

The Honorable Thomas M. Menino

State of the City Address

January 13, 2009

Prepared for delivery

Governor Patrick, Secretary Galvin, Attorney General Coakley, Treasurer Cahill, Auditor DeNucci, Senate President Murray, Speaker DiMasi, distinguished guests, and my fellow citizens. Thank you all for joining me tonight here at Boston's Faneuil Hall – a building that represents the resilience and strength that must guide us this year.

Congratulations to new City Council President Michael Ross, and thanks to the entire City Council for your service to our great city. Together, we will serve with commitment and compassion.

The most compassionate person I know is my wife, Angela. Thank you, Angela, and thanks to my family for your unconditional love and support.

Thank you also to all of the men and women who serve in the United States Military, including the 20 City of Boston employees who are currently on active duty. We are grateful for your service and sacrifice.

Tonight we mourn the loss of a member of the Boston family. Lieutenant Kevin Kelley dedicated 30 years to the Boston Fire Department and the City of Boston. He was a loving husband and father. We offer our support and prayers to his family, the injured firefighters and residents. Please join me in a moment of silence to honor him.

Our firefighters put their lives on the line every day. Our whole city thanks you for your service.

Tonight, let's note the history that will be made one week from today when Barack Obama is sworn in as President of the United States. We share a strong belief in the power of people and the importance of an urban agenda. I look forward to working with an individual who's so dedicated to moving our country forward. We are really going to need that partnership now.

This is no ordinary year. But ours is no ordinary city.

We are confronting a great economic crisis. Boston did not create it, but Boston must deal with it. Together, we will overcome it. The problems are truly global in scale, but they are also very, very real in our city.

I am in the neighborhoods all the time. The other night, I talked with families at a hockey game in East Boston, who told me how tough it has become for them to put food on the table. Recently, at a groundbreaking, I sat with construction workers who voiced real concern about their jobs. I spent Christmas Eve on Bowdoin/Geneva with small business owners who told me their business is off.

I understand how they feel. Whether it's at your kitchen table, or at my desk, the numbers are not pretty.

Governor Patrick already was forced to cut \$1.4 billion from the state budget and has talked about another \$1 billion in cuts this year. Speaker DiMasi has prepared us for what could be a ten percent cut in local aid.

Taken together with rising costs and declining revenues, the City is looking at a shortfall in the range of \$140 million this coming year.

That dramatic figure threatens all our hard-won gains in education, in public safety, and in our neighborhoods. I worry about all the residents who depend on the services we provide, and I worry about the City employees who deliver them.

Because \$140 million means cuts to core services. It means cuts in jobs. We are talking

about real pain for working families, and I don't want that.

Other cities are already laying off hundreds of people. But, Boston is no ordinary city. We've had the foresight to prepare for the bad times, even when it was deeply unpopular. That's why we were able to refinance debt and cut costs by more than \$30 million.

I will not stop seeking efficiencies and streamlining operations throughout City government. I will not stop fighting for legislation that gives cities the additional tools we need to manage through this crisis and beyond, and I will focus our resources on our shared priorities: public safety, public education, and economic opportunity for everyone.

We cannot tighten our belts out of this situation – no matter how much we prioritize, legislate, and consolidate. We need courage and urgent action.

Tonight, I am asking municipal union leaders to partner with me on behalf of working men and women. If we can agree to a one-year wage freeze, then I can protect core services for residents and preserve jobs.

I know this will be hard on working families, but the way I see it, a one-year wage freeze beats core service reductions and painful layoffs.

We all love our city. We all benefit from a strong Boston. When we work as partners, we weave the fabric of the city together. As we draw this fabric closer, we feel the warmth of human connections that will help us not only weather this storm, but to lead our nation out of it.

Make no mistake: I have a bold vision for Boston – a city of strong community and unlimited opportunity. We already have made important gains on that vision by working together, staying focused on our goals, and maximizing every resource. The tough economy may slow our advance, but we will not be stopped.

There are many reasons to have faith in our city. Right now, Boston residents are seeing their second straight year of property tax reductions. Right now, nearly 40 buildings are under

construction – creating some 10,000 permanent jobs. Right now, the city’s population has surged to more than 600,000 people for the first time in 30 years. Never has Boston been so diverse, and never have our neighborhoods been so strong.

Boston’s neighborhoods are special for me. You can feel the sense of pride when someone says, “I’m from West Roxbury” or “I’m from Hyde Park.” That pride has to do with people’s sense of commitment. The most powerful expression of that is homeownership.

I remember when Angela and I bought our first home – we still live there. It wasn’t anything fancy, but it was a dream come true, the culmination of years of hard work. It increased our sense of belonging to the neighborhood, and it gave us a deeper feeling of responsibility to our neighbors.

Foreclosures destroy that.

I started foreclosure prevention efforts more than ten years ago. Today, we can see the difference our efforts are making. Graduates of our first-time homebuyers course have a foreclosure rate that’s less than a third the rate of the overall Boston market.

In the last two years alone, the City prevented nearly 450 foreclosures. We kept nearly 500 families in their homes and preserved over \$130 million in home values.

But we didn’t stop there. We created the nationally-recognized Foreclosure Intervention Team. We purchased 12 foreclosed units in the Hendry Street neighborhood – one of our hardest hit areas. A year ago, in this 4-block area in Dorchester, there were 16 foreclosed and abandoned properties. Today, there are three.

Street by street, block by block, we will do even more this year. I will stand by your side to preserve your investment. I will stick up for Boston’s neighborhoods. I will fight to protect all that we have achieved.

This same commitment is what keeps our communities safe. People standing up and saying,

“I am responsible for my actions and my community.”

That attitude, paired with police work we all can be proud of, is making a difference. We reduced crime by 8% in 2008. We cut homicides for the third year in a row. We will improve on these gains in 2009, because protecting Boston’s residents is my top priority.

I will not allow a handful of criminals to threaten our communities. We will take your guns. We will break up your gangs, and we will lock you up. Violence has no place in Boston’s neighborhoods.

Keeping our streets safe must start with putting bad guys behind bars, but it’s about more than enforcement. It’s about intervention and prevention, too. That’s what our community service officers, our neighborhood crime watch groups, and our non-profit partners do so well. Together, they work to prevent retaliation and build trust with residents, which lies at the heart of community policing. Please join me in thanking all our public safety personnel and our dedicated neighborhood partners.

Boston is more than a city of neighborhoods. We are a city of neighbors. Just look at Michael Ferchak. He’s the nurse who rushed to the aid of firefighters last Friday. On behalf of the city of Boston, thank you.

Not every neighborly effort will be so brave. But every time we reach out to a fellow resident we bring our city closer.

Last spring, my team, together with volunteers, hit the streets to knock on over 2,000 doors to enroll our kids in summer and afterschool programs. This winter, we will do even more. We are calling every single senior in Boston. We want to make sure all our seniors stay warm, safe and healthy.

This commitment to each other has made Boston a center of diversity and culture, of tolerance and inclusion, of innovation and forward thinking.

Look at our investments in green technology, where Boston has become a national leader. Not only are we creating a healthier city and a legacy of sustainability, we are also driving economic growth, and introducing new opportunities for our residents. We are investing in training for new green jobs.

At the same time, we are working hard to support green businesses in Boston. Companies like Next Step Living, which improves residential energy efficiency. Or entrepreneurs like Marty Walsh, who owns Geek House Bikes in Allston. Marty received a City of Boston loan to help fund his shop's expansion. These progressive businesses represent a key component of Boston's economic future.

I know folks are truly worried about their jobs. Yet, even as this fog of economic uncertainty lingers over the nation, there is a great light shining on Boston. People look to our city for inspiration. They look to us for reassurance and for leadership, and it's through strong leadership that we are well-prepared, so that Boston emerges from these challenging times on solid footing.

My administration is doing everything we can to grow Boston's economy. In 2008, the City helped launch 100 small businesses by providing financial and technical assistance. In 2009, we will make available \$40 million in HUD loan funds to jumpstart construction in Boston. I am reaching out to CEOs of our largest employers to ask them to do everything they can to save jobs through these tough times.

When we talk about economic opportunity, we need to talk about bringing more of that opportunity to Boston's neighborhoods.

Neighborhoods are where I love to be. I am out there every day, from Roxbury to Brighton, from Bunker Hill to Mission Hill. I know residents find opportunities in our schools, parks and libraries.

Now more than ever, people rely on these neighborhood institutions. Right now, we're

seeing a surge in library use – a one-third increase in requests for new library cards citywide. I am proud of how hard I have fought to allocate library resources where they can make the most difference – at your neighborhood branches. Within these buildings, you can uncover the past and discover your future.

That’s why, despite a tough financial climate, I am thrilled to announce the opening of new libraries in Grove Hall and Mattapan. Libraries are central to learning, and nothing matters more than education.

Tonight I was introduced by Moriah Smith, a high school senior from Dorchester. Moriah has served as the student representative on the Boston School Committee. Through the Boston Public Schools, she’s had the opportunity to discuss the Constitution with Supreme Court Justices, and she’s received a great education. She’s learned how to think critically, independently and creatively.

Moriah reminds us that all children dream, and that the Boston Public Schools are a place where young people learn the skills to realize their dreams. I look at students like Moriah in classrooms throughout our city, and I see Boston’s future doctors, teachers and even a mayor or two. All of Boston’s students energize me to keep pushing for progress every day of every month of every year.

We have come a long way from the days when 7 of our schools were in danger of losing accreditation. Today, test scores are up. One in four juniors and seniors take Advanced Placement classes, and eight of our high schools are nationally recognized by US News & World Report.

We achieved these gains by being creative and collaborative, and we will keep our focus on addressing the achievement gap and pushing the envelope of excellence.

Tonight, I am announcing a new partnership that takes us even further in that direction.

The Cloud Foundation is making a \$1 million commitment, so that we can match 2,000 of our most

driven students with leading innovators in art and science. I would like to thank the founder of the Cloud Foundation – Dr. David Edwards – for his commitment to Boston’s youth.

These students will learn how to develop and implement cutting edge ideas. This is exactly what drives Boston’s dynamic economy, and what will strengthen our position as a hub of innovation in the years ahead.

Our City has made great strides. In our neighborhoods, we have decreased foreclosures and increased safety, decreased property taxes and increased opportunity. In our schools, we have decreased the achievement gap and increased learning.

But I must remind you: unless we work together and take urgent action, our hard-won gains will be lost.

In the worst of economic times, we must show the best of Boston. We have to work together to move our city forward.

The State of the City is in our hands, and, for that reason, I know that the state of our city is strong.

When we dare to dream and are willing to work, our boldest aspirations and our greatest hopes soar over the wall of uncertainty and despair. Time after time, we have found new ways to work together unselfishly.

Today is such a time. Today, we must renew our core principles. Today, we must awaken our revolutionary spirit that sparks Boston’s enduring hope and confidence.

Boston’s best days are ahead of us. I pledge to you that I will continue to work tirelessly to move our city forward this year and in the years ahead.

Thank you. God bless the great city of Boston.