



**Office of the Mayor
City of Los Angeles
ANTONIO R. VILLARAIGOSA**

**"Accelerating Our Ambitions"
Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa
State of the City Address
Los Angeles
April 18, 2006**

President Garcetti; members of the City Council; City Controller Chick; City Attorney Delgadillo; managers and commissioners; community leaders; students and faculty of the Accelerated School; fellow Angelenos:

It is a fundamental feature of our democracy, a thread so essential that we see its colors woven into the fabric of the constitution itself, that, from time to time, we're entitled to hear directly from our elected leaders and to call them to account.

To call them to account for the state of things:

For the state of our economy, which, I am happy to say, is registering record growth;

For the level and quality of government service, which is gaining ground every day with a renewed dedication to performance and fiscal responsibility in the City of LA;

For the state of our safety and security, which thanks to the brave men and women of the Los Angeles police and fire departments, is reaching historic heights!

But in the end, I think we'd all agree... That this day isn't about addressing the state of things as they are:

It's about the state of our city as it should be.

Over nine months ago, I stood before you on the south steps of City Hall, and I asked you to dream with me about a different kind of future for Los Angeles.

A future where LA is taking the lead as the great global city of the 21st century.

A future where people in communities around our city are drawn closer together by a world-class transit system.

A future where we are growing greener as we grow.

Where children can walk to school in safety.

And where no kid in any neighborhood in any part of Los Angeles is ever robbed of his or her childhood.

And I asked you to imagine a future where it doesn't matter who you are or where you come from... Whether you're African-American, Latino, Caucasian or Asian... Whether you're gay or straight, rich or poor... Where every Angeleno has a chance to show their talent.

Ladies and gentlemen, we could have returned to the south steps today.

But, instead, we came to South LA.

It's true that from City Hall you can see LA in all its bright lights.

You're somewhere in between the Eastside and the Westside...
Neither in the Valley nor at the Harbor, but acutely aware of the needs of both.

You're bound by no allegiance of neighborhood, except that you're closer than anywhere else, both in physical space, and in orientation to the compass, to the original settlement of El Pueblo.

It's a beautiful place for an inauguration.

But if you really want to talk about the state of our city...

You need to come to South LA.

And if you want to catch a glimpse of the state of our future...

You need to visit the Accelerated School!

Here in South LA, we have many, of the residents of our city who work the hardest and earn the least... People who clean hotel rooms...Who sweep the floors...Who watch our children...And for whom time is a thief when it comes to caring for their own families.

In South LA, you can view our history up close. You can behold both our feats and our failures. It's here that you can witness the spires of the Watts Towers soaring above the scars of the Watts riots.

And from South LA you can see the skyline and the corporate towers of Bunker Hill reflecting back at you in the distance. On a clear winter day, you can even see the silhouettes of snow-capped mountains. But too many young people here go through life believing they'll never reach the towers or the mountains.

It's here in South LA that you see the most pervasive problems Angelenos face.

Here, you see them magnified. You hear them amplified.

Here you can sense the frustration every commuter feels... In the eyes of a single mom who rides the bus to work every single day.

And in raw relief, you can see the shortage of community policing that plagues every neighborhood in our city, from Watts to Woodland Hills... From Toluca Lake to Silverlake.

And while we all live with the legacy of sprawl and smog, it's people in the concrete flats of South LA who really understand the importance of greening our city.

And it's here... Where our public schools are struggling just to survive... It's here where the dropout crisis is most menacing... It's here where the threats of gangs and gun violence are simmering... Steaming... At the verge of a boil...

In the midst of all this, it's here in South LA...

Where you find the Accelerated School.

Fellow Angelenos, we have a lot to learn about ourselves... In South LA.

The Accelerated School is a public school. A charter school. And they run things differently here.

They believe that every child is a gift... And that every student should be treated like they're gifted.

They believe that great schools have the power to transform communities.

They believe that the culture of low expectations is fundamentally a failure of leadership.

And talk about dreaming! This school was founded by two teachers with a dream. And before they built this temple of high expectations, they used to rent rooms in a local church just to hold class.

And they went door-to-door to sign up their first groups of students.

Angelenos, I intend to follow their example!

I intend to walk door-to-door myself to fight for fundamental reform in our schools!

Above all, the Accelerated School demonstrates what you can achieve... When you accelerate your ambitions... When you're willing to dream big and reach far... And when you drive toward the future with both passion and purpose.

This is how I've tried to govern in these last nine months.

I've been out there every day in every community in every corner of LA. And I'm proud of what we've achieved in this short period of time.

But that's not what we're here to talk about this evening:

We're here to imagine the state of Los Angeles as it should be.

Two days from now, I will present my financial plan for the fiscal year. We're calling it "Tough Choices for a Brighter Future." And it's a tough plan.

As most of you know, when we assumed office, we inherited a deficit of 295 million dollars.

Now, this deficit belongs to no single person. It has accumulated over time. It represents an unfortunate combination of easy choices and short-term thinking.

Angelenos, I'm here to say that we need to make tough choices for a brighter future now. We can't realize our dreams if we don't live within our means.

We will eliminate the structural deficit over the next five years, and my first budget makes a 47 million dollar down payment on that promise.

We've already identified over 40 million dollars in savings. And my budget calls for the creation of a performance unit in the office of the mayor.

Patterned after a successful and innovative program developed by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, the Mayor's Performance Unit will scour city departments to improve productivity and squeeze value out of every tax dollar.

I am a proud progressive. But the onus is on those of us who believe in government to demonstrate that government can work better than it does today!

We need to accelerate our ambitions.

We can no longer afford to hide behind our financial condition to avoid confronting our biggest challenges.

We need to stand up... And face up...to the problem of crime and gangs! And we need to own up... To the fact that Los Angeles can't thrive as a great global city if we continue to hold the dubious distinction as the most under-policed big city in America.

I want to thank Chief Bratton and the men and women of the LAPD who put themselves out there on our behalf every single

day. They do it on the meanest streets at the darkest hours of the night.

I'm here to say that we need to stand with them.

Last week, I offered a strategic plan to bring the LAPD up to full force by adding 1,000 new officers over the next five years. On Thursday, I will present a budget to the City Council that begins this build-up.

This is a historic and complex challenge. We face obstacles to recruitment. We face challenges of retirement and attrition. We face a considerable cost.

This build-up is going to require our full commitment as a city, and it's going to demand an uncommon exercise of fiscal discipline and political will.

As we all know, it's easy for politicians to talk tough. Now it's time to take the tough votes. Angelenos, it's time for all of us to make the tough choices.

By asking LA residents to pay a larger portion of the cost of picking up their trash, we can pick up the cost of the police build-up over time.

We can pick up the thousand officers we need! We can pick up the speed of police response! We can pick up community policing in the Valley! We can pick up community engagement in South LA! We can pick up foot patrols on skid row! And we can pick up the quality of life in every neighborhood and community of LA!

And because we all know that it's not enough to be "tough on crime," my budget is tough as nails on the root causes of crime.

It includes a substantial new investment in prevention programs, including \$2 million for the gang recovery program. It will double

the number of city-financed summer youth jobs. It expands library hours, and invests in after-school programs like LA's Best.

It is a matter of accelerating our ambitions.

And Angelenos, we need to put our foot on the pedal when it comes to traffic.

When I ran for mayor, I promised to do the tough, common-sense things to fix traffic and keep LA moving.

We've banned rush hour construction. We are repairing our roads. We're on our way to synchronizing every traffic light in the city over the next three years. And in my budget, we're funding critical initiatives to move LA farther and faster.

My budget funds a gridlock tiger team... A rapid response unit of traffic officers who will move around the city identifying and addressing traffic "hot spots" on our most congested corridors.

We've already deployed traffic officers at our busiest intersections, and this budget increases their ranks.

We're boosting the budget for street resurfacing and maintenance by 34%.

We've placed strong, vibrant leaders in our planning and transportation departments, and they are working hand-in-glove to make transit-oriented development and pedestrian villages a reality in the City of Los Angeles.

Working with City Council leaders, we are fighting tooth-and-nail in Sacramento and Washington, D.C. to make sure that L.A. gets its fair share and to make sure that we have the resources we need to build a public transportation system that a world-class city deserves!

Working with Congressman Henry Waxman, legislation to repeal the federal ban on funding for the Wilshire subway has already been introduced in the house.

And my office has been in close contact with the Governor and the Legislature to pass a statewide bond that will provide critical funding for new transit projects in LA and around the Southland.

And to our leaders in Sacramento I can't say it more clearly: the people are counting on us. We all need to roll up our sleeves and get this funding package on the November ballot!

We need to accelerate our ambitions.

We need to imagine a future in which Los Angeles is the greenest and cleanest big city in America.

Working with the City Council, we're funding the master plan to restore the Los Angeles river.

We'll be breaking ground shortly on our initiative to plant a million trees.

And because you can't be a great global city if you're not a great global citizen, we're cutting our contribution to greenhouse emissions.

We're forging ahead with a plan to reduce air pollution at our ports, which account for 21% of the diesel air pollution in Southern California.

We're committed to growing our port, the engine of our economy, and growing it green.

We're adopting and incentivizing green building standards.

We're expanding recycling.

We're working toward the goal established by my administration of diverting 70 percent of our trash from landfills by 2015.

And we're making the DWP a better steward of our resources by protecting our groundwater and by recycling and conserving every drop we can.

And Angelenos, we need to face the tragedy of homelessness in the wealthiest city in the richest state in the greatest nation on earth.

We're forging a new partnership with the county.

We're reforming the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority.

For the first time, we've fully funded the housing trust fund at 100 million dollars, and we've invested 50 million in permanent supportive housing for the mentally ill and chronically homeless.

And we're bringing the safer cities program to target crime on skid row.

But, Angelenos, I would submit to you that we can do all these things... We can put more cops on our streets... We can work to keep traffic moving... We can green our city... We can make new our commitment to deal humanely with our homeless...

But unless we face the crisis in our schools, we will never truly hold ourselves to account.

We can't be a great global city if we lose half of our workforce before they graduate from high school.

We'll never realize the promise of our people... We won't tap our talent... LA won't be one city... If we shrug our shoulders and adopt the path of least resistance... If we choose to remain a city... Where 81 percent of middle school students are trapped in failing schools.

We need to accelerate our ambitions.

To borrow a phrase from of the great author Carlos Fuentes, "this I believe:"

I believe that we need to make our schools more accountable by giving the superintendent far greater operational control.

I believe that we need to change the funding equation and move resources from the downtown bureaucracy to the classroom.

I believe we need to abandon the one-size-fits-all approach and give educators the freedom to innovate.

I believe teachers should be respected as professionals, and we should give them that respect by giving them the freedom to teach.

I believe we need to trim the fat and use the money to beef up teacher pay.

I believe we need to empower teachers by giving them the responsibility for peer assistance and review.

I believe that every great school must have a great leader.

I believe we need a new principal leadership academy to develop a new generation of school leaders.

I believe in the power of small learning communities.

I believe we need to equip our schools with best practices, and we need to vest them with the power to implement change.

I believe schools should control their own budgets.

I believe more power should devolve to principals, teachers and parents in their neighborhoods.

I believe we need to lengthen the school day and year, and we need to compensate teachers for that time.

I believe we need to genuinely engage parents as partners, with respect... And we need a parent resource center and coordinator at every school.

I believe we need to substantially increase the number of charter schools in the City of LA.

I believe we need to replace the culture of low expectations with a culture of accountability and respect.

That means uniforms that send our kids a message that they are in school to learn and that we are all on the same team.

That means parent compacts that spell out their rights... And their responsibilities to be actively engaged in their children's educations.

I believe we need to get the business and philanthropic communities fully into the act.

I believe we need to reinvent vocational ed and give our kids more job-based skills.

I believe we need to better coordinate city and district efforts.

I believe we need to bring cutting-edge law enforcement tools like compstat in and around school campuses to guarantee our schools are free from crime and gangs.

I believe we need to expand after-school programs and work together on joint-use to transform schools into genuine neighborhood centers.

Now, I know some of these ideas are new, and some are not. And over the years, we've had many well-intentioned efforts at reforming the educational system. But any student of the LA Unified can tell you... That we can't address our problems in the classroom... We won't make real headway... Unless we change the lack of accountability at the top.

I believe we need new leadership at every level.

I believe we need to wake up and shake up the bureaucracy at the LAUSD!

So today, I'm asking the California legislature to usher in a new era of progressive reform in the state's largest school district.

My proposal is based on five key principles.

First... The buck needs to stop at the top. Fragmentation is failing our kids. Voters need to be able hire and fire one person accountable to parents, teachers and taxpayers...A leader who is ultimately responsible for system-wide performance.

Second... All of the cities in the LA Unified need to be fully engaged and given a fair voice in the process.

Third... We need to give the superintendent the power and the authority to lead and manage fundamental change.

Fourth... We need to preserve the voters' voice in an elected board, with that board's powers designed to serve the needs of parents, not politicians.

And fifth... We need to strengthen and invigorate the charter school movement both to give families more choices and to keep positive pressure on the school bureaucracy.

My proposal will give the mayors of the cities in the LA Unified a new oversight role in district affairs. A council of mayors, whose members will be proportionally represented, will oversee the hiring and firing of the superintendent and approve the budget.

This proposal will add accountability by giving the superintendent... Not the school board...the authority to direct personnel decisions, grant charters, develop the budget, and design and manage the instructional program.

And it will preserve the current elected school board, but it will refine and redefine its responsibilities. They will be put directly in the service of LA's parents.

Parents need a stronger voice in the process!

The elected board will continue to oversee disciplinary and transfer appeals, but we'll ask them to do more than that. We'll ask them to act as advocates for parents and the communities they serve.

They will review complaints... Create and issue school accountability report cards... Conduct an annual survey of parents... And make recommendations based on the results. And their ultimate charge will be to help parents navigate through the system and to solve problems with their kids' schools.

And because accountability means holding everybody to account... We'll ask the legislature to make these changes on a trial basis with six years to show progress and results. We'll measure what we did and how we did it. And we'll hold ourselves accountable.

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to close this evening with a message directly to the teachers:

I know that this proposal will raise some concern and spark some controversy. Change is never comfortable.

I understand your fear. It's hard to risk what you've got when you've never had what you deserve.

But I want you to know how deeply I feel about this.

I believe that any serious effort to improve our schools begins and ends with you.

I've been fighting for public education my entire life.

It was a public school that gave me a second chance... And a public school teacher who showed me the path to success.

The teacher's union gave me a job and a calling.

I live with a teacher. I know about the rewards and the sacrifices that teachers make. I know how a teacher feels at the end of a long day.

I want you to know... That I believe we will never fix our schools without raising respect and reward for the teaching profession.

I have no illusions. No reform package is a panacea unto itself. We won't get there in a single academic year. And just like any parent, we'll make mistakes along the way.

We'll struggle. We'll worry. At times, we'll lie awake at night.

But I promise you: we will do it together. And that's why I believe we will prevail.

I believe we can do right by these kids. Just like my mother did right by me. And like your parents did for each of you.

My mother Natalia raised four children on her own. And she nourished us on a steady diet of great books. She loved the

works of Shakespeare. So, I'll leave you this evening with a favorite line from *The Tempest*:

"WE are such stuff as dreams are made on."

The state of our city is up to all of us.

Let's remember why we came to South LA today!

Let's write a new chapter in the history of progressive reform!

Angelenos: Shakespeare also told us that...

"action is eloquence."

Let's match our dreams with our deeds!

Let's accelerate our ambitions!

God bless you all.