

Mayor Barrett's 2011 State of the City Speech

As Prepared for Delivery

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Thank you Vera for that kind introduction.

Good Morning Milwaukee! I am delighted to welcome you to the beautiful campus of the Milwaukee Job Corps Center. This is a great place for young people to complete their high school education in a campus-like setting, learn a marketable trade, make lifetime friends, and graduate with a good job in hand. And, it's in Alderman Bob Puentes's district. Thank you, Bob.

...and I also want to thank the young men from the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music Jazz Ensemble for their entertainment this morning.

We are joined today by some of the first students who enrolled in Job Corps and who have committed themselves to learning the life skills they need to graduate and succeed in the world of work. To the young people involved in Job Corps, I want you to know we believe in you and we believe in the mission of Job Corps. By the end of June, this center will be the home to 300 students.

I'm proud of the role I played to bring Job Corps to Milwaukee. I like to call it my "17-year-overnight sensation!"

I was a new Congressman in 1993 when the planning began. Despite a great local partnership and high marks from the U.S. Department of Labor, Milwaukee's first application for a center failed. The proposal scored 10th in the nation, but only nine sites were chosen.

But, we weren't ready to quit. Just a couple of years later, with renewed commitment, we again brought local and state partners together and began a second application process. With strong support from City of Milwaukee officials, unanimous Congressional support, and leadership from the City's Housing Authority, Milwaukee was awarded the Job Corps site and its multi-million dollar investment in youth development.

As a result, our community will reap tremendous benefits. I especially want to thank Congresswoman Gwen Moore whose passion for this project was matched by her incredible hard work in seeing it through. And to our United States Senator, Herb Kohl, thank you. Senator Kohl's support never wavered.

The Milwaukee Job Corps Center is a symbol of what we can achieve when commitment and perseverance prevail.

Today, as we take stock of our wonderful City, I say we must renew and revive our commitment to our City, to our home, Our Milwaukee, and we must do so with a new level of enthusiasm and energy.

We all know we are living in tumultuous economic times. We are the children and grandchildren of the generation that experienced the Great Depression. We have been through our share of downturns and we have weathered recessions. But we have never experienced the likes of the

crash of 2008 and its continuing aftershocks.

The very foundation of the middle class - job security, home ownership, the financial wherewithal to support and raise a family and the hopes for a secure retirement - have been rocked.

The slow economic recovery and consistently high unemployment rates have fueled levels of uncertainty, fear and anger that I have not witnessed in more than 25 years of public service.

These feelings are very real and run very, very deep. Today, the middle-class is navigating uncharted territory. The rhetoric is boiling in the cauldron of conquer and divide politics. Middle-class teachers are being pitted against middle-class sales managers. Middle-class truck drivers, who plow snow and pick up our garbage, are being pitted against middle-class police officers and firefighters. Parents who have lost their jobs and are now toiling at ten-dollar-an-hour jobs, with no benefits to keep their heads above water are just plain mad. And I don't blame them.

So there is a need for shared sacrifice that includes our city workers. I believe at this difficult time, public employees need to pay more for their benefits. We began addressing this issue in earnest in our last round of contract negotiations and we will continue to do so.

But there is a very important point to be made here; we have made significant progress without attacking the fundamental right to organize.

Most of us agree that shared sacrifices are necessary. The problem, of course, is that sacrifices are not always equally shared. All employees, including police and fire, are going to have to be part of the solution. No one should be given a pass based on who they supported during a political campaign.

With a high degree of certainty, I can unfortunately tell you that the cuts coming from Madison are going to disproportionately impact the City of Milwaukee. The fact that we have been responsible stewards of your tax dollars will not matter. The fact that we are home to 73% of the region's poor won't matter.

The fact that we bargained a two-year, zero percent pay increase with our largest City union won't matter or, the fact that we made a \$47 million dollar payment to the City's pension fund without borrowing a penny won't matter.

Despite having absorbed an inflation adjusted loss of \$60 million dollars in state shared revenue since 2003, we have maintained services and budgeted strategically.

I want to be very clear here today. Governor Walker is planning to cut shared revenue to the City. With close to two thirds of our operating budget costs for salaries and benefits going to police and fire, we're going to have a very difficult time preserving all current services.

A cut to shared revenue is a cut to public safety.

I know he's trying to wash his hands of the public safety impacts of his decision by excluding Milwaukee police and fire from his proposals, but that just pushes the decision to the City level. There will be an impact.

The pending cuts will challenge us all. My priorities are to protect the essential services we provide to working families, to all families, and jobs, jobs, jobs. There are going to be changes. We're going to have to continue the innovations that we've initiated and we're going to have to be even more creative, more cooperative and more committed in our efforts to continue the growth of our great City.

In fact, we've already begun. This morning, I'm pleased to report a cost-saving, cooperative arrangement between governments. We are finalizing an agreement with Milwaukee County that will designate the City's Public Safety Communications Center as the central answering point for all incoming 911 cell calls. This agreement will eliminate the need to transfer emergency cell calls from the County to the City and will improve the quality and efficiency of 911 services we provide to our residents.

I've begun working with the Public Policy Forum and Greater Milwaukee Committee about examining consolidation of County Public Work services with the City's Department of Public Works.

I'm also asking members of the Milwaukee Intergovernmental Cooperation Council – the Council of all Milwaukee County municipalities – to take a hard look at consolidating municipal health department functions.

This is not a Milwaukee versus suburbs political battle. The City of Milwaukee already provides fire service to the Village of West Milwaukee. There already exists a consolidated North Shore Fire Department. These are real world, working examples that benefit taxpayers. They can serve as the launching pad for further study and consolidation of services. We owe it to middle class taxpayers to provide essential services at reasonable costs. I look forward to discussing these ideas with other leaders as well as with the various City unions.

To those of you who know me, you know that I strongly believe that we have a moral obligation to create hope in the lives of our young people. One way to do this is to provide our young people a summer job. Since 2005, I'm proud to report that 7,000 Milwaukee students have benefitted from a summer job through my Earn and Learn Program. Placements have been as varied as cleaning up at Summerfest, to working with Giacomo and Angelo Falluca at Palermos Pizza, to interning in a City department, to joining the Johnson Controls' Conservation Leadership Corps.

This summer, the public funds for this program will fall far short of meeting the goal we set for 2011 – 3,000 jobs. We have public and private commitments –both in funding and job placements – for 1,200 teens.

I will not settle for that. We must do better.

With the help of Manpower's Jeff Joerres, Tim Sullivan from Bucyrus International, WE Energies' Gale Klappa and Ellen Gilligan from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, we are going to initiate the Mayor's Earn and Learn Summer Jobs Fund. My staff has a lot of legwork to do and I know that economic times are tough, but let's get going. Let's put a few thousand Milwaukee young people to work this summer and build for future summers and future careers.

Stay tuned because we will be knocking on your doors. Our ask will be simple. It costs \$1,500 to place a Milwaukee teen in a seven-week summer job. So, yes, we will be asking for a

tax-deductible contribution to the fund. If that doesn't work, we'll be asking you to hire a Milwaukee teen. I want to extend my thanks to Jeff, Tim, Gale and Ellen for their commitment. We share a commitment to Milwaukee and I sincerely appreciate your willingness to work with me.

I can't talk about hope and young people without addressing the Milwaukee Public Schools. And, I can't talk about strengthening our middle-class without talking about our schools.

Superintendent Gregory Thornton has already had an impact – winning the \$20 million GE grant to improve science and math education. I'm committed to working with him to secure the next round of Race to the Top Dollars that are designed to go directly to school districts. I want Superintendent Thornton to succeed and I want him to have the tools necessary to move this district forward.

The state legislature should give him the power to close and reorganize failing schools and to immediately implement financial measures that would direct more resources into the classroom and provide him with the flexibility to deal with the pending cuts in school aids.

The fact is The Milwaukee Public Schools have to become a more attractive option. The days that the district was the only publicly-funded option are long gone - and whether you like it or not, they're not coming back anytime soon.

I want to take a moment now to talk about downtown and the need for a new approach to what was once the City's major shopping district. West Wisconsin Avenue –from the river to the Marquette campus – is a stretch that needs a major jolt of new ideas and, more importantly, new investment.

West Wisconsin Avenue generates no shortage of opinions and comments. I think we have heard them all – from constructing a pedestrian mall to selling everything on the stretch to a theme park developer.

But we don't have a magic wand. The City has invested tens of millions of dollars in the Grand Avenue. And while Development Commissioner Rocky Marcoux has a talented team, we can't – and we shouldn't- throw a disproportionate share of City resources at this one project.

A few months ago, I was having a conversation with my friend Steve Chernof about West Wisconsin Avenue and the Grand Avenue Mall. I asked him, "Why should the City be solely responsible for this?" That's when I invited Steve to engage the West Wisconsin Avenue Stakeholders and have them take a run at a viable redevelopment plan that breathes new life into this area.

Steve agreed to take on the project and we're pulling together a working team that will include the stakeholders- business people, developers, retail experts, architects and academics.

City staff will offer background information. But, this will not be driven by City Hall. I want a fresh set of eyes on the Avenue. Injecting new life into West Wisconsin Avenue will only add to the attractiveness of Milwaukee.

And while we're on the subject of downtown, I want everyone here to know we're committed to removing unnecessary impediments to development. As part of that, we are reviewing ordinances regarding historic preservation to make sure we protect our history without impeding

investment.

As City leaders, we'll continue our efforts to grow our economy and capitalize on our strengths so that jobs exist for those who want to live in Milwaukee and raise their families here. We have right here an industry that sets us apart. We are the creative hub of the Midwest and one of the top five creative clusters in this entire nation.

From artists to architects....from photographers to product designers....This Region's creative community is important to our economic well being as well as to our quality of life. And so I am happy to announce today that the Milwaukee Economic Development Corporation – itself a very creative financial agency – along with its financial partners, will be re-tooling one of its products to help provide “Creative Capital” to the Creative Industries of our region. With this capital support, we hope to build and expand our newly-recognized Creative assets.

While I'm on the subject of new and exciting ideas, let's talk about trains. High speed trains and high speed rail money. Most of you probably know that Governor Walker and I disagree about the value of President Obama's high speed rail initiative.

I worked hard to get train manufacturer Talgo to locate in Milwaukee, in a neighborhood that cries out for middle-class jobs. I'd like to thank Talgo for choosing Milwaukee.

I believe that the mid-west high speed rail line would have given Milwaukee and our region a huge financial boost as well as an advantage in recruiting businesses and middle class families. But just as I never quit on Job Corps, I'm not willing to give up on improving rail service to Milwaukee.

Just last month, I met with U.S. transportation Secretary Ray LaHood to discuss the viability of financing the improvements on the Milwaukee to Chicago Hiawatha Line through the second round of High Speed Rail funding.

For 2010, Amtrak reported record ridership between Milwaukee and Chicago; an increase of 6% to 783-thousand riders in 2010. The increase over the last five years has been 49%. This is more than a commuter train line; it's a valuable and necessary economic life line, connecting two large regional economies, arts and culture and residents to work.

Within the next few years, we will need additional trains on the Milwaukee-Chicago run. That would increase our daily trains from seven to nine and further strengthen Milwaukee's economy.

We should not let this opportunity to strengthen our region's economy slip away. Let's make this happen. And I'm asking that we pull together---Democrats, Republicans, the business community and get it done.

Home foreclosures continue to affect Milwaukee's residents and neighborhoods. This city has been a national leader in addressing the problem through partnerships and action.

The Milwaukee Homeownership Consortium actively works to preserve and promote homeownership in the City. At an event on a snowy Saturday in December, more than 600 people turned out to learn about opportunities for homeownership and purchasing foreclosed homes.

There are many people with stable employment and good credit, who could be homeowners.

We are extending an invitation to them to look at available homes in neighborhoods all across Milwaukee.

So, who are these potential homeowners? They are people like Leslie Edwards, who purchased her home on North 39th Street last month. The house had been a bank-foreclosed property, acquired by the City. The City invested in repairs on the home, and Leslie agreed to buy it. She's a homeowner now; her neighborhood is better off because she is there; and the city is stronger thanks to her investment. Leslie is here and I want to thank her for investing in Milwaukee and congratulate her on being a homeowner.

Our non-profit homeownership counseling agencies are key partners in these efforts as they work with families who are facing foreclosure, as well as those who are interested in pursuing homeownership.

Today I'm pleased to announce a new initiative, the Block Stabilization Program, to improve the appearance of city blocks where two or more homes have gone into foreclosure. I want to thank the Common Council for working with me on this. We are offering modest incentives to homeowners who make visible exterior improvements to their homes. In neighborhoods that look good, foreclosed homes are more likely to sell to new owners.

Access to financing continues to be a challenge to addressing the foreclosure issue. I would like to recognize and thank US Bank, for its commitment in providing mortgages to homeowners participating in the City's Neighborhood Stabilization Program, and Pyramax Bank which recently made a \$1 million financing commitment to provide mortgages to homeowners purchasing foreclosed properties.

Our efforts have also been aided by developers both large and small. Walnut Way Conservation Corporation and Layton Boulevard West Neighbors are working with the City to address foreclosures in their neighborhoods by renovating foreclosed properties and making them available for homeownership. Thank you to Sharon Adams, Fran Dawson and Charlotte John-Gomez for your assistance.

Earlier this year, Police Chief Edward Flynn and I were extremely pleased to announce that crime has decreased for the third straight year. The numbers speak for themselves, but equally compelling are the stories I hear from residents who talk about neighborhood groups working with the police to take their neighborhoods back.

Chief Flynn and the great men and women who work for the Milwaukee Police Department are implementing a common sense and innovative approach to crime fighting. They understand that safe Milwaukee neighborhoods are key to maintaining and attracting middle-class families. They also get that the police can't do it alone. District officers are working directly with neighborhood residents; opening the lines of communication and restoring trust. In the last year, more than 200 neighborhood watch groups were jointly formed.

Chief Flynn and this great department continue to build upon data-driven police response, and while crime is down, there were too many people killed in Milwaukee last year.

Unfortunately, we're seeing an increase in homicides stemming from domestic violence. We have to and we will drive that number down.

I also want to thank Fire Chief Mark Rohlfing and the brave men and women of the Fire

Department for their hard work and commitment to protect the residents of our City. Last year, the City of Milwaukee had the lowest number of fire fatalities since the Department started keeping records.

In fact, I think this is the lowest number of fire deaths in over 100 years.

People in this room and people throughout this City share my love for Milwaukee and my commitment to our future. I anticipate some difficult decisions are ahead for me and for other Milwaukee policy makers. We will be fighting hard to create jobs and protect the middle class. I'm also asking for more from Milwaukee's business community – ideas, financial support for good causes, and investments in growing companies and jobs, right here in this City. The challenges we face are serious. But, if we stand together – if we make a commitment to Milwaukee – we can and will keep our City on the path to success.
