

Remarks of Mayor Noam Bramson
State of the City
March 1, 2018

Deputy Mayor Hyden, thank you for calling us to order. To you and the entire City Council; to the City Manager and Administration; to colleagues in government, community leaders, neighbors, and friends; to all assembled here and all watching at home: good evening.

This past New Year's Day, if you'd asked me to predict the contents and tone of the 2018 State of the City, I would have bet anything that this year's speech would be the most upbeat, the most positive, the most joyful I'd ever given.

And there was every good reason for such a prediction. Our crime rate is the lowest in nearly 60 years, our bond rating is the best in more than 80 years, and our development boom is the biggest in New Rochelle's history.

Indeed, a little later, I will take great pleasure in describing the dramatic progress we have made together on a whole range of vital priorities. As you will hear, when it comes to New Rochelle's future, there has never been better cause for optimism and excitement.

But this is not the speech I predicted – it cannot be. Instead, I feel compelled tonight to open in a very different spirit, because, as you all surely know, our community did not begin the year as we'd hoped and anticipated; we began the year with heartbreak.

Safe and Supported Children

On January 10th, a student in the prime of her young life was taken from us at the hands of a classmate, an unspeakable tragedy for everyone involved, most especially for family and loved ones now burdened with grief that can be scarcely imagined, and for friends forced somehow to make sense of sudden, violent loss of a kind that no child should ever have to confront.

This was followed on January 17th by a second episode of student-on-student violence, and then the very next day, by a third. And although, thank God, the injuries sustained in these last two events were far less serious than in the first, these

episodes together, coming as they did in such quick succession, have sent shock waves through our entire city, leaving many parents to question, often in anguished terms, whether they can send their children to school with the sense of trust and security all of us deserve to feel.

And not just parents. This affects everyone in New Rochelle, whether or not we have children in the public schools. It affects us in moral terms, because we all have a stake in the future of every young person. And it affects us even in material terms, because our home investments and our economic future are bound up in the image and health of the public schools and the real and perceived safety of our community at large.

So our first and primary duty, before everything else, is to meet this test, to meet it with every ounce of energy and wisdom we can summon, and to meet it together as one united community.

In this spirit, let me report to you that the City has augmented Police presence in and around New Rochelle High School, deployed youth workers to engage students afterschool along North Avenue, and opened a dialogue with nearby business owners to engage them as partners.

The School District has implemented tighter campus access policies, announced new student registration procedures, and moved to create a new position dedicated exclusively to security needs.

These are essential first actions, aimed at immediate safety concerns.

But, to be clear, this challenge is much bigger than law-and-order alone, and a strategy that begins and ends only with security protocols will miss the mark. It's also a question of how we intervene in the lives of at-risk young people to provide positive support and direction. It's about encouraging a culture of respect and accountability and discipline, inside and outside the classroom. It's about integrating a community perspective into every aspect of Policing. And it's about how we create a nurturing environment in which every student can excel.

So I applaud the Board of Education for convening a community Task Force that will address these interlocking issues in the comprehensive fashion they demand.

I thank the Task Force members for the gift of their time and wisdom.

For its part, the City will be not simply a participant, but rather a partner, in this vital exercise – we’re different institutions, but we serve the same people, and we all have the same goal of keeping New Rochelle safe, vibrant, and successful.

And I look forward to acting on the recommendations that emerge – with the goal of preserving the many, many things that are right in our schools and community, while confronting and changing anything that holds us back.

In meeting this test, none of us should feel like a bystander. Yes – the City and the School District have perhaps the chief responsibility to act, but this is a challenge large enough for everyone to grab hold of. When a child takes a wrong turn in life, it is almost never because a single thing failed; it is almost always because many things failed.

So all of us can play a role in achieving solutions. As mothers and fathers, as volunteers, as members of houses of worship – there are countless ways to make a difference.

And if anything positive has emerged from this experience, it is the sheer number of people who have come forward to say I believe in New Rochelle, and I want to help.

For those feeling newly-inspired to get involved, let me make three suggestions . . .

First, take direct action to improve the lives of your neighbors.

If you aren’t sure how, then visit volunteernewyork.org/newrochelle, created by our friends at the Council of Community Services and Volunteer New York, as part of the #newrostrong campaign. You will find more than 50 active volunteer opportunities listed at this very moment related to mediation and conflict resolution, cultural competence, mentoring, safe spaces, and lots more, with additional opportunities on the way. Whatever your skills or interests, I guarantee there is a group in New Rochelle doing great work and eager to enlist your help.

Second, be a role model.

Demonstrate that even on an issue like this, when our feelings are so intense, we are still capable of engaging each other with respect and civility and kindness. And beyond that, that we won’t surrender our good judgment to unwarranted fear or panic.

That means, hard as it is, we have to apply some perspective to these events. It is necessary, although very difficult, to keep two separate and seemingly contradictory realities in our minds at the same time.

On the one hand, that these are enormously serious episodes that require our full attention. And on the other hand, equally true, and just as important, that New Rochelle is a safe city – our streets are safe, our schools are safe.

In fact, as I said earlier, our safety record last year was the best in more than half a century. And with fresh data for the beginning of 2018 just released, crime is down yet again – by more than 25%.

These events have been so pervasive in the news and over social media. And, in this climate, understandably, even minor incidents of a kind that occur in and around every high school in America find themselves in the spotlight. You almost cannot help but feel as though we are in the midst of a wave of violence.

And yet, when you look closely, that is emphatically not the case.

So be a role model for your kids, for your neighbors, for your friends, by drawing a bright line between the appropriate concern we should and must feel, and the self-defeating panic that can only cloud our thinking and make it more difficult to achieve solutions. And then let's remind each other to stay on the correct side of that line.

And the third way you can make a difference. Remember why you love New Rochelle, and share that feeling far and wide.

This is a great community. It was yesterday. It is today. And it will be tomorrow.

At New Rochelle High School, thousands of students arrive each morning to learn and grow. And with all but the fewest exceptions, they greet each other with respect, and friendship, and love. That was true yesterday, it is true today, and it will be true tomorrow.

Many of us have been moved by the extraordinary example of the young people in Parkland, Florida, who have responded to their own tragedy with such remarkable strength, poise, and purpose. But you don't have to go that far to be inspired.

Listen to the testimony of own student leaders, many of whom have spoken out in ways that are enormously impressive and powerful; they will tell you that they are proud of the school community they have created together; that their experience is positive and uplifting.

To put this in the most personal terms I can, Catie and I will send our older son to the High School this fall. His younger brother will follow next year. We will send them not with some sort of weary resignation or nervous caution, we will send them eagerly, joyfully, absolutely certain that they will thrive, that they will be protected and nurtured and guided into the young men we hope they'll become. There is no place we would rather send them to school, no place that has the same range of academic excellence and facilities and extra-curriculars, and, above everything else, classmates from whom they can learn directly to appreciate both the differences and the commonalities that make us human.

Role Models

Our confidence is not based on wishful thinking, or some increasingly distant memories of my own years at New Rochelle High School; our confidence comes from knowing the exceptional group of students our sons will join.

It comes from knowing Kimberly Collins. Kimberly, would you please stand. Kimberly is the co-President of the High School Christian Club and Black Culture Club, and the Vice President of the entire Senior Class. She was just selected to be part of the U.S. Senate Youth Program, one of just two high school students in all of New York State to achieve this impressive distinction. Even more importantly, Kimberly puts her values into action on behalf of the most vulnerable; she created and led a toy drive for children whose parents are incarcerated. Next year, Kimberly will take her talents to Georgetown, where she will continue from afar to bring pride to New Rochelle. Thank you, Kimberly.

Our confidence comes from knowing Jency Maldonado. Jency, please stand. Jency came to New Rochelle from Honduras in the middle of her 7th grade year. We can all imagine how difficult it must be – at that age, especially – to be uprooted from friends and familiar surroundings and to find oneself suddenly in a new country, surrounded by a new culture, needing to learn a new language. And yet just five years later, Jency is an accomplished member of the National Honor Society, tackling some of the most challenging courses at New Rochelle High School – and, in an action that both honors her roots and affirms what is best about America,

Jensy has devoted her WISE project to finding scholarship opportunities for DACA recipients, so all Dreamers will have the positive future for which Jensy has worked so hard. Thank you, Jensy.

Zahra Masih, please stand. Zahra spent last summer at Regeneron studying immunohistochemistry. That's too many syllables for me, and I don't really know what it means, but I am told that Zahra's research holds great promise for the treatment of cancer. Zahra has received early acceptance at Cornell, where she will surely continue to push the boundaries of science. And having already given our community the gift of her intelligence and dedication, one day, she may give some of us the gift of life, too. Thank you, Zahra.

Juan Felipe Tobon-Rua, please stand. As the Captain of the New Rochelle High School Varsity Soccer Team, Felipe was instrumental in bringing home to New Rochelle the 2017 New York State Championship. It goes without saying that Felipe is a tremendous athlete, named the MVP of the Championship game and a two-time All-State Defender. But he's also much more; he's a member of the National Honor Society, he's an AP Scholar, and he's a great role model, who volunteers his time as a children's coach and is universally admired by his peers. Felipe has already been accepted to multiple colleges, and I just hope that before he moves on to the next stage of sports and academics, he'll find a moment to give my son his autograph. Thank you, Felipe.

Randall St. Louis, would you stand. Now please don't hold it against him, but Randall is the kind of young man guaranteed to generate inferiority complexes in the rest of us. He is an accomplished cellist, a member of New Rochelle's varsity track team, a National Merit Finalist, and the Salutatorian of the Class of 2018. Next year, he's going to Harvard – don't hold that against him, either. Randall's mother and father are here, and hopefully they will make themselves available after the speech to offer parenting tips. Thank you, Randall.

Finally, I'd like to recognize a group of students, collectively: Zoe Colman, Kathleen Dillon, Jordan Gray, Julia Middlesworth, Caleb Redlener, Jake Sitzer, and Andrew Sorota. Please stand.

This is the Executive Committee of New Rochelle High School Model Congress LIV. (And, full disclosure, as a member of the now ancient-seeming Model Congress XXIII myself, I have a special place in my heart for this club which does so much to inspire political awareness and action.)

When eight School Districts on Long Island recently made the unwise and unwarranted decision to withdraw from this year's Model Congress weekend in New Rochelle, these outstanding students responded with wisdom, eloquence, and maturity – reaching out directly to the Long Island Superintendents to stand up for our city, and explain in powerful terms that this is a moment to come together, to support each other, and not succumb to impulsivity. I said earlier that adults should serve as role models, but in this case, it's the other way around; it's the kids who are showing the way, and if those administrators on Long Island have any good sense, they should be listening closely and taking a lesson. Whatever the outcome for this year's Model Congress weekend – and we're still working at it – these youngsters have demonstrated leadership far beyond mere play-acting, and if they were seated in the actual Congress today, our country would be a whole lot better off. Thank you, Model Congress.

Now, think about these kids I've introduced. And then remember: they aren't the exception; they are the rule. We had a hard time figuring out who to bring tonight. These students – and hundreds more like them – they are New Rochelle High School. They are New Rochelle.

And although the events of the past two months have been profoundly serious and important, our students, our children refuse to be defined by them. We will not allow any incident to obscure or distort a larger and truer picture of hopeful, accomplished, good-hearted young people who make us proud every single day.

Do not doubt for a second our ability to overcome the challenge of this moment, and emerge on the other side better than ever before.

A moment ago, I asked the students to stand. Now I ask everyone here to please stand with them. Let's stand together. If you feel as I do, then let's express ourselves with our hands and with our hearts, let our applause, as one community, be a statement of unshakable faith in these young people and absolute determination give them the future they deserve. Let them know how we feel.

As it is for students and our schools, so it is also for our community as a whole. New Rochelle faces problems that are real, challenges that are deep, but they exist in a bigger context of vitality, success, and dramatic progress.

In this spirit, I say right now, before I even get into all the good news, which is coming next in the back half of the speech. I say right now, that even at this moment, even at a moment of grief and concern, with these youngsters guiding the

way, and all of us committed to each other, the State of our City is strong.

So let's talk now about the reasons to celebrate. In the interests of time, I'll restrict myself to three, but there are many more.

A Booming Economy

First, our local economy is booming.

For too long, New Rochelle had a reputation as a community that couldn't get out of its own way, where development was too risky, too time-consuming, too controversial. Those days are over. Like never before in our history, New Rochelle is open for business.

The positive buzz among investors and planners is overwhelming.

The Regional Plan Association, with a mission that encompasses 20 million people all across the New York metro area, has put forward New Rochelle's downtown plan as exhibit A of quote "Development Done Right."

Last week, Bloomberg Philanthropies named New Rochelle a "Champion City," one of just 35 in a nation-wide competition of more than 300, for our proposal to use virtual reality to model new construction and improve the quality of urban design.

And just yesterday, almost 350 business leaders and real estate professionals from throughout the northeast gathered here in our downtown for a conference on New Rochelle's path-breaking development strategy. The enthusiasm was off the charts.

So the folks who study this full-time, who live and breathe urban planning and economics, already understand the powerful framework we have put in place. And with ever-increasing numbers and excitement, they are pointing to New Rochelle as the innovative model for small cities everywhere.

But I know that for many of us living here and waiting eagerly for improvements, it may still feel like a lot of talk without much to show for it. If you visit the downtown today, you'll see some improvements, but also much that's distressed and far short of its potential. And, let's face it, when you're hunting for a parking space, a closed garage may have a more pressing claim on your attention right now

than the project slated to built on that site in a couple of years. Transitions are never simple. And it's just plain hard to visualize the sweep and scale of the change on the horizon, before it's built and physically present. So in the hope that we can all share in the excitement already felt by the professionals, I want to take you on a little tour of what's coming . . .

5 projects are already under construction, and should be completed this year or next:

A high-rise at 587 Main – the first from our master developers, tech-enabled millennial housing on Burling and on Huguenot, a boutique hotel on Church Street, and a project on Lecount with one entire building face devoted to public art.

That's just the very beginning.

5 more projects are fully approved and are ready to start construction within the next twelve to twenty-four months:

From artists studios near the train station, to apartments on Huguenot and on Commerce, to mid-rises on both sides of North Avenue that will completely transform the critical block between Treno and Fifth.

Each of these developments will have a powerful effect on its immediate surroundings and, collectively, they will have a big positive impact on the downtown as a whole. But with the exception of 587 Main, they are relatively modest in scale.

Not so for five additional projects that in their scope and ambition will reshape New Rochelle from the street-front to the skyline.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words, so to unveil renderings, I am delighted to call up my colleagues on the City Council, who have worked together as a team, on a bipartisan basis, to make these achievements possible. By the way, they are all way over-qualified to play the part of Vanna White, so I very much appreciate their assistance.

- Number one, 45 Harrison Street. This 27-story tower with 238 apartments from MacQuesten Development will include the off-site creation of a brand new, modern fire station to serve our growing city. It's a complicated project

with a lot of moving pieces, but we hope to have it fully approved by the end of this year.

- Number two, at the site of the Church-Division garage, our master developers at RXR will build their second project: two towers, each 28 stories, a total of about 700 apartments, with ground floor retail and restaurants, and a public plaza in between. This project was announced a few months ago, but now we're able to reveal the new, updated design, as elegant as it is exciting. And in just two weeks – two weeks! – we will break ground.

The other three projects I am thrilled to announce publicly for the very first time tonight.

- At 14 Lecount – with a development site that extends to Main Street and North Avenue, Wilder-Balter proposes two more towers, each 27 stories, with a total of about 500 apartments, a project that will include the redesign and activation of Anderson Plaza. This goes to the Planning Board this month, with a ground-breaking planned by the end of 2018.
- At 500 Main Street, a 16 story building with 243 apartments from BRP Development and Covenant Church, beginning construction in 2019.
- And lastly, at 277 North Avenue, just across from the train station and wrapping around the K Building, Fisher Development proposed to build more than 400 apartments, rising 28 stories, at one of the most vital and visible spots in our entire city.

In total, 15 projects either underway or ready to roll. A skyline with eight new towers. Just imagine.

And even that's not everything. There are still more projects under active discussion, not quite ripe just yet to be unveiled, but likely to come forward later this year or early next.

Most of these new homes will be market-rate luxury, but more than a hundred will be affordable to our workforce, a significant net increase in the stock of affordable units within our central business district.

Our competitive, fair financial terms will ensure that the cost of public education is more than covered, including capital needs.

And while, as you've heard, these developments are primarily residential, almost all of them must and will include active uses at the ground level that generate life and commerce, and together they will offer a powerful boost to the local economy, with new demand for goods and services, and the kind of forward momentum that gives us a better chance to attract office space in our next wave of growth.

When New Rochelle's downtown plan was adopted in December 2015, some questioned whether we could achieve our ambitious vision. These images, with many more to come, and the reality of glass and steel to follow, answer that question with an emphatic, unambiguous, proud, confident yes. Yes we can. Yes we will. Yes we are.

In a few short years, New Rochelle will be a dramatically different and healthier city. Not different in its soul and spirit, which we cherish and will fiercely protect, but different and better in its appearance, and energy, and claim on the future – a downtown we can all point to with pride as a emblem of resurgence and a gathering place for everyone in our region.

For all of us who have waited and worked for this opportunity, it is truly a thrilling prospect.

And that's not all . . .

- We want our economic resurgence to go hand in hand with cultural vitality, so New Rochelle is continuing its commitment to the arts, with a new installation – thanks to the Business Improvement District – completed at Ruby Dee Park, with a black box theater coming to Main Street, and with new NRNY sculptures coming to the downtown area as a whole.
- We know that technology and innovation can position New Rochelle as a magnet for talent, while providing an exciting experience for residents and visitors, so we're installing 24 Verizon Digital Kiosks – the first going up this very week – on-street internet portals with free wi-fi, that show off New Rochelle, and put information about our community at everyone's fingertips.
- We know that city services, especially public safety, need to keep pace with growth. That's why we've increased operational manning for our outstanding Fire

Department. And why we've strengthened our terrific PD with seven new officers, and more on the way. Let's hear it for New Rochelle's bravest and finest.

- We want shoppers, diners, and visitors to receive a warm welcome to New Rochelle and to be guided conveniently and easily to their destinations, so we're installing all-new way-finding signage, emblazoned with our Ideally Yours logo.
- And we stand with the Chamber of Commerce in celebrating and honoring the businesses that are already doing a great job and bringing customers to our city. That's why our Business Ambassador has spearheaded a Featured Business Program that shines a spotlight on some of New Rochelle's best establishments – helping them to succeed, and helping all of us to succeed together.

Big changes are afoot, too, just outside the downtown core.

- To the west, we're working with Montefiore to remake the streetscape surrounding the hospital, so that a provider of vital services and one of our largest employers is connected more fully to our community as a whole in a way that is safe and attractive.
- And just to the east, where US1 nearly touches the shore of Long Island Sound, we're finally poised to connect the heart of our city to the waterfront. This is a very big deal, because, right now, unless you operate one of the City's garbage trucks, you wouldn't even know that this vital stretch of the shoreline existed; the only thing on the site today is our Public Works Yard – aging, contaminated, and completely closed to the community. My mother, from her apartment on the 36th floor of the Halstead, has a spectacular view of the waterfront – from up high, you see the limitless potential, but if you're here on the ground, forget about it.

We've known for generations that this has to change. We've debated it, planned it, sometimes fought about it. And now, finally, the change is just about here. A new DPW Yard, away from the waterfront, is coming: the location has been picked, the lease has been signed, the funding has been approved, and construction begins next month.

And this huge step will, in turn, permit us to roll immediately into an environmental review for Pratt Landing, an exciting project of homes, shops, restaurants, and parks that will finally permit all of New Rochelle – not just my mom and her high-rise neighbors – to fully experience the beauty of Long Island Sound a stone's throw from anywhere in our downtown.

And there's one last piece of big news on the subject of economic development that I am delighted to share publicly for the very first time tonight. 55 years after it left Main Street, leaving a gap that has never been filled, City Hall is moving back downtown.

At the base of their Harrison Street tower, MacQuesten development has agreed to build out a brand new civic complex. It will put the people's house back in the heart of our city, right between Main and Huguenot, bringing employees, visitors, and residents closer to shops and eateries, helping to create a more robust daytime office population, and making a bold statement of confidence in our downtown's future.

And this plan will actually save tax dollars, with the annual price tag for occupying and operating the new city hall lower than what we pay to operate and maintain our current facilities.

For the School District, which will inherit this building, it opens up new possibilities for classrooms, or administrative needs, or programming, or any other purpose – at a much more affordable cost than constructing new space.

So I congratulate our hard-charging, inventive Development team for taking the lead on forging such a promising public-private partnership. For our economy, for our City, and for our Schools, it's win-win-win.

And here's the thing, "win-win" is the right way to think about every aspect of good planning.

That's even true for our environment. We don't usually think of railroad tracks and downtown towers as environmental initiatives, but we should. Because compact, walkable communities served by mass transit use less energy and produce less greenhouse gas. When New Rochelle proposes to build more than 6,000 housing units near our train station, that's not only bold economic action, it's bold climate action, too.

A Sustainable Future

And it brings me to our second big reason to celebrate tonight. New Rochelle is embracing sustainability as never before – shaping a city that blends the best of urban energy, with the tranquility and beauty of nature.

Through community choice aggregation and renewable energy credits, we're delivering 100% renewable power to New Rochelle's residents and businesses, while saving money on the average electric bill.

With a big boost to our tree planting budget, this year alone, we're adding 800 new trees to our streets and parks – on our way to 10,000 over two decades, making our city more attractive and more healthy.

At Beechmont Lake, one of the most visible open spaces in all of New Rochelle, we're making the largest investment since the 1970s – at long last restoring the lake's ecology and natural beauty with a dredging and landscaping project that will begin later this year.

At Hudson Park, we're proud to support the volunteer-led effort to rebuild the historic greenhouse and make it into a center of learning and play for children.

At Lincoln Park and Ward Acres, we're fortunate to have community gardens that produce amazing varieties of fresh produce and that exemplify sustainable, local agriculture.

And many of our other parks and playgrounds are benefitting from improvements and upgrades thanks to the care and leadership of our pound-for-pound, best-in-class Parks & Rec Department.

Meanwhile, here in City Hall, our own municipal employees are setting a great example by choosing sustainable ways to get to work – mass transit, carpooling, walking, or biking – and by integrating electric vehicles into our municipal fleet. In fact, New Rochelle just won the Green Cities Commuter Challenge, coming out ahead of our sister cities in Westchester and earning a congratulatory visit from the Lt. Governor. Now I don't want you to think I am gloating, but this does prove once and for all that New Rochelle is superior in every possible way to Yonkers and White Plains.

Even as we improve our internal practices, we're also building the green infrastructure of tomorrow, to make it easier for all of us to embrace sustainable, healthful lifestyles. We've introduced four EV charging stations with ten more

coming this Spring. And we're implementing a 10-year complete streets plan that will make our roads safer, calmer, and friendlier for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers alike.

For those who want to weatherize their homes to cut down on wasteful heating and cooling, the Energize program provides one-stop-shopping for grants, contractors, and all the help you need to start cutting waste and saving money.

And looking ahead to our new Public Works Yard, we're exploring facilities that will let us all recycle textiles and food scraps, moving us closer to a zero waste community and a zero waste society. Thank you, DPW, for taking the lead on this priority, and for your essential service to the people of New Rochelle every single day.

Finally, to close out this topic of sustainability, tonight, I have the pleasure of announcing that, as of this very moment, New Rochelle's Bike Share program – the first in Westchester County – is officially up and running.

It's just a soft opening, but it still features 50 bikes at multiple locations – from Wykagyl in the north, to the Marina in the south, to the train station and Iona in the middle, plus seven other spots all around town. All privately-funded. Including a few right here at City Hall by Hamilton Avenue. You can ride a bike home tonight.

The hard launch with 100 bikes is planned for late April, but if you join New Rochelle's bike share now, then you can get a discount on membership. There's also discount pricing for students. To sign up, just visit bikenewrochelle.com, download the app, and you're literally ready to roll.

All of these steps together make our community a healthier, more enjoyable place for those who are already proud to call New Rochelle home today . . . and make us an attractive option for those looking to lay down roots tomorrow. And they align New Rochelle with forward-looking communities everywhere determined to do our part to deliver a healthy and prosperous planet to our children and grandchildren.

One Community

Finally, there's one last reason to celebrate tonight, in some ways even more important than our economy and our environment. It's the character of our city –

our bedrock commitment to lift up the whole family of New Rochelle, so that all of us are valued, all of us enjoy the blessings of progress, and all of us have an opportunity to contribute together to the common good.

Sometimes that character is expressed through public action . . .

So to ensure that our growing economy creates real job opportunities for New Rochelle residents, we created the First Source Referral Center, which has already placed dozens of people in new positions, while training others for careers that can last a lifetime.

To ensure that everyone's voice is heard, and everyone's voice counts, I have personally benefited enormously from an Advisory Committee on Immigrant Affairs, making certain that the newest Americans are not only welcomed, but empowered to be full stakeholders in the future we build together.

To ensure that those who wear our nation's uniform are always afforded the honor and respect they've earned, I applaud the City Council for appointing a Veterans Advisory Committee to advocate for veterans interests and enhance our community-wide celebrations of military service and sacrifice.

To ensure that everyone is treated with dignity and given an equal opportunity to express their true selves, I am proud that New Rochelle has expanded its harassment and non-discrimination policies to encompass our transgender friends and neighbors, colleagues and coworkers, children and parents.

And to ensure that every taxpayer gets a fair return on their investment in New Rochelle, especially at a moment when the federal government is outrageously targeting New York, we worked to allow homeowners to pre-pay their property taxes in 2017, and we stand ready to work with State authorities to shield our region from the worst effects of the new federal tax law.

So government action is important . . . but, in the end, our character is defined much more by the innumerable good works that occur person-to-person, group-to-group, quietly and without fanfare. It's the volunteer who brings a meal to a homebound senior. It's the artist who shares her creative talents with a youngster. It's the friend who stands up to a bully.

It's the outstanding leadership and example of My Brother's Keeper, and HOPE Community Services, and the Boys and Girls Club, and the YMCA, and the

Council on the Arts, and so many other organizations without which New Rochelle would be a far different and far lesser place.

No matter the circumstance, no matter the challenge, no matter the fashion – and no matter the counter-example from Washington or anywhere else – we will always stand up for the values of New Rochelle, knowing that what makes our community great, what makes our nation great, is brotherhood and sisterhood from sea to shining sea.

And if sometimes it's harder to live in a place like this, because we have challenges others might not, we know to our core that the rewards are infinitely greater. I would never deny my children the experience, the blessing, the life-affirming opportunity to know humanity firsthand in all its breadth and beauty. Wouldn't every parent say the same.

That is the motivation and the end product of the actions and achievements I've described tonight. A fierce belief in New Rochelle not just because it happens to be our home, but a fierce belief in everything New Rochelle represents.

Spring is Coming

This has been a difficult winter, but spring is almost here.

Spring is almost here for 80,000 neighbors and friends, whose lives are bound together.

It is almost here for a great library that lifts our spirits, for colleges that expand our minds, and for houses of worship that stir our souls.

It is almost here for places of natural wonder, for the sunrise at Davenport Park, for the wandering trails of the Colonial Greenway, for the gentle waters of Glenwood Lake and the glacial stones of Nature Study Woods.

Spring is almost here for neighborhoods filled with history and charm, and for towers soaring ambition and drive.

It is almost here for the home of icons like Thomas Paine and Norman Rockwell, Carl Reiner and Whitney Young, Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee and E.L. Doctorow .

. . and the home, too, of tomorrow's icons, like the exceptional young people we met tonight.

This is our New Rochelle, and it is strong.

Our hearts were broken this winter, but not our spirits. And as one season turns to the next, may we each in our own ways – and together as one – keep our community healthy and vital, worthy of its proud heritage, and thrilled by its bright future.

Thank you. God bless you. And God bless New Rochelle.