



Mayor Dwight C. Jones
State of the City Address
Carpenter Theatre at CenterStage
1/26/10

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you Sam and Blaine for being here with us tonight and for sharing your video creation about the city of Richmond.

Please also give a hand to the Huguenot Concert Band which greeted your arrivals this evening under the direction of Mr. Christopher Moseley. I am so fortunate to be mayor of a City that has such rich and significant arts and culture: painting and sculpture, film and photography, literature and theatre, dance and music, history and heritage, nature and science – so much that helps drive our economy and helps lift our hearts.

I thought it important to open the evening by sharing the River City video project with you, because for me, it really underscores what we all need to focus on more...we all need to think about our City in a new, different and dynamic way. We really offer a unique atmosphere with metropolitan business, dining, and cultural events along with small-town charm, and to top it off...a river runs through it!

Richmond is a great place of opportunity. It's a place of history and innovation...a place of creativity and purpose. Richmond is truly timeless.

So thank you again, Sam and Blaine for that wonderful work and for standing up for Richmond.

Thank you all for joining me here at CenterStage tonight and welcome to my inaugural address on the State of the City.

At the outset, let me say that we are all aware of the serious and catastrophic earthquake that devastated Haiti earlier this month. I know that all of our thoughts and prayers go out to those who have been affected by this disaster. As so many across the country and world have responded with unsurpassed generosity and humanity, I am further encouraging your continued support to the relief efforts. I know that many Richmonders have already answered the call of humanity. For those that have not had the opportunity to give, I implore you to do so.

Greetings to those members of the General Assembly who are here tonight, members of the Richmond City Council and the School Board of the City of Richmond. My thanks to the Richmond Performing Arts Center (RPAC), Bob Mooney and the CenterStage Foundation for accommodating our request to be here this evening. We look forward to all of the great performances we'll be able to see here at CenterStage.

BUILDING A BETTER RICHMOND

During my campaign for Mayor of this great city, I set a clear goal of "Building a Better Richmond." To Build a Better Richmond we need to improve upon our past successes, and look to the future with a renewed sense of vision and optimism.

My administration represents only the second administration in our new strong mayor form of government. This strong mayor form of government is well suited for tough times such as these. Our nation, our commonwealth, and our city are in the midst of the worst financial crisis in 75 years. I will make the tough choices that the voters elected me to make based upon a city wide vision.

Given the challenging economic climate, it is clear that we cannot tax our way out of this nor can we cut our way out of these financial challenges. We must and we will implement new strategies that allow the City to weather this storm while positioning us for stronger and more sustainable growth.

Building a Better Richmond must include:

- World Class Education.

We will ensure that our children are prepared to learn when they reach school. Over the next year as we make investments in expanding access to early learning opportunities for our children. We also will ensure that once they reach school they are supported with the necessary services to ensure achievement. You will hear more about this work in the coming months.

And after my first year I can stand here and tell you that we will be breaking ground on two new elementary schools this year and a new middle school and a high school next year - the first high school to be built in over 40 years. We must improve our standards and competencies and I'm determined that no student will have to face the failing schools that I experienced. Our schools will be models of innovation and creativity in urban education.

- Restoring Fiscal Accountability and Fiscal Responsibility.

We have already made many tough choices. Our first task was to shave an initial \$28.5 million from the general fund budget. We met the extraordinary financial challenges of the time, and we did so without interrupting core services or initiating layoffs.

We have handled the tough economic and budgetary conditions with responsibility and accountability. Moreover, we have not balanced the budget on the backs of those in need.

One of the most important indicators of our approach to budgeting and fiscal accountability is the City's bond rating. The City's bond rating is vitally important to our ability to borrow money for important capital projects—and at lower interest rates. Perhaps most importantly a strong bond rating is a clear signal to businesses that our city is strong financially and a great place to do business.

I am proud to say that we have been able to maintain our general fund AA bond rating, and in fact our utility's bond rating was upgraded from AA- to AA. We have begun restoring accountability to our financial affairs and ON OUR WAY TO AAA STATUS.

- We are sustaining Richmond's reputation as being a good place to work and to do business.

Over the past year Forbes.com rated Richmond as the 4th best city to find a job. We've also been rated as one of North America's top five cities for best quality of life, human resources, and development and investment promotion (Foreign Direct Investment Magazine). We made the list of cities that are friendly for young professionals in the "Mighty Micro" category. And our downtown continues to blossom as an arts destination as evidenced by the thousands of people I see every First Friday on Broad Street.

- We are serving all neighborhoods in the city.

We need safe and secure neighborhoods, and I must commend the Police Chief and the Richmond Police Department as we've dropped from 49th to 99th in terms of city crime rankings. Public safety is more than just cops on the street and making arrests. We are taking a holistic approach to making sure our neighborhoods are safe and secure. We've begun to redevelop public housing and are working to de-concentrate poverty. We are looking for alternatives for our people so that we can create a different roadmap to follow. We must break the cycle of being disenfranchised or believing that a destiny of failure and inequity is all that is available for some.

- We will ensure that every child has an equal chance at life and equal access to quality health care.

Tonight I am pleased to announce my Blue Ribbon Commission on Health Policy. This Commission will advise and assist me in setting health policy priorities, and securing additional resources that will allow us to reach people at the level of their need. We need to understand the factors that give rise to health care disparities in our City and develop and implement strategies that can ameliorate those problems.

Addressing some of these issues may well require new legislation, and an exploration of fiscal resources that have not been explored before. In addition, all of us may need to make modifications in our lifestyles and behaviors that allow us to live long, healthy lives.

Our Deputy Chief Administrative Office for Human Services, Dr. Carolyn Graham, will be heading up the Blue Ribbon Commission effort.

- We will continue providing a safety net for our most vulnerable people. We have too many of our residents who are in need—who require food, shelter, and an opportunity to succeed in life. I will not turn my back on the least amongst us.

And it is through Building a Better Richmond that we will provide that safety net for all.

PRESENT DAY CHALLENGES

There is so much that I want to share with you this evening about where we are as a city and where we are going.

The earlier video showcased some of the highlights of my first year in office.

But, tonight, I really want to focus on where we are going.

As we focus our attention on where we are going, it's necessary to underscore that we began this journey at a time of historic economic crisis. The country as a whole was experiencing the worse economic downturn in 75 years. The economy was lagging, state revenues were on the decline, local revenues were decreasing and key spending items were showing increases. Consumer confidence was at an all-time low and unemployment high. We really walked into what some would call a "perfect storm."

Today we are still in the midst of a lagging economy. The city faces another budget gap in the range of \$30 million, and the forecast over the next five years does not show much improvement. But despite all of the challenges we have faced over the last 12 months, together, we have turned those challenges into great opportunities for progress. Because of our determination and willingness to make tough sacrifices, we have a lot to be proud of in Richmond.

I am here to tell you that the state of the City is resilient!!

We are resolute, we are determined, we are purposeful.

We will face the present day challenges.

Our collective resolve will allow us to face the present day challenges and transform the way Richmond provides services to its citizens. As we embark upon this journey to Build a Better Richmond we will face tough choices but together, we can continue to seize the opportunities to prepare our City for better times—which definitely lie ahead.

I will be unapologetic in my leadership of this city. I will be resolute in my focus on our core priorities and vision for becoming the Tier One city for all of Richmond's citizens. I will continue to communicate with you directly and honestly. I will cooperate and collaborate with all those who share our common vision and goal of Building a Better Richmond.

When I took office, the branches and offices of City government were hotly embroiled in litigation against each other as well as our school system. These embarrassing disputes arose in part from disagreements regarding the powers afforded the various branches and offices of the City government by the Charter.

In January of 2009, more than 1.2 million dollars of taxpayers' money had already been spent in legal bills alone. In times such as these, I viewed these expenditures of the taxpayers' money as unconscionable. I had the lawsuits dismissed. I decided that I would give the City Council's charter review commission an opportunity to address the matter.

Make no mistake, our charter does need work: Too many powers remain either vague or unaligned with accountability. However, litigation is expensive and I will employ it only as a final resort.

I commend the committee on their hard work and the progress that they have made; but more work is needed. The charter is still based largely on our old Council-Manager form of government. Clearly, the Mayor is elected at-large by all of the people. The people of Richmond must be assured that their intentions are being met -- to have an accountable government in which each branch and each office is equipped with the tools needed to effectively carry out the peoples business. Ultimately, our Charter must reflect our new form of government in which the Mayor is directly accountable for the operations of city government.

As we continue to address the present day challenges, we must look to and prepare for the future.

This is a time when we will need more innovation and consolidation of service delivery.

We will need to look closely at our core functions and we will need to change the way city government delivers its services.

In the past, Richmond City government grew by appendage. You had a problem and you created a new arm for it. Well, we will not operate like that any longer.

The Budget realities that we face will require us to make tough choices. Options that will help us close the anticipated budget gap include:

1. Health Care Premiums - we will explore reducing the city's contribution for "employee only" coverage
2. Agency Consolidations - last week we announced two more consolidations with the Office of Emergency Management and the Department of General Services being merged into other departments.
3. Furloughs - we will explore a progressive approach wherein higher salaried persons may have more furlough days than lower salaried individuals.
4. Tax Collections - we may change the way we collect taxes from once yearly to twice yearly and promote payment plan options. Now this doesn't mean anyone will pay more in taxes, it means that the annual payment will be broken out into two or more payments. This change alone can save us \$2 million in interest payments.
5. Targeted Layoffs - it's almost inevitable that we are going to have to make such tough decisions given the financial realities that we face.
6. Other Options - outsourcing, privatization, and managed competition are also being explored.

This is a time when we will need to make sure that we maximize the city's competitive advantage. We will need to ensure that the deals that are made work for the city and not against the city.

In the past, Richmond has agreed to arrangements that often benefitted our partners more than they benefitted the residents of the city. We can have no more of that.

This is a time when we must create a sustainable local economy, and we must ensure that there is housing opportunity so that city workers, our teachers and our police officers, not only will want to, but can live in the city and that our dollars are re-circulated within our borders.

In the past, there hasn't been enough attention on the long-term growth and development of Richmond's job base and labor force. We can have no more of that.

Even as we meet the present day challenges, we position ourselves for growth. We must be priority driven and we must initiate strategies that streamline government, include sacrifice in the short term but position us for strategic investment for the long term.

The present budget gap that we face is not a light matter. But let me state again...we cannot tax our way out of this, nor even just cut our way out of this; we need to position ourselves for growth.

AGGRESSIVE ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

In order to grow our way out of this economic challenge, in order to remain resilient, we need to embark on an aggressive economic and community development strategy. This type of approach to economic and community development has been lacking for too long in our City.

As we grow our City there will be core principles that my administration will follow:

- We will be competitive;
- We will get tangible return on any investment we make;
- We will continue to facilitate situations by which city workers, especially our teachers, police officers, and firefighters, can and do live - as well as work -- in the City;
- We will expand our opportunities for inclusion so that all of our citizens have a meaningful chance to share in our promise and our challenges.

By that I mean,

- We have consolidated and reorganized our community and economic development departments. This consolidation will establish a robust economic and community development agency with a strategic mission and model values. This department will be multi-disciplinary and equipped with the technical wherewithal to conceptualize and administer model programs and initiatives. The staff has to be nimble, creative and solutions-oriented. They will be focused on performance and excellent service. We will be able to more effectively address the needs of real estate developers and small business owners. We will have a true workforce development effort and become a much more effective facilitator for attracting and retaining both large and small employers, creating jobs and preserving neighborhoods.

We know that growth in health care and education, in particular, bodes well for Richmond's ability to expand its job base. Over the last year, Richmond led the region and the state in job growth in these two areas. We increased jobs by almost 5,000 in these disciplines. I see an opportunity to build on that success to promote more job creation in the years to come.

The reorganization will enhance our ability to become a Tier One city by allowing a more aggressive and strategic approach to developing our city with purposeful intent and not by default.

- Our Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, or CEDS, is underway.

This is a federally funded project which will lead to the establishment of guiding principles for economic development in the future. We need our own roadmap as to where we want to go rather than reacting to the various ideas that may be generated at the individual level.

In addition to this federally funded program, we are also establishing an internal council made up of a cross section of city agencies. It will also be comprised of key executive branch agencies as well as selected quasi-public organizations, government-supported and non-profit partner enterprises.

The Development Council will principally be responsible for the creation and refinement of strategies, systems and polices that facilitate economic development and neighborhood revitalization activities.

This body will serve not only as our government's principal vehicle for vetting large-scale real estate projects and moving them expeditiously through the development review and permitting processes. It will also serve as a potential resource for conceptualizing and shaping economic and community development policy.

We will not be complacent in our economic development strategy. We have too many important projects that will require a forward thinking, progressive approach so that we “get it right.”

PROJECTS ON THE HORIZON

We must not squander our huge opportunity to remake and invigorate projects that are vital to the economic and social growth of our city. We have thus far identified about a dozen major anchor projects that will receive my Administration's undivided focus over the next several years. These projects alone have a cumulative estimated development costs of is roughly \$2 Billion dollars.

We have one shot at redeveloping areas like Dove Court and North Jackson Ward. Getting these projects right means that residents of the North Jackson Ward community and The Dove Street Redevelopment area are able to realize their dream of living in a thriving, vibrant community with mixed-income housing with necessary, up-to-date amenities and safer streets.

More importantly, these projects will be tremendously important to addressing and reducing the poverty levels in our city and breathing life into communities like these that have too often been neglected.

Further, we cannot waste the enormous potential of the 25th Street/Nine Mile Road Corridor. This area will be a top priority for redevelopment and revitalization. Our comprehensive approach to economic and community development provides an opportunity to revitalize a commercial corridor that has long suffered from disinvestment and declining market base due to urban flight. This corridor already has clear competitive advantages:

- strong civic support
- stable housing market with opportunities for infill and renovations
- proximity to downtown and riverside
- public transportation
- access to interstate highways

- historic structures
- city resources (Enterprise Zone, CARE area [Commercial Area Revitalization Effort], Neighborhoods in Bloom)

These projects are so critical to the goal of poverty elimination and the de-concentration of poverty.

We have already begun taking important steps towards developing an aggressive implementation strategy for the revitalization and development of one of our city's most desirable areas. Shockoe bottom is a microcosm of our city. It has history, it has arts, it has culture, it has great dining, it has a vibrant nightlife. Further developing and revitalizing this area is a key component to our Building a Better Richmond. The right revitalization strategy will embrace these important elements while propelling us into the future.

This comprehensive and aggressive economic development strategy will position us to become a Tier One city; a city with major attributes like a multi-modal transportation system, a revitalized and vibrant downtown, world class education, clean and green, and well managed...a city that is growing by design and not by default.

We've successfully cleared the first hurdles to securing the GRTC Cary Street Property. Once Council approves my plan, we can begin to work with the residents and businesses in that community on a revitalization strategy for the site to guide development once it is sold to a private entity. This is an important acquisition for the city. This is 6.8 acres in the middle of our city. The city has little available land...we are land locked. To acquire a site of this size and to be in a position to guide its future use would be a strategic victory and further allows us to continue with a growth strategy for our city.

The Hippodrome Project was approved last night. We're enthusiastic about this project. The City's \$600,000 investment in this project, or 5% of the total project costs, is helping to secure millions in private capital. This project will:

1. help anchor the historic Jackson Ward neighborhood with much-needed commercial, cultural and entertainment activity, and
 2. provide an affordable residential component for workforce housing
- This project is a great illustration of how the City can promote neighborhood revitalization in a manner that is fiscally responsible and also leverages maximum private capital.

We will also be working on stabilization plans for distressed historic assets such as the Leigh Street Armory and the Moore Street School. And these projects are just a small sample of the way in which we will be moving the City forward strategically.

Critical to our ability to attract and retain businesses throughout our city is our public education system. We have a moral obligation to ensure that our schools provide children with world class skills and knowledge.

Our city has many successes to be proud of but we have much work to be done.

- Nine Richmond Public Schools teachers have earned National Board Certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.
- For the third straight year, U.S. News and World Report has ranked Richmond Community and Open high schools among America's best.
- More than 85 percent of Richmond City schools met the benchmark scores for accreditation on the latest round of the state's Standards of Learning (SOL) tests, based on preliminary data.
- All of the city's high schools are fully accredited.
- 93 percent of our elementary schools have earned full accreditation.
- 83% of elementary schools had reading scores above 80 percent
- 79% of elementary schools had math scores above 80 percent
- Seven of the city's eight high schools scored 80 or above in reading and math

Creating a world class education system is personal for me. Many elected officials talk about improving education but I know first hand just how disadvantaged a young person can be when their public school fails them. You see, when I graduated from high school and entered college, I was functionally illiterate. My public schools failed me and many of my classmates. And that's why I worked so hard to make sure that we will move forward on actually building new schools instead of continuing to talk about doing it.

I am extremely proud of the collaborative relationship we have built with Dr. Brandon and the entire school system. Together we have moved our plan forward to start building schools from the planning and discussion phase to moving dirt and breaking ground later this year.

Our focus on improving schools will strengthen our position to capture the promise of our potential as a Tier One City.

REGIONAL COOPERATION

During the first months of my administration, I made a concerted effort to reach out to our regional partners. For too long, the City of Richmond has been the step child of our region. Throughout the first year, we have been determined in our pursuit of rebuilding a partnerships with the surrounding localities. Clearly we want to do what is strategically in our best interest, but this is not a time to turn away our partners.

Instead of focusing on what distinguishes us, we should spend some time on the projects and concerns that unite us.

We need a new coliseum.

We need a coliseum that is befitting a Tier One city. One in which we can attract major sporting events and other entertainment. To that end, I have begun working with several business leaders to develop a strategic approach to addressing our coliseum. And I want to mention that I appreciate the work of Tom Farrell from Dominion and John Luke from our newest corporate citizen, Mead Westvaco, and others in helping to scope out what the community wants in a new sports and entertainment facilities. Whatever we do, we need to do it in a way that is what our residents want and that is cost-feasible. For a region our size, I think we need a facility that can provide for the events that our residents want to enjoy!

A word about our Squirrels...The Flying Squirrels have already made a substantial investment in the community of Richmond. They are gearing up for a great season and have shown a commitment to our City. They like the location of the Diamond, and the truth is that rebuilding on that site would afford us the opportunity to gain the support of our regional partners.

Just last week, Richmond's new arena league football team, the Richmond Raiders, kicked off their season.

So the future holds a lot of promise.

INVEST IN YOUTH

As we look to the future, it is clear that we have to invest in our youth.

Part of being a Tier One city is investing in our people. We've got to show young people that they do matter and that we are working to meet their needs.

The City of Richmond has approximately 9,000 teens between the ages of 15 and 19 years old who will need jobs during the summer.

These young people will require a variety of work experiences so that they are exposed to what it will mean to be an active participant in today's and tomorrow's global economy.

I am excited to announce that we are launching the "Mayor's Summer Works Initiative". This is a summer jobs program which fosters a relationship between the City government, its corporate partners, public schools, the non-profit sector and the city's youth.

The city has done some measure of summer jobs before, with various programs working in silos. This initiative will be a comprehensive broad-based city-wide approach to employing our youth over the summer months and we will be contacting many of you in the coming weeks about participating in this program.

If you join me in this most ambitious effort, businesses will receive a tax credit. But more importantly, you will be contributing to the development of the City's 21st century workforce.

- The Summer Works Initiative will stimulate the economy of our city, through federal tax incentives under the Work Opportunity Tax Credit.
- Businesses that are involved will have an opportunity to receive tax incentives, and the incentives increase from 25% to 50% over a three year period of time.
- Our goal with this program is to ensure that our business partners employ at least 95 percent of the young citizens who wish to work.

Ultimately, our hope is that a number of employers will offer many of these young people opportunities beyond the Summer Works Initiative.

So we have lots of important work to do together and we want your input all along the way.

MAYOR'S PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNICATION CORPS (MPACC)

Essential to a well managed government is that information flows freely from both the citizens to the government and from the government to the citizens. Moreover, citizens expect and deserve a responsive government.

Many of you may know about the old neighborhood teams process. I have said on previous occasions that I was developing a process by which information would flow from the residents to the government and vice versa.

Tonight I am happy to announce the frame work of the Mayor's Participation and Communication Corps (MPACC). MPACC will be an integral component of our work to become a Tier One City and build a better Richmond.

Our organization will be modeled on boundary lines that remove the politics that so many have said doomed the prior Teams Process. The new "teams" will build upon a proven model of boundaries. The MPACC groups will allow for more accountability not only from the City but also the residents. We must both hold each other accountable so that we can capture the full promise of our potential.

Twelve MPACC units which will be based on the Richmond Police Precinct/Sector police boundaries—there are four Police Precincts with three sectors per precinct.

This is a model that works...Richmond has gone from a top ten city for crime to a top 50 city to almost dropping out of the top 100 (99th). This is largely due to the transition to a sector based policing system which has proven quite effective in decreasing crime and increasing citizen involvement.

Beginning February 15, we will host precinct-level meetings to work with residents on the guiding principles for MPACC – a memorandum of understanding between residents and my City Administration. For example, we will lay out the framework for the lines of communication as well as accountability for city departments and the MPACC groups.

Creating teams along the precinct/sectors the police department uses will allow for more accountability as well better communicating, collaborating and cooperating.

Citizens should always have input and a voice in their government. These MPACC teams and this process will allow interested Richmonders to have a voice and input in the direction of our City.

The model will allow our residents to voice concerns, ask questions, and receive honest and direct answers about our vision. The answers you may get are not always going to be what you want to hear but the answers will be forthright and based on best practices and our collective vision of the future of the City of Richmond.

CLOSE

In closing, we have set an aggressive agenda and developed a bold vision for our beloved City and what it can become. We have already begun to do business differently in the City of Richmond. We have changed many things, ranging from agency consolidations, the way we approach economic and community development, to the redesign of our website; which harnessed the talent in our Information Technology department by undertaking this project completely in-house.

Just like our new website, the City overall will have a new look and feel and we are expecting a much improved user experience.

We are broadening our reach through greater usage of blogs, Facebook and twitter. In fact, there are live tweets going out tonight of this State of the City address. We want everyone's involvement.

What is clear is that to effectively transform our challenges into opportunities, we must all challenge ourselves and push the boundaries of our potential.

So as we walk into this new decade...let's embrace our opportunities.

Just like the message that I heard when I embarked on this journey, we not only want a good city, we want a great city. Even during this time which is challenging for all of us, we will facilitate transformational and sustainable revitalization for our City. We must harness our talents and capabilities to create an environment that guarantees success in our efforts toward Building a Better Richmond. This city can be the greatest capital city in the nation; all we need to do is seize the opportunity.

Thank you.