



A Vision for New Jersey



Mayor Ras Baraka answered the audience's questions after his speech

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The Honorable. Ras Baraka, Mayor of Newark, visited Rowan University on February 20, 2024, to discuss his plans for New Jersey and how he envisions helping his state.

Rowan University's Institute for Public Policy & Citizenship (RIPPAC) is a university-led organization that helps educate its students and the public on politics and policies. They do this by holding events and inviting guest speakers to discuss the issues within New Jersey and how they plan to resolve them, as well as career development and other programs.

"The Vision of New Jersey" is a series of seminars where the University invites representatives of the state to speak on their vision of a safer and better state. Many of these guest speakers are mayors, senators, and U.S. congressional representatives.

This time, they invited Ras Baraka to discuss his goals to better New Jersey. He was greeted by Dr. Dworkin, Director of RIPPAC, who welcomed him to the University and thanked him for coming down from Newark.

Mayor Baraka is the 40th mayor of the City of Newark and has served as its mayor since 2014. Since then, he's worked to better the city he calls home by tackling issues that the city faces. He was met by students and staff of the University as well as supporters of him after it was rumored he may run for governor.

He's made the news on his success in reducing the crime rate in Newark to the lowest it has been in 5 decades. He also made progress in increasing the bandwidth of Wi-Fi and communication to city parks and other public areas.

The mayor addressed Newark's main topics: housing, education, immigration, and cost. Believing more affordable housing should be made using state taxes and support the people who live in the area.

"We are not talking about issues solely targeted toward black people but problematic to the state of New Jersey, and we have a responsibility to address them together."

Mayor Baraka talked about his belief that "politics should stay in the way of progress," or the people will get content. He encouraged more people to be inclusive, to read more into the policies, and to participate in the community to ensure all voices are heard.

He also stated that residents of all groups should be able to have basic living and affordable housing and that New Jersey should work for the people as much as the citizens work for the state.

"We talk about people in categories, rich and wealthy or middle class, but this is not what New Jersey is," He told the audience. "We are working families trying to make sense of all the politics and press... trying to save the little we can as we watch all we work for disappear in the high cost of living in this country and this state."

He later went on to talk about how jobs should not discriminate from hiring people in specific fields just because they are reformed convicts, documented immigrants, or black or brown but by their character. Believing every individual should be allowed to work and provide for their family.

He concluded his speech by announcing his campaign for the governor's office and encouraging young people to take the initiative to pursue public office roles.

"We need you; it's hard work, and nothing is easy," he said, looking into the audience. "It's worth fighting for... The stairs are harder than the elevator, but you feel you accomplished something when you reach the top."

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Civics 101

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Keep in mind you can also request a vote by mail form when you contact the Philadelphia City Commissioners office. You don't have to go and vote in person on election day. You can vote in advance of election day, which I think is one of the best things that's happened for Philadelphia and Pennsylvania voters in quite a while.

If someone asked you--what does a PA State Attorney General do? Here's the answer.

The Pennsylvania Attorney General is the state's top lawyer. The office can bring down drug rings, investigate public corruption, and defend the state when it is sued.

The attorney general is also a political figure, working with the Governor and the Legislature to reform state drug laws and its prison system and to combat the state's heroin epidemic.

Most modern-day elected Pennsylvania Attorneys General have been former prosecutors — either District Attorneys or U.S. Attorneys.

In addition to investigating criminal operations, the Attorney General's office looks into scams targeting seniors and violations of the state's clean air and water laws and evaluates whether mergers break antitrust laws.

The Attorney General, in essence, runs a large law firm with a broad scope that includes investigating drug traffickers, Medicaid fraud, and prescription drug abuse. The office works on criminal, civil, and consumer protection cases and has 830 employees in offices across the state, according to the latest figures provided by the Attorney General's office. More than half of those employees work on criminal cases.

The Attorney General doesn't actually appear in court very often. They make key decisions on major cases, assist in local and federal investigations, and meet with legislators and constituents regularly. The Attorney General's office investigates crimes or schemes that span multiple counties. It also works with federal investigators on cases that span multiple states. The information in today's column about the Attorney General's role comes from a website called Public Source.

In the upcoming weeks, we'll take a look at the job descriptions of some of the other key political seats that are up for grabs. Stay tuned.

Septima Clark

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Citizenship Schools were the base on which the whole Civil Rights Movement was built. And that's probably very much true." Rosa Parks also said that while she may have sat down once, Mrs. Clark kept on working and building: "I am always very respectful and very much in awe of the presence of Septima Clark because her life story makes the effort that I have made every minute. I only hope that there is a possible chance that some of her great courage and dignity and wisdom has rubbed off on me."

As a woman in the movement, Mrs. Clark said she felt the men around her often did not do a good job of listening to or including her or other women. Yet she observed that it was largely women who got things done: "In stories about the Civil Rights Movement, you hear mostly about the Black ministers. But if you talk to the women--who were there, you'll hear another story. I think the Civil Rights Movement would never have taken off if some women hadn't started to speak up." Even later in life, Mrs. Clark was never hesitant to speak up. One of the injustices after her 1956 firing was that South Carolina refused to pay the pension she had earned for her forty years of teaching or the pay she would have earned in the few years before her retirement if she had not been dismissed. She did not give up on fighting for those wrongs to be righted, and in 1976, the governor reinstated her pension, and five years later, the legislature approved paying her back pay.

Although her signature accomplishment may be the programs she established for Black adults, she never lost her original and enduring passion for educating children. During "retirement" in her 70s, she became the first Black woman elected to the Charleston School Board. Near the end of her life, she said: "Education is my big priority right now. I want people to see children as human beings and not to think of the money that it costs nor to think of the amount of time that it will take, but to think of the lives that can be developed into Americans who will redeem the soul of America and will really make America a great country."

This Women's History Month, let's continue to honor Septima Clark's history-making legacy by making her priority our own.

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2024 Women's History Month