

Karen Bass’ “State of the City” speech: A declaration of war on Los Angeles’ working class

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28 April 2025

Democratic Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass, delivered her 2025 State of the City address last week, unveiling a proposed budget that slashes 1,647 city jobs—the most severe round of layoffs since the 2008 Great Recession. This budget, introduced under the guise of “fiscal responsibility,” is a ruthless attack on the workers who keep the city running, while the wealthiest residents of Los Angeles continue to enjoy obscene levels of luxury and privilege.

The layoffs, affecting nearly every department from sanitation and tree trimming to clerical and maintenance services, will have devastating effects on the city’s functionality and population. Even as Bass described these cuts as “a decision of absolute last resort,” it is clear that this move is not a reluctant necessity but a conscious political choice made in service of the city’s rich and powerful.

According to the 2025 World’s Wealthiest Cities Report by Henley & Partners and New World Wealth, Los Angeles ranks as the fifth wealthiest city in the world. It is home to 45 billionaires (56, according to Forbes), 220,000 millionaires, and an astonishing 516 centi-millionaires. Wealth among the city’s elite has grown by 35 percent in the past decade.

Despite this staggering wealth, Los Angeles has one of the highest homelessness rates in the United States and a steep poverty rate (as of 2023, 18.4 percent of children). Tens of thousands of people live on the streets and thousands of Angelenos die every year without permanent housing, while city workers now face unemployment and further financial instability.

The ruling class, including the billionaires who bankroll Democratic and Republican political campaigns and shape policy behind closed doors, have

successfully imposed a system where essential social programs and public services are gutted to preserve the wealth of the elite. The nearly \$1 billion shortfall in the city’s \$13.95 billion budget is the predictable outcome of class warfare waged from the top.

The official narrative blames the shortfall on declining revenues from business and sales taxes, rising liability payments and costly labor contracts. This narrative obscures the truth: the budget crisis is manufactured by a system that prioritizes private profit over public need.

City officials openly admit that legal payouts—often stemming from police brutality and harassment—have ballooned to \$320 million this year. Meanwhile, tariffs and broader economic instability have impacted business revenues. Yet, these issues are used as a smokescreen to justify austerity for workers while shielding the wealthy from any meaningful contribution to the city’s fiscal health.

Bass’ decision to retain a 6 percent reserve fund—above the city’s 5 percent requirement—while simultaneously firing nearly 1,700 people speaks volumes. There is money. It is simply not meant for workers.

The one area of the budget that saw an increase was the Fire Department—up 12.7 percent, with the addition of 277 positions. But this is nothing more than a political maneuver designed to save face after the devastating Palisades Fire in January exposed the city’s total lack of preparedness.

Reports have shown that more than half of the department’s vehicles were not in service and fire officials lacked critical resources during the crisis. This modest funding bump is nothing more than a

reactionary public relations stunt to deflect criticism, meant to pacify the population, not protect it.

While sanitation workers and clerical staff face layoffs, the LAPD remains virtually untouched. The decrease of 94 positions in the police force is not the result of budget cuts, but natural attrition—resignations and retirements. No sworn officers will lose their jobs.

This glaring exception reveals the priorities of the Bass administration. The police, who serve as the first line of defense for the capitalist state, are protected at all costs. Their role in suppressing protests, enforcing evictions and criminalizing poverty is far too valuable to the ruling class to permit any budgetary sacrifice. The Trump administration would completely agree with such decisions.

Meanwhile, the civilian positions within the LAPD—over 400 dispatchers, clerks, and technical support staff—are on the chopping block. These cuts will lead to further delays in response to emergency calls and increase the reliance on paramilitary policing to “solve” the social crises that result.

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 721, which endorsed Bass during her 2022 mayoral campaign, has postured as an opponent of the layoffs. Its president, David Green, stated: “We’re going to fight for every single one of these city jobs. One layoff is too many.”

But these words ring hollow. The SEIU leadership has already proven its role as an enabler of austerity. The union is currently involved in a separate contract dispute involving more than 55,000 Los Angeles County workers who are preparing to strike. In a calculated move to defang the strike’s potential, SEIU officials gave a completely unnecessary 10-day notice and limited the action to a mere two days.

The SEIU has an impeccable track record of betrayals, repeatedly selling out its members at critical moments. In 2022, Local 721 struck a deal for 55,000 Los Angeles County workers that slashed real wages amid soaring inflation, despite an overwhelming strike authorization. That same year, they canceled a planned nurses’ strike and forced through a concessions contract far below cost-of-living needs. In 2023, when 11,000 city workers were ready to fight for better conditions, the SEIU deflated their momentum with a meaningless one-day walkout, all while public services were gutted in favor of police and private contractors.

Karen Bass has long positioned herself as a “progressive” voice, even a radical at times. Her history with community organizing and her nominal criticisms of LAHSA (Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority) defunding have misled some to see her as a potential ally of the working class.

But Bass’ latest budget makes her allegiances unmistakably clear. Like every other representative of the Democratic Party, she serves the interests of capital. Her role is not to oppose the billionaires who run this city, but rather to manage their affairs.

The consolidation of city departments, the elimination of the Health Commission and other advisory bodies, and the hand-waving around the issue of homelessness while freezing funding for her already defunded “Inside Safe” program all reinforce the conclusion: the Bass administration is firmly aligned with the interests of wealth and power.

The decisions being made in Los Angeles are not unique. They are part of a broader, national—and indeed global—offensive against the working class, spearheaded by the fascistic Trump administration. Capitalism in crisis is demanding ever greater sacrifices from the masses to preserve the fortunes of the elite.

Workers must respond with their own counteroffensive. The planned layoffs must be met with mass mobilization—not just by city workers but by county workers, educators, nurses, entertainment workers, students, logistics workers, and especially the city’s immigrant population, who suffer disproportionately under these cuts.

These struggles cannot be left in the hands of the union bureaucracies or the Democratic Party, which have repeatedly proven their loyalty to the ruling class. What is required is the independent political mobilization of the working class, based on a socialist program that prioritizes human need over private profit.

Only through the expropriation of the billionaires and a complete reorganization of society along socialist lines can the basic rights of housing, healthcare, education, and dignified employment be secured for all.



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