



July 9, 2017

Dear Fellow East Siders:

As the much-enjoyed evening concert series returns this Wednesday to Blackstone Boulevard, my letter will discuss the State budget, the Ward 3 primary election and the response to a serious child safety issue at the Kizirian elementary school.

Just over a week ago, both houses of the General Assembly suspended their sessions without passing a budget for the fiscal year that began last Saturday. As a result, the State is currently operating under the provisions of the 2016-17 budget. A failure to adopt the current year's budget may cause three major impacts on the City's budget (which was based on the version passed by the Rhode Island House of Representatives, but not the Rhode Island Senate). First, the City's recently-issued automobile tax bills incorporate the reductions prescribed by the House budget (funded with approximately \$3.5 million in State subsidies to Providence). Second, the City budget incorporates an increase in State municipal aid of approximately \$3 million over last year. Finally, the School Department budget assumes an approximately \$10 million increase in State education aid. Some or all of these impacts can be deferred temporarily, but if left uncorrected they will cause substantial hardships and/or may require the passage of a supplemental City budget. We in Providence share these concerns with citizens in many other Rhode Island cities and towns; so it appears likely the current standoff in the General Assembly has to be resolved; however, should that not occur within the next few weeks, it will necessary to develop contingency plans.

Our neighbors in the Third Ward will hold a primary election next Wednesday (July 12) to nominate a Democratic candidate for the seat vacated due to a recall election on May 2. These voters have endured the misfortune of electing two representatives (Speaker Fox and Councilman Jackson) who became subject to corruption investigations, but they deserve great credit for successfully using the democratic process to remove Councilman Jackson from office. All three candidates in the primary deserve our thanks for their interest in serving the City, and each offers different valuable possible contributions to City government. I am particularly pleased that each has an established career outside of a possible term on the City Council. Their careers not only provide a base of knowledge and skill, but also reduce the risk they will face any personal financial stress that can lead to the temptations that compromised the political careers of elected representatives, such as Councilmen Jackson and Aponte. When our neighbors cast their votes, I hope they will select somebody who helps them and the City dispel the cloud that currently hangs over City Hall due to the prior indictments of the Council's top two leaders. To clear away that cloud, we will need more than somebody who agrees personally to obey the law. Instead, I hope to gain a colleague who will join in the hard work to develop and gain passage of stronger ethical and "good government" standards for all City Council members, as the current leadership does not see the need for this type of reform.

Many of us, especially parents with children in the Providence Public Schools, are deeply concerned about the report of a physical education teacher at the Kizirian Elementary School who was recently arraigned on child molestation charges. The media also reported there are questions about the school's response upon learning of the incident, and whether State laws requiring reporting of these incidents were properly followed. Last Monday, the School Board began to review its procedures, but postponed an investigation of the incident at the request of the Commissioner of Public Safety, who wanted first to conduct a criminal investigation of the potentially responsible individuals. At this past Thursday's meeting, the City Council considered a resolution to refer the matter to the Attorney General, which would have been a mistake for several reasons. First, investigations of this kind are typically performed by the State Police, not the Attorney General. Second, the School Board has the first responsibility to address this issue, and the City Council lacks the expertise to

manage the details of the School Board's operations. Finally, a complete investigation should go beyond the question of whether any crimes were committed to raise such issues as whether educators failed to perform their duties properly (even if it did not rise to the level of a crime), and whether the School Department needs stronger standards and policies to ensure greater vigilance. Thankfully, the City Council ultimately decided to forward the resolution to the Education Committee for review and revision. When the Education Committee meets, I will propose revisions that recognize School Board's primary responsibility for investigating and resolving this situation, and urge our passage of resolution recommending the School Board commission an independent external review that will produce a thorough report. A few years ago, Penn State University followed this approach after an assistant football coach was charged with molestation, and that investigation ultimately held the head football coach and the university president accountable. While we certainly hope the issues here are less extreme, I would like to see the School Board to conduct the same type of searching investigation to learn the answers to some very troubling questions.

Sincerely,


