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QUEENS CIVICS COMMENTS ON PROPOSED CITY BUDGET

In testimony Thursday, May 7, 1998 to the Queens Delegation of the City Council, the Queens Civic Congress [QCC] advocated lower class sizes, restore music and art programs and afterschool and evening programs for our youth, increased library service, and additional building and housing enforcement staff,, announced QCC President Sean M. Walsh. The statement presented by Mr. Walsh at the American Museum of the Moving Image, also called for an end of the disparity in the assignment of police officers to Queens, increased patrol and unmarked cars for each Queens Police Precinct, more parks enforcement agents to prevent vandalism and professional parks workers to keep our rebuilt parks in tip top shape, weekly recycling pickups removal of capital costs from the calculation of water rates and elimination of the NYC Water Board.

“Our testimony, one week after QCC President Sean Walsh’s participation on a City Council panel on expanding New York City’s middle class, emphasizes the solution to keeping the middle class rests on a budget which protects and preserves housing and provides the best schools and programs for our kids.” stated QCC Vice President for Public Affairs Corey Bearak. “Our existing housing stock is a valuable natural resource which must be protected at all costs by means of a fair but firm policy of code enforcement,” stated Mr. Walsh in his testimony. “Our children are another valuable natural resource which must be protected at all costs by providing a public education second to none and an after school youth program.”

The statement, prepared by QCC President Walsh, follows, follows:

Deputy Majority Leader Spigner and fellow members of the City Council, thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you on the issue of the New York City Budget. My name is Sean M. Walsh; I am President of the Queens Civic Congress, an umbrella organization of eighty-five civic organizations in Queens County. I have, in addition to today's testimony, provided you with a copy of the Congress' platform, which was approved unanimously last month at our Annual Luncheon, as well as a copy of my recent testimony at the NYC Water Board hearings. In the interest of the many speakers here today I will just highlight a few of the budgetary issues in my testimony.

Education is a priority to the families of Queens. In addition to the obvious need for more permanent classrooms, there is a need to bring class sizes down and restore music and art programs. Schools must be opened at night for youth programs to keep our children off the street. Keeping an after school program open is cheaper than building jail cells. The library budget must be increased not just restored. School based budgeting must be fully funded and implemented. No child should have to attend in 1998 a school with a coal burning heating system.

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While crime has fallen and the New York City Police Department has done an excellent job, there is a major discrepancy in the number of uniformed officers assigned to Queens when measured against the proportional share of reported crime in Queens. Queens gets 19% of the NYPD's uniform man power while it has 25% of the reported crime. Queens has the highest response times in the city. First, we believe that the budget discussions should address this disparity of manpower allocation. Second, the Council should increase the NYPD OTPS budget to provide more marked and unmarked cars as well as for nondescript undercover cars. Third, the Council should fund a substantial civilization program to allow police hired under the Safe Streets program to be put back on the street. Police visibility is an important element of any crime prevention program.

Our parks are cleaner but we lack the routine professional maintenance. We need park attendants, park enforcement agents, and skilled laborers to maintain our parks. Millions of dollars are spent under the capital budget to improve the parks but within months they are vandalized because no one is there to close the gate.

Sanitation recycling, a necessary element in our waste management program, has been a great success here in Queens. People are cooperating. However, we see the need to reallocate the Department of Sanitation resources. The bi-weekly pick up, especially in high rise neighborhoods, of recycled materials is insufficient. Recycled waste can now in many situations out strip all other garbage.

The City Council responded last summer with legislative action regarding the illegal conversions of residential housing. Now we ask you to respond by fully funding the Department of Buildings and the Department of Housing and Development in order to fulfill your legislative agenda. Both the DOB & HPD have never recovered from the budget cuts in the fiscal crisis of the 70s. We need examiners, inspectors, lawyers, engineers, support staff, a new computer system not more self certification.

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Water rates are out of reach. The Water Board is itself out of reach. Not one member of the Water board attended the recent hearings on the water rates. First, capital costs must be removed from the calculation of the water rate. In no other portion of the city budgeting process are capital items funded by a regressive use tax. In addition why are rates increased prior to the determination of agency expenses. Eliminate the Water Board now!

I had the privilege to participate in the City Council's forum on expanding the middle class in New York City. My panel discussed creating affordable housing. Our existing housing stock is a valuable natural resource which must be protected at all costs by means of a fair but firm policy of code enforcement. Our children are another valuable natural resource which must be protected at all costs by providing a public education second to none and an after school youth program. The solution to keeping the middle class is first and foremost are these two budget concerns.

Again, I want to thank you and I am looking forward to working with you during the budget process.