



2018 STATE OF THE CITY

YONKERS

MAYOR MIKE SPANO

MARCH 14, 2018

Good evening Council President Khader, Majority Leader Sabatino, Minority Leader Breen and members of the City Council, members of the Judiciary, the Board of Education Trustees, our Superintendent of Schools, teachers and students, State and County representatives, City commissioners and board members, and fellow Yonkers residents. I'd like to thank those watching live on, online or on social media. And a special thank you to our city's first lady, my wife Mary, our parents and our children, Michael, who's watching from college and Alexandra and Christopher who are here with us tonight.

Before we begin, let's give Yonkers Public Schools Teacher Kaira Hassell and student Gloriana Montes another round of applause for helping us kick off this evening.

It's hard to believe that it's been six years since I first addressed you here as your Mayor. We've faced some challenges, many that honestly, I wasn't sure how we'd get through. But I have been continually reassured by the grit and can-do attitude of Yonkers. We face these challenges, take them head on and come out ahead.

We are tough because of who we are. Resilient because we have to be.

At the same time, our accomplishments and successes have outweighed any crisis we've experienced. Successes that many never thought were possible – from our excelling schools and safer streets to the ongoing revitalization efforts across our city. When I reflect on these achievements, one word comes to mind – YES!

Yes invokes feelings of change, renewal, accomplishment and optimism. We have changed the discourse in our city. The days of Yonkers being dismissed are behind us. Now, the State of Yonkers is a feeling -- a feeling of transformation, a feeling of arrival, a feeling of fulfilled promises.

Why yes? Let's start with our improving schools.

We know Yonkers is a great place to raise a family, and plenty of other people know it too, because not only are our schools adding students every year, but they grow in achievement as well. In 2012, the Yonkers Public Schools graduation rate was just 72%. Over the last six years, our graduation rates have improved by

double digits, from 72% to 86%. For the first time a Big City district has exceeded NY State's average. That is remarkable.

Our improved numbers can be attributed to the incredible leadership of our superintendent of schools, Dr. Edwin Quezada, Board of Trustees, teachers, administrators, and most of all our students and parents.

Another reason for this is Yonkers' acceptance of the My Brother's Keeper challenge. In 2016, Yonkers became one of 250 communities to accept the challenge of ensuring our young men of color graduate high school ready for college and career, to complete postsecondary education or training and to successfully enter the workforce. In just two years, we've had astounding results and people are taking notice.

In January, the Campaign for Black Male Achievement spotlighted Yonkers as a "City on the Horizon" for its investment in helping Black men and boys succeed. Mentoring programs like "Each One-Reach One" and "Cross-Age Literacy Tutoring" are making a difference. Enlisting community groups like Yonkers Guardians, in which black law enforcement officers mentor our young men, are making lasting impressions. Congratulations to all our MBK leaders and students. You make us proud.

In 2017, our nation and neighboring countries fell victim to numerous natural disasters – in Puerto Rico, Mexico, Texas, Georgia and Florida. Many of their young people were displaced due to earthquakes, hurricanes and other life-altering events. So what did we do? We opened our doors and said welcome. The Yonkers Public Schools welcomed the needs of 150 additional students who were displaced by these disasters. Yonkers offered refuge, stability and comfort. Many of these students came with disabilities, and most of the students from Puerto Rico and Mexico were English Language Learners.

We also are providing our young women opportunities to advance themselves in the world of technology. The new "Girls Who Code" program, provided by the Yonkers Public Library, attempts to close the gender gap in tech, one girl at a time. This past year, young women got their first exposure to computer coding in

the free after school program. They are provided the tools they'll need to solve problems in their day-to-day lives -- and it's planted the seed for some of them to become future computer programmers.

Preparing for our future is a necessity, but I also believe knowing our past is equally, if not, more important. In Yonkers, our past dates back over 400 years and is a key component to our nation's history – unfortunately, not many are aware of it.

Did you know that George Washington spent time in Yonkers? Today, a plaque stands at St. Joseph's Seminary where his headquarters was stationed and where he prayed before he went off to the Battle of White Plains.

Did you also know a major turning point in the Revolutionary War occurred right here where we are this evening? One of the first naval battles between the British and the American forces was just off this shore in 1776. After this key victory, the Americans later went on to win the war. By the way, there's no plaque designating this historical event – but we'll fix that!

These moments of American history are just a sample of what took place here. I've asked our Superintendent of Schools to include Yonkers history into our students' school curriculum. It's time our young people learn they are taking the same steps that some of our founding fathers might have taken -- right in their own backyard. We are fortunate to have Philipse Manor and the Sherwood House still standing, providing us a glimpse into our past. History doesn't have to be just another passage in a text book – it can be tangible and real to our students, we just have to show them.

We know sports enhances a child's education and enriches them as young adults. That's why we're continuing to bring back sports in our schools.

The Yonkers Public Schools' Athletics program is gaining momentum, especially with our young women. Yonkers Middle High School senior Lina Montes was voted the 2017 All Section Girls Soccer Honors and Roosevelt Senior Ly-rell Walker was just selected Yonkers Basketball Athlete of the Year –both of them maintain a

96 grade point average. Amazing job, and congratulations girls for being at the top of your sport and the top of your class.

Plus, our Board of Trustees recently announced the District's new merged football teams – Yonkers Brave and Yonkers Force. Combining teams from the eight high schools, our young athletes will have more opportunities to excel outside the classroom. Great job by our schools in providing more varsity options to our students. Go out there and make us proud!

So many of Yonkers students have built up themselves, their teams and communities through their achievements in sports. One of them, Trill Williams, a Yonkers resident, recently helped his Stepinac football team clinch both the Catholic High School Football League AAA title and the New York State Catholic High School Athletic Association crown. Trill will now go onto play for the Orange at Syracuse University. Congrats, Trill!

Despite the successes of our schools, we still have many battles to win. Our buildings are too old and overcrowded.

You know the challenges: our schools are 4,500 seats over capacity for a district size of 27,000 students; nine of our schools are over 100 years old; children are forced to learn in converted basements and cafeterias; many of our libraries no longer function as they were intended because they are being used as classroom space.

Simply put: there remains to be a capacity and infrastructure crisis in Yonkers Schools.

After many meetings and calls lobbying our concerns and two long legislative sessions, Albany is finally beginning to realize the crisis and has passed two bills that will help set the stage to rebuild our schools. While I appreciate it, it's simply not enough.

No legislation comes close to addressing the costs of rebuilding 38 schools, the 15% overcapacity and substandard conditions in which our children learn.

The bottom line is that even with the new legislation, Yonkers alone still cannot afford to rebuild these schools.

Yonkers receives just \$472 per pupil while the other big cities are receiving anywhere between \$900 to \$3,000 per student.

During this year's legislative session, we should all be demanding an increase in the aid ratio for Yonkers. There is no reason why the state pays for 98% of our sister cities' reconstruction costs, but only 70% of ours. We applaud what the State has done for Buffalo, Syracuse and Rochester, and now I am asking them again to support Yonkers. Our students cannot wait. Stop spoon-feeding us. New York, let's rebuild these schools!

When telling Yonkers' story of the last six years, we must talk of the renaissance -- economic redevelopment.

The numbers tell the story.

In 2017, we began construction on nearly a dozen projects like Extell and Avalon Bay, topped off Hudson Park River Club; and RXR, the largest mixed-use development in Yonkers; opened luxury projects like Rivertides, UNO and soon Modera; the historic Boyce Thompson Center was redeveloped – and we now have Starbucks, by the way!

Several years ago we talked about how we needed more quality affordable housing. Our public housing stock has not been refurbished since World War II. I told you then we'd invest \$250 million to restore these homes. Tonight, I am proud to say Promise Made, Promise Kept. Construction is under way and in some locations completed, with the repair and renovations of every MHA unit across the city. Thank you to Governor Cuomo for making these funds available. And a special thank you to MHA's director, Joe Schuldiner and the MHA board for making this a reality.

We continue to attract companies of every size. Lowe's Home Improvement Center and well-known retail store Century 21 opened their doors. On South Broadway, our small businesses are reaching new levels of success like Mona

Jeans, which started as a women's clothing store just four years ago and now has opened a third store in the district.

Our downtown also attracts new businesses. This year, Hudson Global, one of the world's largest marketing and advertising agencies, will be moving into iPark, bringing 50 skilled jobs to our waterfront.

Our hospitals continue to expand and provide life-saving and advanced care for the region. St. Joseph's Medical Center recently opened up the Center for Advanced Wound Care. St. John's Riverside Hospital recently opened its Health Ambulatory Center at Boyce Thompson and will soon break ground on its long-awaited Emergency Department expansion.

Our Hudson River Museum has reinvented itself too. Attracting new visitors to the scene, the Museum is having much success among the 21-39 year old age group with its new After Dark events – creating new ways to celebrate art, science and music. After Dark features live music, gallery tours and of course, cocktails! Make sure to mark your calendars April 27 and October 26 for the next gatherings.

Although I may not fit After Dark's demographic anymore, I did get to witness the amazing turnout the museum had during this summer's solar eclipse. More than 1,200 spectators witnessed the first total solar eclipse in the US in 40 years.

Hudson River Museum also is attracting world-renowned artists, like Maya Lin, known for her design of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Maya and her husband Daniel Wolff own the old city jail which now houses their art collection. Maya's latest work, "Maya: A River is a Drawing," will be on view at the museum from October to January 2019. The exhibition reflects her interpretation of the geology and topography of the Hudson River and the effects of climate change.

Just as the museum is a staple in our city, so is our emerging arts scene. We've talked about the galleries and the murals that line our Daylighted parks downtown. We've seen the arts renew the downtown business district, garnering attention from all over. The *New York Times* cited how "murals embellish building exteriors and public sculptures are seemingly everywhere you look" and called

downtown Yonkers “a Cleaner, Greener Place to Call Home.” This year, we are expanding our revitalization efforts and extending our mural project to the South Broadway BID. I believe the arts will have the same positive impact on South Broadway as it’s had on the waterfront.

Speaking of the Yonkers waterfront, we are proud that it soon will be home to the nation’s first permanent public-art project that recognizes the plight and struggle of enslaved Africans. Local artist, Vinnie Bagwell, is creating the Enslaved Africans’ Rain Garden. Six Yonkers slaves were among the first to be freed 64 years before the Emancipation Proclamation. Students from Yonkers Public Schools and Sarah Lawrence College are assisting in the project. You can see the first two completed life-size statues here tonight in the Library’s lobby. The Garden will be permanently installed along the Hudson River esplanade. Thank you Vinnie Bagwell for creating this piece of art recognizing our history.

We continue to have great success with our Yonkers Arts Weekend, celebrating our 5th year on May 5th and 6th. New this year, is the free art narration app, Otocast, that will be available all year round to anyone interested in visiting our great galleries, murals and art projects.

Film production in Yonkers has hit an all-time high as well, with over 175 productions shooting here in 2017, bringing in close to \$650,000 in revenue for us – the best year on record!

With all this activity here in Yonkers, comes a growing economy and most importantly, more jobs. We’ve attracted over 6,000 full and part time jobs to our city since 2012 – with industries such as construction, hospitality, retail, entertainment and technology.

In fact, we’ve been named among the nation’s top 25 growth cities. Based on migration trends tracked by U-Haul, Yonkers beat out top locations like San Francisco, Brooklyn and Manhattan. To that, I definitely say Yes!

Our successes also can be measured by our advocacy efforts.

In 2016, we sounded the alarm over the Maritime industry's plan to create ten new anchorage locations for oil barges near Yonkers along the Hudson – and I am proud to say we won the fight. This past week, we witnessed six construction barges come loose, one of them sinking off our shore. It highlights how important it was to fight additional barges from being anchored here.

Quality of life in our city remains a top priority for us, and that includes neighborhood parks where we enjoy time with our friends and families. One such park is Coyne Park. Situated in the vibrant McLean Avenue neighborhood, Coyne Park is a home away from home to many of our retired seniors, mainly because of one very special lady who dedicated her life to Yonkers seniors -- County Legislator Bernice Spreckman. A long-time Yonkers resident and advocate for her fellow seniors, Bernice devoted endless hours and resources to brighten their days. Sadly, our dear friend Bernice left us this past year, but her legacy lives on. I am pleased to announce that I just signed the resolution approved by the Parks Board and then passed by the Yonkers City Council to rename Coyne Park Community Center the Bernice Spreckman Community Center. We thank Bernice for her service and love for her community.

You also will see improvements at many of our other neighborhood parks, including new playground equipment at Richter Playground, a new pavilion at Redmond Field and a new fitness area at O'Boyle Park.

At the highly revered Untermyer Gardens, the restoration of the canals has become a critical infrastructure project with the replumbing and relining of the Persian Walled Garden. With support from Scenic Hudson, this will enable other capital projects, including the restoration of the Temple of the Sky and the Persian Pool. Special thanks to Stephen Byrns, president of the Untermyer Gardens Conservancy, for spearheading this transformation.

You may know the Temple of Love, which overlooks the Hudson River and Palisades at Untermyer, was recently restored to its former glory. Thanks to the generous donation of former Mayor Angelo Martinelli, the Temple of Love lives on and is a lasting tribute to his wife Carol. Thank you to the Martintelli Family for always making us proud.

Our iconic Grinton Will Library is getting a facelift this year. The multi-colored shades on the front façade of the library have been removed for a more modern look. But don't fret. Folks at the Library have saved close to 50 pieces of the 1960s era panels and they will be used for a future art project. I love that a little piece of our history will continue to live on...

I heard a rumor the City Council may use some of the panels to decorate their new Council Family Bus.

In all seriousness, I just want to say thank you and welcome to our new Yonkers City Council.

Ice Skating fans are also in for a treat. Right now, when any of us visit E.J. Murray's Skating Center, it's like going back in time. Murray's will undergo a \$2 million renovation this year – its first since its construction in 1960. Construction is set to begin for renovations, inside and out. These will include a new main entry way, a new state of the art sound system and new bathrooms. I am most excited for the new elevated mezzanine that will provide new bleacher seating for 75 spectators, allowing clear views of the entire rink. Who knows, maybe Yonkers could host the next winter Olympics?

Another notable improvement underway is the Nodine Hill water tower. Standing on top one of our highest hills and visible from across the city and even parts of Mount Vernon and New Rochelle, it was built in 1938. It is one of three that services the city. Our public works team along with outside contractors and engineers are performing extensive interior and exterior restoration. Our goal is not just to provide a nice coat of paint, but to protect and invest in our city infrastructure for the next 30 years. Special thanks to our Yonkers City Council for greenlighting this in our capital budget.

The most innovative improvements have been and will continue to be the care we give to our environment.

In 2017, Yonkers was among the first large cities in New York State designated a Clean Energy Community. Now we've been awarded a \$150,000 grant to fund an electric-generating waterwheel that will be the centerpiece to Phase III of the Saw

Mill River Daylighting, on New Main Street. We also plan to roll out bike racks across the city and a new mobile app to keep you up to date on alternative transportation options.

Speaking of bikes, I am very excited to announce that starting this spring, Yonkers will join the growing list of progressive cities that make dockless bike sharing available to residents and visitors. Spin and Lime Bike are partnering with us and will be placing bikes throughout the city – some of them are on display in the lobby this evening. There's no need to return them to a permanent docking station. Want to visit a local park on a Saturday afternoon? Hop on a bike.

Need to see the Mayor? Hop on a bike. It's that convenient!

We've made great strides in recycling efforts over the last six years. However, those efforts are sometimes thwarted by the amount of single-use plastic bags that we produce and use. On average, these bags are used for just 12 minutes, yet the impacts on our environment last for generations. Plastic bags have devastating effects on our wildlife, sewage systems and more -- even the production of them emit toxic and hazardous chemicals.

Therefore, on the recommendation of the Yonkers Green City Advisory Committee, I am proposing the Environmental Protection and Pollution Prevention Act, along with Councilmembers Sabatino and Rubbo. This legislation would require all retail stores to impose an impact fee when dispensing non-reusable bags. In a recent "Plastic Bag Task Force Report," bag fees put in place internationally resulted in a reduction in single-use plastic bags by 50-90%. Think about the potential benefits for us here. Customers at the ShopRite's located in Yonkers use 300-400,000 plastic bags each week. Let's cut that number significantly, lead by example and be the first big city in New York State to take action. Let's rid these bags from our roadways, streams and parks. If Yonkers can lend a hand in bettering our environment by setting an example, we will make a difference.

As the quality of life improves in our city, so does our public safety.

Since 2011, Yonkers' crime rate has gone down 34%, and down 9% just from 2016. Over the last seven years, we transformed the Yonkers Police Department and our approach with the people we serve. Community policing is not just a slogan, it's a way of life. Through Compstat, we look at crime patterns. We hit the streets, sit in neighborhood association meetings, meet with community leaders, mentor our youth and simply listen. I am proud to report that this year, Yonkers has its lowest crime rate since we began keeping statistics in the 1970s.

Please join me in congratulating the fine men and women of the Yonkers Police Department.

We also are ensuring our police force reflects the community it represents.

This year, we casted a wider and more diverse net when recruiting our newest class of officers. In 2017, nearly 75% of those who took the Yonkers Police Exam were either female or minority.

We also can say the same for our fire department. Fifty percent of our newest class of firefighters are minority while one third of them are military veterans. Combined, this latest fire class is the most diverse group of Yonkers firefighters we've ever had.

When our police and fire departments can better reflect, and in turn, better relate to the people they serve, I think we can all say YES!

I believe it is the human impact that continues to make us a better community.

Some of you know, I am a hockey dad. I see first-hand how a sport can build character and self-confidence. That is why when the Yonkers Police approached me about volunteering their time to start a youth hockey team, mentored by our officers, I immediately said YES! With the support of the NHL Players' Association Goals & Dreams program, we formed Yonkers Force Youth Hockey – a learn-to-play program for kids ages 7-9. Many of these children never played hockey or ever stepped on the ice before – like pros, they picked up the game quickly. Our young people are engaging with our police, breaking down barriers and building

bridges. The smiles on the kids' and parents' faces say it all. That's what community policing is about.

No moment during my time as mayor was more frightening than when I received a call on September 25, 2017. I was told one of our officers was shot in the face after responding to a call of suspicious persons loitering outside a residential home. The extent of the injuries was unknown. Later that evening, I was told that Officer Kayla Maher sustained injuries due to a shootout and was bravely covered by responding officers and brought to safety while shots were still being fired. Five officers put their lives in harm's way for the sake of their fellow officer. By the grace of God, Kayla's injuries were not life threatening and she was released from the hospital the very next day.

Learning of her and her fellow officers' bravery was both humbling and inspiring. They define the very meaning of "protect and serve." They not only saved Officer Maher's life, but they also saved the very life of the man who tried to take theirs. That is true heroism.

Last week, I had the pleasure of elevating Officer Maher to the rank of Detective. Please join me in congratulating Detective Maher and Officers Lebzelter, Reda, Moore, Bennett and Captain Lane; thank you for your service to Yonkers and to each other.

Our Yonkers Fire Department also continues to make strides in keeping our residents safe. There is no question that in today's world, first responders must be prepared for any type of situation or emergency. That is why new this year, the Yonkers Fire Department will be adding Narcan to the Department's EMS response protocol. Enabling our firefighters to administer a lifesaving drug to prevent a possible overdose increases our chances in saving more young lives.

Sadly, the rise of opioid deaths in this country has become an epidemic. One hundred and fifteen Americans die each day from an opioid overdose. Now more than ever, we need support from our federal government to crack down on this growing attack on our communities. Locally, I will be working with our schools and first responders to expand our opioid outreach programs. We need a call to

arms and teach our children about the dangers of opioid abuse before it's too late.

For firefighters, the dangers they subject themselves to during life-threatening situations can never be overstated.

Recently, our Yonkers bravest responded to a fire on Lewis Street, where residents were able to safely escape. While battling the blaze, five firefighters sustained injuries, with Fire Captain Chris Joao sustaining the most severe burns to his head and hands. The incident reminds us how grateful we should be of our fire department. Captain Joao is home recovering from his injuries. Please join me in thanking him and all our firefighters for their bravery.

Along with Empress Ambulance, let's give a round of applause to all our first responders who routinely risk their lives for us.

Across the nation this morning, our young people made their voices heard in the National School Walkout to oppose gun violence. Millions of students, including those here in Yonkers, chose to say enough is enough when it comes to school shootings. I joined our students to honor the 17 individuals who were senselessly murdered last month in Parkland, Fla. I was overcome by the many fearless students standing up for their right to be safe and organizing to make the world the secure place it should be.

Since January, the US has had over 40 mass shootings. When does this stop? We must call on our federal government to stand against the powerful interest groups and instead stand up for the people of this country. There is no reason why military-style assault weapons should be made available to anyone other than the military. The banning of these weapons does not infringe on a citizen's Second Amendment right. The only function of these weapons is mass destruction. Today's walkout is about our country no longer standing idly by as more innocent lives are destroyed. There is no time for partisan politics, instead it's time for action. The federal government must act now. Enough is Enough.

While we hope there's action in Washington to prevent further tragedies, in Yonkers, we can never be too prepared. That is why we are continually training

ourselves for the worst case scenario. Our schools are working towards a new state of the art school security system which links all cameras, alarms and lights to police and to a citywide security platform. We've held numerous interagency exercises, active shooter drills in the schools and new school security officer training. We hope this type of violence never hits home, but we are best prepared in the event that it does.

With achievements, also come challenges, especially our annual budget. We have tough decisions to make this year, ones that no mayor likes to make. Over the last six years of my Administration, we've been frugal with our spending. We've instituted hiring freezes, we've increased revenues and we've merged departments. While we are narrowly approaching our constitutional taxing authority, our taxpayers are at their taxing limits, too.

How do we fix this? I believe all signs point north, to Albany. Earlier this year, I addressed the Joint Finance/Ways and Means Committee, pleading them to hear our calls for assistance. Here's how things stand:

Over the years, municipalities have taken a big hit when it comes to state funding. In 2019, Yonkers is expected to receive the same amount it's received for the last eight years. Plus, we must remember that we, the taxpayers, pay more towards our local school district than any of the other big city taxpayers.

Get this – we spend \$9,288 per Yonkers student. Our three sister cities, Rochester, Syracuse and Buffalo, COMBINED spend \$8,367 of their local tax dollars on their respective students. Imagine – Yonkers alone provides over \$900 per student than the other three districts, COMBINED. On top of Yonkers contributing more to its schools, we receive less from New York State to help fund those schools when compared to our sister cities.

Years ago, New York State created revenue sharing to recognize that the State has a partnership with its big cities to address the unique needs of their urban populations. Each year we are sending more money up to Albany, despite our local cost increases and mandates, including healthcare, pensions and contract costs, not to mention infrastructure needs.

If you look at just the last five years, Yonkers taxpayers have sent the State an additional \$250 million in revenue. Today, Yonkers sends close to 25% more to the State in revenues than it did five years ago. Yet during that time, our state funding has remained flat. We send 25% more. They send 0% back. The math just doesn't add up.

We also must look at the increased revenues to New York from Yonkers' largest employer – Empire City Casino. While an Assemblyman, I was proud to support video lottery terminal machines as gaming revenue. Along with the legislation came host community funding to Yonkers' schools. At the time in 2006, Empire City's annual revenues were approximately \$5 billion, which translated to approximately \$20 million each year for our schools. No one thought it would work, but I certainly did. Since then, Empire City has grown exponentially – with more than \$9 billion in annual revenues. While advertisers, vendors, horsemen and even New York State, itself, have benefitted by an increase in their share of the revenue, our share as the host community is down to \$19.6 million. It's time Albany recommit to Yonkers for its contribution to the education of our students.

As we gather here to celebrate what I believe is the rebirth of our city, we have to remember it wasn't so long ago that it seemed America had given up on its cities.

Cities were places of high crime, high unemployment, low investment, and stagnation.

If we don't pay attention it could happen again. Whether it does will depend very much on whether the federal and state governments pay attention to the needs of our cities, not just Yonkers, but all cities. Our cities are expected to be the safety net for those who are homeless, those who struggle to speak English, those who are economically disadvantaged and those who lack education.

But who provides the safety net for our cities?

Our urban renaissance is fragile, and far from complete. Now, more than ever, we need the state and federal governments to increase their commitment to our urban centers.

I've always said that the diversity of our city is our greatest strength. Seven years ago, I made a pledge to our residents to make sure their diverse voices were heard, that we'd advocate for everyone. It was then I decided to convene advisory boards that would recommend programs and policies that would better our communities. In 2018, we now have seven advisory boards, consisting of volunteers who celebrate culture, breakdown stereotypes and enact change. This evening, we have representatives from all our advisory boards. Please join me in thanking members of our African American, Disability, Hispanic, LGBTQ, Muslim American, Women's and Youth Advisory Boards.

On a side note, I'd like to personally thank them all for being good sports last week when they were pranked by the hidden camera show "Impractical Jokers." For those of you who don't know the show, google it. It was a lot of fun!

This month, I look forward to standing alongside our Disability Advisory Board to announce a new program that will save lives and provide comfort. Working with our emergency services, our Disability Board is launching the city's first-ever First Responders Disability Registry. How does it work? Yonkers residents with special needs or family members of those with special needs fill out an online questionnaire that provides specialized information to our EMS services in the event of an emergency at their home. The goal here is simple: to eliminate or lessen emotional trauma, fear and conflict when first responders enter their homes. Those precious moments matter in a time of emergency. I think it's a great idea and I am thankful to our board for making it happen.

Each year, we strive to improve ourselves and improve the services we provide. One service I know we can always improve upon is our listening skills. We receive approximately 110,000 calls a year through our 24-hour Helpline, we respond to hundreds of messages each week on our social media platforms. But, I know we can do more. Starting tomorrow, residents will not only be able to call the helpline, but also they will now have the ability to have a live online chat with members of the Office of Constituent Services. Simply log onto yonkersny.gov, from your home computer or smart phone, click live chat and get real time

service. We work for the residents of this city, they deserve answers and we will provide them.

We also are indebted to the veterans who sacrificed so much for our everyday freedoms. This year, our Veterans Services Department lost two of its most decent and devoted Yonkers veterans – Eli Vetrano and Gino Egiziaco. Yonkers will forever remember you!

We can never give enough back to our veterans who gave so much for our freedoms. But one project this year will have lasting effects for our veterans. Along with our friends from Habitat for Humanity, we are renovating a home at 7 Moquette Row for one of our vets and his or her family. This property was in tax arrears so the City Council took my recommendation and voted to donate it to Habitat. The property will soon go back on our tax rolls. It's a win-win for all. I invite our City Council and other elected officials to join me as we roll up our sleeves next month at Habitat for Humanity's First Annual Build-a-thon and get to work on making a home for our veterans. Thank you to Jim Killoran and Habitat for 30 years of service to Yonkers and Westchester.

To all the veterans joining us tonight, please stand so we can thank you for your service.

As I mentioned earlier, I believe Yonkers today invokes feelings of optimism and renewal, the feeling of Yes! That feeling can be attributed to many accomplishments, whether it be more jobs, better schools or a safer city. But I believe the feeling is mostly due to the great people of Yonkers – the everyday people who contribute to the unique fabric of our community; people who make Yonkers stand out among the rest; the people, who no matter the odds, continue to inspire us -- our Yonkers heroes.

It's people like Jose Jimenes, the good Samaritan on his way home from work who sacrificed his safety to save young Jaelyn Rodriguez from being mauled by a dog;

It's the City's meal delivery drivers who routinely take the extra steps to check on the wellness of our seniors, saving the lives of 14 elders just this year;

It's Teamsters 456 members Sindona, O'Farrill, Maldonado, McMahon and Moore who traveled to Puerto Rico and assisted victims of Hurricane Maria;

It's Yonkers student and Girl Scout Gloriana Montes who started a children's library for victims at My Sister's Place;

It's long-time community members who add to the vibrancy of our city and celebrate our many cultures, like Yonkers Columbus Day Committee member and beloved "Feast Lady" Jacqueline Campanile and former Nepperhan Community Center Executive Director Mary Alice Gaines, who both recently passed away.

These residents and so many others bring vitality and spirit to Yonkers, and make us thankful to call Yonkers our home.

To all of you who continue to inspire and uplift us, I say YES!

Our journey isn't over yet in Yonkers. While we have so much to do, we have so much to be proud of.

We now can say:

YES, Yonkers is leading the state in improved high school graduation rates.

YES, Yonkers has the lowest crime rate since we've been keeping statistics.

YES, Yonkers is building more housing than any place in Westchester.

YES, Yonkers has attracted more than \$2 billion in private investment dollars in the past six years.

YES, Yonkers celebrates its diversity like no other, and honors its immigrant tradition with a helping hand to those who come here to find opportunity, equality and dignity.

YES, Yonkers contains a population that speaks 80 different languages, yet speaks with one voice to show respect to all regardless of color or culture.

YES, Yonkers has nearly 200,000 of the most extraordinary neighbors, friends and colleagues that you could ever hope to meet.

You have my word and my commitment that we will continue to work together to make Yonkers' best days stand before us.

Because when we say Yonkers, I know we all can say Yes!

Thank you so much.

May God Bless you and God Bless the City of Yonkers.

Good night.