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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**COUNCIL PRESIDENT GIVES DEMOCRAT RESPONSE TO
MAYOR'S ANNUAL STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS**

Good Evening.

You have just watched the annual state of the city address – and have heard what the Mayor has done and what initiatives he plans for the future.

We Democrats share some of the Mayor's optimism that many of the proposed projects are exciting and grand.

But this City is about more than large development and promises yet to be realized.

In fact, some of these projects were planned in previous administrations and are still awaiting completion.

As the Mayor enters the last year of his term, I ask you to take a look at the big picture.

After all, you alone will determine whether or not you are better off today with the current Administration.

And you alone will make your own conclusions as to whether this Mayor has provided the leadership to really get things done.

If you are a student at Gorton High School and have attended class on the stage of the auditorium --- nothing's been done.

If you or someone in your family was a victim of gang violence or violent crime --- more has to be done.

Last year, we Democrats said "the time to fix the education system is NOW."

We called upon the Mayor to include parents and educators in every step of the decision-making when it came to the governance of the schools. Sadly, he did not.

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In previous state of the city addresses, the Mayor repeatedly called to take over the Board of Education. Thankfully, he dropped that idea.

But what about the \$300,000 the Mayor spent to study the matter? Or the \$350,000 that the school district spent last year in a school funding lawsuit that was dropped before Yonkers could benefit from a court decision?

That's \$650,000 of your tax dollars wasted and that is just one example of bad fiscal management.

Tonight, I want to talk to you about what the Democrats have offered and what we hope to continue to build upon: Education, Leadership and Inclusiveness.

After 12 years of Republicans slashing education funding, Democrats have finally retaken Albany. We offer a new plan, a new vision, and renewed hope that good government really can work to better our lives.

The vision of Democrats has led to majorities in both houses of Congress, and our senators and congressional representatives are working hard everyday to improve the quality of life for our residents.

Democrats recognize that what matters most to people is public safety, good jobs, and affordable housing.

We believe in controlling government spending and accountability and that all should be included in the decision-making process --- and we have worked hard to accomplish that.

But at times there were obstacles put before us by this Administration that made it difficult for us to do so.

Last year's Capital Improvement Plan required the proper leadership from this Administration. Sadly, we did not get it.

Our Budget Committee felt strongly that this Mayor has already incurred too much debt - soon to be over \$468 million, which is a 55% increase in his brief tenure at the helm and over a 155% increase, since 1997, if you count his time as Deputy Mayor.

When the Council identified a funding level at which it was comfortable, the administration should have focused on identifying items that could be appropriately scheduled within the time frame of the remaining year.

Instead, they chose to grandstand and blame the Council majority for our refusal to increase funding and further tax our residents.

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Where we exercised fiscal responsibility and compromise, the Administration refused to negotiate.

Recently, the Mayor vetoed the Living Wage law.

The Council Democrats, led by Majority Leader Patricia McDow, believe that if the City is going to subsidize projects with tax breaks, then the lowest paid workers ought to be paid a fair wage.

We proposed a modest \$9.00 per hour plus health benefits – that’s only \$18,720 a year.

While every elected official has embraced the plight of the working poor, neither the three Republicans who voted against the bill, nor the Mayor has suggested an alternative.

That is just plain wrong and unfair to the hardworking men and women in Yonkers who are without representation.

While our municipal unions are well represented, soon there will be nine unions without a contract. These valuable employees must be treated as the professionals that they are --- with respect and with fair contracts.

In past years, there was a feeling that the community had not been heard in the environmental review process. Since January 2006, our new Democratic majority has heard you, and we have listened.

Under the leadership of Real Estate Chairman Dennis Robertson, we have made the deliberations for the \$3.1 billion downtown waterfront project one of the most inclusive and extensive environmental reviews in Westchester history.

And we’ve encouraged dozens of public meetings on everything --- from building heights to tax increment financing.

This is also why I am serving on a task force to provide direct access from the Sprain Brook Parkway to Ridge Hill.

Education Chair Sandy Annabi and the Council Democrats are aware that the most important issue facing our City today is our children’s education and providing them with the skills to succeed in the world around them. This education should not end when the school day is done. Our school buildings are resources that can be used for community activities on evenings and weekends.

Democrats believe in open government and accountability.

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To accomplish all of our goals, we need strong and effective leadership and the willingness to work together. Democrats have now shown the way. We wait for the Mayor to work with us.

It is an honor and a pleasure to serve you.

Thank you and good night.

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