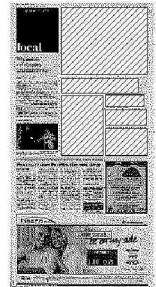


FOR THE DAILY RECORD/KAREN FUCITO
Former Gov. Tom Kean and Sen. Cory Booker take part in the United Way's Public Officials Forum at the College of St. Elizabeth, moderated by Kate Tomlinson, publisher New Jersey Monthly, left, Friday in Morristown.

Booker, Kean speak at College of St. Elizabeth



MICHAEL IZZO @MIZZODR

FLORHAM PARK - Two of New Jersey's most notable politicians shared the stage for the first time Friday night to discuss ways to improve life for struggling families in New Jersey at a United Way Public Officials Forum, "United for ALICE," hosted at the College of Saint Elizabeth.

U.S. Senator Cory Booker, a Democrat, and former New Jersey Governor Tom Kean, a Republican, said bipartisan political action is needed to find solutions to make life better for the 890,000 New Jersey working families that United Way considers ALICE, individuals who are asset limited, income constrained and employed.

"What frustrates me is... when you see how fragile a family is when they're doing everything right and they're barely making it," Booker said. "That's where I have a lot of respect for you, Governor, that's where it takes political courage to often tell people what they don't want to hear."

During the 45-minute conversation, moderated by New Jersey Monthly Publisher Kate Tomlinson, Booker and Kean discussed issues including supporting unpaid family caregivers, the need to attract higher paying jobs to New Jersey, and expanding access to quality preschool education.

"Most of the problems are caused by people at one point and if people caused them, people can solve them ... but they've got to believe that they can solve them," Kean said. "Preschool education — that's the one thing we know works ... There is no argument on this. Every single piece of research that I've seen in the last 20 years says that if you give kids preschool education, you change their whole future trajectory."

Booker and Kean were brought together by United Way of Northern New Jersey to shed light on the problems facing ALICE families. About 400 people attended the event.

"Seeing this crowd tonight, I am optimistic we can make a difference," United Way CEO John Franklin said. "I believe that we can do as Mothers Against Drunk Driving did ... or the people who dreamed up public education. I believe we can change the dialogue in this country."

Since 2004, the United Way of Northern New Jersey

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Public Officials Forum has united community leaders to raise awareness for issues threatening the health and well-being of New Jersey residents. The 2014 United Way ALICE Report found that 1.2 million New Jersey households are financially insecure.

Friday's forum was sponsored by Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation, which is also a

founding member of United Way's National ALICE Advisory Council. Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation Country Head Bob Spurr also spoke about the company's dedication to supporting United Way and its employees.

The United Way also presented its first ALICE Impact Award at the forum to Franklin Lakes resident Kevin Rigby, a former mayor of River Edge, chief of staff to former New Jersey Sen. Bill Bradley and retired Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation executive. Rigby was selected for his advocacy for United Way and support of ALICE, and for his work making Novartis a caregiver-friendly workplace.

"I'm not accepting this award as the completion of my service," Rigby said. "I plan to continue to lend my voice and talents to this cause."

Staff Writer Michael Izzo: 973-428-6636; mizzo@GannettNJ.com

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FORMER NEW JERSEY GOVERNOR TOM KEAN