

# D.C. MAYOR MURIEL BOWSER SEES A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR THE NATION'S CAPITAL

**Muriel Bowser**  
**Mayor**  
**District of Columbia**

**April 8, 2015**

## **Excerpts From Mayor Bowser's Remarks**

**Challenges and opportunities:** D.C. is the economic engine of our region, accounting for one-quarter of the job market and, in the last year, over two-thirds of it private-sector job growth.... We're in the top 10 cities for venture capital investment, a top five U.S. city for new construction, and we're number one in the U.S. for attracting entrepreneurial founders of companies.

**Goals:** Making sure that more Washingtonians have access to the great prosperity that our city is experiencing...focusing on how we preserve and create more pathways to the middle class.

**Five strategic investments for city government:** Education, economic opportunity, public safety, neighborhoods, and investing in our environment and infrastructure.

**Public schools:** [We are in an] eight-year transformation of D.C. Public Schools to the point that now the President regularly says we are the fastest-improving urban school district across the United States of America. [Applause.] Our business community has been front and center with us during this school transformation process....It continues to be our single biggest priority, making sure that we're investing in our schools.

**Anxiety in the District:** If there is an anxiety in our city, it is that our city would become unattainable for people who have regular jobs and are fighting to stay in the middle class. And we know that having affordable housing is the best way to ensure that pathway.

**Gaps:** In a lot of places in this city, unemployment is below the national average, housing ownership is above the national average, crime levels are below the national average. And in some neighborhoods of Washington, we're two and three times the national average in those areas.

**Homelessness:** We have, we think, 8,000 chronically homeless people in the District, and many of those are children. And we also have a failing family shelter, and we have other shelters for single adults....

First and foremost: We want to stop homelessness, prevent people from getting into homelessness. We want to make sure that the people who are circulating in our homeless system have meaningful job opportunities and training so that they can get out of it. But we know we also have to be prepared for emergency housing situations. And the way to do that is not to have this big shelter, but to have smaller shelters where people, when they need emergency housing, can find it.

**Interest in public service:** [My parents] absolutely instilled in us the value of public service. You know that in D.C. our first local elected official is the advisory neighborhood commissioner

– unpaid volunteer service, elected, and you represent 2,000 of your neighbors. And my father was in the first class of ANCs in 1976....

So I grew up with, you know, family outings, and fun was passing out flyers and going to community meetings. So I always, I think, had that spirit.

**Satisfaction with being Mayor:** Oh, absolutely. Even more, actually, now, I think. I feel convinced, and I shared this with some of our team, that sometimes you know your politics, but you don't know how you will govern. And I promised people a more cooperative style, but I also promised them that we would have a big vision and be decisive. And that's the job of the chief executive, to take in and listen to a lot of people, but at the end of the day, you have to make decisions. And I feel very comfortable with making decisions.

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DAVID M. RUBENSTEIN: Welcome, members and guests of The Economic Club of Washington, welcome to this 11th event of our 28th season, a luncheon in the Atrium Ballroom at The Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center in Washington, D.C. I am David Rubenstein, president of The Economic Club of Washington. Welcome to everyone.

Our featured guest today is the Honorable Muriel Bowser, the Mayor of the District of Columbia. Thank you very much, Mayor Bowser. [Applause.]

Mayor Bowser serves as the eighth Mayor of the District of Columbia. She was elected in November of 2014 and took office at the beginning of this year. She is a native of Washington, grew up in Northeast Washington, in the North Michigan Park area, went to high school in Bladensburg, Maryland, and then subsequently went to Chatham College and later went to American University, where she got a Master's in public policy.

She became involved in metropolitan government. She worked in the Montgomery County government and in the Council of Governments. And then, in 2004, she ran for the Advisory Neighborhood Commission and was elected, and subsequently reelected to that position. In 2007, she ran for the City Council position being vacated by Mayor Fenty, who had just been elected Mayor – this was from Ward 4 – and she was elected to that position, reelected in 2008, and then reelected in 2012.

Then she decided to run for Mayor. And it was a very contentious election in the sense that many people were running, but she won the Democratic primary with 43 percent of the vote and won the general election with 54 percent of the vote. And she just gave her State of the District speech a few days ago, and she'll talk a little bit about that and we'll get into that. But it's my honor to introduce the eighth Mayor of the District of Columbia, Muriel Bowser. Thank you. [Applause.]

MAYOR BOWSER: Thank you. Thank you, David. [Applause.] Well, good afternoon, everybody.

I am really delighted to be here, and I want to thank David and the Economic Club for the invitation and for that wonderful introduction. And I'm looking forward to our chat in just a

few minutes. I know his questions will be more interesting than probably these remarks, so we'll get right to them. [Laughter.]

We are going to talk about, as I understand, challenges that we face and the great opportunities that we face, and my first hundred days in office. I am really proud to be Mayor of my hometown, and I'm especially proud to be Mayor at this time in the history of our city.

We know that D.C. is the economic engine of our region, accounting for one-quarter of the job market and, in the last year, over two-thirds of it private-sector job growth. We know all the great accolades that are associated with our city now. We're in the top 10 cities for venture capital investment, a top five U.S. city for new construction, and we're number one in the U.S. for attracting entrepreneurial founders of companies. So with these great strides, we are well-equipped to face our challenges.

So I don't claim to have all the answers to eradicate our toughest problems, but I will commit and have committed our government and our city with experimenting with new approaches to face them head on. And we are always seeking solutions to engage and empower our residents and all of our stakeholders.

So last week, I delivered my first State of the District address and I outlined my administration's pathway to making sure that more Washingtonians have access to the great prosperity that our city is experiencing. I spent that time focusing on how we preserve and create more pathways to the middle class.

Creating these pathways isn't just about policies and programs, however. It is also about how we attract great partners to help us.

Now, I have the privilege of leading a government of over 30,000 people for the 660,000 of us that call D.C. home. And as much as we can do by attracting a great team – and I'm grateful that I've done just that – we can do so much more in partnerships with our private-sector partners, and we're always looking for ways to do that.

Just last week – I know you've been following – I introduced my first budget. And just like every mayor in the history of mayors, when I swore the oath on January the 2<sup>nd</sup>, I inherited all of those wonderful accolades I just mentioned, but I also inherited the challenges. And one of the challenges was a \$190 million budget gap. My chief financial officer, who's here – Jeff DeWitt – give him another round of applause because he has jumped in and been fantastic. [Applause.] And I'm not just buttering him up because he's looking at our budget right now.

Jeff's job is to make sure that he estimates the revenues coming in from the District and validates the expenditures that we expect to make next year. And he told me, a gift of being sworn in as Mayor, that we had to close a \$190 million gap. And we set about doing it.

My commitment to the residents of the District of Columbia was to tell them what I know when I knew it, and tell them the best ways to deal with the problems facing the District. So we put everything on the table. We looked at all of our programs and services. And last week, I

delivered a balanced budget to the Council. So not only did we close that \$192 million gap, but we were also able to make the critical investments with that budget that D.C. residents told me that was important.

We know that this budget represents a fresh start in many ways. We also put the people in the process. Previous Mayors had gone and written the budgets, gone pencils-down on the budgets and then sent them to the Council, and left our residents and our businesses to go to the Council to make a plea. Instead, what we did was we turned the process around, and we asked residents and stakeholders what they thought about closing the gap before we finished the budget.

What you're going to find are five strategic investments that represent my overarching values and the values that I believe I was elected to push for. They are education, economic opportunity, public safety, neighborhoods, and investing in our environment and infrastructure. These are not siloes or separate buckets. What we find, in fact, is that our leaders in these various agencies are interacting all the time, looking for synergies across our government to achieve our goals.

So in order to do all of these things, we need to continue to figure out from leadership what the investments are that we can look to the private sector to help us with as well. In order to have safer communities, we know that we need to improve our education system. And I'm delighted that we've been joined by the chancellor of schools – I saw her a little bit earlier – Kaya Henderson. [Applause.]

Kaya Henderson has been a part of the eight-year transformation of D.C. Public Schools to the point that now the President regularly says we are the fastest-improving urban school district across the United States of America. [Applause.] We know that our business community has been front and center with us during this school transformation process. And I know I speak for Jack Evans, who's here and represents Ward 2 on the Council of the District of Columbia, it continues to be our single biggest priority, making sure that we're investing in our schools.

We're also investing in infrastructure by fully funding Metro/Wmata and their request to the District for us. And we've done so, in Jack Evans' words, without increasing fares and without cutting service. We know that Metro is really an economic engine for how our city will grow.

This region will increase in the next 25 years by millions of people. The District of Columbia alone will top 800,000 residents, and we haven't been at 800,000 since the 1950s. So we know that it's important that we make these investments. If we don't make these investments, it hurts the economic future of our city. And we will do so in a smart way and we will hold everybody accountable for every dollar of the District's taxpayers' money.

We are also funding our fire and EMS system, with over \$80 million of commitments to making sure we have world-class equipment, and that our firefighters and EMT providers are the best-trained anywhere in the United States of America.

In our neighborhoods, we are investing over \$100 million directly to the Housing Production Trust Fund. If there is an anxiety in our city, it is that our city would become unattainable for people who have regular jobs and are fighting to stay in the middle class. And we know that having affordable housing is the best way to ensure that pathway.

But as I always say, you can't afford housing if you don't have a good-paying job. So jobs and housing form the theme of the budget that I submitted to the Council. And we know that the Council members support those things, too.

Our budget also includes \$1.3 billion for continued school modernizations over six years. And I see two former city administrators for the District of Columbia, Neil Albert and Dan Tangherlini, because they got this started some years ago, making sure that we're making these investments in our schools.

I'm also happy to report that we're focusing on the young people in our city who have fallen the farthest behind and making sure they have programs for them for schools and jobs.

More people in the District are spending their dollars locally than ever before. We are going to continue to attract more foreign and direct investment in our city. And because of the hard work and discipline of a lot of people, this year we saw our credit rating improved once again. The District is indeed a good place to do business. But there's more work for us to do to achieve our full potential, and we know that we have five key economic development priorities.

First, I talked already about protecting, preserving, and producing more affordable housing in the District of Columbia. Now, this is an area, you know, that, you know, the government doesn't do such a good job building housing or maintaining housing, and so we need innovative solutions to help preserve the housing that we have and to build more.

Also a part of our economic development strategy is supporting innovation and entrepreneurship. We are a tech capital, almost, you know, because we've gotten out of the way of the tech community. But the tech community, we spent some time down at South by Southwest recently, and we heard what businesses need to build and stay right here in the District of Columbia.

We also want to make the District government a more approachable and easy place for small businesses to do business. And for too long, our small business office has been focused on giving people certificates that say they're disadvantaged instead of helping to build capacity and make matching opportunities. And that's exactly what a Bowser administration will do.

Driving investment and development, particularly to overlooked and underserved communities, is also a key pillar of our economic development strategy. I talked for 24 months around the District of Columbia as I was running for the job about how we finally close gaps. In a lot of places in this city, unemployment is below the national average, housing ownership is above the national average, crime levels are below the national average. And in some neighborhoods of Washington we're two and three times the national average in those areas. So my commitment – I told people for that time – was that we would make a concerted effort every

single day with intentional policies and funding to close those gaps, and that I would appoint a Deputy Mayor who was responsible for looking and working with me and making sure that we achieve the synergies across our government to close gaps in education and job opportunity and bricks-and-mortar economic development in Wards 7 and 8. And I am very proud that I appointed the first Deputy Mayor for greater economic opportunity to represent our city. So if we are to meet the needs of the District and stay economically competitive with other cities, we need to engage our communities in a more meaningful way, and we intend to do that.

In the coming year, we are committed to these goals. We will look for more opportunities to get D.C. residents, including returning citizens, on the job by our largest infrastructure projects or by creating incentives to work with us, or by making sure we make investments in economic development tools to keep our city competitive.

I'm frequently asked, you know, do you believe in having tips and tax abatement and other tools, and I always say yes because we want to have every – you hear that, Jeff – [laughter] – we want to have every tool on the table when we're competing in this region. And that's exactly what we intend to do.

We're proud, for example, that D.C. United is going to have their forever home here in Washington, D.C. That's a good thing, right? [Applause.]

We're also going to be very proud to host a Super Bowl one Sunday in Washington, D.C. That's a good thing, right? [Scattered applause.] Uh-oh. This is not a crowd for football. [Laughter.]

But we're working on all of those things. We believe that we're a sports capital, too. And big cities do big things. We have world-class sports facilities, arts, and theater, and other cultural investments. And I'm very pleased that the new chairwoman of our Arts Commission is here, Kay Kendall. So thank you, Kay, for your leadership in what we intend to do in the arts. [Applause.]

We'll also make first-time investments to reinvigorate upper Georgia Avenue. Before I was elected Mayor, I had the great privilege of representing Ward 4 on the Council for almost eight years, but also for chairing the Committee on Economic Development. And then I grouped our projects and big-city projects like Walter Reed and McMillan and St. Elizabeth's, but also those small neighborhood projects that really impact people's lives in every ward in the city. There are a lot of them, and people want to see them moving. And the partnerships that we make with the private sector to get those small projects moving are also very important to us.

So we are committed. We launched a new tagline for our city, that "We Are Washington, D.C." And as we were thinking up all these taglines, what was important to me is that we be able to operationalize something that I said for 24 straight months across the city, that the next Mayor of the District of Columbia would have to focus on all eight wards. That doesn't mean that all eight wards need the same thing, but each ward needs what it needs, and that we would have to pull together the best team to focus on how we move our city together.

So it'll be a hundred days in office in just a few days, and I am convinced now more than ever that I have the best job in the world. And I'm looking forward to working with each one of you to make D.C. an even bigger success. Thank you very much. [Applause.]

## **CONVERSATION WITH MR. RUBENSTEIN**

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Thank you very much.

So when I said in the introduction that it was a contentious election in the sense that many people ran – everybody seemed to want to be Mayor of the District of Columbia. So to those who didn't make it, would you say after a hundred days that they didn't miss anything because being mayor isn't so great, or would you say actually it's worth all the aggravation and hardship and hard work to get to be Mayor? [Laughter.]

MAYOR BOWSER: I would say that being Mayor is pretty great, especially of this city. I talked to you already about how we're growing and the position that we're in. I meet mayors all the time from various places in the country, and they would like to switch places with me. So that tells you you're doing something right in a city.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So what is the biggest disappointment or surprise you've had at something you didn't realize was the case or biggest disappointment that you found the first hundred days?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well, I've got to tell you, I was on the Council for eight years. I watched very closely two Mayors as a Council member. I ran for Mayor for 22 months. So I saw all the issues and I was frequently asked about the issues that were most important to Washingtonians. So there was somewhat of a buildup. So I don't know that I've been surprised by a lot. The enormity of the problems in some of our agencies, where I thought there were problems but they're even bigger than I thought, is probably the biggest surprise.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So let me ask you about your relations with Congress. You went up and met with Members of Congress, and did they seem that interested in the District of Columbia or not that interested?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well, I've had an interesting couple of months with the Congress. In my first hundred days, one of the Congresspeople, as you know, threatened to throw me in jail, so that's kind of the start of it. [Laughter.]

You know, our approach was to start a new relationship with the Congress. And I campaigned and I've been able to live up to my commitment to have a Washington office. So the mayor of New York City has about two dozen people here. The governor of Maryland has a Washington office here. So their whole job every single day is to work the Congress, the White House and all the federal agencies for the things that their cities need. You know what our Washington office consisted of before I was elected? Nobody.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Nobody.

MAYOR BOWSER: We didn't have a Washington office. So there was one person that usually worked for the Mayor who tried to follow these things, and we relied on the enormous talents of our delegate, our Congresswoman, Eleanor Holmes Norton. Now, she can't do it all, so I decided that we would create a Washington office, and we were very proactive with our relationship with the Members of the Congress.

So I met, even before I was sworn in, with our oversight chair and the subcommittee chair and the leaders. I met with the Speaker of the House and then the Minority Leader, Nancy Pelosi, and people that have something to do with our money.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So the person who said they wanted to put you in jail, did they realize you control the District Police Department, or they didn't – [laughter] – they didn't know that?

MAYOR BOWSER: I think they do now.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now they know, OK.

MAYOR BOWSER: I think they do now. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So what about the Administration, President Obama's Administration? Have you had much interaction with them yet?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well, they've been incredible to us. I think you know that President Obama endorsed my reelection, and I don't think that's happened in the history of the District of Columbia. He's made his senior team available to us. They invite us, from our schools Chancellor to other heads of our departments, to come to the White House all the time. I was most recently there to talk about infrastructure and investment, where the President paired major cities like ours with foreign investors who are interested in transit projects or interested in, you know, big, large development projects so we could have that one-on-one time. But they've been very helpful.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So when you went up to meet with Members of Congress, one of the issues was something of great interest to members of The Economic Club of Washington, the marijuana law. [Laughter.]

MAYOR BOWSER: Yes, I imagine so. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN – Now, as I understand the marijuana law – not being an expert in the subject – [laughter]

MAYOR BOWSER: [Laughs.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: – is that you can now have two ounces in your possession if you're in your house and you can't grow it in your backyard, but you can grow it in your house and so forth. Why can you grow it inside and not outside? [Laughter.] And why only two ounces? And did

Members of Congress think of overturning that, or was that something that Members of Congress even bothered to talk with you about?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well, let me emphasize that this is the people's law, David. So this was a referendum where people across the District galvanized and got this measure on the ballot. And we don't make it that easy to get something on the ballot. When the people change the law, it's a pretty rigorous process. And seven out of 10 people voted to legalize marijuana. What we found, and what most people said, is that small amounts – possessing small amounts of marijuana shouldn't ruin your life. And what we saw was a disproportionate number of young people, especially young men of color, getting arrested and ruining their lives because they possessed a small amount of marijuana. And what most adults believe is that an adult at home should be able to use marijuana. And so that's what the referendum said: home use, home cultivation by adults. And that's the law that I stood up to preserve for the District.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And you don't expect that there will be further waves, like Colorado or Washington State, where people can have stores to buy marijuana, that kind of thing? You don't see that happening in the District?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well, I think that we are going to have to have a long, hard look at some point in working with the Members of the Congress about reasonable regulations of marijuana. We have some experience, for example, in D.C. with medical marijuana, where we regulate the cultivation in small dispensaries for marijuana throughout the city.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Well, like, right now the federal law is against marijuana, so if you're a federal law enforcement agent and you see somebody in D.C. with two ounces of marijuana, you theoretically could arrest them, I guess, because it's against the federal law, but the D.C. law would say it's OK. So you have to work that out, I guess, between the federal and the D.C. police?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well, I will say this, that while it seems complicated, that the law enforcement officials know their jurisdiction. They know the law and they know what to do.

This has basically been a small, incremental change for us. In D.C., we decriminalized the use of marijuana last year, and this is the next logical step.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So in your budget – one of the things you proposed in your budget was a modest increase in the sales tax. It's 5.75 percent now. You're going to take it up to 6 percent, which raises about \$22 million. Many politicians like to say they didn't raise taxes. So by only getting \$22 million out of this, is it really worth your giving up saying you didn't raise taxes, or you supported this because you really think that \$22 million is important?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well, what I told the residents of the District – and I have a long history on the City Council of being a very fiscally conservative politician. I looked at our whole government, and I'm not going to say that we need to raise money if we don't need to raise money. I promised the residents that if I thought that we needed to raise money to achieve the priorities that they sent me down there to work on, I tell them. And that's exactly what I did.

I have proposed one of the slowest-growth budgets in the last five years, only increasing just over 3 percent. And we've seen increases of 5 and 7 percent, even in the last five years. So we think there's not a lot of bells and whistles on this budget, but what it does do – I told you that the anxiety that people have around Washington is not that we're going to continue to grow, it's that we will push people outside of the District of Columbia.

So it was so important that we were able to live up to the affordable housing commitment of \$100 million a year. It's so important that we get straight our human services policies that are going to allow us to make homelessness in D.C. rare, brief, and non-recurring. If we don't make those investments now, it's going to cost us more later.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: How many homeless people do you think there are in the District of Columbia? And you're proposing to build four new shelters to replace the big shelter that exists, is that right?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well, we participated in what they call a point-in-time count, and we have, we think, 8,000 chronically homeless people in the District, and many of those are children. And we also have a failing family shelter, and we have other shelters for single adults that, you know, you probably wouldn't want to spend any time with. So we have to make some changes around that.

First and foremost: We want to stop homelessness, prevent people from getting into homelessness. We want to make sure that the people who are circulating in our homeless system have meaningful job opportunities and training so that they can get out of it. But we know we also have to be prepared for emergency housing situations. And the way to do that is not to have this big shelter, but to have smaller shelters where people, when they need emergency housing, can find it.

But the biggest thing: We just have to step back and have a policy shift. When I first came on the Council, we believed in housing first. Mayor Fenty was one who believed in investing, and it's proven around the country that if you give people housing and we focus on housing first, then the circumstances that got somebody into homelessness, they'll be able to deal with it, with mental health issues. They'll be able to deal with substance issues. They'll be able to focus on job training. And then the cycle of getting out of homelessness is shorter. And so that's a policy that we're going to go back to.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. Now, you mentioned Mayor Fenty, and you've had a number of predecessors who are still living in the area. Do they call you up with advice all the time or do they give you any ideas about what you should do as Mayor? Or any ideas you can share that they've given you about what you should or shouldn't do?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well, I'm grateful to have the support of our previous Mayors, and they've all been involved at some point in giving me their feedback about what they did when they were in the District. And I would say the common theme is to hire great people. Hire great people.

And so we approached our transition and we have to speed up our transition. In the District, for every mayoral race in my memory, the Democratic nominee was thought to be the next Mayor right after the primary, and we held our primary in September. This year, for the last election, our primary was in April, and I actually did have a competitive general. So we had a shortened period of time to really transition our government.

But I called on about 300 Washingtonians to participate and chair our transition committees. And I told them: this is not an honorific thing; you're going to have to work real hard for 54 days. And part of that was being able to tap into their immense networks. And I said to them: please reach out to your networks, because we want to attract the best people.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So the best people, I think in the District of Columbia government are the best, are the ones who do the parking tickets, because – [laughter] – my observation is, if I park somewhere for 30 seconds and go in and pick up something, I get a parking ticket. I mean, they're very efficient. How are they so efficient? [Laughter.] I mean, they just everywhere, wherever I'm parking. Do they just follow me around, or – they're good everywhere? [Laughter.] Right? You raise a lot of money off parking tickets, don't you?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well, we – [laughter] – we raise a fair amount. Not as much as we used to. [Laughter.] And you know why? Because we're – you're –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: I'm not parking as much, or?

MAYOR BOWSER: Yes. [Laughs.] What we have found is this, that people don't mind paying for parking; they just want to know how much it costs and they want it to be easy to use and they want to understand the rules. They want the signs to mean something every time, no matter where they go in the city. And so we have a lot of work to do – I'm looking at Jack Evans when I say this because I know he agrees with this – on parking.

But we have an innovative tool, and I want to introduce you to it. It's called Parkmobile. And all the cool kids use it. [Laughter, applause.] And you never, ever have to get a ticket in the District of Columbia.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But that wouldn't be good for you, though, right? Because you need the money from the parking tickets, no? Or – [laughter] –

MAYOR BOWSER: That is not why we have parking meters.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. All right, OK. [Laughter.] So –

MAYOR BOWSER: We don't want anybody to get a ticket in the District.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. People understand parking tickets, and you don't pay – if you don't put up the money, you should get a fine. But what about the speeding? Like, if you're going through a red light? [Laughter.] Do you have a lot of those red light things, or is that popular?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well – [laughter] – I’ll tell you what’s not popular: running red lights.

Now, does anybody in here think that if you run a red light you shouldn’t get a ticket? This is just a more efficient way to enforce the rules, that’s it. So you never have to get a speeding ticket, a red-light ticket, or a parking ticket in the District of Columbia. So it’s our job to make it easy for you to comply.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. Well, I’m going to try to do that better.

MAYOR BOWSER: So I’ll work harder. I’ll work harder.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And speaking of transportation, one of my other favorite subjects is potholes. There seem to be – [laughter] –

MAYOR BOWSER: [Laughs.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You inherited a lot of them. You didn’t create any potholes, but there are a lot that are here. And you have a rainy day fund of about \$1.8 billion or something. Why don’t you take some of that rainy day fund and fix the potholes? [Laughter.]

MAYOR BOWSER: Yes. Well, you’ll be happy to know that our budget also includes an increase in – you know, it sounds kind of funny, but he’s right, right? We should have roads that, you know, you don’t have to kill your car just to get to and fro, just to go to our restaurants, just to spend money at our theaters. So we want you to have a safe drive in the District. And we have increased, actually, the investment that we’ll make in regular road repair.

We think we do OK on the major routes. We have a lot more catching up to do on our residential routes. And for the first time I think in a long time, we’re actually going to increase our attention to alleys as well.

So we have to look at our entire transportation network. That includes our roads. That includes making sure we have fair and predictable parking policies all over the city. That also includes our bus, streetcar, and Metro. And we are very focused on that. In order to accommodate and not have total gridlock in this city, we have to do a better job.

And there’s another thing that doesn’t get mentioned as often as it should, and I’ve challenged my team to look at that, and that’s light synchronization – how can we get people through the city better. [Applause.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Wow. I like that, too.

MAYOR BOWSER: You like it?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Red light – every time I go, I’m always getting a red light and I got to stop. That would be great if you could do that.

MAYOR BOWSER: [Laughs.] Right. [Laughs, laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Let me ask you, the first day that you became Mayor, or the first week – you had to deal with a Metro issue. There was a tragedy on the Metro the first week. Somebody died.

MAYOR BOWSER: Yes.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: What was the cause of that? And what are you doing to see if that – to make sure that doesn't happen again?

MAYOR BOWSER: Sure. So we will know the causes, I think, when the National Transportation Safety Board issues its final report, and they have been very rigorous in the investigation. The city, of course, has been a hundred percent cooperative in that investigation. And I won't know all the technical terms, but it just appears that it was a smoke incident created by water getting on an insulator that created a lot of smoke. And I will say – and I think that happened on a Tuesday, a Monday or a Tuesday after maybe a week or nine days, I believe, after I was sworn in, and it was among the most challenging things that I've had to deal with.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So also in that first week you had to make the decision about whether to close the schools, I guess, with the snow. And who actually makes the decision on closing schools? Is it the mayor, or do you delegate that to somebody else, or?

MAYOR BOWSER: No, it's the mayor. Yep. It's all me.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. So do you, like, stay up at night getting weather reports, or do you have to get up early? [Laughter.] How early do you get up? And what about sometimes when they say it's going to snow and then it turns out they were wrong and you've closed schools? Does that ever –

MAYOR BOWSER: I know, that would be the worst.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Right.

MAYOR BOWSER: And I don't like that. I don't like the idea of closing the government or schools if we don't have to.

Our government, we provide direct services, OK? So the residents need us. That's why we're there. And so it's my opportunity not to figure out how often I can close the schools or close the government; it's how quickly can we get the roads clean so that people can go about their jobs. Now, I haven't figured out how to keep the snow from hitting the ground, so we have to figure out how to get it up better.

I will say this, that I think that we had, we counted, 24 snow events this winter, and that's a lot. It snowed – I think, for the first nine weeks I was in office – it snowed or we had some

inclement weather event each one of those weeks. The first one wasn't, like, brilliantly executed, but every one since then I think we've been pretty happy with.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So you don't see this as a test from God that's testing you whether you're good at closing the – [laughter] –

MAYOR BOWSER: Actually, I do see it as a test from God. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: You see it as a test from God? OK.

MAYOR BOWSER: I do.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Right, OK.

MAYOR BOWSER: That's exactly what I would say to myself: Why is God doing this to me? [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. So in your budget, you said you wanted to build out the streetcar line that's being built now. And what's the theory behind why tearing up the streets and putting the rails in is better than the other things?

MAYOR BOWSER: I feel like I should invite Dan Tangherlini to come up here and talk about the streetcar. [Laughter.]

What I said was this. We inherited a 37-mile proposal, multiple lines across the city, north to south, east to west. And we've been engaged, I think since Mayor Williams was in office, in getting the streetcar running. I think that's when the first of the cars was purchased. And so we've been invested in this for a number of years and many millions of dollars.

The idea behind streetcar is what I talked about a little bit earlier: We have to figure out ways and many modes to move people across this city. And the streetcar is a good way to do that.

In addition, it signals to a corridor, and especially an underinvestment corridor, that the government is in on this corridor big and you should be too. And we see places where the streetcar has gone and the private investment has followed it. So it is not only a good transportation tool, but also a good economic development tool.

Now, what I promised is that we would right-size the plan. So I'm committed to getting the current 2.2-mile segment up and running, but also making common-sense connections. So instead of stopping in the middle of Benning Road, it will extend to downtown Ward 7. Instead of stopping short of Union Station, we get to the station, to downtown, and eventually all the way to Georgetown.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So let me talk about your background a moment. You grew up, as I mentioned, in the District of Columbia. You're the youngest of five children. Did your parents

instill in you the sense of public service? And why did you get involved in public service? What propelled you to do that?

MAYOR BOWSER: I think they absolutely instilled in us the value of public service. You know that in D.C. our first local elected official is the advisory neighborhood commissioner – unpaid volunteer service, elected, and you represent 2,000 of your neighbors. And my father was in the first class of ANCs in 1976.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Really?

MAYOR BOWSER: So I grew up with, you know, family outings, and fun was passing out flyers and going to community meetings. So I always, I think, had that spirit.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, your parents are alive.

MAYOR BOWSER: They are.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And so they're very proud of you, obviously. Does your mother or father call you with advice from time to time? Or do they say do this or do that? And what do you say to them about their advice?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well, they're parents and they're my parents, so they do. And they're very smart, and my father especially has a political intuition that is pretty spot on. And he's been around the block a number of times. He knows people throughout this city. And he left for me – both of my parents – a very good name in this town. So, you know, I do grassroots politics, and so any time I'm out there knocking on doors, I'm at a church, there's somebody who knows them.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So when you're Mayor of the District of Columbia, do you ever have any time to yourself? Because you can't go shopping so easily without people coming up and saying, fix this pothole or fix this whatever. And so how do you actually do any shopping or how do you have any free time? Because, you know, you have police guards around you. And how difficult is it to be Mayor?

MAYOR BOWSER: It is different. It is something to get used to. But there's certainly worse things than having people who want to protect you and keep you safe. And so I appreciate the work of our force. And probably that kind of last-minute, I want to run and get some Ben and Jerry's, that type of thing you don't do as easily as you once did. But people oftentimes, when they see me at the grocery or they see me – you know, I ran into the Macy's last week, and people always say to me, what are you doing here, if I'm at the grocery store. [Laughter.] I say, well, I'm shopping. [Laughter.] And so, no, there's nobody – the city doesn't employ anybody to shop for me –

MR. RUBENSTEIN: There are no shoppers for you? No shoppers?

MAYOR BOWSER: – or to pick up my dry cleaning. There is no city residence, so I live in Oglethorpe Street like I have for the last 14 years. And the people of the District are excited that we won. They're excited to support what they see as a fresh start in the city. And so while it is different from being the Ward 4 Council member, when nobody wanted to take my picture, everybody now has a phone and wants to – I just say post it, tweet it, and say what you want to see for the District. So it's not so bad.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So when you first got elected to the Advisory Neighborhood Commission, did you have it in the back of your mind, you know, that you might run for Mayor, or –

MAYOR BOWSER: No, I didn't. I really didn't. So I moved to, you know, a neighborhood that I thought was a really good neighborhood, and I saw being ANC as a way to make it better. So that's just why I ran, because I wanted to get things fixed in Riggs Park.

I met my Council member who was running for Mayor. He was successful. Then I could really see that being elected – being an elected official – I thought I would probably be in government, probably run an agency, but it became pretty clear to me that the fastest way to get things done would be to run.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, usually when a Mayor comes in, the Mayor says, in any city, I'm going to get rid of a lot of the people who my predecessor hired. And you kept a number of people, two very prominent ones: the Chancellor of the school system, Kaya Henderson, and the police chief, Cathy Lanier. So the reason you kept them was?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well, I wanted it to be perfectly clear. And not only did I keep them once I got elected; I sent the message when I won the primary, and I said that if I'm Mayor I want these women to continue to be leaders because they're doing a great job, but also they're forward looking. So they're not just playing for, you know, where the ball is, but, you know, where we're going. And that is one of the most important things that I see in leadership.

Now, let's be clear: The reason why I said that last April and I didn't want to wait till January is because cities around the Nation were trying to get our people. And you know, we believe very strongly that we have the best city, and for public officials we're a great city to work in because we're a city, a county, and a state all at once. We have a \$12 billion budget. We have a lot of good things going for us, including a rainy day fund, which we can use for some short-term priorities but mostly, if something happens, we can run our government for 45 days with that rainy day fund. And not too many municipalities are in that situation. We also have a small legislature, 13 people. So really the 14 people that get elected to create the law and execute the law can make some really innovative things happen really fast.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: On the school system, what would you say is the biggest challenge we have to the public school system right now in D.C.?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well, I think that, you know, we've come a long way in our system, much different than when I was growing up in D.C. I think that you can see that parents are starting to

vote with their feet. More people, by the thousands, are coming back to public schools. We have a great traditional public school system, also a robust public charter school system. This year I increased our schools budget by \$30 million, not because we're running things inefficiently – in fact, we're making our central office more efficient – but because we have 2,000 more people coming to our public schools. And that's a great signal. That's a great signal for the business community, too. People have more confidence in our public schools.

Now we have to keep them. So investing in middle schools sends the signal to people with small kids that these schools are going to be ready for your kids in middle school and high school. But also making sure that we're being nimble. So if our reforms and our programs aren't working for our boys, then let's get some programs that do work for our boys. And so we have an empowerment initiative that's going to be focused on boys that includes a boys-only high school.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. And crime is down in the District compared to recent years, is that right? And the homicide rate is down as well.

MAYOR BOWSER: Yes.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So do you anticipate the crime rate can continue to come down, or it's pretty low now relative to other cities of our size?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well, we can always drive it down, and we know that crime rates going down don't happen by accident. And I'm very proud of the leadership of our chief of police. But there's still a lot more to be done. We still have too much violence in neighborhoods across the District of Columbia. And so I'm committed – in fact, part of our new initiatives is to, you know, step back from being so reactive and be more proactive and anticipate violence. Gun violence and homicide, we need to try some different approaches in the District.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So the District, with Maryland and Virginia, tried to get the Olympics here. It didn't happen; it went to Boston. But now Boston may be having second thoughts. Will Washington consider reentering that, or you're done with Olympics for that year, 2024?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well, I think that we had just a really fantastic team. Washington 2024 did fantastic work. And if they wanted to get back in it, I would perk up and listen.

But, you know, it's too bad that we didn't make it for the first round because D.C.'s really ready. We have a good amount of the infrastructure that we need. I was so attracted to the proposal because it would also speed up the investment that we intend to connect both sides of the Anacostia River.

So I think that we have a lot of expertise in our city. Andy Altman is back, who put together the plan for London. And I think that, if it doesn't work out for the Olympics – which is probably a longshot at this point – we shouldn't lose the immense talent that came around the table to push a regional initiative. You mentioned people from Maryland, D.C., and Virginia.

And there will be other opportunities for us to work cooperatively, whether it's around sports or arts or big business, to push the region forward.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And you are a sports fan in the sense that you go to the local teams very much, or not? Do you have a chance to go very much to the games?

MAYOR BOWSER: I go to all of the teams' games, and I'm mostly a fan of, you know, the hot dogs and, you know, beer. [Laughter.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Hot dogs, OK. All right.

So as a final question I'd like to ask you, if you had to do it all over again, knowing everything you now know, you would have still run for Mayor and you're very happy with the position. Is that right?

MAYOR BOWSER: Oh, absolutely. Even more, actually, now, I think. I feel convinced, and I shared this with some of our team, that sometimes you know your politics, but you don't know how you will govern. And I promised people a more cooperative style, but I also promised them that we would have a big vision and be decisive. And that's the job of the chief executive, to take in and listen to a lot of people, but at the end of the day you have to make decisions. And I feel very comfortable with making decisions.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. Well, thank you very much for your time and the job you're doing.

MAYOR BOWSER: Thank you. Thank you.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Thank you. [Applause.] Thank you very much. Well done. Thank you. [Applause.]

MAYOR BOWSER: Thank you. Thank you. [Applause.]

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## **Muriel Bowser** **Mayor of the District of Columbia**

Mayor Muriel Bowser brings a pragmatic, hands-on approach to finding solutions to address the needs of residents in Washington, DC. She was first elected Ward 4 Councilmember in a special election in 2007, re-elected in 2008, and again in 2012. On November 4, 2014, voters elected her as the seventh elected, and only second woman, Mayor of the District of Columbia. Voters have strongly endorsed Mayor Bowser's ambitious agenda focused on an open and ethical government, rebuilding quality neighborhoods, and transforming our schools and commercial corridors.

During her tenure as Councilmember, Ward 4's population has grown, quality school choices and public spaces have increased, and hundreds of units of housing have been created. Dozens of new stores, restaurants, and small businesses have opened, and violent crime has plummeted. Positive and sustainable change is visible on every corner of Ward 4.

Throughout her career, Mayor Bowser has focused her attention on enhancing the lives of residents District-wide. She was selected by her colleagues on the Council as Chairwoman of the Committee on Economic Development and created more than 5,000 units of affordable housing, passed legislation to build a new soccer stadium, and secured the best portion of the Walter Reed campus for DC. Previously, as Chairwoman of the Committee on Government Operations, Mayor Bowser worked with her colleagues to pass comprehensive ethics reform in the District, improved the safety and efficiency of the Metro system, and increased transparency in government contracting. As Chair of the Committee on Libraries, Parks and Recreation and the Committee on Public Services and Consumer Affairs, Mayor Bowser championed the causes of increasing the revenue generating potential of our public spaces, curbed bullying in our schools and recreation centers, and created consumer protections for homeowners facing foreclosure. As Chair of the Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority (Metro) Board's Planning, Program, and Real Estate Committee, she led the adoption of comprehensive revisions to joint development policies that promote more transparency, competition, higher quality transit oriented development, and include Metro's first ever affordable housing policy. She also previously served as Chair of the regional Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' Transportation Planning Board.

Mayor Bowser's strong message of representing all eight wards won the hearts of voters and an endorsement from President Obama, who described Muriel as "a champion for working and middle-class families, and a passionate proponent of Washington, D.C." She is committed to improving the lives of all Washingtonians, whether they have been here for five minutes or five generations. Her fierce advocacy to improve the District won her the endorsement of *The Washington Post*, which wrote: "Smart, hardworking and independent-minded, Muriel Bowser has shown herself to be an effective advocate for the interests of her demanding ward and a leading voice for education reform and good government." She was also honored with the Democratic State Committee's Legislator of the Year Award (2012), the Phyllis Campbell Newsome Public Policy Leadership Award (2012), and the NoMa Business Improvement District Public Sector Award (2012).

Mayor Bowser, a native Washingtonian, earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in History from Chatham College and a Master's degree in Public Policy from American University.