



**Mayor Mitchell J. Landrieu  
2011 State of the City Address**

**Mahalia Jackson Theatre for the Performing Arts  
New Orleans, Louisiana**

**April 28, 2011**

**\*\*\*Prepared Remarks\*\*\***

**EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY**

Good morning, thank you for being here. Thank you to Archbishop Aymond for today's invocation. Thank you to the KIPP Renaissance band and Band Director Lionel Williams for their wonderful music. Thank you to our elected officials, and especially the City Council, whose partnership with us this past year has helped to lay the foundation for progress in the years ahead.

On Inauguration Day, nearly 365 days ago, we spoke about the challenges we must face together. We gave testament to the belief that there is nothing that cannot be fixed, no problem that cannot be solved. No divide that cannot be bridged. We are all one team. One fight. One voice. One city. We all agreed it begins with one single step.

We made a commitment to one another to stop thinking about the city we were and start building the city we want to become. A commitment to turn the page in our history. A commitment to come together, to find higher common ground, to reduce crime, to create jobs, to improve our schools, and to eliminate blight. Today, my optimism and faith is unshaken. My belief in the people of New Orleans and this city's destiny remains unchanged. We are one city that will share one fate.

With eyes wide open, we told you about the state of City Hall as we found it. A government mired in budget problems. NORF in shambles. Technology systems on the verge of collapse. A police department that too often failed to protect and to serve. Decaying infrastructure. A water distribution system bleeding forty percent of its water. A Sewerage and Water Board power plant from a different age.

We let the sun shine in because I firmly believe that the people of New Orleans will rise to the challenge and work together to fix our city's very real problems. Through hell, high water, and oil – and we've had our share of all three – we are charting a new and different course.

Today, the state of our city is stronger than it was one year ago. And, it will continue to get stronger each and every day.

But while our city is one with great hope, we must remain steadfast as we fulfill our promise to bestow upon our children a city better than that which was given to us. So that in 2018, on our 300<sup>th</sup> birthday, we can present to the world a new New Orleans. We will say that we are stronger, we are smarter and we are better than ever before. We will celebrate our 300<sup>th</sup> year as a world-class city.

As your Mayor, I am accountable for making the government work.

This responsibility does not inspire lofty rhetoric or political platitudes. We all see it in the seemingly small things that people expect and are often taken for granted. So when you wake up in the morning and the lights go on and warm water runs through the faucet, when you are on your way to work and the red light turns green, when the trash is picked up on time, when Mardi Gras and Super Sunday go off without a hitch and French Quarter Fest has record crowds, all of this reminds us in City Hall of why we are

here. When we face the hard challenges and get things right, only then can we take pride in the work we have done. And today I want to take a moment to say thanks to our public employees for their dedication, especially to the police, firefighters and EMS medics who save lives every day.

In our first year, we plugged the holes, steadied the ship and have begun to lay the foundation for change and transformation. From day one, we took decisive action to live within our means and eliminated an \$80 million budget deficit. We made government smaller by downsizing programs and cutting contracts. We renegotiated all three sanitation contracts saving millions, while adding recycling which will start next week. We furloughed all city employees, including my top-level staff, effectively cutting our pay by ten percent. We took back 464 take home cars, reduced overtime and slashed hiring and travel expenses.

We promised you that our budget process would be different. Working together with every City Council member, we held community meetings across New Orleans, listened to what you said and funded what you asked for. And now we are delivering results.

In the first four months of 2011, we have already filled over 18,000 potholes, fixed over 3,000 streetlights. By the end of the year, we will have filled 30,000 potholes and fixed 16,000 streetlights. Miles of streets are being resurfaced from Crowder to Harrison, North Galvez to Magazine, St. Bernard Avenue to Berkley Drive.

We finally have a budget that is structurally sound, fiscally prudent and guided by the principles of cutting smart, reorganizing and investing in your priorities.

But the hangover from past budget practices still lingers. The city's employee health plan racked up millions more in claims than had been projected last year. These costs will have to come out of this year's budget. So yet again, we will ask every department in City government to get more efficient, to downsize, and to reduce costs. We will continue to cut smart and reorganize for as long as it takes so that we can make the investments you all asked for in the budget process last year.

In our community meetings, you spoke loud and clear that your number one priority is public safety. On March 17th of this year, after inviting the Department of Justice to help reform the police department, they issued their findings on the practices of the old NOPD. It painted a chilling picture and called for major reforms. We will, and we must, transform the NOPD into a department that fully protects each family and serves the entire community. We will do it willingly and we will do it swiftly.

We are not waiting for the consent decree to get to work. We immediately rolled out a comprehensive 65-point plan for reform. We took steps to revamp the Canine Unit and after six months, it is back up and running with the blessing of the Department of Justice. I've ordered Chief Serpas to have a plan on my desk for how to completely overhaul the police detail policy by May 15<sup>th</sup>.

And, just last month, Chief Serpas also named sixteen men and women to the new merit-based rank of Commander. They are committed to lead our department's turnaround efforts. They will do whatever it takes and they will be held accountable. They are here with us today. Please stand up and be recognized.

This is bigger than the police department. There is more cooperation at Tulane and Broad than ever before. We have begun to speak with one voice. I want to thank Sheriff Marlin Gusman, District Attorney Leon Cannizzaro, Chief Public Defender Derwyn Bunton, the Judges from Criminal and Municipal Courts, and our federal partners, including the FBI, DEA and U.S. Attorney Jim Letten. Our efforts are beginning to produce results but our work has only just begun.

To improve public safety we must ensure that everyone has the opportunity to work with dignity and to provide for themselves and their families. And there's good news on that front. In the last year, unemployment rates have remained lower than the national average and home values are up. We have welcomed hundreds of new jobs and over half a billion dollars in private investments from corporate leaders like Blade Dynamics, TCI, Folgers Coffee, and the Hyatt Regency. We launched the Fresh Food Retailer Initiative to provide \$14 million in capital for grocery stores and supermarkets that will create jobs, promote healthy living and serve parts of the city that need it the most.

To grow the economy we created the NOLA Business Alliance, a historic public private partnership that will attract major businesses and retail to all areas of New Orleans, especially New Orleans East. The new CEO Rodrick Miller and members of the Board, led by Mr. Henry Coaxum, are with us today. Thank you for all your work.

At the same time, we all know that local businesses are the backbone of our economy. To create a level playing field, in my first month in office I signed an executive order to completely reform the City contracting process and we hired the city's first Chief Procurement Officer. And, we also hired a Supplier Diversity Director and I signed an executive order that immediately opened the doors of opportunity for hundreds more Disadvantaged Business Enterprises.

We hosted an Economic Opportunity Summit for over 500 local business leaders linking them to recovery projects across the city – the VA and University Medical Center, the Army Corps of Engineers and all of the school facilities work. Out of this summit, small business owners like Dwayne Bernal and his team at Royal Engineering learned about new opportunities, and now they manage the city's streetlight program. City Hall will continue to leverage capacity within our own communities. As we move forward on over 200 brick and mortar recovery projects, totaling over 800 million dollars, we will demand that the people of New Orleans be the ones who rebuild New Orleans.

The positive economic momentum is growing every day. Our cultural economy and tourism industry continue to thrive. More than one million revelers celebrated one of the biggest and safest Mardi Gras seasons the city has seen. Huge crowds came out for

French Quarter Fest and we are gearing up for another amazing Jazz Fest, Zurich Classic, and Essence Festival.

New Orleans is one of the leading centers in the world for the intersection of culture and commerce. The cultural economy in New Orleans employs 12.5% of our workforce – 28,000 jobs – pays \$1.1 billion in wages, drives our tourism industry, and nets \$8.6 million in local sales taxes, contributing to the life of the city both culturally and economically.

Film is also becoming another major economic engine. In the last year, the city played host to 35 feature films that produced \$360 million in revenue for the region. We have earned the nickname “Hollywood South” and, in just the past four months, we have already surpassed last year's economic impact. At this very moment, nine more movies are in production in your city.

With our new momentum, major financial players are starting to take notice. Goldman Sachs has chosen us as a site for the *10,000 Small Businesses Initiative*. They are investing over \$20 million to build capacity, to provide capital and to give our small business owners world-class development training. And it is all happening in partnership with Delgado and the Urban League – a model that will expand the pipeline of talent that will drive job creation.

New Orleans small business owners like Mr. Elbred Malone, owner of Malone Electric, are making a difference. With a sound financial plan and ideas for how to expand he is helping more families get back into their homes and is providing needed services to the community. Mr. Malone will support his family and Malone Electric will support New Orleans. The same is true for Ms. Mindy Hobley, owner of Ringlett's Hair Salon, and Mr. Kendall Washington's Safe Spot Pest Control. Every one of the thirty local, small businesses benefitting from this initiative – whether they are teaching kids martial arts or providing daycare for working parents – adds tremendous value and jobs to our community. The Goldman Sachs class is here today and I would like to recognize their hard work and dedication to revitalizing our city. All of you please stand.

Meanwhile, the groundwork is being laid for a knowledge-based economy driven by re-emerging health and technology sectors. As a major first step, we started turning dirt at the Veterans Administration hospital, and last week, we broke ground on the University Medical Center in Mid-City. I will play a leading role in ensuring that we don't rebuild what we had, but create a world-class 21<sup>st</sup> century research and academic health care center that will provide excellent care and thousands of quality jobs.

I want you to imagine what it will be like. Soon a mother who lives in Faubourg Lafitte, what used to be the old Lafitte Housing Development, will leave her beautiful new home on Orleans Avenue and Galvez and walk to her job as a med-tech – only six blocks away on Canal and Galvez. Her son will attend New Orleans Charter Science and Math School and take classes at the same hospital where his mother works. He will go to college at Xavier, then medical school to become an oncologist and raise his family and

work in the same, transformed neighborhood. And they will have dinner down the street at Dooky Chase or Willie Mae's Scotch House. This is a sustainable community. This is real place-based development. And it is happening over and over again.

But healthcare is not just happening downtown. In the first four months of my administration, we delivered on our promise, bought Methodist Hospital, saved \$23 million, and have recently secured high-quality operators. The new hospital will be the anchor for our redevelopment efforts in New Orleans East. In the coming months, the urgent care facility will be complete and families in the East will no longer have to worry about a thirty-minute ambulance ride to the emergency room. My commitment to delivering a state-of-the-art hospital to New Orleans East is stronger than ever.

Finally, we led the effort to secure the funding needed to keep open our nearly 90 primary health care clinics that have served over 300,000 residents in the metro area that total over 1.2 million visits. Our clinics are a national model – they are affordable, accessible, and provide quality health care. Dr. Don Erwin and Mrs. Lona Edwards help run the St. Thomas Community Health Center on Magazine Street. At St. Thomas, uninsured mothers, wives and sisters can receive the care they deserve. They complete over 300 mammograms a month, which is vital to the prevention and early detection of breast cancer. Thank you for your work. And our City Health Department is now focusing on important public health challenges like childhood obesity and lead in our playgrounds.

Just as jobs and health care support the creation of a safe city, so will a quality recreation system. That is why we've committed almost \$100 million to 60 recreation-related projects. In the past year, we did what you asked us to do and doubled NORD's budget. We created the NORD Commission, a public-private partnership that is raising the bar for recreation in our city. Our director Vic Richard and the NORD Commission are with us today. We thank them and Councilmembers Fielkow and Clarkson for their hard work.

And we look forward to this summer when our kids and our camps will have the resources they need. Last summer, only 500 kids learned how to swim in NORD pools. This summer we will partner with the Red Cross to provide swimming lessons to more than 6,600 kids.

Last summer, there were only 8 pools open. This summer, there will be 12 pools open across the city.

Last year, only 1,600 kids enjoyed a summer at one of four city-run camps. This year, more than 4,600 kids will play, laugh and learn at 31 different camps across the city.

Last year, the summer jobs program served only 1,000 teenagers, but 700 were turned away because we ran out of slots. This year, we doubled the funding and 3,000 teenagers will now have the opportunity to work and learn.

This is more than a list of numbers. This is about families and communities.

Jobs, schools and recreation are all important to creating a safer New Orleans. But abandoned houses are also part of the problem. If we want to fight crime, we also have to fight blight. In every community meeting we asked you, "When is the time to get serious about blight?" And everywhere we went, you told us, "The time is now!" Blight threatens our home values, our quality of life, our culture and our public safety.

Our aggressive blight reduction effort will eliminate 10,000 blighted properties over the next three years. So far, we've completed over 12,000 inspections and demolished over 500 blighted properties. We've dedicated millions of dollars in new city resources, consolidated departments, and have created BlightStat to track our progress and troubleshoot problems. Now, residents like Mrs. Rita LeGrand of Lakeview can hold our feet to the fire.

The whole community is mobilized to help in this anti-blight effort. Nearly 600 volunteers have come out to help during our Fight the Blight days – from Sampson Park to the Cutoff Center, from Conrad Park to Hunter's Field. At Taylor Park, residents brought me to a row of abandoned, blighted houses right across from a popular playground. Like so many throughout our city, they sat untouched for years, left to rot by a deadbeat and irresponsible owner. Unbelievably, these properties were allowed to remain standing by a city review committee that actually insisted on stopping demolition. It didn't make any sense. I left Taylor Park that day and at the request of the neighbors promised I would return. Within 60 days, we came back with a bulldozer and the neighbors cheered when we tore those houses down because those houses threatened their safety.

While we fight blight, we will protect our cultural identity. Preservation and progress can co-exist. To this end, we orchestrated the largest property relocation and restoration project in the city's history, spending \$10 million to save and rehab over 70 historic homes slated for demolition in the VA footprint. As we have done in the past, where it makes sense and is appropriate, where there is a plan and where there is funding, we will keep what is rich and beautiful. But when it comes down to protecting children and families, public safety will win every time. I invite the historic preservation community to partner with us to create plans, establish timelines, and secure additional financial resources to protect the cultural heritage of this city.

We now stand at a unique moment in our history. We are transforming the NOPD and creating jobs. We are rebuilding our schools and improving recreation. We are making health care more accessible and fighting blight. At the end of the day, by working together, we will cease to be a patchwork of blighted homes and decaying buildings. Families and neighbors will come together at rebuilt playgrounds to watch our kids play in NORD baseball, soccer and football games. We will meet in the auditoriums of new schools to watch our children sing and dance. We will bring our children to Joe Brown Park in the East for swimming lessons and to Rosa Keller Library in Broadmoor to check out books to read together at night.

But while we have much to be proud of, there is still so much to do. This year we went one yard - the longest yard. We have 99 more yards to go and it will be tough the whole way. We are in the midst of a fundamental shift in the way government works and relates to the private, faith-based and non-profit sectors. Government must get smaller and less costly, while delivering better results and creating better value.

This year, it's all about execution.

This year, we are going to make City Hall work better for you by streamlining the permitting process and improving customer service.

This year, we will get 3-1-1 back on line.

This year, we will reform the Civil Service system, which will give us the flexibility to hire and fire, give talented employees the chance to advance their careers and make sure you get the quality service you pay for.

This year, the Tax Fairness Commission will continue its work to ensure that our policies are equitable and everyone pays their fair share.

And this year, our 16 new auditors and revenue agents will aggressively enforce sales tax compliance so that everyone pays what they owe.

Taking action now is especially important in the area of infrastructure. The truth is that all of the progress in building parks, pools and playgrounds will be for naught if they are built upon a fragile foundation. The power plant at the Sewerage and Water Board is nearly 100 years old. We need a minimal \$200 million upgrade to make sure last fall's "boil water advisory" never happens again. I am determined to ensure that our city will be compensated for its replacement.

In the coming years, over \$13 billion in investments will hit the ground in the metro area as we repair our bridges, restore our airport, and rebuild our roads and our hospitals. \$1.8 billion will go toward rebuilding the schools of New Orleans. In the past six months, the RSD and OPSB have broken ground at eight new schools in every part of the city – from Parkview in Gentilly to Frantz Elementary in the Ninth Ward. If we continue to build at this pace, we will spend up to \$25 million every month on school construction. It's worth the investment because the future of New Orleans will not be decided in the boardrooms on Poydras Street, but in classrooms across the city. Our children deserve a world-class education in world-class facilities.

We know that the path to creating a better New Orleans, a smarter New Orleans, a safer New Orleans, goes right through the schoolhouse door. We have the responsibility to give our children the chance to be artists, scientists and entrepreneurs. To be the builders of cities, the leaders of government, the innovators of tomorrow, the explorers of the unknown and the dreamers of new ideas.

Something special and unique is happening on the streets of your city. We are a city that holds our schools and teachers accountable for achieving results. We are a city where parents can choose where to send their kids to school. We are a city that believes that all students, no matter their race or class, have the right to an excellent education. In New Orleans, hope is hitting the streets.

Today, students from schools all over the city have joined us. Miller McCoy and Warren Easton. Gentilly Terrace, KIPP and Lusher are all in the house. All of these schools have different approaches. They have different stories and different histories. But they are all bound together by the singular desire to provide an excellent education. And this is all that matters.

At the end of the day, good schools are part of the solution and bad schools are part of the problem. Kids don't think about whether or not they go to a charter school or a traditional school. They want to be at a school that is safe and has high expectations. Kids don't think about whether or not their teacher is a 30-year veteran or a first-year teacher in Teach for America. They want a teacher that believes in them and pushes them to achieve more than they ever knew was possible. And it is working. The achievement gap between students in New Orleans and students across the state has been cut in half. But we must push further and higher.

There is no question that our schools are coming back to local control. We will insist on it. This year, I will engage the community to rally around one vision and to speak with one voice to create a framework for K-12 education in New Orleans. The model that we agree on will hold fast to the principles of choice, transparency, equity, accountability and excellence. Where these principles are manifest, you will find a great school. Our schools will be held responsible for delivering on their promises – they will be open and they will be accessible. They will continue to improve and they will serve all students. They will offer more access to early childhood education and after school programming. And they will partner with colleges and universities.

We have one chance to get this right.

I recently received letters from 8<sup>th</sup> graders at Miller-McCoy Academy, a charter school in New Orleans East. In one of the letters, Ozier wrote that many “black men turned to the streets, violence and drugs because they were losing interest in school.” He said if teachers were more like the ones at my school, our problems in New Orleans would disappear. Great teachers at great schools make so many problems disappear.

We are not rebuilding the city we were, we are creating the city we want to become. A city that prepares kids to compete globally. A city built upon a solid foundation. A city where neighborhoods and communities thrive. And most importantly, a safe city. A peaceful city.

At this moment, there is a battle being waged each and every day on the streets. It is the battle for the heart and soul of New Orleans. Last year, New Orleans had 175 murders. In the first four months of this year, there have been another 72.

By the time you wake up tomorrow morning, I will have likely received another message that says exactly the same thing: "Mr. Mayor, we are sorry to inform you that earlier this evening...police officers responded to gunshots...officers found young African American male ...gunshots in the back of his head... announced dead on arrival." There are no witnesses.

The death of young, African American men on the streets of New Orleans and throughout America, at the hands of other young, African American men is a national tragedy and a national shame. We lose over 13,000 Americans every year to violence and it's the hardest thing to talk about. The fact remains – it is the single most important issue facing our city. A whole generation of young people is being lost to the streets. Too many lives taken too early. Too many families bearing too much pain. The relentlessness of the killing has made us numb to the reality.

But, we cannot ignore it. We have to face it head on. We will respond to crime and murder the same way we respond to a catastrophic hurricane or a homeland security threat. We will be relentless and we will be focused. And we will coordinate our efforts. This is the model – prevention, intervention, interdiction, prosecution, rehabilitation, and re-entry – we will initiate a comprehensive and collaborative response to the emergency.

Today, I'm announcing that this effort will be led by our new Criminal Justice Commissioner – Mr. James Carter. A well-respected member of the community, tireless advocate for justice, former councilmember and lawyer, Mr. Carter will have a single directive – coordinate all efforts throughout the criminal justice system and community to reduce murder and crime. We thank him for being with us here today.

I am also announcing the launch of the Mayoral Strategic Command. The Strategic Command will be the City's War Room to combat murder. The Commissioner will serve as a partner alongside other key leaders as we tackle this issue at the highest level. Our mission is clear – change the culture of death and violence on the streets of New Orleans to a culture of peace and safety and security.

But, this is only part of the answer.

In the coming weeks, we will convene the reconstituted Criminal Justice Council, which will coordinate with those already leading the charge on the ground. We will be tough and we will be smart. We will continue to improve training for our police and put more cops in the community. We will work harder to get illegal guns off the streets. We will partner with the FBI, DEA and Department of Justice. We will enlist the help of neighborhood groups and faith-based leaders.

And we can do more. Change will not just come from the top down on this one. We need all hands on deck. Cops and judges, teachers and coaches, business people and clergy, brothers and sisters, parents and families. And now, it involves you. Each and every one of you.

Murder in New Orleans is a public health epidemic that threatens our entire city and everyone needs to help find solutions that work. I am calling on everyone – from every neighborhood across this city – to join me this summer at the City’s first “Crime Action Network” summit. Show up and speak out. Come to listen to each other and to learn from each other. Come to create an action plan for how to address this problem that touches us all. And most importantly, be prepared to get to work.

This will not be a summit full of false hope and unfulfilled promises. This summit is about action. We must be united. We cannot back down. Enough is enough.

When will we see that every life has value? That every murder kills a piece of us all? And yet we allow it to repeat – over and over and over again. We cannot continue to allow our future to be torn apart from the inside out by an endless cycle of death, destruction, and violence. Every murder is one murder too many. Each one has a ripple effect that touches us all.

In February, a 17-year-old was shot to death in the 7<sup>th</sup> Ward. The same weekend, a 19-year-old was killed by a man with an assault rifle. Earlier that month a 15-year-old was killed in the East. Another 15-year-old was shot dead in Holy Cross in January. And in September, someone gunned down a 16-year-old. All teenagers. All from the same school.

In the last year, the students of John McDonogh High School have buried five friends and classmates. There will be no graduation celebrations for the families of these young men as they are left to wonder what might have been. And they will not walk across the stage to receive diplomas because each and every one is in their grave.

New Orleans, this begins and ends with us. In Genesis Chapter 4, Verse 9, God asks Cain where his brother has gone. Cain responds, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” For too long, we have failed to live up to the moral obligation embodied in this question. We have failed to embrace the belief that no one should be left behind. That out of many, we are one.

Take a look around. Look at the faces of the young students here with us today. With our support, our guidance and our love, you are looking at our future doctors and engineers, nurses and teachers, mothers and fathers. The next Chief of Police and the next Mayor of New Orleans. The ones who will take care of us, our children and our city when our time has passed.

Or, if we choose to be blind and fail to see that all of our lives are intimately woven together, then these students may have difficult paths ahead. Ones that will be filled

with obstacles and challenges as they struggle to find the right way on their own. Lives that, at this moment are full of promise, will become lives full of pain. We see it on the streets, in our churches, schools and homes everyday.

Am I my brother's keeper? Yes. Yes I am. I have to be. We have to be. We share this responsibility. We must turn this around together.

New Orleans, for too long, we have been waiting. Waiting for someone to pick us up, waiting for someone to help us out. But, we can't wait any longer. We must proclaim together that New Orleans is no longer a city that hope forgot, but now is a city of infinite possibilities. We are limited only by our imagination and our willingness to work hard.

There is no doubt that it will be difficult. But it is because of our resilience and sheer will to do whatever it takes, that we have a chance. One moment in the arc of history to create something special. So that upon our beloved city's 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, we will celebrate. Rejoicing in the knowledge that New Orleans came together to do what is difficult for the sake of what is right.

And, when confronted with the fires of violence and poverty and distrust, we refused to yield. We refused to back down. We will be ones who walked through the flames and found ourselves unbowed and unbroken. United and proud.

One team. One fight. One voice. One city. One future. Let's get back to work.

Thank you and God bless the City of New Orleans.