

Transcript: Mayor de Blasio Delivers 2021 State of the City Address

January 28, 2021

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Let me tell you a story, a story about a city that bore the brunt of the COVID crisis, a city that was the epicenter, a city that was laid low, but refused to be held down. Let me tell you a story about how things change, about the way we come back, about the way we build something better. Let me tell you a tale of a new city. And this story begins with a little history.

There were times before when we were laid low, when so many naysayers said New York City's best days were over – after the Great Depression of the 1930's; the fiscal crisis of the 1970's; that horrible day, 9/11/2001; after the Great Recession hit; and Hurricane Sandy. Each and every one of these horrible moments came with prophecies of doom for New York City, and yet New York City fought back. New York City found a way. New York City made something better each and every time. And where did it take us?

By January of 2020, one year ago, we were at the strongest point we'd ever experienced in our history – the most jobs we had ever had in New York City, our strongest economy, record-low unemployment; our schools, better than ever – Pre-K for All, 3-K; our city and our streets, safe – crime driven down year after year, while police and community came closer together. One year ago, today, New York City was surging forward, taking all of the pain of the past and turning it into progress.

And then, COVID hit. And the story could have ended there – all of our achievements, falling away. But that's not New York City. New Yorkers did what we always do. New Yorkers fought back. We created a path forward.

So, in March and April, we were the epicenter of this crisis and we didn't have all the things we needed. We built our own. We created our own supplies to save lives. We built ventilators. We produce PPE. We created our own testing lab. Whatever it took, we found a way here in New York City. New Yorkers stepped up to protect each other.

Then, the summer came. We went from worst to first – from the epicenter to one of the safest places in the United States of America. And to make sure we could deepen our fight against COVID, we created the largest Test and Trace Corps. in the nation, protecting thousands and thousands of New Yorkers. And when the naysayers said it couldn't be done, and when cities all over the nation dared not to try, we reopened our schools. We made them the safest places in New York City. That's our way forward. That spirit, that heart, that willingness to take on any challenge, that is how we build a new city.

Together, we will drive a recovery for all of us. To do it, we have to aim high. In May, we will begin to bring back the rest of our City workers – the public servants our city depends on with a dedicated vaccination campaign. And, today, we are declaring a new goal. In June, we will reach a milestone – 5 million New Yorkers vaccinated. That is how we jumpstart a recovery for all of us. We will reach high levels of immunity to create a safer city, a city ready for a full comeback. It will be a signal to the world that the comeback is happening right here, right now. We need the supply, but, so long as it's there, New York City will lead the way.

As we bring our city back, we need to bring our children back. We need to help our children reach their full potential, and that's why we'll bring our schools back fully in September. They've been the safest places in New York City, and they will be again. We'll bring our schools back for our children, but we'll also recognize all they've been through. We'll close the COVID achievement gap with new

approaches to learning, using the power of digital education and the strength of our educators to reach every child with an individualized approach. It's not just about academics, it's also about the emotional needs of our children. And so, we're going to provide mental health screening for all the children of New York City. We're bringing in more social workers to serve them, creating more community schools where the whole community gets involved in helping our children.

Our 2021 Student Achievement Plan reaches the whole child. And to make sure we continue to create a fair and better city, we'll deepen our efforts to diversify our schools, changing our approach to admissions, and ensuring that every child has opportunity where before it was denied them. We'll deepen the extraordinary pool of leadership in our public schools with a new training academy for our next generation of superintendents. We'll harness the amazing energy that allowed New York City public schools to keep going no matter what, and we'll ensure the next school year is a transcendent moment for our children.

The new city we need to build has to be a city where everyone belongs. That new city we build has to be one where everyone feels fairness and the decency they deserve. To do that, we have to transform the relationship between our police and our communities. We have to change the culture of policing, fundamentally. We know that the COVID crisis has left us with new challenges, but we overcome those challenges by bringing community closer, by deepening neighborhood policing, by ensuring there is trust. To overcome the challenge of violence fostered by the COVID crisis, we're creating a new joint force to end gun violence and fight back against shootings. This will not just be the NYPD, it'll be leaders of communities all over New York City. It means getting the community involved. It means bringing in the Cure Violence Movement and the Crisis Management System, working with district attorneys, ensuring that everyone is working together for a common purpose.

We know it is only a very few who commit the violence in New York City. But with this new approach, we will identify, individual by individual, who's creating the violence that afflicts everyone else, and will bring to bear all the energies of community and law enforcement to end that violence. We'll re-energize the Ceasefire Initiative, which has done so much good. We'll use the power of the Cure Violence Movement and the Crisis Management System to deepen its reach in our communities. We'll double the workforce that does this crucial work, involving and engaging community members to solve community problems. We'll also ask the community to help us decide who are the best local police leaders for their neighborhood. From this point on, the selection of precinct commanders will be made with the engagement of the community. When it's time to choose a new commander, precinct council members will meet with multiple candidates and provide their views to the Commissioner, before the Commissioner decides. By bringing in these voices of the neighborhood, we'll make sure that local police leaders have the support and engagement of the communities they serve.

The way forward in this city depends on trust. The forward depends on accountability. Where there is accountability there is also trust. Trust between neighborhoods and police. And that's why we are announcing the David Dinkins Plan to expand and strengthen the Civilian Complaint Review Board. We named it after Mayor David Dinkins because he made the CCRB a reality. And this new plan takes historic steps forward. We will grant the CCRB new review powers, we'll make sure the NYPD patrol guide is reviewed, and expand the power of the CCRB to do the kind of proactive work necessary to improve the relationship between police and community, to give people more confidence. That trust and confidence ultimately means more cooperation between community and police, and that is the way to reduce crime and violence. That is the ultimate expression of neighborhood policing.

And we'll also change the value we put on community engagement, by changing the training of our police officers to focus more on a real dialogue with the community. We'll expand the People's Police Academy, ensuring that officers are trained by neighborhood residents before they ever walk the streets of our neighborhoods. We'll change CompStat itself, the very tool that has helped us move forward over decades. The new CompStat, CompStat 3.0, will focus deeply on efforts to engage the community, to maximize trust, to maximize neighborhood involvement in stopping crime. We'll do all

the important work and the precision policing we've always done, but we'll deepen the true X-factor in the equation – the involvement of the people, the involvement of the neighborhood itself.

As we tell this tale of a new city, as we drive a recovery for all of us, we will bring our city back in so many ways that you will see and feel. And one of them is, we'll create a cleaner city. We'll hire 10,000 New Yorkers, using stimulus funds, borrowing from one of the greatest initiatives of the New Deal. New York City's own Franklin Delano Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps, and we'll update that idea. The City Cleanup Corps will wipe away graffiti, power wash sidewalks, create community murals, tend to community gardens, beautify public spaces, and work with community organizations to clean their neighborhoods. This will be a cleanup blitz during the year of 2021 to help us come back strong.

In our new city, we will reach those who live on our streets, a painful tragedy that we can no longer accept in New York City. So, we'll take the plan we initiated just a year ago, the Journey Home, and we'll deepen it to end street homelessness as we know it. We already today have the lowest number of New Yorkers in shelter that we've had in years. We're doing more and more to get folks the affordable housing they need, but the pain of New Yorkers living on the streets has to end once and for all, and only ends with intensive human firsthand outreach. Bringing folks off the streets and giving them a chance for new life, it only works with thousands of new Safe Haven beds, and more mental health and substance misuse services to help people find a better way. We recommit ourselves as we come out of the COVID era. And for the city to move forward, for us to tell a new story together, we all have to participate in the greatest challenge facing us ahead.

Soon, the day will come when we aren't talking about the coronavirus, but we will be talking about the climate crisis. It will be the clear and present danger confronting all of us, and the only way we overcome it is to fully acknowledge the danger, and use everything we have together to stop it. And so, that means New York City has to lead the way in ending the use of fossil fuels and turning to renewable energy once and for all. We started by taking the billions of dollars in New York City pension fund investments and taking them away from fossil fuel companies that were poisoning the earth, putting that money into renewable energy development. And now, we resolve to deepen this effort by making a commitment to a \$50 billion investment of our pension resources in renewable energy over the next 15 years. We will take all of our pension fund dollars away from any element of the fossil fuel supply chain and make sure those dollars are helping us create a greener future. But that's just the beginning, we need to make clear that New York City will renounce fossil fuels fully. And, therefore, we need to ban fossil fuel connections in the city by the end of this decade, literally ensuring that our only choice is renewable energy. We need to turn to renewables like never before and connect New York City to clean Canadian hydropower and invest in the transmission lines that make that possible. With this new asset, New York City's government will run on 100 percent renewable energy in the next four years.

These are the kinds of efforts that change the reality fundamentally, but we also have to change the way we live if we're going to fight climate change, and that means moving away from our cars, leaving the era of the automobile behind. We're going to make Open Streets a permanent part of New York City, giving back the streets to the people, to pedestrians and bicyclists, using them to deepen our Open Restaurants Program and create beautiful community oasis. We'll make Open Streets permanent, and we'll keep building them out more each year so New Yorkers have a better way to live, and not one that always depends on the automobile. We'll take our bridges, our iconic bridges that we see as beautiful symbols of the city – but, unfortunately, has also been part of the problem – and we'll turn them into part of the solution. For the Brooklyn Bridge and the Queensboro Bridge, we'll create new two-way protected bike lanes. We'll have space on the bridges devoted solely to clean transportation, and we'll create new bike boulevards in every borough designed to give bicycles travel priority and put cyclist safety first. These are the kind of changes that allow us to move out of the era of fossil fuels and the era of the automobile, and into a green future as part of our commitment to the New York City Green New Deal.

To build a new economy, we have to have a different vision. We have to have a recovery for all of us. We have to understand that an economy that works for everyone is the only one that's acceptable after everything that we've experienced with COVID-19, after the disparities and the pain. And so, our economy increasingly will be based on the notion that health care is a human right. And the only way to build a strong society is to build a healthy society. If we ever need an example of why that matters, we've got it in the year 2020 from the coronavirus.

In the years ahead, we will make New York City the public health capital of the world. We will take all of our strengths, our universities, our hospitals, our incredibly talented workforce, our entrepreneurs, our creative people, we'll take all those strengths and marry them with a vision – fairness and equality in health care. We'll take the pain that we experienced during the coronavirus crisis and use the lessons we learned to lead this country and the world in creating the new cures, and stopping the next pandemic, in building a sense of public health for everyone, in creating a public health corps., thousand strong, taking the model of our Test and Trace Corps. and making it permanent so that community-based health care and the promotion of healthy lives, the proactive, preventative efforts lead the way.

We're going to create opportunities in the new economy for folks who haven't had their fair share. At Medgar Evers College, in Brooklyn – New York City's one historically Black college – we are going to create a health care career hub that focuses on training the community for the jobs that will grow from this point on, an accelerator program to jumpstart the careers of our next generation of health care workers. We'll deepen our commitment to the life sciences, an area of tremendous potential for New York City. We will invest to create a life sciences campus on the East Side of Manhattan, and then build it out all over the five boroughs. By creating LifeSci Avenue, we'll have a focal point for the life sciences industry of this city. And then, from there, so many other key areas of intense activity will grow just as we've seen with our technology sector. Today, in New York City, technology jobs account for over 350,000 New Yorkers' livelihoods. Life sciences is going to build up fast, just as we saw with tech. We see this as an industry that could account for 100,000 jobs or more in the course of the next few years. We achieved that by investing public dollars, but also rallying and organizing the efforts of the extraordinary institutions that make New York City the single most impressive collection of talent and expertise in public health anywhere in the world. By ensuring that we become the public health capital of the world, we rebuild our economy, and we rebuild it with an eye towards fairness and sustainability.

To bring back the jobs we need, we have to prioritize the communities hardest hit by COVID, and we ensure a fairer economy than we've ever seen before. We have to bend the work of government to fighting inequality. For that reason, we're going to make permanent our Task Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity. Leaders of color within the City government, building an agenda for their own communities, ensuring with urgency that every community gets its fair share. This is something that's been a game-changer in 2020, and it should be a permanent part of our government – a guarantee that equality will govern decisions. And to make sure we address the pain of the past, to make sure we uncover and attack institutional racism, I'm naming a Charter Revision Commission with a two-year mandate. This panel will act as a Racial Justice and Reconciliation Commission as well. These leaders will do the work to ensure the structural racism is identified and solutions are clarified and acted on in this city. Around the world, in moments of truth, in moments of change, nations turned to truth and reconciliation commissions. Here in New York City, we can lead the way in our nation by speaking openly of the wrongs of the past, naming them, denouncing them, turning away from them, creating new approaches and making them the law. That will be the mandate of our Charter Revision Commission.

To create a recovery for all of us, we'll focus on minority- and women-owned businesses, ensuring that when New York City invests in major new efforts to create housing for our people, minority- and women-owned businesses will lead the way. We'll focus on hiring people from the communities where the housing is being built to build the new jobs of the future. We're going to work in Albany on a

community hiring economic justice plan, which will give us the right when there's new development in New York City to ensure that the people hired to do the work are from the very same neighborhoods where the development takes place. For too long, New Yorkers have watched tall, shiny buildings built in their own community, and yet nothing was there for them. This law will ensure that community residents benefit not just from the new housing, but from the jobs created as well. We're going to work constantly for a fair economy, and that means we must tax the wealthy, and we must redistribute the wealth of the city to those who do the work. Even during the height of the pandemic, we saw the stock market boom. We saw 120 New York billionaires grow their net worth by \$77 billion in the course of 2020. We're going to work with our colleagues in Albany to ensure that money that has been earned during this pandemic goes to those who have suffered the most. We'll join the fight for higher taxes on the wealthy and a new billionaires' tax. These are the steps that can give us the resources needed to build a recovery for all of us.

The next generation of economic growth demands more than just broadband connections. 2021 will be the year of 5G in New York City. The City will aggressively expand 5G infrastructure all across the five boroughs. And we're going to help revitalize small businesses directly. We're going to set up a small business recovery tax credit to keep their doors open, and, with stimulus funds, provide struggling small businesses loans to get them back on their feet. We'll cut the fines that used to afflict our small businesses and cut the red tape that they used to have to overcome just to get their work done and give them the ability to hire our fellow New Yorkers. We saw it with the Open Restaurants Program – by simplifying, by trusting small business, we're able to bring those restaurants back and save 100,000 jobs. We'll use that same approach to help small businesses all over the five boroughs. And to jumpstart our recovery, we're going to have a massive campaign to market our city to ensure that New York City is seen all over the world as exactly what we are, a place of extraordinary strength, and energy, and drive – a place that will determine the future. The future starts here in New York City. It is the place that people need to come. It is the place where people need to invest. We will show the world day by day and bring in the help we need to grow strong. All of these things are within our reach, if we're willing to build a new city.

And so, this is where the story takes us – and the story is all about the people of New York City. The strength it will take – the focus, the energy that comes from our people – the same people who fought back through COVID – comes from the heart and soul of New Yorkers, the compassion and the decency of the people of the neighborhoods of this city. If you want to know if New York City is going to come back, and come back strong, and come back better, just listen to the voices of your fellow New Yorkers. They will tell the story.

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