

Oakland Mayor Barbara Lee's Official Comments Following City Clerk Swearing In

Good afternoon. First, I would like to thank City Clerk Asha Reed, Bill Patterson, and Maximus Simmons.. Before I begin, I would also like to invite Barbara Leslie, Executive Director of the Oakland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, Keith Brown, Executive-Secretary Treasurer, Alameda Labor Council and Miya Saika Chen, Chief of Staff, to join me.

Good afternoon Oakland! It is with deep gratitude, humility and love for Oakland that I stand here before you as the newly sworn in Mayor of the City that I love the most in the world—a City that gave me hope; a Mills College education; a loving, safe neighborhood to raise my sons; and the support to represent the people as your Assemblymember, State Senator, Congresswoman, and now...MAYOR!

Today marks a new era for Oakland. Like Oakland's gifts to me, I want to help re-instill hope; create opportunities for our young people; ensure a safe path for our sons and daughters to have long, productive lives, and be housed or own homes in a safe, clean City; support our senior citizens and our artists; and recommend solutions to make our City and its people economically healthy and vibrant.

To the good people of Oakland, I am honored to serve as your Mayor. Your spirit, resilience and grit are unmatched. I know we have been through a lot and will continue to go through our share of challenges. But what I know about Oakland is, we are a community that punches above our weight. We are a city of doers, dreamers, entrepreneurs, and innovators -- and together we are going to do the hard work to put Oakland back on the right track.

To my family, thank you for your unwavering commitment and support. I want to note that the bible that I was just sworn in with belonged to my grandfather, an incredible man who was born in 1867 in Galveston Texas, two years after slavery ended in Texas. He graduated from Tillotson University, spoke fluent Spanish and became the first Black letter carrier in El Paso. Galveston as you know is the site where where one of the last groups of people were freed, two years after the emancipation proclamation - and every year we commemorate this event on Juneteenth of June 19.

My mother, Mildred Parish Massey, was a member of the NAACP. She was one of 12 students who integrated the University of Texas. She became the First African American woman to work as a civilian at Fort Bliss Army Base. Many of you knew her. She always told me the word "can't" is not in the dictionary.

My father, Lt Gov Garvin Tutt served in the Korean War in World War 2. He was in the 92nd all Black battalion in Italy, a segregated army. He was a proud military officer who wanted to buy a home in San Leandro. He couldn't because he was Black. He and my mother tried several times to buy a home in San Leandro and ended up being run out of town. My father always gave me hope. Little did my parents know then that I would end up representing San Leandro for 3 decades in Congress.

Today I am also thinking about my stepmother Reiku Tutt. My parents divorced when I was ten years old and my father met Reiku in Japan. When Reiku moved to Oakland, I taught her English. She became a second mother to me and my mom and Reiku became friends.

When I think about my family, I think about the diversity of Oakland - the Oaklanders I talked to and visited with in living rooms, community events, church services, farmer's markets, and neighborhoods over the past many years and especially over the last five months. Thank you for sharing your stories and continuing to inspire and encourage me to meet this moment. You were clear about the need to transform Oakland into a safer and cleaner city. You were clear about wanting a government that you can trust to solve our fiscal challenges, safety, housing, and homelessness challenges. And you were 100% clear always about how much you love Oakland. We LOVE life in Oakland.

Over the last month, my Transition Committee has been working hard at work building a team that can deliver on my 100 day plan. Thank you to my Transition Team: Co-chairs Barbara Leslie and Keith Brown; Director Danny Wan; and Advisors Ben Rosenfield and Barbara J. Parker, for helping to ensure a smooth "Ready to Lead" transition into the Mayor's Office.

Thank you to Miya Saika Chen for answering the call to serve as Chief of Staff! And to Councilmember President Kevin Jenkins, as Interim Mayor, you have been holding down two jobs for the past many months. Thank you for your leadership and continued service, and I look forward to working with you now in my official capacity. And to all our phenomenal City Councilmembers, you all have been my mentors, and more importantly, you are my friends.

Oaklanders expect and demand that we must govern in a new way. And it starts with the people. There is a saying that people closest to the challenges are the ones closest to the solutions. Over the next 100 days, we will bring in Oaklanders from all walks of life to help inform how our government can better serve the people and usher in a new era of prosperity and progress. We will keep the public informed along the way through working groups, listening sessions, community forums, and neighborhood meetings. Updates of this work will be posted online. Our working groups range from good governance, public safety, public-private partnerships, large employers, small businesses, youth, arts and culture, economic development, tech, and inter-faith advisory council and more.

There is no time to waste - Oaklanders deserve transparency, accountability and results starting now. I have begun meeting with county, state, and federal officials and business and philanthropy partners to identify resources and funding streams to Oakland for homelessness, affordable housing, healthy food access, infrastructure, clean energy, economic development, arts and culture, and innovation. And the response has been incredibly positive.

I am also clear-eyed that Oakland, like many cities across California, is projected to have a substantial budget shortfall for the next two years. These budget deficits didn't happen overnight, and they will require both short-term and long-term structural solutions to solve Oakland's budget challenges.

With my team, I plan to immediately review areas of concern, including Oakland's expenditures and obligations, a strategy to collect money owed to the city, making sure taxpayers' dollars are being spent efficiently, and the impact of federal budget cuts on local Oakland programs. I am grateful for the perspectives

As your Mayor, my job is to lead our city out of a budget crisis and into a period of financial stability. We can only do this together if we have a strong, vibrant Downtown, thriving small businesses in every Oakland neighborhood that preserve the character of our great City and contribute towards our vitality, and a City that welcomes investment.

Thank you to all of you for being here on my first official day as the Mayor of Oakland.

I'd like to end with a quote from the late great Maya Angelou, whose late son grew up right here in Oakland.

“Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise”

Oakland, Today we rise!