



EXECUTIVE OFFICE
CITY OF PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

Angel Taveras
Mayor

Angel Taveras - Inaugural Speech - January 3, 2011

Honorable elected officials, family and distinguished guests from near and far, good afternoon and welcome to Rhode Island's great capital City – Providence.

Not far from where we are now gathered, Roger Williams planted the seed that would become Providence, Rhode Island: a community that refused to conform blindly, refused to accept the conventional wisdom of their time. This strong belief in self-determination helped develop Providence into a bustling city, where creativity and resourcefulness have been celebrated and encouraged ever since.

Today, Providence is home to history once again as I stand here, ready to begin work as Providence's 37th Mayor.

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Honorables oficiales, familiares y huéspedes distinguidos de todas partes, muy buenas tardes y bienvenidos a la ciudad capital de Rhode Island – Providence.

Cerca de aquí nuestro fundador, Roger Williams, sembró la semilla que se convertiría en Providence, una comunidad de individuos que rehusaron aceptar ciegamente las normas y el pensamiento convencional de la época.

Esta fe en la autodeterminación ayudo a convertir a Providence en una ciudad dinámica caracterizada por su creatividad y recursividad.

Hoy, con mi investidura como el alcalde trijésimo-séptimo de esta gran ciudad, Providence se re-encuentra con la historia.

History will reflect that we owe a debt of gratitude to the 36th Mayor, Congressman-elect David Cicilline for leading Providence out of the storm of corruption that stained the reputation of this proud city. Thank you Congressman-Elect Cicilline.

I stand before you today humbled by the honor Providence voters have given me: a once-in-a-generation chance to move our city forward. I know – and you know – that we face great challenges ahead. But I also know that with our collective determination, with our hard work, we have the resolve to meet these challenges head on.

We have at our fingertips resources and assets that other cities could only dream of. We walk on streets with history and beauty unruined by time. Our many universities and hospitals supply us with an abundance of talent, energy and innovation. We are blessed with a community of entrepreneurs, artists and activists who challenge and inspire us to dream big and do better. We are a city of creators, who for much of our nation's history, have defined American arts, culture and industry.

As we stand here today, we are in the midst of a new storm - a financial storm that stretches far beyond Providence, beyond New England, beyond our nation's borders to much of the world. It is a storm that has devastated cities across America from Atlanta to Newark, from Detroit to Sacramento. All over America, cities and states are struggling to overcome staggering budget deficits while maintaining basic services.

Rhode Island's capital city has been especially hard hit by the effects of this global recession. We are currently operating without an approved budget and we face serious budget deficits for this year and next. Our unfunded pension liability has grown to more than \$800 million, a figure that doesn't even account for the cost of providing retiree health care or other post-employment benefits. Over the last several years, Providence has lost tens

of millions of dollars through cuts to local aid. And while in some cases federal stimulus dollars softened these blows, these funds are drying up.

Compounding what I call the “ticking time-bomb” of our unfunded pension liability is a foreclosure crisis that hit our neighborhoods with relentless fury. Many have lost their homes and property values have plummeted. Unemployment in our city is rampant – exceeding 20% in some neighborhoods. Small businesses, the backbone of our local economy, are suffering.

Let me be clear: the time for Providence to take control of its financial future is now.

At the same time, we struggle with the development of our most precious resource: our children. Many of our public schools are under-performing. In this era, when even the most basic jobs require advanced skills, far too many of our children aren’t even graduating from high school.

More than half of our students are not proficient in reading and more than three quarters of our students are not proficient in math. It is unacceptable – and unconscionable – that we provide anything less than the absolute best: a college ready education for every single child in this city, regardless of family income, regardless of skin color, regardless of zip-code.

Let me be clear again: the time for Providence schools to become the envy of American urban education is now.

In the face of all these challenges, and in the midst of this storm, I am confident. Confident that together, we will overcome these challenges, weather this storm and strengthen our city and our state.

That confidence comes from the child of a woman who left her home country four decades ago and travelled to the beacon of hope that is America. From the child of a woman who labored tirelessly in factories around this city and state to raise her children. From a child who at a young age believed he could become something he had not seen. And now, this confidence comes from a man who believes in the American Dream,

because he has experienced the fulfillment of that dream in his own lifetime.

Yo siento confianza. La confianza que se produce en el hijo de una mujer que dejó su patria hace cuatro décadas y se dirigió a un país lleno de esperanza, los Estados Unidos. El hijo de una mujer que trabajó incansablemente en factorías por toda la ciudad y el estado para criar a sus hijos. El hijo que a temprana edad creyó que podía llegar a ser algo que nunca había visto.

Y ahora, el hombre que cree en el Sueño Americano porque ha podido realizar ese sueño en su propia vida.

That confidence also comes from the recognition that when we come together and dedicate ourselves to a cause there is nothing we can't accomplish. When our city faces challenges, we don't bow, we rise.

Getting through this storm and solving the problems we confront will not be easy. But have no doubt, this storm shall pass, we will succeed and we will move our City and our State forward.

To weather this storm we must recognize that our fiscal situation is unsustainable. We must, once and for all, eliminate the structural deficit that year after year burdens our budget. Like any family or business in America, we simply cannot spend what we do not have and politicians cannot promise what taxpayers cannot afford for us to deliver.

We must be forthright and transparent in addressing our city's financial condition.

- I will ask all of us for shared sacrifice to solve our financial problems. And it will start right here, in this building with the executive branch.

- We have already begun to consolidate departments and we will seek more opportunities to eliminate redundancies, save on costs and improve services. Every department will be charged with finding savings in their budget and making government leaner, more nimble and more efficient. We will lead by example.
- We will urge our institutions of higher learning and health care - who bring a vibrancy to our city that cannot be overstated – to continue to invest in their own future by investing in our City and helping us weather this storm.
- We will invite the backbone of our city, our city workers – who day after day serve this city in ways too numerous to count – to partner with us in addressing our long term financial obligations.
- We will invite our neighboring cities and towns to work together to jointly lower our costs by regionalizing services where we can.
- And we will invite all of you to get involved in our City by volunteering in our schools and community centers, by supporting our community development corporations, and by serving on boards and commissions.

If we commit ourselves to this notion of shared sacrifice, we can weather this storm and put our city on solid financial footing.

Budgetary problems, however, are only one side of the financial coin. The other is economic development. What economists are calling “the great recession” has eliminated countless jobs, around the county and here in Rhode Island. That’s why we so desperately need to focus on investing in our local economy and growing jobs right here at home.

We must focus on retaining our existing businesses, recruiting new investment to our city and reforming our city’s zoning, permitting and licensing processes.

To coordinate and accelerate my jobs plan I will immediately begin a national search for a cabinet-level, economic-development director to ensure that Providence is maximizing its potential as the state's economic engine.

My economic-development team will understand the urgency of its mission: to help businesses prosper, create well-paying jobs, and put our city's residents back to work.

- We will partner with the state to maximize the development of the newly recovered 195 land.
- We will develop 21st century public transportation for our residents and our commuters.
- We will make business interactions with the city predictable and consistent.
- We will aggressively pursue every economic development opportunity, large or small
- We will strategically invest in our arts and entrepreneurs and in environmental policies that reduce our carbon footprint and grow our green economy.
- And, we will recognize that sustained economic development comes only when accompanied by a well-trained workforce and world-class public schools.

That's why we must continue to strengthen our workforce through education and training. Over the last year, I've had the privilege of visiting some of our city's brightest new ventures, and let me tell you: I have seen the future of our city's workforce and it is diverse and strong. From Capco to Epivax, from Stepping Up to Building Futures, the message is the same: 21st century jobs require 21st century skills. And gaining 21st century skills must start in our classrooms.

As a graduate of Providence public schools, I know first-hand the transformative power of a great education. And I also know that the employees most important to the future of our city are not the Mayor or his staff, but the 2,000 teachers who work day and night to provide the best opportunities possible for our children.

But I also know this: we cannot pretend that our city schools are the best they can be. They are not.

The majority of our students are not on grade level in math or reading. Too many are not graduating from high school and of those that do, many lack the skills they need to enter and succeed in our nation's competitive colleges.

Failure is not an option. That is why I will be asking everyone – students, parents, teachers, institutional and business leaders, community leaders and others – to get out of their comfort zone, to think big, and to think boldly.

- We will expand early childhood learning opportunities so that the youngest of our scholars get the preparation they need to attend school on an even playing field.
- We will develop a comprehensive portfolio of high-quality schools that serve the needs of every child. One size doesn't fit all. That's why I will support the growth of strong charter schools, schools with alternative learning schedules, and new partnerships between schools and the arts, health and technology sectors.
- We will support teachers by continuing to develop a best-in-the-nation evaluation and professional development system that recognizes excellent teachers, supports those who are struggling and removes those who are ineffective.
- We will identify opportunities for strong parental and community engagement, recognizing that a child's most important teacher is always at home.
- And we will build on the excellence of the Providence After School Alliance by working with our colleges and universities to establish meaningful, academically rich opportunities for summer learning.

Justice demands that we fix our schools and ensure their long-term success. By taking these steps we will raise student achievement, reduce drop-out rates and begin the hard work of making all of our schools first-class learning communities. We will transform the Providence Public Schools into a culture of achievement, where the central focus is results, results, results.

Just over 50 years ago, a young senator and presidential candidate, John F. Kennedy, stood right here on our City Hall's steps and spoke of the great hope of a nation. That day, on the eve of his victory, President Kennedy spoke of the "the power of a free society" and he spoke bluntly of the need to "recognize that there are no shortcuts," that there is "no easy way out."

President Kennedy was right then. And he's right now. There are no shortcuts. There are no shortcuts to our budget problems, to growing our economy or to strengthening our schools. However, we are also presented with an extraordinary opportunity to work together. Governor Chafee, I cannot think of a better theme for an inauguration address than yours – "A Time to Come Together".

I want you to know that the Mayor of Providence extends his hand in friendship and partnership for the good of our City and State.

From Westerly to Woonsocket, from Burrillville to Bristol, we are all in this together. We all have an interest in our capital city – the beating heart of our state.

I have no doubt: we will succeed. Through shared sacrifice, this storm shall pass and we will emerge stronger and better than ever.

No tengo duda alguna: vamos a ser exitosos. Mediante un sacrificio compartido, esta tormenta pasara y saldremos mas fuertes y mejores que nunca.

God grant us Divine Providence and bless our great city, our Ocean State and the United States of America.