



Ruben Diaz, Jr
Bronx Borough President

May 21, 2009

RUBEN DIAZ, JR. WAS INAUGURATED AS THE 13TH BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT

Speech:

It is with much excitement, enthusiasm and anticipation that I begin this profound endeavor at Borough Hall. You can rest assured that I am altogether committed to fulfilling my promise of a better future for Bronxites everywhere in each and every neighborhood of this prodigious borough.

I know that our diversity is the bedrock upon which our enduring prosperity will come. Therefore, I will work tirelessly and without compromise towards our mutual goal and shared enterprise of an improved Bronx for our seniors, our children and our hard working families.

In the coming weeks and months, my administration will begin to outline our vision for "One Bronx." One Bronx or *Un Solo Bronx*- this means young and old, regardless of your race, gender, religion, ethnic background or sexual orientation. One Bronx or *Un Solo Bronx*, this means everyone, *todos nosotros* regardless of your immigration status, educational training, profession, or political point of view. One Bronx—this means working, living and standing side by side together proudly and united for all the people of the Bronx.

Perhaps the most important piece of our agenda is economic development, and we will tackle the issue head on.

Right now, at the Bronx County Courthouse, the Target Corporation is interviewing eager Bronxites for the 700 jobs created by their new store in the Gateway Center Mall, at the former site of the Bronx Terminal Market. In a bad economy, we are lucky to see new employment opportunities brought to our borough. But we need to do more.

We need to focus our energy into creating jobs in new areas. Even before I was elected to the New York State Assembly 13 years ago, the environment and environmental justice were major concerns of mine. In my final days in Albany I secured a grant to expand “green jobs” training in my district. Through my grant, the Association for Energy Affordability, in partnership with Nos Quedamos, will be able to expand its training into my former district by setting up teleconferencing systems in our community centers to make these programs more readily available to community residents. Located in Mott Haven, the AEA works with the CWE, the Consortium for Worker Education, to train Bronxites for jobs building green roofs, retrofitting boilers, and making our existing building stock more energy efficient.

Creating jobs is important, but it is just as important that we create jobs for the people who live right here in the Bronx. For too long our borough, and in fact the entire City, have been the home to two separate, very distinct economies, one made up of those with permanent jobs with benefits and a living wage, and the other comprised of those stuck in dead-end jobs with no hope for advancement. Union jobs mean stability, and throughout my career I have done everything in my

power to get Bronx residents into our trade unions, so that when major projects come to our Borough our residents will be put to work. Our efforts with the Consortium for Worker Education and the Association for Energy Affordability will ensure that Bronx residents will be prepared for the growing green economy, and will be ready and qualified for those employment opportunities when they are made available.

This program will provide the blueprint for an aggressive campaign to make The Bronx a leader in the field of “green collar” job creation. And this is just the first step. Over the years, I worked closely with an important organization, Sustainable South Bronx, to develop programs to not only keep our environment clean, but to train Bronx residents to do that cleaning. Those efforts will be expanded to all of our Bronx neighborhoods, and my office will reach out to our borough’s Congressional delegation to see what stimulus funds are available to expand our presence in the green economy. We are not just going to talk about bringing environmentally-friendly jobs to our borough, we are going to lead the City and the nation in making it happen. The Earth, and your wallets, will be better off for our efforts.

These are important steps towards improving our economy, but they are only a small part of the vision that I and my office will put forward to improve the economic health and well-being of The Bronx. We all have seen our family, friends and neighbors struggling to make ends meet in this economy. With the cooperation of my partners in government, our business leaders and our non-profit sector, my administration will begin the hard work of changing those unfortunate circumstances.

I will charge the Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation, under the direction of Rafael Salaberrios, along with our business community including the Bronx Chamber of Commerce, the South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation, the Greater Riverdale Chamber of Commerce, the Hunts Point Economic Development Corporation and other similar organizations across the borough to sit down in the coming weeks and develop a strategic plan that will ensure the strength of all our business districts, and to position them for positive growth in the years to come.

For too long, our business organizations and merchants associations have worked separately to improve their own neighborhoods. One Bronx—this means it is time for them to come together and plan for the entire borough.

Of course, we cannot train our young people for good jobs if our schools are failing them. We must do better. In March of last year I partnered with my colleagues in the State Assembly to elect Dr. Betty Rosa to the State Board of Regents. Dr. Rosa has been throughout her career a tireless champion for the educational progress of our children, and we all remember her great work as superintendent of Bronx School District #8. Working with Dr. Rosa, my office will put together a comprehensive plan detailing what our schools need to succeed.

In just a few short weeks, my office has already identified several school projects worthy of our support. We have allocated funds to renovate the library at the Grace Dodge Memorial High School in Crotona Park, to revamp the auditorium and gymnasium at the Bronx Dance Academy in Norwood; and to resurface the athletic fields at John F. Kennedy High School in Marble Hill.

We are funding new computers and science labs, and in partnership with Out2Play we are helping to restore and renovate playgrounds across the Bronx. We have already been very, very busy.

We will work to secure our borough's fair share of school funding. And we will partner with community and faith-based organizations to develop afterschool and arts programs in every neighborhood; so that our children are not denied the extracurricular programs that other communities have readily available.

Right now, the State Legislature is considering the reauthorization of the law that gave us mayoral control of our public schools. I voted for that plan while in Albany, but I now have some concerns. Parents, educators, community leaders and even students have come to me and argued that the current system does not value their input. Those most affected by our school system must have their voices heard. I believe my appointment to the Panel for Education Policy should have a stronger role in the decision making process.

The health of our business community and the classroom success of our children will be major priorities of my administration. But they will not be the only priorities. We will fight to preserve the much-needed services of our borough's senior citizens centers. We will do everything in our power to make sure that our neighborhood parks are in good shape and clean.

We will develop programs to foster the growth of the health care industry—our borough's largest employer—while at the same time working to make sure Bronxites have access to the best

medical treatments available. The healthcare industry plays a huge role in the everyday life of our borough, and we will encourage the growth of new medical fields, such as biopharmaceuticals, within our borders. The Bronx is already known as “the borough of universities.” With a new focus, we could also become “the borough of healthcare innovation.”

We must keep our cultural institutions strong. Already, my office has allocated funding to bring new transportation equipment to the Bronx Zoo, and will provide a crucial grant to the Pregones Theater on Walton Avenue. Such organizations are a major part of the life of our borough and they cannot be abandoned, even in a bad economy.

We will fight to preserve the vital City services that we all rely on, such as our police, sanitation and fire departments. Right now, City Hall has put forward a cost-cutting proposal to close Ladder Company 53, the only fire station on City Island. As anyone who ever tried to go to dinner on the weekend can attest, the traffic can be, to put it nicely, unbearable. Despite the congestion and remoteness of the Island, the City is ignoring the pleas of the community and moving ahead with its plans. This move will expose the City Island community to unnecessary danger, and could mean the tragic loss of life. I understand that during tough economic times we must find ways to cut from the budget. But Mayor Bloomberg, find something else.

This is a major undertaking, and I cannot do it alone. I will look to my staff for guidance, and I will look to my family for support. I will reach out to every elected official in this borough. We can exchange ideas, and I will listen to your concerns. We may not always agree on the solution, but I will welcome and value your input. One Bronx—this means that what effects Wakefield

also affects Soundview, what effects Riverdale also affects Morrisania, what affects Co-op City also effects Castle Hill.

This agenda will extend beyond our borders as well. I will reach out to citywide leaders on a whole host of issues that affect our lives, from business and labor to education and the environment. This includes our mayor, Michael Bloomberg. Today, I extend my hand to the mayor, and let him know that when we agree on policy I will stand up and proudly support him. But when we disagree, I will be his fiercest critic.

This is not a position I take lightly. I have been charged with a tremendous task, and the faith you all have placed in me will not be ignored. I will look to you, the people of The Bronx, for help in finding solutions to our shared problems. I will build on the good work of my predecessors, from Adolfo Carrion Jr. and Fernando Ferrer, to Bob Abrams and Herman Badillo. For decades, when one said “The Bronx” it immediately conjured up images of a place of urban plight. That has changed, and working together we will continue to rebuild and rebrand our great borough. Those stereotypes of the past have been destroyed. Our borough is a place to do business, a place to learn, and a place to raise a family. The Bronx is home.

For inspiration, we need look no further than our official seal, and the Latin words that inspired the Bronx’s own motto:

Ne Cede Malis Sed Contra Audentior Ito

“Yield not to misfortunes, but advance all the more boldly against them.”

Just like we did not allow the misfortunes of the past to cloud our future visions of The Bronx, we will not allow the bad economy to prevent our continued growth. We will not listen to the naysayers, to those who say it cannot be done.

We will be positive in our mindset, and we will put forward solutions to our shared problems, rather than simply harp on the negative. Together, we will move forward to build a greater Bronx, a greater City, and a greater nation. *Juntos lograremos un mejor condado, una mejor ciudad, un mejor país.* This is our mission, *es nuestra misión*, and I would be honored if you would join me, *espero contar con todos ustedes.*

Today is a day for celebration. Tomorrow, we get back to work.

God bless you, God bless The Bronx, and God Bless America!