

Remarks of Mayor Noam Bramson
State of the City
March 8, 2017

Split Screen

Deputy Mayor Fried, thank you for welcoming us today, and ladies and gentlemen: good evening.

This is the first time that the State of the City Address has been held here at City Hall as an official public event, and while I think that's an appropriate change, I would be remiss if I did not begin tonight by acknowledging the decades-long sponsorship of this occasion by the New Rochelle Chamber of Commerce. Please join me in thanking the Chamber leadership for their outstanding service to our community.

Members of the City Council and Administration, colleagues in government, community leaders, neighbors, and friends:

At some point in our personal lives, almost all of us experience moments when our thoughts and emotions feel torn in two and pulled in opposite directions. Maybe one child is excelling in school, while another is struggling. Perhaps one spouse gets a promotion at work, just as the other spouse is laid off. A friend told me recently about a single, confusing week in which he first danced at his daughter's wedding, and then cried at his father's funeral.

How are we supposed to think and act in these moments, when life unfolds in a split screen?

Usually we wrestle with such questions privately or with our loved ones, and this may seem a strange way to begin a speech about public matters. But I do so for a reason, because this year, I think many of us feel as though our civic life, our communal life together, is similarly split down the middle.

On one side, for our city, this is a moment of unprecedented progress and possibility with exciting opportunities we are privileged to embrace. On the other side, for our country, this is a moment of unprecedented concern and division, with grave responsibilities we are challenged to accept.

So tonight, I wish to speak with you about both halves of that split screen, about our duties as New Rochelleans, and as Americans, in the hope that our divided emotions

can be joined and made whole in a singular commitment to each other and to the future we build together.

Positive Strides

Let's start with the good news. Our city of New Rochelle is making positive strides in every direction.

As we meet tonight, New Rochelle's neighborhoods are among the safest in America, with fire and emergency services that are second to none, and with our lowest crime rate in 56 years.

New Rochelle's fiscal position has never been stronger, with Moody's best bond rating in more than 80 years.

And our businesses are thriving once more, with their highest sales volume ever in 2016, and on track to break that record all over again in 2017.

As we become more safe and prosperous, New Rochelle is also becoming more sustainable. In our city today:

For the first time, every homeowner can take advantage of the Energize Program to make houses more energy efficient. Every motorist can take a nighttime drive in the glow of all-LED streetlights. And every resident, through community choice aggregation, can tap into low-priced, 100% renewable power.

For the first time, every person with a smart phone or iPad, which is most of us, can charge up at a solar Soofa bench. And every person with a Tesla, which is maybe fewer of us, can soon power up at an electric charging station at New Roc City.

For those who want to enjoy the outdoors, there's a new playground at Feeney Park, an expanded community garden at Lincoln Park, a new sundeck at Hudson Park, and a brand new park altogether on Burling Lane.

And for those who just want to curl up with a good read, for the first time in decades, you can buy a new book here in New Rochelle. We welcome Barnes & Noble, and we thank Monroe College for at long last bringing a bookstore to an eager city.

Our partnerships are more vibrant than ever. We're teaming with our School District to share sanitation services and save money, teaming with our sister cities in

Westchester to explore ultra high-speed broadband, and teaming with our neighboring municipalities to improve water quality in Long Island Sound.

To give us all better ways to get around, get to the store, get to work, or just have fun, this summer, New Rochelle will launch the first bike share program in Westchester. 100 bikes, up to 12 stations, north, south, east, and west.

And to make sure those bikes have a safe place on the road, this year, we'll begin designing our complete streets plan . . . because whether we drive, cycle, or walk, public rights-of-way belong to the whole public.

Everywhere is a burgeoning sense of optimism and confidence.

And, ladies and gentlemen, we're only getting started. Because, as we look to the future, much more is coming, including a new emphasis on technology and innovation.

Connected City

In fact, tonight I can give you a sneak peak at exhibit A. In case you didn't already notice our low-key, unobtrusive guest, say hello to Palo. This year and next year, 24 of these kiosks will be erected at key locations all around town, with plans for dozens more to come.

They provide instant, user-friendly access to the web, services, maps, local attractions, events, emergency response, and much more.

You can look up a restaurant.

You get the train schedule.

You can even make a phone call (which seems kind of retro.)

And each Verizon Palo kiosk will be its own WiFi hotspot at gigabyte speed. All at no cost to the City.

This next-generation technology will leapfrog right over the last-gen portals in Manhattan and help make New Rochelle the smartest, most connected city in the region.

After the speech, you can come on down and try it out for yourself. The Verizon Palo team is here to help you out and show off their 13-foot, 1,200 pound baby. (Please wave.) And, before long, look for one at a corner near you.

These kiosks have practical value, to be sure, but, even more, they make a statement – a powerful symbol of our commitment to the future, our belief that a connected community is a strong community, and our determination to compete for and win the jobs, the lifestyles, and the opportunities of tomorrow.

Hottest Emerging Market

Now, in truth, much more could be said about any one of these initiatives, and I've kind of raced through them, just skimming the surface, in the interest of not straining your patience too much.

But I want to dig a little deeper into one last local topic, because it's been the primary focus of the City's efforts for such a long time and the subject of endless debate. I'm talking about our downtown. Tonight, after years of ups and downs, small steps forward and occasional steps back, I can report to you that New Rochelle has the hottest emerging market in the entire Hudson Valley.

If the national economy holds, then in just two or three years, you will be astounded by the changes, with more than a dozen projects moving forward.

- North Avenue can look forward to a complete transformation, extending from the Iona campus down to the edge of the train station.
- At the Burling triangle, east of the hospital, up to seven new buildings will form a brand new transit district, lined by a park.
- Along the Huguenot corridor, new millennial housing will take shape to the east near Harrison and Cedar Streets and to the west just past Centre.
- On Lecount, one project from Wilder Balter and another from Cappelli will re-shape the critical blocks between New Roc and North, already enhanced by the renovation of 5 Anderson.
- While on Main Street, the first project from RXR has broken ground, with performance space and retail at the ground level, rising into a proud and attractive tower of homes.

Most of these developments are fully approved and ready to roll.

Nearly a dozen more are in earlier stages of discussion and review.

And this Spring, we expect the first major announcements from our master developers for bold, catalytic projects on public properties, starting at Church-Division.

We've never seen anything like it – this surge of activity.

And consider this. When the City issued a request for proposals for yet another site – our downtown firehouse at 45 Harrison Street – more than thirty development teams showed, an unprecedented demonstration of enthusiasm for New Rochelle. The responses to that RFP are due this Friday. One more piece of evidence that our city is on a roll and on the rise.

Now, it's true that the first wave of projects is mostly residential, and we know that's not enough. The people of New Rochelle are sick and tired of crossing the border to do our shopping – and we want to keep that spending power here at home. One option for addressing this uncontrolled flow of customers across the border is to build a big, beautiful wall around New Rochelle . . . and make White Plains pay for it. But for those who think maybe that's not so realistic, here's a better idea. The City's IDA has engaged a consumer analytics firm to focus our retail recruitment strategy; they'll help us target businesses that are the right fit for the New Rochelle of today and of tomorrow, and help us configure new retail space to attract the optimal tenants. We won't rest until downtown New Rochelle is known not just as a great place to live, but also a great place to work and shop.

And it's not enough, either, to have a downtown that brims with commerce, but is barren in culture. Fortunately, we already have great artists and craftspeople, great studios and galleries. And now, to ensure that our city's creative vitality grows in concert with our downtown economy, we've launched the Interactive Digital Environments Alliance (or I.D.E.A.) which will combine performance art at our new black box theater with motion capture, virtual reality, and augmented reality technology. Don't ask me what all that means, but it sounds pretty good, with the potential not only to improve our cultural experience as patrons and customers, but also to create the cutting-edge, high-tech jobs that are essential to our region's future. By marrying arts and science, inspiration and innovation, we can build a downtown with a richer wallet and a richer soul.

Ideally Yours

What does all of this mean? Why is all of this important? Because it adds up to a city that is stronger and healthier, where our investment in a home or business is rewarded with rising value, an affordable tax bill, and a high quality of life. A place where we can experience the energy of urban life and the tranquility of nature just steps from each other. Where we are linked to the wider world by every mode of transportation and every line of communication. Where our children and grandchildren, once they've grown up, can live and want to live. And where the rest of us, once we've grown old, can look forward to retiring, close to friends, family, and a community we've come to love.

So when we say New Rochelle is Ideally Yours, we mean it. And we want prospective businesses, investors, and residents to join us, to come along for the ride, to be part of our story. That's why, just two weeks ago, we launched our new website ideallynewrochelle.com, with companion videos that you can see outside and written materials you can pick up on your way out. All saying loud and proud why New Rochelle is the ideal place to live, work, and grow.

I know there's still work to be done. Still many problems to solve and hurdles to surmount. I know people are eager for the changes to jump off the renderings and get into the ground. Believe me, I'm eager, too, and I won't consider any of this settled until the construction cranes start going up. But consider how far we've come.

Just a few short years ago, like many other cities, New Rochelle was wrestling with painful choices and diminished prospects. Our development efforts had stalled, our budget was strained, our services were stretched thin.

And, worst of all, I had a lot less fun giving this speech.

Now, today, for all the reasons I've listed, with gratitude for the hard work and dedication of our professional staff and City employees, with admiration for the loyalty and encouragement of so many residents, I can declare with pleasure, pride, and confidence that the State of our City is strong.

Big Choices

So how did we go from there to here, how did we lift ourselves up? And what does our experience tell us about next steps?

For lessons, consider three big choices, all made within the last year and a half, and all at the very heart of New Rochelle's dramatic turnaround.

Downtown Plan

First, creating and adopting our downtown plan.

When New Rochelle established the goal of attracting nearly 12 million square feet of new construction, we didn't leave the execution to chance. We put in place a unique and innovative framework that is setting the pace for suburbs everywhere:

- a new zoning code, that combines market flexibility with the highest standards for design.
- a completed environmental impact statement that sweeps away delay, risk, and expense.
- and a lightning fast, non-political review process that can move a project from proposal to approval in just 90 days.

Elements that, together, make our downtown more shovel-ready and business-friendly than any competitor.

It's not easy to embrace a vision of change on this scale and with that speed, but we did it. And because of that work, because we tilled the field, nourished the soil, and planted the seeds, everywhere in New Rochelle today, there green shoots bursting into the sun.

Capital Budget

Second big choice: investing in our infrastructure. For too long, New Rochelle's capital needs have been severely and chronically underfunded, with predictable results: roads, sidewalks, water lines, parks, and essential equipment that year by year fall into greater disrepair.

Well, no more. This past December, the City Council approved a 10-year program of capital investments totaling nearly \$150 million – the largest in our history. It includes everything from basics like bridges, dams, and fire stations, to ecological restoration of our lakes, to new playground equipment and playing fields in our parks, to flood mitigation for our neighborhoods, to new trees along our streets, plus an expanded paving budget that will let us double the number of streets we resurface each year, along with those pedestrian and cycling enhancements I mentioned earlier.

To do all this, the Council had to approve a one-time property tax hike above the State cap that amounts to about 1% on our overall tax bills. That may not sound like very much. But trust me, it's a hard thing to do. Hard on the merits when so many people are still struggling to make ends meet, and hard on the politics because any tax increase is fair game in the next campaign.

But I believe that this step, more than any other, will provide all of us with a tangible return on the tax dollars we send to City Hall. Value we can see and feel on a daily basis, not to mention doing a better job of leveraging public investment to attract private investment.

Across the span of a decade, we will all experience roads that are safer, water that is cleaner, services that are better, and parks that are more beautiful and inviting.

So I hope you agree: the big choice on infrastructure was the right choice for New Rochelle.

City Yard

And the last big choice: moving the City Yard. For about a century, New Rochelle's public works operations have been located along prime waterfront property at Echo Bay. When it comes to picking a location to park our garbage trucks and store our road salt, just about everyone can agree that the shoreline is the wrong place, but we've had a slightly harder time agreeing on the right place.

And I can't overstate what a problem this has been. A problem on every level. Our hard-working DPW has been hampered by aging, obsolete facilities and lousy workplace conditions. Taxpayers have footed the bill for wasteful emergency repairs and maintenance costs. Decision-makers have found themselves embroiled in contentious debates, year after year.

Meanwhile, one of our community's most valuable and defining assets, our waterfront, sat neglected, inaccessible, and all-but-invisible for the tens of thousands of people who might otherwise have experienced the beauty and pleasure of the shore.

Tonight, I can report – with relief as much as joy – that the long debate is over. Through a creative public-private partnership, we will build a new DPW garage within the Weyman Avenue retail complex, with a commercial use above. The new facility will improve our operations, have a minimal impact on its surroundings, and even save tax dollars compared to the alternatives.

Above all, this step finally removes what has always been the biggest impediment to waterfront development and lets us now move forward to reclaim the shore. And sure enough, last month, the Council approved the terms of an agreement with Twining Properties for an exciting mixed-use project that celebrates the environment by creating natural open space, reaches for the future in its architectural vision, respects the past in its reuse of the Armory, and invites all of us to walk, shop, dine or simply sit in peace at the water's edge.

I've said it before, but I don't mind saying it again. I can't wait for the day, now closer than ever, when the people of New Rochelle can gather on US1, look to the south, and see – for the first time in any of our lives, an open view of the shore.

Teamwork

So, I know government comes in for some criticism on occasion, and plenty of times that criticism is deserved, but take a moment to reflect on those three big choices – the downtown plan, the ten-year capital budget, and the new city yard. Take a moment to reflect on the preparation and study required to tee them up. Think about the determination needed to push them forward. And think about the possibilities they open for a better, brighter future.

Any one of those three would, in my humble opinion, earn this City Council recognition as one of the most productive and consequential in New Rochelle's history. To achieve all of them in a span of mere months is truly remarkable.

And just as important – at a time when almost everything about American life seems polarized and divided along partisan lines -- where we get our news, who we root for in the Super Bowl, whether we shop at Nordstrom – every one of these three actions, every single one, was unanimous and bipartisan.

I want to ask my colleagues on the City Council to please stand – Lou Trangucci, Al Tarantino, Jared Rice, Ivar Hyden, Barry Fertel, and Liz Fried – and I ask you to join me in recognizing the spirit of teamwork that has brought us so far, and that can bring us farther still.

So there's good reason to celebrate, as we did in high style with New Rochelle's own Mighty Mouse at the best Thanksgiving Parade in memory, as we did with the Council on the Arts at the Hudson Park concert series and at ArtsFest, as we did with the Business Improvement District at our downtown farmers market and with Down to Earth for our uptown farmers market, and as we did with thousands of our

neighbors at New Rochelle's growing street fair. (Hats off to Parks & Rec for their great work on all fronts.)

As someone who grew up here, went to school here, dragged my wife here, is raising my kids here, and who has served in municipal government for more than 20 years, I can tell you without equivocation or doubt that I am more optimistic about New Rochelle's future at this moment than at any other time in my life.

So let's do everything possible to seize today as an opportunity, to greet tomorrow with confidence, to set our sights to the highest place, and to bring everyone along on our journey to the top.

Brotherhood and Sisterhood

I wish I could end my remarks there. (And noticing some of the stifled yawns in the audience, you might also wish I could end my remarks there.)

But I am compelled now turn to the other half of our split screen. To be honest, I do so with some misgivings. Because in a dozen years of giving this annual speech, I have never before felt it wise to comment at length on national policy. Local officials are elected to attend to local matters. And while we may have strong personal convictions about higher-level governance, it's usually best to keep such debates out of the Council Chamber, where politics can too easily get in the way.

Yet the truth is that New Rochelle does not and cannot exist in splendid isolation. From the revolutionary leadership of Thomas Paine, to the iconic imagery of Norman Rockwell, to the idyllic suburbia of Dick Van Dyke, to the inclusive vision of Whitney Young, and Ossie Davis, and Ruby Dee – at every stage of our history, we have drawn from and contributed to the larger story of America.

And this year, in particular, it seems impossible to consider the state of the city without considering the state of the nation.

When the young children of immigrants here in New Rochelle are literally reduced to tears in their classrooms because of terrifying uncertainty about their families' place in our community, we have a responsibility to speak out.

When drastic changes in health insurance threaten a local institution as vital to our city as Montefiore, not to mention placing at risk the medical care and financial security of thousands of our own residents here in New Rochelle, we have a responsibility to speak out.

When a bomb threat is directed at a Jewish Community Center, forcing hundreds to evacuate and burdening hundreds more with a sense of fear and victimization, here in New Rochelle, we have a responsibility to speak out.

And when a city founded by refugees fleeing religious persecution more than three hundred years ago is told to slam the door on refugees today, to turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to the world's most vulnerable and traumatized, including many who risked their lives for our country, we have a responsibility to speak out.

I want to be very clear, in my mind, this is not about party affiliation, it is not about Democrat or Republican.

It is about affirming the cherished values that should bind all of us, together, as Americans, and that are especially important to this city, where our lives are made better and richer and wiser thanks to neighbors and classmates of every background and tradition and circumstance.

So in case there is any doubt or fear, let it be known that in this community, all of us are valued, respected, and welcomed – whoever we are or wherever we come from.

In this community: we don't applaud bullies, we stand up to them.

In this community, we reject the profoundly un-American notion of a nation defined by blood or birth. And say instead this is a nation of ideals, big enough to embrace everyone.

Come what may in Washington, DC, these principles are alive and well in New Rochelle, NY. And no matter the challenge, no matter the fashion, no matter the threat, we will never retreat from who we are.

So even as we work to make our city more prosperous, let us also work to make our city more just and equitable and loving.

In part, this is a duty for the municipal government . . .

That's why our economic development plan aims to create hundreds of new affordable apartments that literally open the door to a better life for working people.

That's why our new First Source Referral Center will provide our residents, especially opportunity youth, with access to the new jobs and skills that can change the course of an entire career.

That's why New Rochelle has banned the box in our employment applications, so that those who have already paid the price for mistakes in the past, are not denied a fair chance to build a better, more constructive future.

That's why I was proud to join the City Manager and Police Commissioner to affirm that public safety depends on public trust, and that local police departments should never be enlisted to enforce immigration laws.

And that's why I will continue standing with other mayors all across the country in common cause – a united voice on everything from mental health care to LGBTQ rights, common sense gun safety to the protection of DREAMers – fiercely committed to everything cities represent about the dynamism and genius of America.

In part, this is a duty for community organizations and partners . . .

We can be so grateful for the extraordinary work of My Brother's Keeper, which has brought together educators, not-for-profits, social service providers, and volunteers to help more people, especially young men of color, achieve their full potential from childhood to career.

We can be so grateful for our Public Schools, the beating heart of a city that believes in every child's potential, and which every day exemplify and act on the principle that diversity and excellence go hand-in-hand.

We can be so grateful for our Public Library, which by offering everything from job placement to ESL, from computer classes to the performing and visual arts – not to mention plenty of books on loan – has become a true resource for body, mind, and soul.

We can be so grateful to HOPE Community Services and the Boys and Girls Club, to the Parent-Child Center and the Campership Fund, to Songcatchers and the Council of Community Services and the Fund for Educational Excellence and the Guidance Center and New Rochelle Cares and the YMCA, and so many other dynamic service organizations – too many to name – that day in, day out extend a helping hand, provide a nurturing space, or strengthen the bonds of family. They need and deserve our support more than ever.

We can be grateful to the leadership of the College of New Rochelle, which worked through a moment of crisis and brought a vital institution back from the brink, helping to preserve an engine of upward mobility for thousands of students – many the first in their families to attend college.

And we can be grateful, too, to the houses of worship and spiritual leaders across all faiths who have joined in common purpose with HIAS and Catholic Charities to advocate for Syrian refugees and to identify homes in our region to which they can be welcomed with open arms and open hearts.

But, above all, this is a duty for all of us as individuals, as human beings with an equal stake in a just future . . .

Please do not make the mistake of thinking that our city's and nation's challenges are too large for any one person to address. Indeed, they can only be addressed by every person doing his or her part.

Those of us who believe passionately that our country is better than the latest headline or tweet must redouble our engagement as citizens, becoming more involved, not less, especially at the local level.

If all you do is offer a kind word to a stranger or a helping hand to a neighbor, you will have made a difference.

And if you want to help in a more tangible way, but are not sure how, here's a tip. Log on to volunteernewyork.org/newrochelle. That's where you can learn about the City's new, more robust partnership with Volunteer New York, where any resident of any age can find a way to make a positive difference in a neighbor's life.

Let us together speak out for the marginalized, share truth and deny falsehood, and, above all, demonstrate brotherhood and sisterhood, from person to person, from home to home, from block to block, and, one day again, from sea to shining sea.

What Makes New Rochelle Great

As I have in prior years, I'd like to conclude by introducing several people whose accomplishments deserve recognition. But tonight there will be one difference, because, as you will hear, through their stories, I hope to make a single, fundamental point.

Millie Radonjic

First, Millie Radonjic, would you please stand.

If you want to know how good things get done in New Rochelle, look no further than Millie.

She is the driving force behind Amy's Greenhouse at Barnard School, built to honor Amy O'Doherty, who lost her life on 9-11. The Greenhouse has been a center of joy and learning and exposure to nature for countless children, as well as the site of an annual 9-11 observance that is equal parts solemn remembrance, celebration of life, and issuance of orders from Millie.

And, make no mistake, Millie is herself a force of nature, unstoppable in her enthusiasm, who cajoles, enlists, and persuades a whirling circle of friends and neighbors – plus a generous spouse – into supporting every project, and who refuses to take no for an answer.

Now that same energy is being applied to another, larger greenhouse at Hudson Park, where Millie and her volunteer army are working to restore a unique piece of New Rochelle's history and make it once again a shining gem for our community. No one who knows Millie has the slightest doubt that she will succeed.

Millie was born in Montenegro, in the former Yugoslavia, and didn't come here until she was an adult. But there is no more patriotic American in this room, in this city, or on this planet.

We're all in your debt, Millie. And we thank you.

The Anaya Family

Next, I want you to meet Martin and Blanca Anaya. (Please stand.) They were both born in Mexico, and arrived here as undocumented immigrants – Martin as a teenager, Blanca at age 20. Now they are U.S. citizens living in the East End of New Rochelle, where Martin earns a living as a laborer, and Blanca works cleaning homes.

They came to this country in the hope of finding a better life for themselves and – just as importantly – of contributing to the lives of neighbors. And they were determined to impart to their children the value of striving to be your best, taking pride in who you are, and giving back to the larger world.

Did they succeed? You be the judge.

Their younger daughter Melanie is, this year, the salutatorian of New Rochelle High School. She's the President of the United Cultures Club, the President of the Science

Honors Society. And the President of too many other things to list without giving yourself an inferiority complex.

Next fall, Melanie will attend Brown University. And, if you can believe it, through a unique and highly-competitive program at Brown, she has already been admitted to Medical School.

Their older daughter Edith is a few years ahead, finishing up college and now applying to grad school as a speech pathologist.

Edith and Melanie are also here, please stand.

Mr. and Mrs. Anaya, if Catie and I set half as good an example for our children as you have for yours, we will consider ourselves very blessed. I cannot imagine a better demonstration of the American dream, or a better gift to our community and country than your remarkable daughters.

Thank you.

Farooq Kathwari

There is no company more iconically American company than Ethan Allen. It has defined the style of the American home for generations. Whether we own Ethan Allen furniture or not, just about all of us have heard of the company, but what many people in New Rochelle may not realize is that the leader of Ethan Allen is one of our own.

Farooq Kathwari, would you please stand.

For almost 30 years, Farooq has been Ethan Allen's Chairman, recognized as one of the 50 best CEOs in America.

But leadership in business is only one part of Farooq's extraordinary life achievements. Acting on a deep personal commitment to human rights, Farooq has served as the co-chair of the Muslim-Jewish Advisory Council, a member of the Board of Overseers of the International Rescue Committee, a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, a member of the International Advisory Council of the Center for Strategic and International Studies. And if I listed all of his positions and accolades, we would be here until tomorrow morning. It's a shame he never amounted to anything.

Few, if any, New Rochelle residents, have made so large a mark in both the public and private sectors, here in our country or around the world.

Yet as a child, Farooq could probably not have imagined his home of many years in the Forest Heights neighborhood or his home today along the New Rochelle waterfront. He was born in Kashmir, spent much of his childhood in Pakistan, and came to the United States as a political refugee. How diminished our community would be without his journey of faith and courage, and without the opportunities our nation extended in return.

Thank you, Farooq.

Doug & Mira Webb

Doug Webb, please stand. Doug and his wife, Mira, live seemingly typical suburban lives. A pleasant house in the Larchmont Woods neighborhood. Two children in the New Rochelle public schools and a third in college. You might find one of them dropping off a kid at the soccer field, or run into the other at Stop and Shop.

But then like Clark Kent and Wonder Woman, they periodically enter a phone booth or spin in a circle around, change identities, and head out to save the world.

As one of the leaders of the United Nations Development Program, and before that with UNICEF and Save the Children, Doug has been at the forefront of combating infectious diseases, including HIV, Ebola and Zika. His missions take him to hotspots all around the globe, with a special focus on Africa. It is no exaggeration to say that Doug's work building institutions, establishing programming, and strengthening public health systems has affected hundreds of thousands of lives.

Mira is one of the leaders of the UN Population Fund, with responsibility for women's health and empowerment. In some of the most challenged places on Earth, Mira has promoted access to education, reproductive care, job opportunities, and the other key building blocks of gender equality and social progress . . . making clear that no society can succeed when half of its members are held back.

Mira would be here, too, but at the last minute, she was called away to the Ivory Coast. (Which happens to all of us.)

Doug was born in Malaysia to Irish and British parents. Mira was born to a father from Namibia and a mother from Finland. Their kids will have more fun than most tracing their genealogy, but however far flung their family tree, they are American to

the core, and exemplars of a generous, big-hearted nation that sees as its cause not America First, but all humanity, first, last, and always.

Benjamin Ferencz

Lastly, if you'll bear with me, I want to tell you about someone who was not able to join us tonight, but whose story, I hope you'll agree, is of special importance in these times.

His name is Benjamin Ferencz. I would say I admire him, except "admiration" seems an insufficient word.

Some historical context . . .

When the Second World War came to a close, the victorious allies were left with the solemn task of bringing justice to the captured leadership of the Nazi regime, some of the most monstrous figures ever known.

It is possible to imagine some parallel universe in which these Nazi perpetrators were simply rounded up and shot in the head. Never before had any group of people done more to earn such a fate, and few would have mourned.

Yet the allies, to their eternal credit, understood that the horror of the Third Reich was more than a product of individual crimes or even of national failure, it represented a catastrophic collapse of the institutions of liberal democracy, institutions common to the entire western world and, for a time, seemingly secure in Germany itself. They understood that only by upholding and strengthening these institutions could they provide a true and enduring defense against a future Holocaust.

So, instead of meeting brutality with more brutality, they conducted the Nuremberg Trials. Trials that have entered the popular imagination through both dramas and documentaries and that remain a fixture of history classes everywhere.

What it must have been like for the judges and prosecutors to stare these monsters in the eyes, to immerse themselves in the evidence of crimes beyond comprehension, to bring the charges on behalf of the millions upon millions of victims – a responsibility that can scarcely be imagined – and through this methodical, painstaking process demonstrate that a system of reason and law – that civilization itself – is strong enough and confident enough to prevail over the most horrific assault without sacrificing its core principles.

The Nuremberg Trials will always be one of history's great acts of redemption, to which every one of us owes a lasting debt, and which we forget – especially now – at our peril.

As I said, Ben Ferencz could not be here tonight. He and his wife Gertrude are wisely spending these cold winter months in Florida.

But Ben calls New Rochelle home. For decades, he has lived quietly and modestly right here on Bayberry Lane.

Ben stormed Normandy on D-Day. Fought in the Battle of the Bulge.

He is 97 years old.

And he is the last living Nuremberg prosecutor.

I can't help but think that his example is more important today than it has ever been.

And I should add: Ben was born in Transylvania.

These remarkable men and women – from Montenegro, from Mexico, from Kashmir and Pakistan, from Ireland, from Namibia and Finland, from Transylvania – are not visitors to New Rochelle. They are not guests in New Rochelle. They are New Rochelle. They are the best of New Rochelle. They are what makes New Rochelle great.

And, if I can borrow a phrase, they are what makes America great.

Our Story

So. I began my remarks by calling this a split screen moment. And maybe that image serves to make the point. But, in truth, it's the wrong image, because it casts us as mere observers, watching passively as two narratives unfold, simply waiting for the ending to come, and hoping that ending will be a happy one.

But if there is one lesson that ties together our local experience with national experience, it is that endings never simply come. Endings are made. By our actions and inactions, by our courage or our cowardice, by who we call "us" and who we call "them," by the voice of conscience we hear and the voice of conscience we ignore.

We are not observers. This is our story. We write the ending. All of us.

And if these are good days for the City of New Rochelle, and challenging days for the United States of America, then by standing together, we can make these better days for both.

Thank you for listening. God bless our community. And God bless all people of good will.