

As prepared for delivery remarks for Dr. Romona Jackson Jones, Chairman of the Douglas County Board of Commissioners' 2019 State of the County Address on Tuesday, April 16, 2019.

Good Afternoon, I would like to personally thank the Council of Quality Growth, Douglas County Chamber and Douglas County Economic Development Authority for hosting this auspicious occasion for two consecutive years.

Board of Commissioners, Mayor Robinson and Douglasville City Council, Mayor Reese and Villa Rica City Council, School Board Chairman, Tracy Rookard Shaw and Douglas County School Board Members, local, state and federal Elected and Appointed Officials, county employees, volunteers, Business Owners, Regional Partners, Veterans, Community Stakeholders and valued Douglas County citizens in the audience, watching by television or the internet.

Before I start, I would like to introduce my fellow Board of Commissioners... Vice Chairman /District 2 Commissioner Kelly Robinson, District 1, Commissioner Henry Mitchell III, District 3 Commissioner, Tarenia Carthan and District 4 Commissioner Ann Jones Guider.... Thank you for your invaluable time, talent and tenacity as we lead Douglas County forward.

My duty this afternoon is to report on the State of our great county. Collectively, we must seize the opportunity to captivate a successful future with unlimited growth potential. As Chairman of the Douglas County Board of Commissioners, it is my distinct honor to serve in a capacity to magnify our accomplishments, clarify our opportunities and manage and specify challenges of our immediate future. Douglas County is a growing region with a changing and dynamic environment and we are emblematic of the thriving economy.

Douglas County is well known as a prosperous business location and destination for culture filled with passionate and energetic people creating a new vibrant approach to economic development in the region. We are ranked among the top 20 Best Counties to Live out of 159 counties in the State of Georgia.

Our conviction to move from "good to great" produced a year of progress in 2018, while bringing government transparency closer to the citizens we serve. Douglas County is the epitome of majestic transformation and our regional footprint serves diverse people, philosophies and economies that transcend municipal boundaries. Our reputation is more than symbolic, we are robust, energetic, and we are competitive.

Douglas County school system is "first class" and prides itself on providing quality education to lifelong learners to become responsible individuals, independent thinkers and productive citizens. Our local colleges and universities consistently uphold the standard for student centered learning and produces a multi- talented highly qualified workforce in Douglas County.

Our water supply is plentiful, however, our community is growing and we must strategically plan today for a future expansion of the Dog River Reservoir. This projected expansion will raise the reservoir level by approximately 35 feet and increase storage capacity from 1.9 billion gallons to 6.6 billion gallons of water.

Public safety is a very high priority and my administration is committed to protecting and serving our citizens. We have advanced our ground game and the long awaited 800 MHZ (E-911 radio system) and towers are slated to go live in October of this year. Our Sheriff's Office and Fire

and Emergency Medical Services Department have soared to a whole new level with the purchase of new equipment, vehicles, resources and personnel to improve our ability to respond. Overall, crime is down in Douglas County and by working together we can help make our neighborhoods safe. Sheriff Tim Pounds says “if you see something, say something.”

Together we are working in a unified bipartisan manner to overcome the fear of failure while embracing optimism as we embark upon a bright and promising future.

Our financial position is very strong with a favorable Aa2 rating. Our credit ranking is very high quality with an exceptionally light burden and incorporates a large tax base and a healthy wealth and income profile. According to Moody’s Investor Service on Wall Street, Douglas County’s median household income rose to \$65,012 (2nd quartile of 2018) and equates to 95.8% of the US level. Our economy is vigorous and unemployment is the lowest in 51 years at 3.4%.

From the depths of the great recession, Douglas County has rebounded from having the highest number of foreclosures in the state of Georgia and we transcended to a record breaking year for home sales in 2018. Home prices are trending upward and median home sale values rose 12.7% over the last year.

Finally, we have broken the chain of communication by creating a business friendly atmosphere for residential builders, developers, realtors, bankers and investors. In 2018, the Board of Commissioners and the Douglasville/ Douglas County Water and Sewer Authority Board of Directors partnered and resolved the gridlock of pipe farm subdivisions originating in 2004. Going forward, we are rolling up the red tape and we are rolling out the red carpet because Douglas County is open for business!

Guided by a new vision for the community and a new comprehensive strategic plan, Douglas County Economic Development and Douglas County Chamber have made significant strides to provide a clear direction and sound commitment to collaboration for greater economic vitality.

For five consecutive years we have had sustained growth with the infusion of young educated residents and strong leaders who are working together to make a positive impact.

Economist, Dr. Joey Smith of West Georgia University pointed out Douglas County is ready to become the next big county in terms of sustainable and well developed growth and I believe he’s right by the astronomical number of cars on Highway 5 and Chapel Hill Road. Douglas County gained more jobs than the other six western counties and produced 2,974 jobs in 2018.

Our small and large businesses are vital to our community and Douglas County Government values your ideals and contributions. As the daughter of a 50 year small business owner, I know all too well what it means to live through the peaks and valley of a small business challenges and opportunities. My mother, just turned 82, and today she still owns a small business and she says “if she could do life over again, she would not change a thing about her small business journey” because God blesses the child with his or her own.

Douglas County is leading the charge in Workforce Development. Last year, Douglas County Chamber partnered with Douglas Economic Development Authority, Douglas UnitE 3, BB& T and Mercer University and offered a nine week Co-Starters program that equips entrepreneurs with insight, relationships and tools to turn business ideas into action.

We are poised for economic success. Switch Data Center, the largest single economic capital investment in Georgia's history is under construction right here in Douglas County.

Google has furthered their commitment to Douglas County in 2018, by donating \$95,000 to the Douglas County Education Foundation this past year. Since the 2003 inception, Google has invested more than \$4.68 billion dollars in Douglas County, creating more than 250 jobs and contributing more than \$8.4 million dollars to local schools and area nonprofits.

Our public engagement is at an all-time high. Douglas County Tourism and film trail is booming with business and we are exploring outside the lines with six billboards going in the next week or so. The Board of Commissioners just approved our new trendy branding logo with a bright and exciting color palate. Douglas County External Affairs is the catalyst for Arts, Culture and Humanities and has gained national recognition for two consecutive years. Our history and tourism museum is a main attraction and Douglasville/ Douglas County Cultural Arts Council launched a new initiative to use public art to further establish the community as a dynamic center of creativity and a destination for visitors.

Fanfare for progressing transportation in Douglas County has become reality. In an effort to address the growing transit and mobility needs of our county, the Douglas County Board of Commissioners has expanded transportation options for citizens with the Connect Douglas Fixed Route Service. The new bus service is currently scheduled to begin spring 2019 and will operate within the boundaries of Douglas County and conveniently connect residents to the places they want to go. Douglas County has become a catalyst for change, our attitudes and spirit to tap into best practices to enhance Georgia's 61 year roadblock in transportation is commendable. Georgia has been talking about advancing transportation since 1958, and we have are no longer classified as part of the problem, we are now part of the solution.

Last year, we cut ribbons and celebrated the opening South Wire opened its new location in western Douglas County and The Board of Commissioners opened the Douglas County Government Annex campus comprised of Tax Commissioner Tax and Tag offices, Tax Assessor, Geographical Information Services and Fleet Operations.

A state of the art Douglas County Community Outpatient Services for Behavioral Health, Substance Abuse Addictive Diseases and Developmental Disabilities opened on Stewart Parkway and our Douglas Public Health Center is thriving and continues to offers valuable health services to the residents of Douglas County.

Good things come to those who wait. A state of the art 16,850 square feet Women's center with a Level Two Neonatal Intensive Care Unit is opening at Douglas WellStar this month. The Women's center is the most anticipated project at WellStar in 40 years.

Douglas County's judicial system mental and accountability courts has become the model in the state for reducing recidivism and we are on the fore-front of the National Stepping Up Initiative to reduce the number people with mental illnesses in jails.

Homelessness is a real concern in the United States and Douglas County Judge Beau McClain along with full support of the Board of Commissioners will cut the ribbon on the first ever Sanctuary Village homeless transitional housing in Douglas County this year.

Our administration is committed to needs of Senior Citizens. As a member of the Atlanta Regional Commission Senior Aging and Independence Board we allocated \$511,482 in state and federal funds for direct services provided exclusively to Douglas County residents in 2018

Our youth are our future and Douglas County External Affairs Department hosted its first Youth Commissioners program to foster opportunity for our future leaders to learn about County Government. Our youth deserves to enjoy recreational activities and a state of the art multipurpose recreation center is on the horizon for Boundary Waters.

We celebrate all of our veterans. I would like to thank State Senator Donzella James and the Department of Veteran Affairs and the Board of Commissioners for hosting the 50th year Vietnam Commemoration Ceremony at the Douglas County Courthouse in December of 2018. I would be remiss not to thank Habitat for Humanity for committing to build at least eight houses for Veterans in Douglas County and as a Veteran I am honored for this act of kindness.

Collectively, this administration has made significant progress and we are beginning to see the fruits of our labor. Upon taking office, I decided to cast a wide net to strengthen our efficiencies in new areas of county government, and I am proud of the significant progress my fellow Commissioners are producing in their perspective roles as Committee Chairman and Committee Vice Chairman in Parks and Recreation, Transportation, Fire/EMS, Residential Oversight, Tax Abatement Oversight, Public Safety and Purchasing Oversight.

As we strategically prepare for our outlook, we must commit to long term capital planning as the common thread to secure our future financial position. We must continue to examine cost savings opportunities and I'm excited about our milestone \$2.2 million dollar Guaranteed Energy savings Performance contract which provides energy efficiency and infrastructure upgrades to 38 municipal government buildings.

We pride ourselves on hard-work while making sure every need for all citizens in Douglas County is being met. Last year was the rainiest season on record in Georgia and several road infrastructure projects were delayed, however, Douglas County Department of Transportation is rolling out a hearty plan in 2019 and Lee Road is at the Top of the list. There are approximately 700 road miles in Douglas County and my administration will spend \$51 million dollars Special Purpose Local Options Sales Tax dollars for road resurfacing and road infrastructure projects and pothole repairs within the next five years and \$10 million dollars of local match improvement grant funding. We are working intensively with Georgia Department of Transportation to secure assurance Interstate 20 and the State Roads and intersections inside of the county are earmarked to be addressed and there is a confirmed commitment to make us whole. Our future is bright and we are "One Douglas". We hold our image and reputation in the palm of our hands and first impressions are lasting. My priority this year is on Gateway beautification starting from Thornton Road to Liberty Road. Our message of cleanliness must be crystal clear. Keep Douglas Beautiful has taken the message of cleanliness into the elementary schools with hopes that our children will hold us accountable. We must re-condition ourselves to keep our road-sides and communities clean. The cost of keeping our community clean only requires commitment.

Together we have labored hard to deliver a body of work that is unmatched, but we still have much more work to do. We are experiencing tremendous growth and our population is exceeding our road capacity and forthcoming expansion projects will provide substantial relief. Douglas County is dark and street lights, sidewalks and traffic lights are needed in key strategic

locations and I'm committed to improving visibility and walk ability to protect the safety of our citizens.

Going forward we must work through the political overlay to address truck traffic in Georgia and Douglas County is not exempt. We must begin to build upon the future with a regional play book that gives consideration to advancing sewer and fiber in specific areas throughout the county to maximize our ability to become shovel ready.

Our strategic priorities, mission, vision and values will not tolerate substandard. This is our county, our image and we must take a pristine approach to address our deficiencies. This is our future our fate and the choices are ours. We strive to be good stewards of our environment, families, neighborhood and communities and we have a giant stake in the direction of our county.

Finally, this past year yielded many accomplishments and we should be proud, however, our work is endless. We must separate our differences and stand on one accord to move this great county forward. This is a new day in Douglas County and our positive profiles of courage supersede the boundaries of political party affiliations. No matter the obstacles we encounter, we must keep moving in a forward direction. As the sister of a Mississippi Preacher, we will not let fear destabilize our conviction because we are a God-fearing community. Our success story has gone viral all over the state of Georgia and we are garnering national recognition for the work we are doing and the work yet to come. We cannot allow our challenges to minimize our confidence and common purpose to do what is right for our community. The state of Douglas County is strong and the momentum of our progress is making a difference today, tomorrow and for years to come.

Thank you, God Bless you and May God Bless Douglas County!