

Partnering for New York City

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

EDITORS' NOTE Kathryn Wylde served as the founding President and Chief Executive Officer of the New York City Housing Partnership Development Cooperation and the New York City Investment Fund, the Partnership's economic development arm, before assuming her current role in 2000. She is a member of the boards of directors of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, the New York City Economic Development Corporation, the Lutheran Medical Center, the New York City Leadership Academy, the Manhattan Institute, and the Research Alliance for New York City Schools.



Kathryn S. Wylde

ORGANIZATION BRIEF The Partnership for New York City (www.pfnyc.org) is composed of the top 200 CEOs from the city's corporate, investment, and entrepreneurial sectors with the mission of maintaining the city's position as the center of global commerce. It works in partnership with government, labor, and civic groups to promote the vitality and diversity of the city and state economy. The organization's 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 for all New Yorkers. Partnership companies account for nearly 7 million American jobs and contribute over \$740 billion to the national GDP.

New York is facing many challenges today with budget cuts in education, hospitals, and police and fire departments, and there is concern that we may return to some of the challenging days of the '70s. Is that an issue, and what should the private sector and business leaders be doing to ensure the city remains strong?

New York City was at the epicenter of the financial crisis and has suffered huge losses due to the recession, which gives us reason to worry about erosion of the enormous progress the city has made during the past 25 years. But we've got strong leadership in Mayor Bloomberg and we have business, civic, and labor leaders who are more committed to the city than ever.

As David Rockefeller predicted 30 years ago, the world needs cities, especially during

this age of the knowledge economy. More people are living in urban centers today than ever before. The importance of cities will increase as the economy congregates around centers of innovation and intellectual capital, culture, and the arts.

How important has the public/private partnership been during these times, and have you seen a reemphasis on those relationships to help address the issues that the city is facing?

A constructive partnership between business and government is the key to most great achievements in this country, whether it is working together in the interests of national security, modernizing our infrastructure, or achieving breakthroughs in medical science and technology. Only through such a partnership will we see the economy recover and employment numbers rise again. It is important to remember that Wall Street and the financial services industry pulled our cities out of the urban malaise of the '60s and '70s. Banks provided the capital and tax revenues that fueled the rebuilding of city neighborhoods and led our economic resurgence. New York's status as a great world city depends on the strength and global dominance of our financial sector and this is equally the case for America's continued leadership in the world economy. Public/private partnerships mean finding our common interests and advancing them together in an atmosphere of mutual trust and enlightened self-interest.

Almost all of the business leaders in this city are engaged in the Partnership. We've gone through a time when there was much blame being put on business leaders and corporations, and the message about the good that companies do in the community as corporate citizens was being ignored. Is this frustrating?

While it's easy to blame Wall Street and financial services when something goes wrong, cities rely upon these global businesses and investment firms to maintain their strength and vitality. The financial sector leaders are the pillars of our philanthropic organizations, the anchor of our real estate markets, and the source of supply chains that keep small businesses alive. Financial firms tend to be the first adopters of the new high-tech

products developed by entrepreneurial, start-up companies. The best aspects of our economy – small business, start-ups, and nonprofit organizations – depend on the procurement, the infrastructure, and the financing provided by big business and, particularly, big financial institutions.

If government over-regulates American industry or taxes it to death, we'll only punish ourselves. I hope we'll move past the blame game so that we can work together for economic recovery and full employment.

For New York City, which is known for the strength of its financial sector, do you see a focus on broadening into new industries and opportunities to create new industry leadership and segments for the city?

In the 21st century, a great world city must be, first and foremost, a financial capital. Yet a city's economy should also be diversified in order to protect against the cyclical nature of the financial industry.

New York City has been very dependent on Wall Street. Under Mayor Bloomberg, we have increased efforts to diversify the economy by taking advantage of our great scientific resources, including the biotech and high-tech research conducted at our academic institutions. We have also worked to expand the entertainment and hospitality industries, which have flourished with help from our cultural institutions. Nearly 50 million tourists and visitors visit the city annually.

New York has always been a media capital, and that industry is challenged and going through tremendous changes right now. Fortunately, New York and its media companies produce content that is in demand around the world and we are out front in the burgeoning digital media sector. So while print media is diminishing, the transition to new media and mobile media is well underway here.

Could you ever have anticipated this as something you would be doing for this period of time, and what is it about your role that makes it exciting and enjoyable?

New York City is an enormously interesting place. You don't have to go anywhere to see the world – you can see it right here. The top talent from across the globe in every sector comes to New York. So being at the Partnership is an opportunity to take advantage of all that the world has to offer while staying right here in New York. ●