

STATE OF THE BOROUGH 2024

Welcome

What's going on, Queens?!

It's Friday, I expect more energy than that. How are we feeling, Queens?!

Thank you all for coming. And thank you to the Queens Theatre for having me back for the second year in a row. Taryn, I'm so grateful for your hospitality, leadership and friendship.

To Ellen Baker, thank you for coming back home to Queens to be with us today. And thank you for sharing your mom with all of us. Claire Shulman was family to me, and I miss her every day.

To my own family, especially the First Lady of Queens, Tameeka Richards, I am on this stage because of you. You inspire me every day to be a better public servant, a better partner and a better person. I love you.

I love you too, D3. He isn't loving his parents too much today though, because we made him go to school.

And to my incredible staff at Borough Hall, you amaze me every day with your dedication. Let's give it up one time for Team Richards and all they do for Queens.

Searching for Justice

Every year that I'm on this stage, I think back to how I got started in this business and who inspired me to get involved.

Today, I'm thinking back to my close friend Darnell Patterson, who lost his life to gun violence when we were just teenagers.

His murder sent me on a search for justice in a world where injustice is commonplace for young men of color like us.

I'm still searching. But I'm thinking back to 2008, when I first found evidence of its existence in the words of presidential candidate Barack Obama.

I remember feeling seen. Feeling ready to serve. With his one simple call to action — yes, we can — there was a new, higher purpose to public service in my eyes.

In a society designed to devalue and dehumanize the Black American, here was a man who looked like me, with the courage to call out our nation's most historic injustices.

I'm thinking back to 2009, when President Obama, in his speech accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, said “that for all our cruelty and hardship, we are not mere prisoners of fate. Our actions matter, and can bend history in the direction of justice.”

He's right. There is so much entrenched cruelty and hardship even in our own borough.

Communities of color from Corona to Cambria Heights have been intentionally disinvested in for generations, eroding the quality of our lives and the quantity of our opportunities.

Pollution and climate change have done their worst to those living on the sharp edge of poverty, with no way of escaping disease or disaster.

But we are not prisoners to these fates.

The inspiration I felt back in 2008, moved by the audacity of hope, is the same inspiration I have felt every single day as Borough President.

Because every day, I meet people who dare to dream up their own destiny — undeterred by their past or present.

And working together these last three years, we are bending our future — our collective fate — in the direction of justice, for all 2.4 million of us who call Queens home.

HOUSING

The Crises at Hand

That's what we're here to talk about today. Justice.

And nothing exemplifies the injustice in our society more than the number 85,290

That is the number of New Yorkers — residents and asylum seekers alike — who will go to sleep tonight in a city shelter. That includes 32,000 children.

But the migrant crisis and the housing crisis share an answer — building.

If you're from Senegal or Springfield Gardens, Honduras or Howard Beach, you deserve a roof over your head.

The definition of social justice is equal opportunity for all, regardless of circumstance. And that equal opportunity is what my office is working tirelessly to deliver.

Affordable Housing Wins

Housing creation fell across the city last year, but Queens didn't get the memo.

Over 5,000 housing units received my sign-off in 2023, including more than 2,900 affordable units. Since I took office, that number is nearly 10,000.

I'm not satisfied, though. As long as our shelter system is overcrowded and thousands of families live on the brink of homelessness, none of us should be satisfied.

But I see those 10,000 units as 10,000 opportunities for a fresh start for families across this borough.

Willets Point

We're talking about 2,500 fresh starts at Willets Point alone, home to the city's largest 100 percent affordable housing development in 40 years.

The shovels are in the ground, and the first 880 units are under construction as we speak.

Once that's done, we've got a 25,000-seat, all-electric soccer stadium to build too.

It took a lot of negotiating to get here, so shout out to the Adams administration and Councilmember Francisco Moya for your partnership.

But where is the justice in new housing, a new school, new retail space and more if Corona, Jackson Heights, East Elmhurst or Flushing families aren't reaping the benefits?

So I'll tell you what I tell the city or any developer that comes through my door. If the community benefits aren't there, then neither is my support.

But if your project is as inclusive as Willets Point — thousands of union jobs included — then sign me up.

Creedmoor

When it comes to community-first planning, we created a new gold standard in our borough — the redevelopment of the Creedmoor campus in Eastern Queens.

Last year, my office launched a series of public workshops with Empire State Development to reimagine 50 acres of vacant, state-owned land there.

And to the credit of Eastern Queens families, they showed up with bright ideas and bold visions.

Through our partnership with Governor Hochul, the draft master plan we released in December includes nearly 2,900 new housing units — including units set aside for seniors and veterans. We've even set aside 55 percent of those units for homeownership too.

Beyond just housing, the plan also includes retail space, open space, community centers and even a school.

Couple the master plan with additional investment in area infrastructure and transportation upgrades, and Eastern Queens will become the borough's next great place to live, work and play.

No more needing to leave your neighborhood to find an affordable place to live, a good school for your child, a park to play in or even a good restaurant.

Instead, justice is on the menu in Eastern Queens. Now let's get some shovels in the dirt.

Rockaway

Now, nowhere else in the borough has been as systematically disinvested in as the Rockaway Peninsula. But the Rockaway renaissance is in full swing.

Over one thousand people have moved into Rockaway Village, including hundreds of formerly homeless families. And remember Rockaway Village's \$30 million Gotham Health clinic we announced last spring?

We're about to sign the lease and get started on construction. Thank you, Health and Hospitals, for your work here.

Over at Arverne East, we're cutting the ribbon in two weeks on the gorgeous, 35-acre beachside nature preserve and community multi-purpose facility. Meanwhile, a \$50 million infrastructure upgrade along Shorefront Parkway is well underway.

With this work in the bag, we can get started on the grand prize at Arverne East — more than 1,300 units of affordable housing in what will be New York City's first net-zero community.

Now that is what justice for Far Rockaway families looks like. What was once our city's most forgotten neighborhood is now home to some of the most innovative development plans imaginable.

Jamaica Rezoning

Speaking of innovative, there could not be a better word than that to describe what we're seeing in Jamaica.

One year ago, I stood on this stage and called on the city to create a Jamaica Neighborhood Plan — a blueprint for how this community can meet the needs of its families.

City Planning Commissioner Dan Garodnick was here last year and I must have inspired him. Because not only did we launch that plan, covering more than 300 blocks, we galvanized hundreds of residents by hosting months of public workshops, bringing them into the conversation and building this plan around them.

Just a few weeks ago, City Planning released the draft zoning framework for Jamaica: More affordable housing, more jobs across countless industries, more public space and better transit access.

It also includes \$70 million for the reconstruction of Jamaica Avenue. We're talking about wider sidewalks, better lighting, street safety upgrades, pop-up programming and more.

I promised to leave this neighborhood better than I found it. Speaker Adrienne Adams and Councilmember Nantasha Williams made that same pledge. And that's exactly what all of us are working to deliver.

Because we are not prisoners of fate in Southeast Queens, my friends. From Gracie Mansion to City Hall to Borough Hall, products of Jamaica are at the helm of this city, and we've got decades of historic injustice to correct.

So you're daggone right, we're moving with the urgency of now in Jamaica, Queens!

QUEENS TECH

Lagos, Nigeria

If I'm being honest, though, I think there's something even more exciting on the way for Jamaica and all of our historically marginalized communities of color.

But before I tell you what that is, let's back up six months and 6,000 miles.

Ever since she got to Borough Hall, Deputy Borough President Ebony Young has been hell bent on transforming Queens into America's next great tech hub.

And she knows you can't do that without engaging Black and brown New Yorkers, who make up 51 percent of our city's population but just 22 percent of the city's tech workforce.

Through Ebony's research, she learned about Africa's greatest tech hub — Lagos, Nigeria.

So last summer, we flew across the Atlantic, determined to learn how Lagos became the Silicon Valley of Africa. And to borrow a line from my friend Mayor Adams, learn how we can make Queens the Lagos of America.

For a week, we met with countless young Black entrepreneurs, app designers. Software developers. Start-up CEOs. All empowered through private AND public investment.

In Lagos, the government is deeply intertwined in the tech field — from directly funding start-up companies to building brick-and-mortar tech hubs. Meanwhile, the city has cultivated relationships with major companies like Google and Microsoft, directly connecting them with local entrepreneurs on the ground to help them grow.

Ebony and I came back to Queens professionally and personally moved — determined to replicate what we saw in Lagos here in The World's Borough.

Diversity Tech and Innovation Center

Now we've done good work so far in the tech space, from giving out \$100,000 in seed funding to start-ups through our Queens Tech + Innovation Challenge to our annual Queens Tech Fair.

But after our Lagos trip, we're not satisfied. We're thinking bigger. So today, I'm proud to announce the creation of a diversity tech and innovation center — Queens' way of bringing economic and technological justice to those who have been long denied it.

Created in partnership with our friends at Pursuit and built within One Court Square in Long Island City, the center should open next year and serve as a hub of programming and growth for 50 start-ups.

I'm putting my money where my mouth is, with \$5 million in funding for this center,

We'll be working with Tech:NYC and EDC to identify those first 50 companies. And we'll be looking to scale up significantly from there.

The man who will serve as the Center's first-ever Executive Director, Randy Wiggins, is here with us today. Stand up, Randy.

Randy is one of the nation's leading tech entrepreneurs and investors, and I can't wait to see all that we'll accomplish together.

I know you've been hearing the word "justice" a lot today, but that's what this work is about.

AIRPORTS

\$20 Billion for JFK

In my office, we're all about connecting Queens residents to the jobs of tomorrow.

And nowhere have we been more successful at that than our airports, which have been critical in driving our unemployment rate down to just 4 percent, the lowest in the city.

Specifically, I'm talking about JFK, which is in the midst of an unprecedented \$20 billion overhaul — arguably the biggest economic development project in Queens history.

The \$400 million new Terminal 8 is done. The \$1.5 billion new Terminal 4 is just about there. The new Terminal 1 and new Terminal 6, at a combined \$13 billion, are well under construction.

We even built a new construction support facility, so we can move materials on barges instead of on trucks that roll along our local roads. More than 300,000 truck trips are being eliminated because of it, reducing air pollution and making our streets safer.

As the co-chair of the JFK Redevelopment Advisory Council along with Congressman Greg Meeks, I love to see it.

But the number of new gates isn't as important as the 15,000-plus jobs we're creating, including thousands of UNION jobs, shout out to our brothers and sisters in labor.

And I'm interested in making sure Queens residents land those jobs.

That's why my office has hosted multiple aviation job and contracting fairs at Borough Hall, to directly connect our neighbors to these new opportunities. And that's why I couldn't be prouder that \$850 million in contracts have gone to Queens-based businesses.

I've said it before and I'll say it again: Southeast Queens has to deal with the plane noise. Southeast Queens has to deal with the traffic.

So it's only just that it's the families of Southeast Queens who benefit the most from this project. And as this work continues, I'll push even harder to demand that justice is EXACTLY what we deliver here.

CLIMATE/ENVIRONMENT

Combating Climate Change

While the Queens economy is soaring, Mother Nature is trying her best to ground us.

I've seen first-hand what climate change can do to a community, from Superstorm Sandy's destruction of Rockaway to Hurricane Ida's flooding of Flushing.

I've also seen what kind of damage fossil fuel plants can do to a community. Look no further than Asthma Alley in Western Queens.

Now what's the common line that runs through all of those examples? The people who suffer the most are the people we most often pretend don't exist: Public housing families. Lower-income families.

Mother Nature clearly doesn't believe in justice for those who have already been marginalized. So it's on us to seek justice for them.

Renewable Ravenswood

For decades, Queensbridge and Ravenswood Houses families have had to endure higher rates of respiratory illnesses thanks to their fossil fuel-burning neighbor next door: the Ravenswood Generating Station.

But justice is on its way to Western Queens, as we transition the station away from fossil fuels and toward renewable energy in a plan called Renewable Ravenswood.

First, Governor Hochul signed off last fall on a historic offshore wind project that will deliver more than 1,400 megawatts of clean energy to the station. Let me tell you what that means for Queens:

It means more than 700,000 homes will be powered by wind.

It means improving community health and cutting carbon emissions by more than 1 MILLION TONS per year.

It means thousands of clean energy jobs and billions in economic benefits, all while PERMANENTLY retiring fossil fuel power generation at that station.

Goodbye, Big Allis!

Thank you to our friends at Rise Light & Power for bringing this critical plan to life.

But that's not all. Justice doesn't mean just fixing a problem. It means creating something better in its wake.

To that end, we just launched the Ravenswood Reuse Planning Study earlier this spring, with funding we secured from the state.

This effort will reinvigorate the local community in conjunction with the station's transition.

Together with Rise and HR&A Advisors, we've established a steering committee of local leaders, and we've begun hosting public workshops to hear directly from the people of Western Queens.

How do we create equitable economic opportunities like locally-based green jobs? How do we expand public waterfront access? How can we better invest in public housing families?

By making sure those closest to the pain are closest to the power. That's how.

Champlain Hudson Power Express

But I'm not satisfied with just one groundbreaking clean energy project here in Queens. After all we've been through as a borough, environmental justice to me will entail Queens becoming an unmatched hub of renewable energy.

Enter the Champlain Hudson Power Express — an international partnership that will help deliver a cleaner, more sustainable future for Queens.

Last fall, we broke ground on a conversion station in Astoria. When it opens in 2026, hydroelectricity generated in Canada and transported to Queens through underground cables will be fed into Con Edison's power grid.

And once the station opens, more than ONE MILLION homes here in the city will be powered by clean, renewable energy.

Beyond that, this project will reduce carbon emissions by more than 3.7 million metric tons — the equivalent of removing 44 percent of the cars from New York City streets.

Think about that: 1.7 MILLION of our homes will soon be powered by water and wind instead of oil and gas.

Thousands of green jobs will be created.

Millions of families across Western Queens will live healthier lives.

That's what environmental justice looks like!

EDUCATION AND YOUTH

Education Funding

Investing in infrastructure goes far beyond new electricity lines, though.

It means investing in the institutions that power our borough. The places where our kids learn, our families grow and our communities flourish.

Now we all want our kids to have the best education possible. But it's hard to give them that here in Queens, when our schools are the most overcrowded and underfunded in the city.

But as the Borough President, and as the father of an 8-year-old public school student, believe me when I say I'm determined to rectify that injustice.

We've done so by allocating \$53 million to schools across Queens since I became BP, including \$30 million just this year.

One of those schools is August Martin High School, where the future is being bent in the direction of justice every single day.

Named after America's first Black airline pilot, the school runs an advanced aviation careers program, where a diverse group of students learn how to take their lives to new heights.

But it's hard to soar when your school has been grounded by decades of disinvestment, like so many others across Southeast Queens.

Thanks to more than \$4 million in funding from my office, however, August Martin's cafeteria, gym and auditorium will finally be getting the upgrades they need to elevate the student experience.

Hydroponics Labs

Here on the ground, we're continuing our work to build out hydroponics labs in schools across Queens.

I've funded 13 of them so far as BP. And I'm proud to announce \$2.3 million in funding for 9 more labs across the borough in Fiscal Year 2025.

To those students in Forest Hills, Woodside, South Ozone Park and beyond, I hope you're ready to get your hands dirty.

Not only will these labs teach our students the basics of agriculture and healthy eating, they will grow the next generation of scientists, biologists and green activists.

We need more of these spaces in our schools, but I can't do it alone.

I'm committed to this work, but I want to see our city commit to it too.

According to New York Sun Works, putting a hydroponic lab in every New York City public school will cost around \$238 million — less than 1 percent of the Department of Education's \$37.5 billion budget.

To our Schools Chancellor David Banks, let's fully fund hydroponics in schools.

Let's get this done and let's give our 1.1 million students a well-rounded education — one that will help put food on their families' tables too.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Parks Funding

Social skills are as important as any other skill our kids can learn in a math or science class, and that's where our parks — the lungs of our communities — come in.

But one of the gravest injustices we face in Queens is the lack of high-quality park space, especially in communities of color.

Yet another example of systemic racism.

Things are changing, though. Just ask the families who enjoy the 34th Avenue Open Street in Jackson Heights every day. I'm proud to have helped make that project a reality and we need to see more of them across the borough.

For our more traditional parks, I feel like New York Knicks star Jalen Brunson with all the dimes I've been dropping. \$20 million worth of dimes for our parks this year, to be specific.

We're renovating the basketball courts at Travers Park in Jackson Heights and Phil Rizzuto Park in Richmond Hill. And we're showing Juniper Valley Park in Middle Village some love with \$1 million in upgrades next fiscal year.

Queens is getting the money from the federal government too. Thank you to the Biden Administration for that \$117 million check to help us build the QueensWay in Central Queens.

Access to green space is, at its heart, an issue of environmental and societal justice. And justice is what my office will continue to deliver.

Cultural Funding

Beyond our schools and our parks, Queens' unmatched cultural institutions are themselves a kind of living classroom that deserve and demand investment.

Yes, that includes you, Taryn and the Queens Theater team.

That includes you, New York Hall of Science, Queens Museum, Queens Farm, Queens Botanical Garden, Noguchi Museum, Flushing Town Hall, Black Spectrum Theatre and so many more.

These organizations teach us all so much about ourselves.

About our different cultures and our commonalities.

About our histories and our futures.

I am committed to ensuring that each of our cultural groups have a bright future.

That's why I'm proud to have allocated nearly \$27 million to these community anchors since I became borough president.

More than \$2.2 million of that went right here to the Queens Theater!

Culture is king here in Queens — the most diverse place on the planet. And you best believe it's going to stay that way for as long as I'm around.

And that's why there should be no cuts to our cultural groups this year, or any other year!

Corona Plaza

Culture is about so much more than the arts, though. I'd argue we experience culture more through our stomach than our eyes or our ears.

And to me, the undisputed champion of combining culture and cuisine is Corona Plaza.

Don't just take it from me though. Just last year, The New York Times ranked the plaza 48th on its list of 100 best places to eat in New York City.

Think about that.

Countless 5-star restaurants and Michelin-star chefs call this city home, and most couldn't hold a candle to the immigrant mother selling tamales at the corner of Roosevelt and National.

That's why the city's raid of the plaza last summer made me so mad.

My Corona Plaza Task Force had been working for a year on making the space safer and more sanitary, and seeing success. But with no notice, these mainly immigrant street vendors were suddenly out of a job with no way to feed their families.

I'll be damned if I let anyone say they support immigrants, but then take food out of their mouths and money out of their pockets. Where's the justice in that?

So we spoke up. We raised hell. And we negotiated, coming to a deal in November that allowed some vendors to return under new regulations. Thank you to Deputy Mayor Joshi for your partnership and to the Street Vendor Project for your relentless advocacy.

It's time to scale up, bring back even more vendors and restore Corona Plaza to its culinary and cultural glory.

We took a big step toward that goal in February when the DOT issued an RFP to find a long-term operator for the site.

And to my fellow Borough Presidents in the room, we took a big step forward for you too.

Because I want to see what we've done in Corona Plaza be the pilot of a citywide program that justly and intelligently addresses street vending.

Whether it's Jamaica, Flushing or somewhere like the Brooklyn Bridge, we've got to make sure we're doing right by everyone involved.

Community Centers

Justice is at the heart of that mission.

And it's a mission we share with so many of our community-based organizations, like Make the Road New York.

And it just so happens that Make the Road is opening a new community center directly across the street from Corona Plaza.

Centers like this one are lifelines for many, and life savers for some.

That's why I'm so proud to have put nearly \$2 million toward the construction of Make the Road's center.

No matter your age, your race, your immigration status or your background, this center and all our community centers across Queens are here to serve you.

But we need more of these spaces. We've got a \$140 million center with two new pools coming to Roy Wilkins Park, where the design phase is getting underway.

Thank you Mayor Adams and Speaker Adams for your partnership there.

Over in Astoria, my office put \$5 million into a brand-new Variety Boys and Girls Club.

In Forest Hills, we put more than \$2 million into renovations at Queens Community House's center.

116th Precinct

Idle time is the devil's playground, and giving our young people a place to go is one way to ensure public safety.

Policing, when done right, is another way.

For Southeast Queens residents, however, it can feel like our cops are absent from that conversation.

Not because they want to be. But because the 105th Precinct has more than 350 miles of streets in its jurisdiction to cover — the same distance between Rosedale and Richmond, Virginia.

So I'm proud to have secured \$104 million for the new 116th Precinct in Rosedale, which is being completed as we speak and will open this fall.

And yes, it's going to have a built-in community center.

This isn't some new project though. This has been FOUR DECADES in the making.

Four decades.

That's how long local leaders like Bess DeBetham have been pushing for a new precinct. This project is literally older than me.

They say that justice delayed is justice denied.

But we won't be denied any more in Southeast Queens, my friends. Those days are done.

TRANSPORTATION

Addressing Transit Deserts

Another injustice that's become ingrained in the Southeast Queens way of life is a sheer lack of reliable public transportation.

For those of us who call Rosedale, Laurelton or Springfield Gardens home, just getting to Jamaica can take an hour by bus.

But we all know it's not just Southeast Queens. Southwest Queens families experience that same injustice.

Over in Eastern Queens, they've been singing that same song for decades.

But more reliable mass transit options are on the way for all of us, no matter where we live.

Queens Bus Network Redesign

For the 800,000 bus riders in this borough, we can expect relief in the form of the Queens Bus Network Redesign, which is in its final stage.

This \$30 million investment will add four entirely new routes, including a new express bus line between Laurelton and downtown Manhattan.

It also creates eight new 24-hour routes, and 27 rush routes that directly connect with subway and rail hubs.

Is this a perfect plan? No. I want to see more connections between our bus system and the LIRR, especially for Eastern Queens residents. But it's an incredible step forward.

Interborough Express

Turning to our train lines, the Interborough Express will be nothing short of a game changer for Jackson Heights, Maspeth, Middle Village, Glendale and Ridgewood.

Beyond it being just a 40-minute ride end to end, the light rail line connecting Jackson Heights and Bay Ridge will

reduce traffic congestion and connect almost 1 million residents to 17 different major transit connections.

Finally, no more going through Manhattan! I'm sorry, BP Mark Levine, but Queens is leaving you for Brooklyn.

I know Brooklyn BP Antonio Reynoso is on board too, because we both know what an economic boom it can be for communities on both sides of our border.

Now let's get shovels in the ground — and passengers in their seats — ASAP.

QNS Rail Line

Speaking of new rail lines, I have to give credit where credit is due. Back when she was in the City Council and even to this day, Elizabeth Crowley has been pushing the QNS — a proposed 10-stop passenger rail line between Jamaica and Long Island City.

Elizabeth, I'm on board.

I'll never say no to more mass transit, and the existing rail line there is only carrying freight. As Southwest Queens continues to grow, let's start carrying commuters along that line too.

Far Rockaway Ticket

When it comes to train lines that already exist, 2023 was a historic year for the historically overlooked Rockaway families, who FINALLY experienced a little transit justice.

In this speech last year, I called on the MTA to extend the City Ticket discount to Far Rockaway, which for no good reason at all, had been excluded from the program.

Excluded, no more.

In August, we launched the Far Rockaway Ticket, allowing local families to pay half of what they previously paid to ride the rails.

I know I was a thorn in their side for a long time about this, but I couldn't be more grateful to the MTA and my Rockaway colleagues for making this program a reality.

Cyclist Safety

But when it comes to Queens' growing community of cyclists, they risk paying the ultimate price every time they strap on their helmet.

2023 was the most dangerous year for cycling deaths in New York City since 1999, as 30 bike riders were killed in crashes, while nearly 400 more were seriously injured. Most of those deaths occurred in areas without bike infrastructure. Beyond unacceptable.

We've made progress in Queens with projects like the Queens Boulevard bike lane. And I've allocated \$4.5 million toward the construction of bike infrastructure across Queens.

But we need to see a much more intense effort on DOT's behalf when it comes to finally building out the bike lane on the Queensboro Bridge. I have no interest in seeing the \$3 million I invested there go to waste.

And like our friends at Families for Safe Streets, I want to see this infrastructure built all over Queens.

Pedestrian Safety

Get it done to protect our cyclists and our pedestrians — one hundred of whom were killed in New York City last year.

One problematic spot has been North and South Conduit Avenue spanning South Queens and Brooklyn, which has become the new Boulevard of Death.

But this year, Brooklyn BP Reynoso and I formed a joint task force with the DOT and Councilmembers Joann Ariola and Selvena Brooks-Powers, in an effort to rectify dangerous sections of the roadway.

And we're already seeing success.

In December, we finished the redesign of North Conduit at 79th Street in Lindenwood, where two people had died since 2018.

Thank you to the DOT for helping make that happen. Now let's replicate work like this all across Queens.

And while we're at it, let's take back control of our streets from reckless drivers.

Because the family of 8-year-old Byron Palomino Arroyo, who was killed in East Elmhurst last month, deserve justice.

So to our friends in Albany, let's finally pass Sammy's Law this session and allow New York City to set its own speed limits. Get it done.

HEALTHCARE

Healthcare Funding

Of everything we've talked about today, from creating jobs to building housing, none of it means anything if we don't have our health.

And while we've come out of COVID stronger than ever as a borough, it would be a dereliction of duty — an injustice of the highest order — to forget about the healthcare heroes who got us through our darkest days.

I said in my first State of the Borough that I would root our recovery in strengthening our healthcare system, and that's exactly what we've done over the last year.

\$32 .7 million in funding from my office has gone toward that goal, including \$14.4 million this last year alone — the largest single-year allocation for healthcare I've made since becoming BP.

In that \$14 million pot includes nearly \$5 million to upgrade six different Gotham Health clinics across Queens, \$3 million for state-of-the-art cancer fighting technology at Jamaica Hospital and \$3 million to centralize and improve care for newborns and their mothers at Elmhurst Hospital.

Supporting Nurses

Banging pots and pans during the pandemic was great, but we need to speak with our wallets and not just our hearts.

We need to stand with our nurses pushing for fair pay and safe working conditions too.

Because justice in healthcare means fairness for providers, not just patients.

CONCLUSION

We've talked a lot about injustice today, and the work we've done together to root it out. I'm so proud of the progress we've made, but that progress is under threat like never before.

We are The World's Borough. 190 countries are represented here. More than 350 languages and dialects are spoken on our streets.

The political and religious ideologies sprinkled throughout our communities are infinite.

That diversity is our strength, but it can be our downfall if we're not careful. Because we live in a world that is more divided now than at any other point in my lifetime.

Pandemic-fueled bigotry threatened thousands of our AAPI neighbors in Queens. But we stood shoulder to shoulder with our brothers and sisters in that community to stop Asian hate.

Our Sikh and LGBTQ communities have come under attack repeatedly, but never will we stop pushing back against prejudice.

Most recently, the brutality that Hamas brought to Israel on October 7th, and the needless suffering in Gaza in the months after, has fanned the flames of distrust and disgust here in Queens.

But we will not allow ourselves to be divided.

I visited Israel last year with leaders from Queens' Jewish community. I smelled the stench of death lingering in those burned-out kibbutzes myself.

I've met with our Muslim leaders here in Queens to let them know that they have an ally and a friend at Borough Hall.

And after every meeting, I come away more convinced than ever that The World's Borough is the world's blueprint to follow. That no matter our background, we all strive for the same things: Unity, peace and prosperity.

Martin Luther King once said that “we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.”

For thousands of years, humans have been trying to escape that network and untie that garment. And every time we try, it brings war, hate, famine, corruption and endless suffering.

On a local level, it brings gentrification, wealth gaps and disinvestment designed to hold entire communities back.

It brings injustice.

But one thing we've never been short on here in Queens is faith.

Faith that despite our differences and despite our circumstances, we can build a future for our kids that we couldn't have imagined for ourselves.

Faith that Dr. King said in his own Nobel Prize acceptance speech, “gives us the courage to face the uncertainties of the future.”

Faith that “will give our tired feet new strength as we continue our forward stride toward the city of freedom.”

My friends, I have faith in you. I have faith in us.

The state of our borough is stronger than ever, because I have faith in our shared mission.

To create a borough rooted in justice for all 2.4 million of us.

To overcome the cruelty and hardship of our world, and build a borough that transcends our divisions.

To not be prisoners of fate, but pioneers of a future worthy of our families.

We have the power to decide what that city of freedom looks like.

Thank you! God bless you, Queens! Now let's go build it!