

STATE OF THE BOROUGH ADDRESS
RUBEN DIAZ JR., BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT
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I am proud to stand before you today to deliver my annual “State of the Borough” address, here in one of the crown jewels of our city’s public education system, Hostos Community College.

Just a few weeks ago we officially kicked-off our full year of festivities and events celebrating the centennial of Bronx County. I stood with our City Council delegation to recreate the inauguration of our county’s elected officials back in 1914.

Our Bronx Chamber of Commerce presented my office with a plaque, outlining the tremendous growth our borough has seen over the past 100 years. And the Empire State Building, perhaps the most iconic symbol of this city, was lit in the colors of the Bronx to celebrate this great anniversary.

People are taking notice. We are opening minds and changing perceptions.

We will celebrate our heritage this year. But 2014 is not just about looking to the past. We will focus on the present, and develop smart plans for the future.

The Bronx is transforming, all around us. We are writing a new chapter of the history of our borough. And we are doing so in strong partnership with our institutions, businesses, elected officials, non-profits and, most importantly, the 1.4 million citizens who call the Bronx their home.

We do not stand still. We do not rest on our laurels. We are modernizing the Bronx—creating the “New Bronx”—and ensuring its strength and vitality not just today, but for centuries to come.

Throughout the 20th century, currency and stock certificates for countries and companies all over the world were printed in Hunts Point at the American Bank Note building. Today, that structure is home to the Sunshine Business Incubator, which has helped over 70 small companies take root through shared space and creative partnerships. That is the “New Bronx.”

Before anyone lived there, Co-op City was the site of Freedomland, a theme park that celebrated the history of the United States. This year, our borough’s first indoor mall, anchored by a brand new Macy’s, will open at Bay Plaza, creating hundreds of new jobs. That is the “New Bronx.”

For decades, the former landfill at Ferry Point Park was an eyesore. Drivers coming to the Bronx using the Whitestone Bridge saw piles of brown dirt as their welcome mat. Now, they will see the rolling hills of a lush, green golf course—a major new tourist attraction—with a first-class clubhouse and event space, created by the Trump Organization.

Donald Trump understands the power of his brand, and we are now partners. That is the “New Bronx.”

We have a great story to tell, especially when it comes to safety. The truth is on our side. In 2012, the crime rate in our borough was the lowest it had been since the early 1960's. Last year, we shattered that record.

We have made huge gains in crime prevention, and our reductions are setting the pace for the entire city. By certain metrics, the Bronx is a safer place to live than cities such as Philadelphia and Boston, and much safer than New Orleans or Washington, D.C.

But we have to rewrite outdated narratives. We have to think differently. If a politician in Paris decides to use our hometown to make a cheap political point, or a tour operator twists facts to make a quick buck, we will set the record straight. That is the "New Bronx."

We also have to make sure that our borough stays safe. For instance, we are reintegrating those who have faced legal troubles back into society. Last year, our reentry task force assisted more than 160 moderate and high-risk parolees with job training, housing placement, education and other services designed to reduce recidivism.

My Veteran's Advisory Council was also successful in creating a new "Veterans' Court" in Bronx County. This program serves as an alternative to incarceration, and will assist veterans whose felonies have resulted from mental or substance abuse problems arising from military service and steer them into treatment programs.

Another example is by enhancing security at our public housing developments, which can deter crime and improve quality of life for over 100,000 Bronx tenants. This year, we put more than \$5 million into providing seven NYCHA developments with various upgrades, including Middletown Plaza, Eastchester Houses, the McKinley Houses and others.

We have also put forward legislation designed to curb criminal activity. This year, we will renew our call for a statewide public "gun offender registry," similar to the private one that already exists and is used by the NYPD.

With Council Member Vanessa Gibson, chair of the City Council's Public Safety committee; as well as State Senator Jeff Klein and Assembly Members Carl Heastie and Jeffrey Dinowitz, we will pass this law.

Legislation can make us safer, but crime reduction starts on our streets. Nothing helps decrease crime more than a well-trained, professional police department, functioning in tandem with a civic-minded citizenry.

Yes, we have the greatest police department in the world. We owe our NYPD a strong round of applause for their efforts to keep us safe.

They cannot do it alone. The populace of the Bronx has played just as important a role in lowering crime. We owe ourselves a round of applause as well.

Safer streets, safer neighborhoods, a safer Bronx, requires a strong partnership between the people who live here and the police officers that serve us. We can always do better. And we must do better when it comes to “stop and frisk.”

Our new mayor understands how harmful “stop and frisk” can be, and is committed to reform. I stand ready to work with Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner William Bratton, in their efforts to reshape “stop and frisk” in a way that keeps our neighborhoods safe, but does so with respect.

There are other ways to rebuild the trust between the community and the police. We are doing this by creating new community partnerships, and healthier Bronxites, through an innovative program we launched in January, called C-BALL—the Community Board Athletic Leadership League.

The goal of C-BALL is to promote physical activity through basketball while facilitating engagement within our community boards and with city agencies, such as the NYPD. Our first game took place in January, and I am proud to say that I joined the elected officials team, but sad to say that we lost. It’s safe to say that none of us will be heading to the NBA anytime soon.

C-BALL is just one way we’re making our borough a healthier place. We held our first ever health summit last year, and nearly 1,000 individuals from all over the nation joined together that day to listen, to voice their concerns about health issues in the Bronx, and to begin outlining a plan of action. We are joining the City Council to push an expanded “paid sick leave” bill, and will redouble our efforts to require a “health impact statement” for construction projects this year.

We partnered with the Food Network and Cablevision to promote healthier eating in our schools, and our CAN initiative continues to help Bronxites make the small healthy changes in their lives that will eventually lead to big results. Through these projects and more we are creating a model for healthy living through community engagement, right here in the Bronx.

Our schools—where future generations of engaged citizens are created—are another key to a great city. Working with our education consortia, my office continues to meet with school and university leaders at every level to discuss capital needs, curriculum and the shared issues that face our public schools.

We’ve done some great work in our borough, thanks to the input and advice of these consortia, and I am grateful for their efforts. Since taking office in 2009 we have put almost \$24 million into 173 education projects at all levels. I’ve seen firsthand how important this can be, not just to a school and its physical plant but, more importantly, to the students who spend their days inside.

In October, I cut the ribbon on a new computer lab at P.S./M.S. 194 in Castle Hill, a project for which I provided over \$100,000. The students were awesome. They displayed their computer expertise, showed off their Powerpoints, and even did a little Tweeting. They were engaged, and our funding helped to make that possible.

Partnering with Chancellor Carmen Fariña, my office and our consortia will continue to identify

schools like this that are in need of upgrades, especially technology upgrades, and provide them with the necessary funding to make those improvements.

Big changes are coming at the Department of Education. For the past 12 years, we've seen an education system dictate from the penthouse, rather than engage from the ground floor. We've seen an education system that did not properly engage parents and the community-at-large, while outright denigrating the leaders of our classrooms--our teachers.

It is a new day. Greater involvement, and greater transparency, are coming to Tweed. In cooperation with the new administration, we will push for our schools to reach new heights of success.

When given the opportunity and the resources, our children do succeed. When given a chance, we develop geniuses in the Bronx, such as the students at the Bronx Design & Construction Academy. These students are one of just five winners across the entire world of the Zayed Future Energy Prize for green development. They flew all the way to Dubai to accept their award, and we are proud to have them with us today, right here in the Bronx.

How we acquire those resources has been a topic of some discussion as of late. Should we create new taxes, or should we use existing funds to give our students a necessary leg up? What's important is that universal pre-K is implemented, and it's time to take the politics out of this proposal. It's time for Mayor de Blasio and Governor Cuomo to compromise on universal pre-K. Our children deserve no less.

Our borough has a long, rich history when it comes to education. The numerous world class colleges that call the Bronx home have earned us the nickname "The Borough of Universities." We have institutions with amazing alumni communities, such as The Bronx High School of Science and DeWitt Clinton High School, where former graduates still play a major role in the life of those schools to this day.

Unfortunately, right across the street, one example of our borough's great history in education is crumbling before our eyes. It is an absolute disgrace that the City allowed P.S. 31, one of the most iconic school buildings in our city and my own alma mater, to fall into such disrepair that it is scheduled to be torn down.

This past summer I walked those halls again. What I saw was incredibly disheartening. These were the very rooms where I fell in love with learning, and where teachers like Mr. Poloso and Ms. Rosen, and our great principal Mrs. Russo; helped set me on the path to where I am today.

With that said, it is time for innovation. The city must issue a new RFP for the P.S. 31 site. This RFP should examine whether or not the building can be saved, and should also explore a wide variety of uses for the site in order to stimulate street life and blend in with the neighborhood.

The lower Grand Concourse is an exciting place these days. Hostos Community College is planning a major new Allied Health & Science Building just down the block, a project I believe is so important to the future of our borough that I have committed more than \$2 million in capital

funding to its completion

With the right neighborhood engagement, and the appropriate community benefits agreement, I can even see a new soccer stadium a few blocks from here.

Given all of this new development, we have to do more to influence growth. That means continuing to implement our conceptual master plan for the redesign of The Bronx. That means smart, sensible planning—planning with a purpose—that makes the most of our available amenities. It is time for the creation of a new waterfront district along the Harlem River between 138th and 149th Streets, one that would lead to development similar to the Brooklyn Bridge Park. Bronxites should have quality waterfront access, and this project could make that happen.

We must also fight for the future of the Bronx General Post Office. Many of us tried to stop this sale. Legislative efforts in Congress to protect this facility were useless, and we are now faced with a daunting task. We cannot allow Washington bureaucrats to simply sell one of our most cherished assets to the highest bidder. This is a public asset, and its liquidation cannot be carried out behind closed doors.

We do have options. We have met with several developers that have put forward innovative ideas for this space. Doing what's best for our borough requires us to move on good ideas, rather than wait for things to just happen on their own. In order to get the best possible project, in order to see the best possible ideas move forward, we must stand up and we will be heard.

We've done so much in the last four years. And I must take a moment to acknowledge the amazing new venture that will bring the world's greatest ice sports complex to our borough, the Kingsbridge National Ice Center.

This project will bring \$300 million in private development funds, living wage jobs and the strongest possible community benefits agreement ever written to our borough. I have to thank Council Member Fernando Cabrera, former Council Member Oliver Koppell, State Senator Gustavo Rivera, Community Board #7, the Kingsbridge Armory Redevelopment Alliance, and the hundreds of residents and organizations who contributed to this victory. We have set a new standard for responsible development.

That, ladies and gentlemen, is “planning with a purpose.” That, ladies and gentlemen, is the “Diaz Doctrine.”

The world's largest ice sports center is one example of what can happen when we think differently. It's time we all “think different...think the Bronx.”

It's time we embark on our innovative ideas. It's time to bring ferry service to Soundview. This plan would open up new transit options for thousands of Bronx commuters. A recent study found the Soundview route to be among the most promising ferry sites in the city, and noted that property values and new development has grown faster at current ferry locations. Working with Council Member Annabel Palma, we will see similar growth here.

It's also time to expand Metro North access to the East Bronx. This has been a vision in the minds of Bronxites since the 1960's, and we have never been closer to making it happen. New stations in Co-op City, Parkchester, Hunts Point and Morris Park would make the Bronx more attractive to new businesses while opening up new employment opportunities across the region for our residents.

In May, I joined Senator Klein and other community leaders to release a report on the immense impact this expansion will have on the Bronx. It showed that this plan will create 5,400 new jobs, increase home values by more than \$140,000 per home, and increase business activity in the Bronx by more than \$1 billion.

In his "State of the State" address in January, Governor Cuomo himself made this a priority of his administration. Let me be crystal clear...nothing is more important than making this long held vision a reality.

We've accomplished a great deal, together, over the past four years. We've created more than 14,000 jobs, and will create thousands more with the Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation. We've placed nearly 1,500 Bronx residents into available jobs through our workforce development programs.

We've invested more than \$600 million in housing, building nearly 13,000 new units. We've created projects like the Bronxchester Urban Renewal in Melrose, a LEED certified development that will bring us nearly 1,000 mixed-income housing units of all sizes, retail and community space, and a new skate park. Projects like this contribute to the continuing growth of the "New Bronx,"—a place of boutique hotels and green development.

We've helped to create more than \$75 million in loans through our Business Initiative Corporation, helping companies of all sizes expand in our borough. Our parks are greener, having seen more than \$100 million in capital upgrades in my first term. Crime is lower, our streets are cleaner, and thanks to the Bronx Tourism Council, thousands of new visitors are taking a new look at the "New Bronx."

This is our year, ladies and gentlemen. In 2014, we are going to show the world that the "New Bronx" is more than just rhetoric. It's a movement. This is our centennial celebration. And we are going to have the most productive year our borough has ever seen.

We will revisit the Cross Bronx Expressway, and develop a plan to rehabilitate and redesign this road so that it works for our borough, and is no longer an eyesore.

In partnership with Council Member James Vacca, we will rid our streets of their most common summer nuisance, dirt bikes. With Council Member Palma and the entire delegation, we will expand our "living wage" bill to bring labor harmony to city developments and give more people an opportunity for success.

We will develop a plan to allow Bronx residents more access to their waterfront, with a goal of

allowing one to walk, run or bicycle without interruption from Pelham Bay Park all the way to Riverdale.

We will increase recreational activities in all corners of the borough, and will welcome two new YMCA centers in Williamsbridge and the 149th Street Hub. We will join Governor Cuomo in his call for a renters' tax credit, and provide relief for the more than 80 percent of Bronxites who do not own their own homes.

We will, together with Assembly Member Marcos Crespo, demand a DREAM Act for New York State. If they can do it in New Jersey, why not here? We will create a new specialized portfolio high school for Bronx students—one that does not rely solely on a high stakes test to gain admission, and we will join Mayor de Blasio in his call for increased STEM options for our students.

2014 is our centennial. We celebrate 100 years as our own county, the youngest county in New York State. However, our story starts 375 years ago, when Jonas Bronck landed in Mott Haven, becoming the first European settler north of the Harlem River.

The early 18th century saw the need for a crossing between our borough and Manhattan. That bridge—the King's Bridge—is long gone, but its name lives on in that thriving community.

The fight for freedom from the crown came later. Our own Gouverneur Morris joined the brave men who publicly declared their independence from the British, and the minutemen fought valiantly at the Battle of Pell Point. Many of the heroes who battled for that freedom—Heath, Putnam, Greene—are memorialized in our street names.

The 1840's saw the completion of the High Bridge and the founding of Fordham University. In 1846, Edgar Allen Poe sought refreshing country air, and moved near today's Grand Concourse.

The late 19th century saw the purchase of the land that would become some of our greatest parks—Van Cortlandt, Pelham Bay Park, Crotona Park and others—ensuring that our residents would forever have amazing outdoor space, and shaping our neighborhoods for centuries to come.

The 20th century saw the completion of our bridges and highways, the extensive infrastructure that makes us so attractive to new business today. The Jerome Park Reservoir opened, the Morris Park Racetrack was closed, and the original “House that Ruth Built” was completed.

Throughout this our population was in flux. We started with the Dutch and the Germans, and later saw major emigration from Irish, Italians and European Jews. African-Americans and Puerto Ricans came after, and today we see Dominicans, Albanians, Mexicans, Garifuna, Bangladeshi, Africans and many others joining the great Bronx melting pot.

Hip-hop and salsa were born here, but let's not forget, so was doo-wop. We are the home of Willie Colon, Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa and Dion & the Belmonts. We are a place of bacalaito and burek, pizza and pastrami. We have seen tremendous changes during throughout

our history, and we are a stronger community for having embraced that change.

And no time is that more apparent than today. We are a place of growth, a place where new business is moving and existing businesses are expanding. We have seen hundreds of millions of dollars in new housing, and thousands of new jobs. We are seeing major new projects built here, and even bigger ideas on the horizon. We're getting safer. We're marketing ourselves as a destination, and we're receiving national and international attention for our efforts.

A major newspaper in Switzerland says The Bronx is "filled with gardens and artists' lofts." In Ireland, they say that The Bronx is "bursting with energy" and a "place on the rise." In Spain, they write The Bronx "isn't what it was...it's *better!*" And in Germany they declare, "The Bronx is Back!" Clear across the globe, people are appreciating the "New Bronx!"

But I cannot do it alone. Our centennial is a time to celebrate our shared ideas, and our shared sacrifice, for the betterment of our borough. Colin Powell, who went from an apartment on Kelly Street to the highest levels of power in Washington and the Bronx Walk of Fame, once said. "A dream doesn't become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work."

We know what we want to see in our borough. Our dreams are laid out before us. Over the past four years, if not the past four decades, we have put our own sweat, our own determination and our own hard work into rebuilding and redesigning our borough, into realizing our dreams of what The Bronx can be and will become.

Over the next four years, we will go even further. We will build on this strong foundation, so that 100 years from now, when our successors observe the bicentennial of this county, they will look back at our work and see it as a watershed moment.

They will look back and see a time when the people of this borough—regardless of race, gender, creed, sexual orientation—came together with a common cause, a common dream, and worked as "One Bronx" to develop the "New Bronx."

Our Bronx.