



Below is the unedited questionnaire response of:

**Michael Sterling**  
Mayoral Candidate

## 2017 Candidate Pre-Interview Questionnaire

1. Describe briefly your qualifications for this office. In addition, please identify up to 5 organizations or individuals who are actively supporting your candidacy and why you believe their support is important.
  - I am a 2004 graduate of Morehouse College and a 2007 graduate of Texas Southern University law school. I served as a corporate litigator at one of the largest law firms in the world, Sidley Austin and later was appointed as one of the youngest federal prosecutors at the age of 27, by Attorney General Eric Holder. I was the Senior Advisor to the Mayor of Atlanta from 2011 -2014 and led the reform of the City’s “most dysfunctional organization,” the Atlanta Workforce Development Agency from 2014 – 2016.
  - I have the support of Michael Espy, a former Congressman and the former Secretary of Agriculture for the United States. Secretary Espy became one of the youngest congressman and cabinet members to ever serve our great country. As a young candidate, I think it is critical to understand the difficulties and challenges in leading at such a young age. In addition, it is an honor to have the support and counsel of such a national historic leader.
  - I have the support of Kevin Gillespie, Shannon Evans, and Thad Keefe. Each of these individuals own a small business in the City of Atlanta. Small businesses are the cornerstone of our continued economic growth in the City of Atlanta and understanding the needs of small businesses is vital to leading our City into the next decade.
  - I have the support of the Nick and Donya Kemp. They are a married couple in Atlanta with two small children. Nick and Donya are both public school educators that work for Atlanta Public Schools and they live in the City of Atlanta. This couple uniquely understands the educational challenges that our city confronts and they know the immediate and direct impact the Mayor could have on our education system and how new leadership will impact their quality of life and their children’s quality of life. They have shared with me that as educator and parents, they support me for the future of the children they serve every day and for their own children.
  - I have the support of Deon Vincent, a life-long resident of Mechanicsville. Deon never believed that anyone in politics cared about him and he didn’t believe that anyone in the government would ever help him. He changed his mind after encountering me when I was the

Executive Director of the Workforce Agency. One night I got out of my bed to grab Deon from the back of a police car. Deon represents thousands of young people and citizens who believe that the City is passing them by and that government doesn't care about them. However, he has decided to believe again. For the first time in his life, he trusts someone in politics and he will cast his first ever vote for Mayor of Atlanta for me.

- I have the support of William Murphy Talmadge. Over the last several years, Murphy and I established a friendship. Murphy will tell you that he doesn't believe in much in politics, but that he does believe in me. Murphy is the grandson of former Georgia Governor and United States Senator Herman Talmadge and the great-grandson of former Georgia Governor Eugene Talmadge. I am an African-American whose life started at a small orphanage in South Texas. I believe our friendship and Murphy's support represents the idea that we can become a generation of hope and healing. It is a microcosm of the potential to reconcile divisions that once made it unlikely that Murphy and I could to ever be friends and would have previously made it impossible for Murphy to support me politically. It represents the possibilities that we can be a generation of hope and healing.

2. What is your vision for the City of Atlanta and how would you implement it? Please be specific.

My vision for the City of Atlanta is that everyone will be included in the dream and promise of our City. I want everyone to feel safe in their own neighborhoods, reduce income inequality, help small business thrive, improve our public education system, mitigate bad traffic, and improve infrastructure, and I want us to be a thriving entertainment and arts cultural center of the world.

I will draw on my experience as a federal prosecutor to work with law enforcement on smarter ways to tackle crime. I will look at developing a larger public safety team that includes essential services and programs with proven outcomes that reduce crime and increase neighborhood safety. I intend to focus on the quality of our force over the quantity of officers.

I will invest in more job training and educational attainment for residents. I will work with Atlanta's business community to solve the skills gap for middle skill jobs to provide more residents with opportunities to earn a middle-class wage. I have a 9-point plan for infrastructure that I would be happy to share with the Committee. In addition, I intend to conduct a street by street study to re-engineer areas of severe choke points so that in-city traffic on our most congested areas during our most congested times can move more rapidly. I will work with our research institutions like Georgia Tech to help develop methodologies that allow for easier flow of inner city traffic. I will also add a traffic response team that can immediately react to high volume backups and incidents in the city that cause traffic congestion.

I will work with APS to deliver quality universal early childhood/pre-k education for every student in the city. I will also appoint an education liaison from my administration to actively engage with local schools and communities to tackle relevant neighborhood issues outside of the classroom that impact student performance inside the classroom.

I will invest in small businesses and start-ups utilizing Invest Atlanta. I would like to develop a public private partnership fund utilizing the city's economic development arm that provides small business and start-ups with opportunities to have direct access to capital and provides them with necessary resources to start and grow their businesses in Atlanta.

As the Senior Advisor to the Mayor of Atlanta, I facilitated the legislation that created the City of Atlanta's entertainment office. Great cities cultivate arts and culture. I intend to work with local arts organizations, large and small, to grow the City's arts community. I also hope to create city-zoned arts districts, artists-in-residence opportunities and more.

3. Please identify the three greatest issues or problems facing the City of Atlanta and specifically how you would work to solve them.
- Ending the culture of corruption. I learned as a federal prosecutor that corruption in government can be both blatant and subtle, and it takes a wide variety of tools to combat corruption in all its forms. When I am Mayor, I will: (i) require anyone who lobbies the Mayor's Office, city council, and/or city agencies to register as a city lobbyist and I will require them to regularly file lobbying activity reports with the City of Atlanta Board of Ethics; (ii) work proactively with the U.S. Attorney's Office to implement anti-corruption procedures; (iii) put all of the Executive Office checkbook spending online and in an easily searchable format for the public; (iv) train employees in anti-corruption procedures and incentivize whistleblowers within city government to report corruption; (v) dedicate my administration to using technology to build real time alliances and exchanges between government, citizens, businesses, civic groups and the media increasing accessibility and transparency.
  - The safety of every family and neighborhood in our City. We must work to create a city where every resident can feel safe in their home and in our neighborhoods. We have made some progress as a City in adding more police officers to our force, but even so, last year we had a worse murder per capita rate than the city of Chicago. It is impossible to maintain the business growth, the population growth, to maintain the character of neighborhoods and communities if people don't feel safe in our City. We must be more creative in tackling the city's toughest criminal elements. More police bodies and personnel, while helpful, cannot alone solve the problems of our most vicious crimes such as murder and sexual assaults. I am going to focus on the quality of our police force over the quantity of officers. And we will employ more tactical operational pursuits across jurisdictions that get at the root of some of the more sophisticated criminal enterprises in our City. We'll also work to implement proactive community policing and social programming with demonstrated results to reduce crime.
  - Education. Atlanta cannot be a great city without a great public education system. I will work with APS to deliver quality universal early childhood/pre-k education for every student in the city. I will also work in coordination with APS by having an education liaison team to actively engage with local schools and communities to tackle relevant neighborhood issues outside of the classroom that impact student performance inside the classroom.

4. As Mayor, what would be your goals for your first 100 days in office and what would be your approach to achieving them?
  - I don't intend to have an arbitrary 100-day deadline of goals. I intend to tackle with relentless focus what I have outlined in my vision above. Those above-mentioned goals will be my one hundred-day priorities and my 500-day priorities. I do intend to spend significant time personally visiting diverse neighborhoods all over the City of Atlanta in the early days of my administration to immediately began uniting the City, along with other City leaders, around shared interests such as safety, better streets and sidewalk and infrastructure, quality education for all our kids, reduced traffic, and economic opportunity for all residents
  
5. How do you view the City of Atlanta's financial position? Should the City of Atlanta have additional tools in place to ensure financial management going forward?
  - I think the City's fiscal position has improved significantly. Our bond ratings have increased in our general and enterprise funds. I think we need to continue to maintain statutory minimums for our cash reserves. We also need to update our financial systems to ensure we meet our financial obligations and that we collect on outstanding debt consistently and on-time. And we must do more about mitigating corruption and suspending business with organizations that have engaged in fraud and/or corruption.
  
6. Please describe your philosophy regarding property tax assessments and municipal taxation.
  - Reasonable property taxes play a significant role in attracting new residents, businesses, families and to ensuring the City maintains affordable housing. I would support a property tax cap on the percentage that municipalities and local governing bodies can raise property taxes per year. I would support state-wide legislation to that effect. To maintain local control and ensure that property taxes could be raised in instances of necessity, I would support that cap being able to be exceeded with a super majority vote of the local governing body. I believe that would help keep taxes in check for residents, but still provide enough local control so that if it were a true necessity, our local governing bodies i.e. school board, county commission and/or city council could exceed the cap.
  
7. What is your opinion of Atlanta's MOST, and what approach do you support to fund long-term water and sewer operations?

- I led the effort on behalf of the administration to reauthorize the MOST in 2012 during a difficult election cycle. I even came out of that effort with a few scars from a public fight with a city council person. I support the MOST, but I do think we need to explore some public-private partnerships for the long-term funding of our water and sewer operations. I have been working with 32 Advisors and some of the country's leading experts on P3s to explore innovative solutions for long term funding.
8. Would you change the current procurement process to protect against "pay to play"? If so, what changes would you support?
- Yes. As I mentioned above ending the culture of corruption is one of the biggest challenges confronting the City. When I am Mayor, I will: (i) require anyone who lobbies the Mayor's Office, city council, and/or city agencies to register as a city lobbyist and I will require them to regularly file lobbying activity reports with the City of Atlanta Board of Ethics; (ii) work proactively with the U.S. Attorney's Office to implement anti-corruption procedures; (iii) put all of the Executive Office checkbook spending online and in an easily searchable format for the public; (iv) train employees in anti-corruption procedures and incentivize whistleblowers within city government to report corruption; (v) dedicate my administration to using technology to build real time alliances and exchanges between government, citizens, businesses, civic groups and the media increasing accessibility and transparency.
9. If elected, describe your role in ensuring ethical and transparent management of City resources by City employees?
- See answer to 8 above.
10. What economic development strategies would you prioritize to ensure the City of Atlanta captures its fair share of future job growth?
- I will invest in more job training and educational attainment for residents. I will work with Atlanta's business community to solve the skills gap for middle skill jobs to provide more residents with opportunities to earn a middle-class wage. I have a 9-point plan for infrastructure that I would be happy to share with the Committee.
  - I will work with APS to deliver quality universal early childhood/pre-k education for every student in the city. I will also work in coordination with APS by having an education liaison team to actively engage with local schools and communities to tackle relevant neighborhood issues outside of the classroom that impact student performance inside the classroom.

- I will invest in small businesses and start-ups utilizing Invest Atlanta. I would like to develop a public private partnership fund utilizing the city's economic development arm that provides small business and start up and opportunity to access capital and receive other necessary resources to start and grow their businesses in Atlanta.
11. What strategies would your administration implement to ensure an adequate supply of affordable housing?
- I do not think there is a silver bullet. There must be some mandatory and voluntary inclusionary zoning in the City. We should keep our property taxes under control. There also should be innovative solutions like micro homes and container homes. We can also explore opportunities in partnership with HUD for capitalizing Housing Trust Funds.
12. What workforce development strategies should the next administration prioritize? How will these strategies address and improve economic mobility among low-to-mid skill workers?
- We have great guidance from the recent Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which provides new guidance on mandatory partners, business leadership in workforce solutions, and requires regional plans for the first time. I believe that utilizing the guidance of WIOA and working cooperatively with regional and business partners to focus on business approved training for middle skill jobs in those high demand industries like health care, technology, business services and more, we can start to achieve better results on economic mobility.
13. What are the three most important transportation/infrastructure projects that should occur in the City of Atlanta? Please rank them by importance and urgency and explain your reasoning.
- I have a comprehensive 9-point infrastructure plan that is completed and that I will furnish to the committee.
14. What strategies would you pursue to improve the safety – both real and perceived – of all residents, visitors, and workers in Atlanta? What partnerships are needed to realize these strategies?
- Please see my answer above to my vision for the City of Atlanta and the three greatest challenges that the City is currently facing.



15. Georgia ranks 49th among states for per-capita arts funding. What actions would you take to ensure our arts and culture organizations have the funding they need to thrive and enrich our city?
- Please see my answer to my vision for the City of Atlanta and how I plan to implement that vision. I would also personally raise funding from philanthropic partners, increase City spending on arts, and ensure current City ordinances regarding required spending on arts are enforced.