

CAPITAL

Invoking Jacobs, Stringer and Florida talk urban innovation



By Conor Skelding 6:22 p.m. | Jul. 16, 2014

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City comptroller Scott Stringer and urban thought leader Richard Florida gave back-to-back speeches on the future of New York City on Wednesday afternoon.

The pair spoke at Onramps of Opportunity: Building a Creative + Inclusive New York, an event co-sponsored by Stringer's office and N.Y.U.'s School of Professional Studies Initiative for Creativity and Innovation in Cities.

"Creating a city of shared prosperity is going to require all hands on deck," said Stringer. "We won't do it by looking backward to the economies of yesterday. Instead, we need to build what we're calling 'on-ramps of opportunity' to the jobs of tomorrow."

After a wide-reaching speech that quoted E.B. White and touched upon education, transit, and infrastructure, Stringer introduced "my co-partner and friend for this conference, professor Richard Florida."

"In an earlier generation, we had voices like Jane Jacobs who illuminated the importance of American cities. Today, that voice belongs to Richard Florida," Stringer said. "His writings and commentaries have guided my thinking."

Florida is perhaps best known for his writings on the creative class, which initially suggested that creative professionals could help revitalize urban areas, though he later conceded that "[talent clustering provides little in the way of trickle-down benefits](#)."

On Wednesday, Florida discussed the service economy, and advocated for a higher minimum wage.

"We can pay a little bit more for a cup of coffee. We can pay a little bit more for a stay at a hotel. We can pay a little bit more to have our home cleaned. And it's really pennies on the dollar," he said. "So we gotta bite the bullet, and we gotta do that."

Florida called the service economy "the infrastructure which makes the knowledge economy thrive, making it more efficient, making it more skilled, making the people that work in it more engaged."

"The motor force of economic development is exactly what Jane Jacobs told us it was. It was the clustering of diverse groups of people in urban centers," Florida said.

The pair spoke with a handful of reporters before the event.

"I may have some good, big ideas, but I certainly don't have the awareness of the ground-level day-to-day realities of policy and politics that the comptroller and his shop do. So the combination makes a great deal of sense, for both of us," said Florida.

Stringer added, "When you overlay our finance responsibilities and our audit function, and then overlay it with this extraordinary academic perspective on the economy and the vision of cities, this is a collaboration that we would hope for. And that we found. And we're gonna take it very seriously, put a lot of resources behind it."