

Embargoed until 5 PM PDT, Wednesday, April 13, 2011

“A New Contract”

2011 State of the City

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, Remarks as Prepared

President Garcetti, Members of the City Council, City Attorney Trutanich, City Controller Greuel, distinguished guests, friends, fellow Angelenos:

We come here today to the campus of Thomas Jefferson High School to recognize a family of teachers, parents and students whose story should both shame us and inspire us to do better.

Six years ago on my first visit, Jefferson was in a literal lockdown.

It was a living lesson in what happens when adults stop believing.

Kids roamed unsupervised, graffiti was everywhere, and police in riot gear patrolled the corridors.

A combustible mix of gangs and failing academics, the campus was a powder keg waiting to explode.

Across the City, the incidents at Jefferson were a haunting echo of our worst history.

Many of the students and teachers I met were disheartened and demoralized.

There were those on the outside who suggested the problems here were simply too big to solve.

But I want to pay tribute today to all those who never stopped believing:

To Board President Monica Garcia and her colleagues on the school board who included Jefferson in the first round of Public School Choice and gave its families a second chance.

To Principal Michael Taft, who leads Jefferson’s resurgence by insisting on rigorous accountability and a curriculum aimed at college readiness.

To the families in the Jefferson community who have raised their hands and moved their feet to take back their kids’ futures.

To the team of teachers who do the most important job there is, performing minor miracles with astonishing regularity.

And, of course, to the Democrats of Jefferson High.

To those students who raised their sights and raised their API score by thirty-three points last year!

If you want to understand something about the State of our City and the direction we are headed, you need to come to South LA and see what is happening at Jefferson High.

Together, we are turning a corner.

And together, despite unprecedented local, state, and federal budget challenges, we still believe in a place we like to call the City of Angels.

Six years ago, I asked you to dream with me about a city bold enough to take on its toughest challenges.

We set ambitious goals from the very start; understanding it would take time; realizing we wouldn't succeed at everything we try; but knowing in our hearts that setting big goals is the only way you accomplish anything worth believing in.

We also said, we'd focus on deadlines, not headlines and we'd measure ourselves on the basis of what we build.

I'd like to talk about where we are today, what we've built, and where we need to go in the next two years.

Let's start with where we are.

Despite the global recession, our local economy is growing stronger.

We can now see clear evidence of a gathering recovery in Los Angeles.

Unemployment is down from its August peak.

Port traffic is steaming up 16 percent.

Overall trade is up 26 percent.

Our housing and construction markets are coming to life – with a 67 percent surge in housing starts and a 22 percent increase in planning revenues, both early indicators of future construction jobs.

At the start of my second term, I promised to make job creation job number one – and we have.

Our Office of Economic and Business Policy is busy transforming the way the City does business.

We no longer let the palm trees do our marketing.

We have City staff cold calling employers.

We are jump-starting job creation with a business tax holiday.

We are giving more work to local firms with our Local Preference Ordinance, and keeping our tax dollars circulating and multiplying here in LA.

We are helping our most vital employers cut through red tape and access resources and capital.

And our efforts are paying off.

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We have won the confidence – and the business – of major companies from Lucky Brand to Mission Foods, from Target to Google, and from across an ocean, we've brought BYD, a leading Chinese clean-technology company, to its new North American headquarters.

LA is and will continue to be open for business!

When I took office in 2005, I also promised to fight for a public transportation system worthy of a world-class city.

Today, we are well on our way.

We've synchronized over 90 percent of the city's intersections.

We secured funding for major projects on the 405, the 5, and the 110.

We are investing billions in the first major modernization at LAX since the '84 Olympics.

We spearheaded Measure R, the largest local transportation initiative in decades, which will build \$40 billion in rail and road projects.

And together with local partners, we assembled a national coalition of over one hundred mayors, the AFL-CIO, and the Chamber of Commerce behind a bipartisan idea we're calling America Fast Forward.

We are asking Congress for innovative and proven financing tools, so cities and states can access capital quickly.

This effort will create jobs right now using our investments in transportation projects.

It creates the conditions to bring in private sector investment.

It creates incentives for local jurisdictions to raise their own revenue.

And it leverages limited federal dollars in a smart way.

America Fast Forward will create almost one million jobs nationwide.

166,000 jobs right here in LA.

America Fast Forward is leaving LA's Union Station and gaining steam in cities coast-to-coast and it's time for Congress to get onboard!

In my first State of the City Address I committed to making LA the cleanest and greenest big city in America.

Doubling the size of our rail system, building bike paths, and providing alternatives to our car culture is part of that solution, and we are taking a 360-degree approach.

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Working with the City Council, we tackled one of the biggest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions – buildings – and established one of the most aggressive green building standards in the nation.

We committed to greening the Department of Water and Power by setting the bold goal of 20 percent renewable energy by 2010.

And we did it.

The DWP faces new challenges today, but we remain committed to shifting away from dirty fossil fuels and creating an environmentally — and economically — sustainable future.

At the Port of Los Angeles, our award-winning Clean Truck Program has reduced emissions from diesel trucks by 80 percent.

Our transportation department became the first in the world to exclusively operate clean-fuel buses.

Over 2,000 clean buses have already logged one billion clean air miles, reducing cancer-causing particulate matter by more than 80 percent, and eliminating nearly 300,000 pounds of greenhouse gas emissions per day.

We built approximately 650 acres of new open space with 45 new or expanded parks for LA's families.

We made recycling and water conservation a top priority, because in a big city no step is too small when it comes to protecting our environment.

As a result, LA now recycles more than any city in America and uses less water today than we did 30 years ago.

Six years ago, we recognized that LA was the most under-policed big city in America and vowed to change that.

We said that spreading our officers across remote distances had made the Department remote from the people they serve.

We said that by underfunding community policing, LA had paid too dear a price.

Six years later, we're living in a different city.

LA has emerged as a national model of progressive policing.

With a record high of 9,963 sworn police officers, we brought homicides to a record low in 2010.

We have 40 percent fewer gunshot victims than six years ago.

We have the lowest per capita crime rate since the start of the Eisenhower Administration.

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Public support for the Department is at an all-time high.

And with that support, Chief Charlie Beck is helping to lead the charge against gang-violence by using methods of prevention and intervention.

Six years ago, our City's gang programs were uncoordinated.

Today we have a gang violence expert on staff and a comprehensive citywide team.

Six years ago, program spending was driven by politics and patronage.

Today we are "flooding the zone" using stats to concentrate resources where they are most needed and where they can have the greatest impact.

Six years ago, LAPD officers would respond at the scene of a gang shooting alone.

Today, they are joined at the scene by an intervention worker who dispels misinformation and resolves conflict before it escalates.

Six years ago, too many kids were left to loiter on the streets during hot summer nights while our public parks were dark and empty.

Today, we've turned the lights on with Summer Night Lights.

It starts with the simple premise that if kids have a safe place to go and activities to keep them busy they'll stay out of harm's way.

And it works.

Our first SNL season, we recorded the safest summer in 30 years.

We led a 40 percent reduction in gang-related crimes, a 57 percent reduction in gang-related homicides, and a 55 percent reduction in shots fired around these sites.

Last year, over 700,000 people visited 24 parks and were served 382,000 meals.

We've done more than just turn on the lights; we've reclaimed our neighborhood parks, replacing drug deals with family picnics and gang meetings with community soccer games.

We've done all of this despite one of the toughest fiscal challenges the City has faced because we believe in better.

Over the last two years, working with our City Council, we've tackled nearly one billion dollars in combined budget deficits.

We've led an unprecedented reorganization and downsizing of City government.

We've trimmed our workforce by more than 4,000 permanent positions.

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We've fortified the fiscal safety net by requiring a rainy day fund in the City Charter.

We've stabilized our revenues.

Working closely with our public safety unions, we passed a pension reform plan that protects retirement benefits and saves the City \$152 million.

In partnership with the Coalition of LA City Unions, we now have a watershed agreement that will correct our cost curve on health and pension spending far into the future.

This agreement will save the City nearly \$400 million dollars over the next three years.

And next week, I'll be able to present a budget that offers a sustainable long-term solution to our structural deficit while funding critical priorities.

No fine print.

No surprises.

I have a message for Wisconsin's Governor Walker:

Collective bargaining works in Los Angeles!

Our budget will clearly define and fund core City services.

It will expand library hours, including the restoration of Monday service.

It will allow the Department of Recreation and Parks to open new facilities – and new doors – for underserved youth.

It will lay down 735 miles of street maintenance and resurfacing.

And yes Angelenos, I've heard you loud and clear: it will fill 300,000 potholes, a 20 percent increase over last year.

And in keeping with a record of sustained success, our budget will fully fund and maintain the current size of our police force.

The simple truth is, my budget will propose a series of deep, permanent, and strategic reductions in City spending.

It will call on each member of our City Family to fairly and squarely shoulder their responsibility to help us balance the budget, with no protected parties or sacred cows and that begins with me.

I am proposing an eleven percent cut to my staff budget.

But perhaps, most fundamental to the state of this city – or any city – is the state of our public schools.

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When I first visited a locked-down Jefferson High School, it was against the advice of many.

When I first decided to get involved in school reform, I was told it was politically foolish.

I have no authority over the schools.

The bureaucracy was too entrenched.

The problems were too big to solve.

And so, they argued, they weren't my problems.

I've been told all my life that I can't or I shouldn't.

The way I see it, that was advice from adults who have stopped believing.

While it is true that I don't have formal authority over our schools, I do have a bully pulpit and I will continue to use it.

Six years later, with a school board committed to reform; with philanthropic partners like the Lundquist family, who understand that we are all stakeholders in our public schools; with nonprofit partners like City Year, who I see represented in big numbers; with charter partners like those gathered here today; with our civil rights and civic partners; and with our school-based and family partners, we have made real progress.

You see, school reform must come from the bottom up, not the top down.

Together, we passed the Public School Choice initiative to bring proven leadership and accountability to our lowest-performing schools and new campuses.

By the end of this year, nearly 100 schools, including Jefferson High, will have been given that same chance at success.

Together, we expanded teacher-led reforms.

And together, we created the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools.

The Partnership took on 21 of LA's lowest-performing schools in the most historically underserved neighborhoods.

It now serves 18,000 students, more than Santa Monica-Malibu and Beverly Hills Unified School Districts combined.

Our Partnership schools are proving that kids respond when you challenge them, regardless of where they come from.

In two consecutive years, our Partnership Schools outpaced both the District and the State in student performance.

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But our mission isn't simply to serve our own, it's to pilot reforms that can be taken to scale District-wide.

And that's exactly what we've done:

The Partnership built a data system to track student success in real-time – it's now used throughout the LAUSD.

The Partnership created a simple tool based on a concept parents know and understand – a report card.

Now we have report cards for all of our schools.

The Partnership was instrumental in a legal victory that protects low-income schools from a "last hired, first fired" policy that results in disproportionate layoffs that create revolving doors of teachers and unstable learning environments for kids.

At Roosevelt High School, the Partnership has taken what was once called a drop-out factory and transformed it into seven small schools – the largest small school conversion in California history.

Together, we're turning a corner and believing in our schools again.

This is a pivotal moment for our schools and our City.

Beginning Monday, we have a new leader in Superintendent John Deasy; a proven reformer, a former principal and superintendent whose dad worked as a short-order cook to put his kids through school.

Like his dad, he won't settle for anything less than high expectations for every child.

He is ready to use data not only to hold teachers and schools accountable, but also the district and himself accountable.

I think of John as Bill Bratton with a ruler.

The stars are aligning, but it's up to us to chart the way.

With a new superintendent, a newly-elected board, newly-elected union leadership, and the Mayor's office, we have an opportunity to move forward in good faith focusing on areas where we share common ground.

Together, we must confront our looming budget crisis.

Let's show the public that we'll do more with the money we have, so they'll give us more of the money we need.

But first, let's make sure Sacramento finds a solution to the current budget crisis; one that honors our students' fundamental right to a quality education, a right that begins with keeping quality teachers in our classrooms.

California is 47th in the nation in per-pupil spending.

This must change.

We must restore funding so we aren't firing a single effective teacher, let alone 20 percent of the teachers in the state's largest school district.

In these tough economic times, we cannot leave the work of transforming our schools to government alone.

We need public-private partnerships and private investment.

Let's build an LA Fund for Public Education modeled on successful efforts in New York and Chicago.

Let's use this fund to seed innovation and deliver on priority initiatives such as restoring art, music, and after-school programs.

Because reform is more than just reading, math and test scores, it's about nurturing creativity and creating possibility.

Let's get rid of the one-size-fits-all approach and make sure that every family has access to a variety of good choices.

Let's turn the LAUSD into a network of independent, locally-controlled campuses.

Today, well-off families already have a choice, but let's give all of LA's families those same choices.

Let's open up enrollment outside traditional neighborhood boundaries, creating zones of choice.

Let's help parents make informed choices by giving them the tools they need:

A school report card that makes apples to apples comparisons, measuring progress and performance with a letter grade, just like student report cards.

And let's protect and expand the use of the parent trigger to empower families to convert failing schools.

But to fulfill the promise of more and better choice, we need a strong leader in every school.

Let's create a leadership academy to train and support the next generation of transformative school leaders, knowing that they are our single most important agent for change.

And finally, let's put teachers at the center of the reform movement.

The teacher contract expires in June, and with the stars aligned, we have to seize this opportunity.

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Let's negotiate a new contract that empowers teachers, parents, and principals at all schools.

Let's stop dictating at the District-level and let our local schools make the calls on budget, staffing, curriculum, schedule, and professional development.

Let's recognize the pivotal role of teachers by supporting them with the resources they need and compensate them for demonstrated effectiveness, not just years of service and course credits.

We need to create career pathways that reward our most effective teachers, reform a broken tenure system, and do away with a "last hired, first fired" seniority system – it is demoralizing to teachers, and it doesn't serve our students.

We need to create a multiple-measure evaluation system.

When more than 99 percent of District teachers receive the same satisfactory evaluation, it serves no one.

Let's do away with forced placements that don't work for students, teachers, or principals.

Instead, let's adopt a system of mutual consent, where teachers and principals agree on hiring and assignments.

This may seem like a fantasy, but the fact is that we already use an empowerment contract, but only in a lucky subset of schools.

Let's insist on a teachers' contract that is simple, flexible, and straightforward.

One that streamlines work rules and empowers school sites.

With a record number of pilot school applications, we know teachers want an agreement that a pilot contract affords and that innovation demands.

In closing, I'd like to say this directly to our teachers:

I know that these proposals will raise some concern and spark controversy.

As a former union organizer, I understand your fear.

I stood with you then and I'll stand by you now.

Change is never easy.

It's hard to risk what you've got, when you've never had what you deserve.

But as I've said many times, any serious effort to improve our schools begins and ends with you.

Our time is now.

The nation is watching.

LA must take the lead.

We can be the Best in the West and the First in the Nation.

We can fulfill the promise of public education by agreeing to a new contract with ourselves – a promise to put aside the concerns of a few adults in the interest of all children.

We can do it if we remember what Thomas Jefferson said:

"To penetrate and dissipate the clouds of darkness, the general mind must be strengthened by education."

At Thomas Jefferson High School, teachers and students are proving that we can dissolve even the most ominous clouds, and when those clouds part, we can see that the stars are clearly aligned.

LA, this is your opportunity.

This is our opportunity.

Let's seize it together.

Our kids are counting on us.

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