

Written by Kathy

Thursday, 14 April 2022 04:29 - Last Updated Friday, 15 April 2022 11:16

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**By Kathy Wray Coleman, associate publisher, editor-in-chief**

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CLEVELAND, Ohio- Cleveland Mayor Justin M. Bibb, a former Barack Obama intern and banker who won the nonpartisan runoff election for mayor in November over then City Council president Kevin Kelley to become the city's fourth Black mayor and its second youngest behind former mayor Dennis Kucinich, delivered his first state of the city address on Wednesday evening at the Maltz Performing Arts Center on the campus of Case Western University where he earned both an MBA and a law degree. Some 1,000 people attended the free and open-to-the public but ticketed event that was also streamed live by the City Club and nearly every mainstream media outlet in Cleveland.

"We said that Cleveland can't wait, and we meant it," the captivating mayor said during opening remarks, a reference to his campaign slogan, one that helped to catapult him to the city's highest political office. "Cleveland, the wait for change is over."

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A Democrat raised on the southeast side of the city in Cleveland's Mount Pleasant neighborhood by a social worker mom and father who was a Cleveland cop, Mayor Bibb said that as soon as he took the leadership helm as mayor he began making progressive changes for the betterment of the city, and that Cleveland is on the rise. Deemed the poorest big city in the nation in 2019 by the Center for Community Solutions with 114,000 people living in poverty, including 37,700 children, the city remains steeped in poverty, prompting the mayor to say during Wednesday's speech that Clevelanders "have to do more with less."

Billed as a look back at the mayor's first 100 days in office since he officially stepped into the role on Jan 3, Wednesday's state of the city was hosted by the City Club of Cleveland and also included a question and answer session of previously chosen questions submitted by Cleveland residents. Cleveland City Council President Blaine Griffin and few other members of the 17-member city council were there, as well as members of the mayor's newly appointed cabinet, and the city's top brass, including interim police chief Andre Drummond and higher ups.

Other dignitaries there, mainly Democrats, include Ohio 11th Congressional District Congresswoman Shontel Brown, Cuyahoga County Executive Armond Budish, state Sen Nickie Antonio of Lakewood, former Cleveland councilman Zack Reed, who ran unsuccessfully for mayor last year in the primary and later endorsed Bibb, and Maple Hts Mayor Annette Blackwell.

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Cleveland's first new mayor in 16 years, who, per state law, also controls the city's public schools, Bibb laid out several initiatives he plans to address as mayor, including public safety, economic growth, community development, and education, and he spoke on his achievements in office thus far. They include a bailout of the Westside Market in cooperation with city council, the filing of a motion in Cleveland Municipal Court by the city's chief prosecutor that asks the city's judges to expunge some 4,000 low level marijuana criminal records, and what the mayor says is a much needed \$10 million project for upgrades at Shaker Square on the city's east side that is in the workings.

The mayor said that public safety is his first priority, and he spoke about the city's response to the pandemic. He also promised to fight poverty tooth and nail, and said that he is committed to revamping the Burke Lakefront Airport, and working with the city council to develop an ambitious city budget that includes resources for improving the city's inner city neighborhoods, including city streets and walkways.

The mayor asked for patience as he carries out what he called a strategic economic agenda designed to improve city services so that Cleveland can become a more sustainable city, and a city that residents can be proud of.

"I did not promise that I will be a perfect mayor but I did promise I will do my best every day," said the articulate Mayor Bibb, the city's 58th mayor and a novel mayor who, before winning office last year, had never held public office.

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The mayor spoke about the tragedy regarding the New Year's Eve carjacking and shooting death of slain Cleveland police officer Shane Bartek, 25, and also took the opportunity to call for an end to the escalating gun violence in the city after the recent passage of Senate Bill 215 by Ohio lawmakers, a new state law that permits Ohio residents to carry concealed handguns without a permit.

"This moves the needle on gun violence in the complete wrong direction, and undermines our ability to keep cities safe," he said.

Bibb said that Cleveland, a largely Black major American city of some 372,000 people and Ohio's second largest city behind Columbus, has the mechanisms to someday become a great city and that he is determined to carry out the demands that voters called for when they put him in office last year by a landslide.

"I am committed to delivering on the changes you called for," said Bibb, whose roughly 45 minute speech drew routine applause from the tentative audience.

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The mayor said that police reforms and accountability are upmost to improving the city, as well as the full funding of the new Community Police Commission, which is mandated by the voter adopted Issue 24, a charter amendment for police reforms that Cleveland voters overwhelmingly approved in November. According to the mayor, Issue 24 will be taken seriously as the city and the U.S. Department of Justice remain parties to a court monitored consent decree for police reforms that was implemented in 2015 behind several questionable police killings of Black people since 2012.

Bibb, 34, walked away with 63 percent of the vote when he upset Kelley via last year's mayoral election. It was a political shakeup that stunned some old heads, including outgoing four-term mayor Frank Jackson, 75 and a Kelley ally, and some members of city council who also supported Kelley's candidacy like Councilman Griffin, Jackson's former protege who succeeded Kelley as city council president. A former city council president himself and the city's third Black mayor, and its longest serving mayor, Jackson opted out of seeking an unprecedented fifth term last year.

The mayor is also poised to revamp the city's largely Black Cleveland Metropolitan School District, which is under the control of the city mayor as to a state law that took effect in 1998 when the state of Ohio and the school district were released from a longstanding desegregation court order. The mayoral control law eliminated an elected school board and replaced it with appointees of the mayor, who also controls the schools multi-million dollar budget that is funded primarily by taxpayers.

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Cleveland sits in heavily Democratic Cuyahoga County, the second largest of Ohio's 88 counties, and most of its residents live in poverty. It is the second most segregated city in the nation behind Boston and most Blacks reside on the city's east side and Whites on the west side, the two sides separated by the Cuyahoga River.

**By Kathy Wray Coleman, associate publisher, editor. Coleman is a seasoned Black Cleveland journalist who trained at the Call and Post Newspaper for 17 years and an experienced investigative and political reporter. She is the most read independent journalist in Ohio per Alexa.com [Clevelandurbannews.com](https://www.clevelandurbannews.com) and [Kathywraycolemanonlineblog.com](https://kathywraycolemanonlineblog.com), the most read Black digital newspaper and Black blog in Ohio and in the Midwest.**

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(216) 659-0473. Email: [editor@clevelandurbannews.com](mailto:editor@clevelandurbannews.com). We interviewed former president Barack Obama one-on-one when he was campaigning for president. As to the Obama interview

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