

MAYOR CHARLES ROYER
STATE OF THE CITY SPEECH
JUNE 11, 1984

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge that June 11 is a very important day in Seattle. Today is not only Jeanette Williams' birthday, it is also the sixth anniversary of the day the freighter Chavez rammed the West Seattle Bridge. Few will remember my words today, but West Seattle will never forget the events of that day. Next month, we will celebrate the opening of the fine new high-level bridge, but today we pay homage to the ship that began the demolition phase of a project that has been on time and under budget ever since. And to you, Jeanette. Happy Birthday.

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I have occasionally used charts and graphs to help illustrate the state of the city. Today I draw on graphics by Room 209, Grades 5 and 6, Whitworth Elementary.

Listen to this combined assessment:

"Seattle, what's to dislike?

I don't like the crime, litter and pollution.

On our streets, traffic, traffic every day.
Coming and going, this way and that.

There's a line at the food bank. There are
burglars, murderers and shootouts in Seattle.

I don't like the way these words sound and feel,
full of fear and accusation.

How can we change, Seattle?

"Seattle, what's to like?

A little bit of everything from forests to trees
to harbors of water.

No other city has so much.

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I like the face of the city where buildings are tall like crystal blades of grass looking to the sky.

Downtown, there's everything. The Pike Place Market dicing and slicing, mixing up something new.

Towns, within town.

I like the racial mix with so many different kinds of people.

We care about each other.

We are a sparkling, jewel-like Emerald Seattle city."

Modern American cities don't always provide a supportive environment for children. There has been a growing perception that cities are not safe, that urban schools have failed, and that children are better off in the suburbs.

It is not difficult to understand that perception. The neighborhood fabric of most cities has been damaged--by freeways slicing through communities; by environmental carelessness; and by the neglect of parks, libraries, and neighborhood schools.

As that damage grew worse, families moved out, taking with them not only their children, but their political will, imagination and resources.

For a century, Seattle has been known as a family city--a good place to raise children. But since the Boeing recession, when large numbers of workers lost their jobs and left, Seattle has lost its children. Between 1970 and 1980, the number of children and youth in Seattle dropped by 36 percent, while the population declined only seven percent. In fact, our entire population decline in the last decade was accounted for by the loss of more than 40,000 children.

We endured ten years of the anguish that goes with closing schools. To many it seemed Seattle was destined to become a childless city, vulnerable to the patterns of violence and decay that characterize any community where life is not tempered by the influence of children.

But the tide has begun to turn. After ten years of decline, the number of children born in Seattle has increased steadily the last four years and school enrollments are stabilizing.

While more children are being born into the city, it is not at all certain their families will stay. Concerns about safety, the quality of education, the environment, and the cost of housing continue to drive families away. Seattle is at a turning point. During the next few years we will decide--by our actions or by our inaction--whether Seattle will succeed as a city for families with children.

KidsPlace

A few days ago, together with the Superintendent of Schools and the leaders of several community organizations, I announced what might well become an action plan for reversing the trends that are aging our city. We are calling it "KidsPlace."

KidsPlace began with a survey of students in the city's public and private schools. We want their views on Seattle's strengths and weaknesses and their ideas for improving our city. Corporate donors and foundations already have agreed to fund the 20 best ideas, and I am offering the job of Mayor for a day to the kid with the best idea. (I want to stress that the contest is limited to kids--Councilmembers are not eligible.)

Once the results of the survey are in, we'll highlight the best features Seattle offers to families, and develop a plan to overcome our weaknesses.

KidsPlace is meant to put the needs of children at the top of the city's agenda and to begin to make the kind of progress for children we have made for the elderly during the past decade. Just as Seattle's nationally respected initiatives for the elderly brought benefits to everyone, improvements for children will make Seattle more livable for everyone. For example, pedestrian safety improvements may be designed for children, but they help all of us who cross streets at less than Olympic speed.

The new 911 emergency system will aid children calling for help by automatically displaying the address from which the call is made. But it will also help those who do not speak English, and those who may be in shock or unable to speak. A city that respects children respects the human spirit.

To build that respect within the government, we organized-- more than a year ago--a task force on children in the city, primarily involving department heads and chaired by the Mayor. We explored new information. As a result, I intend to review each department's budget proposal for its impact on families and children.

We are dealing with a vastly different social landscape. Fifty percent of the children in Seattle's public schools now come from single-parent families, and nearly two-thirds of all Seattle mothers work outside the home.

Employee Benefits

Together with the unions who represent many of our employees, we are pursuing several measures to provide better support for the parents within our own sizable workforce. For example, we will review our benefit plans to ensure good coverage for employees and their dependents for alcohol and substance abuse problems.

I have also directed my staff to begin a review of our leave plans as they relate to parents. We expect to expand the use of sick leave to cover child care and to create leave options for new fathers and new adoptive parents.

Comparable Worth

Clearly, the changing family structure tells us that city government should also take the lead in changing wage structures to compensate jobs of comparable worth with comparable pay.

We have already begun work on the complex task of developing a system to implement comparable worth. The joint labor-management committee I established this spring is reviewing the system that will be the basis for comparable worth, and that work will be finished by mid-July. I will move as quickly as possible to provide equity for those whose work has been undervalued and underpaid.

Health care

The high cost of being born is a serious problem for many Seattle families, especially the working poor. The Health Department, Seattle's community clinics and five hospitals have joined to create a unique system to address this problem--a system that now delivers 12 percent of all the babies born in Seattle. Still, infant mortality among Blacks continues at high levels and nearly 1,000 women in

King County did not receive adequate prenatal care last year. While we have begun to address this problem, I intend to give it special attention in this year's budget.

Survival Services

Too many of Seattle's children are growing up poor. Between 1970 and 1980, the percentage of Seattle's families living in poverty increased from 8.4 to 12 percent. Nearly half of those receiving help from food banks last year were children.

Human services traditionally have been viewed as the responsibility of the state and federal governments. Last November, we turned to our general fund to respond to the critical need for emergency shelter, food, and medical care for the poor. It was the right decision.

I share the frustration of those who cannot see why so many remain homeless and without food in a nation of plenty. You and I know it is the direct result of federal priorities that shortchange the poor to fuel the arms race. There will be homeless and hungry people throughout our nation until those priorities change. We must respond.

I will recommend continued funding for the Emergency Human Services Program in 1985. My request will reflect the City's fair share to meet the documented need. I will also develop a strategy for getting others to do their part.

Childcare

Working, single parents make child care a central issue, not only to support social choice, but to meet economic necessity. Our Department of Human Resources provides childcare assistance for 2,000 children from low-income families, and now operates the federal Head Start program for 700 children. But hundreds more are on the waiting lists for these programs. Even affluent parents have difficulty with the availability and logistics of childcare. As we know from helping build a childcare center at the Pike Place Market, state and local regulations and the cost of space make it difficult to provide affordable childcare downtown. To help create childcare near the workplace, I have recommended incentives and development bonuses to encourage childcare centers in new downtown buildings.

We should reinvigorate our work with the school district to create a system of private nonprofit childcare centers in

elementary schools throughout the city. If we are to market our city and our public schools to parents of young children, we must find creative ways to put the neighborhood back in neighborhood schools.

Family Neighborhoods

Our strong neighborhoods are our best hope in keeping our children. In rewriting the City's Comprehensive Plan, we have protected those neighborhoods. We dedicated more than 70 percent of Seattle's land to single family neighborhoods, and required more open space and lower building heights in multifamily areas.

We have reinforced those new land use codes with action--not only to strengthen neighborhoods, but to build them.

Burke-Gilman Place, a new neighborhood we are building near Children's Orthopedic Hospital, will include 37 units of housing for families whose children have special health needs, and a park designed to allow those children to participate with everyone else.

Another new neighborhood is taking shape along Yesler Way, as the Environmental Works and the Central Area PDA complete work on 23 new family townhouses and prepare to start building another 22 homes across the street.

Scattered Site Housing

We haven't drawn attention to all the family housing we have built in the last few years, for the simple reason that we wanted housing that would not attract attention.

I remember very well the angry words when I first brought the scattered site family housing program to some neighborhoods. But that program has worked well. Six hundred and thirty-two family homes will be completed by the end of the year. That is the equivalent of a public housing project as big as High Point or Rainier Vista, yet the housing blends so well with the neighborhood it has become part of the fabric of the community.

Dr. James Hogan of Seattle University conducted a study of the scattered site program and reports it has done more than provide shelter for families--it has lifted their spirits, helped them toward new opportunities, and improved neighborhood housing quality.

Senior Housing Program

Our Senior Housing Program is another major victory for Seattle's families. By providing safe, affordable housing throughout the city, the program makes it possible for elderly people to stay near friends and relatives and continue their contributions to family and neighborhood. Seattle ranks third among major cities in the percentage of population over 65, but our housing stock was never tailored to their needs. A new supply of homes custom-built for elderly residents helps to balance Seattle's housing supply, and that benefits everyone.

The Senior Housing Program is on schedule and far under budget. Three hundred and nineteen units are already finished, with 500 more under construction. Through hard work and good timing, the Seattle Housing Authority will complete 1,000 units next year and still have more than \$10 million with which to work.

The SHA Commissioners and the Senior Housing Oversight Committee have proposed that the remaining funds be used to continue the Program, adding more than 200 rehabilitated units for the downtown elderly, several small projects for the disabled, and a major project designed for the frail elderly most at risk of going to nursing homes.

A few have recommended we discontinue the program.

When the people voted by a large majority to provide \$48 million to meet the housing needs of the elderly and disabled, they expected us to meet that need. We have exceeded our goals for production, but we are a long way from meeting the need. Nearly a thousand people are still on the waiting list for senior housing.

It makes no sense to take funds away from a needed program simply because it exceeds its goals. Every penny raised by the Senior Housing Bond Issue should be used for the purpose for which the voters intended--to build housing for those who need it.

We are strengthening family neighborhoods in other ways:

- In Georgetown, the old City Hall has been beautifully restored to house the Georgetown Clinics and Service Center;

- In Wallingford, the Interlake School is being converted to housing and shops, and Thursday I will turn over the keys of the old Wallingford Precinct Station, so it, too, can be restored as the new home of the 45th Street Community Clinic and the Wilmot Branch Library;
- In the Central Area, DCD is helping the school district assemble land for a new school to replace Bailey Gatzert, the first new school in many years;
- At Greenlake, the Parks and Water Departments--and the weather--are working together to battle the milfoil, algae, and other afflictions that threaten the lake;
- In West Seattle, Madrona, and Mt. Baker the Engineering Department is correcting sewer problems that affect neighborhood beaches;
- In neighborhoods throughout the city, new traffic diverters and signals are being installed;
- Five thousand street trees have been added in the past five years; and
- Six thousand family homes have been weatherized by City Light and Human Resources, saving enough power to equal the output of Lucky Peak Dam.

Utilities

Our utilities provide critical services to Seattle's families--services that we take for granted unless they are interrupted or there is a sudden increase in cost.

We had to increase rates this year to maintain the financial integrity of our utilities. Those efforts succeeded, even against the heavy odds created by the WPPSS default and the uncertainty that followed. City Light and the Water Department both won high double A ratings on their last trips to Wall Street. The Lucky Peak Dam project required a lot of overtime at City Light, OMB and the City Council, but we made it work and moved another step closer to energy self-reliance.

More teamwork will be required of us in the months ahead. We must act on conservation standards, landfill closures and a long range plan for the city's water supply. Our review of

Metro's water quality budget and our work on rate equity will affect the budgets of every family in the city.

The Downtown Plan

Our decisions about downtown development also affect Seattle's families. No other city in the country has such strong single family neighborhoods so close to downtown. By preserving their character, we set the stage for our downtown plan. If we are to create jobs and still protect neighborhoods, office and commercial growth must be sharply focused downtown.

The growth of downtown Seattle as the region's center of international trade and commercial activity, represents the cornerstone of Seattle's future economic development, adding 55,000 new jobs by the year 2000. We need those new jobs. But downtown is more than a commercial center--it is the neighborhood everybody shares. It should be constantly alive with people, not a sixty-story ghost town at the end of the work day.

Our Downtown Plan will strengthen downtown neighborhoods and encourage economic development and new jobs. It will reinforce the neighborhood character of the International District, Pioneer Square, the Market and Belltown and increase downtown residential population to 25,000 by the turn of the century.

The Plan is already having a positive effect, even in the early stages of Council review:

- Home builders are approaching the City with plans for the new Belltown housing district;
- The Urban Mass Transit Agency has rated the Metro transit tunnel as the top project in the nation, while the House Appropriations Committee has put us on the list for federal funding;
- The Seattle Art Museum will bring new life to the depressed area along Second Avenue;
- The Downtown Seattle Association has suggested the creation of a Downtown Trust Fund to raise millions of dollars for downtown parks, the Art Museum and housing;

- The DSA has voted to share the City's commitment to maintain the existing supply of downtown low-income housing;
- Pioneer Square Theatre, Intiman, Empty Space, and City-Stage are opening new theatres downtown; and
- Citizen volunteers continue to refine plans to convert the urban desert between the city and its waterfront into a harborfront park that all Seattle can enjoy.

If we adopt the downtown plan on the schedule Paul Kraabel proposes, we will ensure that the next wave of downtown development is sensitive to Seattle's spirit.

Seattle Center

Like the Market, the waterfront, and the downtown shopping districts, Seattle Center and the Zoo are major family attractions, and they are both showing new energy. The fine touch of Ewen Dingwall is apparent in the appearance of the Center's grounds, where record-breaking crowds attended the Northwest Folk Life Festival. The China Exhibit is well underway, and the new Bagley Wright Theater offers a spectrum of entertainment from William Shakespeare to Lily Tomlin.

David Hancocks' well publicized escape from the zoo carried him only as far as the Seattle Center. His imagination will be evident in the long range plan for the Center which we will submit to the Council the end of this month.

The Zoo

We've all followed progress at the zoo through the P.I.'s morning elephant bulletins. It's been good progress. The children's crusade to save the elephants is being matched by corporate donations. I knew from visiting schools that kids cared about the zoo, but I didn't realize how strongly adults felt until I announced the formation of the zoo commission and was swamped with volunteers. With this infusion of support, Woodland Park Zoo will continue to develop into one of the finest in the nation.

The Environment

The painful decision to close another family attraction--Gas Works Park--did not endear the Mayor to Seattle's children. In early July, the health advisory committee will complete its assessment of the risks associated with the park. Based on that report, we will do what is necessary to finish the

job we began a decade ago--converting an awful scar from the city's past into a beautiful--and safe--part of Seattle's future.

After toxic soils were discovered at Terminal 5 last fall, I appointed a committee to coordinate City departments on all environmental issues. As a result, we were able to respond quickly to Gas Works, and to other environmental problems.

With the Council's help, we succeeded in getting Metro to begin work on a comprehensive plan for the improvement of water quality in Puget Sound.

Gas Works Park dramatizes the fact that those who came before us were not always gentle with the land. Now we not only have the responsibility of cleaning up our own mistakes, but theirs. And clean them up we will.

Bond Issues

We have a similar problem in overcoming the historical neglect of fire stations, libraries, and parks. We must make up for what we couldn't do during the Boeing recession and the years of slow recovery that followed, a need estimated at \$200 million.

We have been doing a better job of keeping up with current needs: in the last year, we replaced the north and south police stations, resurfaced 11 miles of streets, began repair of five major bridges, installed a flood control system at Longfellow Creek, and started a raging debate in Fremont about the new color for their bridge.

We have also added to the City's emergency reserves. Since 1978, we have brought the emergency fund from a negative balance to its present level of more than \$6 million and built the Cumulative Reserve Fund from a level of \$40,000 by adding more than \$12 million during the past three years.

We have developed the City's first comprehensive long-range maintenance plan which I will submit to the Council in July. We are doing a better job of keeping up, but we can't make up for past neglect within our operating budget. To the extent funds could be reprogrammed from less urgent projects, we have done so. But large amounts of uncommitted funds are not waiting in the City's treasury to be diverted to fix the parks, libraries, and firestations. Yes, there is money in

our accounts-- but it has been committed to necessities like building senior housing and repairing bridges.

The Seattle 1-2-3 bond issue won majority support last fall, in harder times. The proposal you approved last week is much less costly. By reducing the term of the bonds, we will save \$100 million in interest payments. This is our best chance to avoid passing on to our children the bill for repairing the parks, libraries, and community centers that are so important to Seattle's families. We're going to win this time. For the future.

School Bonds

A few weeks ago, three members of the Council and I met with officials from another major city to learn from their successes and problems. After several hours of upbeat presentations on almost every aspect of life in their city, we asked about their public schools. There was an awkward silence. Later, several of them confided they had simply given up on their schools.

That is one thing Seattle must never do. We have asked a lot from our schools during the past fifteen years--to be sensitive to neighborhood concerns as they faced closing one-third of their facilities; to implement desegregation without a court order, to accommodate the huge influx of refugees; and to teach children from families who speak 38 languages. We asked all this during a period of severe budget cutbacks and reductions in faculty.

After fifteen years of dealing with every conceivable problem, from the end of the baby boom to the advent of break dancing, it is remarkable that Seattle still has a good public school system. But we do. Our students are scoring well above the national average in achievement tests. We now have the chance to make that good system better. Enrollment is stabilizing. For the first time in many years, we have stability in faculty. The public rallied last February to pass the levy with 85 percent support.

We can solve the district's most serious problems by passing the \$64 million bond issue to repair the schools. The need is real. As the increasing number of young children become ready for school, our schools must be ready for them. School buildings must not only be safe, they must be inviting.

This is a good time to ask the voters for the tools to make the city a better place for children. The City is in solid financial condition. The local economy is growing at a rate of 7 percent, a pace that exceeds inflation. In spite of financial problems throughout the region, we have retained strong double A bond ratings. Our investments are secure and productive. We have not had to use the full local option sales tax to balance our budget. Employment has increased by 31,000 new jobs in the last year, and thirty-four percent of Seattle's employers expect to hire more workers during the next three months, a signal of strength in Seattle's economy.

We have the economic, human and natural resources to support a sustained effort to make Seattle the best city in the nation in which to raise a family. The forces against us are complex and will not be quickly or easily overcome. But Seattle has the energy and imagination to overcome those forces and we have the audacity to believe we will succeed where other cities have failed. We can renew Seattle's tradition as a city that supports its parents and treasures its children, and through that tradition, remains forever young.