

**STATE OF THE BOROUGH ADDRESS
BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT RUBEN DIAZ JR.
FEBRUARY 19, 2015**

Welcome to my sixth annual State of the Borough address, and welcome to our newest destination, the largest indoor shopping center in New York City, The Mall at Bay Plaza.

We've seen unprecedented, transformative growth since I became the borough president.

We have built nearly 16,000 new units of housing, and have created more than 15,000 new jobs.

City Island was named the best neighborhood in the entire city by the real estate blog Curbed. J-Lo tore the house down at Orchard Beach. Anthony Bourdain highlighted our borough on CNN. We even have our own hot sauce. Tourism is up 14 percent...even the president of Israel came to the Bronx.

Unemployment is down nearly five percent since 2009. Investment is at a record high.

And we even made history with our very own speaker of the New York State Assembly, my good friend, Carl Heastie!

The state of The Bronx is stronger than it has been in decades.

We are maximizing our assets, while improving our quality of life.

For decades, this citadel of commerce was nothing more than a parking lot. Now it is an economic engine, and home to nearly 2,000 new jobs. When I walk around this mall I ask employees, "Where do you live?" The answer, over and over again, is "I live in The Bronx." That's because more than 90 percent of the jobs here have gone to Bronx residents.

In our 2011 quality of life survey, we demonstrated that Bronxites often left the borough to shop because they were dissatisfied with our local options. This shopping venue is an immense improvement. Keeping those spending dollars here in the community is having a big impact.

In its first six months this mall saw its sales rise 20 percent over initial projections. Bronxites have embraced this mall in tremendous fashion. And we know that consumer spending equals job growth.

Our efforts are bearing fruit. What we are doing is working.

Together, we are making great things happen.

We are helping all businesses, small and large. For example, Marlene Cintron, President of the Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation, was able to convince Prestige Properties to extend the lease of the Bagel Cafe in Bay Plaza. This preserved a small, beloved neighborhood

institution.

In October, the community was up in arms when the future of Barnes & Noble, our only bookstore, was in doubt. Consequently, we acted. I mediated an agreement between the bookseller and Prestige Properties, to keep it open for our community for years to come.

Now, I'd like to take a moment to thank Sam Shalem and Prestige Properties, our hosts today, for all they have done for The Bronx. They heard our united voice. They put people over profits.

Youngwoo & Associates is another major developer that has made a significant commitment to our borough. They purchased the former Bronx General Post Office and we are working hand in hand with them, our elected officials, Hostos Community College and Community Board #4 to unlock the potential of this landmark as an innovative new commercial and community space. The GPO will feature quality retail tenants, first-class office space and preserve the continued operation of postal services.

To the west of here, the Kingsbridge National Ice Center is progressing. This is a game changing redevelopment. It will activate a long-dormant landmark and create living wage jobs. My office and the BOEDC have been working diligently with KNIC and its leadership, including hockey legend Mark Messier and gold medalist Sarah Hughes, on construction, permitting and programming. Soon children from all over The Bronx...from all over the region...will be skating to new heights.

In Soundview, we will see the development of New York State's largest television and film studio in partnership with York Studios. This nearly 300,000 square foot, state-of-the-art space will feature eight new sound stages. It will be built green, and will host hundreds of new jobs.

Our food industry is another key to putting more Bronxites to work. For too long, the fish and meat markets at Hunts Point, and other borough food manufacturers, have been forced to store their perishable goods all the way in New Jersey. Therefore, they incur great expense to cross the bridge every day. These markets are responsible for thousands of jobs. These markets feed the entire region.

We must make sure they can remain competitive. It is time for the city to develop a plan to build a new freezer facility in Hunts Point. This will allow our markets to expand, lower costs for consumers, reduce truck traffic and pollution, create hundreds of new jobs and keep more revenue in The Bronx.

Just before Christmas, we finally broke ground at the future home of FreshDirect. We have improved this project since it was first proposed. FreshDirect has one of the most fuel efficient delivery fleets in the city. They accept EBT on their website, a unique program that is among the first of its kind in our nation. They now deliver to the entire borough. Freshdirect could help end food deserts and reduce obesity. They will bring at least 1,000 new jobs. They will save and create thousands more.

The time to build is now. We are moving forward.

All types of development are coming to our borough, from retail and industrial to medical and professional. In the east Bronx, we will see a new, nearly two million square foot office expansion at the Hutchinson Metro Center. This \$550 million complex will include professional and healthcare jobs, a bio-tech incubator, community facilities and more. Estimates indicate that this project will generate thousands of new jobs, and I am proud to support Simone Development in this transformative endeavor.

When it comes to getting Bronxites jobs, we have already done so much. But there is even more to be done.

According to Census data, just 18 percent of working age Bronxites have a bachelor's degree, compared to 33 percent statewide and almost 60 percent in Manhattan. Our challenge is clear. We have to do more to improve the employability of Bronxites at all levels, regardless of their education or personal history.

We are working with our schools to align curriculum with the jobs in demand. This year, we partnered with our principals consortia to convene a Career and Technical Education forum at Bronx Community College. This event allowed our public school principals to participate in a discussion with some of the leading employers across the region.

At the former site of the Fulton Correctional Facility, we have developed a multiservice center for our borough's formerly incarcerated population. In partnership with the Osborne Association, we will help those coming back from prison find work, get the services they need, and rebuild their lives.

The BOEDC has also partnered with the governor and the State Department of Labor to develop a new program, "NY Works." This program puts Bronxites looking for jobs into direct contact with potential employers in The Bronx. Since that initiative was launched in August, we have made more than 4,000 job placements. Without a doubt, these are tremendous numbers.

This initiative has been so successful that Governor Cuomo committed an additional \$10 million in funding. We are bringing together development and job placement like never before.

We are taking advantage of the Harlem River in new ways, creating strong blue-collar jobs while also building new employment and housing opportunities from Mott Haven to Fordham Road.

A complete metamorphosis of the Harlem River waterfront is coming. Last year, both my office and SOBRO issued reports highlighting the promise of this underutilized area. From just south of the 3rd Avenue Bridge all the way to 149th Street, we found the opportunity for thousands of housing units of all kinds, new waterfront access and park space.

The opportunity does not end there. There's more. To the north we have Fordham Landing. This site could host up to one million square feet of mixed-use development, including housing of all

types, community space and additional waterfront and park amenities. This is a great site for a public/private partnership, and we will work with the owners and future developers to activate and revitalize the northwest Bronx.

One of the great features of Fordham Landing, is that it has great Metro-North access. And speaking of Metro-North, in advance of our four new East Bronx Metro-North stations we are examining rezoning opportunities in these neighborhoods. I must once again thank the Governor for including these stations in MTA's five-year capital plan. I am also grateful to our borough's MTA board members—Fernando Ferrer and Charles Moerdler—for their continued advocacy on this issue. It is time for the State Legislature to approve the capital plan, so that this phenomenal transit upgrade can become a reality.

These ideas have the potential to completely invigorate our borough. Better and greener housing...new and more efficient commuting...jobs of all kinds...more access to the waterfront. That's my master plan for The Bronx.

The Bronx has never been more open for business. If you're looking to invest, the time is now.

At the same time, we are ensuring those investments create better paying jobs, as well. Last year, we joined with Mayor Bill de Blasio to increase the living wage for workers at City-funded developments to \$13.13 an hour, building on our victory at the Kingsbridge Armory. And I support Governor Cuomo's call to raise the minimum wage, and to increase it at a higher rate in New York City.

Job creation and economic development are not our only focus. We are also advancing a robust policy and legislative agenda designed to make life better and safer for our residents.

Late last year, the city announced LinkNYC, a proposal to transform public payphones into Wi-Fi kiosks. We found the original plan to be deficient in several ways. Wi-Fi speeds in Manhattan would have been incredible, while the other boroughs would have seen slower speeds and slower rollouts.

We were not going to accept a high-tech "poor door." First, I issued a report critiquing various deficiencies in the LinkNYC proposal. Then, with Comptroller Scott Stringer and my fellow borough presidents, we negotiated a better LinkNYC not just for The Bronx, but for the entire city of New York.

Thanks to our advocacy, under this new plan The Bronx, as well as Upper Manhattan and Staten Island, will receive more high speed kiosks. Due to my recommendation, the city will enact a solar-powered pilot program in our borough to improve the network's resiliency. Now LinkNYC will work for everyone.

We're tackling an important public health issue. I'm sure the ladies here today, and even some of the men, have been getting their manicures and pedicures. I have to admit I've gotten my nails done before. . If you regularly visit a salon, then you know that some of them can be unsanitary.

This past summer, a relative of mine was forced into the emergency room after a pedicure led to a serious infection. When I speak to people about this issue, every one—every single person—has their own horror story about a friend, a family member, or even themselves, who visited a salon to look good, and ended up with a major health issue.

We have seen numerous cases of staph infections, hepatitis and other illnesses. Doesn't the evidence demand more oversight? I think so.

That's why, in September, we announced a set of legislation that would introduce a letter-grading system for cosmetology businesses. The new system will be modeled after the current letter grading system used to monitor restaurants and food service establishments. Our legislative package includes not only letter grades for salons and spas, but a call for increased training options and for a "Customer's Bill of Rights." This legislation was introduced at my behest by Council Member Rafael Espinal, and is supported in Albany by State Senator Gustavo Rivera.

We are making sure that all stakeholders, including businesses, are involved in crafting this proposal. Already, we have partnered with the New York Hispanic Cosmetology and Beauty Chamber of Commerce to hear their concerns.

Moreover, we have heard from numerous businesses who support this legislation, and who want their industry to be cleaner and safer. In partnership with my colleagues in government and responsible business owners, we will spend this year pushing for a cleaner, safer and healthier environment for customers and employees alike in our beauty spas and nail salons.

From healthier salons, to a healthier Bronx, we continue to make great strides in greening the borough. The Bronx River is cleaner than ever. We've lead the way in solar panel installations. I've invested millions of dollars in LEED certified new housing. But we must aggressively green our older housing stock and retire dirty boilers, if we're going to bring down air pollution and reduce asthma.

We need to utilize capital dollars in smarter ways. Last year, we proposed, to HPD an innovative partnership with Village Power Financial which would leverage a revolving fund with private sector investment to accelerate the greening of large residential buildings. This partnership would make tax dollars go further than ever before, through the power of "impact investing."

Impact investments are ventures made with the intention to generate measurable social and environmental benefit, alongside a financial return. With Council Member Andrew Cohen, we will identify eligible buildings. We believe this proposal will clean our environment, create new jobs, reduce energy cost, and in the long run, keep our city affordable.

We are looking not only to do well, but to do good.

We will also continue our push for a citywide and statewide public felony gun offender registry. Last year, unfortunately, our proposal for a statewide database was halted in Albany. This year,

with State Senator Jeff Klein, Assembly Member Jeffrey Dinowitz, and Council Members Costa Constantinides, Ritchie Torres and Paul Vallone, we will redouble our efforts to expose those individuals who would commit gun crimes to public scrutiny.

Our borough is safer today than it has been in decades. For two straight years we saw the total number of homicides in The Bronx drop below 100 for the first time since the early 1960's. That would not be possible without the NYPD, working hand-in-hand with a concerned citizenry.

Let me be clear, when a police officer does wrong, I will speak up. When justice is not served, I will protest. But I know that the majority of our police are doing great work. I know they are keeping us safe. I know they are putting their lives on the line for us.

On the evening of January 5, two of our finest in the 46th Precinct were responding to a robbery at the end of their shift. They both, unfortunately, were greeted by the bullets of two thugs. The results could have been horrible, as we saw in Brooklyn. They could have paid the ultimate price. Thank God they are ok. Thank God they are able to be here with us today.

Please give a round of applause to Police Officers Andrew Dossi and Aliro Pellerano!

This coming year, we will continue to articulate and execute a vigorous agenda. We will encourage our youth to have their voices heard, and to take advantage of a new law that allows individuals as young as 16 to be eligible for appointment to our community boards.

We will continue to modernize our housing stock. Last year, I put nearly \$3 million in capital funds towards housing, helping to build 600 affordable units. Our green developments, such as Via Verde and Arbor House, are nationally recognized for their design.

I have committed funding to the city's first ever development designed specifically for LGBT seniors. I am excited that SAGE and HELP USA are about to embark on this innovative development in our borough. I am committed to be a borough president for all people, regardless of race, gender or sexual orientation.

But to truly bring transformative housing development to The Bronx, we have to examine not just available space, but space that does not even technically exist.

My office is putting together a report examining the possible decking of three Bronx train yards—149th Street, the Grand Concourse yards near my alma mater, Lehman College, and the 1 train yards connecting Riverdale and Kingsbridge.

We will examine possible costs and potential density, and will take the first step towards creating new space as a key component of our city's housing and economic development future.

Mr. Mayor...if they aren't interested in Queens, why not try The Bronx?

We will make sure that the housing we develop works for everyone, so that we are able to retain

our growing professional class. We do have a population of skilled professionals. We must provide more amenities to retain them, so that their employment status and purchasing power stays right here where it belongs.

We must finally act on the redevelopment of the Sheridan Expressway. We have seen the success of converting highways into boulevards with pedestrian crossings, such as those found on the West Side of Manhattan. It will not only provide for new housing development opportunities, but will improve pedestrian safety and access to parkland along the Bronx River, without compromising access to the Hunts Point Market. The State can no longer drag its feet on the future of the Sheridan.

We will get healthier, as well. Recent studies rank our borough number 62 of New York's 62 counties in health indicators. We must change this. Today we are launching a social media campaign. This initiative will challenge all Bronxites to encourage one another to adopt a healthier lifestyle. So when you eat a healthy lunch, or get in a good workout, hashtag #NOT62! on social media. Let's start trending toward a healthier Bronx together!

The Bronx, unfortunately, remains one of the centers for HIV transmission. I am committed to changing this and have created an HIV Roundtable to assist us in staying on top of the latest developments in HIV/AIDS and to initiate innovative approaches to help those living with HIV.

As part of our continued efforts to support our seniors, we are announcing a special partnership with the City Department of Finance SCRIE and DRIE Out-Reach Team. Our staff will visit 10 buildings this year to inform and enroll Bronxites in these two important programs. Participants will have their rent frozen. Consequently, the City of New York will provide their landlord a property tax credit which is equal to the amount of future rent increases. We will make sure our seniors can stay in their homes.

We will continue to fund worthy projects. My administration has provided more than \$126 million in capital funding to over 360 projects since 2009. Last year alone, we provided \$9 million to 25 different endeavors, including security upgrades at NYCHA buildings and affordable housing in every corner of The Bronx.

In our schools, my office has provided more than \$26 million to 180 different institutions. With these funds, we are making our schools work better for all of our children by providing them with new computers, smart classrooms and science labs. But a strong education system requires not just an updated building. We must also ensure we are doing everything we can to nurture the minds of young Bronxites. We must ensure that they have every opportunity to excel.

Building on our success at Barnes & Noble, we will do more to put books and Bronxites together. We will continue to expand access to gifted and talented programs, so that children in every Bronx neighborhood are exposed to the strongest curriculum at an earlier age. With AT&T, we will expand our work with "Chess in the Schools," and bring this wonderful mental exercise to more students.

We will make sure that our high school students are afforded the best possible education, regardless of their performance on a single standardized test. There is an inverse relationship between the racial makeup of our public school population and the population of our specialized high schools—including the Bronx High School of Science.

The New York Times reported last year that just 21 Hispanic students—and just seven black students—were offered entry into Stuyvesant High School’s freshman class. What is even more shocking is that those numbers were down from the previous year. How could a number already so low get even lower?

I am optimistic that, working with Chancellor Carmen Farina, we can change this. In 2012, I issued a report calling for equal access to test preparation for public school students, and I echo that call today. We can do even more.

It is also time to create new specialized high schools, one in each borough, which would use a portfolio admissions system to choose its freshman class. These schools must also guarantee admission to the top two students in each public middle school. We must ensure that the best and brightest from every community have a chance to excel.

Last year The Bronx Tourism Council, in partnership with the Department of Transportation, put The Bronx on the map...literally. Not only do we now have a Bronx visitors map, but we are seeing sleek wayfinders on our streets. We will continue to promote the amazing cultural opportunities our borough has to offer on the national and international stages. Travel operators, writers and editors from South America, Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands have come to discover and write about The Bronx, further solidifying our borough as a travel destination. With a number of new strategies and the upcoming, first-ever comprehensive, “Bronx Visitors Guide,” we will continue to attract new visitors in 2015!

We will encourage everyone, regardless of their status, to show the world they are a real New Yorker by getting their official NYC ID.

With the BOEDC, local elected officials and other stakeholders, we will develop plans to improve the Kingsbridge retail corridor along Broadway. We will study the revitalization of our city's epicurean epicenter, the Arthur Avenue Retail Market. We will examine the future of the Cromwell/Jerome corridor, and consider ways to increase housing and commercial opportunities that will complement the existing community.

We will connect our neighborhoods across the water, by implementing ferry service in Soundview. And we will connect our communities across the land, as we work to bridge both halves of Van Cortlandt Park over the Major Deegan.

And we will, with our Congressional delegation, see to it that my predecessor and friend, Herman Badillo, is memorialized in the renaming of the Morrisania Post Office—a fitting tribute to his trailblazing record in Congress.

If we put in the effort, if we advance a strategy and work assiduously to see it enacted, nothing is impossible.

We can improve police/community relations. We can build a strong legislative agenda that makes this city a cleaner, safer place. We can create new jobs.

We can do all of this.

In his famous address before the Democratic National Convention in 1984, our late governor, Mario Cuomo, spoke passionately about the importance of government in the lives of everyday Americans.

He said, “We believe in a government that is characterized by fairness and reasonableness, a reasonableness that goes beyond labels, that doesn't distort or promise to do things that we know we can't do.”

He said, “We believe in a government strong enough to use words like ‘love’ and ‘compassion’ and smart enough to convert our noblest aspirations into practical realities.”

His words still resonate today. His words resonate within me, as I work with our civic and elected leaders, non-profits, first responders, our community boards, and every single one of the 1.4 million people who live here to make The Bronx a better place to live, work and raise a family.

So we move forward. We move forward, in the spirit of Herman Badillo and Mario Cuomo. We move forward, understanding that we can design and enact a transformative agenda for our future while also respecting the hardships and the glories of our past.

Look at where we are today. Look at the hundreds of Bronxites working here this morning. Look around you at this tremendous structure, and the new opportunities it has brought to our borough.

We can. And we will. Because we deserve it.

Thank you!