

State of the City Address 1994



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IN CITY COUNCIL
FEB 10 1994

READ
WHEREUPON IT IS ORDERED THAT
THE SAME BE RECEIVED.

Michael R. Clement CLERK

Vincent A. Cianci, Jr.
Mayor of Providence

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
FEBRUARY 10, 1994

Council President Petrosinelli, honorable members of the Providence City Council, ladies and gentlemen:

We are honored tonight to have Governor Sundlun and Mrs. Sundlun join us on an important and solemn occasion for our community....

The saddening events of recent days and weeks have been shocking to us all.

In little more than a month, we've had five shooting deaths in this city, including the tragic murder of Sergeant Steven M. Shaw.

We cannot allow the murder of a police officer or any citizen to go unanswered. We cannot allow people with guns to think they can rule our streets. We will not allow this to happen. I call on all citizens to unite and take action now.

Yesterday, after months of study by a special task force, I proposed that a new court -- the Gun Court -- be created in this state. The purpose of the new court is to correct the flaws in the existing criminal justice system -- a system which, too often, fails to deter violence and fails to protect the law-abiding public.

The Gun Court will deal only with gun crimes, so there will not be long waits until cases come to trial.

Judges will be given new powers to deny bail to suspects who have previously been convicted of gun violence.

Judges will also be required to schedule trials within 90 days of the Superior Court arraignment. Ninety days, not one or two years!

Most important of all, the Gun Court will have the power to

put most gun offenders in prison for mandatory jail terms. No probation, no suspension, no parole! This is the way the federal system works, and it's the way the Rhode Island system should work.

Today, just the opposite is the case: most gun offenders spend little or no time in prison, and they have little to fear from the criminal justice system

We did a survey of 140 arrests by the Providence Police for gun offenses ranging from murder and assault to illegal possession. We were amazed to find that only 31 of the 140 have been sent to jail. Only 16 have gone to jail for more than two years!

This has got to change. We must make Rhode Island safe for good, decent law-abiding citizens. The Gun Court I propose is an important step towards righting the balance.

Legislation will be introduced in the next few days, and I will launch a personal campaign to secure passage by the General Assembly of these much-needed reforms.

I call upon every citizen to march under this banner of justice. We seek to empower the judiciary of this state: We will give them the tools, and they will show us justice.

Let the message go forth: In Rhode Island, if you carry a gun and you commit a crime, you are going to jail -- period.

The emotions and the images of this week will be with us for a lifetime.

The death of Sergeant Steven Shaw....the funeral amidst the wind and the snow....thousands of police officers marching in solemn procession....marching to the beat of the drummer....as 5,000 brothers and sisters march in solidarity, they are saying with every footprint in the snow, "Give us the tools, and we will protect you."

We must sustain faith in our city. Providence, after 360 years, is a great city, full of life and promise. There is so much good we have inherited from the past. And there are so many good people who are working today to strengthen our community.

While criminals may attempt to tear at the fabric of our community, many among us have a gift for mending the fabric and making us strong.

I'd like to take a moment to recognize just a few of these people. I like to call them "unsung heroes."

Day in and day out, community police officers Tabatha Glavin and Rhonda Kessler are helping the disadvantaged children of Smith Hill and Mount Pleasant. Tabatha and Rhonda have bridged the gap



between the police officer and the neighborhood; they've become big sisters and pals with the kids on the block. These two police officers

are an important reason why Camp Phoenix is such a success; it seems that Tabatha and Rhonda are always taking neighborhood kids to the beach, a picnic or a baseball game. Tabatha's community police office is a home away from home for some children: there's a big round table where the kids can do their homework; there's a ping-pong table, and games and puzzles for visitors to use. On Smith Hill, it's not surprising that Officer Glavin is known to everyone as "Tabatha."

There are many more "unsung heroes" in Providence.

*Thanks to teacher Michael Tudino at Mount Pleasant High School, and Diane DiPrete Sparling at Central High School, our Public Service Academies are up and running. The academies are preparing disadvantaged young people to be the future teachers, police officers, firefighters and other public servants of the city of Providence. This June, the first 26 students in the program will graduate; and, as I promised two years ago, full scholarships at either Rhode Island College or CCRI have been arranged for every academy graduate. An additional 175 students are in the lower grades of the academy: Michael and Diane are working hard to graduate them all and to put them into college so they can pursue their dreams.

*Then there is Adelina Mendez, one of our community organizers, who is based on the city's south side. Adelina has been our secret weapon in the battle to wipe out graffiti. She has personally contacted more than 300 graffiti writers, and has convinced a number of them to sign an amnesty pledge. The pledge involves more than an end to vandalism: Adelina's recruits also promise to stay in school, stay out of gangs, and stay out of trouble with the law.

*The anti-graffiti crews also deserve a lot of credit. In less than four months, despite the unusually harsh weather, they've removed more than 800 graffiti tags across the city. And a special police effort has resulted in the arrest of 35 graffiti vandals.



More heroes:

There are Chhem Sip, a native of Cambodia, and Father Dan Trainor and Sister Angela Daniels from the Assumption Parish, who have done a tremendous amount of good working with gang members from the Asian community. In little more than a year, the program has reached more than 500 Southeast Asian youth, encouraging them to turn from gang activity to constructive involvement with family and community.

*Two more heroes -- well-known this time -- are Tom Skala of Fleet Bank and Fred Lohrum of Hospital Trust. Both these men took a personal interest in the highly successful program known as City Year, and at my request they provided the key funding needed to launch City Year in Providence. They didn't hesitate for a minute. City Year is an urban peace corps: it recruits high school graduates from Providence and around the state to devote a year to full-time community service in the inner city.

There are many more heroes whose story we could tell:

*There's Vivian Weisman of the Jewish Community Center,

who has dedicated countless hours since 1986 to the tough and meticulous work of lowering the dropout rate in our schools. Today Vivian chairs the Dropout Prevention Collaborative. And she has good news to tell: in just the last three years, we have lowered the dropout rate by more than 25 percent.

*There's Sister Ann Keefe, a member of the inner-city ministry at St. Michael's parish who has been doing good in South Providence for 15 years. Sister Ann was a founding member of the Good News Housing Corporation and the Southside Community Land Trust. She strongly believes that grassroots organizations can rebuild the spirit of community and rebuild triple-deckers as well. We are proud that Sister Ann now sits on the board of the Providence Plan Housing Corporation.

*And there's Umberto Crenca at AS220, a man with an artist's vision who knows how to get things done. Not only has he made AS220 one of the city's most important art spaces, with a steady stream of performances and exhibits; he's also moved into newly renovated quarters on Empire Street -- and AS220 has become one of the charter residents of Downcity.

These are just a few of the many people who are making a difference in our community. They are mending the community, making us strong; they are preventing the behavior that can lead to violent crime.

I would like to ask every one of you to please stand up, so we can give all of you a well-deserved round of applause.

While I'm at it, there's one more person I'd like to take a bow. He's worked for the city for almost 20 years, and now he's going to work for Johnson & Wales University. As the city's Chief Building Inspector, he's had a hand in just about every building that's gone up over the last generation. He knows his subject better than anyone else in this state, he has served with great skill, good humor, and impeccable honesty...and he's my cousin as well, so let's all say "thank you and God bless" to Merlin DeConti.

For three long years, I have spoken before hundreds of groups in this city and state...it may even be thousands of groups now...and I have tried to bring one basic message: that the broader Rhode Island community must rally in support of the capital city, because city and suburbs are inextricably linked...they are intertwined...and one cannot exist without the other.

Now we are being heard.

We have said that the taxpayers of Providence are overburdened -- that significant tax relief must come from the state of Rhode Island.

At last, the educators who crafted "Guaranteed Student Entitlement" are saying the same thing. They are saying our burden is too heavy. They are saying that education costs must be shared more equitably in this state.

We have said that there are two school systems in this state, one for the more affluent suburban communities and one for the inner-cities -- two systems, separate and unequal.

At last, the educators who designed GSE are saying the same thing. According to Commissioner McWalters, Providence -- with its many poor, and its many immigrant children -- must spend more per student than the suburbs if we are to overcome the disadvantages our children bring to school.

We have also said that the tax-exempt colleges and hospitals must contribute more to Providence -- especially when almost half our property is off the tax rolls....especially when the new immigrants of this city have such great need for the services these health and educational centers provide.

At last, we have entered into constructive discussions with the colleges and hospitals regarding these issues.

We've been meeting regularly over the last year -- quietly, without a lot of publicity -- and I believe the presidents of these institutions are now more aware of the urgency of the city's needs. They are also more willing to discuss new ways they can assist us.

In our conversations, I have stressed that Providence faces major challenges as we approach the twenty-first century. We are experiencing a new wave of immigration not seen since the 1920s. Poverty is concentrating in Providence, wealth in the suburbs. Tax-exempt institutions are expanding. While this expansion is good for our state's economy, it is detrimental to our tax base.

The colleges and hospitals must assume greater responsibility for the fate of their host city: they already contribute a great deal to Providence; but they must contribute a great deal more if we are to prosper together in the decades ahead.

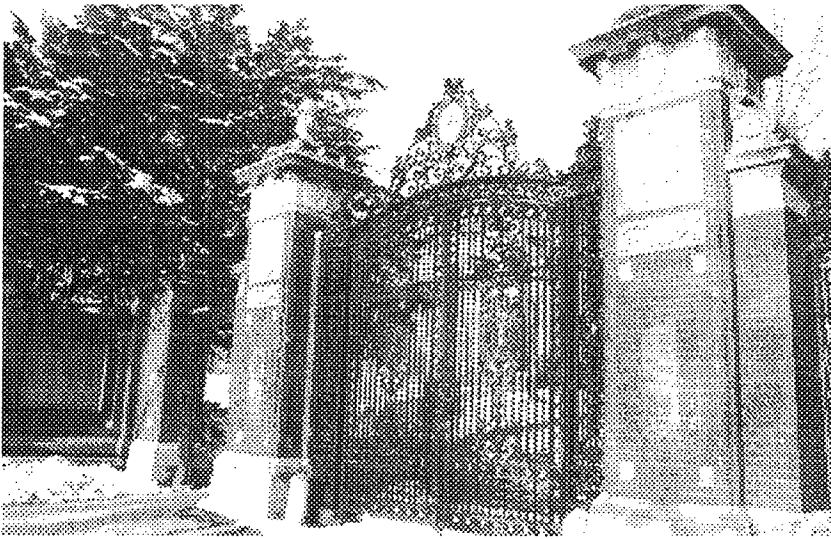
How can Brown University, Rhode Island Hospital, Providence College, Women & Infants and the others contribute more to the city?

I have asked the colleges and hospitals to assist us in winning passage for key legislation at the State House, including the PILOT Program and Guaranteed Student Entitlement; they have already begun to work on our behalf.

I have proposed that a select group of tax-exempt properties be put back on the tax rolls.

And we have discussed how the institutions can become much more involved in improving health and education in the city.

I'm pleased to say that Providence College is already taking steps in that direction.



Providence College. has agreed in principle to assume a special relationship with our new Feinstein School. Students who attend the Feinstein School will devote a significant amount of their time to community service. Providence College will assist us to make this new concept truly meaningful to students, and will assist Feinstein graduates to obtain scholarships to P.C. We are very grateful to P.C. for its new commitment, and I'd like to thank Mr. Edward Caron for attending tonight's event to represent President Cunningham.

So we are making some progress in our relations with tax-exempts. Discussions are continuing with Dr. Vartan Gregorian of Brown, William Kreykes from Rhode Island Hospital, President Cunningham of P.C. and other representatives of the non-profit community. I am confident that consensus will soon be reached, and that we will be ready to announce a new partnership in a matter of months.

Very soon, the Governor and I will be making another important announcement, regarding the Providence Place Shopping

Mall. I will save most of the specifics until then. But because some information regarding the project has become public, I would like to make a few points now.

You should know that Providence Place will provide more than 3,000 construction jobs right away, and 2,500 permanent retail jobs when the mall opens in the fall of 1996.

We successfully negotiated a provision that says Providence residents will be given first preference for the job-training that will be provided and for employment at mall stores.

We also insisted that ambitious affirmative action goals be set for both the construction and operation phases.

And there are requirements that the developer take a lead role in revitalizing the downcity area, and promoting the flow of patrons between the old and new downtown.

It's also important to recognize that Providence Place will not be just another mall. The lead tenants and many of the specialty shops in Providence Place will be among the most prestigious stores in the country. Providence will join a very small group of communities in America with so many sophisticated retailers. We will have the only concentration of such stores between Boston and New York -- and we will have unrivaled visibility and access from the highway.

As a result, we believe that Providence Place will draw up to 50 percent of its customers from Massachusetts and Connecticut, with some shoppers traveling 30 to 50 miles to get here. A high percentage of the sales taxes at Providence Place will be new taxes, not transferred from some place else in Rhode Island. As I have pointed out many times to the Governor, the state stands to reap a very sizable annual dividend from the development of Providence Place. Lest we forget, millions in new taxes are just what the state needs to launch Guaranteed Student Entitlement.

As you look over the proposal for Providence Place, keep in mind that the mall means jobs for our people, tax relief for property-owners, and new educational opportunity for our children.

For two years we have successfully managed this city without need for property-tax increases. We will do everything in our power to freeze the tax rate in the coming year as well.

Over time, Guaranteed Student Entitlement holds out the promise that we can even lower the tax rate. This program, developed under the auspices of Governor Sundlun, also gives equal educational opportunity to every school child in Rhode Island -- whether they live in Warwick, Barrington or Providence.

What does GSE do for Providence? Plenty. First it lowers the property tax contribution to the schools by more than 30 million dollars. Then it assumes 100 percent of the rising cost of education -- forever. Then it demands that the educational product be vastly improved, and offers to pay for it.

We owe a great deal to Education Commissioner Peter McWalters, Fred Lippitt as chair of the Board of Regents, Representative Paul Crowley of Newport and to Gary Sasse of RI-PEC for their leadership in developing the GSE. I will do everything I possibly can to secure enactment of the GSE this session, with funding to scale up as quickly as possible.

I can report to you that we are experiencing success in balancing this year's budget.

*First, I have received personal assurances from the Governor that his budget will provide for full funding of the PILOT program, as needed.

*Second, with assistance from this honorable City Council,



the COLA issues appears to be under control.

*Finally, we are in the latter stages of discussions with the RI Port Authority and with a private developer regarding a new partnership at the Port of Providence. The agreement we expect to reach should be sufficient to balance the city budget for this year, and has significant potential for creating new jobs at the Port of Providence.

Let us not lose sight of the progress we are making as a community.

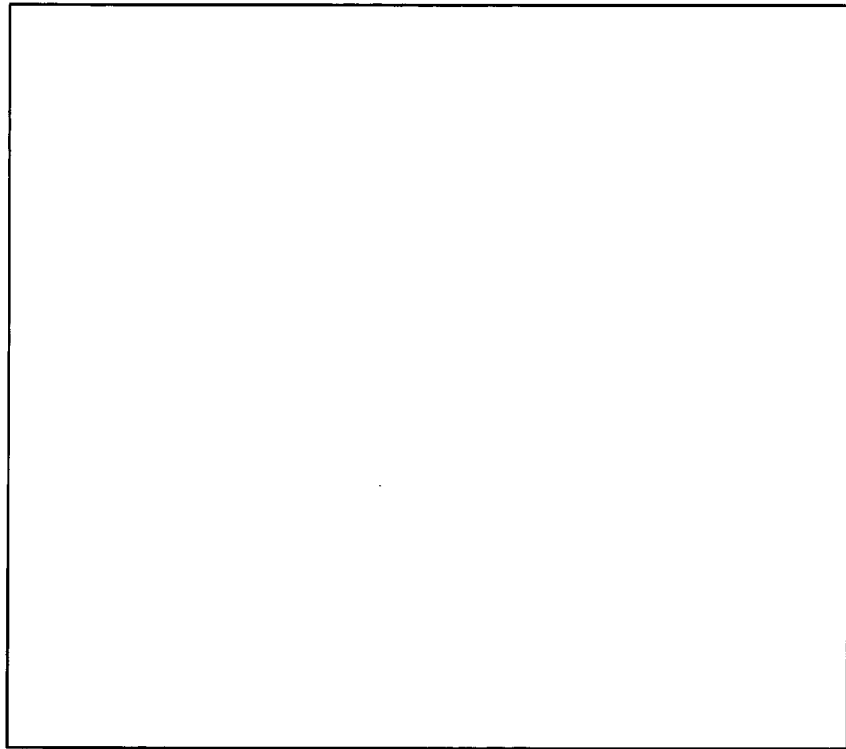
Over the last three years, the number of serious crimes against people and property has declined by almost 20 percent.

The number of serious crimes against people -- murder, rape, robbery and assault, has declined by one-third.

And the use of guns in the commission of crimes has actually declined by 35 percent.

Yes, progress has been made. But we can, and must, do even better. We must institute the reforms I propose for the criminal justice system.

Colonel Gannon deserves a lot of credit for the reduction in crime thus far. He's a 36-year veteran who has direct experience with



every aspect of police work. He's a rock-solid cop who's deserving of this city's heartfelt gratitude. Colonel, please take a bow.

Sergeant Steven Shaw was an integral part of the department as well. Together we will put into place major reforms that will be fitting tribute to his name.

When Providence loses a police officer, Providence loses a

son. Please stand and join me in a moment of silence in memory of Steven M. Shaw.

I have a vision for this city. When I think of that vision, I think of what a child of ten would want and would need. A child in Mount Pleasant, a child in Elmwood, a child in Mount Hope -- it doesn't matter where he or she lives. A decent home in a safe neighborhood. A school system which prepares him to earn a decent living. A city economy that provides jobs with a future. This is the vision that has drawn immigrants here since the founding of this country. It is a vision which we must perpetuate and preserve.

Let us resolve tonight that nothing will stand in the way of this vision. Together we are sure to prevail.

Mayor Umecosa Ekan. J.
Feb 10, 1994