

Trenton Mayor Eric Jackson's 2016 State of the City Address

October 13, 2016

City Hall
Trenton, NJ

Mr. Council President, members of the City Council, neighbors, fellow Trentonians, and stakeholders...good evening.

Thank you for coming to City Hall to hear my report on the substance of our successes, the challenges that we must meet together, and the hope and vision for Trenton, our bold and resilient capital city.

I want to thank Pastor Harris for his prayer, for his faith in God, and for his belief in our future, and the people of Trenton.

Before I begin my remarks, I want to acknowledge the elected officials who serve the people of Trenton with unwavering dedication:

City Council President Zachary Chester;

Councilman-at-Large Alex Bethea;

North Ward Councilwoman Marge Caldwell-Wilson;

Councilman-at-Large Duncan Harrison;

Councilwoman-at-Large Phyllis Holly-Ward;

South Ward Councilman George Muschal, who could not be with us this evening;

and East Ward Councilwoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson.

Now, Council members and I don't always agree, which is a healthy facet of our government—differing opinions and perspectives can result in innovative

solutions. And I know that these men and women are committed to our city and our residents, and their role is an essential part of our city government.

Please join me in thanking them for all that they've done and will do in the months ahead for our city.

Let's give them a round of applause.

And a very special thanks to my wife, First Lady Deniece Jackson, and my family for their love, commitment, and support of me and our city.

Let's give them a round of applause.

I want to recognize and thank Mercer County Executive Brian Hughes for his leadership and support. Our relationship with our colleagues in county government is essential.

I also want to thank Senator Shirley Turner, Assemblywoman Liz Muoio, and Assemblyman Reed Gusciora for their support and leadership at the State House.

I want to take this opportunity to thank our Senate and Assembly leaders for their efforts both publicly and behind the scenes to convince Gov. Christie that the Urban Enterprise Zone program needs to be extended, especially for cities like Trenton that need every tool to attract commercial activity to our local businesses. Thank you.

And finally, I want to highlight and thank our trailblazing Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman. We appreciate her leadership and advocacy of Trenton in Washington. Trenton's story is replete with firsts; we've been at the forefront of history, culture, manufacturing innovation, and leadership. Bonnie is among those firsts, and we're very proud of her and the work she is doing.

My friends, we continue to build on the foundation that we laid during our first year in office.

With the help of my leadership team—Terry, Francis, Marc, Ernie, Jim, Ron, Les, Diana, Qareeb, and Merkle—we continue to plan and execute and to produce results that advance and sustain Trenton's economic revival and improve the lives of our residents, especially our children.

Along with my hardworking staff, to whom I extend my thanks, we pursue our jobs every day with several key priorities. They are to listen; to engage; to collaborate; to inspire and to be inspired; to learn from our mistakes; and to establish a governance framework that positions our city to capture the people, ideas, and resources that we need to succeed in an ever-changing, highly competitive regional and national economy.

Trenton is unique.

We are a brilliant example of America's promise, but also an example of challenges that lie ahead for cities like ours who are seeking to reinvent themselves and take advantage of emerging demographic and economic trends.

Trenton is American ingenuity, American innovation, American ethos, American resilience, American resolve, American multiculturalism.

Our city of great promise and potential is the American experience.

How do we build on this distinctiveness?

How do we position Trenton to take advantage of opportunities, those moments that help us unite as one people to establish clear pathways toward our common goals, especially those aspirations we have for our children—the generations that hold the future of Trenton in their very hands?

Together.

I began my career in the private sector, became a public servant in 1994, and I have been in the public sector for 22 years, learning from and working with bright people and organizations to make things better.

I ran for Mayor because I love this great city and because I want to build on that greatness to ensure a robust future, a destiny that demands all of us to contribute to the vision and work together to make it a reality.

What I have learned during my service has confirmed my belief in the role of government as a key catalyst to empower people with the tools and create the conditions to help them succeed individually and for their families.

As your Mayor who is driven by this philosophy, I want to accomplish so much more for you, and most importantly, with you.

We must continue to work together to create a future for Trenton. No one man or woman can inspire renaissance for our city alone.

As your Mayor, I strive to do much more than what we've accomplished over the last year, and since we took office in 2014.

Working together in common cause with a number of partners, we have explored and implemented initiatives that have the potential to deeply impact the lives of people in Trenton.

For example, we want our residents to be healthier, have access to information about their health, as well as services that improve their wellness.

Under the leadership of Jim Brownlee, we partnered with the Henry J. Austin Health Center, a Federally Qualified Health Center that is at the leading edge of comprehensive healthcare delivery—from prenatal to geriatric care.

Our new shared services agreement with the Center ensures that Trenton residents who do not have health insurance—more than 2,500 adults and 1,500 children—are able to access comprehensive primary healthcare.

This is critical. Why? We know that access to primary healthcare helps people manage their health issues better and keeps them out of the ER, thus reducing pressure on our area hospitals, which are world-class, Tier 1 providers of care.

I want to take a moment to congratulate Dr. Kemi Alli, the Chief Executive and Medical Officer of Henry J. Austin Health Center, on her leadership and on the Center's winning of a National Award for Innovative Care for Diabetes at the Community Health Institute and EXPO in Chicago.

Please join me in giving Dr. Alli and the staff at the Center a richly-deserved applause.

Thank you, Dr. Alli. Well done.

I want our city government to do more than deliver the basic services that our residents expect.

I want it to be in the problem-solving business; to use its power to link ideas, people, and resources together to meet challenges head on and to brainstorm sustainable solutions.

Again, my administration's focus is on the well-being of Trenton residents, especially our children.

Guided by our city's award-winning Trenton 250 master planning initiative that incorporates community input into its processes, we've designed a Health and Food Systems Element, the first of its kind in New Jersey.

We're guided by this element with our Trenton Health Team to expand access to healthy foods, increase opportunities for physical activity, improve health literacy, and address potentially harmful housing conditions.

Thanks to the hard work of Directors Jim Brownlee and Diana Rogers and staff, we've successfully applied for and received a 2.1-million-dollar federal grant to abate lead in the homes of more than 150 families. This grant will also enable us to increase our case-management capacity.

This is a valuable expansion of our services. Lead poisoning is a persistent public health policy concern, and given the scarcity of government resources, cities can't tackle the problem alone.

With our Trenton Health Team leading the way, we've created an alliance with Novo Nordisk, a global leader in diabetes care, that will strengthen our ability to make meaningful and long-term improvements at the policy, systems, and environmental levels.

Through an initiative called the Community Health Collaborative, Novo is awarding a five-year grant totaling 5-million-dollars to help us underwrite targeted community outreach. In particular, the project will support the health and well-being of grade school children, educational programming for parents, and ways to provide greater access to better food choices.

We continue to strengthen and expand services for people who are homeless.

Last year, with our partners in county government, the Mercer Alliance to End Homelessness, and the Rescue Mission of Trenton, we launched the Coordinated Entry Assessment Services Center, also known as CEAS. CEAS serves homeless adults, providing a range of services that include placement in permanent housing.

Our CEAS Center has assisted more than 150 people since it opened on April 2015. I am so proud of the work that it's doing.

Last November, I answered First Lady Michelle Obama's Challenge to end veteran homelessness by the end of 2015. Together with our county partners, we got to work. We identified 79 veterans and were able to get them all placed in housing and connected to other services to help them rebuild their lives.

No one should have to suffer the indignity of living on the streets, especially our veterans. We will keep on this challenge and continue to be a safety net for homeless veterans, adults and families. That is our moral obligation.

I want to thank the leaders in our community who work tirelessly to care for and protect the rights of the homeless: MaryGay Abbott-Young, the CEO of the Rescue Mission of Trenton; Frank Cirillo, Executive Director of the Mercer Alliance to End Homelessness; and County Human Services Director Marygrace Billek.

Thank you for your hard work, commitment, and leadership.

Reinvention, I believe, must be powered by collaboration, and that is the essence of my leadership.

This is an exciting time for our public school students and Trenton public schools. Test scores are up. We've lifted graduation rates. We're building a new high school.

We've partnered with devoted organizations, such as Any Given Child program at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, and the VH1 Save the Music Foundation, to restore, expand, and preserve music programs in our schools. We've done this because we know that when our kids are exposed to the theatre, dance, music, and visual arts, they become more creative, more innovative, more reflective, more curious, and more confident.

I want Trenton's children to have endless possibilities, and, as Mayor, I will do all that I can to ensure that arts programming remains a part of their curriculum.

We want all of our kids to succeed in school. But to realize this, they have to be in school.

Chronic absenteeism, according to the U.S. Department of Education, impacts students across the country and is a challenge for children from all ethnic backgrounds. The effects of missing school are felt even more acutely by our minority children, who struggle with disproportionate socioeconomic burdens.

Chronic absenteeism is a primary cause of low academic achievement and a powerful indicator of those students who may eventually drop out of school. If our kids are not in school, how can they learn? More importantly, what solutions can we devise and implement together to reverse this trend?

That's why last December we partnered with community and civic leaders and the I Am Trenton Foundation, which provided a grant, to participate in President Obama's My Brother's Keeper initiative. Trenton's Capital City My Brother's Keeper initiative is focusing on three key areas: chronic absenteeism, employability of our young people of color, and childhood literacy.

Together with our change agents, we've developed an action agenda; aligned ourselves with Trenton Makes Words to promote reading; held a building trades fair; organized a field trip for our public school science students to Janssen Pharmaceuticals; helped shape our successful Summer Youth Employment

initiative; identified internships for high school students; and organized Trenton Makers' Day, which had a dual purpose—highlighting companies in our city's manufacturing sector and connecting our children to how cool stuff is built as a way to pique their career interests.

Last May, I visited 5th grade students in the robotics club at Parker Elementary School. I was wowed by their technical abilities and teamwork.

I'm not sure if you are aware of this fact, but the Trenton public school system has been working diligently to bolster its Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics program on a number of levels across the district, including the recruitment of more girls into the program. This is one of many indicators of our school district's dedication to preparing Trenton kids for high-quality jobs.

The robotics class is taught by Darrell Moody, an educator for nearly 20 years and a teacher in Trenton public schools for about 10 years. Mr. Moody is among more than a thousand teachers in the district who are committed to educating our children, and we're lucky to have him.

These intelligent, curious kids—these aspiring scientists and engineers—showed me how to program their small robots to detect color, follow the edges of shapes on the floor, and climb stairs in a nearby hallway. They are learning how to code. That's pretty amazing stuff.

Let's give our kids a round of applause for all their hard work.

I'm so proud of our public school students. I enjoy visiting our schools regularly to interact with the kids, because I always learn something from them; knowledge that inspires me on many levels and empowers me to be a more effective leader. When you engage our children and introduce them to possibilities that encourage them to apply their gifts and potential, you help them see a clearer path to realizing their dreams. You open their eyes to where their education can lead.

That, my friends, is one way we can reduce gun violence in our communities. We have to show our kids, convince them that we care deeply about them and their future, introduce them to mentors and activities that nurture their personal growth, and—most importantly—we won't give up on them.

I believe without a doubt that the quality of their education has a direct impact on their self-esteem and their earning potential once they leave high school. The time and energy we invest in them now will pay dividends in the future.

And I know that you'll work together with me to lift our public schools up, not tear them down.

All of you know that we're searching for a superintendent who is innovative, creative, a dynamic game-changer, who can lead our district into the future — and we've got to select the right educator.

Now, I want to share with you what we're doing in this century-old building to improve our city government.

In the Department of Administration, under the leadership of Terry McEwen—my business administrator—we negotiated and executed new contracts with all six of the city's collective bargaining units.

These new contracts allow us to fix our labor costs, saving taxpayers money, specifically with our two police unions. Those union members are working new schedules that have significantly reduced overtime and enabled police command staff to deploy officers more effectively.

We have been aggressive in impacting workers compensation settlements, reducing them 1-million-dollars from \$2.8 million to \$1.8 million over the last year.

We hired a new information technology firm that is upgrading our IT systems, including expanding fiber-optic capacity, our e-mail servers, making Wi-Fi available to visitors at City Hall, and assessing our software and computer equipment needs.

The Department of Administration prepares and introduces the budget and works with City Council to make adjustments and cuts. We hired a budget officer, Joan Garrett, who spearheads formation of the budget, which we will soon introduce to the Council.

We've strengthened HR processes. Employees for the first time in many decades will have a comprehensive personnel manual that details city policies and procedures, and we're providing staffers with training in vital areas like harassment and a hostile work environment.

We have vastly improved the city's relationship with the Division of Local Government Services at the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, the state government entity that administers transitional aid—20- million-dollars of which we received on June 30th.

Relationships matter. We've worked hard with our state government partners to restore their confidence that our municipal government is operating professionally, efficiently, and with transparency and integrity.

I want to thank Commissioner Richmond and staff at DCA for being a partner who has worked with us to improve our operations.

We continue to advance economic development, building on the forward momentum that we initiated during our first year in office.

At the heart of our strategy is real estate development, transforming blight into new and renewed spaces for residents, for visitors—for people to live and to enjoy our urban experience.

We're implementing a sophisticated software platform that will enable us to manage data regarding the many thousands of land parcels in our city. Better-managed information means that we can make smarter decisions involving economic development and land use.

Let's look at the triumphs and the possibilities.

On a beautiful sunny day last month, I joined Dr. George Pruitt, the President of Thomas Edison State University, and more than a hundred stakeholders from across many communities, to cut the ribbon on the University's brand new 26-million-dollar nursing school.

Now, let me ask you: do you remember what the site looked like before the University's new nursing school was built?

The old Glen Cairn Arms apartment building, which had long since outlived its useful life, sat abandoned and dilapidated for more than two decades on a main street of our city. Thousands of people passed it every day.

Thanks to the leadership of Dr. Pruitt and the University's board of trustees, and City Council, that corner has been transformed with a beautiful new building of higher education and opportunity. Today, it's a pleasure to see.

That's the direction our residents want us to go: forward, not backward, and certainly not burdened by blight that is frozen in time.

We've helped Mercer County Community College embark on a major 6-million-dollar expansion of its James Kerney Campus in our city's downtown area. The college's three-story, 8,500-square-foot facility will give our residents access to higher education opportunities in cutting-edge, high-demand careers with new programs in security systems technology. This investment in our downtown area enables us to advance our larger plans for our city's downtown business district.

With Thomas Edison State University's investment, never before has there been so much academic expansion, which is a brilliant sign of how committed these important institutions are to the future of Trenton.

We're acquiring real estate for new construction and adaptive reuse.

We recently took title to Block-2 from the New Jersey Schools Development Authority. It's a nearly seven-acre site that is part of the former Roebing Steel Factory. Over the next 90 days, we'll conduct an engineering and environmental assessment of the site, and then we'll issue an RFP for its redevelopment.

Our Division of Real Estate continues to divest our portfolio of city-owned property through auction—assets that should be generating tax revenue.

In fact, we've sold more than a million dollars in city-owned real estate at three separate auctions held right here at City Hall since my administration took office.

We've also sold sixty-two thousand dollars in lots and structures. These properties are no longer the responsibility of the city, and we're sending tax bills to the new owners.

And we've been aggressive in foreclosing on properties to get them into the auction pipeline and private hands—and ultimately back on our city's tax rolls.

Trenton 250, our award-winning master planning initiative that encourages community input, has helped to inform our economic development strategy. As you know, Trenton 250 is our long-range vision of a redeveloped Trenton.

Residents have provided a lot of useful feedback that we are immensely grateful to get, because redesigning our community for the future is a collective process.

Here's what we've learned.

Trenton residents want a safer city.

In a moment, I'll talk about public safety and how community participation is essential to keeping our neighborhoods secure.

Trenton residents want well-designed and affordable housing.

And they want it to be close to public transportation, energy efficient, and complementary to our city's existing architectural character.

What's great about Trenton is that we've got a solid public transportation infrastructure with a newer train station—one of the busiest in America—a successful light rail system we'd like to see extended, and a network of buses, and easy access to major highways.

This year, we'll complete work with our partners in Local Planning Services at the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs on a redevelopment plan for the Trenton Rail Station Redevelopment Area, and we will meet the requirements for Transit Village Designation from the New Jersey Department of Transportation.

Also, we've resumed conversations with stakeholders regarding the redevelopment of our city's waterfront, thanks to a grant from the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission. We will use this money to organize a practical plan that we can provide to lawmakers and investors. Our waterfront is a valuable asset that is underutilized. Changing that reality will require a significant alignment of interests and is a challenge that we are meeting deliberately and enthusiastically.

Trenton residents want a 24-hour downtown environment, and I know that Tom Gilmore, TDA's new Executive Director, will help us meet this goal.

Dynamic cities have robust downtown centers at their core.

Therefore, we must develop a strong mix of housing, retail, restaurants, artist studios, and entertainment venues so that residents and visitors' needs will be comfortably met. From there, rents and sales prices will stimulate new construction and renovation of existing spaces.

To that end, redevelopment of the Bell Telephone Building is in the pipeline, and we just acquired The Commonwealth Building, a corner property at 150 East State for market-rate housing development.

For the first time in many years, we're not only conceiving of bold plans that will fundamentally change the landscape of our downtown area, we're making significant progress.

A key part of our blueprint is Greater Trenton, a public/private partnership that I announced a year ago.

Greater Trenton is another example of how we're working together with stakeholders in our business community to attract private capital investment to our city.

We can't create employment and business opportunities without the investment and innovation of business. And attracting investors, entrepreneurs, artists, business owners, and new residents, requires a high degree of cooperation and is best achieved through the efforts of a unique public/private partnership.

That's Greater Trenton, which now has a founding CEO in George Sowa, an accomplished real estate executive who knows the lay of the development land.

I want to thank Greater Trenton board co-chairs Bernie Flynn and Caren Franzini and the board, for their recruitment of George, for their commitment to Trenton, for their expertise, and for their leadership.

In the long-term, we want a downtown area with assets that generate better returns on investment so that developers will build new projects within walking distance.

For instance, The Whittaker, a multi-million-dollar condominium community in the historic Mill Hill neighborhood, has nearly all of its 20 units sold with the help of 100 percent mortgages supported by the New Jersey Housing Mortgage Finance Agency.

The Roebling Lofts, a 43-million-dollar, 125-unit market-rate residential rental project is currently under construction in Chambersburg and is scheduled for completion and occupancy in the spring of 2017.

Nearby Brunswick Circle on New York and Ohio Avenues and on a former industrial site will soon be home to 169 units of market-rate rental townhouses. The builder, Mercer Management and Development, anticipates occupancy in the first half of next year.

Then, there's Culbertson Lofts: 66 market-rate units on Monmouth Street led by Ajax Management, a local developer serving residential consumers.

We're increasing our business advocacy—visiting more than a hundred businesses who've been operating successfully in our city for years to learn about their needs. For instance, The Hibbert Group, Marshall Industries, Case Pork Roll and Hutchinson Industries to name a few.

In the Department of Inspections under the leadership of Les Graham, we've improved the speed of service, including plan reviews and permitting, so that home and business owners and developers don't have to wait a lengthy time to get

their projects going in our city. And we've made the permitting process more user-friendly, particularly for our Spanish-language contractors.

Since last October, the department has issued more than 2,000 permits, collecting more than a million dollars in fees, which is a strong indicator of the demands on its modest staff. We understand that the process of complying with permitting, licensing rules and building codes can be very frustrating, but we are here to assist you in any way we can. And we will!

Our housing and sub-code inspectors and departmental staff are among the best of any municipality in New Jersey. They handle thousands of issues every year and they do it with professionalism, pride, and with the protection of our residents in mind.

We've strengthened our bonds with our partners in the business sector, working together to make important progress in areas like economic and workforce development.

We established a powerful collaboration between our administration, Bob Prunetti, the CEO of MIDJersey Chamber of Commerce; Millhill Child & Family Development; Rider University; and former Trenton Mayor Douglas Palmer to launch a summer jobs initiative that put 85 kids to work in private, nonprofit and government organizations.

Our youth employment initiative has been a resounding success and a testament to what can be accomplished when organizations and people of like-mind collaborate to support our city's youth.

We followed a simple formula. MIDJersey Chamber and its foundation and Mayor Palmer raised tens of thousands of dollars to fund the program, which leveraged the city's contribution.

Millhill Child & Family Development did an amazing job recruiting the young people who participated. And Rider University provided the training on their campus that was necessary to prepare the kids for the workplace—showing them the skills and expectations to be successful in the program.

The Chambers of Commerce are invaluable partners.

For example, Latino entrepreneurship and business ownership is exploding in America, and in Trenton. This activity is helping to expand our city's economy, and it couldn't come at a better time.

But, Latino entrepreneurs face many obstacles and challenges to starting and growing their businesses—everything from insufficient startup capital, understanding regulations and tax laws, and finding appropriate locations, to creating and circulating effective advertising.

We explored these issues and more during a Latino business discussion forum in West Trenton organized by the Princeton Regional Chamber of Commerce. It included a dynamic panel discussion that was moderated by our Chief of Staff Francis Blanco and John Thurber of Thomas Edison State University.

We learned that although the hurdles for Latino entrepreneurs seem common enough, they really aren't. The forum was an opportunity for me to learn and to use that knowledge to devise ways with my Latino Advisory Council to use city government resources to help Latino business owners succeed.

We're examining methods to build capacity for African American and women-owned businesses in our city; to help them access more customers and more contracts. Conversations and meetings with John Harmon, President of the African American Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey, have helped us tremendously.

To that end, we've been working with a consultant over the last year to develop practical strategies to help these businesses also build capacity. When our small and minority-owned businesses succeed, so too does our local economy and our city.

I want to thank CEOs Bob Prunetti of the MIDJersey Chamber of Commerce; Peter Crowley of the Princeton Regional Chamber of Commerce; John Harmon of the African American Chamber of Commerce of NJ; and Herb Ames of the Capital Region Minority Chamber of Commerce for working with us.

Now let me talk public safety—about the leadership of Police Director Ernie Parrey, about Trenton’s police force, which is working harder and longer than ever with fewer resources and an overall increased public scrutiny of police work.

Last year in May, I told an audience of business people at the Wyndham that our economic development work and our efforts to strengthen public safety are parallel action plans. They go hand-in-hand.

I believe that now more than ever.

In order for our work in economic development to grow we must have a practical, sustainable plan to combat crime. This includes gun violence, which has become a local and national problem.

In our local reality, as Mayor, it’s my charge to devise ways to create environments where people feel safe. I take that responsibility very seriously. I am pleased to report to you that we have very effective relationships with our law enforcement partners in our ongoing, comprehensive strategy to combat crime.

The synergy of these relationships has translated into solving crimes quickly, locking up criminals, and removing guns from our streets. This work is not done and it's not easy.

Last year, we reduced overall crime by nearly 9 percent, which speaks to the effectiveness of our police command staff and our rank and file officers. But we've had a challenging summer like most cities, with crime spiking almost four percent. However, overall crime is still down by 5 percent year-to-date, and still down 18 percent compared to crimes rates when we took office in 2014. We continue to work hard to keep our residents, businesses, and neighborhoods safe.

Let’s take a closer look at what our police department has accomplished over the last year to fight crime and to build better ties to our communities.

Twenty-three more cops graduated this month from the police academy. They will be partnered with more experienced officers in the field to begin the next phase of their rigorous training. That will bring the total number of police officers deployed to 247 in a city that receives more than a hundred thousand calls for service annually. We also have an ongoing, comprehensive recruitment drive to entice residents of our community to join the ranks of our police force.

We're addressing gun violence using our effective relationships with various law enforcement agencies to curtail crime in our city.

And recently we announced a plan to focus police resources to enforce and extend a curfew for our youth. To tamp down violent crime, specialized police details will zero in on six hot spots in our city where crime rates have spiked, and we'll accomplish this with our state, county and local law enforcement agencies.

We recently entered into an agreement with the FBI that will provide additional funding for personnel and vehicles for Trenton detectives who'll be working with the federal law enforcement agency on joint investigations in our city.

Because our city saw a spike in violent crime this summer, we welcomed a partnership with Acting Mercer County Prosecutor Angelo Onofri of the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office and the Mercer County Sherriff's Department. They placed their personnel alongside our cops in our city's most difficult neighborhoods.

You asked that our officers and police vehicles be fitted with cameras and we've moved forward with that objective.

We've implemented an electronic ticketing system. Police officers are able to issue various citations in a more timely and efficient manner.

We've reactivated the Old Trenton Neighborhood bicycle post to address quality-of-life issues in an area that is experiencing a renaissance.

The department continues to improve its relationship with our neighborhoods and community leaders.

Our Police Explorers Program, which introduces our young people to careers in law enforcement, successfully graduated 31 young people, some of whom had an opportunity to spend time at the statewide Explorers camp in Lakewood...and they finished Number 1 overall in this highly-competitive program.

Let's congratulate our Police Explorers with a round of applause.

National Night Out was a great success with over 85 community groups and neighborhoods participating. More than 3,000 children enjoyed Trunk or Treat, and Half Way to Halloween was a summer carnival that brought more than 2,000 community residents for family-fun. And I hope to see you at our next Trunk or Treat event on October 27th.

We partnered with the NJTL of Trenton – and SEED Male Mentoring Program to provide instruction and mentoring to our youth; to encourage youth to excel and succeed; develop confidence; leadership skills; and to reach for higher educational endeavors.

In the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, led by Qareeb Bashir, we're updating equipment, adding personnel, increasing efficiencies and management oversight, and making capital improvements.

We've hired 18 new firefighters for the 2016 fire academy class.

We've made structural improvements to Station 6 and Station 7, where we plan to activate two new fire trucks into service.

We've invested in a new 100-foot aerial ladder truck that will allow our firefighters to extend their reach and effectiveness combating elevated blazes in buildings and other structures.

And similar to the objectives of the Trenton PD, we want to encourage our young people to become firefighters. Therefore, we've launched the first Fire Explorers program, and we're very excited about showing our kids how to become first-responders.

By working together in common cause, our unique city of Trenton is making progress, capturing the resources that we need to become a more vibrant urban center.

We can only achieve this transformation through collaboration.

For example, I am proud of the work of the Trenton Green Team, a volunteer-led effort that we actively support and participate in. Our strong relationship with all the organizations in the Green Team helped us to successfully garner silver certification for our city from Sustainable New Jersey. It's the highest level of achievement possible. We've completed more sustainability actions than almost any other community in New Jersey.

This distinction recognizes the good work that community organizations, volunteers, and city departments are already doing, ranging from making our air cleaner through our tobacco-free parks ordinance, to making healthy foods available to our residents through our local farmers markets and community gardens.

In addition, we helped secure 25 thousand dollars in grant funding for a second straight year to make the Levitt AMP Concert Series a reality for music lovers. Hundreds of people enjoyed free weekend concerts from jazz to Latin to the sounds of the symphony.

And the Division of Recreation organized our own Summer Concert Series, which filled Mill Hill Park with music by local talent. These and other events such as Art All Night, Art All Day, our Pork Roll Festivals, and Trenton Punk Rock Flea Market, are making Trenton a cultural hub and destination.

By working together, we'll build a city that is more culturally rich and more economically vibrant, a city of opportunity for jobs, entrepreneurship, housing and economic growth—a modern urban center that is a climate-ready community with reduced air pollution, making it more walkable, more bikable, and transit-friendly with cleaner streets and safer neighborhoods.

Your city government is making important investments of time, energy and money to support these goals.

We've resurfaced several streets and installed ADA-compliant curbs throughout the city and we're planning to do more.

We're upgrading older traffic signals and stripping crosswalks and intersections around our public schools.

We are spending millions at our Water Works to ensure the highest quality of Trenton's water supply for our customers. We've made nearly 3-million-dollars in improvements at the Whitehorse Tank. The nearly 9-million-dollar cleaning and lining of Ewington North was completed on time and under budget.

We're preparing to make capital improvements to our four senior centers, the Mill Hill Playhouse, the Trent House; Hetzel Pool, the sandbox at Greg Grant Park, and Douglass House.

We have a bold plan for our downtown area that we'll be announcing in the months ahead. We'll be upgrading our metered parking in key city business districts. I recently helped cut the ribbon on NJ Realtors new 9-million-dollar headquarters at 10 Hamilton Avenue along the South Broad Street business corridor. The new building is the shape of things to come for that area, and we are working with developers to bring additional projects there.

Our city is making important progress.

After years of stagnation, faulty leadership, stakeholders growing ever-frustrated by a rudderless city government, and residents rightfully demanding improvements and government that has a vested interest in the future of our city, we are finally where we need to be:

Moving forward – moving together.

Thank you and God bless the people of Trenton.