

A Spirit of Public/Private Cooperation

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

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to assuming her current post in 2000, Kathryn Wylde served as the founding President and Chief Executive Officer of the New York City Housing Partnership Development Corporation and the New York City Investment Fund, the Partnership's economic development arm. 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 With the mission of maintaining the city's position as the center of global commerce, 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. It works in cooperation 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.

In terms of the impact of the global economic crisis, how has New York City fared during this time and where do you see it in regard to recovery?

New York City was the epicenter of the financial crisis. We lost a significant number of our anchor institutions or they went through major acquisition or changes, and that had an impact on our financial district and on the city as a whole. We lost close to 50,000 jobs in the high-end financial sector and that translates into 200,000 jobs overall, given a multiplier of two and a half other jobs for every financial service job.

But we also recovered more quickly than anybody expected. Both the so-called TARP institutions that received federal funding during the crisis and our economy as a whole have rebounded. New York ended up suffering less from the recession and recovering more quickly, in terms of its overall economy and revenue base, than most of the rest of the country.

The reason for our city's resilience has a lot to do with the leadership of the Mayor and of the business leaders of our city, both in finance and other sectors, who were working together with our Congressional delegation and with federal agencies throughout the crisis in moving quickly and effectively to avoid disaster.

Is there a focus on bringing new industries into New York City and will we see the city expanding into other sectors?

One unintended consequence of the financial crisis was that many highly talented entrepreneurial individuals were cut loose from big institutions. Some started their own businesses, or got involved with friends and colleagues in other sectors and began working on a range of entrepreneurial activity. We have seen an abundance of new ventures in the financial technology and information technology sectors, and emerging sectors like cleantech.

Do you feel New York is still a competitive leader in innovation?

Absolutely. New York is stronger than ever when it comes to entrepreneurship and innovation. The ties between the business community and the university community are more robust; our universities are investing in new areas of research, engineering, and scientific endeavor that will fuel the next generation of business formation; and there are strong partnerships forming between the venture capital community and higher education.

Is the education system being addressed the right way, and has the Partnership actively tried to play a role in the reform?

Education has long been the top priority of the Partnership because the city's business leaders understand the central importance of a great public and higher education system.

Because of Mayor Bloomberg's commitment to being the "Education Mayor" and the recruitment of Joel Klein as the city's greatest Schools Chancellor, we have seen a transformation of New York's public education system.

Our public schools today are a magnet for attracting families and employees to New York. There are still challenges, particularly in our most economically distressed communities, but the progress that has been made in the past decade is amazing.

We are very encouraged that although turning around the nation's largest public education system is a long process, it's going to result in a system that gives every student the opportunity for a great education.

What is it about the Partnership that achieves the level of interest and engagement of some of the who's who in New York?

The Partnership is a network of leaders who share a commitment to New York City and to keeping it a great, strong place to live, work, and conduct business.

The Partnership brings together like-minded people and gives them an opportunity to invest their time and their personal and business resources in projects and activities that matter.

We are a results-oriented organization; we're not here to be a think tank or to do long-term planning – we're here to partner with the Mayor and other government leaders to work on real problems and bring real solutions quickly in a spirit of public/private cooperation.

Many top business leaders give much time and energy to many efforts but, oftentimes, the perception of them is still negative. Does that frustrate you?

I don't think our members are looking for credit or recognition for what they're doing. They come to the Partnership looking to make a contribution, to support what the Mayor is trying to achieve, and to make sure that New York City remains a great place for them, their families, their employees, and for all the people in the five boroughs for the next generation.

The frustration comes when it's clear, for example, that there is a fiscal crisis but it's hard to get everybody to come together to make a commitment to do something about it. The frustration comes when we must depend on Washington, for example, to rework an outdated air traffic control system, which is costing our city over \$2.5 billion a year in economic losses.

We can't even put cameras on buses to enforce bus lanes and move our bus traffic efficiently without getting a law passed in Albany.

The biggest frustration for our members is when there are clear ways to make our city more efficient and effective, but the political process makes that hard to accomplish. ●