

Jay Webber Campaign Announcement speech
January 25, 2007

Thank you all for coming this evening.

Thank you Fr. Francis and Mayor Druetzler for helping to make our event a success. I also have to pause and thank several people especially. Thanks to my mom, dad, and grandmother, who have always been selfless and loving in their support.

Thanks to my three beautiful little girls, Annie, Molly, and Cora Rose. It is my sincere hope that this campaign will teach them some invaluable lessons about what it means to serve others.

And, of course, thank you to my lovely bride Johanna, who supports me and sustains me each and every day. Quite simply, I married up. A Harvard trained lawyer who could be doing anything she wants anywhere in the world, Johanna has chosen to be here with me, because, like me, she believes in the promise of this state and the goodness of its people. I thank her for all that she does to allow me to be so involved in civic life.

Finally, I have to thank our hosts, Sal and Lisa Cortese, for opening their home to us this evening. We're here not just because they are extraordinarily hospitable, but because Sal and Lisa embody the best of what New Jersey can be.

Sal and Lisa are living examples of the American Dream – the basic notion that if you are honest and hard working, our nation will provide you, and your children the opportunity for a better, more fulfilling life.

Sal's father, John, came to Morristown from Calabria, Italy in 1965 in search of greater opportunity. He didn't speak a word of English when he arrived.

He couldn't afford a car, so he walked in the dead of winter from Morristown up to the old Sandoz plant on Route 10, and worked there as a mason during the day. In the evening, he used to walk back down to Morris Plains to bag groceries at Shop Rite for a few hours to earn extra money. Determined to enjoy all of the opportunities America provides, John also used a few of the spare hours he had during the week to take English classes at the Neighborhood House in Morristown.

Eventually, John Cortese saved enough money to start his own business, and in 1974 he and his son, John III, Sal's brother, incorporated John Cortese Stone Masons. The business flourished, and the Cortese family grew. John Cortese truly lived the American Dream.

And Sal watched and learned. Growing up in Morristown, he absorbed the many important lessons his father was teaching, some explicitly, some by example. Sal worked fulltime in the family masonry business from the time he was a boy, but found time to get his college degree. Sal has gone on to be a very successful small businessman, running the masonry company with his brother John.

Lisa was born here in the United States, a first generation Italian-American. Her father came here from Sicily in the '40s for many of the same reasons John Cortese did. Lisa has made her family proud by earning a degree in chemistry, and today she teaches in the Mountain Lakes school system.

Together, Sal and Lisa are integral members of Morris Plains. They have four kids, and are busy passing along to them the many life lessons their immigrant parents taught them. Outside the home, through their professional and volunteer activities, Sal and Lisa are deeply involved in making the lives of other children more fulfilling and meaningful.

It is the millions of families like the Corteses who help make America great. Their family came to our shores asking only for opportunity, and it is opportunity America gave them.

And the Corteses have not turned their back on their country. Through their tireless efforts, their commitment to our common principles, and their basic decency, they have made our nation, and our community, a much richer place. They, and the millions like them, deserve our gratitude.

Just 40 short years after John Cortese arrived here full of hope and seeking opportunity, we are watching another great migration take place in New Jersey. But this migration is an exodus away from our Garden State. Instead of coming here in droves, families are leaving in record numbers, because they no longer believe the state gives them a chance at the American Dream. The problem is so staggering, one non-profit organization, the Regional Planning Partnership, suggested that New Jersey could soon be on a “death watch.”

For every family that leaves New Jersey, we pay a great price. The fabric of our great state tears a little every time one of our residents leaves. We lose workers and small businesses. We lose students and teachers. We lose grandparents, grandchildren, friends, and neighbors. And the economic and human toll on the families that stay, either by choice or out of necessity, only grows.

We know where our chief problem lies – and it is with the Democrats in Trenton. Addicted to power and unable to control the special interests that gave them that power, their big-spending, high-taxing, red-ink agenda has brought down a crushing burden on New Jersey’s families. Their waste and mismanagement of programs like the School Construction Corp., and state institutions like UMDNJ, have been appalling. Their insatiable hunger for more land to confiscate and regulate has destroyed the nesteggs of thousands, and driven up the cost of housing for millions. Their extremist social agenda has thumbed its nose at our basic American values.

The American Dream is not dead yet in New Jersey, but if we continue on this path, that dream will surely pass away. If the Democrats have their way, we will be left as a State essentially made up of two classes: the very rich, and those almost wholly dependent on government largesse to survive. But it doesn't have to be that way. Ours was once a land of promise, and opportunity, and hope. That's why people came.

It can be that way again. You and I have the chance to do something about it – starting today, right here, right now.

Let me share with you my vision for New Jersey.

I see a New Jersey that, through the fortitude and common sense of its lawmakers, finally stops trying to tax and spend its way to prosperity. We can be a State whose government lives within its means. When we are, we will finally be able to provide the tax relief our families so desperately need.

I see a New Jersey that, through the character of its leaders, finally rids itself of the stigma and stench of corruption. We can be a State that sends citizen-legislators to Trenton to serve us, not to be served. When we are, we will have a more vibrant, and honest, democracy.

I see a New Jersey that, through the courage of its legislators and governors, restores the balance of power among our branches of government. We can be a state that respects its founding principles. When we are, the will of the people, rather than the whim of our judges, will make law.

And I see a New Jersey that, through the goodness and decency of its people, celebrates values like tolerance and diversity, while always upholding its most cherished and self-evident truths. We can be a state that represents the best of the human spirit. When we are, we will be the truly free, compassionate people we believe ourselves to be.

And when we achieve all of those things, we will have gone a long way toward restoring the American Dream in our great State.

There will be cynics who will say our vision can never become reality. Let them talk. While they are busy naysaying, you and I will be busy building a better future for New Jersey: one legislator at a time, one town at a time, one family at a time.

We have an obligation to bring our vision to fruition. We owe it to ourselves and our children. We owe it to all those families who have yet to arrive on our shores, but are headed this way full of hope for the future. And we owe it to all those whose simple desire is to stay right where they are, here in the Garden State, because this is the home they love.

So I invite you to join me on this campaign. It won't be easy, and we won't succeed overnight. It might not unfold exactly as we expect. But as we go, at least we'll always know where we're heading, which is, sadly, more than we can say for our friends in the majority party.

With this vision for a better, brighter, New Jersey, and with the support of family and friends, tonight I formally, and humbly, declare myself a candidate for the Republican nomination for the State Assembly in our 26th Legislative District.

This campaign is not about getting one person elected to the State Assembly. Rather, it's about giving voice to our shared principles, and achieving our common goals. It's about restoring the citizens' voices in Trenton.

My name might appear on the ballot, but when it does, it will represent all of our hopes and aspirations for making our great state an even better place to live.

I know, from experience, that primary battles can sometimes get heated. And I am sure the candidates in this race will disagree from time to time, on policies, priorities, and records. And we'll debate those issues. That's a good thing: those debates are what democracy is all about. If the Republican Party is to ever regain the majority in Trenton, we have to be the party of ideas. We have to be smarter, more innovative, and more focused. And primaries like this can promote those goals.

To the extent the candidates in this election will disagree, the question for voters will be who best represents their principles and priorities. Who has the right vision for our State? Who has the courage to articulate and advocate his convictions? Who will most creatively find a way to advance our common goals, and who will show the prudence to know when to compromise on policy, without compromising his principles?

The voters must decide who they want to help lead them into the future. I hope, come June, the Republicans in this district will agree that I am that leader.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming and listening this evening. In the campaign ahead, I will rely on your prayers, your enthusiasm, your generosity, and your energy. I hope to prove an able standard bearer for you. I cannot promise you that I will have all the answers to the problems that plague us, but I promise I will do my very best to find them. Together, you and I can succeed in making New Jersey a state that this generation, and the next, and all of those who have come before us, are proud to call home.

Thank you very much.

Jay Webber