

# Mayor Steven M. Fulop Inaugural Address



Monday, the First of July  
two thousand and thirteen

Jersey City City Hall  
280 Grove Street  
Jersey City, NJ 07302

Thank you, thank you, Reverend Clergy, Senator Menendez, Governor Christie, former Governors, members of the Legislature, County Executive DeGise, Freeholders, members of the Judiciary, Mayor Healy, mayors, former mayors, Councilpersons, labor leaders, most importantly my Mom, Dad, and family and finally to all who live, and call this great city home, welcome.

As Jersey City touches Lady Liberty, Jersey City has been symbolic of America; the historic struggles of immigrants arriving from foreign shores, the task of forging a single people, a beloved community, from the rich diversity of world faiths, languages and races.

Jersey City was destined to be that place, where families landed to begin life anew.

Jersey City was destined to be that place where people sacrificed not their faith or traditions, but raised their children in ancient practices, while offering them the American dream.

Jersey City was destined to be that place where despite not sharing a common historical faith, history, language or culture; we were united in the single belief of the gift, which are freedom and the hope of America.

Jersey City was destined to be that place in our history and so it shall be again today. From this day forward, my administration will be forged in the valued idea of Jersey City not only as a place of hope, but also of opportunity; where government is not an end to its own selfish needs, but serves the people for whom it was purposed.

Service is a clarion call for my family.

From a family of holocaust survivors that immigrated here for an opportunity to provide a better life for their children like many of you is born my sentiment that whether it is service in the Marine Corps, or service on the council, or those public servants teachers, and employees here today - service has always been understood as the price for a life well lived.

And my fellow marines know the credo of the US Marine Corp, "Semper Fidelis" calls upon us to be faithful to this nation and the service required.

Indeed, for me, service was the partial payment for the cost of citizenship. It was a principled way to recognize that my parent's hard work and sweat equity could only be fulfilled in this nation, in this state, because as our Governor knows, America and our State reward persistence, resolve, and hard work.

And whether it was my grandparents, Senator Menendez's parents from Cuba, Governor Byrne's grandparents from Ireland, all of our families were blessed with the opportunity to know and believe in the promise of America.

Jersey City has always been home to those seeking opportunity of this new American life.

Ever since Major "Light Horse" Harry Lee attacked the British during the Revolutionary War at Paulus Hook in 1779, Jersey City has played a critical role as a gateway to opportunity for the nation.

Think about the 60,000 former courageous slaves who reached Jersey City on the treacherous Underground Railroad in the 19th Century, or the immigrants who sought the Golden Door of the American Dream in the early 20th Century, or even today the Latino, Arab, and Asian Pacific families, who have recently revived our old neighborhoods; Jersey City has always been a gateway to America.

As Alexander Hamilton so boldly exclaimed, "On the west bank of the Hudson River, a great city shall rise".

And so, Jersey City, in many ways, is a beacon of things to come in America, a community which harbors the great challenges, hopes and aspiration of America.

However, Jersey City's history, like many other cities, has also struggled with forging a single community, our history witnessed the buildup of great manufacturing enterprises and then their eventual collapse, the flight of the middle class, the urban decline and the rise in crime, then the rebuilding of our coastline with gleaming new buildings, the disparity of income between our "Gold Coast" and those older, forgotten neighborhoods, the dysfunction of a political system, which promised too much to too many, while delivering too little to too few, and then today, most tragically, and indeed shamefully, the failure to properly educate our children.

Arguably, had we educated our children to the fullest measure of their gifts many of our problems would not have been so unwieldy.

But, we didn't.

Education, a basic promise of the American Dream, was slowly sacrificed on the altar of political compromise and failing standards.

We, as a community, must do right by our children, we must demonstrate to the state and nation that here in Jersey City education and training is our most precious legacy.

Schools are the place where the transmission of knowledge, the hope for a better life, the promise of the American Dream is either fulfilled or it lapses, and then dies.

For education and workforce training, the seeking of a job and the prospect of work must be a cornerstone for our fellow Jersey City residents.

Jersey City must not only improve the education of our children, but we also must align the training of skills to the creation of jobs.

While we continue to attract investment in our city, we have a responsibility, and duty, to ensure that capital investment is matched with an investment in the training.

As my friends from the Carpenters, Operating Engineers and 32BJ know, we have to ensure that workers receive quality training for real work opportunities.

Today's lack of alignment between education and training and job opportunities is a challenge we must answer.

Working with labor and business, houses of worship and nonprofits, Jersey City will link training to jobs for the benefit of our families.

Here in Jersey City, the percentage of unemployed young is tragically high, particularly among young men of color.

We must make every effort to find a path of training toward employment.

If gang violence, addiction and prison have become the all too common end of our young, then we have to make every effort to reclaim their youthful promise toward a healthy, productive and law abiding end.

And, if that young person is suffering from addiction, served jail or prison time, languished in homelessness, it is not our option to discard them; actually, our obligation only intensifies to reclaim that lost young life.

As it was instilled in me in the US Marine Corp, leave no one behind.

Jersey City, indeed America, cannot lapse into the world of "have" versus "have not", and it is my commitment to change this tide in Jersey City.

As the son of immigrant parents, there is nothing more important to me than the idea of education and training.

My parents left the failed dysfunction of communism to search for opportunity here, to start a business, to work hard, and to give back.

My grandfather worked for 30 years in a plastic manufacturing company on West Side Avenue to make sure that I would have a better opportunity than he did.

Good schools, sound job training, will strengthen our communities and neighborhoods.

Education, job training, and a good job will bolster our families, our neighborhoods, and our city.

As the Jersey City community is built with our differences, as well as with our similarities, as one of the most ethnically and racially diverse cities in the world.

We understand and we are committed to the creation of Dr. King's "beloved community."

Whether the office parks and condominiums of downtown, the neighborhoods on "the Hill" or the artists of Bergen-Lafayette, or the family houses and apartment buildings of The Heights, we rise or fall as a single community.

The success of our downtown must be linked to job opportunities for the graduate of Snyder or Dickinson and all of our high schools.

We must create pathways to link the jobs of tomorrow with the education of today.

Thus, after education and workforce training, a second priority is increased private capital investment to enhance the economic quality of life of our communities.

The aspirations of those families who came to Jersey City were not simply to flee the horrors of past homelands but it was the desire to move toward a place of economic promise, a better life, and the hope of an even better future for their children.

To help families achieve those worthy ends, we need even greater private capital investment, and a government that works in an honest and efficient manner.

We cannot subscribe to the false choice, between the prosperity of Downtown and the potential of our older neighborhoods.

No, Jersey City has engaged in that false choice for too long.

Indeed, we are and must be one city, one community, one congregation of believers in the aspirations of our future.

A great city requires commercial enterprise, a trained labor workforce, quality schools, and beloved communities.

Our local history demonstrates when we work together, as a community, as a shared city, whatever the challenge, we are at our best.

When we engage in idle, self-destructive bickering; instead of building a sound economic and educational future, we lose precious time and the promise of opportunity for our children.

We must recognize that investment in our city, new construction of offices and condominiums, city parks and city-scapes, is not only essential - but good.

The great cities of this nation don't demonize business, but their mayors pursue it.

That is my second commitment to you.

In addition to improving education and job training, while encouraging increased investment in our city, my commitment is to lead an ethical and competent city government.

Recognizing the rich and colorful legacy of many of Jersey City's past mayors, I offer this one promise: we will be both honest and competent.

To quote the late NYC Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, "there is no Democratic or Republican way of cleaning the streets."

Thus, we must be less political and more pragmatic to run a city that works, where streets are safe, neighborhoods are clean, properties are maintained, and property taxes are stabilized.

In a word, "efficient."

In all of these commitments and obligations, I have set the bar high for myself, our administration and this beloved city.

We must ask more of ourselves for it is what we now do, in this time, which will determine the course of this great city for our children.

When future generations reflect back upon this time will they understand us to be a city who set aside our petty differences to build a great "city on a hill" or did we allow our own selfish natures to destroy what we have been asked to do.

When Benjamin Franklin appropriated the phrase "God helps those who help themselves" in his 1736 almanac, he was suggesting that we are blessed with the capacity to influence our fate by the work we undertake only if we are willing to forgo our own interests.

Now, we must rededicate ourselves to the hope and opportunity, which is Jersey City.

Yet, this as mayor, I cannot achieve this by myself because we collectively must be willing to work for the future.

I share with you a story from the Talmud regarding Honi the Righteous.

One day, Honi the Righteous was walking on the road and saw a man planting a carob tree.

Honi asked the man, "How long will it take for this tree to bear fruit?"

The man replied, "Seventy years."

Honi then asked the man, "And do you think you will live another seventy years and eat the fruit of this tree?"

The man answered, "Perhaps not. However, when I was born into this world, I found many carob trees planted by my father and grandfather.

Just as they planted trees for me, I am planting trees for my children and grandchildren so they will be able to eat the fruit of these trees."

And, so it must be for us.

Here today, now, in front of this hall, which houses the aspirations of our community, we must pledge to do our best: to evoke our best, to serve our community, serve our elderly, and serve our future, our children.

And, yes, we will inevitably have policy disagreements.

Which are essential, in a civil democracy; but let there never be a discord over this simple truth: in the service of one another, we build community, our "beloved community."

And so I ask you to work together today, whether you were part of our campaign or another, whether you lived in Jersey City your entire life or less than a year, to work for the future of Jersey City making the most prominent city in the country.

And, if you pledge your goodwill, faith and hope to the powerful vision of a strong Jersey City that educates her precious young, bolsters valuable investment, and gets the job done, this administration will serve to deliver upon those commitments with tenacity, diligence, and the strength of community.

Thank you all for coming today, God Bless you all and God Bless Jersey City.

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