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Speaker Quinn unveils job recovery plan

In her State of the City address, Christine Quinn calls for help for high-tech companies, reform of the inspection process and tax relief for small businesses.

By Daniel Massey

City Council Speaker Christine Quinn focused her State of the City address Thursday afternoon on lifting the city out of the economic downturn that has led to the loss of 143,000 jobs in the five boroughs—outlining a plan to cultivate a high-tech industry, revamp the city's inspection process, lower taxes for mom-and-pop shops and better prepare New Yorkers for the job market.

“I want to focus on just one thing, the thing that's on every New Yorker's mind—jobs,” she said.

The speaker unveiled a slew of programs, ranging from initiatives to attract high-tech startups to plans to improve the city's dismal GED system.

“There's work we can do right now so when the storm passes and the economy recovers, New York will be at the forefront of that recovery,” she said.

She announced High Tech Connect, patterned after a successful program in San Diego that pairs budding tech companies with successful entrepreneurs in the industry, and helps them develop business plans and find work space.

Another program aims to boost the city's fledgling renewable energy industry—one of fastest growing parts of the high-tech sector—by helping businesses get the financing they need. David Arena, president of Grubb & Ellis New York, will spearhead a renewable energy investment initiative, which will bring together companies that have financed clean energy businesses elsewhere, like Citibank and New Grid Energy Solutions.

And, via the new Municipal Entrepreneur Testing Service, start-ups will be able to use city buildings to test their products, free of charge.

Ms. Quinn's previous State of the City address focused on challenges facing small businesses, and she touched on the topic again today. She announced a revamping of the city's much-maligned inspection process, saying the city would change the way it thinks about the process.

“We'll educate businesses about their responsibilities instead of looking for an excuse to write ticket,” she said. New legislation will create a Bill of Rights for business owners, detailing rules that inspectors must follow.

And small manufacturers would get help via a \$10 million investment fund that will transform vacant industrial buildings into factories.

On taxes, Ms. Quinn said the increases over the past two years are temporary, and that they will be scaled back once the downturn ends. She said she'll work to win a corporate tax exemption for 19,000 mom-and-pop retailers, including newsstands, hardware stores, flower shops and delis, saving them \$3,400 each per year.

And finally, her speech focused on overhauling the city's GED system—which last year was called “inefficient and extraordinarily dysfunctional” in a Community Service Society report—to better prepare New Yorkers for jobs. The city will unveil a new Web site to centralize test preparation, as well as institute programs to get more New Yorkers to sign up for the test and to help them pass it.