

Swearing in speech: Yvonne Hinson-Rawls

Giving honor to God, my personal mentor, I am pleased to have this opportunity to thank you fellow Citizens of Gainesville, my family, friends and supporters.

I am extremely honored to be your Commissioner for District 1 and to accept the responsibilities that you have entrusted to me. I am grateful for the 54.3% vote of my neighbors and district residents who have empowered me to make decisions to improve the daily life of our community's residents. I want to thank the Mayor, my fellow commissioners, and the city's staff for the warm reception that they have extended to me as a new member of the City Commission. I also want to thank outgoing commissioners, Jeanna Mastrodicasa and Scherwin Henry, for their outstanding service on behalf of District 1 and the City of Gainesville.

Some of you may think I have been waiting until the end of today's ceremony to begin my service, but that is not the case. Before I formally announced my candidacy for office, I came back to Gainesville, where I was born, to help make my hometown a better place to live, work, and play. After devoting a year of service to President Obama's Campaign, I served Precinct 28 as the Precinct Committeewoman. I am currently serving the Alachua County Democratic Executive Committee as its Membership Chair, I served a year and a half on the Gainesville Housing Authority's Board of Commissioners and I have completed the City of Gainesville's outstanding Citizen's Academy.

During my campaign I listened to you, business associates, friends and neighbors as you shared with me your hopes, plans and dreams for the future of a better community. Immediately after you elected me I began to attend city commission meetings and met with the various charter officers and their respective staff, and every department in GRU to find out how I could begin to make an impact on the issues you said were important to you. I needed to know how to improve the quality of services provided to District 1, whose time is NOW, and, to this great city that I have always called home.

Despite my love for this community, the reality is that our city needs improvement in many areas. A city that is no stranger to recognition, Gainesville has topped multiple lists in the past, boasting the No. 1 place to live and work in America in 2007 and this year Gainesville was recently ranked No. 6 in a list of the "Top 25 Hardest Working Towns in America". However, The United States Census Bureau's American Community Survey, reported the city of Gainesville had the fifth-widest income gap in the country from 2005-2009. A research economist at the University of Florida attributed the high level of income inequality to two factors — a small city with a large university and medical complex, and the poverty rate and lack of jobs in east Gainesville.

As I mentioned during the election campaign, I will direct the attention of my colleagues on the City Commission and the attention of the Charter Officers to problems in areas of concern to me and to you. They are jobs and job training, economic and community development, parent empowerment and education. As a retired elementary school principal, I know first-hand about the effects that a declining neighborhood, job markets, schools, and hopelessness can have on the fabric of community life. It leads to related and equally devastating problems such as crime, broken families, drug abuse and most horrible of all, apathy. If we, in District 1, don't care about our own community, who will?

An old Ashanti Proverb says, "The ruin of a nation begins in the homes of its people".

As District 1 Commissioner, please believe that I will do my very best to address each of these problems so that the quality of life of those most affected will improve. My first plan, with my colleagues support, is to find a way to match jobs with the jobless. Do you know that in District 1 zip codes, over 13,000 people are unemployed and looking for work?

I plan to be accessible to you, to listen to you. We may not always agree, but I will always listen. I will work hard to understand the issues that come before me and the city commission. The scripture tells us in 2 Timothy 2:15 that we should, "Study to show thyself approved" and Proverbs 4:5 tells us to "get wisdom...and in ALL thy getting, get understanding." As a former principal and educator, I can relate to that! (wait for laughter). It's what I expected of my teachers and students and I'll hold myself to that same standard. I will never lose sight of the fact that holding public office is a trust between the office holder and the people that are represented. I will insist on accountability for every dollar of taxpayer money that is spent, and that when spent, those dollars will be allocated equitably so that all members of our community benefit from a fair distribution of resources. I will be a strong advocate for the residents of District 1. I will represent your interests to the best of my ability, while remaining aware that District 1's prospects for prosperity are directly tied to the prosperity of Gainesville as a whole.

Thank you again for your trust in me and for your prayers. Before taking the oath of office, I reminisced on the road I traveled and the adversities my grandparents overcame for me to be here today. I stand on the shoulders of giants. I am grateful to live in a community that has embraced change and is willing to strip away the thin veneers of stereotypes, racial profiling, divisive rhetoric, false humility, pride, and greed from the solid foundation of truth, justice, fiscal responsibility, and equal opportunity upon which our city government is built. I am extremely grateful to my supporters, whose belief in me has sustained me through a long, but satisfying campaign. I could not stand here today were it not for my Lord and Savior who sustained me, my praying mother, Doris Ingram who gave birth to me at the tender age of 16, my loving husband Ronald who labored beside me and gave me peace in the turbulence of the campaign, my brilliant daughter Kamelya, who managed all my technology, my handsome son whose phone calls kept me encouraged, my campaign manager Brendon, my cousin Lynn for organizing the field, my siblings Herman, Gail and Marilyn, my nieces Erica and Camille, Evelyn Foxx, the entire Hayes clan (I wish my father, L.E. Hayes were here today), and many other family members and long-time friends.

I invite you to roll up your sleeves and join me. Help me to serve you better. Get involved in your community. "It takes the whole village" Ask questions, join citizens' advisory committees, be engaged and let's search for solutions together. As I close, I'd like to read something Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. so eloquently stated more than 44 years ago: "...everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve. You don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love."

Thank you for entrusting me, not with a position but as the guardian of your hopes and dreams for the future of this great city. With God's help, we will prevail.