



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Gustavo Rivera

Senator Rivera was the Keynote Speaker at SoBRO's South Bronx Leadership Forum

GUSTAVO RIVERA May 23, 2011

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Senator Gustavo Rivera (D,WF-Bronx) was the keynote speaker at SoBRO's South Bronx Leadership Forum on Thursday, where he addressed an audience of students, community leaders and business leaders. Senator Rivera spoke on the need for government to partner with business, educational institutions, grassroots organizations and community members in order to bring about responsible community and economic development.

For the full text of Senator Rivera's speech please see below for the attachment:

Good Morning SOBRO!! It is good to see all of you, especially all of the SOBRO students that have joined us here this morning. I feel like I am back teaching in the classroom. Though I must say that I've never taught a class this early in the morning...None of you better fall asleep on me now...It is great to see you all.

Thank you for that kind introduction Phillip (Morrow – CEO and president). And thank you all for the work that SOBRO has done for the South Bronx over the years. As I understand it, you're coming up on your 40th anniversary, right? Congratulations on 40

years of partnering with community members to bring positive change to the South Bronx.

I have been asked today to talk about a belief we all share. In order to improve a community's quality of life, in order to empower community members, we must work toward responsible community and economic development. Now what does responsible community and economic development mean? To me it means development that isn't just about turning a profit or creating low-wage jobs in the short-term. It's development that improves the community in the long-run. Let me give you an example that many of you know well: the Kingsbridge Armory, which I can actually see from my window. Now some in this room might believe that the development plan for the Armory was better than no plan at all. That's a legitimate argument and I respect it. I wasn't in office when the deal fell through so I won't comment on the process. But what I will say is that in principle I don't believe in development for development-sake which creates low wage jobs that also potentially displaces hundreds of other jobs in the surrounding neighborhood. The Armory isn't just a structure with the potential to create jobs. it's a resource that has the power to transform the community around it and improve the quality of life of tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of Bronxites.

I am proud to sit on the Borough President's Kingsbridge Armory Taskforce - bringing together officials from all levels of government, educators, business and community members. The taskforce commissioned a recently completed report that weighs the options and proposals for the future of the Armory. Our litmus test is simply this - how will the proposal we support make the community around the Armory and the Borough of the Bronx a better place to live in over the long-term? That is the question at the core of this discussion of responsible community and economic development and this is something SoBRO you has: a comprehensive vision of community empowerment that includes strengthening businesses and creating innovative economic, housing, educational, and career development programs for adults and as well as young people. I am here to say I know you can't do it all alone. More importantly, you shouldn't have to.

As a progressive, I believe that government has a necessary and **positive** role to play in responsible community development. That is the belief that informed my decision to run for State Senate last year in the Northwest Bronx. It is the belief that I carry with me when I am in Albany advocating on behalf of my neighbors in the Bronx. And it is what drives the work my staff and I do here in the Bronx to help improve the lives of my constituents.

Government has a responsibility to help create a society where individuals have the freedom to pursue their dreams, a fair shake at realizing those dreams, the ability to care for yourself and your loved ones, and the comfort that comes with knowing that you have the support of a strong community and network.

And ultimately any responsible community and economic development plan has at its heart those same values to help ensure individuals have:

- ? the fundamental right of a quality education;
- ? access to vital services such as health care, affordable housing, and transportation;
- ? safety and security in their home and in their communities;
- ? the support of networks in their community which make civil society strong - be it churches, synagogues, mosques, associations, businesses or community groups.

Absent a government role in the pursuit of these goals, responsible community and economic development can't take place. While it is not government's job to create a civil society, it is government's job to support and sustain it with programs, funding and policies

whenever and wherever possible.

We need policies and actions at the state-level that reflect the same values and goals we have as a community to bring about responsible community development. We know at times that policies and actions are not a reflection of these values and goals.

Consider the following: Right now, New York is the most polarized city by income in the country.

- ? The top 1% of earners account for nearly 45% of the city's total income.
- ? a recent report by the Drum Major Institute states that the two fastest growing sectors in the private workforce are also the lowest paying: hospitality and retail sales.
- ? Two million people in the five boroughs rely on food stamps to live.
- ? The City's poverty rate continues to be more than 20% or about 1.8 million people.
- ? The hourly median wage in New York City has decreased nearly 9% between 1990 and 2007; at the same time average annual salary and bonuses on Wall Street doubled.
- ? In the Bronx, unemployment remains at 12.5% - the highest in the city.

These figures indicate that we continue to fall short of the values I just set forth. And I saw it first-hand in the discussion of our state budget and the fight to include what became known as "the millionaire's tax." I stated then and continue to believe now, that the rich should not get two tax cuts - one at the state and one at the federal level - at the expense of middle and working class families.

When there were complaints that the so called “millionaire’s tax” would impact those who are not **THAT** wealthy, that is, those that make over 300,000 a year, I had to remind my colleagues of this fact: In the district I represent, the Northwest Bronx:

- ? the median income for a family of four is about \$26,000 – about half the national average.
- ? four in ten children will grow up in poverty.
- ? we have some of the highest rates of obesity, heart disease and diabetes in the city.

Now please don’t get me wrong: I share these statistics with you not to point out what’s wrong with the people of the community I represent, or the Bronx as a whole. the people of the northwest Bronx, like all Bronxites, are strong and resourceful. they want the same things everyone else does: good schools, safe streets, access to health care, the opportunity to land a good job or start a business.

Folks in my district know how to sacrifice. they do it all the time. But they can’t afford to be the only ones sacrificing and they shouldn’t have to be.

Instead of extending a tax that’s already in place which would bring \$4-5 billion a year of revenue to New York state, we have cut education funding, making it even harder for young people to receive a quality education and have the opportunity to go to college and get ahead.

How do I come back to the Bronx and explain that math when in my district:

- ? nearly 20% of the adult population has less than a ninth grade education.
- ? another 22% have some high school, and about the same amount have graduated high school.
- ? 16% or so have some college education, while only about half that have actually graduated college. that's right, only 8% of the adults who live in my district have graduated college. Nationally the graduation rate is four times the rate of the northwest Bronx.

And we all know that education is the key to success. For the young people that are here especially, I want you to consider this:

- ? **According to US Census report a few years ago, the average amount a person might earn with a high school diploma is about \$1.2 million over a lifetime. that might sound good, but let's say you work 50 years. that comes out to about \$22,000 a year.**
- ? **A person with a bachelor's degree earns an average of \$2.1 million. That's close to double, simply by investing a few years (and some money) into the world of higher education. so now you're up to around \$45,000 a year.**
- ? **The biggest winners are those who stick it out for the professional degrees like law and medicine, with an average lifetime salary of \$4.4 million. let's say you work 40 years in that profession- that's an average of \$110,000 per year. in most cases you make much much more.**

I share all of this to point out that we must approach responsible community and economic development TOGETHER from a holistic, comprehensive perspective. My job as a policy maker is to keep an eye on the big picture. More and more, we are seeing that community organizations, non-profits, foundations are taking on roles that government used to have -

funding projects that might have previously come from public dollars. And while we are all thankful that these organizations and foundations or even private individuals at times are in our lives, government MUST step up. Government needs to step up because of the possibility that one day there won't be an organization or a foundation or an individual to save the day. Government and those of us in it cannot walk away from this responsibility.

That means NUMBER ONE: providing funding for a quality education that prepares our young people for the careers of tomorrow. I know this firsthand because I am an educator. It means prioritizing our children's education over tax cuts for the wealthiest New Yorkers. It means fighting overcrowding in schools and pushing back on proposals that include thousands of teachers being laid off. In my community and probably in yours, it means providing strong English as a Second Language programs for our english language learners. It means providing career-focused and technical education options as well as solid support for our community colleges and affordable public universities. It means government needs to take work readiness programs for our youth and summer programs seriously, because that is what is preparing young people for their careers while also giving them a paycheck.

But we can't stop there. We have a responsibility to parents as well. Often times that means finding the people in the community that can partner with government to bring about real, meaningful change in a community. This is especially critical in the area of workforce development. Businesses, educators and government need to work together to define evolving workforce priorities and steer investments into workforce development. When we work together, we can do amazing things. An example is the Small Business Development Service at Lehman College in my district, which offers loans and other financial advice at the same time it partners with the college's continuing education office to offer classes on things like how to start a new business. A public university investing public funds and resources to assist private individuals and business owners so that they may thrive in the private sector - that's a proven formula for success.

Our partnerships can't stop there. In the same way that SoBRO recognizes the importance of affordable and safe housing for a community, we know that in order to bring about meaningful community development, we know families and communities need to feel safe and secure in their homes. That is why so many of us have fought so hard for years to strengthen rent regulation – not because we don't like landlords - but because an individual making \$25,000 a year cannot be economically stable if they are suddenly asked to pay fifty or sixty percent of their salary for an apartment. Late last year there was a poll taken in the Bronx, which showed that one in three Bronxites fears becoming homeless if rents go up. I suggest to you that responsible community can't take place in that atmosphere because communities become unstable if people are forced out of them when rents go up.

In my district alone, there are almost 72,000 rent regulated units and tens of thousands of families that are afraid of what could happen if rent regulation laws expire on June 15th of this year. That's why in Albany, I have been reaching out to those legislators who DON'T have rent regulated units in their districts and who aren't hearing directly from their constituents about this issue - to educate them about the huge impact this would have in my district, in the Bronx and throughout New York City. Destabilization of the housing market here would have repercussions throughout the state.

But it doesn't stop at rent regulation and affordable housing. safe housing will continue to be an issue that we in government have to work on. we can't do it without partnerships like the one that led to the purchase of the Millbank buildings in Kingsbridge - right in my neighborhood. If it hadn't been for the tenants, the support of the Northwest Bronx Community Clergy Coalition, the Mayor, Speaker Quinn, business owners and other members of the community, we would not have been able to kick out one of the worst landlords in the city from our neighborhood.

And in the same way that individuals have a right to feel safe in their home - they also have a right to feel safe in their neighborhood, their community. Unfortunately, that's not always the case, as we well know here in the Bronx. I am grateful to be the Ranking Member on the Crime Victims, Crime and Corrections Committee - a position that allows me to better address these concerns in my community.

This is an area where government needs to reach out to folks in the community to find smart solutions to fighting and preventing crime. I have been trying to do just that - meeting with all of the precinct captains in my district and asking them for their ideas and suggestions on how to help them do their jobs.

That was how an idea for a bill I am introducing next week came up which creates a registry of Security Cameras that face public spaces. The registry will include their location and the owner or operator. It provides quick and easy contact information in the event of a crime. This idea came out of a meeting with Commanding Officer of the 50th Precinct, Brendan del Pozo.

He explained that police currently waste valuable time trying to figure out if there are security cameras around a crime scene and who operates them. Sometimes this footage even gets to NY1 before it gets to the police. I believe we can get this legislation passed and create an important tool for solving crimes.

But it's not just about creating new legislation. it's also about learning from other communities and seeing what has worked to tackle the larger issues at hand - in particular the issues of recidivism, gun violence and crimes that result from retaliation.

That's why I am trying to bring SNUG to the Bronx (which is guns spelled backward), a program focused on community participation and partnerships between community organizations and state law enforcement working together to prevent gun violence. This program has been very successful in Chicago and has proven successful in other boroughs, as well as Mt. Vernon and Yonkers. I know it's usually the folks in the community that know the most about the history of violence of a neighborhood, who did what to whom, who are committing crimes and which members of the community have escaped the cycle of violence. We need those community members to put their efforts behind stopping gun violence in the Bronx.

But it doesn't end with public safety. In any responsible community development plan, we have to discuss health. We are all acutely aware of persistent health disparities - both in terms of the basic health of a community as well as access to health care. These issues present a huge challenge to our communities. As you might have seen, the Robert Wood foundation recently ranked the Bronx as the unhealthiest county in New York State in its annual county health report.

This is a major concern in my district and throughout the Bronx. That is why this summer and fall, I will be partnering with dozens of community organizations in the Bronx as well as Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. to launch a health initiative to encourage Bronxites to lead healthier lives by providing them with health education, resources for making healthy choices, and promoting healthy lifestyle choices.

There are already so many resources and so much great work that is being done. What we want to do is to combine our efforts, bringing folks together from the health community - doctors, nurses, groups like the American Heart Association, as well as community organizations such as Union Community Health Center and Health First. Together with these organizations, community gardens, schools and bodegas, we will hold a series of

events and activities all summer long into the fall aimed at helping Bronxites meet their goal of living a healthier lifestyle and highlighting the resources available for Bronxites to make healthy choices.

this isn't just about personal behavior and health education. it's also about access to affordable and quality health care - not emergency room health care – but **preventative** health care.

At the national level, President Obama passed health care reform, but now it is up to us at the state level to fill in the details. the law requires that the state of New York set up our health exchange by 2014. As a member of the Senate Health committee I will be advocating for the merits of a single payer system – medicare for all - or at the very least a public option at the state level where all of those who don't have private insurance can buy into a public health plan that is affordable and accessible.

So these are the factors that help create and support responsible community development: education and workforce development; affordable housing and public safety; access to quality affordable healthcare.

Lastly, we have to invest our public dollars wisely in economic development that sustains economic growth and stability. In my part of the Bronx, I believe we must develop responsibly, supporting the businesses and industry already there and creating new opportunities from them. An example: 30% of all industry in my district comes from education, health and social services. I have 6 hospitals in my district including Montefiore, the biggest employer in the Bronx. I have several colleges including Lehman College and Bronx Community College. Fordham University sits just to the east of my

district.

We must find ways to use these existing resources to spur further economic development and create good paying jobs. Hunts Point as you know is in the South Bronx. I would like to see a wholesale green market in the northwest Bronx that is used to bring together the health and education communities in the neighborhood. I've met with groups like the Farm Bureau that are just begging to meet the food demands of the city with the supply of their farmers. I have also met with members of my community dedicated to urban farming that are looking for a way to sell their goods. We can create jobs in the community that promote some of the health objectives I mentioned earlier. And we should be using summer youth employment to support our kids who want to work in the green market industry. It just might spur a career path for many of our youth.

This fall Lehman College is set to launch a school of health sciences, human services and nursing. When that happens, I intend to look for ways to integrate Lehman's academic programs into the health sector of our economy in order to further support the creation of jobs that foster and promote advancement.

Hopefully you have begun to see the approach to responsible community and economic development I favor. It is an organic, holistic approach that focuses on the needs of the community from all aspects of life. Many of you are small business owners. You know what it is that makes your businesses successful. I'd be willing to bet that among those things include a skilled, productive, and educated workforce, and DEMAND for your products. Sometimes you may need government help - other times you'll need it to get out of the way. But in order to be successful, I think you will always need the things we've talked about that make a community stable and viable.

I know that the conversation we are having here today is a reflection of your belief in the value of bringing elected officials, businesses, and other members of the community together, putting us in one room, inspiring one another and figuring out new ways to partner up to bring meaningful development to the Bronx. So thank you for this opportunity to speak to all of YOU. I am excited to hear from YOU – especially from the students here today- and have a dialogue about these issues.