

MAYOR CORY A. BOOKER

State of the City Address 2009 As Delivered

[INTRODUCTION]

There is not a newspaper that you can read,

a TV you can watch

or a radio you can listen to without knowing some of the state of our nation and City.

We are in a state of severe challenge;

we are facing an economic crisis,
a housing crisis,
a banking crisis.

Unemployment is rising,

GDP is declining and

hard working families and governments are facing the hardest of choices.

Newark is not immune to this national and even global reality.

This will be a hard time for our City.

But in the face of this difficult time,

Newark will not lie down.

And we will not hesitate in the aggressive pursuit of our City's agenda.

And understand this,

we have a great destiny calling us and we will fulfill it!

For too long our City has been underestimated and even disrespected but

in trials dating back to before this nation's birth,

Newark, our country's third oldest city,

has always persevered and triumphed.

We in Newark know who we are

even in the darkest of nights, when others gave up and gave in,

we found ways to shine our light, our truth and our strength.

You have heard me say it many times. We are Brick City, and just like bricks

we are strong, hard, resilient, enduring and

most importantly, when we come together as a city there is nothing that we can't build or create.

And so in this difficult time,

Newark is coming together -- across sector,

across race,

religion,

generations,

and even joining with phenomenal friends around the nation

to show our might and demonstrate what is possible in Newark

what is possible in America.

Through profound coalitions, Newark is demonstrating the best of American ingenuity.

We are creating innovative models of success and forming some of the best examples of American grassroots empowerment.

This is the story of Newark in 2009.

We have challenges - we still have more mountain to climb.

But this nation in crisis can look here for hope

can look to Brick City for examples of real urban change.

America can look to Newark as a model of a city standing against the winds of an economic hurricane

and in so many ways

America can see our City gaining ground.

[Financial Empowerment]

[Family Success Centers]

So we must meet the financial crisis with this spirit.

Newark must be a city of inclusion,

a city where every person counts.

Our city must be a place in which each resident has the opportunity to prosper and thrive.

This is an ambitious vision

but we are making progress towards achieving it.

Over the last year we have joined with others to create one of the nation's most impressive menus of financial empowerment efforts.

In 2008, through a tremendous coalition, we opened a network of 11 Family Success Centers,

one stop shops providing holistic support for families.

They served thousands of Newarkers by providing direct support in dealing with financial challenges,

housing concerns, childcare needs and more.

We helped families to succeed.

In the coming year, we will open additional Family Success Centers,

which will be even more essential as we grapple with the economic downturn.

This year, in order to serve the 4,000 grandparent headed households, we will open the first of its kind GrandFamily Support Center in collaboration with many partners,

offering in one location the services and support these grandfamilies need to keep their families strong.

[Vita Centers]

In addition to the Family Success Centers and the GrandFamilies Success center,

we joined with The Newark Asset Building Coalition to open 12 free tax centers,

throughout the City,

including one in City Hall.

These centers have raised awareness around the Earned Income Tax Credit and other tax incentives

the numbers are compelling:

between 2007 and 2006, the tax centers doubled the number of returns they filed – saving Newark residents hundreds of thousands of dollars in tax preparation fees

and we saw a nearly 16% increase in the number of people who successfully filed for the EITC.

Nearly 30% of those who filed with us had not filed taxes in previous years – even though they were eligible for cash back.

In Newark we are working towards the day when every dollar owed to residents comes back into their hands.

[Financial Empowerment Center]

Through another broad-based coalition, our City now has a Financial Empowerment Center.

This pioneering center utilizes a single location to connect people to financial and legal counseling, public benefits, tax credits and a host of financial empowerment opportunities.

One of the groundbreaking opportunities are Individual Development Accounts, enabling working Newarkers who are committed to regular savings toward improving their lives

to receive two dollars for every one dollar they save up to \$4,500

-- so if someone saves \$4,500 they can receive an additional \$9,000.

-- This is free money

-- and IDAs encourage the personal discipline and habits necessary for long-term financial empowerment.

[NHA's Self-sufficiency Program]

Another one of our great partners is The Newark Housing Authority, which has instituted the Self-sufficiency program to move low-income families toward greater financial independence.

Families receive a host of intensive services and can take advantage of interest bearing escrow accounts which can later be claimed upon successful completion of the program.

In 2008, these escrow account funds totaled over four hundred and eight thousand dollars. Attending one of the graduations I saw our residents go from being dependent on public housing to being independent home owners

-- folks went from debt fret to being financially set -- further showing that in Newark,

-- no matter what your background or how challenging your situation

-- we are building -- brick by brick -- programs that can help.

[Housing]

You can not talk about grassroots financial empowerment unless you talk about housing. We must make housing opportunities more plentiful and more secure for our residents.

Yes, we are in a housing crisis,

yes, the capital that fed the housing boom earlier this decade has dried up and yes, these will be difficult times for our City but we will step up to this challenge, we are working harder and doing more.

[Foreclosure prevention]

For example, when the sub-prime crisis hit, we lined up the best of the bricks to hit back.

The City has partnered with a wide variety of entities to create The Foreclosure Prevention Task Force.

The Task Force conducted street-by-street surveys, reached out directly to hundreds of households and assisted many families in staying in their homes.

The Task Force also hosted a Workout Fair in which 15 loan servicers helped over 230 residents stay in their homes.

This year, the City will fund 5 community-based organizations to conduct even more outreach and counseling services to prevent foreclosures.

Newark is making a strong stand and we are making progress and we are having some important victories.

I'd like to ask a courageous couple to stand.

Would Alvarnia and Lamar Davis please stand.

These are great Newarkers who will not only remain in their Newark home thanks to the Task Force but have been telling their story all over our City.

There is no shame in having fallen prey to predatory lending practices – you will not have to suffer in silence, reach out the city and a huge coalition is here to help.

[Banks]

Our local banks are critical to the financial success of Newark too. I will require that banks in which the City makes millions of dollars of deposits behave even more responsibly.

If you take City deposits, you need to stand up for our City.

And there are many ways to do so

– from foreclosure prevention to community investment.

And, in 2009, we'll be orchestrating opportunities for such positive and responsible practices to happen.

We'll recruit banks into a new "Bank on Newark" campaign,

in which institutions will make their savings accounts and other banking products better known and more accessible to our residents

– providing alternatives to expensive check cashing places.

Some banks are already stepping up.

For example, in November, Capital One Bank opened a student-run branch at West Side High School,

providing employment for students, who in turn help other students and their families increase financial awareness.

What a great thing to do –

go to one of our free tax centers, get an interest free quick refund, take your check

not to a high fee check cashing service

but instead deposit it in our student run Capital One Bank branch.

Talk about keeping our money in Newark and making it work for your family and your

neighbors.

[Affordable Housing]

Our belief, that every Newarker counts,

that every Newarker should have access to housing,

extends to low-income families and communities that are too often marginalized.

Newark's housing efforts must be aggressively inclusive.

If they are not, as Newark rises, too many residents may become priced out of their own town.

This is unacceptable.

Despite the economic downturn we have stepped up to the challenge of building a Newark for everyone.

Between 2006 and 2008, the City doubled the number of affordable housing units under construction

and we more than tripled the number of units in the pipeline for development.

We are incorporating low income housing into the fabric of our rebuilding efforts including in our downtown projects such as the Richardson Lofts, the first new housing in the arena area, which will have 80% market rate and 20% affordable housing.

I am grateful to the Newark Housing Authority Executive Director, Keith Kinard, and his team, who, through their efforts during the past two years

coupled with prior construction, resulted in the final fulfillment of the requirements of a lawsuit that has hung over the NHA since the 1980s.

I am also proud that we are working to create more housing for people who are often trapped in the middle

– they make too much to qualify for low income or public housing

but too little to afford an expensive home or rent in our City.

We are greatly expanding options for these Newarkers.

This work force housing is beginning to have a highly desired affect of getting our professionals –

teachers, police officers, and firefighters

to remain or move back to our City.

Through an incentive program we created with one developer, numerous City employees moved into beautifully renovated apartments on Elizabeth Avenue and are saving approximately \$1000 per year on their rent.

I hope that more of our firefighters, school teachers and police officers join them in returning to Newark

– Newark can be a city for everyone, and our professionals who we pay to serve our great city should benefit also by living in our great City.

Throughout our City, we supercharged our home-owner rehab program. Since January 2008,

we rehabilitated, or are in the process of rehabbing, over 100 senior citizen homes

– helping our elders who are on fixed incomes and who are often not able to afford critical home repairs.

I am proud of our progress at increasing the production of affordable housing and for the help we have provided to seniors and our municipal employees but I am not satisfied

– even in these difficult economic times, we will continue to work to build a more affordable Newark for everyone.

[Special Needs Housing]
And everyone means everyone.

We cannot allow our special needs populations – too often marginalized in our society – to be left out.

In the past year, we have made progress in expanding opportunities for these Newarkers.

We will soon cut the ribbon on a 51-unit supportive housing facility developed by HELP USA,

with significant private support from Newark's good friend, Jon Bon Jovi. 25% of the units in this building will be set aside for people living with HIV/AIDS -- the first new construction to be developed for this critical population here in Newark.

With Integrity House and, with the help of philanthropists, we are constructing an affordable housing project for women who are recovering from substance abuse, and their children.

I want to thank Oprah Winfrey for her tremendous generosity in making this a reality.

We are honored to have Gayle King here, Oprah's best friend –

please accept our thanks on Oprah's behalf.

Our special needs housing projects include increased housing for the homeless, and for people with mental illnesses.

And in partnership with Youth Build, one of my personal favorites, at risk youth are building housing for youth facing homelessness,

all while gaining valuable skills, working towards their GEDs and starting a real career path.

[Senior Housing]

For the thousands of seniors living in NHA properties, last year, we provided more of the dignity they deserve by completing comprehensive upgrades to the lobbies, kitchens and community rooms at 13 out of 23 senior buildings

and the balance will be finished this year.

These renovations also included new security features such as state of the art security cameras and

continuously manned security desks.

[Cleaning up neighborhoods]

Moreover, for our residents of all ages throughout our City, we aggressively moved to strengthen our neighborhoods by cleaning up, attacking blight and eliminating abandoned properties.

We are getting better at the basics

- we eliminated years of backlog on neighborhood tree stump removals and tree inspections.

We dramatically increased the amount of vacant lots we cleaned – performing over 4,850 this past year -- an increase of 145%.

Together with partnership and participation from community groups and block associations,

we increased the number of community cleanups by 50% over 2007.

Through our abandoned property ordinance, we are converting blighted properties into construction sites for local developers to rebuild neighborhoods, creating more affordable housing and employing Newark residents to do the building. This is the model of our new Newark

– from areas of blight we are creating building blocks for our communities –

communities being re-built by our residents.

Nowhere is this being better seen than in our West Ward.

We launched our West Ward initiative last year, rolling out our new abandoned property revitalization program to give opportunities to local Newark-based developers.

I want to thank Councilman Rice for his leadership on this project.

One group of minority developers, including my old friend, Terry Walker, Eddie Watson and Hassan Simmons,

are employing our residents and beginning to rehabilitate properties. This initiative also includes the transformation of an abandoned lot into a community garden and park

– making a once blighted Newark neighborhood, clean, green, and pristine.

I would like to ask Terry and Hassan, and their partners, Dan and John from the Newark Housing partnership, to stand up.

[Green Newark]

Thanks to partnerships among community leaders, philanthropists, nonprofits, union and

clergy, Newark is quickly moving onto the cutting edge of the green movement.

Last month we demonstrated a model for our overall green efforts, as we partnered with Laborers Local 55 to weatherize the homes of dozens of seniors helping them save up to 25% of their heating and fuel costs.

Not only did Newark seniors get warmer, greener, less expensive homes but 25 Newarkers gained critical job experience and participation in the union's apprenticeship program.

I want to thank Rich Cunningham from Laborers Local 55 for his leadership on this project.

Rich, please stand up.

I want to thank Councilman Payne, who is my chief partner in this green movement as our City moves quickly to prepare for green jobs and the other green opportunities that abound.

So from energy audits on City facilities

to distributing thousands of compact florescent light bulbs,

to green businesses,

tax incentives for green construction,

job training programs for a new green economy,

with Innovation Fuels, a biodiesel fuel production facility in Newark and other green business coming,

Newark is saving money, saving energy, saving our environment all while creating jobs and wealth in our City.

[Economic Development]

[Small Business Assistance]

With capital and lending drying up, and businesses finding it more difficult to invest, to expand or even start up,

Newark is stepping up its efforts to provide the resources to grow businesses and create jobs. Through our Bond Assistance Program, we are helping small minority-owned contractors obtain the necessary bonding to undertake larger projects in our City.

In December, three new bondable contractors joined the ranks in Newark – including Maria Yglesias of M&M, a Newark-based, woman-owned construction firm.

Maria, please stand.

Our team has provided support to businesses of all types providing technical assistance classes and on going mentorship.

The same team has developed a Fresh Foods Program to help Newark small grocers make more fresh fruits and vegetables available to our residents. With the support of Councilmen Gonzalez and Councilman James,

I am proud to announce that we will kick off the program in the South Ward owned by Gisela Rodriguez.

Gisela, please stand.

And through our small business, women and minority loan fund, we have made over \$1 million in loans to Newark enterprises in the past year,

helping to launch businesses such as

Dental Kidz, a pediatric dental practice here in Newark.

The business owners of Dental Kidz, Chris and Lezlie Harvell, who live in Society Hill are here today –

would you please stand up?

Beyond launching and supporting small businesses, we must attract new and larger-scale employers to our City.

[Business Attraction]

Last year we saw tremendous momentum towards this end.

In 2008, new companies such as Standard Chartered Bank and Mimeo.com brought hundreds of jobs to our City, hiring Newark residents through a partnership with Newark Works.

We are also seeing bars and restaurants open throughout our City

– the kind of change that always signals a city is on the move.

The expansion of the restaurant industry in our City has created new jobs and enhanced our diverse culture.

All of our growth prompted our first ever Zagat Guide to Newark restaurants which accompanied our first ever Restaurant Week.

Every day, this administration works to build on our strengths and we will continue to fight to bring investment, opportunity, projects and businesses to Newark and New Jersey.

In 2008, Newark had 20 groundbreaking and ribbon cuttings for economic development projects.

Fully half of those events – 10 of them – were in the last quarter of the year.

That means our momentum was growing even as the national economy was eroding.

That said, as President Obama has warned us, the national economic downturn may get worse before it gets better.

In order for Newark and other cities to keep our momentum up through the worst

of the crisis, municipal action alone is not enough –

we need the support of the State and federal government.

[Key Legislation and Governor]

We celebrate the efforts of Governor Jon Corzine and the support and leadership of the state legislature for passing landmark legislation like the Urban Transit Hub Tax Credit.

This legislation has the potential to be a powerful tool for economic development as it incentivizes businesses to move to Newark, attracting millions of dollars of investments and adding thousands of jobs.

This will add tremendous strength to our ability to draw companies and development to Newark and New Jersey.

With powerful neighbors in Pennsylvania, New York and Connecticut, we believe the Governor, legislature and our local team can not only compete but help New Jersey boom again

and have our state see the revival of her cities, expanding opportunity, hope and promise to all of our residents.

If we want to fight crime – let's create more jobs.

If we want to end poverty – let's create more jobs.

If we want to achieve our highest aspirations,

then we must foster an economic climate that creates jobs, jobs, jobs and wealth and prosperity.

With further enhancements to the Urban Transit Hub legislation and the swift passage of the proposed Revenue Allocation District legislation, millions of dollars of investment will come to Newark.

I have a partner in Jon Corzine.

He does not get the recognition he deserves for all he does and is doing for Newark

-- from the tax relief he is giving with the expanded state EITC, to the resources he has made available for our Family Success Centers,

so much of our City success is helped by our Governor.

Governor, please stand up so that we may all thank you.

And, thank you to Senators Ruiz, Rice and Codey

and Assemblymembers Coutinho, Spencer, Tucker, Caputo, McKeon and Jacey,

the amazing Newark delegation,

as well as Senator Lesniak,

for your exemplary leadership on economic development legislation.

Senators and Assemblymembers, please stand.

[New NJPAC Neighborhood]

Thanks to help from our Governor, the state Economic Development Authority, and our local team,

I am pleased to announce tonight that the City is moving forward with a partnership with The New Jersey Performing Arts Center that will strengthen our downtown,

add hundreds of new housing units and

create construction jobs in our City.

In partnership with Larry Goldman, we pledge to intensively move this project forward this year –

securing the resources we need to make it a go into construction.

Further, I am proud to announce that Seton Hall Law School will build 250 student residential units under the leadership of Dean Patrick Hobbs.

This partnership between two important Newark institutions – Seton Hall and NJPAC - holds great promise for our downtown's cultural, educational, and residential life.

The NJPAC project, the Seton Hall dorm, together with the previously announced Shaquille O'Neal 25-story residential tower in the former Science High School building,

make up an entirely new residential neighborhood around NJPAC.

Seton Hall, NJPAC and Shaq – a three pointer of monumental proportions for our City.

And this is just the beginning.

Additional developers are in our City preparing to move forward.

Developers like Ron Beit and Tucker Development will soon pursue additional development projects that hold great promise for our City.

[Springfield Ave Shaq/ Neighborhood commercial corridors]

And the Shaq attack continues on Springfield Avenue,

where Shaq will rehabilitate Newark Screens and turn it into a new movie theater in a better form.

Shaq will turn this facility into a state of the art dinner theater

– a unique venue where you can dine on an appetizing meal while you feast your eyes on the screen.

I look forward to cutting the ribbon, with Councilman Charlie Bell, on this Central Ward project – Councilman Bell, I will buy the popcorn.

[Cultural institutions]

I would be remiss if I did not say that Symphony Hall, this great hall in which we stand, must regain its past glory too.

Under the leadership of the City Council and my office,

the City has stepped up its investment in preserving this institution and over the coming years will dedicate more capital dollars to its rehabilitation.

Newark's historic institutions must not be allowed to diminish as new buildings rise and new venues emerge.

As it was in the past and still is today, Newark is the hub of New Jersey's arts and cultural scene –

from the Newark Museum (entering its 100th year) to the Newark Public Library to NJPAC to the Prudential Center to the new art galleries opening up throughout our City.

Study after study affirms that the arts enhance our quality of life and make

learning more valuable for our children – and for all of us.

If we can continue to elevate the arts particularly in this economic downturn, we will elevate every aspect of our City.

[Children]

Living up to our potential as a City begins by helping our children reach their fullest potential.

As we keep moving Newark forward, everything we do, from the arts to economic development should keep children at the center of our focus.

On the education front,

we are boldly stating that every child counts and every child should have a strong path towards educational and career success.

[Blue Ribbon Schools, Scholarships and Newark Charter School Fund]

We must be uncompromising in our insistence on educational excellence and cannot tolerate failure or accept mediocrity.

Our world is so different than even 25 years ago

-- our children must now compete in a knowledge-based global economy.

I believe that with the right tools and training,

Newark youth will not only compete but they will thrive and set the standards of excellence.

Newark is capable of being the best

– this is our history and our destiny.

My belief in what is possible is emboldened because all over our City there are islands of educational excellence that demonstrate our capabilities.

Two of our public schools,

Harriet Tubman Elementary School and the Robert Treat Academy, have been recognized by the federal government as Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence. Harriet Tubman continues to raise the bar of achievement in our City and

I want to congratulate Principal Deborah Terrell for the incredible achievements at her

school

– every time I enter the school your children inspire and amaze me.

Further, the Robert Treat Academy is the only school in New Jersey

and one of only eight in the country

that is being featured on the U.S. Department of Education’s website as a “high-poverty, high achieving” model school

– an impressive achievement as they had the highest test scores in all of Essex County

– there are students from the school here tonight, would they please stand up.

These schools have shown us that every child in Newark can not only learn but can set the national standard for success.

I, together with the Municipal Council, will do everything in our power to foster excellence in education

– from my Mayor’s Achievement Challenge to the hundreds of thousands of dollars in the Brick City Scholarships that we created and distributed,

we will provide more abundant opportunities for our high achieving students.

One of the best examples of this is the Newark Charter School Fund.

After much lobbying and work,

Newark was selected by national foundations, as one of three cities to receive a \$22 million additional investment to help our charter schools of excellence grow to scale so that Newark children will have increased options of educational excellence from which to choose.

Newark is becoming a center of educational innovation and reform.

We have a Superintendent that recognizes that we must have change,

we must support our teachers,

we must increase options for parents as we demand more parental participation,

we must pare down our bureaucracies and get more resources into our classrooms. I’d like to recognize the new leader of our public schools, Dr. Cliff Janey, for his work and leadership.

Dr. Janey, please stand up.

[Alternative High School Initiative]

Working with Dr. Janey, in 2008, we launched our Alternative High School Initiative.

With support from national foundations - such as Gates and Wal-mart -

and other partners like the National League of Cities,

Newark became one of America's premier cities for creating new pathways for youth at risk of dropping out.

Our new alternative high schools will provide innovative educational models.

I want to thank Councilman Quintana who is not only the Vice President of our Municipal Council but who sits on the Board of the National League of Cities and has provided leadership on this critical initiative.

We are also looking at many ways to keep our children, of every orientation, in school, safely, and to help them succeed.

I will not tolerate the harassment of any of our children

and after too many years of challenges, my office is working with the Newark Pride Alliance and The Hetrick-Martin Institute to start a pilot after-school program for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender youth.

HMI has served New York's LGBTQ youth so well for 30 years and I am proud of the program they are starting in Newark.
[Parks]

I'm also proud and so excited that our youth and families will have expanded opportunities for sports, recreation, open spaces and fun.

We have a phenomenal County Executive, a native son of Newark.

In the past years he has made dramatic investments in our 5 county parks and is developing a new 2.7 acre veterans memorial park

– the first new county park in 80 years.

He is restoring Newark County buildings and even building more.

I want to publicly thank him: Joe Divincenzo would you please stand up.

Well, Joe D is a quarterback and I'm a wide receiver, and from him I caught the pass – and I got the ball now.

In 2008, following his example – following his challenge - we announced the City's largest parks expansion plan in over a century and, over the past 12 months, have been delivering on that promise.

Through GreenSpaces, a public private partnership, and through partnerships ranging from the Trust for Public Land to Tiki Barber who is helping with recreation equipment,

we have started to build an even greener, more beautiful city.

We identified 20 city parks for rehabilitation or creation, 10 of those parks are now finished or are underway, employing Newarkers in the building process and creating apprenticeship programs for our Newark youth

– with the county and city in partnership, Newark is fast becoming one of America's most

green urban centers.

And we haven't stopped yet. I'm proud to welcome the Home Depot Foundation and KaBoom, Inc. to our parks partnership -

- they have committed to building a new playground in Newark this spring.

And further, our city is a waterfront city but for too long we have talked about doing a park on our river's edge but failed to deliver.

At long last, we will create Joseph Minish Park – we will soon start, and over time, finish Minish, beginning with a stretch of several acres of green space and boat dock along the Passaic River.

I want to give a special thanks to our Congressional delegation which, for years, has been securing funds for this project and so many others in our City.

Here tonight, from our Congressional delegation, a man whose name is synonymous with Newark, Congressman Donald Payne.

Parks add to the vitality and health of our City. But we must do more to address the growing health concerns of our citizens.

[Health]

In 2008, our City faced tremendous challenges in the continual demand for providing healthcare services to our community.

We saw the closings of two hospitals.

Averting catastrophe, earlier this year, both hospital sites were purchased by a group of investors who will develop cutting edge medical models to provide services focused on primary and diagnostic care.

I want to thank Councilmen Amador and Ramos and Assemblymembers Coutinho and Ruiz, for ensuring our closed hospitals became health centers containing models of primary and diagnostic care for our residents.

The health care challenges of Newark and all American cities will continue until federal action is taken

but again, we will not take this challenge lying down and today we acknowledge a win in the battle for health care justice in Newark.

[Newark Rx]

I am truly pleased tonight to announce Newark Rx,

to begin to combat the rising costs of prescription drugs.

Newark Rx will create immediate access to affordable medications for thousands of uninsured Newark residents.

Newark Rx is the creation of my office, Heinz Family Philanthropies, PhRMA, and other innovative partners.

Several pharmaceutical manufacturers are contributing funding and donating free – FREE -

medications for the uninsured.

I know through the amazing work of Teresa Heinz and Jeff Lewis of Heinz Family Philanthropies that more partners will be added and more people who need medications will get them.

I am honored tonight to be joined my friend, Chris Heinz,
a member of one of America's leading political and philanthropic families.

Would Chris Heinz, please stand up
and please accept our gratitude on behalf of Teresa Heinz and the Heinz Family Philanthropies.

Thank you for making this a reality
and
thanks to our entire coalition of pharmaceutical manufacturers.

[Criminal Justice]
[Community Courts]
Free and open access to medical care is one form of justice in our City. We seek many more.

I am pleased to announce a new initiative intended to engage citizens in the process of justice in our community

-- the creation of New Jersey's first ever Community Court.

Community courts zero in on low-level crime – offenses like vandalism, shoplifting, minor drug possession – and combine punishment and help.

In the community court, instead of fines many people can't pay
or short jail terms that do them no good,
quality-of-life offenders will be sentenced to visible community service throughout the City
and referred to drug treatment, job training, adult education, counseling and other services.

Research suggests that this problem-solving approach to justice works:

community courts in other cities have helped reduce crime while improving public trust and involvement in the justice system.

I am so proud of the collaborative effort of my team, the Municipal Council led by Council President Mildred Crump,
the New Jersey Office of the Courts and our non-profit partners in this innovative endeavor.

[Re-entry]

Our re-entry programs continue to expand and draw investment.

We are working on an array of programs to help men and women coming home from prison to succeed.

We now have innovative programs in our City

ranging from the nation's only pro bono legal service program for ex-offenders –

helping men and women untangle the legal barriers they often have to employment and success,

to our Newark Comprehensive Center For Fathers which offers an intensive, comprehensive program designed to enhance fathers' education and marketability in the workforce,

while teaching and helping the men to be responsible fathers and productive residents.

We also announced last year that we obtained over 4 million dollars in federal and private grants

to enable us to expand our ex-offender programs,

and help men and women coming home make positive choices.

[Public Safety]

But for those who choose a life of crime in Newark, there will be consequences.

Thanks to the profound involvement of the community,

foundations, local businesses and other philanthropic partners

– people giving of their own money – even council people on this stage who contributed,

our police foundation and Community Eye Program allowed our Police Department to become one of the most technologically advanced in the state.

We now have greater computerization,

enhanced records and communications abilities

and over 100 cameras have been placed throughout our neighborhoods that, so far, have captured over 5200 events and led to dozens of arrests.

We will shortly launch our Gunshot Detection technology;

have inkless, electronic fingerprinting, and other departmental innovations.

And, within the coming months, people will be able to anonymously text in their tips to our tip lines.

Economic downturn or not,

we will continue to rebuild our police department.

Last year we hired over 100 police officers and

we will hire more this year.

And, in the next several months, the City of Newark will break ground on a brand new state-of-the-art South Ward police precinct which will also house our Department of Homeland Security.

The results of all of our efforts can not be denied.

Last year, we took over 500 guns off our streets.

We are now down 38% in murders since 2006

and have 32% less shooting.

This means, because of our collective efforts – from residents in our community, to county, state and federal officials – that since 2006, over 200 people were not injured or killed.

But progress is not success.

We have work to do Newark.

One person shot in our City is one person too many.

Ask the victim of any crime in our City and you will see that the urgencies still exist in Newark.

We cannot relent.

We must stay the course.

We must rise to the challenge.

The evidence to me is clear that the best way to stop crime is through a community in unity

– creating jobs and opportunities, mentoring, coaching and tutoring, greater activism amongst our churches, mosques and other religious institutions. To stop crime we must have all hands on deck –

we will either rise together or fall apart.

And Newark, I am so proud that in my years as mayor I have seen this kind of unity.

From grassroots groups like the street warriors to block watches and countless calls to our anonymous tip lines -

Newarkers are standing up.

Newarkers are rising to the challenge.

And because we are rising,

every week, our headlines are NOT saturated with the blood of our citizens –

we are already 52% down on shootings year to date.

Because we are rising our city is changing its reputation and becoming more and more a place inhospitable to the level of crime once associated with Newark.

Because we are rising, our police director is now visited, called, and asked for help by police departments all over the country –

and they ask, how is Newark seeing such a dramatic reduction in

shootings and murders – how are you doing it, three years in a row now? Well there are answers, ranging from police strategies to community investments

. . . . but I sum it up simply by saying - Newarkers are rising.

Rising to the challenge and rising with resounding clarity of purpose.

These bricks are laden with heroes who every day rise.

Uriel Ocasio, an aide to Councilman Payne was at Andros Diner eating.

When he came out he found himself in the middle of an armed attack.

His friend was shot and killed, he was shot three times, in the face, in the chest and in the arm.

Yet, with these wounds he still managed to wrestle his assailant to the ground pinning him until police could arrive.

Seriously wounded he fought through his injuries,

healing his body with a spirit that was never broken.

I am proud that Uriel went back to work for the city, but not as a councilman's aide,

he joined the Newark police academy and is now a special police officer in our city.

When I stood over his hospital bed, and tried to comfort him,

his eyes gave me the comfort

- I saw his determination, I saw his grit, I saw his spirit proclaim –

I Will Rise.

Altariq Onque, is another city employee.

However, years ago he was in prison.

For six years he served behind the brick and bars of a state penitentiary for his crimes.

When he came out, as the easy temptations of the street called at him again,

he was walking with a friend and after a little girl passed his way;

the friend leaned over and told him that the girl

– who he didn't know or recognize

- was his daughter.

That was a moment that changed his life,

Altariq went on not only to turn around his life

but to start one of Newark's most successful grassroots antiviolence organizations called Stop Shootin,

which mentors youth and empowers them to succeed.

He started Stop Shootin in the same neighborhood that watched his arrest and incarceration.

I wasn't there but I know

when Alteriq saw his beautiful little girl

who he did not know before,

he swore an oath that for her, for his child, and for his City – he would rise.

All over our City there is a rising,

not just the bricks and mortar of new buildings and new homes,

but the spirit of Newark – a spirit of hope, of faith, of praise and determination - is rising.

In crumbling schools built before the 1900s yearning to be replaced,

there are teachers who reach into their own pocket to buy school supplies, they stay late to tutor and arrive early to prepare,

they look at each and every one of their kids, no matter what their background or home situation and say –

“you will rise, you will rise, you will rise.”

There is a 7 year old child in the South Ward,

his hopes unleashed,

his dreams ablaze,

his vision of the possible expanded beyond that of his ancestors

because now there is a black man in the White House by the name of Barack Obama, his mamma doesn't need to ask him what he will be when he grows up, she can see it in his eyes,

he will rise, he will rise, will rise.

There is a man in the central ward who works a full day and overtime,

his arms weary from work, his face and clothes dirty.

He doesn't go home to lie on the couch and turn on the TV -

I know this man,

he goes to Hank Aaron Field to coach other people's children.

Each one, he insists at the core of his being,

as they shag his pop flies,

will rise, will rise will rise.

On their knees in the darkness of tomorrow morning,

I promise you,

there will be a senior in our city,

she may be a deaconess in her church,

or a tenant association officer,

she may be a graduate of our senior citizen police academy or be raising her grandkids,

she will be bowed in prayer

– she has seen a depression, world war, the depths of sexism and racism, confronted bigotry and hate,

but she knows

God is not finished with her yet,

she has work to do,

for her family, for her building, for her church, for her city and she will get up off her knees from prayer,

before the sun appears in the morning sky

and we will rise, we will rise, we will rise.

This is the spirit of our city,

like Jonah in the whale,

like Joseph cast into the pit of death,

like Daniel in the lions den,

with faith as our fuel

and a gut full of grit

we will rise, we will rise, we will rise.

We have more mountain to climb Newark,

and it is the rough side that we must go up,

but we have our ancestors at our back,

angels are forming our wings,

and destiny calls us from the mountaintop,

I can hear it!

So believe me Newark, we will rise, we will rise, we will rise.

This will not be an easy journey,

there will be sacrifice and pain,

skeptics and cynics will gather like vultures telling us what we cannot do.

But we will prove them wrong again and again,

as we rise, as we rise, as we rise.

America needs our example,

they will be yearning for our light and hungering for our hope in the darkening of this economic crisis

and through our collective work

we will challenge them to look towards eastern skies

Because America's third oldest city -

Newark New Jersey -

is going to rise, rise rise.

Oh Maya Angelou take me home . . .

They may write about Newark in their newspapers

With bitter, twisted lies

They may trod us in the very dirt
But still like dust - - - We will rise
They may shoot us with their words
They may cut us with their eyes
They may try to kill us with their hatefulness
But still like air Newark we rise
Out of History's Shame
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide
We will rise, we will rise, we will rise
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
Bringing the gifts that our ancestors gave
We are the dream and the hope of the slave
We will rise, we will rise, we will rise,
Does my confidence offend you?
Well prepare to be surprised
In the coming years
You will see this city -
and won't believe your eyes
Because I'm telling you Newark, New Jersey –
We will rise, we will rise, we will rise!!!!

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