

[5]

Monsignor William J. Linder
Founder, New Community Corporation, Newark

MONSIGNOR LINDER: I just wanted to really make some kind of bullet points that I hope we'd all think about today.

I've lived in Newark now 45 years. I went from Irving Turner Boulevard to Orange Street. So you can get an idea of my range of movement in 45 years.

I also have my doctorate in sociology, but I'm not talking from official statistics. I'm talking about my own observations as a citizen here and as someone who's worked I hope hard for relieving poverty in our city.

The first is the issue of crime. Gang activity is far greater today than it has ever been in our city and at the same time I do not see an increasing number of police. In fact, I see with the numbers we have, we now need to employ overtime really to keep them involved downtown, whether it be New Jersey PAC or the arena or the stadium, but I don't see anyone talking about an initiative for more police on the sidewalks where our houses are.

I also see the issue of really the thrust on the national level. So I'm right near Orange Street, you know, that special headquarters for the police. It's not a regular precinct. It's really their special kind of forces, and one is the anti-terrorism and every time I go by, I see a new piece of equipment, usually several new pieces of equipment, and I begin -- it's getting to be a thing that I go by just to see what new toy, you know. And here we are in the streets, the terrorism we have is local. It's local.

I look at the political climate. You know, our Attorney General has 120 indictments and 120 convictions of political people in New Jersey. That's his reputation.

We somehow have to take control of government and we somehow have to take control of the fact that we're not going to tolerate the type of government we've had. And so I really think that one of the great things around our neck hanging on us is really political crime. And we have to. We can't depend upon the U.S. Attorney. We have to do it.

The housing, I look at housing. So what have we done. We've torn down the high-rise, right? I used to be every day for ten years in Hayes Homes, Scudder Homes, and Stella Wright. We moved over 20,000 people out, but we haven't built anything in its place to speak about.

We've lost vouchers in the City of Newark and we definitely have about 40 percent, if we have that, of the public housing population today that we had in 1960.

Where are the people? They're in Irvington, East Orange. The only thing we've done is pushed out to the suburban, or what was the suburban, our problems here in Newark.

With regard to education, we made a great effort through state money and bond money to rebuild schools and some of them are beautiful. They really are magnificent structures, but education doesn't come from a physical place, you know, and we have to get ourselves focused on really what is the solution. Building buildings is probably the easier part. It's building people, wherever they are, that's more difficult.

Unemployment, as was mentioned by Roland earlier, it's really over 50 percent. You know, none of us believe the state figures because they only have the numbers that are registered as unemployed and most of ours are so chronically unemployed, that they never register as employed.

So, you know, it's around 50 percent. We only have to drive through the city and see the street. You know, it doesn't take anything to see that.

We see the post-prison population. We have mandatory sentencing. A lot of it is very biased. You know, like, for example, on the issue of cocaine, you know, whether it be crack, it is a biased system with a mandatory sentencing and then we have nothing for that -- for the return of people from prison. Nothing at all. No programs.

We have an automotive technician program and we try -- we have about half of the students are really coming out of the prison system, yet they all lost their license and while they're in prison we penalized them, you know, add to it by fines and then we charge them interest. So they end up with an ounce of money. They owe the state three or four times what it was when they went in, and yet you can't work for an automotive -- you can't work for like the Ford franchise if you don't have a license because you have to be insured.

And the last thing I would say is on the area of public policy. We in the United States period, we love flagship projects. We love those big glorious things. It fills the front page. I mean the arena just took page after page for how many -- about a month and a half. I mean you couldn't read anything else.

Have you ever seen anything in the paper in the last, take anything, ten years about a major initiative in housing?

And if you ask for that, you'd be told both on the state level and the local level, ah, that would be far too expensive, we couldn't undertake that. We can't afford it.

But no one raised the question of our flagship projects and whether we should build them or not, and no one asked the question about what the continuation of those projects cost the people of Newark. It's huge. We just saw figures like -- what does it take for overtime of the police department every time there's one event.

So I think our priorities are wrong. They've been wrong for 40 years and that's why I am not very positive about what we've accomplished in 40 years. I think we could have done that with our eyes closed.

Thank you.