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Mayor' message: operation opportunity for Providence

March 11, 2009 - Rhode Island

The massive \$790 million Economic Stimulus Bill has passed both houses of Congress, been signed into law by our new President, Barack Obama, and now states and cities across America await the final regulations to accompany the release of those funds and the authorization to use them.

For New England, it can't come soon enough. This unseasonably harsh winter is the perfect metaphor for what we have weathered in the last year, and the release of these stimulus funds will mean the job creation and business expansion long awaited and long overdue.

In Providence, we have adopted our own stimulus effort. In my annual State of the City address, several weeks ago, I laid out my 18-month, 30-step "Operation Opportunity," to place an unprecedented focus on our economy and to strategically align measurable goals, to make new jobs and a stronger economy a reality.

While we address the immediate budget crisis, we must also plan for our future. We must mobilize in this crisis, so Providence can move forward as our nation recovers from this recession - a recession they say that might last months, if not a couple of years.

If we work hard, work smart and stay focused, we will not only have survived this recession but have turned it into one of our greatest opportunities. And how will we do that? By enhancing and leveraging the federal economic recovery plan and expanding opportunity for all Providence residents. The measurable goals will be tracked on-line, at our city's website www.providenceri.com/opportunity. And every time a goal is reached, we will check it off the list for all to see. The goals I have set out to accomplish by August 17, 2010 include:

Stimulating Entrepreneurship

- * Cut the average time of plan review for building permits in half
- * Facilitate development of new, biotech incubator with state-of-the-art wet labs in the Jewelry District
- * Launch economic development dashboard website
- * Establish expediter as new resource for small businesses
- * Establish business-to-business mentorship program targeting small, neighborhood businesses
- * Make \$5 million in loans available, by recapitalizing Providence Economic Development Partnership fund

Greening the Economy

- * Create Providence Green Jobs Training Corps
- * Finalize site plans for wind turbines
- * Double citywide recycling rate
- * Implement executive order, so all new municipal buildings are LEED or CHPS (schools) certified

Preparing the Next Generation

- * Give every parent an on-line data dashboard to monitor their child's daily progress
- * Implement 21st Century science and math curriculum and tools
- * Establish middle school summer program for academic and experiential learning
- * Begin Phase I of new, after-school program for high school students inspired by PASA

Rebuilding Economic Foundations

- * Invest a minimum of \$10 million to improve roads in Providence
- * Make significant new investment in Port infrastructure for additional job growth
- * Open Career & Technical Academy to provide best job training facilities in the state
- * Renovate or rebuild our fourth school, as part of the Building a Legacy program

Ensuring Security for Success

- * Make Providence Police Department the nation's first Center of Excellence in Police Training
- * Create firefighter prep after-school program, with Providence schools for juniors and seniors
- * Implement family home-fire safety program for grades Kindergarten-2
- * Secure national accreditation for Providence Emergency Management Agency, to ensure capabilities are up to the highest standard

Building Pathways to Opportunity

- * Launch Bank on Providence - affordable financial services and financial literacy for low-wage workers
- * Support Building Futures to move 30 Providence residents annually, into union apprenticeships in the building trades
- * Support Stepping Up to move 40 Providence residents annually into health care jobs
- * Leverage federal funds to create 500 summer youth employment opportunities

And Focusing on the Customer

- * Implement performance-based budgeting citywide
- * Double the number of on-line services, including renewal of business-related licenses
- * Streamline license re-issue process with all related city departments
- * End waste from separate leases/ locations, secure office space with ample parking to co-locate departments.

Challenging but certainly do-able, and clearly measurable. Our ability to succeed and thrive as a community in a global economy depends upon our efforts to achieve these goals. We hope you will check in on us from time to time, to measure with us our progress.

David Cicilline is the mayor of Providence

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