



METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT OF NASHVILLE AND DAVIDSON COUNTY

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:
JANEL LACY
(615) 862-6020 DIRECT
(615) 438-3416 CELL
JANEL.LACY@NASHVILLE.GOV

Mayor Karl Dean Inaugural Speech September 21, 2007 Public Square

Mayor Purcell, Mayor Fulton

Vice Mayor Neighbors

Members of the Metropolitan Council

Members of the General Assembly

Members of the Judiciary

Other elected officials

Distinguished Clergy

Mom and Dad and my brothers, George and Mark

Anne, Rascoe, Frances, and Wallen

All of our family

And to all of Nashville.

Let me start by saying thank you.

Thanks to each of you for being here today, and thanks to Nashville for making it possible for me to be here today.

This is an incredible moment – I am honored and humbled to become Mayor of such a great city. And I want to talk about what lies before us. But before we turn our sights ahead to the next four years, I think it's important that we all pause for a moment and say thank you to Mayor Purcell and his staff, and the outgoing members of the Council, for eight outstanding years of leadership and growth for this city.

The legacy Mayor Purcell leaves behind includes a renewed focus on our neighborhoods and vast capital improvements in our schools. Another part of his legacy we are standing on today. This Public Square – which I consider to be the most beautiful green space we have downtown – is here because of the leadership of Mayor Purcell.

Bill, I know you hate when I tell people this. But the truth is Mayor Purcell and I met in jail ... we were assistant public defenders together in the early 1980s. Before I began running for this job in January, I had the pleasure of serving in his administration for seven years.

As a colleague, a boss and a friend, the best thing Mayor Purcell has shown me is that it is better to do what is right than what is easy. There is no better example of that than this beautiful Public Square we are on today and the Historic Courthouse behind us.

I also want to say thank you and congratulations to our new Vice Mayor Diane Neighbors, and to each of the 40 individuals who have been elected to the Metro Council. I look forward to working with you in the weeks and months ahead.

And I'd also like to thank Congressman Bob Clement, as well as Howard Gentry, Buck Dozier, David Briley, Kenneth Eaton and Cheryl Tisdale for the energy and passion each of you brought to the campaign we have just completed.

Nine months ago – almost to the day – I stood on the Shelby Street Bridge and announced I was running for mayor.

It is a bridge that was built at the turn of the 20th century, meant for horses and buggies. It later developed into a bridge for automobiles and now stands today as a walking bridge, which when it's lit up at night I believe is one of the prettiest things in our city. To me, it's a symbol of how we can progress, and still protect and preserve what's most important to us.

It's also a symbol of something else – that Nashville is a city of bridges. We need them to not only connect us east and west, north and south, but between race and religion, between lifelong residents and people who just moved here.

Today we have the opportunity for a fresh start. And I am reaching out to the people who voted for me, the people who voted for someone else, members of the Council, leaders in our satellite cities – everyone and asking that we build a bridge between us, to move our great city forward together.

As I reflect back on the campaign, there's something that gives me a tremendous sense of optimism about the future of our city. It wasn't just that overall it was a very positive experience. It was that during the course of this campaign the basic issues that each of us held up as the things that are most important to this community, were the same.

Public schools. Public safety. And economic development.

What's remarkable is that this didn't happen because someone said it and everyone else decided to say it too. It happened because over the years, as the ebb and flow of public discourse has continued, a true consensus has developed across this community about what is important to us as a city. We have come to agreement about our priorities.

These are not the only things we have to do, but they are the most important things.

What a gift we have – to know our priorities. It frees us up to give them our attention, to really hone in on the challenges we have in each of these areas and to unify our efforts in addressing those challenges.

So we focus, number one, on schools.

We have a lot to be proud of when we look at our schools. I want to tell you that I had a good meeting with Board of Education Chair Marsha Warden and Director of Schools Dr. Pedro Garcia and members of his team on Tuesday. There is a tremendous amount of work being done today to improve our schools.

Education is actually the reason I came to Nashville almost 30 years ago and it's a reason I hope more people will come to Nashville for in the future. I came here in 1978 to attend Vanderbilt Law School and I stayed for love.

While at law school, I met my wife Anne Davis. She's a Nashville native. We've raised three children here and it has been a great place to have a family.

Nashville needs to be a city for families. It needs to be more than just a place where people work, and that means having a public school system which meets or exceeds in quality the public schools in our surrounding counties.

My first full day in office, on Monday, I will begin to work on this. I will hold our first official town hall meeting at a public school, to really get this community-wide conversation started.

Nashville has some great schools – two that are ranked in the top 100 in the country. Think for a moment what an incredible achievement that is.

But it's not enough. We have to raise the bar on our own expectations of what we can achieve in the area of education. Every student in Nashville deserves the best education we can provide them.

We also have to reduce the drop out rate in our schools. That is a very complicated problem. But as a city, I am convinced we can solve it.

We focus on public safety.

I've also met this week with Police Chief Ronal Serpas and the Chief of our Fire Department Steve Halford, and the Office of Emergency Management, and again, we have some things to feel very good about in this area.

The homicide rate is down 25 percent in Nashville, and we're at 16 year lows in many of the crime statistics we measure. But it's not enough. We must continue to work to ensure that every neighborhood feels safe – that the benefits that come from having a great police force and a great fire department are realized in every single segment of this city.

And we focus on economic development.

Here again, we have an incredible track record of success. We're the number one city in the nation for corporate expansions and relocations. Whenever you see rankings of cities – the friendliest city, a great city for singles – Nashville is likely to be in the top 10 nationwide.

But we can't rest on past success. We can't rest until we make sure that all of our citizens share in the prosperity that economic development creates. We need to correct the disparities that exist for our minority companies. We need to help our existing small businesses create more jobs by ensuring that obstacles to their growth are removed.

One other issue, which was not talked about much during the campaign, but I believe will play a major role in our future going forward, is regionalism. Not only is Nashville and Davidson County a vibrant, growing community, but we have the benefit of living in an area that as a whole has seen tremendous growth and prosperity in recent years.

While we need to work hard to ensure Nashville continues to receive its fair share of the economic growth in our region, we must look at the successes in surrounding counties as something that benefits us all.

Again, there is good news here. Nashville has received almost half of all the job growth in our 10-county area over the past four years – more than 11 thousand new jobs have come just to Davidson County.

But as we grow as a region, we also share in the challenges it brings – air pollution and traffic congestion do not end at the county line. We must work together to address these issues. The Mayor of Nashville is the natural leader to enhance regional cooperation and I look forward to working with the community leaders of other counties.

Throughout this campaign, I talked about the momentum our city is experiencing because of the strong leadership we've had in the mayor's office. Mayors Bredesen and Purcell, in their own ways, have achieved great things and have set a very high standard.

It is therefore daunting to say that we can do better - that we need to raise the bar on our expectations of what we can achieve as a city.

But because of the great energy and vitality of the people of Nashville, that's exactly what we must do.

As I stand here looking out at all of you, I have to say that this is an extraordinary moment for me. On a personal level, it is profoundly humbling to realize the trust that has been given and the responsibility that has been placed in my care.

But the thing that motivated me to run for this office and that has energized me everyday for the last nine months, is the idea that it is the people of Nashville who are driving this city forward. It's the people of Nashville who see how great our city can be. And I am thrilled that I now have the opportunity to serve them.

Thank you very much.

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