

State of the Ward Address

FIGHT ON!

As delivered by: Councilman Marion Barry on Tuesday, March 02, 2010

Good evening Ward 8!

Now come on you all, you can do better than that! Good evening Ward 8! Oh come on you can do better than that! Turn to your neighbor on the left and say I am glad that I came. Turn to your neighbor on the right and say aren't you glad you came?

First of all let me thank God for this evening. An evening filled with all kinds of challenges, obstacles and opportunities. An evening we have never seen before. If it weren't for God's mercy, grace and power, none of us would be here this evening. Let's give God some praise.

Whenever you see me, I always give Him praise ... for I know who brought me from the cotton fields of Mississippi to segregated Memphis, Tennessee, to the first in my family to go to college, to the civil rights movement without being hurt or killed. To this wonderful city of Washington, let's give God some more praise.

Serving as your Ward 8 Councilmember has and is both a privilege and an honor. I love serving you. I love fighting for you. I love standing up for you. I love encouraging you. I love uplifting you. I love bringing as many resources to the Ward as I can. I love fighting for respect. I love telling everybody that Ward 8 is poised for greatness.

As I stand before you, I am inspired by the great courage and determination possessed by the citizens of this Ward. The life of a public servant is not easy, nor should it be. It is a life filled with obstacles and many challenges. The life of a public servant is not a 50 yard sprint, it is a marathon.

Daily I hear stories of the constant battle of survival and of success waged by you my constituents, and before I go any further, I want to commend you and encourage you not to stop now. Not when so much is at stake! I know what a challenge looks like, just as many of you face challenges every day. And, I know how it feels to sometimes have to encourage your own self. I am intimately familiar with the constant struggles with powers that demand more and more from you when those powers have no intention of doing anything to help you, or help you to help yourself.

Incidentally, if you want to judge Marion Barry, judge me by the whole book rather than 4 or 5 pages in the book. Judge me by all 4 quarters of the football game, rather than a half a quarter. Judge me by the entire basketball game rather than just a few minutes. To all you stone throwers, those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. Look at your own self before you judge others.

The life of public service is no cakewalk, nor is it a life void of pain that you must, at times, suppress in order to adequately serve your constituents. I thank GOD EVERYDAY for giving me the love for people, the drive to fight for their rights, the thick skin to take all of the stones that are constantly thrown at me by people. I thank GOD for the discernment to look past the petty games and distractions put before me, so that I may better serve my constituents, and I thank GOD for reaffirming within my heart each and every day that No weapon that is formed against me shall

prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against me in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.

If it weren't for the Lord, I don't know where I'd be! I am thankful every day that I do not look like what I've been through, but I do have scars and memories that remind me that I can stand the test, and with God on my side I am a conqueror, and he has made me an overcomer. Just as many of you, I was not born with a silver spoon in my mouth; and once you've picked cotton in the Mississippi Cotton Fields, you don't forget it! You don't forget being faced with the challenges of getting an education because you can't pay for it, and not being able to get a job because of your color. I remember wondering, just as many of you, how I was going to pay for school. Those nights that I spent bussing tables, getting a few hours of sleep, and then spending my days in the classrooms, trying to send a little money home to help my family...I CAN NOT FORGET IT, and I WILL NOT forget it, God made me an over-comer!

The fight and drive I have for you is the same fight and drive I had 45 years ago when I first came to this city. Washington did not have a mayor or city council or an elected school board. I didn't just sit around and moan and groan about it. I got busy and went to work. I started the Free DC movement to advocate for full voting rights. I fought for an elected mayor, elected City Council, and elected school board. In 1968, we finally got an elected school board. In 1973, thanks Congress and Charles Diggs, we finally got a right to vote for a mayor and city council.

When it became apparent that our Downtown was in desperate need of transformation, I went to work. Downtown today would not be what it is, if it weren't for the leadership of Marion Barry. Neighborhood revitalization wouldn't be occurring if it weren't for the leadership of Marion Barry. I gave an opportunity to a number of African Americans who have since become millionaires. Because of my policies and programs, the Black Middle class has become even more solid in Prince George's county and Washington.

The list goes on and on ~ summer jobs for high school students, support for UDC,these needs would have still been "talked" about but for Marion Barry. Years ago when it was thought that diversity would never reach the city hall, this need would still be lacking but for Marion Barry, diversity is clearly evident. God has been with me through every challenge, no matter how big and small, and because of his guidance, WE not only I, have met those challenges and found that there is no problem that can not be overcome! I am an overcomer, you can be an overcomer, and together we will meet the challenges ahead of us!

Now I am no different from any other man or woman, there have been times when I have made mistakes, and there were also times when I was forced to make hard decisions that some did not agree with. But in every action that I have taken while in office, it has been to better my ward and the lives of those who live in it. Frederick Douglass once said, " I prefer to be true to myself, even at the hazard of incurring the ridicule of others, rather than to be false, and to incur my own abhorrence." You can be assured that I, Marion Barry, will 100% be with you Ward 8!

Serving as your Ward 8 Council- member has been both a privilege and an honor. This is a job that I do not and will not take lightly. I want you to know that with every decision I make, your well being is put at the forefront, as well as what will lie in store for future residences of this Ward and

the City. As I address you tonight, I want to give you my assessment of the state of our Ward, actions taken by me and my staff, along with what we hope will lie in store in the year to come. A Phillip Randolph stated, "A community is democratic only when the humblest and weakest person can enjoy the highest civil, economic, and social rights that the biggest and most powerful possess."

Every day that I dawn the steps of the Wilson building, it is these rights I am fighting to uphold on your behalf. It is apparent now more than ever, that the willing minds and able bodied here in Ward 8 are being stifled due to massive job loss, and economic strife. For years, the playing field has been uneven, and it is my desire to narrow the gap. This gap has crippled the possibilities of true economic justice, and kept the playing field unlevelled for those seeking a good education, means to pay for it, and jobs that are equipped to provide well for the families of this Ward.

Now as to the State of our Ward ----

The Washington DC I arrived in many years ago is vastly different from the Washington DC that is present now, and I know of the hard work and due diligence held by many citizens to get us this far; I am now asking for your help, as we prepare to build a bridge and close the gap in 2010 for our residents in Ward 8. In Ward 8 we are no longer sitting and waiting for things to happen; together, we are meeting the challenges-and the challenges are many.

In 2004, I found a Ward where the residents' spirits were down, their heads hanging down - they were disrespected and counted out. Today, I serve and represent a community which is in distress both economically and otherwise - a community of over 70,000 people where over 82% are headed by female heads of households. **But, we can over come this!** A community which has the highest illiteracy rate in the city, highest drop out rate, the lowest graduation rate, the highest health disparities, 35% unemployment, fewest number of college graduates. **Through our own efforts, we can over come this!** A community that is zoned primarily for apartments, leaving little room for homeownership; a community that has the most unpaved alleys, the most run down streets and the smallest number of businesses....in other words Ward 8 is a community that is resource poor. Ward 8 has the greatest needs, but not nearly enough resources from the government to help meet these needs.

These challenges were especially made apparent in the wake of the recession that plagued all of America in 2009 and sadly Ward 8 was of no exception.

In terms of Jobs in Ward 8 - we are in - what I call the emergency room. I am fully aware of the desire to work, but jobs and available training are critically lacking. But I, Marion Barry, plan to lead the effort to get the private sector to commit to 20,000 jobs for Ward 8 residents. The unfortunate truth, ladies and gentleman, that lies in front of us is that there are 700,000 jobs here in DC with only 30% of the workforce made up of DC Residents. This is unacceptable! MAYOR FENTY should be ashamed of himself. He has not done one single thing about it. There are thousands of you who are looking for jobs everyday and doors are continuously closed. On offenders the doors are closed. Go by any construction site ... any bridge - and you will see that there are little to no DC residents working ... let alone... Ward 8 residents.

This is some good news to report tonight regarding jobs --- The United Medical Center has agreed to employ 50% of its workforce from Ward 8.

In addition, to help combat this situation, I realize that many people just need a life line to hold on to, while they still continue to look for work. Therefore, I supported the Unemployment Compensation Reform Act of 2009 which extends the length of time to file an appeal of an initial determination with respect to benefit eligibility, enhances the maximum weekly benefit provided, and expands the eligibility to those who had to leave jobs for compelling family reasons. In the meantime, my office has been hard at work trying to bring businesses to Ward 8, and because of our efforts, there are currently in excess of 50 major development projects planned or in progress in Ward 8. Something we are very excited about is a project that brings potentially 14,000 jobs to Ward 8 in its first phase alone! This is the Department of Homeland Security's new compound at St. Elizabeth's Hospital. This project is touted to be the largest construction project in the United States, and it is happening right here in Ward 8. And I will fight each and every day to make certain that they hold up their end of the deal. If you pass by and you don't see DC residents on the job --- CALL ME! Regardless of what the critics might say; I know in my heart, just as you do, that our Ward is a place people want to work and people want to do business.

And with that said, TONIGHT, I am asking all of you who are unemployed to meet me over at the ONE STOP UNEMPLOYMENT CENTER, located on Naylor Road at 10am tomorrow morning to show the need - our need -- for jobs here in Ward 8. Line up around the corner!

YOU have got to make your way to the site tomorrow. No one is going to carry you. No one is going to drive you. The pressure is on YOU to demand more jobs here in the Ward - you must stand up and FIGHT. And the pressure will then be on Mayor Fenty to do more for THIS city - to do more for THIS Ward.

President Barack Obama speaks of going green, and we know that there will be many jobs created by the growing green economy. That is why I am in full support of a Green Job Summit, which I am positive will properly equip the citizens of Ward 8 in being properly positioned to take advantages of the Green Jobs that will be coming here to DC and to our Ward.

One key factor in getting our citizens back to work is knowledge, and I agree with Mary McLeod Bethune when she stated, "Knowledge is the prime need of the hour." and as echoed by our President in his State of the Union address, job training will be essential in getting our residents back to work! The residents of Ward 8 can use work...the residents of Ward 8 have the skills, and the residents of Ward 8 are prepared to go through the training! And with that said, you must WANT to WORK ... you must STRIVE to WORK ... YOU MUST TAKE THE JOBS THAT YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE UNTIL YOU CAN GET THE JOBS THAT YOU WANT. I am proud that we have started this process by allotting 4.6 million dollars for Adult Job Training, and we've taken crucial steps legislatively to keep our vocation schools open on nights and weekends, better preparing our residents to competitively enter the evolving job market.

As for Education -- Ward 8 has the poorest schools in the Nation. Tell me, Mr. Mayor, how can our city allot 2 Billion dollars for education and nothing to show for it? Of course, there have been bright spots, SOME levels of improvement... of minor gains, but what about the overall

performance? When 200 students can be put out of school in the course of a year, with nowhere to go ... THAT IS A SERIOUS PROBLEM. And the pressure lies at the front door of the executive, Mayor Adrian Fenty. As parents, we can no longer accept or settle for mediocrity. We must push our children, our students to desire to be more than just a G.E.D recipient, the must strive to receive more than just that High School diploma – it is our responsibility to urge them that higher education – a college education – is the way to prosperity here in America. We must encourage them to set their goals high in hopes of achieving and being concerned among the best. The key to success lies in education. Mayor Fenty knows that – that's why he's got his kids in the best public schools in the District. But what about making all DC public schools the best? We must fight for what's best for our children, and parents should have the right to be able to choose the best public and charter schools for the children. Again, the pressure lies at Fenty's feet.

In terms of the beautification, renovation of our Ward -- After much work, 2010 will bring 7000 units of affordable housing! This housing comes as we are now seeing the roads and alleyways being paved and consistent trash pickup! Not only will we have housing, but after a 25 year battle, Ward 8 will now have its first Super Market that will service the citizens of the Ward! This is only the beginning! I have recently spoken with Ms. Edmonds, who heads the Department of Housing and Community Develop, about hiring an architect to redesign, block by block the corridors of Good Hope Road, Martin Luther King – on down to St. Elizabeth's. At the end of the day, it will be my goal to make certain that this part of Ward 8 is just as beautiful at Barracks Row! We must insist that this historic area of our Ward is renovated! Where there are bricks with grass growing out of them ... they must be removed. Where there are untrimmed trees ... they must be trimmed... This year, Mayor Fenty. This year!

Barbara Jordan once said, "If we promise as public officials, we must deliver. If we as public officials propose, we must produce." Mayor Fenty should be working daily to uphold this charge.

As I prepare to close I am reminded of a Biblical story I heard a few years ago. This story was of a young man who was the baby son of wealthy father. Although his intentions for his family were always good, the jealousy of his brothers landed him in a pit and then sold into slavery. Where there might have been some who would have been broken after that, not him. He rose in ranks as a servant, and was very well liked by his owner, but when making the decision to do the right thing, instead of falling into temptation, he was lied on and put into prison. While in prison, he did not lose faith, but just stayed obedient to what the Lord was telling him, and his gift of discernment was apparent by everyone. Soon, his skills of interpretations was needed by the king; and through his obedience within this skill, he rose to second in command of the whole region. Soon, the very people who put him in the pit needed him for survival.

Ward 8, regardless of how insignificant, misunderstood; underestimated, mistreated you feel, remember that we do not and will not stay in the pit! The same boy that was thrown in the pit by his brothers (who were only jealous of his gifts and talents) possessed the very potential that landed him 2nd in command. I want you to know that it will be by the very blood, sweat and tears of this Ward, which will ensure the sustainability of Washington DC. I see it, I know it, and the rest of this city knows it as well.

DC NEEDS Ward 8 to survive, and as long as I am in office, we will not only survive, but we will excel and exceed in all areas of education and economy. It is my unwavering desire to Narrow the

Gap and Level the Playing-field for Ward 8, and with your continued prayers and support, this desire will be met and then you my friends, will see the benefits of living where you can be

educated, work, and worship without leaving the ward if you don't want to. I know what no sounds like, and what impossible looks like; but I've heard God say Yes when no was all around, and I'm glad to know I've seen God make what seemed impossible become TOO EASY. There's nothing to impossible or no dream unattainable for Ward 8. I am just asking you to do one thing;

Don't judge me by just a few chapters, try to understand the whole book, Don't count me out after a few innings, come and talk to me at the bottom of the ninth, Don't call off the bets after only 2 quarters, there are many touchdowns ahead; We as a community must stay in this fight together, do not let the media or other politicians divide us...I am in this to win it...I am an overcomer!! Thank you and may God continue to bless each and every one of you.