



METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT OF NASHVILLE AND DAVIDSON COUNTY

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Mayor

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State of Metro *By Mayor Karl F. Dean*

Vice Mayor Neighbors, members of the Metropolitan Council, the Judiciary, other elected officials and distinguished guests: Good morning, and thank you for joining me here today.

I want to thank Dierks Bentley for that tremendous performance. Dierks is a great citizen of Nashville. He puts on the annual “Miles & Music for Kids” concert and motorcycle ride to benefit Vanderbilt’s children’s hospital, and he has been a huge supporter of Lower Broadway. His love for the honky-tonks and the Nashville Predators is well known.

Dierks, thank you for taking the time to join us and perform today.

I also want to thank our Youth Poet Laureate for her wonderful reading. A junior at Hume-Fogg Magnet High School, she was born in India and raised in Nashville. She represents the best of our city and its future with her skill at expressing herself, her commitment to the arts, her belief in the power of language and her creative ambition. She is a great advertisement for our city and our schools.

If you have a certain feeling of déjà vu this morning, your memory is not tricking you.

Seven years ago, I gave my very first State of Metro address in this same beautiful room.

I wanted to make a statement then, and – while much about our city has changed over the past seven years – the statement is the same today: In Nashville, education and learning must always come first.

Education is what our city has to focus on first and foremost if we want to keep growing and getting better. Education is the key that will open the door of opportunity for our children, and it’s the key for Nashville.

Since my first campaign, I've consistently talked about the three priorities we have to pay attention to every single day: education, public safety and economic development. These three priorities are really one priority, woven tightly together in a fabric of civic fortune, and it never changes, no matter who the mayor is.

Our city will be focusing on education, public safety and economic development for a long time to come.

To me, it's not enough for Nashville to be known as an "It City." This should be a city on a hill, a city of opportunity, a city where every child can get a high-quality education; feel safe, morning, noon and night; find a good job, and live a successful life, no matter where he may have come from or what she might look like.

This is not the Nashville of 50 or 20 or even eight years ago when I took office, and that's a good thing. This is a city that's both more diverse and more accepting of diversity than ever before. In 2012, Nashville had the fastest-growing immigrant population of any American city. Today, 12 percent of our population was born outside of the United States, and nearly half of our immigrants entered the country since the year 2000.

Whenever an individual who was born in another country uproots his or her life to come to the United States and make Nashville home, that's the highest compliment anyone can pay us. And with that praise and honor comes great responsibility to welcome that person, to make him or her feel safe and secure and capable of finding opportunity here. That's why we're doing everything we can to make information about becoming a citizen available here at the library and in our community centers.

We welcome people of all colors and nationalities into our community, because it's the right thing to do. It's also the smart thing to do. We know immigrants make positive contributions to our economy. Cities of the future will look like the city Nashville is becoming.

The capital spending plan I'll submit to the Metro Council in May will help launch Nashville Newcomer Academy. It's a great idea from STEM Preparatory Academy, a charter school in South Nashville with one of the largest English Language Learners populations in the state. The newcomer academy will be a demonstration school designed to meet the unique needs of English Language Learners and provide professional development for other schools serving high concentrations of New American students.

This will be yet another strong step to promote the diversity that makes our city so vibrant.

The best way for the city to create opportunity for all is by investing: investing in schools, investing in our infrastructure, investing in quality of life, investing in jobs.

To put it simply: investing in ourselves.

This has been our approach to governing for the past eight years. We've set priorities, lived by them and made strategic investments to advance each of them, inspiring millions of dollars in private investment and thousands of new jobs.

We've made neighborhoods throughout the city stronger by spending our capital dollars broadly but wisely.

We've looked to the future with new ideas, tackled tough issues and refused to kick the can down the road.

And we've been good financial stewards by putting money away for a rainy day whenever we could, keeping tax rates low and trimming our budget when necessary – but without reducing direct services to citizens.

The state of Metro is very good.

Nashville's future is very bright, because we've worked together and made the right investments, and the rest of the world has taken notice. A lot of other people are investing in Nashville right now, and we're reaping the benefits. Our prosperity, our economic development, pays for almost everything we do, including, yes, education and public safety.

But we'll have to remain vigilant, keep working and stay active to keep it up. We can't afford to sit on our hands. We have to be bold, always seeking new opportunities to move our city forward.

By believing in Nashville, working together and constantly moving ahead, we can do great things. That's the spirit of Nashville.

I want to thank Metro's employees for all the work they've done – and continue to do – to put the city in this position. By teaching children how to read, getting ice off the roads, protecting our neighborhoods, mowing the grass at our parks and providing the hundreds of other services that fuel our city's rich daily life, our employees have helped make Nashville the great success that it is.

This year's budget proposal will include recognition of our employees' high-quality work. All Metro employees will receive a 2.5 percent cost-of-living raise, and we'll take other steps to increase compensation related to increment pay and salary compression issues. I'm happy to be able to propose these increases in pay for our employees.

I also want to take a moment to thank Director of Schools Jesse Register, who will be retiring in June. Jesse and I didn't always see eye to eye, but we both had the same goal in mind at all times: a high-quality education for all students. Jesse brought stability to our school district at a time when it was desperately needed. He treated people well, and he kept the district constantly moving forward.

When I took office, McGavock High School was in turmoil. Its test scores were terrible, and there were big security problems. But when I go there now, it's a different school, a place I enjoy visiting, a place where I can see learning happening. It's the same story at Maplewood High School.

This is what can happen when a good leader brings smart people together to tackle tough problems. Thank you, Jesse.

I'm also happy to be able to say that Metro Schools' graduation rate is up and the dropout rate is down, ensuring that more of our students will have good options as adults.

We've made great progress in education since 2007. Some of our schools – both traditional schools and charter schools – are doing things no one could have imagined back then.

Let me give you two examples, the first a charter school, the second a traditional public school.

At STEM Preparatory Academy, 75 percent of the students are performing at or above grade level in math, compared to about half of the students across the state and less than half in Metro. STEM Prep's students also are outperforming the state and Metro in language arts.

You might think STEM Prep has an affluent student body, but the opposite is actually true: 9 out of 10 students there are economically disadvantaged.

At Granbery Elementary, more than 40 percent of the students are economically disadvantaged, and there are high populations of English learners and students with disabilities.

But the percentage of those students who are performing at or above grade level in reading is roughly twice as high as the state average.

It's the quality of the school that matters, not the management structure or who appointed the principal. It's what happens in the classroom and how we hold people accountable for results that make a difference.

We've done a lot of good things to make our schools better, not just as places for teaching and learning but as good environments for children.

Teach for America has brought a corps of young, bright, energetic teachers into our district.

The Nashville After Zone Alliance has provided after-school academic enrichment, arts and sports activities, and healthy food for children and teenagers who needed them.

Limitless Libraries has made the vast resources of Nashville Public Library available to students at school libraries across Davidson County. Limitless Libraries has turned many children into voracious readers, thanks to the willingness of our library and our schools to break out of their silos, think creatively, work together and enlist the support of the philanthropic community.

Melissa Raines, a librarian at DuPont Tyler Middle School, has said that every afternoon, and I quote, "a group of boys run (literally!) through the library doors to check on the delivery from Limitless Libraries. I've never seen male students so excited about reading! They like to read, because they are reading what they like."

But we still have a tremendous amount of work to do to make sure all of our students can feel so passionate about getting the education they need, the education they deserve.

Every year of school is a critical year. A child only gets one shot at third grade, one shot at seventh grade, one shot at 10th grade. So we have to get every year right, at every school, in every neighborhood.

Our children depend on their schools and their teachers for the knowledge and the skills that can change their lives.

We can't afford to let our students down. We can't afford to waste any more time before we start making all of our schools the kinds of schools that any of us would feel comfortable sending our children to every day.

We have to make sure every year of school is a building block, and not a stumbling block, in every child's future.

We need to take the things our best schools are doing, whether they're traditional public schools like Granbery or charter schools like STEM Prep, and replicate them across the city.

I'm pleased to see that more charter schools want to open their doors here in August, and I hope that trend will continue in the years ahead. Our students and families deserve choices for where they'll go to school, and the more we can do to keep them in our public school system, the better.

The operating budget I'll send to the council today would allow Metro Schools to make the improvements Dr. Register and the Board of Education have identified. We also will propose to use capital dollars to fully renovate Overton High School and Martin Luther King Jr. Magnet School and build a new elementary school in Cane Ridge.

Altogether, my capital spending plan will put \$131 million into our schools, another strong sign of our city's unwavering commitment to education.

The capital spending plan also will include planning money to begin the process of moving Hillwood High School to Bellevue, an important part of our city that hasn't had its own high school for more than 30 years. Money for planning the future of Hillsboro High School and Nashville School of the Arts will also be part of the proposal.

I've talked for more than eight years about how education, public safety and economic development are closely connected.

Children who feel safe will be able to learn, and when they grow up they'll be law-abiding citizens who contribute to Nashville's economy. And companies that see a community keeping its citizens safe and preparing its young people for the workforce will want to do business here, which will keep more people employed and out of trouble.

These things will always be true, and we can never take our eyes off the goal of making them happen, year after year after year.

We can never check a box on the to-do list and say, "OK, education's taken care of" or "OK, safety will never be an issue again."

But we've come a long way in keeping our citizens safe, and I never get tired of thanking the men and women of our police department, led by Chief Steve Anderson. They know this community, and they know how to put our citizens and visitors at ease.

When protesters who were upset about the situation in Ferguson, Missouri, exercised their First Amendment rights on our downtown streets last fall, the chief and his officers responded by giving them hot chocolate and water.

The police force now has 1,431 officers, which is 171 more than when I took office.

We used to have six police precincts; now we have eight. That means each precinct has less territory to cover than it used to, and our officers can be even closer to the neighborhoods they serve.

Our DNA Crime Lab was accredited in March and is now beginning to accept active criminal cases. The lab is expected to expedite the turnaround time for our investigators to receive forensic testing results.

Overall major crime is down, and Nashville has reached record lows for homicides each of the past two years. That number dropped to 41 in 2014, even though the city is bigger than ever before. Many of you remember 1997, when the homicide total reached a record high of 112 – nearly three times as high as last year’s number. I remember that year well from my time as the Davidson County public defender, and I’m glad we’ve come so far since then.

But 41 homicides are still 41 too many. We still read far too many news stories about people who shouldn’t have died and the devastated families who loved them – and who will never get to be with them again.

Those victims were our brothers and our sisters, our children. They were part of our community, and there are no throwaway lives in our community.

So we’ll continue to work hard. We’ll keep doing everything we can to prevent these tragedies from happening.

In my final capital spending plan as mayor, I’m proposing that we build a new, more efficient detention facility for the Davidson County Sheriff’s Office and a new administrative headquarters on Jefferson Street for our Police Department. The downtown Criminal Justice Center has – quite simply – reached the end of its useful life. We also need to move the South Police Precinct closer to the citizens it serves. This will be a major, \$149 million investment in public safety that will have benefits throughout Nashville and Davidson County for decades to come.

We also plan to build a new Family Justice Center to provide critical services to crime victims and their families in times of need. Putting these services under one roof for the first time will offer one place to go – not three or four different places, but one place – for women and children who have been sexually assaulted, who have been abused or who have been victims of domestic violence. Under this public-private partnership, the Metro Police Department’s Criminal Investigations, Domestic Violence and Youth Services divisions will be housed in the Family Justice Center alongside the Nashville Children’s Alliance, prosecutors from the Davidson County District Attorney’s Office and an office of the Tennessee Department of Children’s Services. The new facility, which will be built on Murfreesboro Road, will be easily accessible by bus and will have ample parking.

The Family Justice Center model is a priority for both my office and the Governor's Office. The Family Justice Center in South Nashville would build on the success of the Jean Crowe Advocacy Center, which we opened inside the Ben West Building last year to help domestic violence victims navigate Davidson County's court systems. The Jean Crowe Advocacy Center assists more than 250 victims each month. They are doing great work, and I know the new Family Justice Center will, too.

If we give our kids the education they deserve and we keep them safe, they'll be able to do the kinds of jobs we've been bringing to the city.

I am, with no apologies, pro-business. Business is not a problem; it's a good thing. Creating jobs is essential to creating a growing, vibrant city whose residents have a great shot at taking care of their families and fulfilling their dreams. When people have income to spend, they create the revenue our government uses to fund essential services.

That's why my administration has spent so much time on economic development, including business recruitment. While big jobs announcements are nice, it's what happens after the ribbon is cut and the cameras go away that really matters.

We can see the results all around us every day.

Bridgestone Americas has started building a new headquarters downtown that will house 1,700 employees, including 600 who will move here from other states. These will be high-paying jobs.

Bridgestone, which has been based in Nashville for more than 20 years, looked all over the country when it decided to bring its businesses under one roof. It had very compelling offers to move somewhere else.

But we competed aggressively, and Bridgestone ultimately decided that Fourth Avenue South and Demonbreun Street was the place to be.

HCA, another of our city's finest companies and corporate citizens, also is growing here. HCA is building a new office tower in the north part of the Gulch – near the state Capitol building – that will house the headquarters of two of its subsidiaries and approximately 2,000 employees.

And UBS, a huge financial services firm, plans to add more than 1,000 jobs here.

Younger, fast-growing companies also are choosing Nashville more and more often. Our music, our creative spirit, our diversity, our restaurants and much more have made this one of the most attractive cities in America.

Warby Parker, which makes and sells eyeglasses, has opened its first office outside of New York City here. Eventbrite, the online ticketing company based in San Francisco, has opened a Nashville office with more than 40 people and is growing quickly.

We've worked hard to add Metro programs that small businesses can use to grow their operations. Nashville has become a magnet for young entrepreneurs and technology jobs, and they've made the city a stronger, more exciting place. We need to do everything we can to encourage them not only to start their businesses here but also to keep them and grow them here.

I want to thank the Metro Council for partnering with my administration to take advantage of these kinds of opportunities. Throughout my two terms, the council has understood the need to create jobs and create opportunity, and political ideology generally hasn't come into play.

I also want to thank Gov. Phil Bredesen and Gov. Bill Haslam for partnering with our city so many times over the years in education, economic development and other critical areas. One of them is a Democrat, and the other is a Republican, but they are both former mayors, and they both understand the needs of cities.

It's clear that this city is booming.

You can see it in the cranes in the air, and you can see it in the data. 2014 was a record year for Nashville, with more than \$2.25 billion in construction activity, and 2015 is on pace for an even bigger number. And the city's annual sales tax revenue has grown by nearly \$100 million – more than 30 percent – since the recession.

Much of that growth, that investment, is a result of the confidence we had as a city to invest in ourselves.

We built the Music City Center during the recession because we believed in Nashville's appeal to conventions that had simply outgrown our old convention center. We knew that we hadn't been playing to the strengths of our Music City brand and our geographically central location, and it was time to start taking advantage of everything we have going for us.

By making that decision, we saved at least \$50 million in construction costs compared to what we would pay today. We also put thousands of people to work and sent a message that Nashville is ready to accommodate all kinds of events.

And we're doing just that. The Music City Center is way ahead of revenue projections and has built up approximately \$45 million in reserves in just two years of operations. It's paying for debt service, covering its other obligations and then putting tens of millions of dollars away each year so it can be ready if the economy slows down again.

The thing that really makes me smile, though, is the thought of all the people working in Nashville's hotels, restaurants, bars and honky-tonks whenever the city hosts a big event. Those servers feel that energy when they look at their tips every night.

This is the lesson: By setting strong priorities, sticking to them and being willing to believe in Nashville, we were able to navigate the worst recession in 75 years and come out of it in a strong position, ready to take advantage of the national appetite for travel to the most attractive cities.

There are so many reasons to believe in Nashville. I believe in Nashville, and I know you do, too.

That belief in what we can do together is the greatest asset we have. I've seen it work its magic time and time again. It brought us through not only a flood and a recession but also a different kind of threat: an idea that our government shouldn't communicate with people from other countries in their own languages. That idea threatened to cut us off from the world, but a coalition like none we'd ever seen before – labor leaders standing alongside Chamber of Commerce members, ACLU organizers mixing with ministers of all faiths – sent an entirely different message with a powerful vote.

You can't be afraid to do something big and bold if you know it's the right thing to do. That's how we got where we are today. Nashville has benefited from bold and progressive leadership for a long time.

Consolidating two governments into one; building a downtown arena before it had an anchor tenant, with the faith that one would come; tearing up the parking lot in front of the courthouse and replacing it with a beautiful public square – these were the acts of men and women who peered into the future and saw something better for this city.

You can see the impact of the Music City Center in the landscape around it, too. Omni built a hotel across the street that's accommodating many of the convention center's guests and hosting a lot of big events itself. A Westin hotel is under construction nearby, and more hotels could be on the way.

The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum is now connected to the Omni. It has twice as much space as it used to have, and it had a record year in 2014. It expects to have another one this year, when it should see more than 1 million visitors. And new projects for SoBro, including the Bridgestone headquarters, seem to be announced every day.

By making one big investment, we generated many more. And every one of those investments has meant jobs and tax revenues for our city. Those revenues let us do more for education, more for public safety, more for transit and parks and libraries, and they let us make more improvements to our infrastructure.

But it's not just downtown that's benefiting from that kind of investment.

In Antioch, we took what had become a "dead mall" and decided to build a library, a community center and a park there.

We also contributed \$1 million to the construction of Nashville State Community College's satellite campus on another part of the mall property. And now we plan to do the same to help Nashville State build two more campuses, one in Madison and the other in the Donelson-Hermitage area. I want to thank George Van Allen, Nashville State's president, for all his work to grow the college and make it accessible to students throughout the city.

The private sector is investing in Antioch now, too. HCA is building a \$250 million data center nearby, Asurion is adding 900 jobs, and ARAMARK plans to bring hundreds of jobs to Nolensville Road. Entrepreneur Ben Freeland has made major investments in the area. And the Nashville Predators have partnered with the city to build the Ford Ice Center next door to our new Southeast library, community center and park.

Nashville has a rich history of public-private partnerships. We created Limitless Libraries to give our kids new learning opportunities. We expanded the Country Music Hall of Fame to make it even more of an attraction. We worked with the Nashville Sounds to build a beautiful new ballpark that will be the envy of cities around the country.

These success stories represent the collaborative spirit that makes us successful. When the public sector, the private sector and nonprofits work together like we have on these projects and in Antioch, we can accomplish great things.

Nothing happens without a good team, and I've been lucky to be part of such a good one. I'm very grateful for all the good people who work with me, both in Metro Government and throughout the community.

There is simply no government program like a job. Nothing else compares when it comes to getting people up on their feet financially.

Earlier this year, the Brookings Institution reported that, of the 50 biggest cities in the United States, Nashville was one of just four where income inequality declined significantly in 2013. That gap got smaller because low-income households in our city made more progress than the wealthiest households.

I'm convinced that job creation played a big part in that, and we have to keep doing it. One of the ways we do it is by making our city an attractive place to live, a place where people want to live and work and enjoy themselves.

We've done that in neighborhoods across the city:

- from new libraries in Bellevue, Antioch and Goodlettsville to new community centers in Sylvan Park, Joelton and Sevier Park;
- by building 40 miles of new greenways and putting hundreds of millions of dollars into school construction, renovations and upgrades;
- from new bus rapid transit lines on Gallatin, Murfreesboro and Charlotte pikes – and another coming soon to Nolensville Pike – to new mountain bike trails in some of our parks;
- by building a new baseball stadium near Jefferson Street and a new amphitheater and park that will open this summer along the riverfront;
- from thousands of acres of open space that have been protected from development to hundreds of millions of dollars of water, sewer and stormwater infrastructure;
- and by putting \$82 million, including \$25 million in my final capital spending plan, into building sidewalks over the past eight years.

Large downtown projects tend to get most of the attention. And make no mistake about it; it's critical that we keep the core of our city vital and attractive. I don't apologize for doing that. But we've made investments throughout Nashville that have added to the quality of life our city is known for.

We've made great strides as a city that protects the environment and works to promote active, healthy living. But the percentages of children and adults who are obese or overweight remain very troubling.

On Sunday we'll launch *100 Miles with the Mayor*, a series of events over the following 19 days in which I plan to walk, bicycle or paddle 100 miles throughout the city. I hope you'll join me to exercise and explore Nashville's greenways, bikeways and waterways.

At the same time that we've invested in our quality of life, we've consistently kept our eye on the future and ensured that the city's financial needs will be met. We've added more than \$50 million to our operating reserves. We've reduced debt service as a percentage of the operating budget and maintained a strong AA bond rating through strong management and by keeping our debt within our means.

I'm very pleased to announce that our efforts will allow library hours to expand throughout the city in the next fiscal year. For the first time in more than 10 years, the city's seven larger, regional libraries, which are spread across Nashville, will be open on Fridays.

Nashville Public Library is one of the jewels of our city. I can't imagine where we would be without it. I want to thank Kent Oliver, the library's director, and his staff not only for having us here today but, more importantly, for working so hard to maintain and strengthen this dynamic organization for our citizens.

The library is, in some ways, the heart and soul of our city. I'm deeply honored to be back here for my final State of Metro address.

My vision for Nashville is a city that's even stronger 10 years from now, 20 years from now and 50 years from now.

It's a city that's still growing, still attracting people of all ages, still bringing in businesses and jobs and tax dollars.

It's a city in which our children can attend Vanderbilt or Tennessee State or Lipscomb and work at Bridgestone or HCA or Eventbrite.

It's an innovative city that always embraces technology and creative thinkers and entrepreneurs, whether it's in health care, music or any of the other areas that make our economy hum.

It's a city where everyone has access to high-quality, high-speed mass transit that will help our residents and our visitors get around and get to work on time.

It's a city where everyone can afford to live and work and raise a family in housing that accommodates every part of Nashville's workforce.

It's a sustainable city, one that constantly works to protect the natural environment, and a city that's always adding parks, greenways, bikeways, sidewalks and other places where citizens and visitors can be active and stay healthy.

And it's a city that is even more diverse – and continues to welcome people of all backgrounds with open arms.

Making all of that possible is our challenge. And I know Nashville is up to that challenge. Whenever we're pressed to overcome a problem, we do it.

We're able to do it because of a few principles we hold dear.

We help each other. When a devastating flood struck our city five years ago this weekend, we lent one another a hand and got each other back on our feet. That's the spirit of Nashville: neighbors helping neighbors – and helping strangers – cope with the worst, clean up and get moving again.

We collaborate. We find the right people, the right expertise, the right mix, and we go to work and find the right answer. Smart collaboration creates bold opportunities.

We cultivate business because we know how important jobs are for our citizens and how important tax revenues are for the many things we want our government to provide, from beautiful libraries to stunning natural areas, from clean streets and sidewalks to comfortable classrooms.

We invest in ourselves so others, noticing our confidence, will invest in us. One investment leads to many more.

We leave the city better off than we found it, with more robust services and better facilities – but also with more money built up against the threat of tougher times.

We deal with problems when they come along rather than passing them on.

And we always follow the North Star of our priorities: education, public safety and economic development. Those priorities never change. They're the three pitches we simply have to keep hitting, day after day after day.

I appreciate the citizens of Nashville for giving me this opportunity to serve and lead. The state of our city is very good, and we've accomplished a lot together over these past eight years.

But we can't afford to take our eye off the ball and stop hitting those three pitches. This is Nashville's time, and we have to lean into it and give it everything we have so we can live the future we see: a city on a hill, a city of opportunity.

Thank you very much.