDS crisis in Fulton County. Sadly, we are in the top 5 for new cases in the nation.

Over the past year, I've heard so many touching stories. The stigma of AIDS, the lack of timely diagnoses and care, the loss of friends and loved ones.

I vow we will not give up until we have zero new HIV cases.

As part of our efforts, we are one of the only counties in the nation opening PrEP clinics on college campuses to help an at-risk population. PrEP is a one-pill-a-day drug proven to prevent HIV.

We will open our first clinic at Morehouse next month, then expand to other college campuses in Fulton County.

We've secured funding for this ambitious effort from a pharmaceutical company and an insurer in a unique public-private partnership.

SUMMARY

I could go on and on. I'm so excited and proud about what this county has accomplished.

We've formed an Interfaith Council that has brought all religions together to better understand each other and the issues that challenge us.

We have a sex trafficking task force to help our most vulnerable. People like Carla Miles, who has been brave enough to tell her story of how she was used and abused for 20 years on the streets of Atlanta.

Thank you, Carla, for sharing your journey and for serving on the task force and reaching out to help others. Let's show her our appreciation.

I must mention that we have built 8 new libraries and are renovating 24 more, including our historic Central Library which will be state of the art and the envy of others.

Our investment will ensure our young people have the resources they need to succeed.

Folks, we have found the common denominator!

i close by citing a recent survey done by Kennesaw State university. It found three-quarters of Fulton County residents are satisfied with our services. That's a number to be proud of.

But I know we can do even better. We won't stop until we hit 100 percent.

We are one of the most diverse counties in the state but I stress, we have found the common denominator.

We have found the will and determination to make Fulton the best it can be. With compromise and collaboration, we have found a way to succeed.

Together, we will Move Fulton Forward in 2017. Thank you.