

Special Address
Of the Mayor of Providence

Vincent A. Cianci, Jr.
September 28th, 2001

Council President Lombardi, honorable members of the Providence City Council, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

In the 365-year history of our fair city, generations past have faced great tribulations. A world at war, domestic rebellion, fire, flood, the failure of financial

institutions, the Great Depression. Always we have pulled together, met the challenge, and emerged a stronger community.

Today is another moment in time when strong leadership and resolve is assuredly required in order that Providence may prevail.

The tragic events of September 11th, the concern for terrorism in the land, the shocks to our national economy, the formation of an international alliance, the preparations for war, have caused tremors to sweep across the globe.

These great and terrible events present a formidable challenge to communities across America – the cities of New York and Washington, certainly, but Providence as well – where so much has been achieved, and so much more is within our grasp.

It is against this backdrop that I called a special meeting of the City Council and the assembled community. My purpose is to discuss two matters of vital importance: first, how we may protect the renaissance in our city from the forces of national recession.....and, second, how we may

safeguard our city and its people from the ominous threat of terror.

Two days ago, I journeyed with a contingent of firefighters and police officers to New York City. We made our way to the location in Lower Manhattan that has been appropriately named, Ground Zero. It was a shocking and distressing sight. I saw masses of twisted steel, rising from a mass graveyard, crafted by fanatics and carved by incomprehensible cruelty. I felt a terrible sadness for the police officers and firefighters from New York who were cruelly sacrificed in the first rush to provide

aid. I felt pride in all the relief workers from all parts of the country who came to New York to lend a hand. Most of all, I was proud – incredibly proud – of the relief workers from Providence. They have done more than their share to restore order, to relieve suffering, to lift the City of New York off its knees – and to “be there” for their fallen brothers and sisters. I asked many of these volunteers to be here today. They are the heroes of our community. Please show them our appreciation.

[Recognize police and fire in audience]

As I stood at Ground Zero, I knew I had important work to do back home. I had to prepare my community for the challenges that face America today, and the ordeal that lies ahead.

Make no mistake about it, this suicidal band of terrorists has caused great harm to America. For the first time in almost two hundred years, an enemy force has attacked the American mainland. Thousands of innocent civilians have been killed. Property worth billions of dollars has been destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of workers have been laid off. Trillions in

stock-market value has been lost. The prosperity and optimism of the post-Cold War era has been stilled. And every living American has been shocked out of his or her daily routine, swept by confusing passions of anger, frustration, grief and resolve.

Let me emphasize that the Islamic members of our community share all of our feelings, and deserve our respect and support during this trying period. All religions, Islam included, abhor the killing of innocent men, women and children.

All of us in Providence feel anger, frustration and grief. But the emphasis today must be on leadership and resolve. We must preserve the prosperity that we have worked so hard to attain. We must protect the Providence Renaissance from the ravages of economic reversal. And we must safeguard our people, our property, and our public infrastructure from the potential threat of terrorism.

The Providence Renaissance is not just an elegant turn of phrase. It is 1.5 billion dollars of commercial investment in the downtown area. It is more than 7,000 jobs

in a burgeoning hospitality sector – from the Downcity Diner to the Providence Place Mall. It is tens of thousands of visitors, marveling at the inspiration of Waterfire, putting blade-to-ice at the Fleet Skating Center, enjoying the incomparable experience of live theater at Trinity Rep, thrilling to a performance of “Aida” at P-PAC, reaching the summit of Mt. Everest at the massive IMAX theater, waving excitedly to the polar bears at Roger Williams Park Zoo. The Providence Renaissance is also magnificent new hotels, and it is some of the most wonderful restaurants to be found anywhere in America – from soul food on

Broad Street, to multi-cultural cooking on Federal Hill, to the Cheesecake Factory across from the State House lawn.

Most of these pillars of the Providence Renaissance are less than ten years old. Just think about it: the new airport, the new convention center, the new hotels, the new restaurants, the new mall, the new movie theaters, the new skating rink, and the artistic happening of Waterfire – they are all prime assets, they are the foundation of a new economy, and they have been put into place by the collective community in just a few years' time.

But our burst of achievement is in jeopardy. The shock of the terrorist attacks has caused our national economy to tumble into recession. Airline ridership has declined significantly. Vacations are being canceled. Meetings and conventions are being postponed. Hotels and restaurants, department stores, travel agents, caterers, taxi drivers and many other businesses are all affected to some degree.

It has been encouraging to see our stores, restaurants and theaters filling up again in recent days. Now is the time for Providence

families to be tourists in your own home town. I extend the invitation to all Rhode Islanders: Support your Renaissance City.

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Because so much is at stake, Providence must take pro-active steps to preserve our economic gains. We must strengthen our tourism industry, and protect our new economy, despite the economic slowdown and terrorist attacks.

Today I am filing with the City Council an Executive Order that addresses the community need. I have created a task force that will be called, The Mayor's

Special Commission on Business, Tourism and Culture. Almost 40 professionals drawn from the city's hotel establishments, restaurants, arts institutions, entertainment centers, office-building management, convention business, air travel and academia are represented.

Because economic conditions are changing rapidly, I have asked the commission to prepare an action plan in less than four months. There are two fundamental objectives: to assess the impact on Providence of terrorism and the slowing

economy; and to recommend action steps to protect the city economy.

Now, more than ever, it is important for all economic interests to work in close cooperation. We have achieved great success in the recent past when we collaborated in producing first-rate attractions. Hundreds of thousands of people have poured into the city for the premier attractions. These include the Smithsonian exhibit, the Splendor of Florence Festival, the Gravity Games, the sport championships, the Convergence festival, the Women's Festival, and

Waterfire performances on countless summer evenings.

If we all work together, if we continue to program high-quality festival events, the hospitality industry in Providence has prospects to do well despite the economic slowdown.

I am pleased to announce that John Bowen, the president of Johnson & Wales in Providence, has agreed to chair this special commission. Johnson & Wales – with its emphasis on culinary arts, retailing, and the hospitality industry – is a very important

part of the new Providence. In many of the city's finest restaurants and hotels, J&W graduates are hard at work. We are deeply grateful that President Bowen has agreed to serve at a time of great need for this community. I believe that John Bowen is with us today.

[John Bowen stands for applause]

Membership in this special commission has grown with each passing day. Everyone in our community feels such a great need to serve. President Bowen will be assisted by a

distinguished group of committed Rhode Islanders.

[Mayor reads list of membership on

separate pages]

**READ
NAMES**

Most of the commission members are here with us today. Please stand up and be recognized by the community.

Before I turn to the issues of public safety, let me make one more point. I am aware that a number of businesses in the city have suffered temporary, but severe setbacks as a result of the grounding of planes, the

cancellation of events, and the disruption of daily life since September 11th. In response, my Executive Order directs the tax collector of the city to show leniency towards commercial taxpayers that can demonstrate significant hardship. This measure is temporary, but it is the right thing to do.

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The terrorist attacks in New York and Washington have forced every American city to strengthen its defenses against terrorism. The Attorney General of the United States has warned that terrorists may

well strike again. They may strike anywhere in the country. And they may use weapons other than hijacked airplanes.

Representatives of the United States government have called on us to increase our vigilance against terrorism, and to take every feasible step to reduce our exposure during this period of heightened security risk.

I am determined to take every opportunity to safeguard our city against the potential for terrorist attack. We have a responsibility not only to the 173,000

residents of Providence, but also to the 1.2 million people who live in Southeastern New England. Providence is the center of government, finance, health care and education for the entire region. We must take steps to improve security in the central city.

Accordingly, I am today filing with the City Council a second Executive Order, which creates the Public Security Task Force for the City of Providence.

This task force will examine the points of vulnerability to terrorist attack within the

City of Providence, and make recommendations for action where feasible. Areas of consideration will include municipal buildings; high-rise structures; places of assembly; transportation facilities, bridges and streets; utility buildings and plants; and facilities for the storage of hazardous, flammable, or explosive materials.

We are already taking action to improve security at the Port of Providence, where many storage facilities for hazardous materials are located. In this matter, we have worked closely with Captain Mark Van

Haverbeke, the marine safety officer for the United States Coast Guard. I believe he is with us today. Captain, you can be assured that we will take all necessary steps.

After consulting with the Commissioner of Public Safety, I am taking the extraordinary action of creating a special team to spearhead the campaign to make the city secure.

Three of the most experienced and respected professionals in the public safety departments of the city will be detailed for an indefinite period to the security task

force. They are: William Giannini, assistant chief of the Providence Fire Department; Detective Major Martin Hames of the Providence Police Department; and Joseph Richardson, deputy director of the Providence Department of Communications. John J. Partington, the commissioner of public safety, will coordinate the activities of this group.

Providence is fortunate to have men of this caliber to meet the challenge of the present moment. These four veterans have almost a hundred years of combined experience serving the people of Providence.

Chief Giannini is a nationally recognized expert in responding to terrorism and the release of hazardous materials. Major Hames heads our detective division, and is uniquely suited to provide early warning of terrorism. Joe Richardson has decades of experience in emergency response, communications, and security systems. Commissioner Partington worked as a security inspector with the U.S. Marshal's Office for 20 years. In the 1960s, he escorted children into school buildings in Jackson, Mississippi that were being integrated for the first time. During the 1970s, Partington headed the Air Piracy

Program in New York for six years, installing detection equipment and screening passengers in that region's busy airports.

Today, in 2001, we face even graver threats to the public security. As President Bush has said, terrorism is the first war of the 21st Century. It is a war that has been brought to the American homeland. Providence is fortunate, indeed, to have the expertise and the experience we need to protect our people from faceless attack.

The core group on the security task force will be assisted by a number of other city

officials. They include Robert Kilduff, chief engineer of the Providence Water Supply Board, and Peter Marinucci, director of the city's Emergency Management agency. Also assisting will be John D'Amico, Senior Assistant City Solicitor; and Gerald Florio, operations manager for the Department of Public Works. I am pleased that the man responsible for the four skyscrapers owned by Fleet – Richard Zigas – will join the task force as well.

Commissioner Partington and the other task force members are here today. Let's all

thank them for taking this important assignment.

*[Security Task Force members
are recognized]*

In the coming weeks, I will be meeting frequently with members of the task force to discuss security measures under consideration. Because of the nature of the subject, we will be unable to discuss most of these matters in public. However, the people of this city and this region should be assured that the public safety professionals

in Providence will take every prudent step to increase the safety of us all.

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The world has been utterly changed by September 11th and its aftermath. It is as if a dark cloud settled over the land, blotting out the sun. War, recession, terrorism, grief – the common parlance of a changed community.

The attacks on our great cities served as something of a wake-up call for America. But there have also been some surprises for the terrorists themselves. In the midst of

overwhelming heartache, America did not break. Our patriotism has been reawakened. A new unity has been forged. And almost every nation on earth has chosen to march by our side.

There is much work to be done in Providence, and across our great nation. It may be years before terrorism is conquered. But America is standing tall, marching in unison. And that is the greatest victory of all.

Michael A. Clancy

Mayor

IN CITY COUNCIL
SEP 28 2001

READ
WHEREUPON IT IS ORDERED THAT
THE SAME BE RECORDED.
Michael R. Clancy
CLERK