

Quinn's New York by Dan Jacoby

Christine Quinn just delivered her "State of the City" address. She got a lot of applause, but what did she actually say? Unfortunately, with a few notable exceptions, not all of which were positive, the answer is, "not much."

On campaign finance, she offered minor patches, while calling the current system the best in the country. She's completely wrong; this may be the most extensive matching fund system, but like all matching fund systems it stinks and cannot be fixed. Only a "Clean Money" system offers a true alternative.

She then announced that Senator Diane Savino will introduce a bill to create a New York City Rainy Day Fund. This was her best moment. If we had had such a fund in the 90s, Mayor Bloomberg might not have had to raise property taxes 18% in 2002. This will probably take a constitutional amendment (to the state constitution), but it's a tremendous – and long overdue – idea.

For "middle class housing", Quinn called for a "renter's tax break" that she says will provide \$300 to middle class renters. How much would you like to bet on that? Where does that money come from? Most middle class New York City renters don't pay nearly that much in city income tax, so it can't be a deduction. It could be a credit, which means a lot of New Yorkers will end up getting more back from the city than they pay in. This will almost certainly not happen.

Quinn also called for a repeal of the Urstadt law, which gives the state the power over rent stabilization laws. This one is a no-brainer, but at least she mentioned it.

She then announced two new bills she is supporting to give tenants the right to sue harassing landlords, and to give HPD the power to make repairs to buildings at landlord expense when the landlord fails to make those repairs quickly. Good stuff -- let's see what really happens. If she pushes these bills through, they could make a tremendous difference to the poorest among us.

Health Care: Here is where Quinn took her one tough stand, saying that there are too many hospital beds and insufficient access to primary care. There is a lot of pressure to keep all the current hospitals open; it takes guts to stand up to that pressure.

She also proposed creating 10 new primary care facilities in "high needs" areas, which will pay for themselves by cutting down on the number of people who use the emergency ward for their primary care (or after a lack of primary care leads to serious problems). On the face of it, this looks like a good proposal. Again, however, let's see what really comes out of it.

Her worst moment was when she talked about the problems with the NYPD. She obliquely referred to the Sean Bell shooting, but offered absolutely nothing. No mention that the police haven't had a contract for four years. No mention that cops who don't live in the city don't really care about the city. No mention of the lack of training – including continued training – that could have saved Sean Bell's life. Pure garbage!

In short, it was a speech full of promise, but often short on substance. I give it a C+.