

## Office of the Governor

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### NEWS RELEASE

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#### **Governor Whitman Addresses Town Hall Los Angeles**

New Jersey Gov. Christie Whitman today gave the keynote address at a luncheon of the Town Hall Los Angeles, where she spoke to the forum about the importance of investing in our cities.

Town Hall Los Angeles is a non-profit, nonpartisan forum established in 1937 to facilitate the discussion of public issues. It has a membership of 3,500 representatives from business, the professions, academia, government, the media, and the arts.

The text of the Governor's remarks is attached.

#### **REMARKS OF GOVERNOR CHRISTINE TODD WHITMAN TOWN HALL LOS ANGELES SEPTEMBER 10, 1998**

Good morning. It is a pleasure to be here in Los Angeles, the city of the stars. But L.A. is much more than that. The greatness of this city comes from the sum of its parts -- its neighborhoods. And I'd like to take some time today to talk about the importance of our cities and those neighborhoods.

Whether it's Melrose or Westwood, Little Tokyo or South Los Angeles, West Athens or La Brea -- each neighborhood here has its own character, its own spirit. Neighborhoods are a city's vitality.

Not that long ago, economic decline was draining the vitality of Los Angeles and other large cities. Neighborhoods were devastated by crime. Jobs were fleeing and welfare rolls were growing.

The story is very different today. California's state economy is strong. Taxes are lower. There's a lot less red tape, and a more business-friendly attitude. All of which have had a positive effect on cities.

Today, there is a feeling of opportunity and optimism in Los Angeles. Crime is lower. Welfare rolls are shrinking, jobs and people are coming back to the city.

Just as you've done here, New Jersey is working to restore opportunity and optimism to our cities, and we're getting there through a revolutionary new approach.

It's called listening.

It sounds simplistic, but believe me, it's a radical departure from the way things used to be. For years, when it came to urban revitalization, the prevailing attitude was, "government knows best."

Well, government didn't know best.

The real experts in urban revitalization have never been the bureaucrats. The experts are the people who live and work in the city's neighborhoods. They are homeowners and local businesswomen and men - the mothers and fathers and children who live there every day of their lives. They are the ones who know what their communities need. It's our job in government to help them get it.

I know Mayor Riordan shares this philosophy. His Targeted Neighborhood and Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiatives are all about listening and working with communities through public private partnerships.

And that's very much the heart of our efforts to revitalize New Jersey's cities. Our approach starts by giving people more opportunities for home ownership, helping

urban churches continue their great work in serving the people of the community, and investing in the economic and cultural life of our cities.

Cities are our past. And they're also our future because they have the infrastructure -- the roads, the bridges, the transportation. They have the workforce. You don't need to reinvent the wheel, you have a city. But you need to let people know that. You need to focus attention on what cities have to offer.

Some of you may know that one of my major goals this year is open space preservation. We want to set aside one million acres of open space over ten years. We know open space preservation is great for the environment, but what does it have to do with cities? Open space preservation refocuses development to areas where infrastructure already exists -- our cities and urban areas.

Combine that with common sense regulation, and now you have made it easier for development to occur. That's the strategy we're adopting in New Jersey. That's why we've created a separate code of building standards for buildings undergoing renovation, making us the first state in the nation with such an approach.

Floors that aren't completely flat and doors that aren't totally plumb don't constitute a safety hazard, but fixing them drives up costs. These new rules address these kinds of issues and are common sense changes that take away the financial disincentives of rehabbing old buildings.

Thanks to these new codes, a building that stood vacant in Jersey City for eight years is today being transformed into 24 housing units for senior citizens and a daycare center for 100 children.

True community empowerment starts with home ownership. And we're encouraging home ownership with programs that provide low-interest loans for urban homeowners. This program makes it possible for people in our cities to pay less for home mortgages than they did for rent.

We're also creating affordable housing by helping developers build and sell thousands of homes in areas that haven't seen new construction in decades. By providing incentives for, and expediting the cleanup of so-called brownfields, or contaminated sites, we are making a difference.

Because of these programs, there are 99 affordable housing units standing on what was once a trash-strewn lot in Elizabeth. There are homeowners -- and a brand new homeowners' association - along a Newark street that once was a junkyard and vacant lots.

Community empowerment also means tapping into a community's strength. In many communities, that strength comes from the local house of worship. Urban churches and other faith-based groups often support communities with programs that run the gamut from child care to job training to housing. They can be the spark for revitalizing a city neighborhood.

In New Jersey, our Faith-Based Community Development Initiative acknowledges their power and gives faith-based groups the technical and financial assistance they need to realize their neighborhood improvement plans.

We're starting to see the dividends of many of our efforts. One of the most symbolic is in our state capital, Trenton. On a strip of Delaware River waterfront that was once dotted with weeds and abandoned factories are now a minor league baseball stadium that's sold out every night, an office complex, a new restaurant and nightclub. This once-abandoned waterfront today is alive with baseball fans, families, and people out for an evening of dinner and dancing.

This progress is encouraging, and I believe these projects are the seeds of even greater development. But we all know that the foundation of strong neighborhoods and dynamic cities lies in first-rate schools.

Urban schools need to graduate students with the skills to keep the economy vibrant. We're doing that in New Jersey with the one-two punch of tough new academic standards and greater accountability.

That wasn't always our state's approach to education. For nearly three decades, New Jersey's highest court kept telling administration after administration that they weren't doing enough for the poorest districts, most of which are in our cities.

We weren't alone, of course. Many states continue to face major court battles over school funding, including California.

Our state Supreme Court demanded that the state honor its constitutional obligation to provide a, quote, "thorough and efficient education," unquote, for every child in every public school.

The problem was that for most of the past three decades, the justices defined "thorough and efficient" with dollar signs. They imposed a strictly fiscal solution that my predecessors followed through the 70s, the 80s and the 90s. Governors kept throwing money at the schools, only to be told by the court, "It's not enough. Try again. The children deserve more."

The court was right, of course. The children did, and do, deserve more. And as the court cases dragged on, our state spent more. But we didn't get better educated students. If anything, students in some of our poorest urban districts did worse.

We believed the way to improve education for our state was from the inside out. And we set out to convince the court that what our constitution guaranteed each student wasn't just about money. It was about quality.

Together with parents, teachers, business people, and education experts, we came up with rigorous new academic standards in seven subject areas -- including math, English, science, history, and even world languages.

We then told schools we would hold them accountable for meeting these standards by tying state aid to districts based on achievement. To measure our progress, we added a 4th grade assessment, along with our 8th and 11th grade tests. And in our urban districts, we're implementing top- to-bottom reform, that looks at not only what is taught, but how it is taught.

This Spring our state's highest court affirmed that our standard-based, results oriented plan fulfills our constitutional duty to provide a "thorough and efficient" education for every student.

With that decision, we ended 28 years of school funding litigation. But more important, we entered a new era of promise in education -- an era where the focus isn't on how many dollars go into a school, but how many scholars come out. And for our cities, it's an era that can spell the biggest difference in the way they shape their destinies.

Today, the stories of New Jersey and California are the stories of prosperity, job growth, urban revitalization, and renewed hope.

Everybody likes happy endings. Everybody loves turnaround stories. And though our stories are good, we have a long way to go before our cities and our schools are where we want them to be.

It doesn't happen overnight. But I know we're going to get there. I know it because we are giving communities the tools they need -- a first-rate education, a chance at home ownership, a common sense approach to development, and most important, a government that's listening.

Thank you.