

Prospering In  
NEW YORK

# Partnering for New York City

An Interview with Kathryn S. Wylde,  
President and Chief Executive Officer, Partnership for New York City



Kathryn S. Wylde

**EDITORS' NOTE** Prior to assuming her current post in 2000, Kathryn Wylde served as the founding President and CEO of the New York City Housing Partnership and the New York City Investment Fund, the Partnership's economic development arm. She is a member of the boards of directors of the New York City Economic Development Corporation, the Biomedical Research Alliance of New York, Lutheran Medical Center, the New York City Leadership Academy, the Manhattan Institute, and the Research Partnership for New York City Schools.

**ORGANIZATION BRIEF** With a mission to maintain the city's position as the center of global commerce, membership of the Partnership for New York City is comprised of the top 200 CEOs from the city's corporate, investment, and entrepreneurial sectors. It works in partnership with government, labor, and civic groups to promote policies and projects that contribute to the vitality and diversity of the city and state economy. Priorities include maintaining the city's competitive position in the attraction and growth of its business sector, improving public education, and fostering public-private partnerships that enhance the quality of life of all New Yorkers.

**The Partnership has a clearly defined mission. But what do you see as your specific mission within the organization?**

Number one is to assure that the business community has an open pipeline with

government and with other sectors of the community, such as organized labor and the civic sector, both to receive information on what's happening as well as to bring the expertise of business to help shape public policy and inform community opinion. The Partnership was organized to aggregate business leaders and their resources to help deal with the biggest challenges facing the city. My job is to keep on top of what is happening in the city and to plug the business community into the public dialogue. The issues we're confronting today, like making the city more secure, improving our education, and maintaining the city's preeminence as the world financial capital, all require that business and government work together to find solutions. Neither business nor government can do it alone.

**Do you see New York in competition with other U.S. cities, or in competition on an international stage?**

It's a combination. We've seen a lot of jobs and functions relocate to less expensive areas in the U.S. and overseas during the last couple of decades. But when it comes to the financial services, media, fashion, and information services sectors, New York is primarily engaged in international competition. So we in New York City need to mobilize and provide a coherent business voice in Washington, DC, which makes most of the laws and regulations that impact global trade and investment.

**How does the New York City Investment Fund play a role?**

The New York City Investment Fund was the brainchild of the great financier Henry Kravis. It has provided a means through which the Partnership can put its money where its mouth is, by investing directly in projects that create jobs and build the economy. Because this city is so focused on and driven by major corporate investment, we sometimes forget about the next generation of activity – the small entrepreneurs who are crucial to economic life here. The fund has nurtured hundreds of entrepreneurs in the business and not-for-profit sectors, helping to create the next generation of business activity.

**Are you satisfied with the progress being made in New York City's public schools?**

The Partnership worked hard to win mayoral control of the city school system so there could be real accountability. Over the past five years, we have seen the beginning of a successful transformation in the New York City

public school system. Joel Klein is now the longest-serving chancellor in memory, providing needed continuity of leadership in the system. So we are very enthusiastic about the progress that has been made.

**Why did the Partnership initiate a relationship with the consultancy A.T. Kearney?**

We thought the state needed a much more strategic approach to its economic development. The business leadership of New York City had not really been tapped to help solve problems, particularly in upstate New York. So we introduced A.T. Kearney to the Empire State Development Corporation, and began studying potential solutions. What resulted was a set of strategic blueprints to change programs and policies that are no longer working.

**How responsive has Mayor Bloomberg been to the Partnership's proposals?**

Mayor Bloomberg was a member of the Partnership, as was his Deputy Mayor for Economic Development and his Schools Chancellor, prior to joining the administration. So we have had a special relationship. I think our members have felt an obligation to make sure that New York City's first businessman mayor in many decades has the full support of the business community.

**What would you identify as your key priorities for the coming year?**

We are all very concerned about how New York is going to compete in the global economy as a magnet for top talent and international investment. Unfortunately, many of our national policies are making it more difficult for U.S.-based international businesses to compete globally and for New York City to attract foreign operations to relocate here. This is not limited to onerous reporting and compliance requirements imposed on public companies by our federal government, but also includes a wide range of tax, visa, and litigation policies. The U.S. is perceived as a riskier and more expensive place to do business than many of our foreign competitors. Another major concern in the city is the need to maintain a first-class, 21st-century infrastructure, focusing on transportation, power, and communications. This requires significant public investment – currently estimated at well over \$100 billion in New York City alone. We already have high tax rates in New York City and across the state, on both business and individuals. So if we don't want those tax rates to go up, our economy has to grow and diversify. ●