

The Honorable Thomas M. Menino

State of the City Address

January 9, 2007

Prepared for delivery

Governor Patrick, Secretary Galvin, Attorney General Reilly, Treasurer Cahill, Auditor DeNucci, Senate President Travaglini, Speaker DiMasi, distinguished guests, and fellow citizens. Thank you all for joining me tonight at Dorchester's historic Strand Theatre!

I want to ask you all to join me in a moment of silence in honor of Councilor Jimmy Kelly, who passed away this morning after a long battle with cancer. Jimmy Kelly was my friend. We didn't agree on some issues, but his commitment to his constituents was tremendous, and his word was worth everything. I'll miss his huge heart, his sense of humor, and his deep spirit of public service.

Thank you to the entire Boston City Council, for your hard work throughout the year. I want to congratulate our new City Council President Maureen Feeney.

Governor Patrick, I look forward to working closely with you on the issues facing our Commonwealth and our City. You have inspired us with your hope and your enthusiasm.

Of course, my greatest inspiration comes from my wife, Angela, and my children and grandchildren. Thank you for your enduring love and support.

We all know that Boston's economy is strong. Our population has grown by more than 37,000 people since the last census. We're creating new jobs. Our hotels and offices are full. And with the guidance of our thoughtful planning, we are changing the face of our downtown.

The story of Boston's strong neighborhoods is just as exciting.

I travel this city from end to end, and every day I am filled with faith in the future of this great city, and energized by the people I meet. Like all the women entrepreneurs who have opened retail shops across the city, strengthening Boston's main streets.

Or, like the hundreds of young people at last summer's hip-hop summit. They were so glad I came, that they gave me a new nickname – "Tee Mizzy!" That hip-hop summit, which happened right here at The Strand, was a powerful statement of the enormous strength of our neighborhoods and our young people.

That's what made me invite all of you here tonight. So that here in this theater, we could talk about our commitment to the spirit of Boston – to the spirit of community. So that we could talk about taking on the toughest challenges of urban life – and how we will solve them together.

Many times, on many issues, we have harnessed a spirit of shared responsibility. We have paired the resources of city government with those of the community, the private sector, and the non-profits. And when we have captured that common commitment, we have done great things.

We have created thousands of units of housing. We have achieved great progress in our schools. We have improved public health. And we are leading the effort to eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities.

We have developed a new understanding of the importance of this city's diversity, and a new recognition that Boston's vitality is a reflection of its residents – a mirror image that manifests our many cultures, our various histories, and our shared future.

Working together, we have taken this birthplace of America and have helped it become a beacon for our nation's future.

My fellow Bostonians: the state of our city is inclusive, unlimited, and strong.

Boston has become stronger in so many ways that we now have the opportunity to be truly bold in how we envision our future. But like every organization, City government must balance its

resources between big visions that can redefine the future, and core values that meet our mission today.

That mission is simple: Government is about helping people.

Our core values center on public safety, public education, public health and the delivery of basic services. On a daily basis, City government collects trash, removes snow, cleans streets and much more. Today, we are using new technology to make our service delivery more efficient and more effective.

Because make no mistake, these simple services provide the real framework for healthy neighborhoods.

Our commitment to being proactive, combined with Boston's potential for true greatness, enabled me to attract talented new people to my administration. Half my Cabinet is new this year -- and let me tell you, it feels great! Together with longstanding members of my administration, we are examining all areas of city life, looking for ways to make Boston work better.

As always, I am humbled by the responsibility Boston's residents have entrusted to me, but at the same time, indeed now more than ever, I am excited to bring together the best of Boston, so we can capture every ounce of possibility and promise that I see in our great neighborhoods.

That effort will start right here where I stand before you.

Tonight, I tell you proudly: we are going to save The Strand.

When I was growing up, there were beautiful theaters like this one all over our city. Today, The Strand is the last of its kind. We must be a city that values its cultural assets, that preserves them as pillars of city life. This building speaks to Boston's history, to the generations whose struggles and triumphs have shaped our city. It provides a place for residents all across our city to come together for music, performance, and self-expression.

For these reasons, we are investing \$6 million to save The Strand. This investment will address critical repairs, which will begin next month.

But I have a grander vision -- and I need your help. We cannot bring this building back to its former glory by ourselves. We need private sector funding, and in-kind support from the non-profit community. I am confident that people will recognize how precious this space is, both as a piece of our past and as a legacy that will live on in future artistic celebrations. We need you to join a public-private partnership to support this vision so that The Strand can continue to lift our spirits and bring people together.

Public spaces do not need to be as lofty as this in order to help create community.

Just down the street is Ceylon Park. During the warm weather, the place is packed. Thousands of people use it. There are soccer games and cookouts, families and friends coming together, longtime residents and recent immigrants.

This kind of vitality is what makes me so confident that Boston's great strength is poised to last for generations.

Now, we are going to renovate Ceylon Park. We're going to put in all-season turf, to make it even more valuable, more usable for residents.

We are strengthening civic spaces in all of Boston's neighborhoods. In Mattapan we will break ground on a new public library. In West Roxbury, we are building a new playground at Hynes Field. At our public high schools, we're in the midst of a multi-year commitment to upgrade our athletic fields.

Citywide, we are improving the places that put the life in city life.

But we have to be selective about these and other projects, because our revenues are restricted.

I look forward to working with Governor Patrick and the Legislature to craft a new revenue model, one that will relieve pressures on property taxes and will do more to fuel the economic growth that is happening here in Boston. Cities and towns need revenue diversification to address all the issues we face, from basic services to public safety.

Public safety is a top priority of my administration. I will not allow violent offenders to terrorize neighborhoods and paralyze people with fear.

I chose our new Police Commissioner Ed Davis because of his track record of real results. He knows how to manage resources, and how to cultivate key partnerships, to achieve the bottom line of reducing crime and violence. To give the new commissioner as much manpower as possible, we are putting 190 new police officers on the street this fiscal year.

Our strategy is to increase law enforcement's visibility where crime is on the rise, reassuring residents that we are here to help, and reminding offenders that we are watching them. At the same time, we are emphasizing prevention, returning resources to the programs that help young people steer clear of gangs and drugs. And we are recommitting ourselves to strengthening partnerships among police officers, community groups, and neighborhood residents.

Members of the command staff are now spending weekly shifts at our district stations, giving rank and file officers a direct link to the department's top decision makers.

We are establishing Advisory Councils in every police district, to provide a better framework for communication with residents.

These efforts are all about making sure that important information gets into the hands of the people who need it to prevent and solve crime.

Please join me in thanking the men and women of the Boston Police Department for their hard work and dedication.

In the year that just ended, the Boston Police took more than 1800 guns off of Boston's streets – that's twice as many as the previous year.

Illegal guns are a major problem – but so is the fact that we have stopped feeling shocked by all these guns. Think about it – 1800 guns! That's like collecting 5 guns a day, every day, all year long. That's a lot of death and despair that was prevented.

In addition to removing guns from our streets, we are being more aggressive than ever in going after rogue gun dealers.

That's why Mayor Bloomberg and I teamed up to launch Mayors Against Illegal Guns. We started with 15 mayors. Today, there are 123 of us, from 44 states.

Later this month, I will travel to Washington to meet with Speaker Pelosi. We need to convince Congress to pass common sense gun laws. Laws that punish immoral gun dealers, and protect our citizens. Because guns create fear that can kill our communities. But only if we let it.

I agree with Commissioner Davis. It is astonishing how some people stonewall the police. When neighbors and family members of victims withhold information, they are protecting the very people who pulled the trigger and shattered their lives.

Along with Commissioner Davis and the entire Boston Police Department, I am fully committed to bringing Boston's neighborhoods beyond the recent rash of violence.

We are doing everything in our power to merit the confidence of people who have information to share. Because our ability to move forward requires that ordinary people show extraordinary courage.

We know that real results are the key to increasing people's confidence.

We have seen that happen with the Boston Public Schools, where our progress is being recognized both nationally and locally.

This year, we were awarded the Broad Prize as America's best urban school system. More and more families are staying in the school system, giving their children an excellent education, and our high school students achieved their highest MCAS scores ever.

But I am a long way from satisfied. We must do more to help Boston's young people climb the twin ladders of knowledge and economic opportunity.

That's why we hired Manny Rivera who was named the best urban school superintendent in the country.

With strong leadership, we will continue our march toward providing all of Boston's children an education that prepares them for the opportunities of tomorrow's economy, and fills them with a steadfast belief that their aspirations are achievable.

I have been very vocal in my commitment to eliminating racial and ethnic gaps in all areas – especially academic achievement.

Now, I am assembling the best minds in Massachusetts to develop a 10-year strategic plan. We are not just going to close the achievement gap – we are going to prevent it. This effort is driven by ground-breaking research that shows how children's earliest years actually form the architecture of their brains.

While this planning is in process, we will begin immediately to ensure that all of our kids are ready when they enter kindergarten. To achieve this goal, I am announcing a new initiative called "Smart from the Start." That's what children are -- smart from the start, and that's what we need to be.

In its first phase, this program will reach out to the poorest ten percent of Boston kids under age 5. That's about 38 hundred kids, who face tremendous barriers to school readiness and success.

Using the community centers in the neighborhoods where these kids live, we will offer childcare providers and parents free early learning opportunities. We will combine this with adult

education and ESOL classes that incorporate a curriculum on child development and school readiness.

Our responsibility to the children of this city cannot begin and end with the school bell. To give them a strong education that leads to self-sufficiency, our commitment must start early and extend around the clock, throughout the year.

We will continue to apply the most progressive problem-solving and the most unflinching commitment to the challenge of educating all of Boston's children. Because by opening up their minds, we can open up their worlds.

Stimulate people's minds, and you encourage them to dream. That's the key to change and progress.

I see that happening all over this great city, people daring to dream – from first-time homeowners to folks starting new businesses. These actions are expressions of courage and commitment, and they happen every day in every neighborhood.

Seeing this spirit fills me with the energy to lead this city forward, to realize more and more of its potential.

We will continue to invest in our cultural assets, and in the other civic spaces that we Bostonians share. We will continue to tackle the toughest challenges – because they lie at the heart of our mission to help.

We all know that the road to realizing Boston's great promise is not without obstacles. But today, more than ever before, our momentum is great.

Today, we Bostonians are rich in the resources that all great quests require – purpose, passion, and the power of partnership.

The City of Boston's quest must be for excellence and for equity. We must continue to create opportunity and we must extend that opportunity into every corner of every community, to every home on every block of every neighborhood.

I thank you for your continued commitment to this great goal that we share: the belief that we can make our beloved Boston the very best city in the world, for all of its residents.

Thank you, and God bless the great City of Boston.