

STATE OF THE BOROUGH ADDRESS
BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT RUBEN DIAZ JR.
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A young man who has been without work is able to provide for his family due to the relocation of a factory to his borough, and a job fair in his neighborhood. Years of dedicated activism means his commute will be a little easier thanks to "fair fares," and that his job will pay a decent salary thanks to the fight for the \$15 minimum wage that began right here in The Bronx.

A woman who once worried about eviction and the devastating impact homelessness could have on her family will breathe a little easier, when strong rent laws help keep them in their home and prevent dramatic rent increases, while new tenant protections like "right to counsel" have placed her on more equal footing with her landlord.

A grandmother is able to spend her twilight years with dignity in the neighborhood where she has spent her entire life. Her community bore witness to some of our borough's darkest days, and thanks to new affordable senior housing she will play a role in its rebirth.

An independent bookstore opens in the South Bronx. Its proprietor follows her dream, so that she might offer Bronxites a long-awaited space to not only purchase books, but to learn, converse and grow closer to their neighbors.

A teenager gets involved in politics for the first time, having been inspired by the hopeful words of a transformative candidate. Today she carries a petition and hands out a flyer, and her activism jumpstarts a lifelong passion for civics and crafts a future leader of our City.

These are the opportunities we have offered our residents through disciplined and forward-thinking government that welcomes new ideas, civic mindedness, innovation, entrepreneurship and excellence.

We are a diverse and striving borough. The Bronx is home to more than 1.4 million residents. A quarter of us are under 18. Roughly 40 percent of us were born in other countries and 30 percent of us live below the poverty line. Fifty six percent of us speak a language other than English.

But our residents are more than simple statistics. We are a colorful kaleidoscope of men, women, mothers and fathers, families, gay and straight, people who have spent their entire lives here and new immigrants alike who are looking to build a better life. We believe in the American dream, and we want nothing more than a chance to prove it. It is government's responsibility to present them with the opportunity to do just that.

We are fighting for every child to have access to the best possible education, regardless of their zip code or the color of their skin. We are creating new jobs and building new housing, so that when those children graduate and become adults they can build their lives in the same communities where they came of age.

We are working so that the most vulnerable among us have the opportunity to live in a home that meets the basic standards of dignity by demanding improvements to the reprehensible state of public housing in our city.

We are doing everything in our power to help our youth have a chance to live a productive, meaningful life, free from the senseless violence that can dim the light of our brightest future stars.

We are raising the bar on what it means to provide citizens with opportunities in every facet of life.

That work begins in our youngest grades. In December, just before Christmas, Fat Joe and I visited several schools as part of a new initiative to improve classroom performance and attitudes. Classes in four schools competed for new sneakers and were judged across one marking period not just by grades but on behavior, attendance and other metrics. When we arrived to visit the winners, we were blown away by the response.

While this program is not a panacea, it motivated the students and completely transformed the learning environment in these schools. In one school there was not a single behavior incident after this program began. In another school a student nearly broke down in tears in front of his class when he described his own personal improvement. He had been getting 20s and 30s on his exams, and was now getting 100s. He even apologized for bullying his classmates. He had proved to everyone, but most importantly to himself, that he could change his behavior.

This is a small example of what we've done to improve our schools. Since 2009, I've given nearly \$70 million in capital funding to 443 school projects, nearly a quarter of my total capital allocations. We're demanding equity for all communities in our specialized high schools, and expanded computer science education at every grade. We must support all of our advanced learners, regardless of where they hail from, and we must maximize school busing options to promote increased access to gifted learning.

Our youth need us to believe in them and help them prepare for the opportunities in their futures. We have also called for a renewed effort to offer vocational education in high school grades, and we are creating new paths for high-level career development. We have done this with The Bronx Private Industry Council which matches high school and college students with internships with top employers across the borough.

Officially launching this Spring, the Bronx PIC teaches students soft skills and provides hands-on experience for future careers. These kids aren't getting coffee and making copies. They're learning real skills that will give them a leg up. Thank you to Judy Dimon for her leadership in this crucial endeavor. Together with HERE to HERE, and BOEDC, we will be issuing a report on the PIC's initial success and future plans. We hope even more employers, students, and educators will join our efforts as we set an example for the entire City.

The future of our young people is not just in the classroom or at an internship. We need to work together to protect our children from the dangers of the streets. We have done so much, but we must do more.

That is why today, I am honored to announce the founding of "Camp Junior," in memory of a brave son of The Bronx that we lost far too young, Lesandro Guzman-Feliz. We were all devastated by this tragedy, which unfolded in full view of the entire world. No parent should have to lose a child, let alone in such a brutal, heartless way.

Junior was everything we want our children to be. He was a good student and a member of the NYPD Explorers. He was kind to his parents and his neighbors. His candle was dimmed to soon, but he can be a shining light for generations. Starting this summer, we will give hundreds of Bronx kids a chance to learn by his example.

This camp would not have been possible without the commitment of the Cuomo Administration and the State Department of Parks. Camp Junior will take young people out of the city and bring them upstate to enjoy free recreation and educational opportunities, including an anti-violence curriculum, free from the pressures of urban life and with fresh air and trees all around them. We could not have had a better partner in this project than outgoing Commissioner Rose Harvey, who helped shape the vision for Camp Junior and moved mountains to make it happen.

I went to Camp Junior. I checked out the cabins and shot some hoops on the courts. I saw in my mind just how amazing this camp could be, how we could create an oasis for our borough's youth just a few miles north of the city. Camp Junior will be administered by the Fresh Air Fund and has the full support of Junior's parents, who are here today. When this tragedy struck, I heard from so many from across the nation who asked how they could help our community heal. The answer is simple: help Camp Junior succeed.

Our youth 18 and under may be 25 percent of The Bronx population, but they are 100 percent of our future. We must plan with them in mind. When the next expanding business offers new jobs to New Yorkers, why shouldn't our students be ready for every job there?

Employers should be working with CUNY to develop curricula that make that happen. A sixth grader today should be able, in ten years, to graduate from Hunter or Lehman and step right in to a great job right here in New York City. A student at Baruch should have a direct line to a career on Wall Street. CUNY students should have a pipeline to tech, healthcare, and other well-paying jobs.

All industries, starting with city government and throughout the private sector, need to work harder to create employment opportunities for CUNY graduates. The promise of a CUNY education should be the start of a career, in our great city.

After you start on that path, you need a place to live. We've built thousands of affordable low-income housing units. Since 2009, The Bronx has been home to more than \$15.4 billion and 84 million square feet of total development. Nearly 60 percent of the more than 36,000 new housing

units we've built in that time are affordable. We must continue to build new housing and preserve existing units.

And we must promote equity and opportunity, not just in housing and education, but in all areas. That is why, as a trustee on the New York City Employees Retirement System Board, I will be introducing a resolution mandating that NYCERS allocate double the percentage of its funds currently managed by MWBEs. My resolution requires that diversity increase until our fund managers better represent the diversity of our city. Women are 60 percent of NYC's workforce, and minorities comprise approximately fifty-five percent. Together, we will level the playing field at our pension fund.

Opportunities for our future are predicated on a healthy environment for us all to live in. And, no one has been as committed to resiliency and environmental planning as we have here in The Bronx. Climate change is real, no matter what some of our leaders in Washington might believe. If we do not address it, what kind of world are we leaving behind for our children? We are not leaving that question to chance.

In the Assembly, I authored the first law that created tax credits for developers who built green roofs, and I will not fund a project unless it has a green component. With OnForce Solar, we've built the largest solar farm in The Bronx on Commerce Avenue, with approximately three-thousand solar panels producing 1.1 Megawatts of power, a major step in our efforts to power one million homes in this state with solar energy by 2023. This electricity is going to low-income households at reduced rates.

The environment has always been my top priority. Projects like the Park Avenue Green in Melrose, which meets passive house energy standards, and the Bedford Green Houses, where residents are raising fish on the rooftop, are setting the national standard for environmentally friendly construction.

In partnership with the State Department of Parks, our shoreline along the Harlem River has been rebuilt following Hurricane Sandy, when strong floodwaters covered Roberto Clemente State Park. Today, new environmental measures protect our coastline while new recreation facilities make this park more welcoming than ever before. I'll see you there for a game of skelzies.

Good transit is crucial to our continued success. It is the lifeblood of our city. Expanded ferry service in Throggs Neck is welcome and we are moving forward on the East Bronx Metro North expansion, thanks to the advocacy of so many. So many different people helped make this victory possible, from the shoppers in the Bay Plaza mall to our elected officials across the region.

We must also focus new funding streams on our subway. Any money collected through congestion pricing must be earmarked for NYC Transit. Why should our money go outside of the city of New York? I agree with Governor Cuomo, it's time to shake up the MTA and start fresh. Our city should have control of its own transit system. For that matter, we should explore controlling our bridges and tunnels as revenue sources. It's not such a crazy idea. We did have control of the subways before 1966, when a feud between a governor and mayor—that sounds

familiar—created the unaccountable opaque mess we have today. It is time to return control of New York City Transit back to New York City.

We must invest in our roads as well. The conversion of the Sheridan Expressway into a boulevard has begun, thanks to decades of activism by community leaders, creating new amenities in the area for residents and visitors alike.

Amenities funded by government are key to the quality of life of our residents. To this end, we have also broken ground on a new YMCA in Edenwald, a long-held community priority, thanks to the vision of Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie. We are planning for the renovation and revitalization of our beloved Orchard Beach, one of our borough's crown jewels. So far we have raised \$60 million in government funds to renovate the historic pavilion, and the community planning phase of the project has started in earnest. In the coming year I'll be speaking with my colleagues at all levels of government to do even more.

We must continue to fight crime humanely and intelligently. For six straight years there have been less than 100 murders in The Bronx. Thanks to the great work of our community and to the NYPD. We are safer than we have been in many decades.

As we work towards a safe and just city, we must also continue to be vigilant against over-incarceration and aggressive prosecution. We must close Rikers Island, and eliminate cash bail. If we are going to legalize marijuana the state must pardon and expunge marijuana convictions, and ensure that marginalized communities have a chance to profit from a new cannabis market.

The administration's ineffective and inconsistent behavior in regard to the opioid crisis is helping no one. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive multi-agency effort that matches compassion with enforcement. We need service organizations to recommit to solving the opioid crisis, rather than simply managing it. We need smart solutions like youth prevention, responsible prescribing, and diversion programs. This is a citywide issue. Thank you to my fellow Borough President James Oddo for helping to highlight solutions to the epidemic.

We need to secure the resources and services necessary to ensure that former addicts can remain on the right path, away from abuse and addiction and towards a productive life. We have all been affected by addiction in one way or another. This crisis concerns all of us. We need a way forward. This issue is personal to me, I have watched my uncle Danny fall victim to and overcome his opioid addiction, and I am proud of him. Thank you for coming today Uncle Danny.

Years of strong advocacy from the community and elected officials have brought The Bronx a long way. We will fight for what we deserve, and we will defend ourselves from injustice. We will continue to make the case that Mott Haven is not the best location for a jail. We have seen advocacy by the Diego Beekman community and a plan by its residents to improve the neighborhood.

I know the area well, not just from my time as borough president, but also from my days as a teenager, delivering Meals-on-Wheels in the Diego Beekman Houses. Somewhere in the Diego

Beekman Houses right now is a grandmother. Maybe she's getting Meals-on-Wheels herself, and is worried about where her next dinner will come from. She worries about her grandchild, too, and she holds out hope that he is strong enough to rise above the pressure of the streets. What message is the City sending here?

We're not accepting this. Myself, Congressman Jose Serrano, community leaders, and criminal justice advocates know that we have a better location for this jail: adjacent to the Bronx Hall of Justice at the family court building. Criminal justice reform experts say jails should be located next to court houses for myriad humane reasons in the interest of justice. Why not here? Nothing is set in stone. If they can make changes to their plans in Manhattan, why can't they make changes in The Bronx?

This administration's priorities are entirely misguided. How can we spend millions of dollars to build a new jail in this neighborhood when the schools in this building do not have the resources they need to succeed? How can the city rush through the construction of a new jail, with zero community input, yet cannot figure out how to install new chairs in the P.S. 65 auditorium without a multi-year, multi-million-dollar process?

A City that thrives is one that encourages all residents to take pride in and invest in the communities where they live. No intention to invest is more clear than when a tenant commits to their community by buying their own home. Our borough has the lowest rate of home ownership in any of the five boroughs. Approximately 20 percent of Bronx housing is owner-occupied. We must make it easier, not harder, for middle class New Yorkers to own homes in The Bronx and throughout New York City.

However, some of our homeowners are finding themselves suddenly divested of their homeownership rights with little or no notice by the very City that they call home. The Mayor has proposed expanding the Third Party Transfer Program to seize buildings from bad landlords. Bad landlords should be held accountable. However, the TPT program has been used to seize homes from minority homeowners in The Bronx and Brooklyn. We need a wholesale review of this program before we expand it.

Resident leaders of 1600 Nelson Avenue, Ms. Isabel Adon and Ms. Walkiria Colon, are here today. These women are fighting a court battle for ownership and control of their homes. Please applaud these strong self-advocates, for whom I have stood up against the Mayoral Administration.

My administration has demonstrated again and again that the housing rights of New Yorkers, whether they be renters or homeowners are paramount. For, without safe homes, what do we have?

And what about the shameful state of our city's public housing? Many would say that the worst landlord in New York City is New York City. I agree.

In December, right before the new year as I was going out for Sunday breakfast with my family, I came upon a rotten situation at the Sonia Sotomayor Houses in Soundview. What could only be

described as a mountain of garbage, complete with smells and putrid mystery juice, had accumulated thanks to broken equipment and NYCHA's ongoing lack of accountability. This is not a third world country, this is America. My video went viral.

Just a few hours later the garbage was gone, and the residents of the development were able to breathe freely.

In January, inspired by our success at the Sotomayor Houses, we launched the #CleanUpNYCHA campaign. All New Yorkers should use this hashtag to highlight NYCHA's failures to deliver for its residents and to push for a safer, cleaner and more livable public housing system. If social media shaming is the only way to get results, then we're going to shame them. How does the city propose a new department to protect residents from bad landlords when the city is depriving its own tenants of their human rights to heat and hot water?

Let's be clear. The disgraceful condition of NYCHA is a problem that goes back decades and crosses all political lines. My office does everything it can to help public housing residents in The Bronx. I have allocated \$15 million in capital funding for critical repairs to Bronx developments, including renovations at the Betances and Bronx River senior centers this year. We're also proposing changing the public housing law at the state level, so that when NYCHA executives commit bad acts the law will be unambiguous that they are held personally responsible.

With the partnership of Assembly Member Marcos Crespo and State Senator Zellnor Myrie, we have introduced State legislation to give NYCHA tenants reductions in their rent when they go without basic services. This bill would give them the same remedy that a rent stabilized tenant in a private building would have. NYCHA tenants should be treated just as fairly as other tenants.

What kind of elected leadership are we under when a jail is being imposed upon a residential community working hard to strengthen itself and where they sweeten the pot for Amazon without a firm labor peace agreement while stealing equity from homeowners, and where the City cries broke for our public schools' needs, but can find more than enough money for jails?

Despite all this, The Bronx is thriving. Almost ten years ago, I gave my first ever "State of the Borough" address. I spoke about the need for better paying jobs, to fight crime in our streets, encouraging new development of all types and the need to unite as "One Bronx." Many of you were there, including my family who is with us here today. My sons were still teens. And I had more hair.

That day, I laid out the beginnings of a conceptual master plan for our borough. I set a path for how we could all work in unison to make The Bronx even better while shedding the outdated stigma that had dogged us for so many years.

Our work over the past decade in The Bronx has had a powerful impact. We've cut the unemployment rate by more than half, down to some of the lowest numbers we have ever seen. More Bronx residents have jobs today than at almost any point in our borough's history.

With a newly-empowered Democratic State Senate majority, we've already enacted legislation on reproductive rights, gender identity and LGBT rights, gun safety, voting reforms, sexual abuse, The DREAM Act and more. In the coming days and weeks we'll move on vacancy decontrol, closing the preferential rent loophole, strengthening labor rights, and a host of issues that for too long have languished in Albany due to Republican obstruction.

As the Trump Administration moves our nation in the wrong direction it is up to New York to set an example that smart progressive policies can be effective. Good government creates opportunities for people to flourish throughout their lives from elementary and high school education to outdoor activities to higher education to workforce development programs.

New York City needs adequate funding to help our residents thrive. Funding is one element of what makes the Census so important for New York. Without full participation in the 2020 Census our city and state will not see the political and budgetary representation we deserve. New York State could lose two congressional seats in the next reapportionment, one of which would almost certainly be within the five boroughs. A strong showing can keep our influence and relevance in Washington.

Make sure you're counted. That's what really matters. No one should be too frightened to participate in the Census. I will not answer any question asking about my citizenship status, and I encourage my fellow citizens to do the same. Remember, we are a sanctuary city, and those principles will guide our participation in the Census.

We are the greatest city in the world, not just because we are the epicenter of the financial, tech, healthcare, education, legal, theater, and culinary worlds. We are the greatest city in the world because of the millions of people who make up this city. We are a welcoming, tolerant place. We embrace the immigrant experience, understanding that Emma Lazarus' great poem, "The New Colossus," was not about a wall, but the welcoming Statue of Liberty.

Everyday New Yorkers can do a lot of good for themselves, their families, their communities and our great City when you give them the opportunity. We have done the work to do just that here in The Bronx. Why shouldn't our example be followed all over the Big Apple?

Our example shines for everyone, from up-and-coming artists, to aspiring athletes on the basketball court at the local playground; a city where the rent is no longer "too-damn-high," and where we celebrate diversity, and trust each other despite our differences and diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Where we reject and fight against the tide of hatred, bigotry and authoritarianism brewing throughout the world.

For it is an open democratic society and City that creates opportunity and allows all its residents to pursue happiness. New York must never lose its authenticity and flavor.

Those of us who came of age here may recall when "the block" looked different, when housing was affordable, and when creativity flourished here, birthing great artists like James Baldwin and Martin Scorsese, to Basquiat and Keith Haring, to the Ramones and Hector LaVoe and Boogie

Down Productions. A time when New York was truly a place that if you made it here, you could make it anywhere.

The challenge of our time is to provide a chance and an equitable city while keeping New York's soul - a collection of our hopes, love, and creative endeavors alive, well, and burning strong. For, all New Yorkers need is a chance, an opportunity, and equity to succeed.

I would like to once again recognize those who persist and thrive in our Bronx. The youth participants in the Bronx Private Industry Council internships, and the resident leaders of 1600 Nelson Avenue.

It's people like Curtis Craig, a man who went from being homeless to an apartment of his own thanks to a job at Freshdirect. It's people like Ruth Brizuela, a young lady of 67 years who was able to stay in her longtime home in Crotona Park thanks to our efforts. It's people like Noelle Santos, owner of our borough's only independent bookstore, The Lit Bar, who is bringing books to The Bronx.

In his second inaugural address a man whose leadership, integrity, and intellect we all profoundly miss these days, former President Barack Obama, laid out the case I have made this morning.

President Obama said, "We are true to our creed when a little girl born into the bleakest poverty knows that she has the same chance to succeed as anybody else, because she is an American; she is free, and she is equal, not just in the eyes of God but also in our own."

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the Bronx and New York City I want to live in, lead in, and continue to work together with you to strive towards. 2019 is going to be our best year yet!

Thank you.