



**City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn
Remarks Delivered at Charter Meeting
Wednesday, January 6, 2010**

Four years ago, I stood behind this very podium and said how incredibly proud I was to live in a city with the rich diversity of New York – a city where that diversity is celebrated and seen as a strength, not an impediment.

Today I'm proud to say we've never had a City Council that so fully reflects the diversity of our great city. For the first time, our Black, Latino and Asian Caucus will comprise more than half of our membership. Eighteen of us are women, and four of us are members of the LGBT community. We are tenant leaders and labor organizers, teachers and small business owners.

And just as this City Council looks very different from the Councils of old, we have governed differently too. We have pioneered a new politics of inclusion, bringing together diverse stakeholders and traditional opponents in unprecedented ways.

We've pushed the definition of bipartisanship far beyond the realms of Democrat and Republican. Real estate groups and tenant activists, business leaders and labor representatives, law enforcement and community organizers – under the Council's leadership everyone has come together and worked toward the greater good.

This new approach has allowed us to tackle problems that had long been ignored or stuck in political gridlock. Not all of our solutions have changed the world, but each one has made a world of change in the lives of real New Yorkers.

Here's an example. In spite of continued complaints by residents, hundreds of buildings around the city spent years in dangerous states of disrepair. But in 2007, the City Council began working with both tenant groups and building owners to create the Safe Housing Act. As a result, tenants who had been living in the most dangerous and deplorable conditions imaginable are now proud to call these same buildings their home.

For over three decades, New York City couldn't agree on an equitable way to deal with our trash. But by bringing all stakeholders to the table, this Council passed a waste management plan that is improving our environment, and taking an unjust burden off of low-income communities.

Some people thought that nothing could be done to bridge the performance gap between middle schools and other grades. But we brought together experts representing the full spectrum of the education world, from parents to DOE leadership, and created a Middle School Task Force. Thanks to their innovative proposals we're already making progress, with above average gains at many of the lowest performing middle schools in the city.

But even as we have worked to bring people together, we have never shied away from a fight when the good of New Yorkers was at stake. Some of our battles were fought and won in public – protecting senior centers, or making sure that New Yorkers received the property tax rebates they both needed and deserved. Others were won by negotiation. But we have stood as a balance to executive authority, while refusing to let political grandstanding get in the way of cooperation - or stop us from getting results.

It is for all these reasons, and so many more, that I am incredibly proud to call myself a member of this Council. To my returning colleagues, I say thank you. Thank you for your boundless passion and your ceaseless dedication, to the people of your districts and the city at large.

And to our newly elected Members, we welcome you. I can promise you that you will find the next four years to be among your most challenging, rewarding, and exhausting. You come to this Chamber from a multitude of backgrounds, bringing with you a remarkable array of experience and expertise.

We'll need every ounce of that diverse experience as we approach the challenges ahead. Our economy is still reeling from Wall Street's meltdown. At least one in ten New Yorkers remain unable to find work – and the problem is even worse in communities of color.

Thousands of children will go to bed hungry tonight, and thousands of small businesses may be forced to shut their doors this year. We face continued budget deficits, and countless difficult choices. After a period of extraordinary growth and prosperity, our city is struggling to find new footing.

But time and again, this City Council has found innovative solutions to intractable problems. Time and again, when New Yorkers have called out for help, we have been there to answer.

We will not allow any challenges, however great, to cripple our progress or stifle our creativity. We will continue to be an incubator for big ideas and a Council that is truly representative of all five boroughs. We'll be responsive to the needs of every New Yorker and solve problems from the bottom up.

We'll maintain our ongoing commitment to fiscal responsibility and keep our budget balanced. By embracing new technologies and reforming outdated structures, we'll make government work better for the people. We'll find innovative ways to move forward, and do more with less – to live within our means while planning for future opportunities.

We'll make job creation our top priority, building on existing strengths, and seeking out new sectors that are ripe for economic growth. We'll expand affordable housing across the five boroughs and look for new opportunities in the wake of the housing crash. We'll listen to the needs of small businesses, fighting unnecessary regulation and promoting tax reform.

And we'll continue to work together in a way that puts results ahead of political posturing – that uses diversity as a resource, values collaboration, and makes sure that every voice is heard.

Today I stand behind this podium for the second time, charged by my colleagues to speak for this City Council. And for the second time, I find myself incredibly humbled at the faith and responsibility you have placed in me.

This is an institution I've worked in or around for more than two decades – a place that I believe wholeheartedly has the power to create real change and improve the lives of New Yorkers.

Time and again I've seen the members of this body come together to make this city a better place. Looking out at this room, I could not be more confident in the ability of a group of people to continue that important work. It's our shared dedication that will drive every moment of our next four years together.

I'm incredibly grateful for the privilege of leading this body as we serve the people of the City of New York. Working together, we will continue to overcome the challenges ahead. And we will renew our promise to never be satisfied, but always striving to build a stronger New York City.

Thank you.