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Boston's Mayor Menino makes 5th term his last

By [Andrew Ryan](#) | GLOBE STAFF MARCH 29, 2013

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REPRINTS E-MAIL SHARE

Mayor Thomas M. Menino, awash in affection and a sense of his place in history, climbed to the stage Thursday at Faneuil Hall to confirm he would not seek a sixth term, illness having robbed him of the vigor necessary to be the kind of mayor he needed to be.

No longer, he said, did he possess the stamina to be the tireless neighborhood champion who for two decades drew his energy from the politics of ribbon cuttings, school plays, and chance meetings with residents.

The announcement ends the reign of a former insurance salesman who backed into the mayor's office, only to become one of the most powerful figures in Boston history. Addressing a crowd that included the governor and a senator, City Hall secretaries and union electricians, Menino struggled to check his emotions as he spoke about love.

"I am here with the people I love," Menino said, trembling slightly, "to tell the city I love, that I will leave the job that I love."

Those three words — "I will leave" — capped years of speculation about how long one man could run a major American city. It immediately set into motion a political drama not seen for a generation.

Standing on a stage with his wife, grown children, and grandchildren, Menino gripped the podium and bit his lower lip as he scanned the crowd. They were all there: his devoted staff at City Hall; his former aides who have risen to hold their own elective offices; developers who have reshaped the city; foot soldiers from his five election campaigns; and clergy who have given him counsel and walked the beat with police officers on Boston's most troubled streets.

"I can run, I can win," Menino said as the crowd roared and rose to its feet, "and I can lead, but not in the neighborhoods all the time as I like."

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In the front rows sat city councilors and other elected officials sure to join the growing field of candidates who will spend the next seven-plus months fighting to succeed the mayor.

In classic Menino fashion, he subtly tweaked some of his potential successors, referring to the city's legislative body as "my City Council," reminding them of his 20 years of dominance. But he also vowed to remain out of the mayor's race. "I have no plans to pick the person to fill this seat," Menino said. "I just ask that you choose someone who loves this city as much as I do."

The mayor remained subdued and seemed drained as he spoke, a stark change from a fiery address he delivered Monday that stoked sentiment he might seek one more term. In this speech, Menino wandered off script only a handful of times to offer wry editorial asides, noting that he entered to the Frank Sinatra ballad, "My Way" because, the mayor said, "I did it my way."

The 70-year-old mayor seemed determined to get through the three-page speech without succumbing to his emotions. After an initial ovation that lasted more than three minutes, Menino quieted the crowd with his arms and then bucked himself up for the task ahead.

"You made it harder even than it is going to be," he said.

The mayor had walked gingerly down the aisle at Faneuil Hall, evidence of his sapped strength after a protracted hospital stay and a three-month convalescence in a city-owned mansion that ended only last weekend when he returned home to Readville.

News that Menino would not run for reelection reverberated across Boston and beyond.

"I'm kind of bummed that he's not going to run again," said 25-year-old Igor Kharitononkov, as he stood on Centre Street in Jamaica Plain and talked about Menino's efforts to make cycling safer, improve city parks, and make Boston a more environmentally sustainable city. "I think the mayor's been great."

■ **Special section: Menino's legacy**



BILL GREENE/GLOBE STAFF

Menino and his wife, Angela, received a standing ovation as they took the podium as Faneuil Hall Thursday to announce his decision.

President Obama released a statement that said Menino has “charted Boston on a course for a better future.”

“No two people wear their hearts on their sleeve for the city of Boston and its people as openly as Tom and Angela Menino,” Obama said. “And as they depart City Hall next year, Boston will be a better place to live, work, and raise a family because of the Meninos’ proud service to the city they love.”

The goodbye had begun in the morning at City Hall, where a wakelike atmosphere enveloped the hulking, concrete building he has inhabited since first winning a seat on the City Council in 1983. Menino started in his fifth-floor office early in the day.

His suit coat off, Menino wore a crisp white shirt and orange tie. He sat in his usual seat, not behind a desk, but at the head of a mahogany conference table, with Faneuil Hall and the Custom House Tower looming outside a floor-to-ceiling window. At one point, Menino’s 13-year-old granddaughter stood in front of him and broke down crying. Menino pulled her in close for a hug.

The staff came in waves, filing in and out of his office like a receiving line. First, he spoke with his closest aides who work within shouting distance of the mayor’s office.

“I’m just proud of everything,” said longtime aide Howard Leibowitz, who gulped as his eyes filled with tears. “I’m just very proud, very, very proud. Just so many good young people that come through, that learn their skills through him.”

The next wave included Cabinet chiefs and other top officials, such as Police Commissioner Edward F. Davis and Daphne Griffin, the city’s head of human services, who reached down and gave Menino a hug while he sat in his chair. They gave him a standing ovation, and Menino remained seated, his head down, his chin resting his hands.

When he explained his decision, Menino told aides that the mayor of Boston needs to work 18 hours a day, and he felt he could no longer keep up that schedule, according to several people who heard him speak. The mayor said he only wanted to continue doing the job if he could keep what he described as “the Menino schedule.”

“I know I could win, but it couldn’t be on my terms,” Menino said. “But this is good for Boston.”

Staff members clutched tissues and some walked quickly out of Menino’s office, tears streaming down their cheeks. The grief marked an era’s end, but there was also a great sense of pride for what had been accomplished in the last 20 years.

“It’s been a very emotional day,” said William F. Sinnott, the city’s chief lawyer, who has the no-nonsense

bearing of a former Marine, which he is. “But all day long, I kept thinking how privileged I felt to be part of this.”

In his speech at Faneuil Hall, Menino explored the data point that may bring him the greatest satisfaction of all: Polls routinely found 50 percent of city residents said they had met the mayor.

“I get asked all the time how I met so much of Boston,” Menino said. “I just did what I loved, and then it wasn’t too hard.”

He used it as a motif to recount his accomplishments and routines in his two decades in office.

Menino said he met people rebuilding Main Street in Roslindale and when he embarked on his Christmas Eve walks in the Bowdoin-Geneva neighborhood.

He met people as they rallied with gay friends and neighbors, Menino said, and as they opened their arms to immigrants, standing with them when they became citizens.

He said he met people on cold winter nights as they conducted the city’s annual homeless census, when they stood up to say the downtrodden also count.

Menino met people, he said, when he stood with new homeowners in public housing and told them they deserved a yard and a front door. He met people, Menino said, reading to children in new libraries in Mattapan and Brighton.

“If you want to meet half the people in this city,” Menino said, “all you do is go to their homes and their jobs and where they raise their families and where they strive to improve their neighborhoods and say this: Boston is the greatest city on earth.”

The speech was supposed to end there, but Menino wanted to make clear this was not the end. He will remain in office until his fifth term ends early next year.

So he did something that has given his half-dozen press secretaries indigestion since 1993: He went off script.

“That’s when my whole staff goes crazy,” Menino said. “All I’m doing today is saying I’m not running. I have nine months left. Just think of what I could do in nine months. I don’t have to worry about anything, no voters or anything.”

“We could have some real fun,” Menino said.

After the speech, the crowd spilled outside as dark clouds gathered and rain pattered on the cobblestones.

Current and former Menino aides mingled, sharing stories, and laughing loudly.

Nearby, the bright glare from television equipment stood out against the dark sky. Several city councilors stood eagerly in the light, waiting for their time on camera.

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