



**Mayor Mitchell J. Landrieu
2013 State of the City Address**

May 7, 2013

**Treme Community Center
New Orleans, Louisiana**

*****Prepared Remarks*****

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERED

Thank you for coming.

295 years ago, Bienville planted his flag on this rich piece of soil that is now our home. From that day, New Orleans has grown to become an international capital ruled under the flags of France, Spain and now under the great flag of the United States of America. Since our early beginnings, we were a Mecca for diverse peoples who put down roots and created a deep, unique and authentic culture. This is the city we cling to so tightly and the one we love so dearly. Over the last 295 years we have suffered tragedy and we have celebrated triumph.

Now together we're going forward. Forward towards 2018- forward to our city's 300th Anniversary. Everywhere you look progress is being made. The people of New Orleans have found a way to win, and you know something, we like it.

After decades of decline New Orleans is now one of the fastest growing cities in America; 9,000 new residents last year alone.

Our economy is strong- home values are up, regional unemployment is down and well below the national average. We're putting people back to work, creating jobs.

We are getting smarter. Our schools are improving rapidly. Test scores are up. Drop out rates are down and graduation rates are now better than Baton Rouge, Shreveport and the state as a whole.

And I want to give a big shout out to all the students here today- especially those from Craig and Peter Claver.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation said we are getting healthier. And I feel like we deserve extra credit, because in this city it can be pretty tough to put down the knife and fork and back up off your fried oyster pobo, crawfish bread, or mango freeze.

We are getting cooler. Everybody has started to realize what we've always known- New Orleans is the coolest city in America with 9 million visitors per year streaming into this unique place.

And you want to know who really won the Super Bowl this year- New Orleans did. In fact, many said we were one of the best host cities in Super Bowl history. And ladies and gentlemen here is the thing, we can do it in the dark, with the lights off.

Many thanks to all the city departments- NOPD, fire, EMS, public works, sanitation, safety and permits, and parks and parkways, along with all our local, state, federal, business partners, thousands of volunteers, the host committee and, of course, the Saints. None of it could have happened without you. Thank you.

We don't flinch, whether on the world stage for the Super Bowl or facing down a storm like Hurricane Isaac.

Isaac was a big test- the eyes of a nation were on us- the levees held and we passed.

In order for us to keep winning, this is now our challenge- we must keep what is good, and we must get rid of what is bad.

That is what we are doing.

City Hall wasn't creating jobs, so we launched the public-private partnership NOLA Business Alliance.

The result: 4000 new jobs and world class companies like GE are investing and relocating here.

You asked for more places to shop and eat- now there is a retail and restaurant building boom. 80 new projects are getting off the ground- Wal Marts in the East and Gentilly, a new Mid City Market on Carrollton, Whole Foods on Broad, Costco at the end of Washington Avenue, Algiers Plaza on General De Gaulle Drive. Just to name a few.

Local small businesses said they needed more capital and training. So we brought together the Urban League, Delgado and the Hope Enterprise Corporation to partner with another major company Goldman Sachs for the 10,000 Small Businesses Initiative. The result: \$20 million to help our local businesses learn, grow, compete and create jobs. Now 128 local businesses are on an exciting new path, a pathway to prosperity.

Take Colmex Construction where Ms. Angelica Rivera and her husband Roman Lopez are a newly registered DBE, and one of our 10,000 small businesses. Now, Colmex is growing fast, doubling their staff from 6-15 employees.

Elite Property Management owner Paul Irons is a former tight end with the Cleveland Browns, but we didn't hold that against him. He's born and bred New Orleans and since joining 10,000 Small Businesses his revenues are up by 40 percent. And there are many more- with our help Demo Diva is taking blight down to the dirt, Teresa Lawrence at Delta Personnel has increased sales by \$1 million, and Erin Reho Pelias at ZukaBaby has doubled her revenues.

On top of that we just launched the second round of our Small Business Assistance loan program. 9 businesses have already received over \$600,000 in loans- access to new capital. The result- loan recipients like Derrick Tabb, Director of Roots of Music, member of Rebirth Brass Band, and a business man, can now expand. Derrick will use the funds to finish his Treme Recording Studio.

Our economy is humming and growing, but to be happy and healthy everybody in New Orleans needs easy access to fresh food. So we've leveraged \$14 million for the innovative Fresh Food Retailer Initiative that aims to bring groceries to every part of the city.

And here's a great story- Circle Foods in the 7th Ward is back. Ladies and gents, this is a big deal.

When it opened in the 1930s, Circle Foods was the first African American owned grocery in New Orleans and it was more than just a place to make your groceries. It's where you went with your mama to get your back to school uniforms, 5 green peppers for a dollar, Easter candy, pickled meat or hot sausage for red beans on Monday, or your fresh fish on Friday- you could get it all there. Now with the help of the Fresh Food Retailer Initiative Mr. Dwayne Boudreaux, long-time owner and operator of the Circle Food will be back in business by Thanksgiving.

Also, consider another great story on Jackson Avenue, where Doug Kariker opened up Da Fresh Seafood.

All together, Dwayne, Doug and the other beneficiaries of the Fresh Food Retailer Initiative will have created over 150 new jobs.

Entrepreneurs like Dwayne and Doug are engines for the economy of our future. Indeed, the number of start-ups in New Orleans has doubled in recent years and is now far above the national average. And it's unbelievable, just across town the Idea Village has provided direct support to nearly 2,000 local entrepreneurs, like Matt Wisdom, at Turbosquid.

Is it any wonder why the Wall Street Journal ranked New Orleans as #1 for most improved city for business, Forbes Magazine said that New Orleans is America's biggest brain magnet and the Brookings Institute rated New Orleans number one in economic recovery. Earlier this month Bloomberg News said we are one of the top American Boomtowns and last week the National Journal called us the 'Cajun Comeback'. This is a remarkable turnaround- in many instances we've gone from worst to first in just three years.

But this economic renaissance won't mean much unless everybody is involved.

For years, City Hall's procurement process was in disarray, so with the stroke of a pen and a lot of hard work we've leveled the playing field. We have increased the number of DBEs by over 70%. Now we award contracts based on what you know, not who you know. And everybody gets a fair shake.

We have strong DBE requirements for billions of dollars hitting the ground not just with the city, but also at the airport, the Sewerage and Water Board, and RTA.

And others are following our lead- the Recovery School District has modeled their DBE program after ours.

Furthermore, when Costco came to town we insisted that locals and DBEs make up 35 percent of their construction contracts, and they agreed. And at our urging- Essence, the Super Bowl, and NBA All-Star Weekend, all committed to contract with local firms.

Local firms like Don Harding's Cool Fruit Sensations. Don had been serving at small festivals until he discovered our program, he became a DBE and business started booming.

Now Don serves at the French Quarter Festival and the convention center and even at the Super Bowl.

All those entrepreneurs and business people who participated in the 10,000 Small Business Initiative, the Fresh Food Retailer Initiative, or joined our DBE program. Please stand and be recognized.

I have always said- the people of New Orleans will be the ones who rebuild New Orleans.

These business leaders and residents count on City Hall to be efficient and attentive to their needs. Unfortunately, customer service at City Hall wasn't always so friendly. But now NOLA311 is up and running-- fielding over 200,000 citizen calls in their first year, and at the new City Hall welcome desk Ms Loretta and Ms Freddy will help you get what you need and they do it with a big smile.

For her entire career, Council President Jackie Clarkson worked to get a One Stop Shop for permitting at City Hall. Well, by working together with Jackie and the rest of Council we actually made it happen. And the One Stop Shop on the 7th floor of City Hall is blowing and going with permit processing times being cut in half.

Just ask the homebuilders and construction companies who visited our new One Stop Shop. They almost stroked out; one stop, one place for all their business needs. Thank you so much for doing business in our city and many thanks to all the city employees who make it all happen.

We're changing it up and we're winning, reforming every aspect of City Hall, from customer service to taxi cabs.

When we came into office the City's cabs were old, broken and the taxi cab bureau wasn't working. So we worked closely with Councilmember Palmer, the rest of the

Council, the hospitality industry, cab drivers and the entire community to completely reorganize how we regulate taxi cabs so we could have clean and safe transportation for our residents and our visitors.

Now, drivers who for years had been under the thumb of a few company owners are now free to be their own small businesses and will be able to build generational wealth for their families.

A great example, Mr. Sam Porter. He's been driving a taxi since 1965 and in 1966 applied for his first own CPNC. Now, 47 years later, this administration finally got him and 75 others their own CPNCs. Sam has a brand new cab and it's his name on the brand new permit. He now works for himself, his family, and his family's future.

Mr. Porter, thank you, and to all the taxi drivers for being great ambassadors for our city. Please stand and let the people of New Orleans give you a hand for doing a great job and leading the way into the future.

Now, if y'all remember, when I first came into office I asked the public 'when is the time to get tough on blight' and you told me, 'now!'

Of course, none of our progress on blight matters if you still have a big, old nasty house next door, but we're close to hitting our goal of fixing or tearing down 10,000 blighted properties since we came into office. We are working it day and night because for New Orleans to succeed neighborhoods need to be strong.

That is why we invest millions each year to fight the blight.

But it's not all about bulldozing and demo, it's about bringing properties back into commerce. We turned the soft second program around and got it working again. Now the \$52 million Soft Seconds Program is helping hundreds of families realize the American dream and build generational wealth through home ownership.

1st time home buyers like the Martin Family who were living in a small rented apartment with five kids in the East, qualified for soft second assistance and now own their own home in the same area.

The Martin family and 268 people and families who benefited from the soft seconds program and now own their own home are making New Orleans neighborhoods stronger. Please stand and be recognized.

But as you all know a neighborhood is so much more than a collection of houses.

While others talked we actually made it happen- we walked the walk. We cut red tape and our progress is self-evident by hundreds of millions of dollars in infrastructure improvements - new streets, new bike lanes, new libraries, new police and fire stations, new parks and playgrounds, new schools.

We've already spent millions fixing major corridors- 90 major street projects, 33 miles of streets fixed, \$375 million of street repairs hitting the ground.

Then there are the streetscapes.

And City wide, we've gone from less than 10 miles of bike lanes before Katrina to nearly 60 miles today with another ten miles on the way. And according to the League of American Bicyclists we are now a bronze level bike friendly community.

Plus big time projects are hitting the ground right now.

I know all our lives are busy and it's easy to take it for granted and just pass these projects by as if they had always been there. So in case you missed it, here are just a few highlights of projects finished or getting under way in the last 3 years.

The 7th District Police Station on Dwyer Road

Joe W. Brown Park & Center in the East

New Orleans East Library

The new fire station in Venetian Isles

Oliver Bush Tennis Courts in Lower 9

Sam Bonart Park in Lower 9

The new fire station in Lower Nine

Wesley Barrow Stadium in Pontchartrain Park

Joseph Bartholomew Golf Course and Clubhouse in Pontchartrain Park

Algiers Regional Library on Holiday Drive

Cita Hubbell Library in old Algiers

Rosa Keller Library in Broadmoor

Comiskey Park in Mid City

Norman Mayer Library in Gentilly

Robert E Smith Library in Lakeview

Norwood Thompson Park in Gert Town

The new Coroner's Complex, EMS Headquarters and Rosenwald Center in BW Cooper

St. Roch Market on St. Claude Ave

And St. Roch Park

The 5th District NOPD station in St. Claude

Lyons Center on Tchoupitoulas Street

Harrell Park in Hollygrove

The incredible Saenger Theatre on Canal Street.

The University Medical Center in Mid City.

And the beautiful new Loyola Ave Streetcar line is already open and the Rampart Street extension is on the way.

And ladies and gentlemen there is more to come.

And let's not forget the new housing developments and neighborhoods.

Billions invested in affordable housing for thousands of residents. Residents represented by the HANO City Wide Tenants Association. They are with us today. President Lillie Woodfork, Cynthia Wiggins of Guste, Constance Haynes from Fischer, Donna Johnson of Marrero Commons, Diana Cornerly from Florida, and Emelda Paul from Lafitte.

Thank you for your dedication and hard work, ladies please stand and be recognized.

So here we go, we're working it, doing what we can to change the bad to good.

NORD was struggling, so we doubled funding for recreation and created a new NORD.

This summer 4000 kids will have a great time at 33 youth camps, 1,000 teens at 7 teen camps across the city, 13 pools with 7,700 kids and adults getting swimming lessons, and 1,600 young people ages 13- 21 will learn the value of a good day's work through our Summer Jobs Program.

It's a beautiful thing and all this can only happen through partnerships.

I want to give my deep thanks to all the boosters, volunteer coaches, NORD employees, NORD Commissioners, and sponsors in the house today. Please stand and be recognized.

We're making progress, but none of this can occur if we don't pinch every penny and watch the bottom line. So perhaps most importantly, I've worked closely with City Council and together we've balanced the budget three years in a row.

Here's our way- we cut, we reorganize, and we invest the savings in what really matters. The result-- City Hall is spending about \$40 million LESS per year than the year before we took office.

City government was too big and cumbersome, so we are working to consolidate 19 boards or commissions.

We consolidated departments, cut overtime, cut take home cars, cut millions in contracts, and practically eliminated the use of city credit cards.

And we're moving forward, delivering MORE value to the taxpayers and there is more to come.

This city now belongs to its future. We are building a foundation for our children.

All this progress is wonderful, but as every parent knows, you can never be happier than your saddest child.

Many daunting challenges remain that we must overcome- a dysfunctional criminal justice system, crumbling infrastructure and roads, Sewerage and Water Board reform, and fire fighter pension problems to name a few small ones. And here is the thing- kicking the can down the road is not a pathway to excellence.

There is no challenge more urgent and important than murder and violent crime.

Last year, 193 people, our fellow citizens were murdered in this city.

193 tragic stories and a wake of destruction and heart break.

Let us remember just a few victims from the last two months- Desmond Bell, Sheicho Delbar, Christian Evans, Ryan Carter, Sidiki Navarre, Lawrence Brown, Joseph Massenburg, Nicholas Ross, Norman Driscoe, Tyler Lee. And 8-year old Daymond Harris who last month got caught in the cross fire, shot in the gut, nearly bled out in his mama's arms. Unlike Briana Allen- who was taken from us- by the grace of God, Daymond survived.

But his life is changed, the damage already done.

Yes, no question, we have made progress- last year overall crime was down. Murder is down over 25 percent compared to this time in 2011, down nearly 15 percent from this time last year. But this is not good enough and remember- this problem won't be solved overnight.

Since 1979, 34 years ago, on average, every year 241 mostly young, African American men have been killed on the streets of New Orleans- every year, on average 241 precious lives lost in a relentless drumbeat of death.

This has to stop. Make no mistake, it can be fixed. There is an answer to this age old problem.

Our answer is NOLA FOR LIFE because we will end the cycle of violence, and change the culture of death in New Orleans to a culture of life.

The pillars of NOLA For Life are really simple:

Stop the Shooting

Invest in Prevention

Create Jobs and Opportunity

Get involved and rebuild neighborhoods

Improve the Police Department

Here are a few key aspects of the plan.

Because turning the tide is a huge challenge, we established a new multi-agency gang unit. Now, federal and state law enforcement, the District Attorney and US Attorney work side by side with the NOPD. Their goal- go after and dismantle known violent groups or gangs operating in the city and target 649 of the most violent offenders.

This is our message to them- stop the shooting, or else we are coming for you... and for all your friends.

We're seeing results. Just in the last few weeks, in the 7th Ward, 5 members of the MMG Gang were taken off the streets. And there is more to come.

But we need to get on the front end to interrupt violence actually before it happens.

So in partnership with the Urban League we launched Ceasefire New Orleans in Central City. Now if one shooting has the possibility of leading to another, the ceasefire workers are on it to interrupt the cycle of violence. They are helping young men get on the right track. Young men like Jamal, who after getting involved with Ceasefire went from

hanging in the streets with the wrong people to studying business at SUNO. He is a great example and is with us here today. Jamal please stand and be recognized.

NOLA for Life also puts a heavy focus on prevention. This is where Midnight Basketball comes in. On June 1st we'll start our 4th season and it is wonderful- over 1,000 mostly young men have come out to play ball, get connected to resources, and hear encouraging messages of hope from people who have made it.

But hope alone is not enough; our young people need jobs, so when they put down the gun there is something else for them to pick up. That's why creating jobs and opportunity is the third central pillar of NOLA For Life.

Since taking office, we've doubled the number of summer jobs for kids and rapidly expanded the number of job sites.

Our City's reentry coordinator is creating a pathway so the formerly incarcerated returning to our communities can find jobs and stay out of trouble.

Plus, we've partnered again with Delgado and others to create new job training and placement services for hundreds of people interested in the thousands of new jobs that are coming online at the S&WB, the airport, RTA, and UMC hospital.

So what is NOLA For Life?

NOLA For Life is the multi-agency gang unit.

NOLA For Life is Midnight Basketball- recreation and mentorship for over 1000 young men who live in crime hotspots.

It is Ceasefire New Orleans.

It is jobs and opportunities.

And it's the NOLA For Life Fund. Over \$1 million raised from private sector sponsors like Chevron and others. \$500,000 invested in 23 local organizations that help stop the shooting.

And it's on NOLA For Life Days where from Taylor and Hardin Parks, to East Shore and McDonough Playgrounds- hundreds of citizens have hit the streets with community groups, city agencies, and the NOPD to clean-up crime hot spots.

But the community needs help. That's why the final pillar of NOLA For Life is so important- we must improve the NOPD and give officers what they need to get the job done.

We can't ever forget what police officers risk every day, and what they sacrifice. Earlier this year, Officer John Passaro was shot multiple times responding to an armed robbery in progress. He put everything on the line to uphold his sacred oath to 'protect and serve', and he paid a very, very heavy price.

He is here with us today, one of the many officers, committed to their duty, protecting us from harm.

We salute and honor you Officer Passaro, your wonderful wife Stephanie, and all the other officers who are with us today. Thank you. Give them a round of applause.

So with help from the hundreds of honest, dedicated cops like Officer Passaro NOPD is on the mend- we will reform the NOPD.

We're not waiting for anyone or anything; not even the Department of Justice. We are moving forward.

The Chief is implementing a 65- point plan. We've doubled the number of homicide detectives and funded two new recruit classes. Thank you City Council.

We now insist on higher standards and better training.

We've improved DNA and ballistics analysis, which has resulted in more arrests, better prosecutions. Plus, we launched a domestic violence initiative, cleared the backlog of testing on rape kits and the innovative Project Safe Neighborhood has made over 830 cases against dangerous, armed criminals.

We have begun an overhaul of the paid detail system and have strengthened the civilian-led Public Integrity Bureau staffed with two FBI agents. On top of that, both the Independent Police Monitor and the OIG are vigilant in their oversight.

Misconduct is unacceptable. Racial profiling is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Constitutional policing can be aggressive, but must be based on behavior, not race.

As a consequence of our reforms, since 2010 complaints against officers are down nearly 30 percent. This is a sign of progress and we've made improvements across the board.

Just as the people of this city deserve a good police department that polices constitutionally and keeps them safe, we also have a responsibility to have a prison that does the same.

I believe that this is more about management than money.

All that notwithstanding, I have faith that we can find a solution to the police and sheriff consent decrees. After all, this is what we do down here in New Orleans- we find a way or make one.

None of our problems have easy solutions. These challenges were not created overnight, but the time is now to find the answers. The time is now to right the ship.

Since my first moments as your Mayor I have spoken often of rebuilding New Orleans not as she was, but as we always wanted her to be. So, with our 300th anniversary close at hand, just five short years away, now is the time to prepare. The goal- in five years make the jump from dream to reality and create a city for the ages.

So this is like what we would do to prepare for the Super Bowl or the Olympics or the World Cup. We need to set a timeline, state a vision, work together and get it done. It's crunch time, get your plans ready because we're moving and it's going to be a sprint to the finish line of 2018.

What do we see as 2018 dawns?

In 2018, I see a world-class city with a world-class airport.

For 50 years, many said we needed a new airport, but no one did much about it. Now is the time, we can't kick this can down the road anymore.

The new facility will be paid for with the airport's own funds that can only be used at the airport.

This project will have a big impact on the local economy-13,500 new jobs during construction and once complete it will be a critical economic driver for the city. Just like it was in Atlanta. We're moving forward. This project is on go.

In 2018, I see Federal City on the West Bank, growing exponentially and serving as one of the premier federal assets in the country. And a great economic engine for our region.

In 2018, I see an expansion of our streetcar network.

In 2018, I see a realized City Park Master Plan with new museum facilities, festival areas, outdoor concert venues, and bike paths. They are well on their way and doing a great job.

In 2018, I see at the base of Canal Street on the river, the World Trade Center site remade into a world class civic space. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. As we speak, the City is reviewing the plans as part of a public, competitive selection process, so stay tuned.

In 2018, I see a new UMC Hospital creating thousands of jobs and a new knowledge based economy.

But the future of New Orleans, the heart of New Orleans, resides beyond a new airport, Federal City, new streetcars, City Park, a newly designed river front, a new UMC Hospital, or other infrastructure improvements.

I believe that the true measure for success in 2018 will be the condition of our neighborhoods and how our families are doing. After all, everything we do is merely meant to achieve the ultimate goal of a better life for our friends and neighbors, a better life for all, and a strong foundation for our children.

In 2018 I hope to see a remarkable change for the better coming from all of our neighborhoods.

So, I want to step back and think about what winning looks like for all of New Orleans by focusing in on three place based developments that are under way across the city as we speak.

Iberville-Treme is the site for the over \$30 million Choice Neighborhood Initiative. With this money and another \$1.2 billion of leveraged public and private funding everything in Iberville-Treme is coming together, all at once.

So imagine in 2018 Iberville-Treme with new, affordable, energy efficient housing in the new Lafitte and Iberville Developments; N. Claiborne and St. Bernard Streetscapes, the Circle Food Store, Craig Elementary, the Treme Center, Armstrong Park, Galvez and N. Miro Bikeways, the Lafitte Greenway, the UMC Hospital, and the upcoming N. Rampart Streetcar Line. That is a beautiful picture and it is within our grasp.

This change is not just for the people living in Iberville-Treme, the whole city will benefit and our success will serve as an example for the entire nation of what is possible.

In 2018, imagine, New Orleans East will have had a new hospital which by then will be four years old; Joe W. Brown Park - a regional center for fun, games and community events with the Audubon Louisiana Nature Center right next door along with the now open 7th District Police Station and East New Orleans Regional Library, plus streetscapes at Read and Lake Forest Boulevards.

Plus, the kids at Little Woods, St. Stephens, and Abramson will be getting an excellent education at their brand new schools.

In 2018 think of Pontchartrain Park- new roads and streetscapes, SUNO is thriving; Joe Bartholomew Golf Course is busy from dawn until dusk, the next generation learning the

rules of the game or playing tennis at the brand new courts right next door. At Wesley Barrow Stadium with our partners at Major League Baseball there are great games every night, Pontchartrain Park and Harris Playground are always full of people relaxing, reading, and playing.

The Wal-Mart is just down the street at Gentilly Woods and surrounding the park a lot of the empty homes have been fixed up. The Soft Seconds and NSP2 programs have had a big impact and once people started to move back to the neighborhood more followed. This is happening now! Success breeds more success, winning breeds more winning.

This vision of thriving, sustainable neighborhoods across the whole city is already being realized thanks to the hard work of everyday New Orleanians.

We will leave a remarkable legacy, and in 2018 our 300th anniversary promises to be a milestone in our history. We will have successfully captured this brief moment in time that was given to us to stop this city's decline, turn her around, move her in the right direction and build a strong foundation for generations to come.

In 2018, I envision a safe and prosperous city.

I see a new generation of young people, educated in some of the nation's finest schools, taking the reins of leadership to drive us forward.

I see our young men especially with new opportunities and a bright new pathway to prosperity in front of them.

I see New Orleans embracing healthy living and through our Fit NOLA program becoming one of the ten fittest cities in the United States.

I see today's crop of cutting edge New Orleans companies like Turbosquid, iSeatz, and Pierce Industries as major players changing the landscape of American business.

I see tourism growing to 13 million visitors per year, a thriving riverfront, and the music and cultural economy thriving. This past weekend at Jazz Fest, the Neville's passed the torch to a new generation, handing over the final act on the Acura Stage to Trombone Shorty who is now coming into his own and taking us into the future. The great Quint Davis said it best by describing heritage as not just being in the rearview mirror. He said, in New Orleans you can see heritage here through the windshield. It goes on, forward as well as back.

How right he is.

And finally in 2018 I see, the beating heart of New Orleans, our neighborhoods, happy and healthy, with children playing in safe streets.

When we came together three years ago, I talked about Mr. Jerome Smith.

Jerome is a civil rights leader whose ways and words influenced luminaries like Robert Kennedy, Harry Belafonte, Lorrain Hansberry and thousands more.

For years, he has offered our kids a safe haven at the Tambourine and Fan NORD Summer Camp in the Treme Center. Here they can laugh and learn and are safe from the unforgiving streets of New Orleans in the Treme Center. In my mind, Mr. Smith is at the center of the battle for the soul of our city.

And three years ago, I asked, "How do we send him into battle?"

The answer was, "With nothing."

Before we took office, his request for basic supplies for his camp and his kids was botched by bureaucracy. There were no board games, no crayons, no hula hoops. The building did not have air conditioning. But, Mr. Smith didn't walk away or close his doors or turn kids away. When the heat index was over 100 degrees, he brought in fans and kept the doors open.

There was a raggedy old bus that took our kids to a raggedy old pool, not worthy of their great promise. But for many of these kids, that old bus provided the only ride they ever took someplace new, and that old pool was their only escape from the hot summer streets.

Mr. Smith's camp gave our kids so much, it gave them hope, but it broke my heart because I knew we could do better.

Today, I'm proud and thrilled to say that the Treme Community Center is open, and we're sitting in it. But I want y'all to notice something. Pick up your feet and look down.

Mr. Smith fought like a lion to replace the standard gym floors with championship grade basketball floor.

A lot of folks asked, "Why do young kids need a gym floor fit for a championship team?"

Jerome Smith knew the answer- because all of our kids are champions. And by the way this is more than a gym floor; it is a foundation, a strong foundation for our children's future.

This Treme Community Center is proof that we're not building New Orleans back as she was, we're building her as she should have always been. This Treme Center is a symbol of what is possible when we work together to create the city we always dreamed of. This will be possible because of you the people of New Orleans.

They are represented by the lights of our community who have been mentioned today- Angelica Rivera, Roman Lopez, Paul Irons, Don Harding and Derrick Tabb who with our help are growing their businesses. The Martin family who has realized the American dream of owning their own home. Matt Wisdom and entrepreneurs across the city.

Dwayne Bourdreaux from Circle Food, Sam Porter and his new taxi cab, Ms Loretta and Ms. Freddy at the City Hall help desk, the HANO City Wide tenants association, Officer John Passaro, and Jerome Smith.

They are lighting the way- showing us the path forward.

New Orleans, we are building the City we always wanted to be.

We deserve the best.

We now know how to win.

We like it and we are hungry for more of it.

We have to keep going.

One step at a time.

We are one team, we are one fight.

We are one voice, we are one city.

We are going forward.

Let's get ready for a great future together.

God Bless.