

Written by Kathy

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CLEVELAND, Ohio- Newcomer Justin Bibb (pictured), a former Barack Obama intern and progressive who won the Cleveland nonpartisan runoff election for mayor in November of 2021 over then Cleveland City Council President Kevin Kelley to become the city's fourth Black mayor and its second youngest behind former mayor Dennis Kucinich, gave his second State of the City address on Wednesday evening from a podium in the auditorium at East Technical High School, a forum hosted by the City Club that drew hundreds.

The issues the 35-year-old Black mayor addressed ranged from the pandemic to the costly renovation of the West Side Market, public and student safety, lead poisoning, economic growth, and the selection process for the next Cleveland schools CEO to replace outgoing CEO Eric Gordon. He praised Gordon for his 11 years of service as CEO as the Cleveland schools will welcome a new CEO in coming weeks under the leadership of the mayor, who controls the city schools and appoints school board members per state law.

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The mayor much anticipated address focused on safety, education and educational policy and was a bit different from his first State of the City Address where he took a ceremonial oath of office during an invited-guests-only inauguration ceremony held at the Public Hall Auditorium and prominent dignitaries were on hand to support him like 11th Congressional District Congresswoman Shontel Brown But his speech had similarities to last year's address.

“We can achieve a safer, more equitable, healthier Cleveland,” the mayor said last year relative to his first state of the city address. “We can be the Cleveland that young people move back to because there are good jobs, safe streets, good schools, quality grocery stores, good healthcare. We don’t just have to dream about Cleveland, we can and will work toward that goal every minute of every single day.”

On Wednesday during his speech the mayor again said that safety remains paramount and a major goal of his administration.

“To become a safer city, we must invest in violence prevention and reduction and address the root cause of violence,” he said, adding that even with a shortage of some 200 police officers safer streets are a priority as is “data-driven policing” that can be effectively achieved only when all stakeholders are at the table

He highlighted a \$10 million investment into a violence prevention endowment fund that came about via American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) monies and said that Cleveland cannot progress

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until crime is substantially lowered and people feel safe in their school communities and students are safe in school and when they are coming going to school And the mayor said he will continue to support the business community, including a multi-million dollar project to revitalize the West Side Market that has some city council members griping that the price tag is too high.

As to the pandemic, the mayor said that Cleveland will regroup and recoup, and he discussed the impact that COVID-19 has had on students and their mental health. he also said that education will remain a key focus throughout his tenure as mayor

In spite of never holding office before, Bibb, a Democrat, was the top vote-getter in a seven-way primary in 2021. He ran on the political platform of decreasing crime and reforming the city's troubled police department. Armed with endorsements from key people like former mayors Michael R. White and Jane Campbell, U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown of Cleveland, and the Cleveland Plain Dealer, he went on to win the Cleveland nonpartisan primary election over then council president Kevin Kelley, a former White west side councilman and now common pleas judge who placed second.

With the wisdom of campaign manager Ryan Puente, the former executive director of the Cuyahoga County Democratic party who is now the mayor's chief of governmental affairs, Bibb won the November general election with a whopping 63 percent of the vote compared to Kelley's 37 percent, even though Kelley had been endorsed by Bibb's predecessor, four term former mayor Jackson and a handful of other city council persons, including Black councilpersons Blaine Griffin, who is now the city council president, Kevin Bishop and Kevin Conwell. It was an upset of large magnitudes, and a mandate by voters, Black voters in particular.

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The son of a social worker and Cleveland cop who grew up in Cleveland's Mt Pleasant neighborhood, Mayor Bibb is a former banker who holds a law degree from Case Western Reserve University. He interned for Barack Obama when Obama, who later became president, was a junior U.S. senator.

He ran a cleverly crafted grassroots campaign with the support of young progressives across racial lines who embraced his ideas and political stances. He knocked on doors and met with small community groups across the city long before the primary election got underway, and it paid off in the end as it catapulted him to victory, and to City Hall.

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We interviewed former president Barack Obama one-on-one when he was campaigning for president. As to the Obama interview,

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