



**Office of the Mayor
City of Los Angeles
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"City of Dreams"
Remarks of Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa
Town Hall Los Angeles
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Ladies and gentlemen:

Thank you for having me.

I always look forward to coming back to Town Hall. This isn't just the premier speaker's forum in Southern California—it's where many of our most distinguished community and business leaders come together to meet... to break bread... and to engage the problems—and the ideas—that will define our future as a city, as a state and, indeed, as a nation.

And since you were kind enough to invite me here, I'm going to let you in on something: Speaking at Town Hall is a tough assignment. This is a group with a reputation... a reputation for thinking critically... for asking the hardest questions... and, above all, for refusing to settle for the easy answers.

To be candid, I even considered whether Town Hall would be the best place to give a speech as loftily entitled as "City of

Dreams," especially with so many people pulling me aside these days and telling me that I need to start working to lower expectations.

I think the old story about Johnny Kerr illustrates their fear. Back in the 1960s Kerr was coaching the Chicago Bulls, and his team was in a serious slump. They'd lost seven in a row, and next up on the schedule was a tough road game against the Celtics in Boston Garden. Kerr decided he needed to make a big pre-game speech. He stood in front of his team in the locker room... and he looked his center straight in the eye and he said, "Now, you just go out there and pretend that you're the best scorer in the entire NBA." Then he turned to another player and said, "I want you to make believe that you're the peskiest lock-down defender in all of professional basketball." And he told his point guard, "Son, tonight I'm asking you to pretend that you can run the show better than any player in the league... bar none."

Well...the Bulls lost by 17 points.

After the game one of the players approached Kerr in the locker room, and he put a consoling hand on the coach's shoulder. "Don't worry about it," the player said...

"Just pretend we won."

Now, I know that it may seem like the joke was on Johnny Kerr. But I'm not so sure about that. The Bulls went on to win a berth in the playoffs, and at the end of the season, Kerr was named NBA Coach of the Year.

You see, it's true that while great teams—and great cities—are not built overnight... or made in the magic of locker-room speeches... it's also true that greatness is almost always conceived in the daring of imagination. I'm here to say that we need to start imagining the great city that Los Angeles can be.

No city in America faces more monumental challenges, but no city in the world holds such immeasurable promise. And ladies and gentlemen, I feel this way because there is no city anywhere that is richer in talent. And that begins with the people here in this room. I want to be clear about this: we will not arrive at the most remote reaches of our potential as a city without the active engagement of our business and community leaders in our civic life.

Friends, we need Town Hall to be more than a center of community discussion. We need this place to be a center of community action. More than anything, we need to bring the values of the town hall to the life of our city. Values of common understanding... of common interest... and of common destiny.

Above all, we need to see the future with a common vision—a vision that conceives of Los Angeles—unabashedly—as a city without limits. A vision that looks ahead to the global economic challenges of the coming century... not back to the past formulas of sprawling growth, more freeways, and reliance on unskilled labor in a manufacturing economy. A vision in which we are willing to take risks... and to acknowledge that we won't always get everything right. And a vision that always dares to be bold.

Let's dare to imagine Los Angeles as the cleanest and greenest big city in America. I know this may sound audacious coming from the mayor of a town better known for smog and sprawl. But, friends, this is where the future lies. The great cities of the 21st Century will not be famous for their factories or have smokestacks in their skylines. They won't be the traditional homes of polluting or extractive industries. They'll be places where residents are at home in vibrant, clean, and sustainable communities.

This is why we're leading an initiative to plant a million new trees around the city--and I hope you'll join me in this. It's why we're working on long-range plans to bring life back to the LA River—transforming this vital waterway from a concrete drainage ditch

into an “emerald necklace” that reconnects our neighborhoods and our people. It’s why we’re requiring the Department of Water and Power to get 20 percent of its energy from clean and renewable sources within the next five years. And it’s also why I put an environmentalist named Dave Freeman in charge of the Harbor Commission. Dave’s a tough-talking Tennessean, and he’s holding the bureaucracy accountable down at the port. And, folks, he’s not blowing smoke. With Dave, we are leading an historic campaign to reduce the single biggest contributor to LA’s poor air quality—diesel emissions at the Port of Los Angeles. And we are going to need your help to do this.

Greening LA is not just good for the planet—it’s good for business. These initiatives will not only make our city more livable for the people who reside here, they will attract the tourists we want to come and spend their money here. They won’t only help to improve our air quality and reduce our contribution to global warming and climate change. They’ll generate the kind of climate change we want--they’ll change the business climate... creating the conditions in which the industries of tomorrow—like environmental engineering and green building and architecture--will take root and grow. And, in turn, they’ll help create high-wage jobs and build the green technology and expertise here in LA that we can export from Sao Paulo to Shanghai.

I realize that LA’s history hasn’t exactly been synonymous with the phrase “smart growth,”... but, dare I say it, our future needs to be. We are in a situation today where the demand for housing is greatly outstripping the supply. At present market values, just 12 percent of Los Angeles County residents can afford a median-priced home. And ladies and gentlemen, we face a dim and divided future as a nation if we allow the defining dream of home ownership to become a privilege of just the affluent.

We need to build more housing, both affordable and market-rate. We need to build smart. We need to build in areas--like in our downtown core--that we’ve traditionally overlooked. We need to

strategically target resources in neglected neighborhoods like South Los Angeles. We need to think creatively about how underutilized city properties might be used in building 24-hour communities where people can live... shop... and commute to their jobs without spending the equivalent of two entire work weeks a year stuck in traffic.

Imagine a future downtown where you can walk along Spring Street from 1st to 8th at eleven p.m. and find restaurants, newsstands, markets, and residents... a place that's alive both day and night.

And, friends, we need to face the crisis of homelessness in our city. We need to put our money where our mouth is. Two weeks ago, I called for a \$1 billion housing bond to alleviate pressure across our entire housing market. This investment will create better opportunities for all Angelenos... from corporate middle managers to the very poor. And we are going to use these dollars to build smart and to make LA a national leader in transit-oriented development. I'm proud to say, we've fully funded the Housing Trust Fund for the first time in city history, and we're working to find a permanent revenue source so that we can stay true to that promise. With significant help from the private sector, we've made an initial \$50 million investment in housing for the homeless and very poor that includes supportive services—like drug and mental illness treatment—services that go straight to the heart of the reasons that these folks are on the streets. But we can't do it without the active support of the people here in this room.

We need to see a future in which our diverse communities are linked by a public transportation system that is worthy of a world-class city. And we need to look forward, not back. We need to be realistic about the fact that the days of wide-open freeways in a state of ten million people have disappeared for good from our rear-view mirror. And that the path to the future is laid with tracks. Friends, let's all get on board and commit ourselves to expanding rail transit in LA. Our plan includes

taking the Exposition Line to Santa Monica, connecting LAX to the Green Line, expanding light rail to East LA and the San Gabriel Valley, and developing a long range north-south project in the San Fernando Valley. And we need to take the red line all the way to ocean. But I'm not going to mislead you: these are—big--ticket--items, and we are going to need to find ways to expand funding for transit. We are fighting for our fair share of dollars in Washington and Sacramento. And we are going to have to lock arms together and demand that the state stop playing games with investments in transportation and fully disperse the funding promised under Proposition 42.

We need to imagine a future in which LA is the Venice of the 21st Century. The global commercial capital linking the manufacturing economies of the East with the emerging markets of the South. And we need to understand that our diverse population will be our greatest asset in making LA the center of trade in the Pacific Rim. We need to bridge the gap between small-business owners and capital... to seize the opportunities for trade existing between our diverse communities and their countries of origin... between Mexican-Americans and Mexico... between Chinese-Americans and China... between Korean-Americans and Korea... and the list goes on.

We need to make LA the city where the world comes together. The financial and logistical bridge linking Asia and the Americas... the nerve center connecting investors with the import/export markets of China, Korea, Mexico, Japan, and beyond. And to do this, we need to expand our already-strong logistics sector and build on the enormous potential of our leading seaports and airports.

We need to dare to be the center of cutting-edge technology. Here in LA, we are blessed with some of the greatest research universities in the entire world, but we need to tie them into our economy. We are supporting UCLA and USC in staking our city's claim in the field of stem cell research and making this a center of biotechnology. We're supporting the growth of emerging sectors like new media with the vision of transforming LA into a

“Digital City” where the technology and entertainment industries converge. We want to make LA the undisputed national capital of Spanish-language media and entertainment. And we’re supporting traditional industries like film and television that have represented the heartbeat of our economy for a century. I’ve made filming on city property free. And we are pursuing a broader strategy to keep this vital industry in LA for the century to come.

Most of all, we need to develop the talent of our people. To demand that all of our young people receive an education that gives them a genuine opportunity to develop the skills they’ll need to compete in the marketplace of tomorrow.

And as we gather here at this central meeting place, we need to come to a common consensus—an understanding that the central challenge we face as a community... is reforming the Los Angeles Unified School District.

We will not be a great global city if we accept the unacceptable... if we resign ourselves to a fate in which one-third our students will never wear a cap and gown.

We won’t realize our advantage in international trade, if we don’t give our young people the skills—and the foreign-language skills—they’ll need to compete.

We won’t support the industries of tomorrow here in LA if we don’t dramatically improve instruction in math and science.

We will never be a city without limits if we limit the possibilities of our children.

I intend to fight for--and lead--a fundamental reform of the Los Angeles Unified School District. I’m not talking about tinkering around the edges. I’m not talking about a cosmetic makeover. I am talking about structural reforms demanding dramatic

improvements in accountability and results. We need to build a groundswell of support for change.

I am currently reviewing the broadest range of policy options and soliciting the input of a diverse spectrum of Angelenos and educational leaders. And I will be making our plans known in the coming year.

But I will tell you this today: it's going to be a very difficult fight. It's going to be arduous. It's going to require tough decisions. But, folks, positive change is like childbirth. Yes, there is pain, but there is no greater reward in life.

And this much is clear: No major American city has successfully reformed its schools without the active support and engagement of its business and civic leadership. We can't succeed as a city without your full participation in this campaign for change.

I realize that these goals are big goals. But thinking big has always been the story of Los Angeles.

This has always been a city where dreams come true. This has always been the place where the future arrived first.

Let's remember the spirit of the town hall here this afternoon.

Let's see that future as a common future.

Let's see it as a green future.

Let's see it as a future in which the dream of home ownership is alive and well.

As a future where we are linked to one another by a world-class transit system.

Where the jobs we grow are good jobs.

And where every Angeleno has an opportunity to share in our prosperity.

Thank you for listening, and I would be happy to answer your questions.