

Speaker Gifford Miller's Response to Mayor's State of the City Address

by Gifford Miller

Tuesday, January 11, 2005 12:00 AM

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We heard a lot today about what a great City New York is. I agree. I grew up here. My wife and I are raising our two sons here. I believe in our City.

We heard today about Mayor Bloomberg's version of a City of opportunity. But the reality of his record is that the Mayor hasn't extended opportunity to all New Yorkers.

Because the Mayor's priorities aren't New Yorkers' priorities.

It would be nice to get the Olympics, for example, but not with the expense of a stadium that we don't need and can't afford given that half of the children in our school system aren't meeting basic standards.

It would be nice to have lower taxes, but we can't have real tax relief as long as Republican administrations in Albany and Washington take \$18 billion more than they give back in services every year.

What we didn't hear was that scores continue to fall for our most at risk kids, including children in Central Harlem, Bed-Stuy, and Crown Heights.

And we didn't hear that the number of homeless New Yorkers continues to grow. Or that almost half of African-American men in our city can't find decent jobs. Or that NYC has lost 200,000 private sector jobs under this Mayor.

In short, we didn't hear a vision for a City that extends opportunity to all New Yorkers and makes people the top priority.

We didn't hear a vision for making fundamental education reforms so every child has a fair shot

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at a bright future.

We didn't hear a vision for balancing fiscal responsibility with protecting the critical investments in child-care, housing, seniors, security, and jobs that every New Yorker needs.

And we didn't hear a vision for how the Mayor will finally stand up to Republicans in Washington and Albany who deprive us of the resources we need to fix our schools and build a better city.

We heard a lot of talk from the Mayor about education today, but no amount of talk is going to change the fact that our schools are in trouble.

Although getting control of the schools was the best thing the Mayor did for the City, the promise of mayoral control is unfulfilled.

Under this Mayor, control has meant a bureaucratic reshuffle instead of a radical change in the fundamentals that we need to really educate our kids - smaller classes, quality teachers, safe schools and strong after-school programs.

Children haven't gotten the help they need where they need it - in the classroom. The result is that test scores have remained flat and our children are being left behind.

Parents have been left out of the process. And you can't have real education reform without real parental involvement.

Teachers simply have not been given the respect they deserve as professionals. And they are leaving our schools in droves.

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Schools aren't safer. And instead of a laser-beam focus on making sure every child in every one of our over 1,300 schools is safe, the Mayor has chosen to concentrate on a small handful of schools, some of which have actually grown more violent.

Instead of making fundamental education reforms his priority, the Mayor has chosen instead to invest all of his political capital and energy and the City's resources on a West Side Stadium. That's not my priority.

People are my priority. And while we heard a lot of talk about fiscal discipline and tough choices, the reality is that the Mayor has repeatedly made the wrong choices for people by targeting day care, and senior centers, and jobs programs, and libraries, and parks, and schools for cuts. And our Council has protected those investments.

And what we didn't hear today, and what we know we won't ever hear from this Mayor and this Administration, are real solutions for finally getting our Fair Share from George Bush and George Pataki.

We've reached a crisis on the mistreatment our City gets from these Republicans. Right now, New York City is paying \$18 BILLION more in taxes than we get back in services.

That's \$18 Billion that saps our City's competitiveness. That means it's harder to attract and retain businesses because they pay too much in taxes.

That's \$18 Billion that we don't have for schools.

That's \$18 Billion that we don't have for job creation.

And that's \$18 Billion that we don't have to pay teachers, or police officers, or firefighters or do any of the things a City must do.

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Because of this mistreatment, we are trying to build our City with two hands tied behind our back. And it's got to stop.

It's got to stop if we are going to really reform education.

It's got to stop if we are really going to have a budget that balances fiscal responsibility with critical investments in the future.

And it's got to stop if we are going to be a City that really extends opportunity to every New Yorker for generations to come.

We face real challenges, but our City has shown for 350 years that New Yorkers love a challenge. There's simply nothing wrong with New York that can't be fixed by what's right with New York. And there is a lot that's right with New York.

This city represents the best hopes and highest aspirations of the entire world. Everyone who lives here chose New York because they believe in themselves and they believe in our ability to build a better world where every child gets an excellent education, where every person has a good job with a bright future, where every family can live in a neighborhood that's safe and secure.