

*Mayor
Ferramiah T. Healy*



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6:00 pm

*City Hall Council Chambers
280 Grove Street, Jersey City, New Jersey*

STATE OF THE CITY 2009

INTRODUCTION

Good evening and welcome to our newly refurbished Council Chambers. We'd also specifically like to welcome our County Executive, state and county elected officials, DCA Commissioner Joe Doria, Ed McBride, Governor Corzine's Chief of Staff, my fellow Mayors, Members of the City Council, members of my administration, Reverend Clergy, Friends, and others. I stand before you tonight to discuss the State of our City at a time when our nation finds itself in the worse financial crisis in 80 years. Notwithstanding the significant difficulties that confront us and the upcoming challenges that we face, I am pleased to report to you that the State of our City is strong and continues to be a beacon in these difficult economic times.

Our city is stronger because we have changed the way Jersey City operates, putting us in a better position to handle this crisis. We have opened our doors to new businesses and development, but we have also demanded that these companies train and hire our residents and that they reinvest in our community by funding affordable housing. Although we have implemented bold governmental initiatives, we have lived within our means and have kept spending in check.

While companies around the world are hemorrhaging jobs, the changes we brought about have attracted companies to locate here, such as Arch Insurance, which recently announced it would move 300 jobs to our city. While construction and real estate investment have come to a global halt, we have several new major projects going forward in Jersey City this year. There are currently 3,400 residential units under construction. And while declining revenues have forced state and local government to raise taxes around the country, I am proud to state that our

municipal tax rate will remain stable for the second straight year.

Although we are in an undeniably difficult time, we are also at a historic and promising moment in our nation's history. I am proud to have stood with our new President, Barack Obama, from the start and I stand with him on his mission to change America and to restore our country to its rightful place as the moral leader of the free world. I am confident that with a new philosophy of government that seeks to foster prosperity from the bottom up and not through the trickling down of crumbs from the richest, we will see a smarter and more just government that will make a real difference in our lives. We look forward to having a partner in the White House who won't slash funding for public housing, but who will instead stimulate our economy through the support of much needed infrastructure projects; a partner who will truly improve our security by increasing funding to the COPS program, which will enable us to hire more police officers instead of spending our tax dollars on costly foreign wars.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Today, our police department stands at 895 officers, an increase from the 788 when I took office. Thanks to the hard work and bravery of these officers, violent crime has decreased in Jersey City for the third year in a row. Indeed, it is undeniable that Jersey City is becoming a safer city. For example, there were 2,746 less violent crimes in Jersey City last year than there were 15 years ago. That is a 37.5% drop in violent crime. Yet, even one crime is still too many and public safety remains our number one priority.

While we have hired more than 250 police officers since I became mayor, we still have 136 less police officers than we did in 1973...but we are not done. With help from the Obama

Administration, which has promised to adequately fund the COPS program, we will hire even more police officers and it is my goal to have a force that is 1,000 officers strong. Last year I announced that we were hiring 30 police officers through Urban Enterprise Zone funding. This year, we again sought authorization from the state to utilize \$1.5 million of UEZ funds to continue to pay the salaries of officers patrolling our commercial areas. This allows us to maintain a strong police presence in our shopping districts without increasing the burden on the taxpayers.

It is unacceptable that while 88 percent of police officers are assigned to patrol, we still do not have enough police presence throughout our City at all times...but we are not done. I have instructed the Chief of Police to develop a plan of redeployment to increase uniformed police presence by 15% starting on March 1st. This means there will be more cops in patrol cars, on the beat and on bikes throughout the city, in the day and at night, as the warm weather approaches.

Putting cops in the places where crimes occur and at the times they are occurring is the key to successful modern day law enforcement. By now, most people are familiar with Compstat, the technique of fighting crime that utilizes computers to compile statistics that directs police attention to locations and times where criminal activity is highest. Through my direction, the Jersey City Police Department has been using Compstat with great success for the past 4 years.

However, there is another great resource to fighting crime, which is the community itself. Our residents often have the best intelligence as to where and when criminal activity takes place. This is why the Police Department last year initiated a new crime fighting strategy called Community Stat, pursuant to which the police meet with members of the community in order to obtain information about where resources are needed. Additionally, good relations between the

community and the police force are crucial and Community Stat is furthering this goal, but we are not done. While the initiative has been in place for almost a year, it is my pledge that greater involvement from the community will be achieved through additional outreach. In the coming months, these meetings will be attended by other directors in City government so that residents' questions regarding other quality of life issues can be addressed.

In addition to a sufficient number of police officers and smart strategies, an effective crime fighting effort requires state-of-the-art technology. I am pleased to announce that our emergency responders will be utilizing a new wireless radio system this spring. Many may recall the problems that emergency responders had with their wireless radios on 9/11, which taught us all a lesson about the significance of sound technology. One of the first issues that my Administration had to handle upon taking office was to fight to maintain an \$ 11 million federal grant to acquire this radio system, which the City was in jeopardy of losing. Not only am I proud that we did what was needed to draw down this money to buy the radios, but that the system will be operated out of our state-of the-art new Public Safety Communications Center. This new building, which will be a Silver LEED certified building, will be opened in April.

Additionally, I am also proud of our new West District Building, on which construction will begin within 90 days. This is the first new police district to be built in our city in more than 35 years and will provide our police department with the technical and logistical support they need and deserve.

I have told you that we are not done when it comes to making Jersey City safer. That is why tonight, I am publicly committing to building a new North District that will serve Journal Square and the Heights. A new district there will provide the support the Police Department

needs in its efforts to keep these growing areas safe. More police officers, greater presence and state of the art technology are part of the changes we are implementing to make Jersey City safer.

Anyone who has heard me speak knows that the issue of removing illegal guns from our streets has been one of my top priorities. We have done this by instituting a gun buyback program funded through private donations, through creating the city's first anti-gang unit, and through advocating for local and statewide legislation that would prevent straw purchasers from buying guns for criminals. While our local ordinance was struck down in the courts, we have maintained it is our right and our duty to create laws that effectively protect our residents. Earlier this month, we received notice that the New Jersey Supreme Court would hear our appeal to enforce a 'One Handgun a Month' ordinance in our city. The state 'One Handgun a Month' legislation we have been zealously advocating for is also close to passing. I would like to thank Assemblywoman Joan Quigley for sponsoring this legislation in the Assembly and Senator Sandra Cunningham for sponsoring it in the Senate.

But we can't reduce crime through police presence, legislation and arrests alone. The most pressing domestic public policy issue facing this country is how to get to the root of the cause of criminal activity. The great Indian leader and humanitarian Mahatma Gandhi said, "Power is of two kinds. One is obtained by the fear of punishment and the other by acts of love. Power based on love is a thousand times more effective and permanent than the one derived from fear of punishment."

One way we have tried to live this philosophy is through the Police Activity League. In 2005, the PAL had just two programs—football and cheerleading—and just more than 50 children enrolled. There are now more than 1,000 youngsters, aged 5 to 18, participating in 14

different programs. One great example is Law Enforcement Explorers in which 25 teenagers learn about life in law enforcement. It is efforts like these that can help change the course of a young person's life.

Likewise, last year the Jersey City Police Department and the Board of Education received one of five U.S. Department of Justice grants to fund a pilot program known as G.R.E.A.T., which stands for Gang Resistance Education and Training. This program brings police officers into the classroom to educate our fourth graders about the dangers of being involved with a gang. More importantly, the officers dedicate countless hours to the youths, helping them with homework after school and in recreation programs run through the PAL. Giving our children positive outlets and positive role models is one of the most effective ways we can build our community and fight crime.

Public safety also means a state-of-the-art fire service. The Jersey City Fire Department is the best fire department in the state, and as such, deserves the best quality equipment, training and support. Last year, we began the much-needed restoration of the firehouse at 2 Bergen Avenue using approximately \$2 million in capital funds. The city also purchased a building on Kearney Avenue utilizing \$1.5 million of capital funds that is now serving as a new firehouse. This year, we will work to secure funding for the rehabilitation of the firehouse at Sip and Garrison Avenues, and to build a new firehouse on Communipaw Avenue.

We also secured for the Fire Department impressive funding this year, including a \$321,000 grant for a Metropolitan Medical Response System from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. I am also proud to report that our Fire Department received two prominent awards this year, including the highest award given by the United States government – the

Freedom Award from the Secretary of Defense. The Jersey City Fire Department was the first fire department to receive this award, which recognizes employers who go above and beyond to support employees who are called to active military duty.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

I am proud, and every resident of our great city should be proud, that in the midst of this global economic recession, groundbreakings are still occurring in Jersey City, towers are being erected and job opportunities are being created for our residents.

During the past several weeks, we saw ground break on two major projects. With the Monaco, we will see two towers rise on Washington Boulevard next to the DoubleTree Hotel. These two buildings constitute more than \$200 million of capital investment into our City. The project will create some 400 construction jobs and will be governed by a Project Labor Agreement, thereby affording union apprenticeship opportunities for our residents.

We are also excited about another high-rise residential building where construction recently began on the corner of Marin Boulevard and Grand Street. This project means nearly \$117 million in investment into Jersey City and the creation of 150 construction jobs. Again, thanks to our hard work to change the old ways of development in Jersey City, this project will be subject to a Project Labor Agreement and will provide union apprenticeship opportunities for city residents. We also expect construction to begin this year on 110 First Street, a \$172 million project that will create some 300 construction jobs and which has already helped to produce more than 50 affordable housing units.

I am pleased to report tonight that we have held true to our promise to bring change to Journal Square. On April 7th, we will see ground break and construction begin on the greatest,

most ambitious project we have seen in Jersey City in years -- the new towers at the former site of the Hotel on the Square. This development constitutes a \$500 million investment that will house more than 1,600 residential units and 70,000 square feet of retail space. This project will create 800 construction jobs and 300 permanent jobs. Once again, our commitment to change is producing tangible results. Journal Square will be built pursuant to a Project Labor Agreement, affording union apprenticeship opportunities for our residents. While we only receive \$350,000 a year in real estate taxes for this property today, we will receive more than \$120 million in 30 years from this project, which will also generate more than \$30 million in UEZ revenues and more than \$19 million in parking taxes for the City during this 30 year period. Additionally, we will receive \$2.8 million for the construction of affordable housing. Most importantly, this pioneer development, which is going forward in the midst of these economic hard times, will revitalize Journal Square as a lively central business district with robust foot traffic. It will transform and enhance the retail market in Journal Square and will encourage additional new residential and retail development.

But we are not done bringing change to Journal Square. I also promised to deliver a vision for Journal Square, one that is much broader than this \$500 million project at the Hotel on the Square. That is why last year we completed a study to create a new vision for the renaissance of Journal Square, which we set forth in a plan that is currently before the City Council. We sought the input of the community through an unprecedented public participation process that included several interactive public meetings. Our goal is to create a national icon for a sustainable mixed-use community that is pedestrian and mass transit oriented. This plan covers 244 acres and centers on the Journal Square Transportation Complex. As this vision is executed, the economic

vitality of the Square will be enhanced by expanding every level of residential and commercial activity in Journal Square.

A classic example of positive change is the story of Three Guys Pizza in Journal Square. Acquired by Italian immigrant Andrea Greco in the early '80's, this local merchant relocated and expanded to a better site within Journal Square. Consequently, they have enjoyed a 20% increase in their customer base and a healthy profit gain. Would you please stand, Andrea, Clara, Mike, and Chris Greco. Thank you.

Just 10 years ago, there were no hotels to speak of in Jersey City. Now we have five world class hotels. Last week, we cut the ribbon on the beautiful new Westin Hotel in Newport, which has brought more than 200 jobs to our city, with many going to Jersey City residents. This spring, we will break ground on a new \$125 million five-star Hilton hotel on Marin Boulevard that will have majestic views of the Statue of Liberty and New York harbor. This hotel will create 300 permanent jobs and more than 200 construction jobs.

We continue to move forward with our plans for a vibrant Powerhouse Arts District, which will be the arts and entertainment center of our city. This year we entered into an agreement with the Port Authority to relocate the electric transformer at the Powerhouse that has stood as an obstacle to the historic building's restoration. While we work with the Port Authority to find a suitable location for the transformer, we will begin stabilizing the powerhouse to ensure that it does not deteriorate further.

While we are hopeful that the federal stimulus package will be helpful to Jersey City, we have created our own economic stimulus in Jersey City by creating an investment friendly atmosphere. Most cities would be happy to have even one of the projects that I just referred to,

even during good economic times. These projects constitute an investment in Jersey City of more than one billion dollars.

But none of this could be accomplished without business incentives from our state. That is why when we saw the economic picture darkening during the summer and early autumn, I met with our legislative delegation and testified before state committees in Trenton about the importance of maintaining or enhancing such programs as the BEIP, the Business Employment Incentive Program that gives grants to companies who are creating jobs in New Jersey. I also testified about the importance of the BRRAG and the Urban Tax Hub Credit and fought to have the Urban Enterprise Zone Program restored to its full capacity.

I took the lead and called in representatives from the financial firms located in our city, such as Merrill Lynch (now Bank of America), Fidelity, Goldman Sachs, and Lord Abbott, as well as the commercial real estate brokers and major corporate landlords, to discuss the issues facing their industry in the midst of this economic downturn. Through the Economic Development Corporation, we have also targeted our advertisement and completed a branding campaign for the city so that investors and developers across the country and around the world can further see the benefits of doing business in Jersey City. We are also aggressively marketing our Urban Enterprise Zone program, which offers a 3.5% sales tax at participating businesses. We know in times like these everyone is looking for the best bargain, and what could be better than paying half the normal sales tax? And while retail sales are down across the nation, I am pleased to report that according to figures supplied by the New Jersey UEZ Authority, sales in Jersey City's UEZ increased by 29% from November to December and increased by 3% from

October to November. Increased UEZ revenue means we have additional capital to fund vital programs like police, street sanitation, business relocation grants to name a few.

It is critical that we be vigilant in ensuring that the development projects mentioned before provide job opportunities for Jersey City residents. I am proud that together with the City Council we passed legislation creating the Jersey City apprenticeship program. Under this legislation, developers of certain major projects are required to enter into a Project Labor Agreement. This means the developers must use union labor, which ensures that the projects are completed expeditiously and safely. Moreover, and most importantly, the unions are required to admit Jersey City residents into their apprenticeship programs and the developers are required to provide job slots on these projects for the Jersey City apprentices. An opportunity to join a union apprenticeship program isn't just a job; it's the opportunity to build a career. Apprentices receive a combination of classroom education and on-the-job training in order to learn their trade, while being paid a competitive wage. Although this program is still relatively new, it has made a difference in the lives of more than 100 Jersey City residents who have been admitted into union apprenticeship programs. One such person is 23-year-old Lamont Wade, who was unemployed and had difficulty finding a job when he first heard about the Jersey City apprenticeship program. He reached out to City Hall to learn more about this program and through the efforts of the Jersey City Office of Employment and Training, he was placed as an apprentice in the Laborers Union. Today, Lamont is working at the Aqua Blue building in Jersey City and attending classes to become a union journeyman, while earning \$18.00 an hour. Lamont, I would ask that you please stand up and be acknowledged by the audience for your hard work and how you demonstrate that this program can make a difference in people's lives.

The services of the Jersey City Office of Employment and Training become all the more important in difficult economic times. The Jersey City One Stop serviced more than 10,000 residents in 2008, helping them with job searches, resume writing, access to the Internet, creating e-mail accounts, computer training, guidance on unemployment insurance, and free fax and phone services. As a result of the efforts of the Office of Employment and Training, nearly 1,000 Jersey City residents were able to find jobs during these difficult economic times.

THE BUDGET & KEEPING JERSEY CITY AFFORDABLE

During this economic crisis, the last thing that Jersey City residents need is a property tax increase. Despite increasing costs over which City government has little or no control, we used every resource at our disposal to balance our budget without a tax increase and I am proud to say that the municipal tax rate will remain stable for the second year in a row.

We have made savings and lived within our means. Notwithstanding a structural and recurring budget deficit, we have slowly but surely put ourselves on more firm financial footing by restraining spending and by seeking alternative sources of revenue. In this year's budget, we have cut spending by nearly \$4 million.

But don't take my word for it. The Fitch bond rating service gave Jersey City an A+ rating on our most recent bond offering and gave our overall general bond obligation a solid triple B rating. According to Fitch, these ratings "reflect strong property tax collection rates, moderate debt levels, and a favorable geographic location." Fitch goes on to say that "Jersey City experienced strong economic growth over the past ten years, primarily due to increased commercial and residential development, and it has consistently maintained sufficient operating

reserves.”

We can still achieve greater savings and operate our city in a more efficient way to save the taxpayer money through the consolidation of services. As part of the process of remediating chromium contamination on city-owned property where our Department of Public Works and Jersey City Incinerator Authority are currently located, we began the analysis of relocating these two agencies. The DPW and JCIA should be relocated because the underutilized and obsolete buildings in which they are currently located sit upon chromium contaminated soil and the buildings need to be demolished in order for the remediation to take place. Our relocation analysis entailed a fundamental study of the services offered by these two agencies. It is my goal that by the time these two agencies move to a new structure at the end of 2011, there will be enhanced delivery of services on a more cost-effective basis. That is more change that will help make this city work better for the people we serve.

In addition to keeping our tax rate steady, we are also trying to make life more affordable by providing an array of affordable housing for Jersey City residents. Last year, I am proud that we completed 221 units of affordable housing in Jersey City. Additionally, there are 369 units of affordable housing currently under construction, and another 350 units in the planning stages. Next week, we will cut a ribbon on the Webb Homes on Martin Luther King Drive, which will provide 40 rental units to low-income families. The Webb apartments are located in a beautiful building that includes 10,000 square feet of retail space, which will help our efforts to revitalize the Hub on MLK Drive. This green building uses EPA Energy Star appliances that will consume 20% less energy than a standard building. Most importantly, this project will offer our city's lower-income families access to the type of higher quality, healthier living environment afforded

by "green" building practices.

Just this morning, we broke ground on Summit Heights, which will provide 15 affordable units divided between low and moderate income families and 30 workforce units for middle class families, such as teachers, nurses, firefighters and police officers. We have also completed the Harriet Tubman Homes on Martin Luther King Drive, a model for what affordable and workforce housing should be. Attractive, durable, and green, the Harriet Tubman Homes provides eight total units spread out amongst low, moderate and middle income earners. In addition, we will see the construction of Mary Norton Manor on Duncan Avenue which will provide another six units of affordable housing and 17 workforce units.

These projects indicate a new philosophy of affordable housing that my administration has made a reality. Affordable housing no longer needs to be cramped, segregated and low quality. We have shown here in Jersey City that affordable housing can include market rate and workforce housing, quality construction, and actually improve our neighborhoods. We have also set an extraordinary precedent by making our new affordable housing buildings LEED certified. Making these buildings energy efficient is not only beneficial for our environment but is also helpful to the ultimate occupants because their monthly energy bills are lower as a result of technology that reduces energy consumption.

In 2008, we continued our promise to replace our most distressed public housing of last resort with vibrant HOPE VI mixed-income communities, to provide our most vulnerable public housing residents with better homes and employment opportunities.

Last year, two HOPE VI mixed-income developments featuring green technologies were completed. One was the 67-unit Barbara Place Terrace with 56 affordable units and a multi-

purpose community center that will be open to the public. The other was the 66-unit Gloria Robinson Court Homes with 58 affordable units. Also, construction started on the 59-unit Ocean Pointe Senior Center with extensive on-site services to ensure low-income seniors can “age in place” with dignity. Construction also began on the 78-unit Gloria Robinson Court Homes Phase II – with 71 affordable units and another multi-purpose community center.

Not only did all of these projects improve the quality of life for public housing residents and their neighbors, but in 2008, public housing revitalization created 200 construction-related jobs for Jersey City residents, and generated \$3.5 million in contracts for Jersey City firms.

Last year, we also partnered with the state in the Live Where You Work program, a special home mortgage incentive program that provides a low-interest 30 or 40-year fixed-rate first mortgage for people who will live and work in Jersey City. The program also provides down payment assistance. This is more change that works for the people of Jersey City.

THE GREENING OF JERSEY CITY

Now, it is more important than ever that every individual and every level of government think globally and act locally with regard to the environment. I am proud of the steps that Jersey City has taken in addressing environmental issues, and I congratulate the Municipal Council for passing the series of green initiatives that my administration presented. These ordinances were declared by the Department of Environmental Protection to be the leading green initiatives in the State of New Jersey. I have directed our purchasing agent to purchase only energy efficient and recycled goods. When we construct buildings, we will ensure they achieve at least a Silver LEED rating. I am proud that when our new headquarters for the DPW and JCIA opens for business, it

will be in a Platinum LEED building that will be a model for the entire state.

Another green initiative passed by our City Council will prohibit the City from purchasing gas guzzling cars and will point us in the direction of alternative fuel vehicles. Jersey City also set a precedent by creating an ordinance that provides incentives to third-party private developers to build LEED certified buildings. These green initiatives are a great start, but we are not done. And according to *Men's Health Magazine*, Jersey City ranks among the top 20 cities in the nation for our recycling efforts.

One problem that we have to deal with are what I call "urban tumbleweed," the plastic bags that many of our retail establishments provide to their customers. It takes over a thousand years for a plastic bag to decompose, and these bags harm our quality of life as eyesores in the form of street, curb, and yard pollution. I am calling upon retail establishments, large and small, to phase out the use of plastic bags and to move to recyclable bags. I am also calling upon our residents to use recyclable bags, as I have been doing for many years. Jersey City has its very own recyclable bag vendor. I would like to ask Liz and Holly of "Bag the Habit" to stand up and be acknowledged for their business ingenuity which is also environmentally friendly.

I am also proud of this administration's record of aggressively seeking redress from polluters and securing cooperation from the state and federal government with regard to the proper use of contaminated sites.

One example is the site of the former manufacturing plant of Pittsburgh Paint & Glass on Garfield Avenue. For decades, this 16½-acre site has lay fallow and has adversely impacted the quality of life in the surrounding community. In 2005, we joined the Attorney General and the Department of Environmental Protection in initiating legal actions against PPG to compel them to

cleanup this site once and for all. I am happy that as a result of these legal actions, we have a settlement in principle with PPG, who has agreed to remediate the Garfield Avenue site to the strictest of residential cleanup standards pursuant to a five year schedule that will be overseen by a court appointed site administrator. Jersey City will have a seat at the table as this site is cleaned up in order to keep the public informed of the progress of the remediation. Moreover, PPG will contribute \$1.25 million dollars to the City's Environmental Trust Fund. I'm happy to report tonight that the first installment of this payment will be directed toward the improvement of Fulton Park on Fulton Avenue and Martin Luther King Drive, which today is in an unacceptable condition.

Another example is the PJP landfill, which will be converted into a commercial use: the AMB Warehouse. This warehouse, which is under construction, will create hundreds of jobs and is already providing property tax revenue to our treasury, which it never had in the past.

The other 32 acres of the PJP landfill were slated to be capped and closed off to the public this Spring through a remediation plan submitted to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. This plan was approved and would have made the 32 acres a "no go zone" surrounded by barbed wire. We refused to accept this and fought for a better method of remediation and a different future for this property along the Hackensack River. Instead of barbed wire and a no-go zone, we have succeeded in securing a new waterfront park that we are calling Marion Greenway. This park will host two sorely needed soccer fields, an artificial surface practice field, a long sought-after open space along the waterfront, a mile-long jogging path, and an extension of the Hackensack River walkway. In short, we're changing brownfields into green fields along our western waterfront.

John Muir, the great American naturalist who many call the first environmentalist, once said “Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul.” This is especially true for those of us who live in cities, which is why we have been aggressively working to renovate our parks and expand them. We are currently procuring four contracts to renovate Bayside Park, Columbia Park, Hamilton Park, and to create a new Lafayette pool. This year, we will begin renovating city parks pursuant to our new Parks Master Plan. We will also see renovations at Riverview Fisk Park, Summit Cornielson Park, and a major expansion and renovation at Boyd-McGuinness Park.

In addition to having great places to recreate, our Department of Recreation continues to offer an array of activities for our youngsters. We have added new programs, including our indoor soccer program, an expanded soccer recreation league, and our Saturday recreation program offered at seven locations from January through March. This summer, we will have five pools open where we will host our “Learn to Swim” program. Finally, we will add a boxing program to the Jersey City Armory in the coming months.

QUALITY OF LIFE

We have frequently said that we are engaged in the largest street resurfacing effort in the history of Jersey City. However, this year we’re taking our effort of filling potholes to a new level. Utilizing various sources of funding including CDBG monies, we are planning to pave a total of 19 miles of Jersey City roads. Each year for the past four years, we have repaved 10 miles of city streets, doubling the work done by prior administrations. This year, we’ll be paving Christopher Columbus Drive and other important roadways throughout the city.

To reduce traffic congestion and the air pollution created thereby, we will make it a true priority this year to synchronize traffic signals all over this city.

We are also making a difference by providing critical healthcare services to our citizens. Our Department of Health and Human Services serves thousands of clients through the Women's, Infants and Children Program, which provides education, testing, immunizations, and counseling. Additionally, the Department of Health and Human Services provides food vouchers to meet the nutritional needs of mothers and children participating in the program.

And this year, because of the challenging economic climate, my office developed a relationship with the nonprofit organization "Table to Table," which takes prepared food and other perishables from restaurants and food establishments in Hudson, Bergen, Essex and Passaic counties and delivers them to day care centers, pantries, shelters, soup kitchens, and other sites. Through our efforts, the organization will be able to expand its operations in Jersey City to reach even more families and individuals by receiving commitments from C-Town and the Hyatt Regency Hotel to participate in this important program.

I am also proud to report tonight that the City of Jersey City contributed \$4.8 million to the recent renovation of the Greenville Branch of the Jersey City Free Public Library which will re-open later this month and will feature an elevator and other amenities for the elderly and disabled, as well as a state-of-the-art auditorium.

EDUCATION

Slowly but surely, Jersey City is getting back control of our public schools. While we do not have a direct say in the preparation of the school budget, it is the city government that has to

send out the bills. And while the tasks before our school board are great, no one can be happy with the results of the recent round of testing of our grammar and high school students. Recent discussions between my administration and certain school board members have identified the need for an independent curriculum audit. Such audits have been used by other school districts facing similar challenges. I pledge to work with the Board of Education and Dr. Charles Epps, our Superintendent of Schools, to implement such an audit if a consensus can be reached.

CONCLUSION

Jersey City has changed a great deal in the last several years, and it is undeniable that it has changed for the better. And we are not done. If we remain dedicated and focused and if we work diligently and wisely, Jersey City will continue to thrive and prosper.

This is a pivotal year for our city. We will see buildings rise at Journal Square and the realization of a vision. We will see remediation on our west side move toward development. We will hire more police, pave more roads, and reorganize the way our government operates to create greater efficiencies.

There is no question that Jersey City is a unique and wonderful place. Those of us who live here feel a special pride about our city and a deep desire to see it improve. We are known for our determination and perseverance. We are determined to advance no matter what the obstacles. Yet, it is important that we move forward together and that no person or section of the city be left behind. *E Pluribus Unum*, out of many we are one. Together, people with origins from all over the earth will continue to make our city peaceful, beautiful, and prosperous. Thank you, and God bless you all.