



# One Atlanta

An Interview with  
The Honorable Keisha Lance Bottoms, Mayor of Atlanta



The skyline of Atlanta

**EDITORS' NOTE** Keisha Lance Bottoms is the 60th Mayor of Atlanta. Mayor Bottoms strives to continue Atlanta's progress as a global business hub and the nation's cradle for civil and human rights. A life-long public servant, Mayor Bottoms is the only Mayor in Atlanta's history to have been elected to all three branches of government, serving as a judge and City Council member before being sworn in as Mayor. Only the second woman



The Hon. Keisha Bottoms

to be elected to Atlanta's highest office, she was designated a "Woman to Watch in 2018" by Viacom's BET Network. Leading with a progressive agenda focused on equity and affordable housing, she serves as Chair of the Community Development and Housing Committee for the United States Conference of Mayors. Mayor Bottoms received her undergraduate degree from Florida A&M University and earned her Juris Doctorate from Georgia State University College of Law.

**What were your key priorities when you became Mayor of Atlanta and have you been happy with the impact that you have made in those areas?**

The number one driver for me when I ran for city council in 2009 was equity, but I don't know that I even knew to call it that – it was just the notion of giving people an opportunity to succeed.

I have seen that when people have opportunities, the resources they need to take advantage of those opportunities, and the backing of solid leadership, it makes a difference. I knew that this is what I wanted for my community.

The tagline for our administration is One Atlanta. We have created a One Atlanta office that promotes equity, diversity and inclusion. This office addresses all of the things we saw on the campaign trail that face our community but don't necessarily fit neatly into an operational box.

It is fascinating that even our water commissioner is speaking through the lens of equity when discussing water treatment plants and how we can create resources in underserved communities.

I'm glad to say that after a year of not just talking about it, but doing it, we're seeing a difference in our community.

**Was it important to engage the business community and the private sector in this effort?**

The public/private partnerships we have in Atlanta should probably be the envy of the nation. According to the Metro Atlanta Chamber, *Fortune* has moved away from rankings and now says Atlanta has one of the highest saturations of Fortune 500s compared to other U.S. cities. To see our CEOs camping out on the West Side of Atlanta for the opening of a Chick-fil-A because of what it represents for the community is symbolic of the type of buy-in we have in our city.

Much of what we have been able to accomplish has been because of those living on the ground in our communities working with our business partners and leading the transformation efforts and bringing joint resources to the table.

Atlanta has appointed its first ever Chief Housing Officer to focus on affordability and how we address gentrification in a smart way. Even this position is being funded by one of our nonprofit partners.

It works out well for our city and, most importantly, it matters to our corporate leaders and is meaningful to our communities.

**Will you discuss how Atlanta is focusing on improving education and job training and what is the key to driving change when it comes to addressing the challenges within the education system?**

The key is us finding our sweet spot where we can make a difference because the city government doesn't control the public schools in Atlanta.

In this effort, I believe that we either pay on the front end or on the back end. When we don't invest in our young people, we see crime numbers increase, so it behooves us all to care about what opportunities are being created for young people in their formative years.

Going back to the public/private partnership, I have an advisory board comprised of several CEOs which has been working for the past year to create a vocational training program in conjunction with our Atlanta technical college that is going to provide meaningful job training.

When Delta Airlines says they will need 10,000 mechanics in the next five years, they want to be able to find those mechanics in Atlanta, which means they want to create a pathway for training those mechanics in Atlanta. That is happening through this program.

Our fire department has just partnered with one of our high schools. Beginning in ninth grade, they are starting to train young people so that, when they graduate from high school, they are trained and ready for a job as a firefighter in our city.

The other space where I think there is an enormous opportunity for us is the early childhood education space and looking at how we can be good partners to make sure that kids are school-ready.

**Will you highlight the commitment to transparency for your administration?**

If we have to hide something, then we probably should not be doing it.

There is an inherent distrust in government and we are working to change this. It may never be perfect because we're human, but we need to do all we can to reassure people.

We created an open checkbook portal so people can go online from their smartphones or from their laptops and see where their money is being spent.

The best example of how well this is working is our local newspaper is about to do a story based on questions they have about some of the information they found on the open checkbook. That is what it's all about. People can access and ask the necessary questions.

To the extent that we haven't done things perfectly, it gives us a chance to address those issues when they are brought to our attention by the public which now has a way to pay attention.

**In a short period, your administration has made a strong impact for the city. Are you able to take moments to celebrate the wins or is it always about what is next?**

Unfortunately, my personality is always about what we can do better, but I have reminded my team to celebrate wins.

When it comes to what we have accomplished over a year, it blows me away. It's important for our team that they know that we're out here doing things that people across the country are looking to emulate.

As a leader, though, I keep thinking about what we can do next and better and keep raising the bar. ●