



**Office of the Mayor
City of Los Angeles**

ANTONIO R. VILLARAIGOSA

**“The Better Angels”
An Address on the State of the City of Los Angeles
As prepared for delivery
April 18, 2007**

President Garcetti; Members of the City Council; City Controller Chick; City Attorney Delgadillo; Superintendent Brewer, members of the School Board, commissioners, community leaders...

And who can forget Principal Hamm and the students and faculty of East Valley High?

By order of the charter of the City of Los Angeles, it is my duty as Mayor to make an annual report on the State of our City. But first I want to say one word this evening about my state of mind.

I want you to know how grateful I feel. I don't think it's possible to say how grateful I truly am to have the opportunity to serve this city which gave my family everything.

As Angelenos we have many so many reasons to feel blessed. I believe that we are at the threshold of a special moment in our City's history. Tonight we share this moment with the students of East Valley High, whose voices first rang through these hallways this past October. East Valley is a brand new school. On a regular calendar! Where the first bright notes of an entirely new tradition are being composed each and every day.

And I will tell you: This campus is positively alive with possibility!

And, Angelenos, it is by no coincidence that this is precisely how I feel about the State of our City!

We live in a place like no other place on earth. More worlds are colliding in Los Angeles than any location in the known universe: 224 languages spoken in 469 richly-populated square miles of land.

The heart of our culture is pulsing here. We are the world's creative capital. We are the gateway to the East and the portal to the South.

Our ports and our infrastructure are the engines powering the national economy. We have the world's leading research universities.

We are absolutely alive with possibility!

And, ladies and gentlemen, I believe the moment is now in the City of Angels.

Never before has this infinitely diverse city been more united behind a clear set of common priorities. We've never had a deeper bench of commissioners and community leaders or a more talented team in our city family.

I am privileged to serve with one of the finest Councils in the history of our City. Believe me, they don't get nearly the credit – or the airtime – they deserve! Please put your hands together for President Eric Garcetti and his colleagues on the Los Angeles City Council.

Together, together, we Angelenos are making the case for progressives everywhere.

We're demonstrating that you can expand essential services for people. That you can put more cops on the street. That you can fill more potholes. That you can provide more summer jobs for young people. That you can build permanent supportive housing for the chronically addicted and the mentally ill. That you can expand and protect library hours . You can do all these things while cutting a nearly 300 million dollar deficit to a third of its original size in just two years.

I believe that we are showing the way in LA.

With a progressive and scientific approach to community policing, Chief Bratton and the brave men and women of the LAPD have cut crime in Los Angeles to the lowest it's been since the Eisenhower Administration.

We've shown you can reduce the tax burden on businesses – that the City has a relevant role in fighting film piracy.

Despite state and national trends, 2006 was the best year in City history for new construction, for activity at the port, for retail sales. Jobs are up. Unemployment is down.

And after decades of deterioration and doubt, the debate now concerns only the fine details of the city-making renewal that is inevitable in Downtown Los Angeles.

No city on the face of the earth is positioned more strategically in the first decade of the 21st Century.

So, I report to you tonight: The state of Los Angeles is not only strong... it is limitless.

Of course, we know, we have challenges. We have tremendous challenges. We face risks as great as the rewards.

Increasingly, like America from coast to coast, we are becoming a city of marble and cardboard, a city of prodigious wealth and withering poverty. The defining dream of home ownership is becoming an impossible dream for more and more of our people.

We are losing our children by the thousands to gangs and guns to drugs and disenchantment. We have the nation's weakest core because we have America's smallest middle class. And we are the impoverished inheritors of a persistent refusal to plan and invest.

As a result, we waste more time stuck in traffic. We get less time with our kids. And we spend more days of the year choked by smog.

Yes, we have challenges. And our future as a great global city depends on facing them today. And I have a simple view, Angelenos: I believe it's up to us. It's up to those of us who believe it's possible.

People are so tired today, so turned off and tuned out from public life. It's up to those who believe.

It's up to those of us who believe that a city of four million can be one city. It's up to those who understand that government is not the enemy; it's the hands and the feet of community.

It's up to those of us who share a philosophy based on a fundamental belief in the common good and the goodness common to every human being. It's up to those who believe – as Lincoln did – in “the better angels of our nature.”

It is up to us to lead. To prove that we can be able stewards of the public good. To show that we can deliver on our promises while balancing the books.

Last year, we promised to place Los Angeles on a permanent and fiscally responsible path by eliminating our \$295 million structural deficit. I'm pleased to report tonight that we are more than two-thirds of the way there!

Our budget proposes to reduce the deficit by an additional \$138 million this year. In just two years, we will have cut the deficit by more than \$200 million!

And we're doing it the old-fashioned way: With aggressive, hands-on management. We're slowing the growth of spending. We're challenging general managers to tighten their belts and to do more with less. We're finding smart savings at the back of every desk drawer and beneath every sofa cushion.

Let me give you an example: By simply putting trash compactors at transfer stations, we've cut 5,200 truck trips and saved taxpayers almost \$1 million in the bargain. By installing more energy efficient lights at traffic signals, we're generating savings of between 80 and 90 percent.

And we're saving for a rainy day. Our budget will put \$187 million in our City's savings account.

Angelenos, make no mistake, we are sweating the pennies – but we are committed to tackling global issues.

No city confronts greater environmental challenges than Los Angeles. And we're facing them squarely by daring our people to make la the cleanest and greenest big city in America. We believe that we can't be a great global city if we're not a great global citizen. And we believe it's possible to dramatically reduce the carbon footprint of a city of four million souls.

Last August, I joined with President Clinton and Prime Minister Blair to announce a new effort by the world's great cities to join in the fight against climate change. In a few weeks, I will announce a Comprehensive Climate Change Plan for Los Angeles.

What we have to do to get there is no secret. We have to reduce our over reliance on fossil fuels on coal and oil. That's why we've set the goal of getting 20 percent of our electricity from renewable sources by 2010. Angelenos, we're up to 8 percent and counting. And two weeks ago, we broke ground on an innovative project converting biosolids to energy, the first of its kind in the world.

We're cleaning up the air around our port. We're making the Port of LA an international leader in improving air quality and promoting sustainable development.

We've launched the Million Trees L.A. initiative. We're building more parks with a goal of adding 35 new parks in five years. Just this year, we acquired the land for seven new parks – and two are already open.

We're bringing back the Los Angeles River. Thanks to the superb leadership of Councilmember Ed Reyes, we will consider an historic Master Plan in May to transform this vital waterway into one of the world's great urban green spaces.

We're making progress towards the goal of recycling 70 percent of our waste by 2015. We're expanding incentives for green building. We're increasing our use of recycled water. We're promoting transit oriented development and a new approach to community planning based on a bold vision of smart, elegant urbanism. And we're redressing the mistakes of the past by restoring and protecting the precious natural environment of the Owens Valley.

And, Angelenos, we are surely and steadily accelerating our ambition when it comes to addressing traffic congestion and transit planning in Los Angeles. We're driving full steam ahead.

Remember, a year ago, the infrastructure bonds were stuck in park? Together with our legislative leaders, Angelenos were instrumental in crafting and passing a \$19 billion statewide transit bond.

I was proud - along with Valley Councilmember Wendy Greuel - to have played a role in persuading the California Transportation Commission to restore funding for critical projects on the 5 and the 405.

It is outrageously short-sighted to shortchange transit investments in California's most gridlocked cities. We now have 4 billion additional dollars for transit investment that we didn't have last year. The tracks are laid for \$1.4 billion in new rail construction.

And Angelenos: We are eating and sleeping traffic mitigation at City Hall.

We've synchronized the lights on critical corridors in the Valley and in South Los Angeles. We successfully deployed a "Gridlock Tiger Team" on Wilshire Boulevard. I am pleased to announce tonight that we will be unleashing the Tiger Teams to both the Valley and to South LA. Our traffic officers will continue to unclog the City's busiest intersections during the morning and evening rush hours. And to keep people moving smoothly, in the next fiscal year, we are going to fill 300,000 potholes and repair 575 miles of City streets.

Now, allow me to address what I believe is the most important challenge we face.

It begins with a story.

On December 20, I received a call from my security detail informing me that there had been a shooting in Angelino Heights. At about 8:30 at night two gang members – one barely 20-years-old – were seen driving down a quiet residential street. Neighbors heard the sound of gunfire. Shots rang from the car toward a nearby house. The car sped off. But one stray bullet pierced the front window of a neighboring apartment.

That bullet crossed the living room and penetrated a wall into the kitchen, where stood a lovely 9-year-old girl. Her name was Charupa Wongwisetsiri. She died a few days later in the hospital.

Charupa, or Zsa Zsa, as her neighbors nicknamed her, had been in America for only a year, but her neighbors already called her a pint-sized ambassador for the whole community. They told stories about how she walked her little Chihuahua around the block, about how she talked unabashedly to every neighbor like she was the Mayor of Angelino Heights. They said she had a way of softening even the most recalcitrant of hearts with her relentless enthusiasm and her infectious warmth and humanity.

The next day I met and grieved with Charupa's mother. She told me she had brought her daughter to Los Angeles – and to America – on the promise of a better education and a brighter future.

This was just a week after 14-year old Cheryl Green, a beautiful young girl, was murdered by gang members in the Harbor Gateway because of the color of her skin.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am told that East Valley High is an "unclaimed school." I'm told that four local gangs are currently vying for control here. We have to stop them.

Of course, by now we're all acquainted with the grim arithmetic.

In Los Angeles, we have more gang members than any city in the nation. More than 39,000 youth and adults affiliated with over 400 different gangs. Last year alone, gang violence claimed the lives of 272 Angelenos; 1500 of our people were hit by a bullet discharged from a gang member's gun.

And we see the maliciousness of each murder escalating in a rising tide of violence as the gangs communicate their strength with increasing bravado and more sophisticated weaponry. Teenage kids armed with fully automatic AK 47s. One local gang with an estimated 1,000 members – its members taking orders from jail cells, and exporting violence throughout the Americas.

So, today, after extensive consultation with neighborhood and faith-based leaders, in close collaboration with Chief Bratton and with our county, state and federal partners in law enforcement, and based in significant part on the excellent work of Councilmember Tony Cardenas, Chairman of the Ad hoc Committee on Gangs, I am pleased to offer the elements of a comprehensive and community-based anti-gang strategy.

It recognizes that first and foremost our youth are the true foundation of a great global city.

Our strategy is tough on crime and equally tough on the root causes of crime. We know that there are no simple and satisfying solutions to this intricate and complex problem. But we know where we must begin. Our strategy starts by going straight after the worst gangs and the people who lead them.

In February, we targeted LA's top gangs for suppression. We appointed a gang lead in the Police Department. We've published a Top Ten list of the most wanted, and we sent an unmistakable message when we caught the first three in just three weeks. We've strengthened our City's partnerships with half a dozen federal agencies, targeting our enforcement efforts in the areas of highest need.

We're working with our international partners to coordinate our response to the growth of transnational gangs. Next month I will be traveling to El Salvador to meet with President Antonio Saca on ways to better coordinate our response to this international challenge. And we've already seen a short-term dip in gang-related crime. But we need to do much, much more.

The budget I will present tomorrow provides funding for 780 new police officers in the next fiscal year. Los Angeles is the most under-policed big city in America. Gang members outnumber our men and women in blue by a ratio of over four to one. Ensuring the safety of our people is the fundamental obligation of government. We need more cops on the street.

And I want to say something about police hiring: A funny thing sometimes occurs when you set high goals. Believe me, there were many who said we wouldn't hit our mark of 650 new officers this past year. We didn't only meet it – we beat it – by 80 additional officers! And this year, we will hit our all-time high.

Angelenos, we can't afford to aim low.

And this is why we cannot for one single moment confine ourselves to the dim view that gang violence is primarily an issue for law enforcement.

Take it from a former high school dropout: Fighting gangs is fundamentally a question of putting people on a path to a productive life.

Yes, this is the harder work. This is the better work – believing in our ability to reach the better angel in every Angeleno.

It's going to require a new toughness and a new practicality. We're going to need to coordinate our efforts with far greater precision. We're going to need to invest in strategies proven by practice and supported by research.

In the coming days, I intend to name a Director for Gang Reduction and Youth Development in the Mayor's Office who will bring a long-needed single point of leadership and accountability on this issue.

Our budget identifies \$168 million in spending for youth and anti-gang efforts citywide, and we are going to work to bring this spending into smarter alignment.

We're providing some 10,000 summer youth jobs. We're protecting extended hours at every library branch in the City – six days and 52 hours a week including Saturdays.

We're funding after school programs like LA's Best.

And we recognize that what we're doing is just a start. Gang violence is a national problem. We need national leadership.

Researchers now estimate that the total cost of the war in Iraq could reach \$2 trillion. Mr. President: It's time to tackle our challenges at home. We are losing too many children on the streets of America's cities.

But Angelenos: we can't just shout at the wind. We need to make better use of the resources we've got. Working with City Controller Laura Chick we are going to undertake a top-down, bottom-up review of City spending on gang prevention and intervention programs. I'm not going to prejudge the conclusion of this important and painstaking work, but I will say it here and now. There will be no sacred cows in this process. We don't have a single dime to squander.

Ultimately, our approach recognizes what the research has proven. To be effective, we must concentrate our efforts at the neighborhood level. Our strategy needs to be rooted in the very communities where the problem is most serious. And this work must take place block-by-block, street-by-street, child-by-child.

Our plan designates the immediate creation of eight gang reduction zones where intensive services will compliment stepped-up community policing. These areas have been selected based on an objective assessment of gang activity, crime rates, test scores, truancy, dropout statistics, and conditions of joblessness and poverty.

We won't just "flood the zone" with police. Working with community and faith-based organizations, we will also saturate these neighborhoods with services providing young people with a pathway out. After-school programs. Parenting classes. Counseling services. Dropout prevention. Gang-awareness training. Tattoo removal. Prisoner reentry. And job placement.

We know that this multi-service approach works. We know because we have Homeboy Industries in the house tonight! For those of you who do not know, Homeboy serves a greater number of gang-involved men and women than any organization in our City: 1,000 people a month.

Founded by a Jesuit priest with an unbreakable faith in the power of unconditional love, Homeboy is helping gang members and those making their reentry from jail by giving them the dignity that comes with work – as scratch bakers, as silk screen artists, as landscapers, as maintenance and graffiti-removal workers.

Their "Ya 'Stuvo" tattoo removal program is helping countless young men and women reclaim their identities. At Homeboy, they say "nothing stops a bullet like a job." And they're right. The area has experienced a 44 percent reduction in gang crime.

So, today I am calling on the Governor and state legislative leaders to provide \$30 million in state funding so that we can take this multi-service approach citywide and expand to ten more sites.

While we're at it, we're supporting tougher regulation of firearms in both Sacramento and Washington, DC. And we are fighting for federal passage of the Feinstein-Hatch bill, which would provide \$1 billion in anti-gang funding nationally.

But Angelenos, if nothing stops a bullet like a job, we know that nothing gets you a job like a diploma.

That's why we can't face this problem – or address the State of our City – if we don't face the biggest challenge of all.

In my State of the City address last April, I asked the Legislature to grant Los Angeles and other cities a greater role in leading positive change in our schools. The legislature heard the call and acted boldly. But yesterday, the Court of Appeals blocked implementation of the new law.

Whatever ultimately happens in court, I want to be abundantly clear tonight:

Not only have we forged a new consensus about the need for change. Have no doubt: We are in the school-reform business to stay.

First, we intend to partner aggressively with the LAUSD to address the gang problem: By helping to develop school-based violence reduction plans at every campus; by encouraging the expansion of parent resource centers; by teaming up strategically on the joint use of City and District facilities to create more after-hour opportunities for kids; by expanding the network of safe passageways and safe havens and working with our transit agencies to ensure that every child is safe as they make their way to and from school; by expanding youth mediation and conflict resolution programs; by adding opportunities for career and technical training; and by providing our kids with greater job opportunities in the summer.

Ladies and gentlemen, here at East Valley High, I can feel the possibility in the air. A new reform coalition will lead the School Board in July. We have a new superintendent committed to making "transformative" change. And I am confident that we can forge a true partnership with the new School Board on a plan to rescue our lowest-performing schools.

Angelenos, we have no alternative but to try.

We can't be afraid to raise expectations.

We have to be willing to wade into the weeds, to take on the thorniest issues – regardless of the political cost or consequence.

You see, more than the vicissitudes of the economy or convolutions of the crime rate, I believe that the State of our City has always been best described by a state of mind. By the belief that you can create anything you can conceive.

Of course, whenever I think about what this means, I think of my own mother. A single mom, she raised four kids. She sometimes worked two jobs. She lived on the Eastside. She rode the bus nearly every day of her life.

But she lived her life with confidence. She looked forward to the future secure in the knowledge that – with hard work – her dreams for her children would come true in this incredible City where the dreams of so many had bloomed before.

Angelenos: I'm asking you to dream with me tonight.

If you grew up in a neighborhood like the one where many of us grew up, you know with the certainty that only experience brings that every single gang member starts out a kid, just like yours and mine.

You know what their moms go through.

You know how families grieve.

You know what a mentor can mean.

You see the vistas that open up with great public schools.

And if you are observant, you can see the better angels.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have much, much work ahead of us.

Let's face it with passion.

Let's face it together.

Let's face it as One City.

Thank you for listening.

God bless you all.