

## Sacramento Mayor Kevin Johnson's Swearing-In Speech

November 25, 2008

Thank you, Pastor Williams; you're an inspiration to all of us everyday. I want to thank all of you for coming out tonight to this incredibly special occasion. Typically, the inauguration of the Mayor is a small and private affair. I wanted to make this one different. I wanted to make it about community. I wanted to make it about civic engagement. I wanted to make it about all of you. So thank you for being a part of this with me.

I attempted to run my campaign in the same vein - as a different kind of campaign. One that went out to the streets and met voters where they lived. We knocked on over 150,000 doors from Meadowview to North Natomas and from the Pocket to Tahoe Park. I owe a debt of gratitude to the voters who brought me to this place today. You didn't just vote me into office, with this victory came a clear mandate for change.

This is the start of a new day. The day when the word "change" ceases be a campaign slogan and starts to become a reality. This is no mean feat. Change is an easy word to say. But it's a difficult word to enact. Together we can bring about the change that this city and its citizens so rightfully deserve.

I am ready. And I know you are too. And that's what it's going to take. An incredible public will amongst the citizens of this city. People working together not just for their own benefit but for the good of the whole city. Langston Hughes once wrote, "There's a dream in this land with its back against the wall. To save the dream for one we must save the dream for all."

To save this dream for everyone in Sacramento, there can be no one sitting on the sidelines. This won't be a spectator sport. Together we must take action. Collective action. Aggressive action.

I know it's possible, because I've lived the most improbable life one could imagine. In conjecturing what got me to this point, someone recently referred to this election as a "Cinderella Story" for me. I think the more apropos term would be that mine is a "Sacramento Story."

The Sacramento story of a Black child born into poverty to a single mother, raised by his grandparents in Oak Park in a small, three bedroom house near 16th Ave and 35th Street, right around the corner from the Oak Park Market. The Sacramento story of a child riding his bike to McClatchy Park, playing baseball with the Oak Ridge little league, watching movies at Esquire and Tower theater, eating ice cream at Gunthers and donuts from Marie's donuts and spending time with my friends at State Fair at Cal Expo. The Sacramento story of being educated at Ethel Phillips and CAL Middle School, and then Sacramento High School, where both my grandfather, father and my mother went to school. In this Sacramento story I made it out of Oak Park on a basketball scholarship to Cal, went to play for 12 years in the NBA and the very moment I could, I returned to Sacramento. During my years at CAL and playing professional basketball I lived a life I'd never dreamed of.

And in my Sacramento story after being in that world, I realized that I wouldn't really ever be complete in it. Rather, I would only find real fulfillment by returning to my roots and working to ensure that more children, kids just like me could have the opportunity to live that kind of life. So to make my Sacramento story a different one, I came back to run St. HOPE. We took over Sac High. We started PS7 which ended up being the top performing elementary school in the area. We refurbished the Oak Park Victorian, restored the old Woodward building and theater and established 40 Acres which attracted a Starbucks and several other businesses.

All too little old Oak Park. To make a different kind of Sacramento. And a different Sacramento story for the children who deserve one the most. When I saw what we were able to do in Oak Park, the way that we were able to jumpstart the community, bring new energy and better results, I felt compelled to have that impact at a broader level.

In this particular Sacramento story after a lot of soul-searching, and a lot of prayer, I decided to make the biggest leap of my life. I took on the challenge of running for Mayor because I knew that I could make a positive difference in this city.

The Sacramento story extends out to a taxi driver who once drove me home, refused to be paid, and spent the rest of the campaign volunteering to deliver yard signs to constituents. The Sacramento story also includes Luis, the security guard. The man who innocently allowed me in to City Hall only to become the victim of vicious political games but who stands with me today as a symbol of what we want our city to become friendly, accessible, and open.

And in my Sacramento story, a little poor Black kid from the hood - from Oak Park grew up to become the Mayor of this city. In this story, I hope that children throughout Sacramento will see that truly anything is possible.

When I started my campaign on March 5th, I honestly didn't know what I would face in this race. I thought that Michael Jordan and Hakeem Olajuwon threw some hard elbows; they had nothing on these folks in Sacramento politics! Throughout the campaign, and especially in the last 3 weeks, I have learned a tremendous amount about the politics and challenges we face as a city. Though I knew that Sacramento was not living up to its potential, I actually did not really know about the depths of the issues we faced in almost every aspect of city management. I don't think very many of us did, to tell you the truth.

It was shocking to me to find out that the crime rate in the city had skyrocketed in the last 7 years. While other major cities in the state were enjoying decreasing crime rates, ours were on the rise. So much so that Sacramento is now the second most dangerous city in the state second only to Oakland. Can you imagine? In Sacramento?

And to add insult to injury, we have fewer cops per capita than any of the largest 50 cities in the country. This has led to our police force only being able to investigate 14% of the property crimes that occur and for the crime on K Street doubling in the past decade with over 1000 robberies and over 2200 assaults. This is unacceptable.

In order to shift the crime dynamic, we need to improve public education. While I've spent the last 5 years working to build great public schools through our work at St. HOPE, it seems the city's progress in education has been flagging. About two thirds of

the city schools failed to meet state academic growth standards last year. A full third of our young people are not graduating from high school and we have a persistent achievement gap between wealthy white students and their poor and minority counterparts. This achievement gap mirrors that which is occurring nationwide so much that Black and Latino kids who graduate from high school are at the same academic level as White 8th graders. And the data show that we have more African American males going to jail than we have going to college. This lack of academic rigor and progress has a significant impact on our long term health and vitality as a city.

In order to attract businesses to the region, we have to have an educated and highly skilled work force. If we don't, we'll continue to face the same challenges we're seeing now. Some of the nation's worst foreclosure and bankruptcy rates, the highest unemployment rates in over a decade, and city expenditures that are far outpacing our revenues. Perhaps the most surprising things that have surfaced have to do with the day to day operations and oversight of the city. Mismanagement of the city has led to the government being seen as tired, bureaucratic, uninspired and unresponsive.

What this means in real terms is that our police patrols have been cut in half. We have had "brown outs" of our fire houses that have resulted in slower response time. There are fewer 911 operators for life threatening calls and millions have been squandered in missing water meters, uncollected library fines, counting trees and luxury cat cages. As our nation faces one of the most difficult financial eras in decades and our city faces record budget deficits, it's hard to imagine how we can move toward a new Sacramento. But imagine we must.

As was apparent from my premature spin in the chair at City Hall, I am incredibly excited and motivated to do this work. I cannot wait! Even before today, before the official inauguration, I have been hard at work on the task at hand.

First, I've been meeting with city officials to get oriented to city government and briefed on the state of affairs. It's been both an informative and sobering experience. I have been meeting with business owners, civic groups and community organizations across the city to understand how we can better serve their needs and be better partners to them. I have been working to begin to establish Sacramento as the leader in the region, attending the state of the city address in Rancho Cordova and hosting a "Mayor's breakfast" with the Mayors from 13 of the surrounding cities. We talked about some of the issues that plague all of us and then, and more importantly, we discussed the things that we could take on and collaborate about that would benefit the entire region.

And I've done a few things in an attempt to raise the profile of Sacramento nationally from interviews with CNN, ESPN and the New York Times to an appearance on the "Colbert Report." And let me just say for the record that I was not going to let that fool get away with saying that Sacramento was "unbelievably boring." I had to get him straight because now my job is to be Sacramento's biggest cheerleader, and to spark interest in our city nationwide. I will attempt to inspire people inside and outside of the city. I may not have been an elected official before today, but I am smart enough to clearly understand that I had an invaluable resource in the people of Sacramento.

I've said from the start that this is not the job for one person, but the job for an entire community focused around a collective vision. One of the things I love about Sacramento

is the fact that the moment I was elected, I was inundated with offers from citizens far and wide who wanted to help. It was tremendously inspiring to see. And I took advantage of it. I put you to work. I called a transition meeting at 7:30 am the Wednesday after the election and Mark Friedman, who showed up quite bleary eyed (but on time) commented that it was cruel and unusual punishment. The equivalent to calling practice the morning after winning an NBA championship. I told Mark to get used to it. He's going to have to step up his game to keep up with me.

We now have hundreds of people working on the transition team. People are researching the best practices of other cities, determining how we can make our city "greener," develop our waterfronts to look like those in San Antonio and Portland, bring a new arena for the Kings, curb homelessness and incent businesses and development along the K Street corridor. It is inspiring to see so many Sacramentans who are committed to this city that they are waking up to attend a 7:30am meeting, working for the transition team in the evenings after their day jobs, taking time off of work, and on the weekends to ensure that we can hit the ground running.

The change we want to see in this city must be swift, decisive and measurable. Here are the things that you can expect to see within the first 100 days of my administration: First, we will identify an external team to conduct a full audit of the city finances. We have engaged in several conversations with firms already many of whom have offered to help us pro-bono or at deeply discounted rates.

We will hold a "Gang Summit" to bring together gang members in an effort to address their issues. There are currently over 6000 gang members in 65 gangs across the region. We will bring these folks together in the name of peace and building a stronger community.

I will ensure the city is researching and applying for Homeland security and other grants that would allow us to increase the number of sworn officers on the streets.

I will begin instituting "office hours" one Saturday a month for citizens to visit with me to share their concerns or ideas. My calendar will be made public for transparency and I'll be hosting town hall meetings once a month around the city.

I will meet with the superintendents of all of the school districts in the city to discuss the most significant challenges they face in their work. Then, we'll begin to plan an "Education Summit" to bring together state wide and national experts who can help us craft our citywide reform agenda.

I will meet with the Governor and Congresswoman Matsui to understand how we can address our flood threat and build infrastructure in the city.

I will work with City Manager Ray Kerridge to begin publicizing our 311 system so that citizens fully utilize this 24 hour a day 7 day a week service.

These are just a few of the things that you can expect to see in the first two months of my administration.

The theme for this evening is “Together We Can” because my hope is that today we can spark a new day of activism and service to our city amongst every citizen. When we asked you to come together today for this occasion, we requested that you bring something for the less fortunate. I’m told that just in this one event on this one evening that the residents of Sacramento have committed thousands of cans of food and supplies for this holiday season that will assist several thousand needy families and children throughout this city.

There is power in numbers and as a city; we’re going to show this power. We’re going to flex our collective community muscle. People are excited by the opportunity we have to bring positive change to our city by working together. They are excited about the change they can feel in Washington and the change they can feel here in our own city. With this enthusiasm, I hope to ignite a new sense of civic responsibility, civil service and city pride.

What does this mean?

It means that we all need to become more involved, more engaged and energized to make our city great. There is power in numbers, and I believe that Together We Can.

Together, we can create a new kind of government. The kind of government where the very citizens who are affected by city government are actively working to shape and change it. That’s democracy at its best.

Together we can reclaim our streets and neighborhoods - driving out the criminals and making our city safe for children, families, and seniors. Making it a place that businesses want to open or relocate because crime is not an issue.

Together we can improve our schools and make them places that are worthy of our children. We will be the first city in this country where the color of a child’s skin or the zip code that they live in will not determine their educational attainment levels but a city where every child in every neighborhood can get an excellent education.

Together we can create a city with multiple “destination points.” A beautifully developed Riverfront, a vibrant K Street and downtown corridor, the largest infill development project in the country with the Rail yards and a new arena that also serves as a comprehensive entertainment complex. These destination points will be attractions for Sacramento families but also people from across the state and across the country.

Together we can hold our city government accountable. Accountable for ensuring that our tax payer dollars are doing to the services and programs that improve our quality of life everyday.

In order to do this, I need everyone to take an active role in this effort.

I’m calling on our business leaders to provide internships and job training to young people and the unemployed to ensure that we can develop a highly skilled work force in our city.

I'm asking our senior citizens to go into our schools and tutor students who are not meeting grade level expectations.

I'm imploring the faith community to organize a "Gang Summit" to work with known gang leaders and gang members to peaceably bring harmony to our communities.

I want our young people complete 100 hours of community service before they graduate from high school.

I'd like our labor community to rally their members to organize mass neighborhood clean ups and volunteer efforts in soup kitchens during the holidays.

I hope that our college students will offer to mentor some of our at risk youth in schools and in the juvenile justice system.

It is only with this kind of significant and collaborative effort that change in our city will truly occur. I want to bring a culture of service and civic engagement to Sacramento.

Together we can make this vision a reality.

Together we can create a better Sacramento.

Together we make this a world class city.

Together we can create a city that works for everyone.

Thank you for joining me in this work and on this journey.

Together we can.

(Provided courtesy of <http://blackpoliticsontheweb.com>)