



Eddie A. Perez
Mayor

TO: Court of Common Council and the Residents of the City of Hartford
FROM: Eddie A. Perez, Mayor
DATE: March 9, 2009
RE: State of the City Address 2009

Pursuant to Chapter V Sec.2 (i) of the City of Hartford Charter, I hereby respectfully submit my written report on the state and condition of the City of Hartford:

President Torres, members of the Court of Common Council, and most importantly, the residents of Hartford: As we all know, the State of the City is seriously challenged. We have less revenue coming in; when adjusted for inflation, State Aid is \$64 million less than it was eight years ago; Hartford taxpayers are struggling; and the needs of our residents keep growing. Simply put: Our country is facing a financial crisis and Hartford is feeling the pain on Main Street and in our neighborhoods.

For the past year, I have been fighting this economic storm alongside my counterparts at the U.S Conference of Mayors at the national level. Mayor Diaz of Miami, Mayor Bloomberg of New York, Mayor Daley of Chicago, Mayor Cicilline of Providence--- we're all in the same financial boat and fighting to keep our urban economies afloat.

All of Connecticut's big cities are facing the same challenge. New Haven Mayor DeStefano and Bridgeport Mayor Finch have joined me in making our case to the Governor long before the stimulus package was a reality. Our three cities have regional economic burdens that the other 166 communities in our state simply do not face. I want to thank Governor Rell for meeting with us several times and listening. She recognizes the importance of education and municipal aid and maintained our funding in her budget. For that, Hartford and I thank her for her leadership and compassion. Now we look to the Hartford Delegation to ensure Hartford faces no cuts and the state continues to support its Capital City.

We're waiting for the stimulus to be distributed and the state budget to be adopted. As we wait, we must steer our way through the roughest financial waters since the Great Depression. Over the past six months, Hartford has eliminated 190 positions at the City and Board of Education.

Sadly, that was just the first step. In about six weeks, I will be presenting my toughest budget ever. It will be a bare minimum budget. Unfortunately that means there will be more pain and more personal sacrifice for employees, taxpayers, businesses and visitors.

As I have asked in the past, we as elected leaders need to put politics and personal agendas aside. We must focus our resources on the current crisis. I ask you to think of Hartford and its future first. I ask you to work with me on a two year outlook that prioritizes public safety, job creation, and education and provides essential core services to our residents and businesses. I ask our community and city employees to come together and help meet our budgetary goals for the coming years.

The choice is clear: Either stand still, put our heads in the sand and be devastated by this economic tsunami; or move forward and choose to work together and continue to steer Hartford in the right direction, making tough decisions that better position us when our economy recovers.

When it comes to key priorities, Hartford is moving in the right direction. Our schools are better. 16--- I repeat--- 16 schools last year showed significant improvement in academic achievement. Three of our high schools--- Classical Magnet, Sport and Medical Sciences, and Capital Prep--- are all nationally recognized.

Next year, three new academies are being added to give parents even more choice in their child's education. This is on top of the 11 new academies and schools we have already opened successfully.

Our neighborhoods are safer. Serious crime is at its lowest level in 43 years. Overall serious crime was down almost 10 percent in 2008.

Here's why: We're working closely with federal and state agencies; we're focusing on getting guns off the streets; and our Mounted Patrol is back, as promised.

The Chief of Police has many partners working with him. The Office of Youth Services and its partners at the Juvenile Review Board are identifying troubled youth and helping them turn their lives around. Hartford Crime Stoppers is encouraging the community to call the anonymous tip line. Leadership Greater Hartford and the Hartford Cares Team help bring out the best the city can be in really tough times.

In order to keep the city safe, let me assure you--- there will be a new police class in this next budget so we can continue this good work together!

President Barack Obama stated, “At every moment of economic upheaval and transformation, this nation has responded with bold action and big ideas.”

Well, Hartford now is the time for that bold action and our own stimulus efforts!

First: We will create jobs by accelerating our City construction projects. The President called for “shovel ready” efforts. Hartford has responded and will continue to respond. In the next 90 days, more than \$175 million in construction projects will continue flowing to the City’s neighborhoods. These projects will put hundreds of residents to work--- at good union wages and with healthcare benefits. This builds on our years of success in creating opportunities for women and minority owned businesses.

Second: I am announcing a Hartford Arts Stimulus to create hundreds of new jobs here in the Capital City. We all know that the Arts are one of our greatest treasures and we should build upon them. 7,400 residents from Hartford and the surrounding communities rely on the Arts for work and entertainment. From the Artists Collective to Real Art Ways, from Gaukia to the Hartford Stage--- this is a vital financial force. The Arts in Hartford attract thousands of visitors and pump more than \$189 million into the local economy.

That’s why I am proposing an increase of \$1.7 million in grants to Hartford Arts organizations. This 100-percent increase in our current spending would create new works, new performances, and expand facilities. This funding will come from reprogrammed city funds and federal grants and will be used exclusively to create new Hartford jobs next year and beyond.

Third: In my upcoming budget, I will propose a temporary half-mill tax to provide \$1.5 million in new funding to help families in foreclosure to keep their homes and provide emergency assistance to shelters and agencies that serve Hartford families with young children who have lost their homes through no fault of their own. Our City has never turned its back on residents in need and that need has never been greater.

Finally, you have my pledge that I will maintain our core city services. We must continue to reduce crime, increase the academic achievement of our children and keep our neighborhoods clean and safe. There are no easy answers and that is why it is going to require sacrifice from all of us.

But with this sacrifice comes hope. With every obstacle, comes opportunity. Hartford needs to show the world that we have so many jewels throughout our neighborhoods. Parks, museums, entertainment venues, and historic architecture are just a few. The late Mayor Mike Peters always reminded us of the goodness and

the greatness that the City has to offer. Mike Peters served as one of our brave firefighters for than 22 years and 8 years as Mayor. On behalf of his family members, I am honored to announce that on April 16th, Engine 15 will be renamed the “Mayor Michael P. Peters Memorial Firehouse.”

Our newest crown jewel is the Connecticut Science Center that will open later this year. Already, it has redefined the view along the City’s Riverfront and has transformed the skyline. Now it will connect the progress at Adriean’s Landing.

As a City and as a people, Hartford has come too far to turn back now. We need to believe that great things are still possible. Well, my friends. I believe in Hartford and its people.

But let’s be frank: This is a time of great challenge and great risk. The people of Hartford want and need their political leaders to focus on what is best for our city. I ask for everyone’s support, participation, and prayers as we navigate our way through these troubled waters.

In celebration of his birthday two hundred years ago, President Lincoln once said, “I like to see a man proud of the place in which he lives. I like to see a man live so that his place will be proud of him.”

Today, President Obama shares that vision by saying, “Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we have been waiting for.”

Let’s wait no more! Si Se Puede, Yes We Can, Go Hartford, and God Bless our great City! Thank you.