



MAYOR DAVID N. CICILLINE'S
STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
FEBRUARY 2, 2010

at the Providence Career & Technical Academy

PROVIDENCE THE CREATIVE CAPITAL

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**Mayor David Cicilline
State of the City 2010
Providence Career and Technical Academy
February 2, 2010**

Good evening.

Welcome to the Providence Career and Technical Academy, a place that embodies both the heritage of our city's foundation as a beacon of opportunity and our aspiration to be a great 21st century American city.

Ladies and gentlemen, this Academy *is* Providence. It is the spirit of Providence, the purpose of Providence, and the future of Providence. It is for these reasons that I chose this location to speak with you tonight about the state of our beloved City, the challenges we share, and the way forward to sustain and nurture this unique and resilient place we call home.

Normally, the State of the City speech is a look back at the year's accomplishments, a chance to point to the progress we've made, and to look to the year ahead.

This year is different. These times are different. I want to talk about where we are right now and where we need to go together.

The City of Providence is strong. It's strong enough to invest in an innovative educational system in the face of global economic decline. It's strong enough to improve public safety with fewer resources and more community involvement. It's strong enough to maintain vibrant recreational and cultural opportunities for our youth, families, and seniors in our neighborhoods. It's strong enough to maintain the honesty and transparency that has defined city government for the past seven years. And it's strong enough to help our residents cope with and prevail against the ravages of a fierce economic recession.

JOBS

Our nation is facing the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. This recession has hit especially hard here in Rhode Island, bringing with it one of the highest rates of unemployment in the nation. And Providence has not been spared. But tonight, as I stand before you, I pledge the whole of my administration's skills, energy and focus to the creation of jobs—training for jobs, attracting old and new industries for jobs, facilitating opportunities for jobs, and saving jobs.

I am calling on every major employer in our city to promote new hiring now; I am petitioning our State and Federal government to leverage every available program, grant, and dollar to encourage job development; and I am prepared to help any business that is ready to hire our good workers to overcome local, state or federal government obstacles that prevent economic growth in order to get more residents back to work.

The singular responsibility of my administration and your city government is to find and create jobs—and find and create jobs we will.

Yesterday we were proud to announce Jobs Now! Providence, a new city program funded with \$10 million federal stimulus dollars that will put hundreds of Providence residents to work in the coming months. This program matches unemployed or underemployed applicants with employers who will be reimbursed 100% for the wages of a new employee through September of this year. This program will allow businesses to staff up and begin building momentum again and get area residents back to work.

Jobs Now! Providence is the exciting result of a partnership between the City and the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, and will be facilitated by the Providence Chamber of Commerce, Workforce Solutions of Providence, and the Providence Economic Development Partnership.

One of the fastest growing parts of the economy is the green job sector, which represents a wide range of employment opportunities in fields involved in preserving the environment and reducing our energy consumption. We have been working hard to bring green businesses to Providence – companies like United Natural Foods, Alteris, and Ecolect, to name a few, who brought valuable jobs and the promise of growth in the years to come.

As we work to attract jobs and investment to Providence, we must continue to invest in our most important asset—our residents. We are launching Providence R.I.S.E.S., a system that coordinates existing job resources at the city, state, and federal levels to ensure that limited training dollars are used most effectively for residents who will gain the greatest benefit.

As a part of this system, we will be implementing a \$2.4 million dollar stimulus grant that will train and place nearly 200 residents in green jobs related to energy efficiency and recycling efforts in the coming months. This initiative is a powerful example of how the City of Providence is collaborating with the private sector, including WalMart, and non-profit institutions such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Apeiron Institute to create opportunities in the neighborhoods where they are needed most.

Hundreds of people have been placed in jobs through our First Source program, while Stepping Up is working to grow jobs in the health care field as Building Futures is doing for carpenters and other construction professionals.

Finally, the best way we can ensure the ongoing creation of jobs and the growth of our economy is to support the success of small businesses in Providence. We continued to welcome new jobs and businesses to the city this year, from InQuest Technologies on Federal Hill, EpiVax and NabSYS in the Jewelry District, Ximedica in South Elmwood, downtown's Forensic Risk Alliance and Moran Shipping, Aldi in Smith Hill and Gourmet Heaven on Weybosset Street, to name a few.

These companies chose to locate in Providence because they saw its promise and they recognized it as an environment where their ventures would thrive. They represent not only new jobs, but economic vitality, tax dollars that will support city services, and intellectual and creative capital that will attract other new businesses. They also represent a compelling reason for young people to stay in Providence, to take advantage of the fresh opportunities that the City offers.

Small business is the beating heart of a strong economy and we must do everything we can to encourage and support small business in Providence. On February 27, we will host a Jobs and Small Business Resource Day at the Casino in Roger Williams Park. This will be an event that will offer a wealth of information, interaction, and inspiration to small businesses and job seekers that can make a world of difference in their success.

Our small businesses need capital now. I am especially pleased to announce tonight that the Providence Economic Development Partnership will be making \$10 million in small business loans available in the coming months, providing a much-needed infusion of capital to new and existing businesses.

The City will also continue to support our neighborhood merchants through the Neighborhood Markets program, which provides marketing and technical assistance, as well as loans and grants, enabling them to attract new customers and grow their businesses.

In addition to providing needed capital, we need to do everything we can to make it easy for businesses to grow and interact with city government. This is why I am announcing the assignment of an expediter within the Providence Economic Development Partnership to assist small businesses in getting the information and attention they need. I am also making a commitment that any qualified small business borrower will have access to funds within 30 days of a completed loan application.

And to keep projects in motion and workers working, I'm pleased to announce that we have launched our E-permitting review program, which provides simultaneous online plan review for the first time in the city's history and cuts permitting time in half.

To be perfectly clear, our top priority—every single day—is job creation. Today there is no business more urgent than the business of creating jobs. I'm telling you tonight, we will meet this challenge.

EDUCATION

As I look around tonight in this extraordinary new school, I am reminded that there is no better investment we can make in our long-term prosperity than to ensure that we are providing our children an education that will position them to thrive in a 21st century global economy.

To that end, we have been initiating dramatic change in the Providence Public School system, beginning with the implementation of a Core Curriculum in Math and Science this year, which will be followed by English Language Arts and Social Studies next year.

We have expanded the availability of Advanced Placement courses to include all high schools and we have adopted new College and Workforce Ready Graduation requirements, in order to prepare our students for the challenges and opportunities that lay ahead.

We have implemented a criterion-based teacher hiring system and a teacher assignment protocol that focus on the needs of students. We are providing expanded professional development opportunities for our teachers, and providing extra attention for our students who need it.

We are determined to continue to improve the quality of the school facilities through our Building a Legacy initiative to ensure the educational environment that every student, teacher, and administrator requires in order to do their best work. The renovation of the Nathan Bishop Middle School is another shining example of what's possible.

We are competing for millions of dollars in Race to the Top federal funding that will accelerate the transformation of our school district to provide a top-quality, 21st century education to each and every child in this City. This funding will support the reforms we've already begun, and will help to guarantee that an excellent teacher is in every classroom by investing in their professional development and long-term success.

Our strong competitive standing in this application would not have been possible without the partnership of the Providence Teachers' Union and the strong leadership of union president Steve Smith.

We are committed to pursuing innovation and reform inside the classroom and out. Providence has become a leader in the area of after-school and extended-day learning, in large part because of the Providence After School Alliance, a nationally recognized public-private venture that has substantially increased high-quality, out-of-school enrichment opportunities for young people. We have brought in more than \$8 million in new outside resources to support our after-school programs.

National organizations like the Wallace Foundation have been major supporters of our after school efforts. More recently, the Charles Mott Foundation provided funding to strengthen the connections between after school and the school day. This initiative, called A New Day for Learning, provides resources to involve teachers and community-based instructors so that academic learning during the school day supports experiential learning after school.

Now we are expanding these opportunities to our high-school age students. Earlier this year, we kicked off efforts to create The Hub, a setting for high school age youth to access the programs and services that interest them. The Hub is both a physical space for programs, counseling, and access to the web as well as a virtual space, allowing youth to connect online with these opportunities and each other.

Like education and after-school time, our community libraries are a critical aspect of our neighborhoods and are places of opportunity and exploration for residents of all ages. After the

Providence Public Library, an organization that ran our city's library system for over 100 years, made it clear that they no longer wanted to have responsibility for our nine neighborhood branches, the City stepped in. Through a partnership with the Providence Community Library, a new organization formed by library advocates from South Providence to Wanskuck, our neighborhood libraries are not only secure, they are thriving.

When I took office seven years ago, the promise to the children of this City had been broken, as it had been for the families of these children, for whom they hold so much hope. Since then, our entire community—teachers, principals, parents, and the students themselves—has done so much to turn our schools around and restore that hope.

Today, I make a new promise to the children of this city: Every child in Providence will be valued. Every child will learn and thrive in school facilities that are modern and safe. And every child will receive a first-class education from teachers who meet the highest standards. Every child will have the opportunity to grow and explore lots of enriching out-of-school activities that are supported by their community.

Tomorrow begins right there—in the classrooms of our schools, at the gyms of our recreation centers, and at our neighborhood libraries—in the questions our children ask and the answers they receive.

So let's give them the right answer, right now: Yes, we believe in you and we are investing in you and in your future.

RELIEF

The challenge to get Providence residents working again and to sustain our investment in transforming education here is a tall order. And still there's more to do. The economic crisis that grips our city requires that we do everything we can to provide for those most in need. It requires that we redouble our efforts to point residents to every resource that can sustain them in these incredibly hard times.

I spend a lot of time in the neighborhoods of our city, talking and listening to folks who live and work here.

I have walked down Cranston Street, where many businesses are hanging on by a thread.

I've talked to a carpenter from the North End who hasn't had work in more than a year.

I've had coffee in Elmhurst with people racked by uncertainty about the future.

I've spoken with parents on the South Side who are worried about whether their kids' neighborhood rec center will close.

People are struggling to buy groceries, fighting to keep their homes. These needs are urgent. These problems are real.

Government must be able to respond quickly to provide new and better ways to help. Tonight I am pleased to announce the creation of four Family Success Centers in Providence. These centers will ensure that Providence residents and their families have convenient access to the support they need, such as heating assistance, food stamps, job training and referrals, and financial counseling for families in need.

These Centers will also help people claim their valuable Earned Income Tax Credits and Child Care Tax Credits, which have helped more than 10,000 families in the last seven years.

Data shows that when families are connected to multiple, integrated supports in workforce development, asset protection or basic benefits, they have a better chance for success. The Family Success Centers will bring together resources and employ technology in a more integrated and effective system for our residents.

These centers, which will be supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Rhode Island Foundation, will be open in the four corners of our city by early spring. These kinds of public-private partnerships are essential to keeping all of us moving forward as one community. I want to take a moment to thank the Casey Foundation and the Rhode Island Foundation for their early support of this important initiative.

And we are working hard to do one of the most important things a city can do for its people – keep them in their homes. This means rental assistance, counseling programs, homebuyer assistance, and new housing programs.

Since the recession started, we have been working overtime to prevent foreclosures. Working with the City Council, I recently signed into law two new ordinances that directly address the foreclosure situation. The first helps tenants threatened with eviction from a foreclosed property by allowing renters to remain on site for the duration of their lease agreement and requiring that essential services like heat and water continue.

The second ordinance helps homeowners in danger of losing their homes to foreclosure by providing a mediation process with the lender, facilitated by a counselor approved by the department of Housing and Urban Development. The early success of the program underscores the importance of seeking counseling before foreclosure begins.

Perhaps the most meaningful relief to our resident property owners that I can propose is simply this: no new taxes.

No hidden fees, no phantom taxes, not even a dime's increase in parking meter fares. People can't be asked to pay higher property taxes. As the state continues to push additional burdens down on local taxpayers, I will continue to fight to protect the residents of this city from the crushing impact of the Governor's budget proposals.

As I have said many times in the last weeks, this is the time for new thinking and bold ideas—not just to solve the state's current budget shortfalls, but to resolve the long-standing issues that are obstacles to our long-term prosperity. As long as the buck just keeps being passed to the taxpayers, we will not solve these problems.

Despite how hard it is to make up for shortfalls in times like these, we cannot impose additional taxes on residents who are already pressed to the limit. I know I speak for my colleagues on the City Council when I say we will do whatever we have to do to cover the City's budget without asking our good citizens to put up an extra nickel.

As you know, we are in the midst of a state-mandated property revaluation and I am proposing several measures to mitigate its impact on city residents. First, I propose a property tax freeze for seniors living on fixed incomes, and the City will apply this freeze with a minimum of red tape. I will ask the City Council to join me in passing this needed relief as quickly as possible.

For families hardest hit by revaluation in this volatile real estate climate, I am proposing a Working Family Property Tax Credit, which is targeted to single-family, owner-occupied homes valued under \$200,000 dollars and multi-family owner-occupied properties valued under \$275,000 dollars.

Under this proposal, thousands of affected homeowners will see a credit on their tax bill for \$250 dollars. I have asked Senator Goodwin and Majority Leader Fox to sponsor legislation that will allow us to enact this initiative.

I want the residents of Providence to know that we are accessing every possible resource to support our community. To date, the City has accessed every dollar available to us in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Some was spent to keep senior centers open; some was competitive grant funding that we fought for. And some was in the form of tax-exempt bonds, which we are using to rebuild our schools, infrastructure, and roads.

Only bold commitments like these will provide the meaningful relief that can take us from the difficult place we are today to a stronger and more vibrant Providence.

LONG-TERM ECONOMIC

When I speak of tomorrow, I speak of a time in the near future when this great city will realize its extraordinary promise. Keeping our eye focused on this future is as important as the hard work we're doing right now to move through this difficult time.

Our efforts to develop the City's historic Jewelry District to support a thriving "knowledge economy" are already paying off. Institutions and businesses involved in the life sciences are coming together in this area, investing in biotechnology, medical device manufacturing, research facilities, and infrastructure, that are transforming the area into a regional economic engine. Brown University is relocating its medical school to the area; researchers at Lifespan, Women and Infants Hospital, and URI are collaborating in research and partnering with private sector companies like IBM on a major supercomputing project.

Companies like Isis BioPolymer have come to the Knowledge District, bringing more than 60 new jobs with immediate plans for expansion. This company is doing cutting edge research and has a fast-growing manufacturing division. Their product, a transdermal patch that can be used for everything from quitting smoking to administering medication, is a perfect example of the bold innovation for which this very place was known centuries ago.

As Mayor, I feel a deep responsibility to take this City towards its promising future. I am intent on attracting investment in these burgeoning industries that will redefine the landscape of

business in Rhode Island. I am committed to building coalitions of entrepreneurs whose passion and energy will be the fuel to drive us forward. And I will not rest until I see a modern, comprehensive public transportation system established in this region, creating jobs and supporting the long-term growth and prosperity of the state's economic and cultural heart, which is the City of Providence.

The transit system we've proposed—which is known as Transit 2020—is designed to meet our current needs while investing for future generations. The system features an improved Kennedy Plaza, four new transit hubs, expanded parking options, stronger commuter rail, and rapid bus service between high-density centers. It also features an investment in the economic vitality of the City—a streetcar system that will provide convenient transit throughout our city, serve as an anchor for private and public transit-oriented development, and improve the way that people live in and experience Providence.

The bottom line is that every initiative we pursue in this city means jobs—whether it's building a new veterinary hospital at the Roger Williams Park Zoo or renovating the Mercantile Building with AS220 or developing a transit system or building this very school where we stand today. Building these projects means jobs, and the jobs created by the projects themselves mean jobs for the future.

Finally, I'd like to talk about the future of city government. Like so many households have done this year, our city government has made dramatic adjustments. We are doing more with less, maintaining services for our constituents with fewer resources. And I believe this has provided a tremendous opportunity to innovate and improve the way government works.

We have streamlined and improved our budget process, increasing transparency, speed of reporting, and responsiveness. As a result, the City of Providence maintains an A bond rating, and for the first time in our history, we have been recognized for excellence in financial practices.

We're creating valuable efficiencies by merging the Parks and Recreation Departments for example; we're starting the work to combine several City and school department functions; and we're advocating the creation of a regional metropolitan district, which will allow us to share resources with neighboring communities in areas such as police, fire, and public works.

I'm excited about what we're learning about our own capacity for providing top-quality services with improved systems that cost less. And I'd like to note that none of this would be possible without the extraordinary efforts of our city employees.

For example, our Parks Department has managed not just to survive this recession but to thrive. From Neutaconkanut Hill to Gano Street, there have been dozens of significant park improvements in the last year. Farmer's markets are bringing fresh produce to neighborhoods around the city. We are working with community groups in every one of our neighborhoods, from the Friends of India Point Park to Elmhurst Clean and Green.

In other words, we will respond to this crisis and come through it, even as we are building the Providence of tomorrow. We will be leaner, but more flexible. We will be stronger, but more resourceful. This is what responsible government does: it not only responds to problems, it fights back against the conditions that led to the problems in the first place. I don't have any doubt that's what the residents of this city elected me to do.

CLOSE

Let me end with a few words about the year ahead. It has been a long twelve months for most of us. The situation in Providence has been as difficult as it is anywhere in the country. It's not realistic to expect the federal government—or anyone else for that matter—to simply write a check and make our problems go away. It's not realistic to expect it, and frankly it's not the solution we want.

One of the things I love most about Providence is its history of self-reliance and industry and resourcefulness. We have an infrastructure that includes much more than the streets and buildings and water lines that earlier generations left us. From them, we inherited a belief in ourselves and a capacity for extraordinary accomplishment that will serve us well in the months and years ahead. We will solve our problems just as they did, with innovation and perseverance and with our shoulders to the plow.

This is the moment to recognize our common purpose. This is the time to put aside the fractiousness of the political process and to quiet the din of partisan bickering and put the love of our city above all else. Unity is more powerful than divisiveness; partnership is the antidote to the political self-interest that would harm us.

On the eve of his election as 35th president of the United States, John F. Kennedy made a final campaign stop in Providence, and finished his remarks by saying, "We must make a choice ... to pick ourselves up and move forward." That remains our imperative for the future, a future that starts today.

Thank you.