

## **Eldridge Hawkins, Jr. Remarks at his Inaugural Ball Wednesday, October 22, 2008**

I want to thank all of you for coming together this evening in this celebration of the first hundred days of our movement to transform the City of Orange, New Jersey.

I refer to our work in Orange as a movement because like the other transformational movements of our times, the civil rights movement, the labor movement, the women's movement to name a few, what we seek to achieve in Orange is propelled by the determination and activism of many, many people who have joined together to work for fundamental change in how we live and relate to each other.

You, all of you, in this room and hundreds outside of this room are the movement for change in Orange and I salute you for being a part of it.

Yes, movements have leaders, but they are the work of the many, not the few. And, let me not fail to mention the movement that is on the verge of changing the direction of America: the extraordinary and unprecedented campaign to elect Barack Obama as President of the United States!

I want to take the opportunity at this time to review what we have accomplished together during the past hundred days.

I took office on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008. Our campaign had promised to restore trust in the integrity and competence of government; make streets and homes safer; and make Orange more attractive to tax-paying businesses.

We expressed the belief that Orange can be the next "happening" city, the next Hoboken or Montclair. We promised an administration that would be built upon citizen participation and not operate in secrecy behind closed doors.

Even before I was sworn in, we held public meetings of our transition team to give residents and businesses a voice in shaping their new government. In large numbers people came to meetings with their ideas for better police protection, jobs and economic development, and programs for youth and seniors.

Upon taking office, the first thing we did is to begin transforming the Police Department. I appointed a new police director, John Rappaport, and together we launched an unprecedented crackdown on street crime, gang violence, drug sales, and quality of life crimes. Arrests for major crimes soared. We carried out busts of big time drug dealers for heroin and cocaine. Street corners were cleared of loitering gang members.

Some of our major arrests reflect the fact that in three months we have built a strong partnership with state, county and federal police agencies. We have restored their

confidence in law enforcement in Orange. This has put us in a position to aggressively seek public and private grants to fund our public safety programs.

We started with the Police Department because the key to achieving all of our dreams is to first make Orange safer.

What you are seeing is more than a crackdown on crime. Every city periodically cracks down on crime. What you are seeing is a transformation in how the police department and all of our other departments go about doing their work.

We are bringing the police and our communities together: creating an executive internship program for Orange High School students that will focus on the managerial and organizational side of police work; creating Operation Park and Walk, where officers are instructed to park their cars and walk patrols in designated areas while carrying their radios; creating a new category of law enforcement, special police officers.

After the first hundred days, we are feeling safer on our streets and in our homes. And this is only the beginning. We are developing plans to install surveillance cameras in high crime areas and on Main Street, and to upgrade police computer systems.

We are changing the culture of government and helping city employees become more productive and more proud of the work they do. For the first time, we are systematically and fairly evaluating the performance of our employees.

One measure of how we are achieving a better relationship with our workforce is the fact that we succeeded in negotiating a contract with the city's firefighters who had been forced to work without a contract for three years.

We created a Quality of Life Task Force to coordinate city departments to ensure that we do a better job of housing and sanitation code enforcement, keeping streets clean, and filling potholes.

Together with this task force, I've already paid surprise visits to a public housing project and a condo development, finding numerous health and safety violations. The task force has filled dozens of potholes and begun the demolition of unsafe and abandoned buildings that blight our neighborhoods.

We desperately need residential and commercial development to make Orange more attractive to businesses. This is absolutely necessary to building a stronger tax base that will enable us to hold down property taxes.

Before I took office, redevelopment in Orange was paralyzed for years by a state environmental requirement that a new water pumping station be built before they would allow permits for new development.

With the cooperation of the City Council, we broke the logjam last month and secured approval for construction of the new pumping station. I am pleased to announce that the groundbreaking for our Chestnut Street Pumping Station will take place next week on October 30th, 11:00 am to 12:30 pm at 632 Chestnut Street. You are all invited. It will mark an important milestone in the redevelopment of Orange.

In keeping our pledge to make government more accessible and open, we initiated the taping and broadcast of City Council meetings so that citizens can watch first hand as the decisions are made that affect their community.

We set up a complaint desk at Council meetings staffed by police officers to give citizens the opportunity to make requests for action by city government and to report crime problems in their neighborhoods.

We also set up a reception desk in City Hall staffed by a bi-lingual public information officer to direct citizens to the help they need. And, now, when you call City Hall, you will most times greeted by a cheerful and helpful human being, not the automated computer system that used to answer all incoming calls.

This is just some of what you and I together have done to begin transforming Orange. In these first hundred days in office, we have proven that Orange can live up to its potential. We came into office confident that Orange has the location, public transportation, housing stock, and human talent not just to survive, but to thrive.

Now, we are showing how it can be done. We have set for ourselves an ambitious agenda and we are carrying it out. We are working together to make a difference. And we are getting results.

You came with me to City Hall, and, together, we are turning our city around!

Thank you and God bless.