

★ INAUGURATION WEEK 2007 ★
A Celebration of our City, Neighborhoods and Families
JANUARY 3-6, 2007

**2007 INAUGURAL ADDRESS
MAYOR DAVID N. CICILLINE**

Governor Carcieri, General Officers, Honorable members of the General Assembly, Honorable members of the City Council, family and distinguished guests,

Good morning.

I want to begin by congratulating the members of the Providence City Council on your inauguration, and I look forward to working with each of you on the difficult but exciting work ahead.

Also today, I welcome Carol Aguasvivas, a native of Providence who served our nation in Iraq, and who I have invited as a representative of all the men and women in the armed services past and present. Her brave service reminds us today of all who are putting themselves in harms way on our behalf. I ask you to join me in showing our gratitude.

Residents and friends of our great city...

For generations, we have gathered here to celebrate and re-dedicate our common history, our common destiny, and our common bond in Providence.

But never in our lifetimes have we come together fortified by such a tremendous sense of promise.

For too many decades we were a city in the grip of an internal struggle. Our age-old spirit of optimism, innovation and ambition remained, but a culture of corruption had taken hold of our government and tied our hands.

As individuals we kept our faith in our neighbors and our community, but as a city we fell prey to the idea that special favors and insider dealing were an inevitable part

of the business of government.

But while our spirit was tested, it was never broken. Four years ago, you took the risk that things could be different, that the cost of corruption in waste, tarnished reputation, and lost opportunities did not have to be a part of the cost of government.

Since that time you have lent me your unwavering support, as we have gone about the slow, painstaking work of changing a culture.

Department by department, office by office, I have put professionals in charge, and given city government back to the people. During the late nights, the agonizing choices, and the tough political fights, you gave us the inspiration and the strength to persevere.

And that is why today is such a great celebration. The long, internal struggle for the soul of Providence has been settled. Hope has triumphed over cynicism. Great progress now lives up to great publicity. We have come into our own as a city again.

Our spirit has again been unleashed and I pledge to you: Those dark days are behind us. We will never go back.

The sense of promise we share would be very familiar to the Providence of 1636 and the new City that would give the world one of its greatest and most transformative ideas -- that when a society respects religious freedom, it is more stable, more peaceful, and more prosperous.

It would be familiar to the Providence of 1790, the city whose investors would launch the career of Samuel Slater, who came to this country with nothing but a head full of ideas and a dream to start his own business. The Industrial Revolution they launched not only powered our City for a century and a half, it helped build America into the world's preeminent economic power.

It is the attitude of a confident people always on the verge of something greater.

In 1637, only a year after he founded this city, Roger Williams began to refer to this place as "New Providence." Even then, he had a sense that this city would continually evolve in order to fulfill the great promise of its unique history.

Today, again, this is a New Providence.

We are a city of immigrant descendants where the immigrant story is still alive and well.

We are home to institutions that teach the world's most creative minds how to turn ideas into life-changing solutions.

We are a city that still takes deep pride in the sanctity of labor.

We are a city that values creative excellence as among our most critical assets.

We're builders, inventors, creators, and achievers. We're unique. And best of all, our identity is a perfect fit for the challenges of the 21st century.

If there is any doubt about the power of our unleashed spirit, just consider what we've accomplished together since I stood here four years ago.

We have made our city government smaller and better at the same time. Management positions have been trimmed by 14% even while the city is cleaner, safer, and financially stronger.

We have transformed the investment environment and attracted more than three billion dollars of new development in neighborhoods of our city.

We have begun to address many of the long-ignored needs in our neighborhoods with new roads, a Big Green Can in front of every household on trash day, and the Neighborhood Markets Program to support our neighborhood business districts.

We have created affordable homes for our families at six times the rate of the 1990s.

We have built a network of citywide, high-quality after-school programs for every middle-school child in our city.

We no longer have the highest residential property tax burden in Rhode Island and we have dropped from the top of the list to 17th.

We have become a fiscally responsible government, earning "A" bond ratings from all three major agencies for the first time ever.

We had more candidates running for local office and residents participating in the

political process than at any time in memory.

We are transforming our downtown into a great urban neighborhood, alive with new business and vitality.

We are making ambitious plans for thirty three acres of land at the head of the bay, available for the first time in over 300 years. It will change the face of our city, and create a magnificent new destination for every resident.

And in the most powerful example of what we can accomplish together with our unleashed spirit, we have fundamentally reinvented our police department, literally integrating police and community, with the result that crime has dropped sharply in every category -- the exact opposite direction that crime is going throughout most of the country.

Today we have the lowest crime rate in three decades.

We have reawakened belief in city government and we are again the city of big ideas and breakthrough innovation.

Early settlers of our great city invented freedom of religion.

We launched American manufacturing.

And now we can set another example to inspire the world;
We can pioneer the 21st century American city.

Let me be clear. We are not interested in ambition for its own sake. More buildings, more tourist attractions, and more people, are only helpful to us as a means to an end.

We will measure our efforts in quality, not quantity, and in our ability to foster more rewarding, healthy, and productive lives.

And while quality of life will be our guide, the city of the 21st century is really limited only by the limits of our imaginations.

We will become a green city.

We will develop a system of state-of-the-art, low-emissions rapid transportation. We will redefine the term "green zone" by incorporating into our zoning regulations a new set of standards for energy efficient buildings. We will lead the nation in the city garden movement, with mini agricultural economies in our neighborhoods.

We already lead the world in design education. We will also be a national leader in design. As we embark on a plan to rebuild our school district, we will design schools that are models for educators throughout the nation.

We will be bold again with our architecture and design of public spaces, complementing our world class design of the 19th century with world class design of the 21st Century.

And while we can do these things, and more that we have not yet imagined, the greatest hallmarks of the city we create together will come from finding solutions to longstanding challenges.

I believe we can harness our tremendous momentum to beat back the forces of the national economy that increase the cost of living while stifling the means to keep up.

The city of our future must be a city we can all afford.

I am talking about the basic means for a family to work itself into the middle class, affordable homes, good jobs, and fair taxes.

Most importantly, we need more residents owning and living in their own homes. The housing bond recently passed by the voters of Rhode Island will provide critical resources, but we need much more.

We are finalizing a plan that offers new incentives for developers to provide more homes for low and moderate income families.

We will make use of financing tools that allow us to take future tax receipts from early-stage development and invest it immediately in building homes people can afford.

We are going to make absolutely certain that the city is doing everything it can to help lift families out of poverty.

Today, I will sign an executive order to create a poverty task force to develop new

strategies for city government to become more effective in moving families out of poverty and into the middle class.

Affordability also means more jobs that pay well. We will pursue the growth of entrepreneurial activity more aggressively. We will certainly compete with other cities to lure large businesses, but the real growth in jobs is going to come from fostering and supporting the growing small businesses in Providence.

We are going to take a long hard look at tax policy in the City of Providence to be sure it is fair and promotes good economic growth. We must innovate and make ourselves more competitive and more affordable at the same time.

We understand that, despite all we've done, the cost of government remains too high.

In reality, the City of Providence faces many of the same problems as older American corporations.

We have made the tough cuts in the workforce, but the main driver of the annual rise in the cost of government is the sheer number of retirees, future retirees, and their dependents eligible for pension and healthcare benefits.

We have made strides to rein in the cost of healthcare at the city level, and we will offer all the support we can to our state and federal legislators who are fighting for fundamental healthcare reform.

On pensions we have a great opportunity to restructure the system in a way that keeps its promise to retirees, provides new retirement options for recent and new employees, and saves millions for our taxpayers. I have already introduced a bold, new plan to the City Council and I look forward to working with them to enact meaningful pension reform.

But in addition to affordability, there is another critical and longstanding challenge we must address. And if we are going to seize this moment and pioneer the city of the 21st century together, this is where we must set our highest priority.

I am speaking about the education and healthy development of our children.

If we can guarantee every child the opportunity for an excellent education—

If we can offer every parent or guardian a safe, caring, and enriching environment for their children when they are at work, then we open the door for everything else we wish our city to become.

If we can do it, we will ensure the talent we need to power our growing businesses and grow the next generation of entrepreneurs. We will help families break the vicious cycle of poverty. We will prevent more children from turning to violence. We will retain those young families who would stay if they had more confidence in our schools.

I believe we are uniquely capable of realizing these goals. I believe the future of our city is limitless. But I am an optimist, not a dreamer.

I am especially under no illusions when it comes to the challenges presented by urban public education.

In every American city it is the single, greatest struggle... especially when children are living in poverty or can't speak English. It is a monumental challenge and one that is never solved quickly even under the best of conditions.

There is nothing to which I have devoted more hours of thought and effort than public education and the improvement of our schools... and I have come to this conclusion:

Anything short of a true citywide commitment—

Anything short of a full-scale mission on behalf of our schools and our kids will result in more disappointment. It is all or nothing.

If we accept this mission and do this together, we will vanquish any doubt about our collective power.

So, I am ready to lead an unprecedented citywide commitment to the education and healthy development of our youth.

I am ready to lead the effort to align and coordinate the resources already at hand, and pull together resources from every sector of our city behind our children.

I am ready to lead the effort to transform our schools into 21st-Century learning

environments. In fact, just weeks from now we will receive recommendations from our educational planning consultants for a total overhaul of our school facilities.... a new Providence School district that will feature kindergarten through eighth grade neighborhood schools and smaller, more personalized high schools.

I am ready to work even harder to nurture and encourage the growing partnership between the school department and the teachers union to develop a new student-centered union contract and practices that support student achievement.

And I am ready to accelerate the growth of the Providence After School Alliance, to give every child the opportunity for fun and meaningful after-school activities when parents and guardians are at work.

I promise to do everything I have outlined, and more, but I need *your* promise as well.

All of this will depend on your participation and enthusiasm. We can't succeed with wishful thinking. We will have to commit with time and resources. We must commit with our eyes wide open. And it will take everybody.

The energy we will need requires the commitment of a people on a mission.

Parents and guardians, we're going to pull together more resources and offer more support than ever, but our expectations for your participation and engagement will also be higher than ever.

Teachers, a whole city will be counting on your best efforts in the classroom.

You have shown a real willingness to think broadly and progressively about creating a contract and professional practices that make student achievement the bottom line, and this will be critical.

Identifying, attracting, and retaining excellent teachers will be the highest priority of our school district.

State lawmakers and administrators, we must pull together with every school district in the state to move forward toward finding a predictable and fair funding formula. We can't put it off any longer.

We must expand opportunities with other school districts for joint contracting of

services, purchasing of supplies, and other cooperative efforts that will maximize the use of existing resources.

Businesses, I am going to encourage you to expand your philanthropic and volunteer efforts toward this mission. Let your employees teach their profession to a new generation and watch them become more inspired and productive at work. Re-awaken and re-energize your workplace by employing our young people.

Colleges and Universities, you are already ratcheting up your participation in the schooling of our children but we need you to do even more. We'll need student mentors, professional advancement opportunities for our teachers, and your best ideas and talent.

Social service providers, we will ask you to work in closer collaboration than ever. You will be needed like never before and you'll be asked to work harder and smarter than ever before. But I can personally guarantee you that your effort will never be thankless.

Leadership of the Providence Public Library, you have a 130 year-old tradition of serving Providence families as a private institution. We need to cherish this tradition in our city of ideas, and I pledge to help you rally support for these centers of learning in a way that guarantees their availability for the next generation, especially our treasured neighborhood branches.

Religious leaders, we will need you to help us keep our commitment, and to remind us that we fulfill our most godly function when we remember that we are all part of a single human community.

To our residents who do not have children, I ask you to make every possible effort—volunteering, mentoring, coming together as neighbors, and remembering that our most vulnerable, our small children, are also our most promising.

And finally, to our City's young people: Adults talk a lot about doing things for your sake. We mean what we say, but we probably do too much talking and too little listening. Believe it or not, the most precious thing in the world to us is the simple thought of hope and joy in your hearts.

And in order to nurture that, we have to listen. We will.

Residents and friends of Providence, if this is not our priority, if this is not our commitment, if this is not our will, then it's best that we face up to it now. A half effort would be a wasted effort.

But if we believe that the spirit of Providence has truly been unleashed from its internal struggle—

If we believe that we are uniquely capable of creating a city that is truly of the 21st century—

If we believe we stand at the threshold of an era of opportunity that hasn't been felt in Providence for a century—

It is our historic obligation to seize it.

Men and women who have walked these very streets, who have watched the same tides rise and fall at the mouth of Narragansett Bay, and who have been comforted by the same contours of our city's seven hills, have bequeathed ideas and inventions that changed the course of history.

We are their heirs.

Their spirit lay dormant for many years, but we are the generation privileged enough to feel it awaken in our blood.

May it give us the strength, inspiration, and unity to become the city of our greatest ideals.

Let us be worthy of the glorious city that has been handed to us, and let us be bold enough to hand our children a gift even greater.

May God bless Providence and all those who live, work, and visit our great city.
Thank you.