

## **State of The Borough Address**

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President

Lehman College, Center for the Performing Arts  
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I didn't think I would have one final opportunity to address you in the context of a State of the Borough Address. People say...sometimes it's better to be lucky than good.

Today I get to thank you for your partnership and collaboration in moving the Bronx forward. In preparing for today I had a chance to look back and review what we focused on in the last seven state-of-the-borough addresses. In the first year, in the wake of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks we focused on coming together as a city and community to rebuild, on fiscal austerity, having lost 100,000 jobs in 3 months, and getting back to basics in education. In the second year I presented the three E's – economic development, environment – in the large sense of good neighborhood development, - and on education as we continued our recovery from 2001. In the third year I argued that the best social program is a job and we launched the Bronx at Work program, insisting that any developers doing business in the Bronx had

to do business with the Bronx. In partnership with Cablevision, with the help of our Secretary of State Lorraine Cortes-Vasquez, back then at Cablevision, we installed high speed internet access in every Bronx school and with Con Edison we put every community board on the web. That year we launched the Bronx Domestic Violence Advisory Council and opened 30 new schools. In year four, we announced the plan for the redevelopment of the Yankee Stadium neighborhood, and crafted an historic agreement with a host of community benefits which set the standard for host communities around the city and even as far away as the City of Houston. We announced the creation of 21 more new schools and the start of the Bronx Children's Museum. In year 5 we focused on public safety initiatives, the Team up to Clean up The Bronx community service program that enlisted hundreds of volunteers in every neighborhood of the borough, and negotiated the largest tenant purchase of housing in Bronx history, 1865 units in the Soundview section of the Bronx – the Lafayette/Boynton Coops. In year 6 we focused on greening initiatives, including the planting of thousands of trees, a green roof on the Bronx County Courthouse and many other buildings around the borough, a Health and Wellness campaign to combat obesity, diabetes and unhealthy lifestyles, and the Bronx Veterans Advisory Council. In year 7 we

launched an aggressive quality of life campaign and the Bronx Historic Preservation Task Force that this year published a report identifying historic sites throughout the Bronx worthy of preservation and in some cases land mark status.

With the help of every Bronx elected official and community board we ushered in an unprecedented period of growth and development that includes a new Yankee Stadium neighborhood, the new Gateway Center along the Harlem River, millions of square feet of office and retail space, more than 40,000 units of housing for families of every income, unprecedented parks development, modernization of schools and community facilities, a large expansion of funding for senior programs, healthcare facilities and enhancements to schools in the form of science and computer labs, and libraries, and, an investment of almost \$24 million, through Bronx Federal Empowerment Zone loans and grants for commercial and green projects. Altogether we invested nearly \$210 million, just from borough president funds. When we add everything up, including city, state, federal and private investment we are looking at an investment of more than \$10 billion...this has been a truly unique time of partnership between the public and private sector.

And now we enter a moment of great difficulty and challenge. Today we gather at a moment of great opportunity and newness because of the election of President Obama and a new generation of leaders, but also a moment of great distress and gravity because of an unmatched global economic crisis. If someone would have told me on January 1, 2002, when I first walked – that would be hobbled on crutches - into the borough president's office, that a 47 year old man named Barack Obama would be our President, and that that president along with a Congress led by Democrats in both houses would pass a \$787 billion stimulus bill, followed quickly by a \$275 billion housing rescue operation, in order to get our economy out of an almost unprecedented crisis, rivaled only by the actions of another president and congress to dig us out of a Great Depression..., that major banks would go out of business or have to be bailed out by the taxpayers, that US automakers would have to be rescued, that we would have seen the loss of almost 5 million jobs and more than 2 million foreclosures in a little over a year, that our state, city and borough would be experiencing such distress, and that I would be addressing you for the last time as Borough President and going to work for the 44th President of these United States, I would probably dismiss you as someone with a fairly loose grip on what we purport to know as reality.

I guess this constitutes, yet again, the vindication of those who insist that anything is possible. Once again you and I are called upon to believe that we are in fact able to set our course, and that the limits we imagine are set only by us. Two hundred years after the birth of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglas and 45 years after a 39-year old preacher from the South called our nation to rise up to all it could be, we open a chapter of new promise and potential for our nation and our community here in The Bronx. I am more proud than ever to be from a special American community called The Bronx. I ask you to do yourself and me a favor, today. The next time you encounter a self-loathing pessimist who dwells on the negative and emphasizes the unaccomplished, as opposed to how far we've come, and how promising the future is, please cast them aside and move forward with optimistic fervor. I believe nothing can keep us back...nothing.

It is true that in our short 233-year history we have not faced many moments like the one we face today. It is also true that every time we've had to overcome adversity, the American people have prevailed. Whether it was a civil war that almost destroyed the union, reconstruction, a great economic depression, world wars, civil and social unrest at home, wars

abroad, no matter...we have overcome. The Bronx is no different. Today, we face a time, after years of growth and development, when we will see the effects of a global financial crisis here in our 61 neighborhoods. We are already experiencing the hemorrhaging of jobs, foreclosures on homes, reduced business activity and a slowing of our construction boom. We know this will get worse before it gets better...in part because we have yet to see the full effects of the global financial meltdown and in part because it will take time for the impact of the stimulus package to get to households and businesses. So, while we were able to see great progress in the last seven years, we must now brace ourselves for tough days again. But we know that the people of The Bronx, probably more than most counties in America, know adversity and know how to overcome it. Al Pacino, who grew up on 174<sup>th</sup> Street in the Bronx, was once told by some handlers he needed protection...to which he responded, "I don't need bodyguards. I'm from the South Bronx." We know how to overcome obstacles.

Let me be clear...we know this crisis is not due to the greed and irresponsibility of the hard working 90% of the people who simply get up every day and go to work, school their kids, worship in their communities, participate in civic activities, simply

believing that if they play by the rules they will get ahead. No, we are in this bind because of the greed and irresponsibility of the few. The result of a banking and government culture that has rewarded excess and discouraged responsibility and stability...promoting an obscene view of what it means to succeed...measured not by added value, but by the trappings of wealth. Well, once again, just like we've done in the past, the hardworking people of our city and country will set things right. We will do it by insisting that our government behave responsibly...that it set the right priorities...and that we elect the right leaders with the right motivations... Just this week President Obama, in announcing his plan to stem foreclosures and keep millions of American families in their homes, called on the country to return to our core values of responsibility and common sense...a return to the basics of investing in the areas that build communities of aspiration and opportunity.

While I am very proud of what we've accomplished, now we must turn our attention to unfinished business and new opportunity. The historic American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, offers the next borough president and all officials a fresh opportunity to address our areas of natural strength. The Bronx is known as the borough of parks,

universities and hospitals. It is no secret that at a minimum, one-quarter of the Bronx workforce is in the healthcare industry, and almost one in five in education. These are the building blocks. If we educate and promote wellness and build the connections for paths to careers in these areas of strength, we will make great progress in addressing the needs of this borough. So outside of everything else you will be able to do, I encourage the next borough president and all Bronx and City officials to tee up those projects right away, and let's link the healthcare and education institutions to the schools, colleges and job training programs, some of which will be expanded with funds from the federal government, and let's get people on successful career tracks. There is no valid reason we should be importing healthcare workers and teachers when we have a growing population and young people in our neighborhoods that are uneducated or undereducated, and consequently unemployed or underemployed because of our collective failures. We need to create the local synergies that take more time but make more sense - Back to Basics. We cannot continue in the mode that took our economy into the tank...that quick fix , get-what-you-can-while-you-can, approach. Again, a return to the core values of responsibility and common sense.

Today I am addressing you for the last time as Bronx Borough President and I've accepted the invitation of the President of the United States to be Director of the White House Office on Urban Affairs. After spending time talking to people around the country about the possibility of resetting our priorities and returning to the basics of building strong communities, and carefully considering what President Obama said to the nation's mayors as a candidate, I agreed that this was the approach we needed toward cities and metropolitan areas.

Let me share with you, from much of what the President said to America's mayor's last summer, and why I am going to Washington to work with him.

President Obama acknowledged that in this country, change comes not from the top-down, but from the bottom-up.

...that when a disaster strikes – a Katrina, a shooting, or a six-alarm blaze – it's City Hall we lean on, it's local government we call first and depend on to get us through tough times;

...that because local leaders are on the front lines in our communities they know what happens when Washington fails to do its job;

...that when Washington puts out economic policies that work for Wall Street but not Main Street – it's towns and cities that get hit when businesses close their doors, and workers lose their jobs, and families lose their homes because of unscrupulous lenders.

The President believes local governments need a partner in the White House because,

...when Washington makes promises it doesn't keep and fails to fully fund No Child Left Behind – it's our teachers who are overburdened, our teachers who aren't getting the support they need, and our teachers who are forced to teach to the test, instead of giving students the skills to compete in a global economy;

...when Washington succumbs to petty partisanship and fails to pass comprehensive immigration reform – many communities are forced to take immigration enforcement into their own hands, cities' services are stretched, and our neighborhoods see rising cultural and economic tensions;

...when Washington listens to big oil and gas companies and blocks real energy reform – our budgets get pinched by high energy costs, and our schools cut back on textbooks to keep buses running;

it's the lots in our towns and cities that become brown-fields;

...even with the absence of leadership in Washington over the last eight years, we're seeing a rebirth in many places...we shouldn't be succeeding despite Washington – we should be succeeding with a hand from Washington;

And this president understands what we know in The Bronx... that neglect is not a policy for America's metropolitan areas.

I agree. What we need is a partner who knows that the old ways of looking at our cities just won't do and who knows that our nation and our cities are undergoing a historic transformation. The President reminded the mayors that the change that's taking place today is as great as any we've seen in more than a century, since the time when cities grew upward and outward with immigrants escaping poverty, and tyranny, and misery abroad. And that while this population has grown by tens of millions in the past few decades, it is projected to grow nearly 50% more in the decades to come...not only in our cities but throughout larger metropolitan areas.

We know that nearly 80% Americans live in metropolitan areas that are increasingly inter-dependent. The President recognizes this is creating new pressures, but it's also opening up new opportunities – because our metropolitan areas, not just the central cities are hotbeds of innovation. He explained it's not just Durham or Raleigh – it's the entire Research Triangle. It's not just Palo Alto, it's cities up and down Silicon Valley. The top 100 metro areas generate two-thirds of our jobs, nearly 80% of patents, and handle 75% of all seaport tonnage. The fact is 42 of our metro areas now rank among the world's 100 largest economies.

He recognized that to seize the possibility of this moment, we need to promote strong cities as the backbone of regional growth. We need to promote a new urban agenda that will not only tackle areas of concentrated poverty...we need to make sure kids get the right start; we need to create public-private business incubators...we need to fund the COPS program...we need to restore funding for the Community Development Block Grant program...we need to fund community based health centers...we need to recruit more teachers to cities, pay them more, and give them more support.

In June President Obama told America's mayors he would put forth a plan to provide real relief for struggling homeowners and help them keep their homes and avoid foreclosure, this week he made good on that commitment. President Obama made good on his commitment to help us build more affordable housing by ensuring funding in the stimulus package.

I agree with the President that we need to stop seeing our cities as the problem and start seeing them as the solution. We in the Bronx believe that strong cities are the building blocks of strong regions, and strong regions are essential for a strong and competitive America.

This new national urban agenda has to be as much about South Florida as it is about Miami; about Mesa and Scottsdale as much as Phoenix; about Stamford and Northern New Jersey as much as New York City.

And, I agree with the President that our children will grow up competing with children in Beijing and Bangalore and Berlin. President Obama reminded the mayors that China is developing an advanced network of ports and freight hubs, and an advanced network of universities modeled after our own. And, that Germany has launched rail and telecom projects

to connect its major metro areas. We cannot compete in this global economy if we don't show the same kind of leadership.

So the President's agenda aims to unlock the potential of all our regions by connecting them with a 21st century infrastructure - a world-class transit system...re-committing federal dollars to strengthen mass transit...reforming our tax code to give folks a reason to take the bus instead of driving to work and making metro areas more livable in order to help our regional economies grow. He said we'll partner with mayors to invest in green energy technology and ensure that your buses and buildings are energy efficient. We'll invest in ports, roads, and high-speed rails – President Obama is right, we don't want to see the fastest train in the world built halfway around the world in Shanghai, we want to see it built right here in the United States of America.

The President talked about change during his campaign...I believe as he does that if we can bring about change in our neighborhoods, then change will come to our cities. And if change comes to our cities, then change will come to our regions. And if change comes to our regions, then change will come to every corner of this country we love.

For these reasons the President said he would appoint the first White House Director of Urban Affairs. I am thrilled to be called into service to our country from the village of The Bronx.

So I conclude with this. In about a month you will hear the national anthem, followed by the famous words “PLAY BALL” in a new state-of-the-art Yankee Stadium. On a hopefully sunny April afternoon you will hear the crisp crack of a wood baseball bat meet a leather baseball and the roar of a stadium full of Yankee fans, the start of a new era that will usher in a period of construction of a new regional park. On the waterfront you will see a tennis center and ice-skating concession, and a new mall next to a waterfront park, teeming with families who will be able to take their kids to the Bronx Children’s Museum or join tourists from around the world who will be visiting the new International Museum of Hip Hop, or thanks to the advocacy of my friend Freddy Ferrer, your former borough president, people will be visiting from around the country and the world to participate in the world’s largest Marathon and Latin Music Fest. We will build it and they will come.

Again, I thank my family, my friends and the supporters who helped put me in position to get elected to do this job, and my colleagues who helped

to carry forward a Bronx agenda. Thank you to my staff...a team of people who each in their own way, with the limits of time, experience and politics forged ahead and tolerated me while I tried to build a stronger Bronx.

It's been 2,602 days since I hobbled on crutches down the center aisle of Veterans Memorial Hall to be sworn in as the 12<sup>th</sup> president of the Borough of The Bronx. This community has done more for me than I will ever be able to claim I have done for it. When I come home from a tour of duty in our nation's capitol, I will continue working right here in our city with the optimists who believe our best days are always before us because we can always do better. This city, that has been the incubator for people like Al Smith, a poor Irish immigrant from the lower east side, Fiorello LaGuardia, an Italian Jew who did more for our infrastructure and the garden of skyscrapers we are still building, FDR, and so many others, is my beloved city. This is the city that when pushed to describe it James Joyce could only say "Here comes everybody". This is the city that defies convention and beckons us into the future with the same sense of awe and daring that ring in the words of Emma Lazarus, that 34 year old German-Jewish poet who had grown weary of the anti-Semitism and persecution in Russia, and in 1883 submits a 14-line

poem to help the faltering fundraising campaign for the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. And in her still haunting and quite prophetic words suggests the following:

*“Not like the brazen giant of Greek  
fame,  
With conquering limbs astride from  
land to land;  
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates  
shall stand  
A mighty woman with a torch, whose  
flame  
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her  
name  
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-  
hand  
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild  
eyes command  
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities  
frame.  
"Keep ancient lands, your storied  
pomp!" cries she  
With silent lips. "Give me your tired,  
your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to  
breathe free,*

*The wretched refuse of your teeming  
shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to  
me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

I will come back to our beloved New York, but for now I will join our president in helping to rebuild the promise of America.

God Bless You...God Bless The Bronx and New York City...and God Bless these United States of America!