



Christine C. Quinn

EDITORS' NOTE *Christine Quinn has spent her career in public service, starting as a housing organizer before becoming Director of the Gay & Lesbian Anti-Violence Project. Since 1999, Quinn has served Manhattan's lower west side in the City Council and was elected Speaker in 2006. As the first openly gay Speaker of the City Council, Quinn has worked extensively on issues of justice and equality.*

In your role as Speaker, people talk about your ability to get things done. With so much stagnation in government, how have you been so successful?

You don't take no for an answer. When people tell you something is not possible, you pretend not to hear them. You say, I'm not going to accept that; go out and keep working, and come back when you have gotten to some type of a yes.

Despite economic challenges throughout many of the major cities, New York has bounced back quickly and remains strong. Where is the city today in terms of stability?

My colleagues on the council, working with the Mayor, made some smart decisions early on. During the first three years that I was Speaker, when we had surpluses, we didn't spend all of the money; we planned for the days when the economy would turn downward, with the recognition that the economy cannot remain strong forever.

Nobody thought it would end as quickly or as sharply as it did, but everybody recognized that the good times can't last forever – that is why we planned financially for the future.

Very few other cities do that – very few people have the leadership vision to know that you can't just lead at the moment you're in; you also have to be leading into the future, and that long-term vision is a big part of why we have

been able to weather the recession, not without impact but better probably than any other city in America.

You mentioned the planning within the council, which you have led, but also with the Mayor. Even when you disagree, there is a level of healthy discussion that takes place. What has led to that relationship?

When I was elected Speaker, I decided the Mayor and I would work well together – that was it.

What choice is there? If we don't work well together, things don't get done. I don't think that failure is an option for the two highest ranking elected officials of the City of New York as it relates to the 8.4 million people we are charged with serving.

In what other profession do you get to entertain two of the top folks not figuring out ways to work together? None. So we can't allow politics to be a profession that has that type of failure quotient built into it.

That said, do you shake your head at what is taking place in Washington?

It's a motivation to make sure that doesn't ever happen here.

In running for Mayor, what are the key priorities and themes that you intend to address throughout your campaign, and how has your experience as Speaker prepared you for this role?

I have been very lucky during the time I have been Speaker to put policies in place that have delivered on making New Yorkers' lives better, and on addressing the problems that exist in New Yorkers' lives. That's my job and I have done it well, and developed a record that I don't think anyone who is running for Mayor in this upcoming election can match.

In running for Mayor, I want to talk about the real problems that face New Yorkers: the need to build and develop more affordable housing for the middle class; the need to build and grow our economy with more strong, middle class jobs; the need to get our schools to do even better; and the need to keep our city safe.

I don't just want to talk about it, but to show New Yorkers that my vision is one that is achievable based on my record and what I have already achieved working for New Yorkers.

A Vision for New York

An Interview with
The Honorable Christine C. Quinn, Speaker, New York City Council

Mayor Bloomberg has focused on the strength of the public/private partnership with regard to engaging the business community. How critical is that in terms of handling many of the challenges in New York?

The best way to lead New York is to think of it as a team and to use all of the resources we have to make this city a better and stronger place. Certainly, public/private partnerships are a big part of that.

In terms of the upcoming campaign, the focus tends to be on your gender. Is there too much of a spotlight on that?

If folks want to talk about who I am, that is fine and understandable, but my job is to get things done and deliver for New Yorkers. I do that as who I am and that's the way it is.

How important is the international market to New York City?

You have to take the entire world into perspective if you're one of the leaders in New York City because you need to keep New York competitive and strong. But I would rather be in New York dealing with the international market than anywhere else in the world.

With the scrutiny of the 24-hour news cycle, are there still highly talented young people entering public service?

Absolutely. Twenty-four-hour news is something that relates to every profession – it's our world today. It's certainly part of government and politics, but it's part of everything. Young people know that best because it's the world they're growing up in. They don't need to get used to it – it's part of their reality.

I'm so excited because I see so many young people getting involved in this campaign and in government, and recognizing that it's a great career and a privilege to be part of government and politics.

If I asked those who have worked closely with you over the years what it was like to work for you, what might they say?

They would tell you that I am loud and hands-on, that I insist on thorough follow-up and won't take no for an answer, and that I work very hard and ask other people to work hard, but that I'm grateful for them and their incredible hard work and dedicated service. ●