

1993 State of the City Address

March 23, 1993

Vincent A. Cianci, Jr.

Mayor of Providence

Mr. Council President, honorable members of the Providence City Council; distinguished guests; citizens of our city and state, and especially Governor Bruce Sundlun:

I am honored to present to you my State of the City Address for 1993. I bring you a message of hope. Providence is rising to the challenge of meeting the aspirations of our people. In every neighborhood of this city, good people are hard at work, changing things for the better.

Behind the theories and statistics, there are the faces of hope. I have seen them in my travels across the city. I have seen the mother in the North End who works two jobs to support her children. I have seen the family from Latin America that saves every penny for a new home. I have seen the teacher at Carl Lauro School who brings joy to the face of a little Asian girl. And I have seen the mother in Olneyville who volunteers in the offices of the Community Police.

But I have also seen the faces of fear and worry: the elderly widow who counts out her pennies to pay the taxes; the single mother who searches for affordable day care so she can go to school; the Southeast Asian family that crosses the street to avoid the gang on the corner; the merchant who calls it quits because the neighborhood is no longer safe.

These are the faces I remember -- the faces of hope and of fear. This speech is dedicated to all of those people. If our theories and statistics can meet their needs, then we have done well, and we will have helped solve the problems of urban America.



This is a critical year for Providence. We have begun an unprecedented effort to rebuild our neighborhoods and create new opportunity for our people. Our strategy for change is called The Providence Plan, and it places us in the forefront of American cities and their renewal.

But we must do more. Providence can no longer provide services of a statewide nature without just compensation. Our taxpayers are already overburdened. We must provide tax relief to the homeowners and businesses that are loyal to our city. To this end, we have asked the state government, and the great colleges and hospitals of this city, to provide the revenue and resources we need.

Rebuilding our neighborhoods and finding new sources of revenue: These are the challenges of our city in 1993.

No one has been more understanding of our needs than Governor Bruce Sundlun. He and his wife Marjorie join us tonight in a place of honor. Governor, you are a true friend of Providence, the city of your birth, and we the people of Providence salute you.

Some say the American city has no future -- that the cities are dying. I refuse to believe it! In Providence, we are on the brink of achieving what no other city has attempted, or succeeded in doing.

The Providence Plan, the Alternative Revenue Plan, are blueprints for more than mere survival. They are a bold statement of our confidence and determination to make our city strong. This is our opportunity for greatness!

The future is what we make of it. The time to seize the initiative is now. The long, dark night of the recession is beginning to fade. We have a new president who is committed to the cities and we have a governor who cares. The mayor and the city council have worked together to develop strategies for change. There really is no limit to what we can do. We will show America a city can be reborn. We can -- and we will -- create a shining future for the city founded by Roger Williams so long ago.



There's a new spirit of hope in this city. And a lot of it comes from none other than the Providence Bruins. Rhode Island has opened its heart to this championship team. There's nothing quite like the feeling you get when the puck hits the goal and ten thousand Rhode Islanders cry out in triumph. Never in our wildest dreams did we imagine the Bruins would be so successful. Just think of it: 400,000 tickets sold in the very first year! And the Bruins are leading the league! The long winter nights have seemed not quite so dark because the Bruins came to town.

We have Ed Anderson to thank for bringing the Bruins to Providence, Coach Mike O'Connell to thank for a competitive team, and the players to thank for a championship season. They're one of the biggest success stories of the year: Let's give the Providence Bruins a big hand for a job well done!

(Bruins delegation stands up)



In the neighborhoods, The Providence Plan is also kindling a new spirit of hope. We have brought community police officers into every neighborhood. They are finding practical solutions to problems that have plagued communities for years.

We have brought community organizers into every neighborhood and they are creating a strong alliance to fight substance abuse. In neighborhoods across this city, we will paint thousands of houses and renovate thousands more. We will build recreation centers in several neighborhoods, and take children off the streets. In our schools, we are training future police officers, firefighters and school teachers in specifically tailored programs; and we have made the PROBE study, led by Dr. Edward Eddy, our blueprint for achieving excellence in education.

The Providence Plan is creating hope because we are achieving results.

● **On the first day** of our house-painting program, we were inundated with hundreds of calls for help.

● **On Federal Hill**, we swept away blocks of derelict structures and are building new homes to replace them.

● **In Silver Lake**, we are days away from starting construction on a new recreation center at Neutaconkanut Park.

● **In South Providence**, community police officers have eliminated a public drinking problem that has plagued the neighborhood for decades.

● **In Elmwood**, officers have been highly successful in wiping out graffiti.

● **In the North End**, officers have organized volunteers to call parents when children don't show up at school.

● **In the West End**, we're adding a new wing to an already successful community center there.

● **In the Smith Hill/Chad Brown** neighborhood, we're building a new home for Head Start, an agency which successfully gives our children the kind of love and guidance they so desperately need.

● **In Olneyville**, good people came out to rebuild the community policing office after a fire-bombing by drug dealers.

● **And in Federal Hill**, more than 300 residents turned out a few weeks ago for a community fair organized by the city's substance abuse program to create the feeling of community again.

Community policing and the substance abuse program are agents of change in all our neighborhoods. They are out there every day, achieving victories large and small, making our neighborhoods safe and livable, giving good people hope for the future. These dedicated men and women are the "front lines" of The Providence Plan. They're all here tonight...Let's give them a big hand.

(Officers and Community Organizers stand up together.)

The Providence Plan is taking on new responsibilities as we move forward. One of the most important is "Families First," a new enterprise that may become the biggest program under The Providence Plan umbrella.

Families First is a partnership between the State of Rhode Island and the City of Providence. The objective is to give the city's poor children a much better chance in life. We have just begun a massive effort to improve both health and education services for poor children of this city.

There's no reason why the census tracts right next door to Rhode Island Hospital and Women & Infants should have some of the worst health statistics in the state. The Providence Plan, working with the Rhode Island Department of Health, is going to reach into these communities and give poor children a healthy start in life.

Another challenge -- education: We've got to start well before the first grade if we're going to give our children a fighting chance to succeed in school. President Clinton is committed to early intervention. Governor Sundlun is committed. Now is the time to seize the initiative.

A very important person in all of this is Fred Lippitt. A year ago, I asked Fred to head up The Providence Plan, and he's won our confidence and admiration. Fred loves this city; he has broad experience in education, in health, and many other fields; and he is doing Providence a tremendous amount of good. I think Fred will be particularly helpful as we institute many of the school reforms recommend by the Probe Study in the months to come. Let's give special recognition to Fred Lippitt.

(Fred Lippitt stands.)



Let me pause for a moment to reflect on the fatal fire at 54 Hayward Street a few weeks ago.

This fire was a tragic event for our city -- tragic in its causes, tragic in its consequences. Six innocent lives were lost and two arson suspects are awaiting trial.

Despite the tragedy, we can be proud of the professional and heroic efforts of the men and women in the Department of Public Safety who responded to the fire. There were police officers and firefighters who risked their lives in an attempt to save the victims.

The Department of Communications did an outstanding job coordinating the operation. The Fire Department's Arson Squad joined firefighters in gathering evidence.

And in the Police Department, the Investigative Division, The Patrol Division, the Juvenile Bureau and the Traffic Bureau joined forces to identify and apprehend the two suspects within a week. A great deal of assistance was also provided by the American Legion Post nearby. Post commander Ernest Gilbert is here with us tonight.

These were the people who were closest to this terrible tragedy. It will remain with them the rest of their lives. They deserve our appreciation for their valor and professional conduct. But then again, if you asked any one of them, they would simply respond, "I was only doing my job."

Joining us are the public safety workers who won the admiration of their superiors and the whole city: we are proud of all of them. Please stand up and be recognized.

(Public Safety delegation stands up.)



It will take a decade to implement The Providence Plan in its entirety. But our work to secure new revenue from the state government, and from the colleges and hospitals, will be decided over the next four months. It is an opportunity we cannot afford to waste.

Providence can no longer provide costly services of a statewide nature without just compensation. Although we are a city rich in culture, we are not the richest in dollars. We also have a high tax rate. If we keep going back to the taxpayers for more, we will slowly but surely destroy this city, and the state. This we must not do.

Where are we to turn? We have no choice but to combine with the state government to solve urban ills. Yes, the state government has financial problems of its own. But placing the city's finances on a sound footing is as much in the state's interest as in ours.

Rhode Island, after all, is a city/state, and Providence provides services that are critically important to Rhode Island as a whole. The water system we own and operate serves 600,000 Rhode Islanders. Each business day, more than 300,000 people crowd into our city, and they depend on Providence to provide the services -- police, fire, public works -- that support the state economy.

Providence is also the center of government, the arts, health care and higher education in Rhode Island, and all depend on the services we provide.

Providence also has the unique responsibility of providing services to the large, growing population of our state's immigrant poor. Every year, our school system grows larger, as Hispanic and Southeast Asian families move to our city. These children are the city's responsibility -- but how will we pay to educate them?

We project that school costs will rise by some \$13 million a year for many years to come. But the city's tax base cannot begin to provide these new revenues when relying strictly on the property tax.

The people and businesses that dwell in the suburbs escape all of these responsibilities, and are rewarded with a much lower property tax rate. This is grossly unfair.

Why should the tax rate in Providence be 60 percent higher than the Rhode Island average? The only way this huge disparity can be removed is by rededicating state resources to those most in need.

As things now stand, we give to Rhode Island much more than we get back. The employment base in Providence contributes some \$400 million in taxes -- income, sales, business taxes -- to the Rhode Island state treasury. But the state sends back only about \$70 million to the City of Providence.

That's just not enough. Especially when almost half of the property value in Providence is tax-exempt -- off the rolls. Especially when our fire department must be large enough to protect college and hospital buildings that are in use 24 hours a day. Especially when enrollment in the public schools is growing by 700 students a year and we're borrowing money every year to build new classrooms.

Especially when companies are leaving the city because of our high tax rates, and our tax base is shrinking rather than growing.

Governor Sundlun, to his credit, understands the plight of the capital city. He understands how important Providence is to Rhode Island. This year, the Governor decided to take bold action: he proposed to give less state aid to many wealthy communities, and more state aid to the poor cities.

Understandably, many in the suburbs are disturbed. They do not want to raise their taxes any more than we do.

But all of these communities have tax rates that are much lower than ours. The time has come for the suburbs to pay their fair share and support the services they use in the central city.

Just last week we read in *The Providence Journal* about a new school program in East Greenwich. The children were taken to a gourmet restaurant where they learned the etiquette of fine dining. The children of East Greenwich were learning which forks to use for a four-course gourmet meal -- while the schools of Providence were giving free breakfast and lunch to thousands of poor children -- some of whom did not know whether they'd enjoy a supper that night.

Let's compare Providence to another wealthy community like Barrington. In Barrington, the median income is \$53,000. In Providence the median is \$22,000.

But Barrington's tax rate is a fraction of ours. In fact, ours is 50 percent higher.

Many residents of Barrington also work in Providence. They benefit from the colleges, the hospitals, the zoo, the parks and the arts institutions that are here.

But they pay nothing towards the cost of services that the poor Providence population provides. Most of their tax money goes into the Barrington public schools. As a result, Barrington spent one-third more per student on instruction in 1991 than Providence could afford to spend.

Why should so much more be spent on middle-class children in Barrington than poor, disadvantaged children in Providence? This is not only unfair, it may also be illegal. At the least, it is certainly socially unjust.

Every child should have equal educational opportunity -- regardless of the wealth of one's parents or the community in which one lives. It is the **duty** of the governor and the legislature to rectify the inequities of birth. The state aid formula helps to remove some of the disparity. But it can, and must, do a great deal more.

Governor Sundlun saw this clearly. In the face of suburban opposition, the governor had the courage to act responsibly for Rhode Island and for our children. Governor: your support means the children of this city will have a decent chance in life. When you take this issue to the legislature, the people of Providence will be with you every step of the way. *(Governor receives applause.)*

If we are to hold the line on taxes, we must take a number of additional actions.

- **First**, we must make at least \$10 million in permanent expenditure cuts. This we will attempt to do. I call upon our unions to join us in this mission.

- **Second**, we must collect new revenues from the tax-exempt colleges and hospitals so that we may be reimbursed for the services we provide. We have asked the legislature to make these payments on behalf of the institutions, but if we are turned down, we will ask for authority to charge the institutions directly.

- **Third**, we must sell, or more profitably manage, several city assets that are regional in scope: the water system, the zoo at Roger Williams Park, the City Port and other assets in this category.

The Providence water system provides water to 60 percent of the state. Now Barrington and the rest of Bristol County want to join in too. But Providence receives nothing in return. In fact, Providence taxpayers subsidize the water system for the wealthiest suburbs where water rates are lower as a result. This is unjust; it is unfair, and it is wrong. It should be changed.



We do not take lightly the taxation of colleges and hospitals. They provide important services, employ thousands of people, and help stabilize our neighborhoods.

But these big institutions are also big consumers of city services. The colleges have 25,000 students, the hospitals 450,000 patients a year. On any given day, there are about 50,000 employees, students, patients and visitors at all the colleges and hospitals. The combined payroll of these institutions is at least \$750 million a year. The state reaps millions in income and sales tax revenues from this payroll. But the city collects nothing.

All told, a billion dollars in college and hospital property is excluded from the tax rolls.

We can no longer afford this luxury. The Providence economy is increasingly made up of institutions that are tax-exempt. More than 40 percent of the employment in this city is provided by tax-exempt institutions. It is only a matter of time before we go over 50 percent. How can the City of Providence survive if so much of the economy pays nothing for our services?



Rebuilding our neighborhoods and our revenue base will not be easy. But we have made remarkable progress in the last year in putting the bold ideas of The Providence Plan into action. And I am confident the Rhode Island community will conclude that our financial needs must be addressed in timely fashion -- if indeed, Rhode Island is to survive.

Our greatest strength is the people who care -- good people in every neighborhood; clerks and laborers, teachers and police officers and firefighters, who do the people's business each and every day; and members of this City Council, who work day and night to raise up their neighborhoods. **They** have never stopped caring about Providence -- and neither shall we.

Now, let us join together in this enterprise of hope, commitment and purpose. It will be an exciting, adventurous journey that will fulfill the promise of Providence.

We must put aside our differences and work for the common good. We must conquer our fears; we must sustain hope; we must give to our children a city reborn. All Rhode Island: Please join us in that quest.



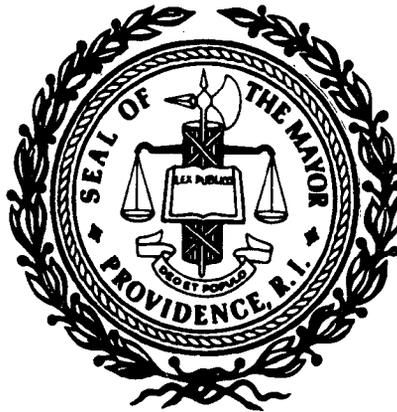
Vincent A. Cianci, Jr.
Mayor of Providence

March 23, 1993

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The Honorable Vincent A. Cianci, Jr.

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State of the City Address

Respectfully submitted
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State of the City Address 1993



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But I have also seen the faces of fear and worry: the elderly widow who counts out her pennies to pay the taxes; the single mother who searches for affordable day care so she can go to school; the Southeast Asian family that crosses the street to avoid the gang on the corner; the merchant who calls it quits because the neighborhood is no longer safe.

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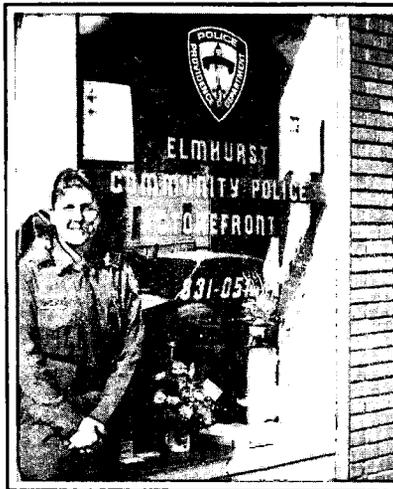
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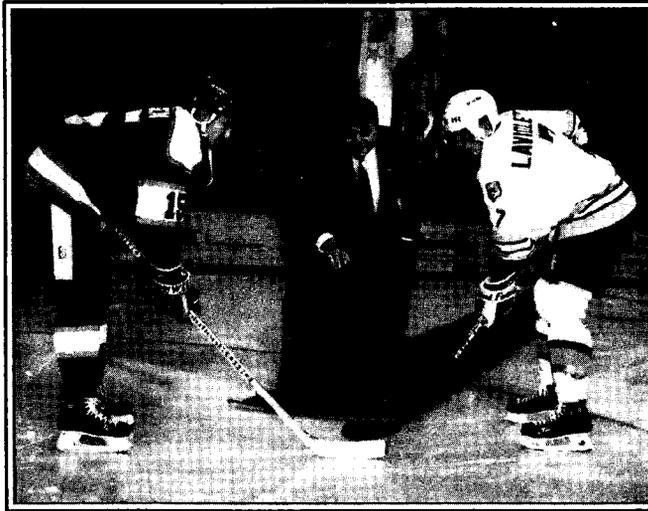
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That's just not almost half of the Providence is tax- Especially when our large enough to protect buildings that are in use Especially when schools is growing by we're borrowing money classrooms. Especially leaving the city because our tax base is growing.



Matthew Luis Cecilio with Mayor Cianci at the Pleasant View School.

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Let's compare Providence to another wealthy community like Barrington. In Barrington, the median income is \$53,000. In Providence the median is \$22,000. But Barrington's tax rate is a fraction of ours. In fact, ours is 50 percent higher.

Many residents of Barrington also work in Providence. They benefit from the colleges, the hospitals, the zoo, the parks and the arts institutions that are here. But they pay nothing towards the cost of services that the poor Providence population provides. Most of their tax money goes into the Barrington public schools. As a result, Barrington spent one-third more per student on instruction in 1991 than Providence could afford to spend.

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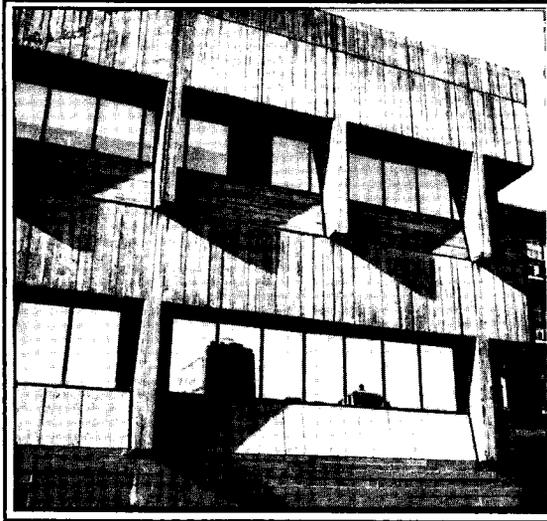
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The Providence water system provides water to 60 percent of the state. Now Barrington and the rest of Bristol County want to join in too. But Providence receives nothing in return. In fact, Providence taxpayers subsidize the water system for the wealthiest suburbs where water rates are lower as a result. This is unjust; it is unfair, and it is wrong. It should be changed.



We do not take lightly the taxation of colleges and hospitals. They provide important services, employ thousands of people, and help stabilize our neighborhoods. But these big institutions are also big consumers of city services. The colleges have 25,000 students, the hospitals 450,000 patients a year. On any given day, there are about 50,000 employees, students, patients and visitors at all the colleges and hospitals. The combined payroll of these institutions is at least \$750 million a year. The state reaps millions in income and sales tax revenues from this payroll. But the city collects nothing. All told, a billion dollars in college and hospital property is excluded from the tax rolls.

We can no longer afford this luxury. The Providence economy is increasingly made up of institutions that are tax-exempt. More than 40 percent of the employment in this city is provided by tax-exempt institutions. It is only a matter of time before



we go over 50 per-
cent. How can the
City of Providence
survive if so much of
the economy pays
nothing for our ser-
vices?



Rebuilding our
neighborhoods and

our revenue base will not be easy. But we have made remarkable progress in the last year in putting the bold ideas of The Providence Plan into action. And I am confident the Rhode Island community will conclude that our financial needs must be addressed in timely fashion -- if indeed, Rhode Island is to survive.

Our greatest strength is the people who care -- good people in every neighborhood; clerks and laborers, teachers and police officers and firefighters, who do the people's business each and every day; and members of this City Council, who work day and night to raise up their neighborhoods. They have never stopped caring about Providence -- and neither shall we.

Now, let us join together in this enterprise of hope, commitment and purpose. It will be an exciting, adventurous journey that will fulfill the promise of Providence. We must put aside our differences and work for the common good. We must conquer our fears; we must sustain hope; we must give to our children a city reborn. All Rhode Island: Please join us in that quest.

Vincent A. Cianci, Jr.
Mayor of Providence