



**National
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Mayor Baraka – A New Direction for Newark

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“When I become mayor, we all become mayor.” Ras Baraka, new mayor of Newark, New Jersey

Add Newark, New Jersey to the list of big cities now being headed by a new wave of progressive mayors. On the heels of New York Mayor Bill de Blasio’s successful “economic inequality” campaign last year, another urban crusader, Ras Baraka, was elected mayor of Newark on May 13. A Newark native, city councilman, high school principal and son of the city’s most well-known poet and activist, the late Amiri Baraka, he will be sworn in on July 1.

Baraka succeeds interim mayor, Luis Quintana, who became the acting mayor last October when former mayor, Cory Booker, was elected to the U.S. Senate. Facing an unemployment rate of 13%, a resurgence of homicides, and a budget deficit of \$93 million, Baraka ran a populist campaign highlighted by his local roots, his experience as an educator and a promise to fight to regain local control of Newark’s public schools, which have been under the jurisdiction of the state for the past two decades.

Education was an over-riding issue in the campaign, as it has increasingly become in communities across the nation. Baraka staunchly defended public education and received enthusiastic support and financing from the Newark Teachers Union. He also stressed his progressive roots, as the son of renowned poets, Amina and Amiri Baraka, a family that has lived in Newark for more than 70 years.

Further distinguishing his progressive background during the campaign, Baraka touted his 20 years as a community organizer, his stint as Deputy Mayor in 2002 and his 2010 election to the Newark Municipal Council representing the South Ward. He has also served as principal of Newark’s Central High School and taught elementary school for 10 years.

Undaunted by opposition from Cami Anderson, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie’s appointee as superintendent of Newark’s public schools, Baraka has been in the forefront of widespread community resistance to the state’s One Newark reorganization plan, which involves closing and consolidating some neighborhood schools to make space for more

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charter schools. While not categorically opposed to charter schools, Baraka rallies against what he sees as a top-down, profit-driven privatization of Newark's schools. He is calling for more community input and, ultimately, a return of decision-making to local authorities.

As urban America faces a plethora of challenges stemming from worsening educational, income and economic inequality, a growing number of cities and mayors are fighting back with progressive policies that put people above profit, support living wages, and are designed to give more working families a real shot at the middle class. In addition to the new mayors of Newark and New York, Marty Walsh, a former union leader, is the newly-elected mayor of Boston. Also, Edward Murray, who became mayor of Seattle in January, has called for raising the city's minimum wage to \$15 an hour. Like Murray, who describes his administration as "committed to progressive principles and practical solutions," Ras Baraka and a new wave of progressive mayors are taking the lead for urban America as Washington continues to be mired in gridlock.

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