

Life In Brief

Current Title: Mayor

Quick Summary

Community organizer whose work after Hurricane Katrina launched her into city politics; emphasizes grassroots-driven solutions to housing, public works, and crime

- Moved to Louisiana to attend Xavier University and fell in love with the state, settling in the New Orleans neighborhood of Broadmoor
- Rose to prominence as a community activist in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, working to save her neighborhood from being converted into a park, which helped earn her earn a seat on the New Orleans City Council
- Became the first female mayor of New Orleans
- Witnessed housing instability and a decline in public services after the hurricane; has made affordable housing and investments in infrastructure a priority, including through increased housing options for homeless and low-income populations, and investments in the city's sewage and water system
- On city council and as mayor, has focused on reducing crime, including through gun violence outreach
- Maintains ties to local organizations and individuals in the Broadmoor neighborhood and city's African American community

Approach and Motivations

Community-based approach; views policy through the lens of her experiences in Broadmoor

- Saw how the needs of her own neighborhood were ignored after Katrina and learned the power of community organizing
- Believes engaging with people who live in a community is best way to identify what that community needs
- As an activist, largely relied on obtaining grants from private organizations to achieve policy goals; as mayor, creates partnerships between government, community groups, and the business and philanthropic sectors

Policy Position and Areas of Focus

Policy priorities include housing security, improved public works, and crime reduction

Housing: *Persistent champion of housing security for displaced, low-income, and homeless populations*

- Led efforts as President of the Broadmoor Neighborhood Association to oppose city proposal to convert her neighborhood and five others into greenspace, securing \$5 million from the Clinton Global Initiative and saving thousands of residents from displacement
- As a city council member, worked to open a low-barrier homeless shelter and introduced legislation to register and inspect city rental units
- As mayor, announced increased funding for low-income housing credits and community development grants to create affordable housing

Public Works: *Focuses on providing modern and reliable infrastructure*

- At Broadmoor Neighborhood Association, led the effort to secure a \$2 million Carnegie grant

to rebuild the local library after Hurricane Katrina

- As mayor, negotiated “fair share” deal to reallocate tax dollars from tourism revenue to improving the city’s aging infrastructure, particularly water and sewage
- Established an Office of Utilities to enforce utility franchise agreements and to serve as a conduit between residents and electric, gas, cable and telecommunications utilities

Public Safety: Works to curb crime and gun violence through outreach and economic empowerment

- As a councilmember, installed crime cameras in her district and worked to address understaffing at the New Orleans Police Department
- As mayor, founded Cure Violence Initiative to reduce gun violence, including through programming at public schools on bullying and the effects of gun violence
- Stated that the best way to stop a bullet is with a job; launched program to match youth with arrest records with minimum-wage summer jobs

Core Communities

City Hall insider with ties to activists in Broadmoor and the black community

City Council: Currently presides over many of her former city council colleagues

- When running for city council, received strong support from Councilwoman Kristin Palmer; the two also served together on the Board of the Regional Transit Authority
- As a councilmember, worked closely with at-large council member Jason Williams to introduce legislation; Williams still sits on the city council

- Enjoys friendly relationship with city council as mayor; initially clashed with former Mayor Mitch Landrieu as an activist but has since earned his support for her work on the city council

Broadmoor Neighborhood: Lasting ties to neighborhood’s economic development group, schools, and religious community

- Founding board member of the Broadmoor Development Corporation and Broadmoor School Board; oversaw local economic development and renovation of the Andrew H. Wilson school
- Created partnerships between the Broadmoor Improvement Association and local churches, to find office space for development work and to open the Broadmoor Art and Wellness Center
- Continues to engage with neighborhood groups, including inviting the Broadmoor Community Church Summer Camp to visit her office

African American Community: Strong support from black community; organizes events to celebrate black history and culture

- Engages with leaders in the black community, including organizing the city’s MLK Celebration with community activist Sabrina Mays
- Strong campaign support from BOLD, a political organization that elevates black community leaders to elected office
- Introduced annual Black Film Festival; vocal enthusiast of city’s ESSENCE Fest, which celebrates African American singers

Relevant Financial Information

Attracted donations during mayoral campaign from local companies and in- and out-of-state

business

owners

- Preferred Outlets: NOLA.com and The Root

Biggest Corporate Donors (2017)

- St. Ann Investments (New Orleans, LA), \$5,000
- Wisznia Company (New Orleans, LA), \$5,000
- Citigroup Investments (Gretna, LA), \$5,000
- Orleans Properties (Harahan, LA), \$5,000
- Richard's Disposal (New Orleans, LA), \$5,000

Media: *Appears in Louisiana cable news to discuss housing, infrastructure, and equality initiatives*

- Favorite Subjects: Inclusivity, public works, affordable housing
- Preferred Outlets: NOLA.com, WWLTV, WDSU, WLAETV
- Social Media Habits: Active on Twitter since her election to mayor

Biggest Individual Donors (2017)

- William & Wendy Reily, CEO of Reily Foods Company (New Orleans, LA), \$10,000
- Doug Ahlers, Self-Employed Business Owner (Ringfield, CT), \$5,000
- Di-Ann Eisnor, Director at Google (Palo Alto, CA), \$5,000
- Robert D Reily, Retired (Metairie, LA), \$5,000
- Charles Kennedy Jr., Owner of the Kennedy Financial Group (New Orleans, LA), \$5,000

Speaking: *Speaks about equity and her personal background before college students, civil rights organizations, and community organizers*

- Favorite Subjects: Experience as first female mayor, disaster resilience, inclusivity
- Preferred Audience: Universities including Bard College, civil rights groups including Human Rights Campaign, and community groups including NeighborWorks America

Political

Donations

- Cantrell donated \$2,000 to the Democratic State Central Committee of LA in 2017

Family and Personal Background

Louisiana transplant with early exposure to the importance of social services and community involvement

- Born in Los Angeles, CA and raised by a social worker mother and a law enforcement-employed stepfather; father left the family when he became addicted to drugs
- Grandmother took in Cantrell when her mother could no longer take care of her
- Her grandmother would bring her to neighborhood meetings, and by the age of 13, she was serving as secretary for her local chamber of commerce

Publications, Media and Speaking

Public appearances center around views on equality, crime, and infrastructure; primarily appears in local cable news and at non-profits

Publications: *Has authored a few op-eds in local and African-American focused newspapers on crime and Southern Democratic leadership*

- Favorite Subjects: Reducing violent crime, the role of the South in the 2020 election

- Dates her political awakening to the early 1990s; her commute to Xavier University took her past the Magnolia public housing development in Central City, where she witnessed poverty and government neglect

Criticisms and Controversies

No notable controversies