

STATE OF THE BOROUGH ADDRESS
BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT RUBEN DIAZ JR.
FEBRUARY 22, 2018

Good morning, and thank you for attending my ninth "State of the Borough" address.

I especially want to thank Marricka Scott-McFadden, my new partner at Borough Hall, for that wonderful introduction and for her service. In January, Marricka succeeded my longtime colleague, Aurelia Greene, as my deputy borough president, and I am thrilled to officially introduce her to all of you. Marricka brings a wealth of public and private sector experience to this position. She's going to do great, and we're lucky to have her on our team!

A neutron walks into a bar and asks the bartender, "how much?" The bartender says, "For you, no charge!"

If you're asking yourself why that was funny, it's probably because you did not pay attention in science class. That comes from Neil DeGrasse Tyson, a native Bronxite and a member of Science's Class of 1976. Thank you, Bronx Science, and Principal Jean Donahue for hosting us today.

We are here today to celebrate all that we have done over the past nine years, and to outline our plans and goals for my final four years as your borough president.

So far, we've done great things. I stand here proud to report that we executed a transformative agenda that has elevated every neighborhood and community in this wonderful borough.

We're keeping people in their homes, building new housing units for a diverse population, and setting the standard for tenant protection for the city.

That's right, The Bronx is building.

We're also working to provide a great foundation to all our youth, regardless of where they live. And we are engaging and challenging more students.

Ladies and gentlemen, The Bronx is learning.

And The Bronx's economy is growing. We've cut unemployment by more than half, down to 5.5 percent. Workforce participation is at its highest level on record, and 110,000 more Bronx residents have jobs today than when I first took office.

Yes, The Bronx is working.

Additionally, we have lowered crime by record numbers, together with the NYPD, District Attorney Darcel Clark and Bronxites. For the fifth straight year we had less than 100 homicides in our borough, and this year the number dropped to an all-time low. We have done this compassionately, and with a commitment to a fairer, more humane criminal justice system.

That's why The Bronx is safer.

Look at how different things are in this borough today than just a decade ago. We have set the bar for the entire nation on transformative urban renewal and redevelopment. We are the new standard for revitalization.

Because of that, The Bronx is rising.

Yet we face significant, but conquerable, challenges: a homelessness crisis, public school students whose needs are not fully met, and significant health disparities.

We also face a once unimaginable threat in Washington: one that we will resist.

And we will prevail.

New Yorkers know that their government can innovate and act as a safety net. My administration has worked day in and day out on education, housing, homelessness, job growth and urban planning.

The New York City public school system has served as the backbone of this city since 1805. Over one million children rely on it to provide a ladder into college and the workforce. When it comes to education, we must evolve. Inequality on this front is a major issue we face.

Last year, The Bronx saw an increase in its graduation rate, and a decrease in its dropout rate. However, math and reading scores, are still the lowest in the city, and too many of our public high school graduates are still inadequately prepared for the future. We are creating new solutions to address these issues.

This year, we continued supporting our schools through capital funding. My office provided more than \$20 million for much-needed technology and auditorium upgrades all over the borough. Since first taking office, I have provided over \$60 million in funding to nearly 400 schools.

The Bronx is leading the way on creating a New York City tech hub in Mott Haven and the workforce to staff it. Following our second Bronx Tech Summit, we are proposing a computer science model curriculum that integrates technology into all subjects.

This is the road to developing essential modes of thinking for life, learning, and the new economy. Yes, we are encouraging lifelong study while also preparing students for the new workforce.

However, some problems remain. The Department of Education has not been preparing all the students in our communities for their best chance at success. More than half of the city's students are trying to learn in overcrowded classrooms, and 60 percent of elementary and middle school kids were in overcrowded classes last year. Yet, not enough seats are funded in the capital plan even by the city's own calculations. The DOE should work towards capping all middle school classes at 22 students to provide more individualized instruction. New York

City must also offer more High School subjects, with class caps that promote discussion and collaborative learning.

We should pilot these programs in high-needs districts that are currently lagging in graduation rates and other metrics and phase them in citywide. This is the way to cultivate our future leaders and actively engaged citizens.

In The Bronx and throughout the city we have a resource deficiency. We are asked to do more with less. The playing field is uneven. To address this, I formed a task force with Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams, and we issued a report with a series of recommendations for gifted education in New York City. At one of our task force hearings, we heard from a Brooklyn parent who spoke of her son's social life, fractured by his long commute.

This inequity is a common theme evident in Black and Latino communities. Throughout New York City, in 2017, Black and Latino students made up a little more than 44 percent of Specialized High School Admissions Test takers, but received just over 10 percent of the offers. One's socio-economic background, race, neighborhood or borough must no longer determine the quality of a public education.

We should truly provide excellence for all. Neither that young man from Brooklyn, nor any other child, should be forced to lead a fractured life.

We will continue to support our CUNY system, as well, as we marry our students' job skills with the needs of this city. We can create incentive programs that directly link CUNY graduates with jobs.

The City should work to hire qualified CUNY graduates. Think of all the nurses from Lehman who could contribute their talents to the Health and Hospitals Corporation, and all the Baruch business majors who could add value to the Economic Development Corporation. We could create pipelines for architects and engineers from City College by leveraging the Department of Housing Preservation and Development.

We should implement tax credits and offer preferences on city contracts to companies that hire recent CUNY graduates. We must build the bridges to success through synergy. I know firsthand how well a CUNY education can prepare you to take on the world.

Urban planning and infrastructure are significant issues in our city. We have a shortage of affordable housing and the subway is falling apart. In The Bronx, we have developed solutions, creating over 21,000 units of affordable housing and rezoning for more functional, more inviting neighborhoods. We are preventing displacement while creating thriving urban environments that are healthy and flourish economically, intellectually and artistically.

We are planning with a purpose.

Take, for instance, the great work we are doing thanks to the leadership of Governor Cuomo and Assembly Member Marcos Crespo at the Bruckner Sheridan Interchange.

The Sheridan Expressway will be converted into a boulevard, making it safer for pedestrians and cyclists. This project will create new park access and ensure the continued vitality of the Hunts Point food markets and the thousands of union men and women who work there. The city needs to move forward on the redesign of these markets immediately. The money is there. It makes no sense to wait.

Along with economic development, we must invest in our transportation. Our straphangers are barely hanging on. We must make "fair fares" a reality. We cannot lose sight of the needs of our working poor as we fix our city's transit. We should be making it easier for the economically disadvantaged to find jobs and climb out of poverty, not only in The Bronx but in communities like Far Rockaway, East New York, Port Richmond and others that are more distant from the city's Midtown core.

City Ticket, which provides reduced fares on commuter rail, should be expanded in The Bronx for cheaper Metro North service every day. Other boroughs are in line to get similar savings, and we call on the MTA to bring these discounts here. Ferry service is coming to Soundview, and should come to Throggs Neck and City Island, as well. We must beef up transit staff where it counts and cut budgets in the right places. By utilizing fiscal responsibility in transit project management we can make the subways more user friendly while we modernize our signal system.

Good transit provides the opportunity for urban density that characterizes New York City's greatness. Our city has a tremendous need for good, affordable housing. We need to build new units for those who need them and make sure that tenants can remain in their apartments.

This year my office provided more than \$7 million in capital funds to private developments, creating more than 1,500 new affordable units. Since 2009, we have directly funded the creation of nearly 8,000 new affordable housing units with nearly \$52 million in capital funds. These are unprecedented numbers. This includes \$500,000 to New Destiny Housing for survivors of domestic violence.

In partnership with Catholic Charities we allocated \$750,000 for Second Farms Affordable Housing, to provide quality housing for the formerly homeless. We also provided \$600,000 in funding to SAGE Senior LGBTQ Housing, which will be the first of its kind in New York City. It is up to every neighborhood to do their part to house those among us who need the most help.

We are also fighting displacement and homelessness by implementing our 'Right to Counsel' legislation. This new law guarantees tenants access to an attorney, thereby preventing evictions. And it works. We have already seen a 15 percent drop in evictions in the Bronx zip codes where the right to counsel has already been implemented. We are doing away with the unfair imbalance of the scales of justice.

We have kept residents in their homes as neighborhoods change. Our negotiations on the Jerome Avenue rezoning have set the tone for tenant advocacy in this city. We were able to secure agreements from the de Blasio administration on several strong tenant protection programs, including a 'Certificate of No Harassment' pilot program - which forces landlords to prove they do not harass their tenants in order to get permits to make significant alterations to their buildings.

The City also agreed to new parkland and a task force to identify and protect buildings of concern. Additionally, the City has committed to guaranteeing more units with deep affordability. My office has also identified more than 2,000 affordable units that need to be actively preserved and rehabbed by the Administration as part of the proposed Jerome rezoning.

I would like to thank the Bronx Coalition for a Community Vision for their advocacy in this rezoning. The plan for the future of Jerome Avenue represents tremendous transformative potential. Whatever we do, this rezoning has to work for everyone, especially the tenants and small businesses in the rezoned neighborhoods.

In the coming days, we will be counting on the City Council to finalize the best possible agreement with the City on Jerome, and to ensure the Administration keeps all of its promises.

The New York City Housing Authority is also facing a crisis of confidence. Crime persists. Buildings are dirty. Repairs are late, if they are made at all. And, of course, residents are being left out in the cold. Just when you think it couldn't get worse, you find out the city has failed to properly inspect apartments for lead paint, putting children at serious risk.

Things have to change. As I said I would in my State of the Borough Address last year, I have taken action, and my office has led on these issues.

In November my Bronx Public Housing Task Force issued a report, outlining several concrete steps the city can take to improve public safety in public housing. I have also called for State oversight of NYCHA, given the city's inadequate response to the issue of lead testing. A State-appointed monitor is the only credible way to improve NYCHA.

Just look at how badly the agency is handling its ongoing heat crisis. When I have pressed NYCHA to address heat and hot water deficiencies they have told me their problems are money, manpower and efficiency. I have solutions.

Did you know that nearly half of all NYCHA boilers citywide need to be replaced today? I, along with nearly 60 elected officials, -- three borough presidents, three members of Congress, 20 City Council members, ten State Senators and 22 Assembly Members--have called on NYCHA to declare an emergency.

The agency has told me that their hands are tied, but they have yet to present a credible counter argument. To put it into perspective, the new Mario Cuomo Bridge was constructed in a shorter time than it has taken NYCHA to replace the faulty boilers at the Patterson Houses. Why is the process at Patterson still ongoing since 2011? Count them! Seven long years.

The recent allocation of new funding for boilers is far from enough. It is cold comfort to these families that deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. We are turning up the heat on NYCHA to act as a responsible landlord, and if they refuse to do so, I call on the governor, to do it for them.

Healthcare is another critical issue on which we are innovating. The healthcare sector is our largest employer and our health outcomes, though moving in the right direction, remain at the bottom of most statistical measures. We cannot stand idly by while Washington makes things worse. We must implement our own solutions. And we are.

Through our #NOT62 initiative, We have been working to expand mental health first aid training in our borough. We're providing greater access to healthy foods through our Community Supported Agriculture program. This program uses EBT benefits to provide fresh produce to seniors, and will expand to additional centers this year. Later this year, we will launch a campaign to reduce the number of diabetes-related illnesses and amputations.

Further, now that the face of opioid addiction is changing to include non-urban communities, we welcome the increased national conversation on this epidemic. However, here in The Bronx, addiction is not a novel issue. We should not accept a national failure to solve urban problems. When they speak of this crisis, are Republicans talking about helping the folks in our communities? This is the gentrification of the opioid epidemic.

In addition, we cannot criminalize this public health crisis. Addicts should be treated with compassion, and we need more effective solutions, than a revolving door to jail, for using drugs or violating parole.

We cannot speak of lower level drug offenses without speaking of bail reform. New York should eliminate cash bail. Whether or not a defendant belongs in jail should not depend on race or financial status.

Recent data indicates that out of nearly 52,000 Bronx arraignments, over 7,500 defendants were detained at arraignment and nearly 4,000 were detained throughout their cases. The individuals our system locks up awaiting trial do not all pose a risk. And this unwarranted pre-trial detention, is arguably unconstitutional. Three quarters of the city's jail population has not been convicted of a crime in their case, and 89 percent of people who had to make bail were not able to at arraignment. We must reform our bail system. I would also like to thank District Attorney Darcel Clark for publicly supporting, limiting the use of cash bail, and for the excellent work her office is doing with The Bronx's new drug court.

Many people in our criminal justice system are in need of mental wellness services, and we must make high-quality treatment widely accessible. The system should rehabilitate, not debilitate.

Reform efforts to fix our City's jails are needed. However, any new site for a jail in this borough must be thoroughly vetted, and the people of The Bronx must have a meaningful say in the selection. The administration presenting the selection of this site as a *fait accompli* undermines the entire process.

Life is certainly not perfect, but we have done well in so many areas. We have put forward a clear agenda, and we have seen success on housing, healthcare, education and other issues. Our parks look better than ever, we're receiving critical new infrastructure upgrades and more people are visiting the borough than ever before. We are an international success story.

In the past nine years we've seen \$15.5 billion in total development. We have turned The Bronx around, and we all did it together.

We've assembled a diverse array of leaders to plan for the future of the South Bronx as part of the State's Downtown Revitalization Initiative. We are building pathways toward leadership and careers for our youth through innovative programs.

Did you know that nearly half of all young people who applied for a Summer Youth job last year—65,000 youth—were denied employment due to lack of opportunities? If a young person wants to work, shouldn't they have the chance to do so? Isn't getting a good job exactly what we encourage our youth to do?

With Here To Here, and the James and Judy Dimon Foundation, we have established the Bronx Private Industry Council, to create ladders to achievement. The PIC will develop an education and workforce preparation initiative of internships and other job training that is the first of its kind in New York. Judy Dimon is spearheading this effort, and we are thankful to have her here today.

The Bronx Youth Corps continues to train youth leaders, along with DreamYard, to address the issues our communities are facing head on. In partnership with AT&T, DreamYard provided Bronx teenagers summer jobs. They learned real skills about wireless technology and business management that will help them in the workforce, and we are proud to have those students with us here today. Thank you all for your good work.

In times of crisis, The Bronx stands united. When a fire in Belmont kills 13 people and displaces dozens of families, we rise to the occasion. To our first responders who fought the blaze, the police and emergency workers who helped relocate families, and the hundreds of people who gave what they could to assist in our recovery, I say thank you. I would like to acknowledge the brave firefighters who risked their lives that day to save others.

I would also like to acknowledge someone who could not be with us here today, Pfc. Emmanuel Mensah, the National Guard soldier who lost his life that day while rescuing others in the burning blaze. This man is the true face of immigration in America.

Thank you to Councilman Ritchie Torres for your work to name one of our streets after this hero, and your partnership on new fire safety legislation, that mandates stove guards and other measures that can help prevent similar tragedies in the future.

When Hurricane Maria first struck Puerto Rico back in September, we worked to help the island on two fronts. First, I co-hosted an event on Southern Boulevard with the New York Hispanic Clergy Organization to collect water and other goods for the people of the island.

The response was overwhelming. Three hundred thousand pounds of resources were donated at the event, so many that it took two days to completely pack and move all the items and we needed the National Guard to help. But fixing the island's problems and rebuilding will take more than donations.

To mark the 100th day since Hurricane Maria ravaged Puerto Rico, I released a 28-point action plan for the short and long term recovery of the island. The Trump administration has

failed 3.5 million Americans on the Island of Puerto Rico. It is up to us to fight for the billions of dollars Puerto Rico will need to rebuild, and to move the agenda for the island's recovery.

So much of our work, as a government, is indeed a moral imperative. As Mayor LaGuardia once said, "Only a well-fed, well-housed, well-schooled people can enjoy the blessings of liberty." The New York City government should exist to ensure that all of our residents enjoy these blessings.

President Trump has, indeed, raised the stakes in dramatic ways. But we are New Yorkers. We have been here before.

In the 1970's President Ford famously told us, in essence, to drop dead. Mayor Lindsay was focused on his national aspirations. Comptroller Beame became mayor and was in over his head. Our city was in financial ruin. But we bounced back, because we are New Yorkers and that is what we do.

When The Bronx was burning we persevered. We started a process of urban renewal that has brought us our success, because we are New Yorkers and that is what we do.

When New York City was attacked on 9/11, we remained strong. We rose again, because we are New Yorkers and that is what we do. We will continue to resist attacks on those that Washington views as powerless.

It is time for our nation's leadership to stop polarizing and speaking untruths, and to start leading. We reject any misguided, harmful, and, frankly, Un-American, erosion of our rights. We will protect our youth who have sought refuge and made their home in this great nation from deportation. We must pass New York State's DREAM Act and Federal DACA legislation.

We must pass GENDA and protect our LGBTQ community, and protect a woman's right to make her own healthcare decisions.

We must value and honor our diversity. The Bronx is a living case study in how diversity creates flourishing communities. It is our differences that make us stronger. We must not forget our greatness and we must elevate the conditions of all who live here.

The legendary labor leader, Cesar Chavez, said it so well, "History will judge societies and governments— and their institutions — not by how big they are or how well they serve the rich and the powerful, but by how effectively they respond to the needs of the poor and the helpless."

In The Bronx, we have gone above the call of duty, and done more than our fair share.

We have provided a safety net for the hungry and the less fortunate. We have built housing for those who need it, and found shelters for those struggling to survive.

We have spoken out to protect immigrant families by calling on ICE to stay out of our courts. We have worked to uplift the spirits of families facing tough times. We fought and won the

commitment to a \$15 minimum wage so that more families can sustain themselves. And let us not forget that the movement for a living wage started right here in The Bronx!

We have attracted billions of dollars in infrastructure spending. We have created thousands of new jobs, and have helped new business expand here. We have encouraged visitors from all over the world to make us their destination.

Our future is bright. We will stand on the right side of history, and nothing can hold us back.

Together, we will ensure our continued success and preserve all the freedoms that make New York City a beacon for the world.

The State of the Bronx is strong, and we will continue to lead the way for our great City.

Thank you.