



CBC's 2021 Medal for High Civic Service Presentation

A CBC Mayoral Candidate Forum

Zoom Webinar Transcript

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October 12, 2021

VIDEO MONTAGE OF PAST HONOREES:

Jerome Powell:

I was struck by three things in your mission statement: independence, objective research, and service to all citizens. I can't say it any better than that.

Loretta Lynch:

Now to be recognized for civic service from this organization in particular, the Citizens Budget Commission is indeed a high honor. I think it is no understatement to say that you are one of New York city's most respected watchdogs.

Stanley S. Shuman:

I have long been a supporter of CBC because I think it plays an absolutely crucial role in the vigilant pursuit of transparency and accountability in our state and local governments. Advocating for policies that will keep them fiscally secure and keep our city a thriving place in which to live and work.

Letitia James:

And congratulations to the Citizens Budget Commission for 88 years of commitment to good governance, to fiscal responsibility, to growth and vitality in the great state of New York.

Richard Ravitch:

CBC represents everything that I have cared about and engaged in, in my professional civic life.

Andrew Rein:

Now listen to our evening centerpiece CBCs medal for high civic service.

Walter Harris:

We give the medal each year to a current or former public servant who exemplifies CBCs values and has demonstrated great dedication to serving the public. We're pleased this year to give CBC's medal to US Transportation Secretary, Pete Buttigieg. His contribution spans service to our country as a Naval officer in Afghanistan, as mayor of South Bend and now as transportation secretary. We all got to know him as a mesmerizing presidential candidate and now he is leading



the charge to rebuild and modernize our nation's infrastructure.

Andrew Rein:

We're also fortunate to have Governor Kathy Hochul here to welcome Secretary Buttigieg, talk with him about public service and the issues facing New York state. But first, we're so glad to have a few words from someone CBC has been working with on a number of issues for the last few years, our Lieutenant Governor Brian Benjamin.

Lt. Governor Brian Benjamin:

Hello, I'm Lieutenant Governor Brian Benjamin. I'd like to congratulate the Citizens Budget Commission on celebrating 89 years of ensuring that every day New Yorkers are considered in city and state financial decision-making. I've worked with Citizens Budget Commission on a number of important issues including the Rainy Day Fund Bill, where we've worked together to pass that it's law. Property tax reform, criminal justice, and now we're working together on [inaudible 00:02:50]. I am certain that we will continue this great partnership to achieve accountability, transparency, and fiscal responsibility so that New York's resources are delivered in a way that helps those who need it the most. And now I'm happy to introduce my partner and leader, the 57th governor of the great state of New York, Governor Kathy Hochul.

Governor Kathy Hochul:

He's just been an extraordinary partner through this journey together. Also, I want to thank the chair, Walter Harris for his great work it's CBC and Andrew Ryan, the president of CBC, also our great awardees. Larry, I just heard you speak. Incredible what you've done. And also I'm looking forward to introducing our secretary of transportation. You know, first of all, all of you have done just an amazing job. As by lieutenant governor said for 89 years, you've been had a pivotal role in making sure that we have not just good government, but smart policies to follow. And so many of the civic leaders here tonight have just worked so hard to improve the lives of New Yorkers, not just for today, but for generations to come. You've worked hard to understand the inner workings of state and city government. And I'm so grateful for your commitment to transparency and accountability.

We're always laying out blueprints for great policy reforms that guide policy makers across government, from the MTA to housing, to accountable budgeting. And we're lucky to have you as a partner and a resource. And I so look forward to working with each and every one of you as we deal with the pressing issues facing our state. And one of the most important things we need to do is deal with transparency and accountability in government. I've made this so crystal clear from day one, that we will be a very different administration, that transparency and holding people accountable is important to me as well. So I'm grateful to Andrew and the CBC on this issue. I've already directed all of my state agencies to deliver a plan on how they're going to improve transparency, literally in a matter of days. And we've improved our delivery of reporting of data, because we want this information out to the public.



It's not just the right thing to do. It's the cornerstone of effective government. We've already taken many actions. We went from the verse in the country to the best in terms of getting money out the door for those who need it for tenants and landlords, a lot of other initiatives we've worked hard on. And I just want to say infrastructure is so important. And that's why honoring Secretary Buttigieg is so important here today. Gives him a chance to know more about us in New York. I've had a chance to work on many issues as a local government official. I have a real affinity for people who come out of local government as he did when he was mayor of South Bend and also a Notre Dame fan marrying a guy from Notre Dame and my son went there so there's that special connection as well. But the way we're going to get out of this crisis is to focus on infrastructure, transportation, and under the ground infrastructure, as well as our many, many projects that need to be funded by the federal government at this time.

So it's not just abstract concepts. We talk about infrastructure. It's what's affecting people's lives on the roads and bridges and our subways. It's getting people to work and getting people to their jobs and hospitals they needed, or getting up for entertainment. We don't survive without strong investments in our infrastructure and our airports as well. Also, climate change is creating an opportunity for us to do something right, to right the wrongs of the past. We cannot ignore the effects of climate change any longer. And I will tell you that I will never forget the faces of people who are trapped in their homes, barely survived because of what happened with Hurricane Ida after we were so unprepared for this onslaught of rain. I'm committed in New York to making historic investments in smart, resilient, and green infrastructure, really rebuilding our roads and investing in water and climate infrastructure. Leading the way on clean energy and transforming our airports, affordable housing as well.

And delivering the public transportation systems that New Yorkers deserve. We're going to be bold and aggressive because we have no choice. And that's how I am anyhow. And we could not have a better partner in federal government. And I'm a former member of Congress. I know how the levers of government are so incredibly powerful in Washington when they work closely with the states. And that's why I'm offering my hand in friendship to our great partner, Secretary Peter Buttigieg and the entire Biden Administration.

Secretary has been a public servant who's answered the call to serve in so many different ways. And he's leading the charge now building on his experience as a local official, something that I still know is so important. He's now leading the way to invest in our nation's infrastructure, building a more resilient and equitable future, which will bring more jobs and economic opportunity for our communities. He's a friend to New York and we're so lucky to have him as partner. I'm so proud to welcome and congratulate Secretary Pete Buttigieg. I'm receiving CBC's medal for high civic service. Congratulations. And also some couple of new twin babies. I want to mention that too, how's Penelope and Joseph doing?

Secretary Pete Buttigieg:

They're good, they're not sleeping much and neither are we but we're overjoyed.



Governor Kathy Hochul:

Neither are you. Well, what a wonderful time in your life. And congratulations again. And I do hope you get some sleep. You're going to need it with all the responsibilities you have, but Secretary, we're both former local officials and that worked me as critically poor because it helps shape my perception of the response when we have in state government and how to take care of the locals. And it's not abstract, but it is about how we get people places more importantly and get them there safely. And can you just share some of your perspectives on how infrastructure in your opinion, coming out of local government and now in this federal position, how it really does affect people's lives in a way that we can tell the story for people to understand how critically important it is for people to support what the Biden Administration and you're doing in Washington?

Secretary Pete Buttigieg:

Well, I think that's exactly the right way to think of it. And then by the way, I'm honored to be joining you here. We'll be great partners, and you're going to continue bringing to New York state. I think the time has come for a politics of the everyday. And I think there's nowhere where that's more clear than the infrastructure. One thing I've found is we've been working with members of both parties of both chambers to try to get this infrastructure deal through, is that every one of them is from somewhere. And it doesn't take much persuading for the constituents who have sent people to Washington to realize that their daily lives and livelihoods are at stake in the decisions we make or failed to make and making it easier to get around, making it easier to get through your everyday life, whatever is important to you in your life. It doesn't happen. There's not a road to get you to where you're going or some safe means of transit or conveyance. And that's exactly why this opportunity is reaching us at the right time as a country.

Governor Kathy Hochul:

Right. And President Biden and all of you have worked done such an incredible job leading our nations recovery during this pandemic. And yet the infrastructure bill, as I mentioned, is so critical for New York's recovery itself, which is 100% of my focus these days, battling the pandemic, but also how we work our way out its how we build back better as you say. And if as long as I can make a pitch for New York, use some of our critical priorities are the Gateway Tunnel Project, the second avenue subway second phase, as well as for New Metro North Stations to take people from the Bronx to increase transit accessibility in some underserved communities. And how do you view the role of infrastructure investment in terms of the impact that our recovery from COVID. Explain the interaction between getting out of COVID, but also investing in infrastructure and how they're so intrinsically linked?

Secretary Pete Buttigieg:

Well, I think as you are leading New York's recovery and leaders around the country are pursuing this, it's very clear that we cannot just be focused on rewinding to 2019. This is the very essence of what maybe is being said so many times, that it just sounds like a catch phrase, but when we say build back better, we really mean that better part. The truth is what happened with the pandemic and is continuing to affect us in our lives and our economy, has surfaced and revealed weaknesses in our old ways of doing things and weaknesses in our physical and social



infrastructure that didn't arrive overnight, that have built up over a long time. But do we have a chance to do something about that right now? And that's part of why you see such bold endeavors if I may, to invoke the title of Felix wrote in his book on underway in this Administration, because we know that there's no going back and that doesn't have to be a bad thing.

Secretary Pete Buttigieg:

Well said, and before I was elected to Congress a decade ago, I'd also been a staffer on capitol working for Senator Moynihan on infrastructure long time ago. And that was the one area of maybe farm bill and infrastructure bills, whether it was always bipartisanship, no one fought over this. Everybody wanted something for their states and for their districts. And it was always people sort of jumped off the cliff together. There was a big price tag, but it was important to keep our economy moving forward. What's your prognosis this year in the climate that we're in, as far as your predictions on the success of the infrastructure build that's under consideration?

Well, as you noted, it's one of the last remaining areas of domestic policy where bipartisan consensus is possible, or at least bipartisan overlap. And again, I think it's because of citizens, communities, civic organizations like this one, holding their elected leaders accountable because everybody can point to the port, the airport, the road, the bridge to the piece of physical infrastructure in their community, in their commute, in their lives that needs attention. For that reason, I think the prognosis is bright, but it won't happen on its own. We still have to get this legislation through. And then critically, as soon as it's signed, departments like mine and administrations like yours will get to work deploying those dollars effectively. Now that won't be an easy thing, but it will be, I think, a very welcomed task because we all know just how great the need is. And maybe most importantly of all, how much potential we can unlock when we do make those investments that have always been those force multipliers on what makes America so strong.

Governor Kathy Hochul:

Well said, Mr. Secretary. And once again, congratulations on your recognition from an organization that we have such respect for. And I look forward to seeing you in person next time you're in New York and we will build back together stronger.

Secretary Pete Buttigieg:

Well, thank you again, honored to be with you. And likewise, looking forward to partnering for the benefit of New York and as we work to deliver the President's vision, eager to see what we're going to be able to accomplish together.

And let me also, that we may not be on screen address, Nick, just to say, I look forward to your father's book. I should say, there's actually a copy of it on my desk right now, but let me hasten to add, it's a borrowed copy from The White House Library. So I look forward to having one of my own and think that that is the exact spirit that we need to be undertaking right now. To really recognize that this is the season for bold endeavors. This is a season for big undertakings, and this is a moment that we will look back on with pride if, and only if, we get it right. Let me also



add my congratulations to Alair Townsend on such a well earned recognition of her service, her leadership, and the impact that she's made for people of New York and across the nation.

And I want to thank the state of New York for producing Polly Trottenberg, who served in so many capacities in New York and is now our Deputy Secretary of Transportation, one of the most brilliant and capable and experienced minds in the field. And of course, I want to thank the Citizens Budget Commission for your service, for your tireless work to make New York the best version of itself. And for the humbling honor of this award, at a time when civic service means so much, I'm so honored to have been named. And I want to thank everybody who has served in some way, who has helped others, especially through these past 19 months. The texture of business, non-profits, government, ordinary people across New York, who mobilized at an unprecedented scale to respond to a pandemic, to economic downturn, to extreme weather is inspiring and something in this challenging time that I think can give us grounds for optimism.

And of course, there's an understanding in this organization that services about more than just responding to the news of the day or the crisis at the moment, your very mission statement, focusing on the wellbeing of future New Yorkers, is I think very compelling at a moment like this, this idea of working for the generations of today and the responsibility that the generations in positions of authority today have for those of tomorrow. Serving the people who will be affected tomorrow by the decisions we make today. It is I think a very natural human thing, especially after hardship to try to restore and return as quickly as possible to what was there before. Sometimes to an idealized version of what was there before. But that doesn't protect us against the challenges that are going to come our way in the future. And I need not preach to New Yorkers about this because this is a place that has legendary examples of rebuilding stronger after enormous challenges. After the fiscal crisis of the 1970s, after 9/11, the event that really defined my generation's project, the recession of 2008.

And I want to take an example from a little bit further back in history that maybe isn't talked about as often. A transportation related example from 1888, a deadly blizzard took hundreds of lives, shut down the elevated trains for weeks and New York, rather than just clearing the tracks of moving on, responded by realizing that the time had come to transform transit in the city to create an underground subway system. And about 16 years after that blizzard, the first subways in New York opened and quickly became and of course still are, indispensable to the city. The New York Tribune a few weeks after the blizzard summed up the reasoning for the bold decision that New Yorkers were on track to make. They said this; tunneling under the Hudson and east river would meet a need, which nothing else can. The city of today has been conquered by the elements for a time only because it has been content to develop on the surface and not at the roots.

So New York made this decision to develop at the roots, beneath the surface, beneath the surface also of course, being the very literal etymology of the word infrastructure. So now in 2021, facing multiple crisis, the time has come for us to talk about how we can rebuild stronger at the roots, which is what this administration seeks to do.



The need is urgent. It is everywhere we see in so many places and in so many ways, how we rely on infrastructure built generations ago. In fact, I was in New York recently at the eager invitation of your congressional delegation, Senator Leader Schumer, and others saw to it that one of my first visits trips as secretary was to tour the Hudson River Tongue, which represents the very best state-of-the-art construction technology of 1910 and 110 years later, absolutely needs to be upgraded and secured. And that's one of the most dramatic examples of the country, but the examples are everywhere from my Indiana hometown to the east and west coast and everywhere in between. We need not only to repair and fix, we need to modernize. And groups like the CDC have pushed for years for these kinds of responsible investments.

So it couldn't be more relevant for us to gather now at the cusp of a once in a generation investment in our country's infrastructure. Let me mention just a few things about this legislation working its way through Congress, it'll make life better for residents in New York and around the country. It includes \$13 billion to make our roadways safer, including a Safe Streets For All program that will help local governments reduce serious injuries and fatalities, especially for cyclists and pedestrians. It represents the largest investment in passenger rails since the creation of Amtrak. We're going to invest in expanding and modernizing public transit with the largest federal investment in transit ever. We can reduce the pollution in our transportation system, which is so vital because the transportation sector is the single biggest contributor in our economy to greenhouse gas emissions. New York knows as well as anybody that climate change has evolved from a theory to an observation from a prediction to an emergency.

And it is now the challenge of our time. The infrastructure legislation would create the first department of transportation administered program dedicated to making our transportation infrastructure more resilient in the face of climate change. When transit is unreliable or delayed or shut down because of weather, the people hurt most are those who don't have other options. People who can't work from home, people who were paid hourly, often the very people that we have belatedly come to call essential workers. This is an investment that will allow us to build a network of electric vehicle chargers all over the country in rural areas and in underserved parts of cities, places where the gas savings might make the biggest difference in people's lives. Transportation can be an enormous engine for opportunity, but it has also often been a major source of inequity. This bill would create the first ever dedicated federal program to reconnect communities divided by inequitable transportation infrastructure, like highways that cut through brown and black communities, like highway overpasses, intentionally built too low for the buses to travel under to get to the beach.

Part of the legacy of Robert Moses right in New York. With this legislation we'll have a chance to modernize our transit roads, bridges, tunnels, ports and airports, everything we've got to do so people in goods can move more efficiently. It is necessary for New York and for America to thrive. I want to take a moment also to emphasize a particularly important issue in our economy right now, which is our supply chain. The pandemic and the rapid recovery of demand have accelerated the challenges that were already present in our supply chains. And this is a global issue, but certainly an acute one here. We've seen COVID related outages throughout the global supply chain and in the US, demand coming back and shifting toward goods at the expense



sometimes of recreation or travel that hasn't been available, has made it very difficult for our supply chains to keep up with what is now a record level of goods moving through our points.

So in the short term, to relieve some of that pressure, we've been bringing together ports, labor, retailers, private freight trucking firms, everybody in that ecosystem, who surprisingly has not always been talking to each other to find solutions. Again, this is a global challenge, largely a private sector system. It won't be resolved overnight, but we are seeing already the ability to make a difference. The ports of Long Beach in Los Angeles, the largest container ports in the nation, have committed to expanding their hours. And as we look to many countries operating around the clock already, we need to continue building out the ability to take advantage of our capacity here. And we're working as an honest broker with the rest of the supply chain on additional commitments that I'm looking forward to sharing in the coming days. But then we've got to look at the longterm.

The place where the government can make the biggest difference is by fixing the decades old infrastructure these industries rely on and building it out for a different future. So this legislation invests \$17 billion in our ports and waterways investments on a level never before done federally, for these purposes. Plus billions for rail and intermodal infrastructure to build out our capacity. This infrastructure modernization is going to take a lot of work. But the fact that it's going to take a lot of work as also a good thing. The legislation, along with the President's broader Build Back Better agenda will add millions of jobs, good paying jobs, many with the choice of a unit. This is about securing the next generation of opportunity in jobs that people can raise a family. It's about recognizing that essential workers are always essential, not just in the middle of an emergency and ensuring the pay and benefits match the importance and the difficulty of their work. It's a transformational investment. And my department is taking very seriously the duty that we will have to implement it responsibly and effectively.

Last thing I want to mention is the sense of we, I talked about the impacts of the decisions we make. And again, I'm addressing an audience that I think exquisitely captures the different kinds of partnerships that are going to be needed to get this done and to face all of the challenges before our country right now. We're going to turn to you for help in the coming years to do the kinds of things the New Yorkers did over a century ago, and this time to do it better than ever, to do it more inclusively than ever, to do it more safely than ever, with more equity in terms of who benefits from the projects. New York exemplifies innovation. The very fact of New York is one of the great achievements of humankind and in the transportation space alone, there's so much more on the horizon. I know the idea, if you build it they will come, is associated in our imagination with the Midwestern baseball field.

But it's also something to think about in transportation. It was true when some scoffed at the idea in the 19th century, the New Yorkers would be willing to lower themselves beneath the surface of the earth in order to get around the city. And yet subways now are elemental to New York. To it's emotional as well as logistical texture. Today if we build better train service, better transit service, more people will use it. And as you're doing in New York, if you build safe, protected bike lanes along the Brooklyn Bridge, more people will use them. In other words, our



transportation choices can predict not just reflect, what is going to happen in the future. If we do this right, harnessing the ethos of CVC to build for current and future generations, with that focus on equity on climate, on economic fairness, I'm convinced that we will look back on these years, on this season, these early 2020s, as an inflection point, where America became prepared once more for bold endeavors to be strategic and rebuild our country better than it came to us.

And I know that all of us as stewards of this great project will find great joy and great purpose in the work that lays out in front of us. And I'm honored to be committed to doing that work alongside you. So thank you again for the chance to address you this evening,

Walter Harris:

Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for being with us to accept CDCs battle and for your very knowing and comprehensive remarks. We also very much appreciate your thoughtful conversation with the Governor. We're fortunate to have two leaders working together for the future of New York. Thank you also for welcoming us and questions from our trustees. I hope it's okay if I jump right in. One trustee was noting that the pandemic will have long-term effects on working commuting patterns. How do you think New York other regions should be planning for different transportation infrastructure? Since we might have very different mobility needs. Should we be doing more micro transit instead of major expansions? What is your advice on the planning and the future in that? And what's the federal role to help facilitate that?

Secretary Pete Buttigieg:

So it's a great question. And it's a set of challenges that's facing every city, every state, every organization. We think about it, not only from a policy perspective, but just as an employer of 55,000 people. Ourselves contemplating what the future of work will look like and shame on us, if we can imagine no more than it returning to how it was in 2019. But what we know is people are going to continue to need to get around some kinds of trips increased as the way people allocated their time shifting. In my view, it's going to be more productive to find the principles that will serve as well across the different unpredictable futures, than to try to predict exactly what that future might hold. And that's where some of the things that I was sharing earlier around equity, around climate responsibility, around economic strength, they're going to serve us well.

We may not know exactly what the work week will look like. How many people will have hybrid, traditional, virtual or other patterns of work. What we know is that whether your commute is digital or physical, we can construct the infrastructure that that commute relies on, in ways that bring access to more people, or we can do it in ways to continue to accrue benefits to those who already have the greatest access, again, be it physical or digital. So that's a principle that we can follow. And then my department will respect as local communities decide, based on the patterns you see emerging in your particular area that need the most attention. And that lay out the specific plans. I'm convinced that very few of the answers need to come from Washington or need to come from my department, but more of the resources do and we're here to help support that local problem solving along these kinds of principles that we've discussed.



Walter Harris:

Thank you. Another one of our trustees noted, to meet New York's climate goals, we need to significantly reduce emissions from transportations. Although the Administration has talked about making the trash session greener, how will those policies support the electrification of both buses and truck plates?

Secretary Pete Buttigieg:

Well, it's critically important. Let me acknowledge this. The city council in New York with its boldness in stepping forward to electrify the school buses for the nation's largest school district by 2025. This is a big challenge and therefore a big opportunity. It's an opportunity for market making in more creation and manufacturing of electrified buses and trucks. It's an opportunity to drive environmental quality and environmental justice. And it's an opportunity to leapfrog some of the systems that are aging out. Again. This is one of the reasons why we need to make a historic investment in public transit, not just in the support for transit to happen at the volumes that it will. And by the way, just last week I pulled the numbers. There were 19 million trips on the subway. So no matter what differences there are between the post COVID and pre COVID world, we know that that people are going to rely on it more than ever, but also making sure that these means of transit are happening in ways that are environmentally responsible and creating opportunities.

If we are developing and purchasing more, we're going to be making more. And this is one of the best places across the entire economy, in my view, to break the old false choice of climate versus jobs. The last thing I'll mention is that we need to continue to create ways for people to get to where they need to go, without having to drag two tons of metal along with them. That's what transit's about, but that's also what micro mobility is about. And there has been such visionary work in New York that's been applied in small communities too, to make it easier and safe, to get around on foot by bike or by other means.

Andrew Rein:

And thank you all for joining us tonight for a wonderful program. We hope you enjoyed it as much as we did. Want to thank you for your support now and throughout the year. And we look forward to seeing you soon in person.

Walter Harris:

I want to express my thanks to all of you for tonight and for your unwavering support now and in the future. Have a great rest of your evening. I look forward to seeing you all soon in-person. Enjoy the evening.

[END]