

STATE OF THE BOROUGH ADDRESS 2011
Ruben Diaz Jr., Bronx Borough President
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One year ago, we came together just a few miles from here to celebrate our home— the Bronx— and our shared accomplishments.

Today, we come together to discuss not only how far we have come, but where we are headed.

We come together to celebrate our efforts to make every neighborhood, every block, even better.

We come together to stand up against those who denigrate our home.

And as we did last year, we come together as “One Bronx” – “Un Solo Bronx.” “One Bronx” is embodied in all of you who sit here today who have been working tirelessly for years, if not decades, to make the Bronx a better place.

Together we are expanding that vision and executing a plan that centers on holistic, intelligent development. A development plan which prioritizes greening our Borough at every opportunity. A plan that creates good, livable jobs. A plan that assists those businesses seeking to operate here. A plan that builds more parks and affordable housing. A development plan that serves all our Borough’s needs.

Our goal, our commitment is to raise the standards and expectations for all in this Borough.

We will fix the way we do business in the City, by forcing corporations that lobby for taxpayer handouts to do better by the men and women they employ. We will not simply accept “business as usual.”

We will change the pay structure of this City, ensuring that a “living wage” goes hand in hand with heavily subsidized development.

Developers must do more for the Bronx, City Hall and City agencies must do more for the Bronx and we, the residents of the Bronx, must also do more.

We know from speaking with, working with, and living with each other that great strides have been made over the past 30 years. It is time to share that story with the world, and there is no better time to start than today, right here and right now.

This chapter of the story begins with our children. As former Mayor David Dinkins once said, “our children are our future,” so I am proud to report that we have, for the second

year in a row, provided the highest amount of funding to schools in the history of my office.

The more than \$12 million in funding we have provided to Bronx schools will go towards new playground equipment, smart boards, physical plant upgrades and other major improvements to schools in every corner of our borough.

And we are not done. Our office continues to meet regularly with principals and administrators from Bronx schools at all levels through our education consortia to discuss their challenges and develop workable solutions.

And we will do more. Recently, I appointed Monica Major, a long-time parent advocate and Morris Park resident, to serve as my representative to the Panel for Educational Policy. I am thrilled to have her as part of my team.

Together, we will both recognize and build on the many great achievements happening in our schools.

In Mott Haven, M.S. 223 was honored this year by Intel as one of the top math schools in the nation. For their efforts, M.S. 223 will not only receive cash grants and prizes totaling \$160,000, but they will also continue to set the bar by which all other public middle schools will be measured.

Over the holiday break, the choir at the Celia Cruz High School of Music showed off just how special their talents are, winning the title of “Best Choir in New York City” at the Bronx Zoo’s first-ever “SING! For Wildlife” competition. They competed against schools from every corner of the City. We already knew the Bronx was number one, and we thank the choir for going out and proving it. Now we can all sing it from the rooftops.

Discovery High School, in Kingsbridge Heights, continues to lead the City, and the nation, in green initiatives. Nine of its students completed a nationally recognized employment training program in green wall and green roof installation. In November, I proudly joined them when they were highlighted by NBC as a national leader in green innovation and given a chance to construct a green wall at Rockefeller Center.

Our schools are doing great things, yet there is still a great deal of work to be done. Last year, I correctly noted that while the Department of Education touted record-high scores on the State Assessment Test, the results of the national tests made it clear that something was wrong with the State’s system. An investigation by the State has further confirmed that for years, the scores on those tests had been grossly inflated.

This fall my office will host an education summit, which will bring together the best minds on education from not only the Bronx, but from across the nation.

Through this summit, we will develop strong new ideas on curriculum, on overcrowding, and on expanding charter schools. We will work to foster innovation while also making

sure our public schools, once again, are the best in the nation. We will put forward new ideas to make sure all students— from our most gifted to those who need extra help and everyone in between— are being served by our public school system. Our children must be prepared to enter college and the workforce, and the way to make sure that happens is to guarantee that our public schools are the best they can possibly be.

Our schools are getting healthier and safer. For several years my office, along with concerned parents and the New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, has led a campaign to compel the Department of Education to acknowledge the crisis of PCB contamination in our schools and fix the problem. Recently, the extent of contamination has been proven to be city-wide. We all know that PCBs are extremely toxic chemicals that for many years were unwittingly put in building materials used in schools. PCBs are particularly dangerous to the health of both children and school workers. Schools are no place for children to be exposed to dangerous pollutants.

There is nothing more important than our children being safe while they get a proper education. Thanks to the efforts of our coalition, which includes Congressmen Jose Serrano, Joseph Crowley and Jerrold Nadler, the EPA has demanded that the City test and remediate PCBs from all schools that may be at risk. I am happy to report that this administration has finally made an attempt to treat the PCB issue seriously. They have proposed a plan that would allocate \$700 million to remove these contaminants from nearly 800 public school buildings over a ten year period. A good first step, but the time table is grossly inadequate. In announcing this program, the City is conceding that our schools have a real problem. We need a faster response...the health of our children is at stake.

We will never stop our efforts to protect our children from this serious threat. And let me be clear, PCB's are not just a Bronx issue, they're a city wide issue and I will work to make sure every elected official in this city makes this a priority.

Remediating PCB contamination is just one way we have made health a priority for school administrators. Last year, in partnership with the New York City Strategic Alliance for Health, we helped create the Excellence in School Wellness Awards. These awards recognize elementary schools for their efforts in creating a healthy school environment. This is key to preventing childhood obesity and improving academic achievement. We encourage all Bronx elementary schools to apply, and in due course, we will expand the awards to middle and high schools. My hope is that our schools can one day be measured not only by using test scores, but also by the health and physical fitness of their students.

To this end, we hosted the first ever Bronx Food Summit, which brought together individuals and organizations from across the City— such as health care institutions, food justice advocates, and people like me who just love to eat— to spend a day discussing strategies to bring more nutritious food choices to our borough, and to make sure Bronxites can and will take advantage of them. The event was wildly successful, and has

led to the creation of a working group that has spent months developing and supporting health programs for the Bronx residents who need them the most.

We have great stories across the borough, not just in schools but in all walks of life. This year we were able to provide \$37.6 million in funding to worthy organizations in every corner of the Bronx. We are helping to renovate libraries in Woodlawn, Castle Hill, and Westchester Square. We are contributing to the redevelopment of the Lehman Center for the Performing Arts, just a few blocks from where we sit today.

Yes, we must provide our children with a quality education, but we must also improve where they live and play. Parks all over our borough are getting much-needed improvements, thanks to our partnerships with local elected officials:

For instance, working with City Council Member Maria del Carmen Arroyo, new playground equipment is headed to Fox Playground in Longwood. Council Members Joel Rivera and Jimmy Vacca have teamed up with me to rebuild Van Nest Park. State Senator Jeff Klein, Assemblyman Michael Benedetto and I are partnering to improve Belden Point, a beautiful waterfront park on City Island. Also, Council Member Helen Foster, Assemblywoman Vanessa Gibson and I are partnering to improve Rocks & Roots Park in Highbridge.

In fact, twelve percent of our total budget allocation, nearly \$5 million, has gone to park reconstruction across the Bronx. Together, teaming up with local officials and community organizations, we are making sure Bronx kids have the green space they deserve.

Preserving our existing parks and greenways is a major priority. This summer, thousands of Bronxites stood together to protest the removal of old growth trees along Pelham Parkway as part of the roadway's long-awaited reconstruction. While this project is critical to improving the safety of motorists and pedestrians alike, it must move forward with minimal impact to the beautiful trees that line this scenic byway.

Hence, I was pleased to assist in the establishment of a task force specifically created to oversee the preservation of these historic trees. I look forward to working the Pelham Parkway Save the Trees Campaign, Community Board #11, the Pelham Parkway Preservation Alliance, local elected officials and the City to ensure that all viable trees along this Parkway are protected during the course of this project.

To quote the great philosopher Dr. Seuss from his book *The Lorax*, "I speak for the trees, for the trees have no tongues." The trees along Pelham Parkway, and our green space in neighborhoods across the Bronx, cannot protect themselves. Like Dr. Seuss said so eloquently, it is our job to protect them.

Like parks, we made great strides in improving housing. Our office has thrown its support behind major rezoning efforts that will lead to increased development in areas

that are primed for new growth, including those in Bedford Park/Norwood and East Tremont and Third Avenues.

Over the course of my first two years as Borough President I have successfully leveraged approximately \$16 million in capital allocations into \$442 million in housing development. My support has facilitated the construction or preservation of over 1,800 units of housing, across 20 different projects of all types, including moderate-income homeownership, affordable mixed-income rentals, and supportive-housing for veterans, victims of domestic abuse and others with special needs. In fact, senior citizen housing represents the greatest number of projects receiving my support.

And we didn't just fund new housing projects; we also took steps to enhance and improve our existing housing inventory. Since I first became Borough President I have been working to assist the tenants living in neglected Bronx buildings. Many of these buildings were crumbling around them, while real estate speculators, interested only in profit, took advantage of, if not outright abused, hard-working Bronxites. In many cases, the treatment of these tenants rose, I believe, to the level of criminality.

I am well-aware of just how bad conditions were within the infamous Milbank and Ocelot real estate holdings—a member of my own staff was among those tenants who were being mistreated. Tenants within these buildings were denied basic human necessities—such as heat, hot water, and even locks on their doors— for weeks, if not months at a time.

This is unacceptable. Now we will be able to fight back early against real estate speculators who have abused the trust of both Bronx tenants and renters across the City. Last month, I joined with City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, Mayor Bloomberg, and others to launch the “Proactive Preservation Initiative,” a new program that will work to identify troubled buildings and make necessary repairs, before things get out of control and tenants are left in a hopeless situation. We will take advantage of these tools to ensure what we saw with Milbank and Ocelot— as well as other distressed properties— never happens again.

Just like our schools, we are working to make our housing healthier and safer. Consequently, we have put together a pilot program, investing half a million dollars to assist low-income buildings in our borough to convert from #4 and #6 heating oil to either clean-burning natural gas or #2 heating oil. Our first building— 530 159th Street— is a 44-unit low-income cooperative currently in the process of conversion. This project and future projects like it, will not only reduce air pollution and energy usage through the consumption of cleaner fuel, but they will also help to keep housing affordable for low-income tenants while providing the market for green jobs, right here in the Bronx.

Burning cleaner fuel is one important way we can improve the health of Bronx residents. But we need to do more. As part of any major project in this City, developers must submit an environmental impact statement, which analyses the effects of physical construction on the surrounding area. But here in the Bronx, where we have some of the worst health indicators in the nation, that's not enough.

We are currently researching the incorporation of a health impact statement for every major development project. Such a report would explore the health effects of land use decisions, guaranteeing that significant analysis will occur prior to planning, zoning, and development. My staff and I are currently working with Council Member Arroyo, chair of the health committee, and other City Council members to develop the best way to move forward with this important proposal, that ensures that new development does not have an adverse impact on the health and well-being of our neighborhoods.

However, we are not waiting for the rest of the city; it is with the health of our borough in mind that we are already working toward the continued greening of the Bronx. We already require new projects to meet LEED certification in order to receive funding and I call on the rest of the City's elected officials to make this a city wide mandate. As we have already shown, we're not just talking about change for new construction but actually undertaking efforts to retrofit existing buildings to make them more environmentally-friendly, as well.

It gets better. We also administer the Bronx Initiative for Energy & the Environment, which works to help both new and existing businesses "green" their physical plant and make the Bronx a cleaner place. Last year, we approved five loans, totaling nearly half a million dollars. Also, through the Bronx Empowerment Zone, we approved 20 additional loans for more than \$2.3 million. For our smaller businesses we have the "springboard" program, which offers both low and no-interest microloans. More than \$50,000 has been approved through the microloan program, with much more to come this year.

My administration has and will continue to make intelligent economic development a reality. We have taken major steps to market the Bronx to new businesses, to support our existing businesses, and to grow the overall economy of our borough. A recent article in "City Hall News" commended our office for its focus on economic development, noting that the \$300,000 I allocated to support the Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation has gone a long way towards the continued revitalization of the Bronx economy.

The proof is right in front of us. Since October 2009, our Business Initiative Corporation has provided 41 loans to Bronx businesses, totaling just over \$24 million. The BIC also has seven loans pending, which will push another \$5 million into our borough's economy.

In all, we have lent more than \$32 million since 2009 to Bronx businesses, from major corporations just entering the Bronx to mom-and-pop shops that have been here for years. In the past year the BIC has increased its lending by 52 percent... an impressive number at any time, but even more impressive during a down economy. Late last year our BIC was honored by the Small Business Administration as a "Bronze Lender" for their work in expanding borough business. At this rate, we'll be heading to gold in no time.

But these are more than just numbers on a page. These are the success stories of the new Bronx economy.

Right here in Mott Haven we have helped Verdero, an athletic apparel and equipment company with exclusive marketing rights to Major League Baseball. With a \$191,000 loan, Verdero will be able to increase their merchandise for the upcoming season, create new jobs, and expand their business beyond the borders of the Bronx.

In Hunts Point, specialty food supplier, Gourmet Guru, was able to outfit its brand new, state-of-the-art warehouse with top of the line, environmentally friendly equipment thanks to \$300,000 in loans.

We are changing the borough's power grid as well. Two companies, C. Kenneth Imports and Flat Rate Movers, took loans to install solar panels on their roofs. Both companies will not only save money by upgrading their energy supply, they will also reduce their carbon footprint.

In June, Down East Seafood in Hunts Point was able to purchase an all-electric, fully refrigerated delivery truck—the only such truck on the road today in New York City. The truck can travel 150 miles before being recharged, and produces zero emissions.

In September, we were awarded almost \$270,000 by the attorney general's office to develop a green roof, in partnership with ABC Carpet and Home, that will not only decrease the company's utility bills, but will also absorb rainwater and reduce storm water runoff pollution in the Bronx River.

Together with State Senator Klein, we were able to bring Cross County Federal Savings Bank to Van Nest. Not only will this branch offer area residents a new banking opportunity, it will also increase foot traffic on this important commercial strip.

We also helped to secure \$5 million in funding through the IDA for Jetro Cash & Carry, one of the most critical businesses in the region. If you buy groceries or eat in a restaurant in this city, chances are you've purchased something that originated at Jetro. This loan will give Jetro the ability to undergo a major "green" expansion at its Hunts Point facility.

Providing funding is not the only way we have helped Bronx businesses in the past year. For the first time ever, thanks to our advocacy, SCORE has come to the Bronx. Through the federal Small Business Administration, SCORE provides free counseling to start-ups, entrepreneurs, and businesses looking to expand.

Also this year, in partnership with the BOEDC, Major League Baseball and the New York Yankees held a seminar to increase their contractors and suppliers from the Bronx.

Each and every day the BOEDC acts as a clearinghouse for Bronx businesses. We do not just provide funding, but help with tickets, violations, infrastructure and a variety of other issues that all businesses, both large and small, are faced with. In fact, in the last year

alone, the BOEDC provided assistance, financial or otherwise, to nearly 700 Bronx businesses. And that has made a real difference in our borough

Much of this success can be attributed to the hard work of Marlene Cintron, president of the BOEDC, and her staff. Since Marlene was brought on a year ago, she has been working tirelessly to not only bring new business to the borough, but to offer opportunities for our existing businesses to grow as well. Thank you, Marlene.

We've also been doing more work to bring new visitors to the Bronx, through the Bronx Tourism Council. This year, the tourism council offered the first-ever eco tours of the Bronx. These tours give visitors the chance to take in the sights at Riverdale's Wave Hill, visit the wildlife at the Bronx Zoo, and canoe the Bronx River. Our parks are beautiful, our waterways are gorgeous, and why shouldn't we show them off?

The long awaited visitors' center at Poe Park is almost complete. This project, funded jointly by our office and City Council Member Rivera and scheduled to open in October, will create new public space where visitors to the Bronx will be able to get information not only on historic Poe Cottage, but the many wonderful attractions our borough has to offer.

When it comes to tourism, we had a pretty good year. More than two million people visited the zoo, with almost 700,000 visiting the botanical garden. People from all over the world, including yours truly, participated in this year's Tour de Bronx. Diners continue to flock to Arthur Avenue and City Island, and visitors to Woodlawn Cemetery can now take advantage of a new interactive audio tour that we helped to fund. Tourism means more money spent in our restaurants, more visitors to our major cultural institutions...more commerce in our borough.

Yet despite our efforts, the growth of our tourism industry faces a major challenge: we lack a world-class hotel. That is a problem we are trying tirelessly to fix. Just a few weeks ago the Pinstripe Bowl at Yankee Stadium brought to the Bronx thousands of out-of-town visitors from as far away as Kansas. Unfortunately, fans of Syracuse and Kansas State football were unable to explore all the Bronx has to offer.

While a new hotel is not here just yet, we have seen movement on a number of fronts. We have been working diligently, in conjunction with the New York City Economic Development Corporation, to bring a top-flight hotel to the area near Yankee Stadium. We have begun discussions with multiple developers who have shown a keen interest in building a 200--to--300 bed hotel, complete with street-level retail, restaurants, entertainment, catering and convention space just blocks away from the stadium.

This development would serve as a new tourism hub for our borough, while creating hundreds of good jobs for Bronx residents and greatly enhancing the area surrounding Yankee Stadium.

As many of you have heard, the Yankee Stadium parking lots are facing severe financial problems. The parking fees being generated by the facilities are not enough to pay the debt on the bonds issued to pay for their construction. For the past two seasons, only about 60 percent of the available parking spaces have been filled. With the support of the Bronx Parking Development Company, which operates the parking facilities, we believe one of the older garages could be used for the hotel development. This would create an incredible win-win for the people of the Bronx and the parking company.

It will not be long before you can take in a Yankee game and walk just a few blocks to your Bronx hotel room.

And my office, together with Governor Andrew Cuomo as well as city and federal officials, is working to make sure that the Hunts Point Produce Market—and the thousands of jobs it provides—stay right here in the Bronx. While certain Machiavellian municipalities have attempted to woo the market away, we have made real progress in the past few months, and I am confident that a new deal with the market's tenants will be reached in the near future.

This spring, we will also release a comprehensive plan for the redevelopment of the Kingsbridge Armory. Last year, I announced the creation of a Kingsbridge Armory Task Force, which would be charged with developing a plan for the future of this historic structure.

Many have said that no one would ever be interested in the reuse of the Kingsbridge Armory. They are wrong. The interest in the armory we have seen has been amazing, and enthusiastic. We have heard from healthcare, cultural and educational institutions about the use of the building. The film industry has expressed great interest, and many studios from across the city, such as Kaufmann-Astoria and Silvercup, came to us with plans that would duplicate their success elsewhere right here in the Bronx.

We heard from one developer, New York Arena Management, who wants to convert part of the armory into a sports arena. Officials from the YMCA also visited us, interested in replicating their success at the Park Slope Armory in Brooklyn.

Nobody can argue that Fordham Road, which sits one subway stop away from the Kingsbridge Armory, would not have been devastated by a retail mall. In the summer, shoppers would have abandoned Fordham Road for the air conditioning...in the winter, the same would be said for the heat. A covered, climate-controlled shopping mall...the end of Fordham Road as we know it. And all at taxpayer expense.

There are alternatives. In October, New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service chose the Kingsbridge Armory for a study through its highly competitive Capstone Program. The Capstone Program is very well-respected, so much so that multiple city agencies have used its services to design and plan major projects. For several months, Capstone has been providing our task force with valuable support as we move forward on developing a new plan for the armory. The report of this task force

must be the cornerstone of a new RFP, and I invite the mayor to join with me to responsibly redevelop the Kingsbridge Armory.

Responsible redevelopment means that whatever plan we choose has a direct positive impact on all citizens, not an elite few. Right now, the Bronx has a poverty rate of 28.5 percent. A recent report by the Fiscal Policy Institute found the bottom 90 percent of city income earners make 34.5 percent of all money made in the city.

In contrast, the top one percent of the City's income earners make 44 percent of all money made in New York. In fact, the same study noted that between 1990 and 2007, hourly wages in this city actually fell almost nine percent.

These numbers are even more shocking when one looks at just how much development has taken place during the past decade. Since 2002, more than \$11 billion in new development took place in the Bronx. Yet we still have the highest poverty rate of any urban county in the United States. How do we address this? What is the solution to this huge income gap? How do we make these development-dollars work for "One Bronx?"

We have a real problem in this city. This is why I am leading the fight to pass the "Fair Wages for New Yorkers" Act, a bill that would require developers who receive heavy taxpayer subsidies for their projects to provide a "living wage." Not only is this the right thing to do to lift our people out of poverty, it is sound economic policy.

A study of 15 cities with similar "living wage" laws, by the Center for American Progress, found that wage standards, such as the requirements put forward in this bill, do not have a negative effect on job creation. This report is not the only credible research we have on the positive effects of a "living wage" law. Professor Robert Pollin of the University of Massachusetts has done extensive research on "living wage" laws. He has found that such laws give workers more money to save, allowing them to lower their debt and make much-needed purchases.

Fiscal conservatives should join me in support this legislation. As Pollin's research demonstrates, wage standards reduce reliance on food stamps, welfare, and other government assistance.

Twenty-nine members of the City Council have signed on to this bill, putting us another step closer to making "living wage" the law. This year I will work to ensure that the City Council holds hearings on this legislation, so that we may begin the discussion on changing our city's wage structure in earnest. It is time to hold hearings on this legislation, and for the City Council to bring it to a vote. The people of New York City cannot afford to wait.

We've worked to improve the quality of life for all Bronxites. And we also worked throughout last year, to make sure all Bronxites were counted by participating in the United States Census. Through our efforts, we were able to bring the total number of Bronx residents who were counted to 65 percent, up from 56 percent in the last Census.

Census participation is critical to ensuring that we obtain our fair share of funding and resources, and I am proud that so many Bronxites heard our call and made their own voices heard.

The Census affirms the great diversity we enjoy in the Bronx; a diversity that must always be celebrated and used to unite us. In October, a brutal anti-gay attack in University Heights against three young men brought the Bronx into national focus. This horrific moment of atrocious violence was sickening, and pushed a diverse group of Bronxites into action.

But even the ugliest moments brought out the best of our borough. In response to this event and several other bias incidents, my office, together with Bronx District Attorney Robert Johnson and the police department, have created a task force, to be made up of clergy and community leaders from all faiths, ethnicities and sexual orientations, designed to stand together in the face of future hate crimes. Not only will this team act to show Bronx solidarity in our most trying times, it will work to educate Bronxites on the definition of a hate crime, how to report a hate crime, and how we can work together to prevent such incidents in the future.

Yes, we are deeply committed to the concept and reality of ‘One Bronx.’ That same month, I wrote to President Obama, urging him to make the long-awaited repeal of the military’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, which prevented LGBT Americans from serving openly in our armed forces, a reality. The repeal of this law hit close to home for me, as my own niece had been forced to resign from the Navy for no other reason than being openly gay. Late last year Congress finally passed a repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” which President Obama then signed into law. I am happy to report that many members of the borough’s LGBT community, including my niece, are planning to reenlist in the military thanks to this courageous act.

This was a major step forward. We cannot tolerate any step back. I have often spoken of “One Bronx,” where we all work together to promote the best of the borough, while also standing up as a whole to push back against what hurts us. The spirit of “One Bronx” was on display in November, when Community Board #10 condemned these attacks. This horrific incident happened on the other side of the Bronx, yet this board stood up and urged all Bronxites to join together and combat all acts of violence and discrimination. This is the epitome of the “One Bronx” mentality, and I urge all community boards to follow Community Board #10’s lead and pass a similar resolution showing their commitment to a peaceful, unified Bronx.

These actions, as well as other efforts by Bronxites from all walks of life, will show the world that we are united as “One Bronx.” We can disagree with one another on the issues, but those disagreements must be respectful. And we do not and will not tolerate any act of violence against a fellow Bronxite, especially when that violence is related to race, religion, or sexual orientation.

“One Bronx” is about coming together. “One Bronx” is about different, diverse communities standing as one. “One Bronx” is about supporting our efforts to improve every one of our neighborhoods.

This past year nothing filled me with more pride—and illustrated the spirit of the “One Bronx” mentality— than the enormous response that we received for our “Peace in Our Streets” initiative. This past fall we led hundreds of volunteers into neighborhoods that had been identified by the police department as hotbeds of gun violence. This initiative promoted the NYPD’s 866-GUN-STOP program, which collects tips on illegal guns and offers individuals a \$1,000 reward when that information leads to an arrest.

We walked the streets and spoke to people about crime in their neighborhood. We went door-to-door in some of our most challenging public housing developments and handed out information on this program. We reached thousands of Bronxites, and the message we heard from them was loud and clear: they are tired of being terrorized in their neighborhoods... they are tired of keeping their children inside, for fear that they will be struck down by a stray bullet... they are tired of the violence. I agree...enough is enough.

And our efforts have already begun to pay off. Last year, the police received 181 tips through this hotline, resulting in the confiscation of 79 guns, 158 arrests, and rewards of \$50,000 paid out to concerned tipsters. These numbers would not be possible without the help of the hundreds of volunteers who joined us, to work for an end to violence in our Borough. Many of you are here today, and I ask that each of you stand up and be recognized. You are the heroes among us, people who quietly work to make the Bronx a better place. Our “Peace in Our Streets” initiative would be nowhere without all of you. We will be back on the ground in just a few short weeks, continuing to spread our message of peace to new communities. I urge all of you to join with your neighbors and join us on the streets.

The Bronx has indeed come a long way during the past 30 years, and we have all played a major role in that renaissance. In the early 20th century, the Bronx was known throughout the world as a borough of neighborhoods, of families, of strong communities working together for the common good of their hometown. Great art, literature, and cultural achievements have come from the Bronx.

In *The Jazz Singer*, which was the first movie in the history of film to feature sound, the lead character assures his mother that when he becomes a successful Broadway star, they will leave Manhattan and move to the luxury of the Bronx. Great authors, from Edgar Allen Poe to Mary Higgins Clark, have all made their home here. Great entertainers, such as Al Pacino, Aventura, Willie Colon, Cuba Gooding Jr. and Regis Philbin, all have Bronx roots. We are the home of Nobel Prize winners, like Rosalyn Sussman Yalow, and of Pulitzer Prize winners like David Halberstam. Internationally renowned fashion leaders, like Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren, as well as and pioneers like Herman Badillo, Colin Powell, and Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, have all called the Bronx home. When hip-hop took the world by storm, it did so from right here in the Bronx.

It is time to let the world know once again that the Bronx is a place of success. We face challenges— in education, in the economy, in making our borough a greener place. But we are all committed to the rebirth and continuing revitalization of our Bronx— the place we call home.

This year, we will continue to build our economy into a force to be reckoned with. We will not listen to the naysayers who say it cannot be done in the Bronx... instead, we will show them how.

We will continue to fight to make our schools better, both in curriculum and in environment. We will not listen to those who say our children are already doing as well as they can...we will show that they can do better.

We will fight to make sure that more Bronxites are able to support their families and rise out of the clutches of poverty. We will not listen to those who say that poverty is an inevitable part of life in the Bronx...we will show them that those chains can be broken.

There are success stories all around us. But the best is yet to come. Please join me on this journey...our journey to a thriving “One Bronx.”

God bless you, God bless the Bronx, and God bless the United States of America!