



MELINDA KATZ
PRESIDENT OF THE BOROUGH OF QUEENS
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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(Remarks as prepared for delivery)

Good morning, everyone. Thank you all for being here.

Special thanks to Dr. Mellow and her fantastic team here at LaGuardia Community College for hosting this year's State of the Borough Address. If Queens is The World's Borough, then LaGuardia is The World's School. Its 45,000 students come from more than 150 countries and speak 96 different languages. It's been a pleasure to provide more than \$5.6 million for upgrades to the college's science labs, library and more. So Gail, keep the projects coming and I'll keep the money flowing.

Thank you to our sponsor, JetBlue. How about a hand for our hometown airline?

Thank you to all of our Community Board chairs, district managers and members for coming today. Taking time to volunteer to ensure community input is a necessary yet oftentimes thankless and underappreciated service you render. For lending your expertise and for your devotion to civic life that is trademark to Queens, on behalf of our 2.35 million residents, I thank you.

Speaking of service, I also want to recognize our Honor Guard, as well as all our veterans in attendance. Much more on our heroes today.

I'd also like to recognize my predecessor, former Borough President Claire Shulman, as well as former speaker of the New York City Council, Peter Vallone, Sr. And I see we've also been joined by our city Comptroller, Scott Stringer.

Of course, thank you to my tireless staff for all their hard work today and every day. They can't say I never let them have fun! Our Deputy Borough President, Sharon Lee, my Chief of Staff, Jay Bond, and everyone else at Borough Hall work so hard to keep Queens moving forward. Join me in giving them a big "thank you."

Queens. We are more than 190 countries. We are more than 200 languages. And since 2010, we've welcomed more than 145,000 new immigrants from across the world. But one thing unites everyone who is here: the desire for a better life for their families, however one defines that. To give our kids a better life than we ever dreamed of having for ourselves.

But in recent years, hate has been on overdrive. From the terror on Emanuel AME Church in Charleston to an originally peaceful protest in Charlottesville, to the massacre at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, to the killings at a supermarket in Louisville, to the assaults, both verbal and physical, in subways and buses and the daily grind of New York.

But we are a borough that isn't just trying its hardest to hold on in these turbulent times. We are thriving because we are united ... and the many countries we represent gives us the strength to go where we want to go. Instead of fearing one another, we have faith in one another. We are thriving because we work to make room for *everyone* at the table. It may be not always be convenient. In fact, it takes effort. And it requires Queens tough.

And this is where our elected officials come in. It is our job to not only represent the interests of our constituents... It is our duty to partner with them, to ensure they have access to every resource imaginable. Just this week, the state Legislature did that, by guaranteeing a woman's right to choose and passing the Reproductive Health Act, while also giving undocumented college students access to state financial aid through the aptly-named Jose Peralta Dream Act.

And that's why my team and I have tried to stay true to the promises we've made over the last five years. Because I believe so strongly in this home we've all had a hand in creating, I have devoted my time in office to keeping what we've built strong, secure and stable. Especially in the face of so much uncertainty throughout our country.

After all, this borough is our home. Our shelter from the storm. We're all living under the same roof here in Queens. We may bicker sometimes like a family at Thanksgiving dinner, but at the end of the day, we're still family.

As Borough President, I will continue to do everything I am able to make our home a place where all of us have a fighting chance. Where, at our core, we value decency and have respect for basic human dignity. Because the true measure of our borough, our society, is how we treat the most vulnerable among us.

However, in this day and age, it's not enough to just talk the talk and condemn what comes out of the Washington. There are real, devastating consequences to the policies we're seeing proposed and enacted.

Such as the public charge proposal. It's essentially an income test for the pursuit of the American Dream. And bottom line: it's vicious and immoral.

Because it imposes upon families an impossible choice: legal residency or food on the table? Legal residency or healthcare? Legal residency or a roof over our head?

And just so you know, 68,000 kids in Queens live in mixed-status households. This policy could compel hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers either deeper into the shadows or deeper into poverty. That in turn jeopardizes the health, safety and well-being of all New Yorkers. We would all lose.

And on the local level, we will continue our Know Your Rights weeks and Resources Fairs — providing free, confidential and multi-language legal consultations with outstanding community partners like Queens Legal Services and others.

We are united against such un-Americanism. The burden to define who we are should not be born solely by immigrants. Here in Queens, we've got to have each other's backs.

And that's exactly what we're doing when it comes to the 2020 Census, as well. It's a simple equation. For each person and each household unaccounted for, that's less federal funding for our schools, our hospitals, our infrastructure— even less representation in Congress and the state Legislature. An undercount is something we simply cannot afford.

One year ago, I pledged to create the Queens Complete Count Committee, and that's what I've done. This bipartisan group of community leaders and government officials will develop comprehensive outreach efforts to make the count here in the borough as accurate as possible.

Speaking of which, the proposed citizenship question? It is unnecessary. Worse yet, it is discriminatory, and designed to skew the count. It goes against the very point of the Census ... to count every person who lives in this country. So I hope the lawsuit against the question prevails.

And let me tell you, another way I plan to fight this is, as I fill out the Census, if the citizenship question appears on the survey, I will abstain. I will refuse to answer that question. Sure, you can call it a boycott. I, Melinda Katz, as an American-born citizen, will boycott the citizenship question, because times like these compel courage by those with the privilege to do so. Because if we aren't counted, we don't count. And if any of us are rendered invisible... if any of us are not counted... we all lose.

One of the top reasons everyone is fighting and sacrificing in order to raise their families here is the education our schools offer. When we make sure our students and teachers have everything they need to succeed, we're making sure our home is one worthy of our children's' potential.

In 2017, I said I would allocate funding so that all 290 elementary and middle schools would have new classroom technology by the end of my first term. Well, we made it happen and then some. Money for tech like SMART Boards and laptops has been allocated to every single public school in the borough, including our high schools and District 75 schools. If you ask me, that is \$21 million dollars well spent.

And for upgrades to our school playgrounds alone, we funded projects at 13 different schools. 5 new playgrounds have been built in conjunction with the Trust for Public Land ... with five more in the pipeline ... and we thank them for their partnership.

But maybe the best thing about our schools is that they are so strong despite the incredible overcrowding in this borough.

We crunched the numbers to see just how much we are "Feeling the Squeeze." And here's what we found. In Queens, our public schools are at 106 percent capacity. Most of the other boroughs aren't even close. Brooklyn, Manhattan, they're at just over 85 percent. Just take a look the numbers on the screen behind me. Look how packed our elementary schools are compared to Brooklyn's. Compare our high schools to Manhattan's.

As a city, we must address these inequities. Our families and neighborhoods are growing rapidly, outpacing the creation of seats at our schools. We know Lorraine Grillo and her team at the School Construction Authority are trying to catch up, and they're doing an incredible job.

But while we rank first in overcrowding, we also rank last in funding. Ruben, you got it good up there in the Bronx, don't cha? Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr., everyone.

If we're serious about giving our kids better lives than we dreamed of having for ourselves, we cannot afford to be shortchanged.

But education can't rely on the schools alone. We needed upgrades at our community libraries. So we put our money where our mouth is. \$46 million for upgrades across 23 different branches, that includes:

- Getting the ball rolling for a new Corona library - Thank you, Councilmember Francisco Moya.
- Upgrades in the pipeline for the South Hollis Library - Thank you, Councilmember I. Daneek Miller
- A brand new library in the pipeline for Rego Park - Thank you, Councilmember Karen Koslowitz.
- Groundbreakings for the brand new library in Far Rockaway – thanks, Councilmember Donovan Richards.
- For the brand new Steinway branch in Astoria – thanks, Councilmember Costa Constantinides.
- A finish line finally in sight for the Hunter's Point Library – thanks, Councilmember Jimmy Van Bramer.
- And after prior years of chronic delays, an unveiling of the Kew Gardens Hills Library - thank you to the late Assemblymember Michael Simanowitz.

When I first came into Borough Hall five years ago, the Queens Library was riddled with mismanagement and even fraud. But we cleaned up shop with a major assist in Albany by State Assemblymember and Speaker Pro Tempore Jeffrion Aubry, and State Senator and Deputy Majority Leader Michael Gianaris. Today, its reputation as a thriving, world-class library system has been fully restored. And so has our faith. Let's give it up for Dennis Walcott, who has led the library with integrity and into a new age.

Speaking of restored faith ... have you all been keeping up with everything that's been coming out of Albany? Let me tell you, bills used to take *years* to pass up there. But here we are in, what, Week 4? Day 25? And you've already codified Roe v. Wade... Passed GENDA... Approved the DREAM Act... Bolstered major voting reforms to LET NY VOTE... *This* is why leadership matters. *This* is how we restore confidence in government. *This* is how we make government work for our families.

Oh, and I hear we're about to pass tax reform? More spending on our schools? Criminal justice reform? Am I now just asking for too much? You know, that's my job.

Something else our children and seniors need are upgrades at our neighborhood parks. And we've funded \$105 million in upgrades at parks across every community. Thanks to the stewardship of Commissioner Mitchell Silver and the newly retired Dorothy Lewandowski, it seems like we're at a groundbreaking every other day.

- Big Bush Park in Woodside: Done. \$1 million for a new playground.
- Roy Wilkins Park in St. Albans: Done. \$1.5 million for a new running track and turf field.
- Rachael Carson Playground in Flushing: Done. \$1.7 million and we're cutting the ribbon shortly.
- Laurelton Playground's new skate park: Done. \$600,000.
- Evergreen Park in Ridgewood: Almost done. Half a million for a new playground, and we're cutting the ribbon this summer. Thank you former Councilmember Elizabeth Crowley for securing an additional \$1.6 million for the rest of the park.
- Mauro Playground in Kew Gardens Hills: In procurement. \$4.2 million. Thank you Councilmember Rory Lancman for additional funding.

It's going to be a busy 2019 for our parks as well.

- Juniper Valley Park. \$2 million for new spray showers -- Thank you Councilmember Robert Holden.

- Newtown Playground. \$700,000 for a new lawn and plaza -- Thank you Councilmember Daniel Dromm.
- Norelli-Hargreaves Park. \$2.5 million for a new plaza -- Thank you Councilmember Adrienne Adams.
- And Redwood Playground. \$1.2 million for a new play space. Thank you Councilmember Barry Grodenchik.

All will have new amenities for our kids to enjoy by the end of the year.

In my 2016 State of the Borough, I said our communities would soon have full access to the entire stretch of the restored Rockaway Boardwalk, from 9th Street all the way to 126th Street. And for the last few summers now, they have. The beaches have been a different story.

We're also making progress along Shore Front Parkway, where a number of new parks are being built. That includes an adventure course, a dog park and a multi-purpose field, as well as Sandpiper Playground. It was a pleasure to partner with Councilmember Eric Ulrich on that last plan ... a \$5.8 million project should be done this summer. Yet another place for our kids to play and families to bond.

And of course, another major project near to my heart, the restoration of the New York State Pavilion. Just look at that "American Cheese" yellow – thanks DC9. This historic, architectural marvel of the 1964-65 World's Fair is now saved. \$21 million toward its revitalization, secured between my office, Mayor Bill de Blasio and the New York City Council. Another \$2 million now coming in from the state. And another \$16.5 million secured by Senators Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand for electrical repairs in and around the Pavilion. All this investment – maybe this year we can actually light it up... right, Commissioner Silver? Let's once again make this a destination of choice and an icon of our borough.

Even with all this investment and all this growth, we are still very much a borough of neighborhoods. We are still a borough of families. When asked where we're from, we say, "Corona, New York," "Bayside, New York," or "St. Albans, New York." And we must continue to do all we can to keep it affordable.

In my first State of the Borough, I said we would soon break ground on HANAC's senior affordable housing complex on 101st Street in Corona. Well in November, the move-ins began. The HANAC Corona Senior Residence has 68 units, 52 of which are at or below 50% AMI, while 21 are reserved for formerly homeless seniors.

Also in 2015, I said we were exploring our options at Municipal Lot 3 in Flushing. Now, we're a few weeks away from residents moving into One Flushing, a 231-unit building with 66 units set aside for seniors.

Three months ago, we helped break ground on the Northeastern Towers Annex on Guy R. Brewer Boulevard in Jamaica. That's 159 units of affordable housing for low-income seniors coming online next year.

Work on the Tree of Life development in Jamaica, which I put \$1.5 million toward, is ongoing. When that building opens, that's 174 more units of affordable housing for low- and middle-income families.

In a time when there is such high demand for this kind of housing, every single home we can build makes a difference in someone's life. When our seniors can age gracefully in their communities, when our

families can afford to put down roots in this borough, our neighborhoods flourish. The bonds that are built over the years become unbreakable.

But our efforts to keep our communities attractive and affordable are in vein if we cannot keep our communities safe. Thankfully, New York remains the safest big city in the nation.

Now, on Rikers – let me be clear: I have been, and I remain, a strong supporter of closing Rikers Island. It is a moral imperative that we overhaul our city's jails system, one that is safer, more efficient, more humane and less costly. And closing Rikers is an integral part of that.

The irony, however, of unveiling a citywide plan for "modern community-based jails" in the absence of community input is not lost on the boroughs, certainly not here in Queens. Any plan by the City – especially the siting and design of any new jails – must include meaningful community engagement and input. I am deeply disturbed by the lack of opportunity thereof for the proposal to erect a 1.9-million-square-foot facility on 82nd Avenue. And that's from a supporter of closing Rikers.

The City needs to start anew. Their current plan has the closure of Rikers nearly a decade out. There's still time and opportunity to do it the right way: careful planning in collaboration with affected communities – who are treated as partners in, not irrelevant to, reform – while employing smart criminal justice strategies to reduce the jail population.

And Queens has continued to see its crime rates fall. Since 2014, Queens North has seen a 14.1 percent drop in the seven major index crimes. In Queens South, that decline was a whopping 20.8 percent.

And there is universal excitement about the creation of the 116th Precinct and stationhouse. It's about time. Because the existing 105th Precinct covers the largest land area of any police precinct in New York City – nearly 13 square miles. That's half the size of the entire Borough of Manhattan. But for the new 116th Precinct, full funding is there: \$70 million thanks to Mayor de Blasio.

One year ago, I was pleased to issue my recommendation as Borough President – in consultation with the affected communities, including Community Board 13 – to approve the proposed zoning and site selection of the 116th stationhouse on North Conduit. *This* is a prime example of robust community engagement and input coming to fruition. And we are that much closer to a victory decades in the making for Southeast Queens, especially by the families of Laurelton, Rosedale, Brookville and Springfield Gardens.

Our city and our borough are safer now than at any time in recent memory. But far too many Queens families are still being victimized by the gun violence epidemic. If we're going to be serious about keeping our streets safe, leaders from the federal government on down, need to realize that gun violence is not just a criminal justice issue. It is a public health crisis.

Queens has really taken the lead in fighting this disease. And I couldn't be prouder of the work that LIFE Camp, K Bain at 696 Build and other leaders across the borough do every single day. They know that solving this crisis means reaching out to young people in our communities and guiding them down a different path. It means breaking the cycle of violence before it even starts.

Our home is more stable when people are afforded a fair shot also at a second chance. One of the ways we do this is by preventing the most minor of crimes from snowballing into an arrest, costly legal fees and more. So in conjunction with District Attorney Richard Brown, the Legal Aid Society and more, we held a warrant forgiveness workshop for those who had been summonsed for failing to appear in court over minor offenses like loitering. Over 400 people showed up, and about 360 had their warrants adjudicated.

And what if you've served time? And you've proven that you've turned your life around and are making good? And a second chance always seems just out of reach?

One of Governor Cuomo's greatest accomplishments, if you ask me, is legislation he signed into law 15 months ago that allows people with two or fewer nonviolent convictions to seal their records after a decade of staying clean. As many as 600,000 people across the state are eligible under the law, but only 51 individuals in Queens had taken advantage of it as of December.

That's why we expanded our Know Your Rights weeks beyond just immigration to make folks across the borough aware of the law, and to shepherd them through the process of getting their records sealed. In total, more than 140 people came to our workshops we hosted last year with Legal Aid, LIFE Camp, 696 Build, Transitional Services for New York, Sheltering Arms, Rock Safe Streets and Fathers Alive in the Hood.

Because it's about eliminating barriers to employment opportunities, and economic opportunities. It's about reducing recidivism rates, and about breaking the cycle. People want to get back to work.

Creating more job opportunities, however we can, has been a priority of my administration since day one. So before I go any further, I want recognize someone who was influential in that regard, my now-former Deputy Borough President and Director of Economic Development, Melva Miller. She's now at the Association for a Better New York, leading citywide public-private partnership efforts for the 2020 Census. But before that, she did incredible work for this borough over the years, and she's a big reason why Queens' unemployment rate fell from 7.7 percent five years ago to 3.2 percent today.

Four years ago when I delivered my first State of the Borough address, we were deep into the process of putting together the Jamaica NOW Action Plan, which Melva was key in developing and executing. There is still so much work to be done in Jamaica, work that will continue for years. But if you live and work there, you can see how much progress we've been making. We really are putting that \$153 million in public investment to good use.

Remember that old NYPD garage on 168th Street? That's where the future Archer Green Apartments, with 380 units of affordable housing will stand. We broke ground on that project in September.

Government loves to put timelines and deadlines on everything. But in the case of Build it Back, it's not for government to say when the job is done. We're not done until the people who suffered the most at the hands of Superstorm Sandy tell us we're done.

But I believe the finish line is in sight. Of the nearly 3,600 homeowners impacted by Sandy, about 100 Build it Back applicants have yet to return home. We're almost there, everyone. So Assemblymember Stacey Pheffer Amato and my Hurricane Relief Task Force will be as active as ever in making sure Build it Back finishes its work early this year.

There is no question that Queens is the borough of growth. And in no other neighborhood has that been more obvious in recent years than Long Island City. Since 2010, more than 9,000 residential units have come online. Now we know that here in Long Island City, the area is rapidly rising into New York's next great tech hub. By design. Because tech jobs, on average, pay more and are growing at a faster clip than jobs citywide.

So in partnership with dozens of local stakeholders – including LaGuardia Community College and many others here today – and funded by the Department of State, we commissioned the Western Queens Tech Zone Strategic Plan years ago.

We unveiled the Tech Plan last summer. A roadmap with six initiatives to facilitate not just job creation, but a more equitable job growth in this emerging global innovation hub and the City's next leading tech ecosystem. And it will be backed up by a series of substantial investments toward workforce development, training, and equitable job growth.

And that is how you steer a borough into the competitive lane in the digital age.

One of the other successes in Western Queens has been the NYC Ferry. Since its launch in August 2017, more than 600,000 people boroughwide have jumped on board. The Astoria Route alone serves an average of about 28,000 rides a week. But maybe the best part about the route is that it consistently has one of the highest on-time rates ... at over 90 percent. If only the subway was as good.

In the Rockaways, more than 25,000 use that ferry route each week. We even launched spring and summer express service in 2018, allowing people to go from Beach 108th Street to Wall Street even faster.

Next stop? How about Northeast Queens? I know Councilmembers Peter Koo and Paul Vallone are pushing hard for that.

But so much of the borough is in need of better transit options.

Take Southeast Queens. The Long Island Rail Road runs through the heart of those communities, so it's only fair that we help residents take advantage of what's just steps from their homes. After some negotiation, the MTA launched the Atlantic Ticket this past June. For just \$5, folks can get on the LIRR at seven different Southeast Queens stations and ride to Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn.

This ongoing pilot program has been a success, sure. And Senator Leroy Comrie deserves a lot of credit as well for making it so. But if we truly want to provide service that Southeast Queens deserves, we need the MTA to expand the scope of the pilot program to include discounted rides to Brooklyn and to Manhattan. We'll be watching.

Now we can't talk about transportation in Queens without talking about our airports. And with an \$8 billion overhaul underway, we are well on our way toward creating a 21st-century transit hub at LaGuardia truly befitting our borough.

Every time I pass by on the Grand Central, here's some transformation. Just two months ago, we cut the ribbon on Terminal B's new concourse. 11 new gates. More than a dozen new concessions. There's even an FAO Schwartz, which means I can never walk through there with my kids again.

While we're at it, we might as well give Kennedy an upgrade, too. In October, Governor Andrew Cuomo unveiled his \$13 billion overhaul plan. To the rest of the world, JFK is the gateway to the greatest borough, city and country on Earth. And when those first new gates go live in 2023, visitors from all over will have an incredible first impression of Queens.

For example, in just a few short months, the crown jewel of the aviation age will reopen its doors and take flyers back to 1962. In September, I had the opportunity to tour the reimagined TWA Hotel and let me tell you, it's going to blow you away. The iconic departure clock in the lobby and other hallmarks of the 60s are still there, but the amenities are state-of-the-art. 512 rooms, six restaurants and 8 bars, including one inside a vintage Lockheed Constellation. And just like our vision for the New York State Pavilion,

the TWA Hotel, too, will become yet another Queens landmark emblematic of our pride and the reach of our potential.

In 2017 alone, more than 59.4 million passengers came and went out of JFK, while 29.5 million people used LaGuardia, generating more than \$64 billion in economic activity across the region.

But they are our airports, first and foremost. We are the affected communities... the ones who live next door or right below... the ones who have to 'deal with' the traffic and plane noise. So as Borough President, and as JFK Redevelopment Advisory Council co-chair — along with Congressman Greg Meeks — I've pressed the Port Authority and others to hire locally. In order to be successful, we need to hire local, have a path to union apprenticeship programs and have ample opportunity for second-chance employment. Ideally, we want every single good-paying job created at our airports filled by Queens residents. Our home and our families will be stronger for it.

While we're building schools and parks and creating jobs, we must remember the most important thing for our families is our health. And in our growing borough, the need for more community and emergency medical care facilities is clear. So we've funded millions in capital into them across the borough.

In Arverne, we're expanding the Joseph P. Addabbo Family Health Center, on which we'll cut the ribbon this fall with his son, Senator Joseph Addabbo, Jr.

In Corona, the Plaza del Sol Family Health Center. In Flushing, the Charles B. Wang Community Health Center's Healthview clinic.

In Long Island City, Planned Parenthood.

And a few months ago, we cut the ribbon on Elmhurst Hospital's new ExpressCare clinic. With the public emergency room in Elmhurst at maximum capacity, we can help cut down wait times in the ER by taking care of patients with non-life threatening issues, right in the clinic. Because *that* is how we take care of our growing families.

I've now served as your Borough President for five years. We've done a lot together. One of the things I'm most proud of is our commitment to Veterans. Between the department of Veterans Affairs at Borough Hall, the Disabled American Veterans Chapter 92 office, and the summons event for vets that my office hosted in November, 758 veterans were served at Borough Hall in 2018 alone. The way I see it, that's 758 Queens heroes finding employment, stable housing and more.

One of those heroes I was blessed to have known was the late Pat Toro. I'll never forget the first time he walked into my office a decade ago in the City Council and told me of his radical idea for a boroughwide Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Ten years ago in the City Council, I secured half a million. I made a promise to you that I would get it done.

As Borough President, I secured the remaining \$2.3 million to fund the project in-full. And on November 29th, I stood alongside dozens of Vietnam veterans as we broke ground on the very monument Pat Toro dreamed of. When it opens later this year in Elmhurst Park, the memorial will bear the names of more than 350 Queens service members who died in the Vietnam War, either killed in action or are listed as missing. Another installed plaque will also recognize Pat and fellow Vietnam War veterans from Queens who died or still suffer here at home due to effects of the war, such as exposure to Agent Orange.

I remember it like it was yesterday. I remember when you came back... and I remember witnessing the betrayal and despair that you and your brothers felt coming home to what felt like... an ungrateful nation.

I remember.

And *that's* why this memorial in our home borough is so important to me and to our children.

At this time, I would ask all our Vietnam veterans here today... if you are able... to please rise so we may see you, and thank you. We know the sacrifices you made, the sacrifices your brothers made, the sacrifices your families made.

Now please remain standing while we ask all other veterans who have served this country or are still serving ... whether it was on the beaches of Normandy 75 years ago this June or more recently in Iraq, Afghanistan or anywhere else in the world ... we ask you to also rise, if you are able.

To all our vets, we salute you and I thank you for the privilege of being able to put my babies to sleep safely in their beds each night.

To those of you who served in Vietnam, it is my wish and my hope that you find comfort in this permanent memorial. It wasn't easy, but it has been an honor to fight for you, by your side, to make this promise a reality. On behalf of a grateful borough and a grateful nation, we say, "Welcome Home."

It has been the honor of my lifetime to serve as the President of this great borough for the past five years. Thank you for your confidence... and thank you for the privilege.

Much more work remains to be done in the fight for fairness, for inclusion, equal opportunity, for shared prosperity. The work will continue to be tough. And that means, just as in a family, there's always going to be some strife along the way.

But just as I say to my kids in my home: even when we fight, I always fight for you and I am always on your side.

It has also been my distinct pleasure to work with all of you to see our home through this incredible period of growth, and to help further and fulfill the promise of Queens.

My parents believed in that promise. My father David Katz, the founder of the Queens Symphony Orchestra, believed in the universal, unifying language of music. My mother Jeanne Dale Katz, founder of the Queens Council on the Arts, believed that with all our different perspectives, we are that much stronger because of it, and we have that much more in common than we do different. And we have a choice in which paths we take. And the paths we choose aren't always self-evident, but we figure it out together.

This June will mark 50 years since my mother was killed by a drunk driver, by someone who chose a path, chose to take a drink, who chose to get into a car, and who ultimately took my mother's life. One minute earlier, or one minute later... our home... our family... our lives... would have been much different.

Choices, they matter, and they change the path of our world. And each generation gets tested in ways that ultimately define it. Every so often, our country comes to a crossroads and we also have to make choices. In many ways, we are at one of those very crossroads right now.

I'm not gonna sugar-coat it, because we all know it. We are living in a time where there are people who are emboldened, who are vicious. People who deliberately divide us, who hold children hostage and who

use workers and their families as bargaining chips. People who would rather destroy who we are as a nation – or at least paralyze it – than to make room at the table.

But when my seven-year-old and my ten-year-old ask me in 20 years how we responded, I'm going to tell them we didn't just talk about standing up for one another.

We didn't just stand when it was easy or convenient. I'm going to tell them we chose to step up when it mattered... when it counted... when *it* got tough.

And we did it together.

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