



**Pedro E. Segarra
Mayor**

TO: Court of Common Council and the Residents of the City of Hartford
FROM: Pedro E. Segarra, Mayor
DATE: March 14, 2011
RE: State of the City Address 2011

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 Winch, members of the Court of Common Council, and most importantly, Hartford residents: Mahatma Gandhi famously said, "The best way to find yourself... is to lose yourself in the service of others."

On June 25th of last year, my 30-plus years of service to the residents of this great City took on a new dimension as I assumed the duties and responsibilities of Mayor. I am most honored and humbled by it. I want to thank my family, friends, and fellow residents for their love and support.

With your help, my mission is to restore faith in government and revitalize our community's commitment to progress. To achieve this, we must change the ways things have traditionally been done in this City.

We cannot repeat the mistakes of the past.

Some of the choices we must make won't be easy; they may not be immediately popular; but collectively, and for our future, we can make the right choices to benefit all of Hartford.

My administration follows four key goals:

- 1. Ensure each office is accountable for operating in a fiscally prudent manner and achieving results to advance the City's interest**
- 2. Safeguard the health, cleanliness and safety of the community**
- 3. Create jobs and improve the quality of education**
- 4. And pursue opportunities to accelerate and expand Hartford businesses and neighborhoods.**

From day one, we took bold and swift action transforming the way we solve problems to obtain immediate results.

Within the first five days of our new administration, we made prudent fiscal decisions that not only closed the budgetary gap but returned \$2.8 million to the Rainy Day Fund. This fund had been reduced year by year, putting our bond rating in jeopardy.

Almost nine months later, we are a more transparent Hartford; a stronger Hartford; a more positive Hartford; and a Hartford that is much more attractive in the eyes of others and more importantly in the hearts and souls of our people.

This didn't happen overnight. This didn't happen by government working alone. It happened through community collaboration to ensure a more accountable, more ethical, and more efficient Hartford.

Without partnerships, there can be no real progress.

We have achieved so much, so far, by demanding progress and accountability.

Making Hartford a safer city is a priority. And although serious crime is down to new historic lows, we can and should do better. By aggressively addressing the core issues of illegal guns, domestic violence, and truancy, we look to further reduce those numbers so that no family--- I repeat, no family--- feels the heartbreak and pain of being a victim.

I am also very proud of our commitment to the Police Activities League that provides recreational opportunities for our youth so that they make positive choices and not wrong decisions. Thank you Chief Daryl Roberts for your leadership; Sgt. Karla Rodriguez for supervising this essential program; and Brad Davis for being the inspiration to make this all happen.

Hartford is a better educated city. The reform policies to which I am committed--- must continue.

To benefit the entire educational system, we must reach out to our higher learning institutions such as Capital Community College, to help lift all of our students.

The Board of Education reports three straight years of improved test scores.

I welcome the new Superintendent, Dr. Christina Kishimoto and the new Board of Education Chairman David MacDonald. I will work with them to face the challenges that lie ahead. I remain committed to pursuing academic excellence for all of our children and our continued effort to improving our educational system.

Five City Magnet Schools received national recognition, distinguishing them among the best in the country.

These achievements are the result of parents, educators and businesses investing in our students.

Our community also believes in the creative efforts of our leaders of tomorrow. The Hartford 375th Anniversary Committee has honored Mario Lopez Silva of Bulkeley High School for winning the essay contest in tribute to the founding and the future of our great city. He is with us tonight. Please note that Mario will attend either Boston University or the University of Connecticut next year and will major in science.

Hartford is an environmentally smarter and greener city. We must aggressively continue on this path. As part of our “One City, One Plan” for conservation and development--- next week, our Green Ribbon Task Force will present recommendations as to how we as stewards can strategically maintain and manage our historic park system. I would like to take a moment to thank Tyler Smith and Bernadine Silvers for their leadership of this group.

Thank you to the community and corporate volunteers who made our “Week of the Parks” clean-up effort so successful. In fact, we did such a good job we’re going to expand things this year! I also want to thank Ron Pitz and Charmaine Craig of the Knox Parks Foundation and the First Gentleman, Charlie Ortiz, for their activist roles in beautifying our City and restoring our tree canopy.

Hartford is a fun city: We will build upon the enormous success of the Bushnell Park Ice Skating Rink that attracted more than 20,000 participants. This is part of my strategy to turn Bushnell Park into a year-round venue for activities. I want to thank all of our corporate sponsors for making this dream a reality. Through the gift of recreation and sport, this past holiday season, we unified city residents and suburbanites and created an economic driver for surrounding businesses. I want to thank Bob Crawford for helping us create this magic. For next winter, I envision an even bigger rink to provide the joy of skating to children and their families all winter long.

Hartford is open for business. Between the H.B. Davis and the Capitol West buildings coming down, new businesses are popping up--- creating job opportunities and customer convenience. With us tonight are Ryan and Kelleanne Jones of “The Market at Hartford 21. Thank you for providing Downtown Hartford with its long-awaited full-scale grocery store and employing 89 people--- most of whom are Hartford residents.

Hartford is a great place to live and soon more people will join us. The old Sonesta and Clarion Hotel, which has been vacant for more than a decade, will be transformed into 180 apartments with street level retail and commercial space. Joseph Klaynberg of Wonder Works Construction and Development could not be with us this evening, but we are excited about this latest investment in the revitalization of Constitution Plaza.

Progress, growth and prosperity are no easy tasks, especially during difficult financial times.

People stop me on the street and say, “Mr. Mayor, you’re doing a good job; you’re getting things done.” My response is, “Thank you, but there’s a lot more to do.”

The Mayor must be an ambassador on behalf of the city to the state and to the nation. Hartford is the Capital City. We must look, feel and act more like the Capital City.

Partnerships are being strengthened with the Governor’s Office, our State leaders, and our Congressional Delegation. While I am thankful that the Governor’s proposed budget is geared towards growing our cities as job centers, there’s still an uphill battle being waged to make sure federal funds for essential services such as housing and after-school programs are not slashed. I continue to reach out to these officials and I continue to reach out to you.

Yes, there are daunting tasks that lie ahead, but the most important task is to change the way we solve problems and carry out the charge that has been given us. We can and must work together to generate the best possible ideas and thus the best possible results.

So, let’s look at the budget.

Under my leadership, Hartford is taking a unique approach. Working in collaboration with City Council for a second consecutive year, we are holding a series of workshops to identify priorities and services that meet the needs of residents, taxpayers, and our diverse neighborhoods.

Members of Council, I want to personally thank you for your efforts as we work diligently and creatively to close a \$7 million shortfall for this fiscal year and an almost \$18 million gap for next year.

I can assure you --- no stone will be left unturned. No idea ignored. Last year, I led the charge of no new taxes and I continue to control spending in a thorough and careful manner. I have led by example: driving myself, pumping my own gas, and planning to return 10-15% of my budget back to the General Fund.

City departments are being reorganized to increase efficiency, productivity, and accountability. An early retirement option was instituted and we avoided lay-offs. Pension reform has begun. Benefit packages are being re-examined. In fact, the City is on the verge of becoming the first municipality to join the State’s prescription plan--- saving us \$1.8 million per year!

With the good work we are doing, I can report to you tonight that the City of Hartford has maintained its “A” Bond Rating, despite a troubled national, state and local economy. This stable outlook is a strong endorsement of our fiscal strategy regarding our future investments.

Changing our fiscal outlook is one challenge; changing our perception is another.

First we need to do a little self-reflection and focus. We need to look within; find the good; and share it---and my friends, there’s a lot of good and a lot of heart in Hartford.

We have a world renowned Arts and Heritage Community that is a driver for our local economy.

By working with our partners at the Greater Hartford Arts Council, our Jobs Grant Program has created, expanded, and retained more than 340 Hartford-based jobs, including 80 for Hartford youth. I have made a personal effort on behalf of the Mayor’s Office to be an ambassador to arts organizations to help them expand their reach and impact.

With the next round of grants being announced, we look forward to building upon that number--- not to mention the positive economic impact this investment has had on our local businesses across the City.

You know, we talk a lot about dollars and cents; I’d like to recognize some of the organizations that have benefitted from this investment: HartBeat Ensemble--- represented tonight by Greg Tate; the Hartford Children’s Theatre--- Dulcie Giadone is with us; and Cheryl Smith with the Artists Collective. Council, I urge you to join me and once again invest in this program --- and to invest in Hartford artists.

Speaking of jobs, while other cities have laid-off city employees --- including public safety personnel and teachers --- Hartford has hired police, fire, and seasonal workers to make our city safer and cleaner. It is now time to hire even more Hartford residents. During this budget process, I will work with Council to strengthen and implement programs that hire more Hartford residents and promote more of our businesses.

We can start by investing in our infrastructure.

Let’s face it, after the record-setting winter we experienced, our roads have had it; so there are construction jobs to be filled as well as a lot of potholes! A comprehensive and pro-active plan is already underway and will almost triple the street paving efforts of previous years. The \$3.5 million investment will also include creating about 30 jobs over a period of five months.

Once again, I emphasize that this is a collaborative effort. I expect that you--- the residents and business owners of this city--- will notify our 311 Call Center so that we can pinpoint trouble spots and improve upon our quality of life by filling these potholes within 100 hours.

There are about 60 development projects across the city that we are pursuing. Nine of these are cornerstone initiatives that I have shared with the Governor.

I'd like to take a moment to highlight three of what may be lesser known efforts:

1. Swift Factory--- turning a vacant factory in the North End into a multipurpose live and work facility;
2. 101 Pearl Street—pursuing creative options for this 13-story general office building that will benefit the Downtown district and neighboring tenants;
3. The Lyric Theatre--- restoring this historic theatre in the Frog Hollow neighborhood and transforming part of it into the Puerto Rican Arts and Cultural Center.

Now that we have talked about more immediate action, let's change our focus to the bigger picture and more long-term growth.

Here's how. First, let me re-enforce my stance that I will lead the effort to recruit the UCONN Medical and Dental Schools to Hartford. As the job-hub of the state, it is essential that the Capital City be the focus of intense medical research, training, and technology. I have already had meetings with the stakeholders and reached out to the Governor's Office regarding this pressing issue.

I also call upon my alma mater, the UCONN School of Social Work, to relocate here in order to maximize services to the people who need it most. Our Constituent Services Office plans to take-on several graduate summer interns from this program so that they get hands-on, in-the-trenches-experience in this field.

Next, I will lead a standing Jobs Roundtable of community business leaders, entrepreneurs and innovators. We're not just going to "Shop Hartford"--- which is important to strengthen our local economy --- we're going to grow Hartford.

However, with limited resources, government cannot maximize the community-wide impact of the many promising job creation opportunities that are out there. To address this situation, my administration has launched the "Opportunities Landscape Project."

1. This will identify the greatest opportunities that now exist in Hartford to improve educational outcomes and increase income for our residents.
2. We will coordinate the efforts of individuals and groups who together possess the expertise and resources to enhance these opportunities.
3. Public/private partnerships will then invest in these ventures.

The ultimate payoff of the “Opportunities Landscape Project” must be to close the most glaring educational, job, and income gaps that separate our City from other parts of the state. We can do this if we coordinate the best programs, practices, and policies and hold each other accountable for helping Hartford residents to share in the prosperity enjoyed by others.

To create this and other job growth opportunities, we need comprehensive tax reform. As your advocate, I will fight for three main principles:

- 1. Protect our residential taxpayers against catastrophic tax increases**
- 2. Provide relief and predictability for the business community,**
- 3. And continue to recognize the acute burden small business has had to endure.**

Any reform must provide simultaneously relief in a balanced and equitable way.

In building a better Hartford for the future we must pay homage to the past. 375 years ago, the Reverend Thomas Hooker arrived here. This man’s courage, his audacity to be different, and his adventurist spirit made this city --- and this country ---- great --- because he called for a free and open government.

Three months from today, I look forward to retracing his steps in the “closing ceremonies” of our Hartford 375 Celebration. I am honored to carry on in his name and lead this great city to a new and better tomorrow.

As Mother Teresa said, “We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.”

My friends, the drops in the ocean we have made so far together are already sending positive ripple effects well beyond our borders.

So I say to you, the State of the City of Hartford has been lifted during my tenure and with perseverance; we can reach new and greater heights.

God Bless you, God Bless the City of Hartford!