

EMBARGO – MARCH 11, 1992 -- 7:30 P.M.

State of the City Address

**Council President Petrosinelli, Honorable
Members of the Providence City Council, Ladies and
Gentlemen:**

**Thank you for joining me tonight. I have called
the City Council into session to receive our plans for
moving this city forward. I bring you a message of
hope. Yes, we face great challenges. But we have it
in our power to renew and rebuild the City of Roger
Williams. We can -- and we must -- create a brighter
future for our city.**

**I truly believe that Providence is a city poised for
greatness. There are so many good people in this
city -- people who were born here and will never
leave, people who came here for a better life. Some
of the most dedicated people in Providence serve on
The Honorable City Council. Dave Dillon, Jimmy
Petrosinelli, Tommy Glavin, Evelyn Fagnoli, Joannie
DiRuzzo -- we've all been together for a lot of years.
Let me say to EVERY Councilman in this room: I
know how much you care about Providence.**

I've seen how much you give of yourselves in community meetings across this city. Long days, long nights -- all because you care.

Now in the '90s, we face challenges like never before. There are so many ways that we can strengthen this city. We must have the courage to lead, even in the face of adversity. We must create new hope and new opportunity for the people of Providence.

*** * ***

Can we change this city? I say we can. Look at all we've accomplished in little more than a year:

*** First, despite the recession, we brought American Power Conversion to Providence, and we brought one thousand jobs to Providence. I set only one condition: First preference in hiring must go to the people of our city. To date, MORE THAN 600 Providence residents have applied. Many will be given rewarding jobs with one of the fastest-growing companies in America.**

*** Second, we raised more than one hundred million dollars for our ambitious new housing plan. Beginning this year, we will build or renovate thousands of properties in every part of the city. We will paint houses, improve houses, renovate abandoned houses, and build affordable houses. We will change the face of our city.**

*** Third, we introduced "Community Policing," a strategy that assigns an officer full-time to helping a neighborhood solve its community problems. In Olneyville, in South Providence, in the West End, good people have welcomed Community Police Officers with open arms. In my experience, no other city program has done so much good for so little cost. I'm pleased to announce to you tonight that officers will be assigned this year to FIFTEEN additional neighborhoods across the City. Community Policing is coming to YOUR neighborhood, and we're going right to work to build better communities.**

*** Fourth, we aggressively pursued affirmative action plans in the Police, Fire and School departments, and we've made remarkable progress. Since we reached a landmark agreement with the Teacher's Union last September, we've hired twenty-six minority teachers. Two women have joined the Fire Department for the first time in the long history of this department. We will continue in our efforts until the city work force truly reflects the diversity of this city.**

*** Fifth, with the help of Urban Planner Andres Duany, we developed the "DownCity" strategy for reviving the old department store area of Downtown Providence. Already, we expect there will be sixty-five million dollars in new investment in this rundown section -- and I'm talking about this year.**

*** Finally, we created a master plan for renewing the City that is already being called one of the most creative in the country. It's called the Providence Plan. In a few more weeks, we will announce the formation of a commission that will be responsible for refining and implementing the plan.**

I will leave the specifics 'til then. However, I will assure you tonight that every neighborhood will benefit from the Providence Plan. It includes major proposals for putting people to work, making our neighborhoods safe and livable, educating today's children for tomorrow's jobs, providing decent and affordable housing, strengthening our middle-class communities, and creating jobs in Downtown Providence.

I am confident that the Providence Plan will guide all that we do during the course of this decade. There will be ample opportunity for every member of the City Council to assist us in refining the plan. To succeed, we will need support from the entire Providence community and, indeed, from the rest of Rhode Island.

*** * ***

I'd like to take a few moments to discuss City finances. The Mayor and the City Council share the responsibility to run government efficiently, and to tax as lightly as we can. I'm proud that we've lived within our means despite the recession. I expect to end this fiscal year with another small surplus.

o

But we face another difficult process of preparing the budget for the coming year. At the moment, proposed spending exceeds expected revenues by almost thirty million dollars -- and that's without making provision for any raises. In the next few months, I will do all I can to close this gap. You can assist me by endorsing the Legislative Package I have sent to the Assembly, which provides for millions in new revenues from sources other than property.

However, our greatest challenge is to convince the Legislature to provide an equitable amount of school aid to the City. There has been a great deal of confusion about the amount of aid we are to receive. We were first told Providence would get sixteen million dollars more than this year. Then we were told the correct number is 5.6 million dollars. I regret to inform you that both numbers are wrong. As things now stand, we will receive only 1.7 million dollars more.

Even this minuscule increase is more apparent than real. The proposed State Budget eliminates all other kinds of State Aid, reducing the gain to one million dollars. And when you consider that the State is mandating we spend an additional 2.3 million dollars for Special Education, you can see that the "plus" for Providence is really a "minus."

The conclusion is inescapable: The Mayor and the City Council of Providence must unite in a campaign to win our fair share of Education Aid for the school children of this city.

Every child in Rhode Island should have equal opportunity to a decent education -- regardless of where he happens to live. Yet this state hands out money so that East Greenwich can spend twelve hundred dollars more per child than Providence can afford to spend. I think that's grossly unfair -- and it may be illegal as well.

Not everyone sees it that way. A legislator from East Greenwich says it's unfair for the State to favor Providence at the expense of East Greenwich. He suggests that politics is behind such reform, not equity.

Well, let me teach him a lesson or two. In Providence, in 1990, almost 60 percent of our students qualified for subsidized lunch because of low income. In East Greenwich, only four percent of the students were covered by this program. Only **FOUR PERCENT!**

In Providence, more than 40 percent of our students come from Hispanic or Asian families. Most are immigrant families, learning a new culture and a new language. Guess how many students in East Greenwich have limited proficiency in English? **Nine Students. Only NINE STUDENTS!**

In Providence, almost a third of our students need tutoring and other compensatory education. In East Greenwich, it's only 1.2 percent.

It's clear that the need for School Aid in Providence is very great, and the need in East Greenwich is very small. Can the taxpayers of East Greenwich afford to pay more? I'll say they can. The median income in that town is almost **DOUBLE** the median in Providence.

Are taxpayers in East Greenwich paying their fair share? Not by a long shot. The tax rate down there is one-third less than our's.

So let's have no more crocodile tears from the Country Club set. It's about time that the wealthy communities make their wealthy residents pay for their exclusive schools. It's about time that the State of Rhode Island recognize where its responsibilities lie, and distribute aid ONLY to the communities that truly need it.

I don't want to sue the State to get the money we deserve. I don't want to demand the right to tax commuters, or propose other new taxes to pay the bills. But we will be forced to consider these options unless the General Assembly gives us our due.

Members of the City Council, Members of the Providence Delegation: Please join me in our quest for justice, on behalf of the school children and the taxpayers of Providence.

*** * ***

The City's needs are very great. We do not have the luxury of waiting until times improve before beginning the great task of rebuilding Providence. Good people across this city are looking to us to lead. We must be innovative in finding ways to pay for the actions we must take.

Fortunately, there are many sources of funding -- federal, state, and local -- we can utilize without having to raise the tax rate. After a year of planning, I will be bringing to the City Council a steady stream of new programs for your approval in the months to come. Let me tell you about the most important new source of funding.

Later this year, New England Electric will begin to spend 600 million dollars to triple the generating capacity of the Manchester Street Power Plant in Providence.

We are still discussing with the utility what the new assessment should be. But it is already clear that the completed power plant will pay ten to fifteen million MORE in taxes than it pays today.

We expect to propose to this Honorable Council that this huge increase in taxes be SET ASIDE each year for the retirement of new bonds we propose to issue.

This means of financing is permitted by state law and is known as "Tax-Incremental Financing." Under the terms of this act, we must seek your approval this year, even though the tax benefits will not be reaped until 1995 and thereafter.

The revenue potential at Manchester Street is so great that, over time, we could borrow 100 to 150 million dollars for the good of the city. We would NOT have to raise the tax rate to do so. And we could afford to pay off the bonds.

At this juncture, we plan two projects that would tap only a PORTION of the revenue increment. One is the new Housing Plan I have discussed; we would borrow about 20 million dollars for this purpose, so that we can provide decent and affordable housing for all our citizens.

The other is a new public safety headquarters for the Police and Fire departments. Anyone who has been in the existing station at La Salle Square knows how deteriorated and outmoded this building is. We owe it to the men and women of these departments to provide them with a modern facility. We will be supplying you with more information in due course; but I can say now that we are exploring both new construction and the complete renovation of the existing station.

I will make this pledge to the members of the Police and Fire departments: We will give you the modern headquarters you deserve, and we hope to begin construction during 1993.

Many more programs are in the works. Over the last year, we have listened well to the people in every neighborhood who love Providence and want to stay here -- but need our help to strengthen their neighborhoods and improve the quality of life. We realized that the needs are too great to do a little bit here and a little bit there. We must be comprehensive in addressing the needs of YOUR neighborhoods.

We have listened, and we are about to launch the most comprehensive process of renewal in the history of the City of Providence. Let me give you an overview of what's in store for YOUR neighborhoods:

*** First, during this calendar year, almost one hundred streets across the City will be repaved. A federal grant will pay for the repaving of about 18 MILES of roads. EVERY ward will benefit.**

*** Second, we intend to repave 3,000 SIDEWALKS as needed in most parts of the City.**

*** Third, we will help establish an endowment that will pay for the planting of ONE THOUSAND STREET TREES each year.**

*** Fourth, this year we will launch a new program we call "Clean City," which will strictly enforce laws against dumping on vacant lots and clean up all lots owned by the City.**

*** Fifth, as part of the Housing Program, we will build hundreds of affordable homes on vacant lots. When I say "Affordable," I mean less than people are paying today for rent.**

*** Sixth, we will purchase hundreds of abandoned houses, and turn them over for free to homesteaders who renovate their new properties.**

*** Seventh, we will help to pay for PAINTING 3,000 HOUSES in most parts of the City.**

Eighth, we will finance home improvements for THREE THOUSAND OR MORE HOUSES in Providence. Financing will be offered at very low rates and very generous terms. This is a program for ALMOST EVERYONE in Providence, including people with low incomes, moderate incomes -- and even those with incomes up to \$50,000.

*** Ninth, we will give special attention to the community needs of Federal Hill, which was particularly victimized by absentee landlords during the '80s.**

We are buying 29 huge, old tenements in the area of Federal Street and DePasquale, we have demolished many of the houses, and we will be replacing them with affordable houses for owner-occupants.

As you know, we have also halted the demolition of the former St. John's Church, which served as a beacon of hope for countless immigrant families who passed through the neighborhood over the years. The bell tower and the church itself will be refurbished, and will remain as a monument to the aspirations of immigrant families who settle on Federal Hill to this day.

Regardless of our heritage, Federal Hill is special to us all. The Hill has plenty of life left to live; we will give all the support we can to the residents of today who endeavor to strengthen this special community.

*** Tenth, the Public Buildings Authority will finance community facilities that are critically needed by the people of this city. I'm talking about a new recreation center in Mount Hope, Josh; A new recreation center in Silver Lake, David; a new community center in lower South Providence, John; and addition to the West End Community Center, David. And I'm talking about a new neighborhood center in the Ryan Post building, Councilwoman DiRuzzo, Councilman Glavin and Councilman DeLuca.**

We will also finance the new children's museum at India Point Park, a multi-service center for Hispanic organizations on the South Side, and new quarters for Head Start in the North End.

*** Eleventh, I'm pleased to announce that we have convinced the State Board of Regents to develop a new vocational high school on the South Side of Providence. This will be a 250,000-square-foot facility with a full complement of athletic fields for the benefit of students and the neighborhood. I can also announce tonight that we will assist the International Institute to relocate to larger quarters on the South Side. This will enable the institute to expand its critically important services to our growing immigrant population.**

*** Twelfth, we intend to offer scholarships to students in every part of the City for post-high school education. Unlike the children's crusade begun by the State, City scholarships will be offered now, not ten years from now. Scholarships will be offered to youngsters in public and private schools. They will encourage children to finish high school, and they will reward parents for choosing to live in this city.**

*** In addition, we intend to establish public service academies in the City's high schools. These academies will offer special pre-professional training for young people who wish to become teachers, police officers and firefighters in the City of Providence. As an incentive, we will offer scholarships to all those who complete the programs successfully and agree to return to Providence. This is a long-term program that will produce the City work force we need to reflect the diversity of this city.**

*** Finally, we are developing a new program that will enable City kids to experience the beauty and the wonder of Narragansett Bay. As part of the Elementary School curriculum, City children will visit Camp Cronin in Narragansett for a day of exploration and learning about nature.**

Put all of these programs together, and you have a comprehensive strategy for change. We pledged to give first priority to the neighborhoods during this term, and with YOUR help we will fulfill that pledge. We will reach out to every block of the City and improve the quality of life for our citizens.

*** * ***

Downtown Providence is also part of our strategic thinking. We must protect the jobs and taxes that currently exist there, and we must encourage new investment as well.

Unfortunately, the recession has not been kind to the old department store area of the Downtown. Vacancies are everywhere, and many buildings are in fair to poor condition. Andres Duany has helped us to appreciate the value of the architecture in this section of the City, and he has helped us to develop a strategy for attracting new investment.

A great deal is at stake. In the area bounded by Eddy, Weybosset, Empire, and Washington Streets, there is almost 80 million dollars in taxable value, and almost \$2 million in taxes collected each year. If we are going to protect this value and add to it, we must turn things around -- in a hurry.

Another reason time is of the essence is because the new convention center will open in a few years. We cannot have a commercial slum at the doorstep of the new center. We must revitalize the old real estate, and attract lively new uses.

This is why we are giving financial assistance to Trinity Repertory Company. Richard Jenkins has done a wonderful job winning back audiences -- the theater is running at more than 80 percent of capacity. But Trinity still has a great deal of short-term debt from the disastrous season they had a few years ago. The City must come to Trinity's aid. In the next few weeks, we will be showing you how we can assist Trinity in a way that won't harm the City.

Saving Shepard's is also extremely important. The tenants have been found, and I expect the Governor and I will have an announcement on this matter soon. The most exciting thing about this venture is that Shepard's will become home to a new museum of Rhode Island history. This will be a substantial, well-funded museum that will become an important anchor for this part of the City.

There's more good news. Mr. Duany has been working closely with Johnson & Wales University as well as the City, and the college is ready to significantly expand its operations in Downtown Providence. We're talking about a major new library, and hundreds of additional dormitory beds.

You should know that the college took a long, hard look at whether it was wise to remain in Downtown Providence. We convinced Johnson & Wales that the City would take numerous steps to revitalize the old retail area, and now the college is expanding its presence here instead of leaving.

This is good news indeed. Just as tax-exempt colleges help to shore up tax values on the East Side, so Johnson & Wales will help us to revitalize the old retail area of the Downtown.

Finally, I would like to give you a report on one more major project, the relocation of Route 195. Before the decade is out, the old 195 will come down. More than 50 acres of land will be opened up for new development on both sides of the Providence River. In our preliminary planning, Dorrance Street and other Downtown streets will be extended to the banks of the Providence River, and a series of wharves will reach into the river. Some day, we anticipate that stores, restaurants, apartments, hotels and office buildings will be located along the river's edge. In fact, there's room for more than three million square-feet of taxable building space.

* * *

So there you have it: My agenda for the City of Providence. All of these programs, taken together, will rebuild hope, rebuild neighborhoods, and strengthen the City as we move towards the next century. My administration put together this plan; but we will need YOUR help and YOUR support in order to succeed. I want EVERY Councilman to participate in the exciting enterprise of renewing our city. I will always be willing to listen, to amend, and to revise in the interests of the City. In the months and years ahead, let's ALL go forward under the same banner. Let's build a better city for the benefit of all who come after us.

#

Vincent A. Cianci
Mayor - March 11, 1992

IN CITY COUNCIL

READ
WHEREUPON IT IS ORDERED THAT
THE SAME BE RECEIVED.

Michael R. Clement CLERK