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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS WITH USCM  
MEMBERS AND CIVIL RIGHTS LEADERS**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Excellent. Everybody good? Okay, well, first I want to thank all of my fellow mayor's and leaders of civil rights organizations who have gathered with us today at Gracie Mansion. This is the beginning of a very powerful partnership between America's mayor's and our strongest voices for fairness and equity that are our civil rights leadership.

We had a conversation that started this morning on the ways we're going to work together to confront some of the challenges we face today in America. And one of the things that was immediately striking as each mayor went around the room and each leader went around the room is how much of a common experience we're having in every part of the country. Cities of all different sizes were facing the same realities. And we are ready to work in common cause to address these issues both locally and in Washington.

I want to give a special thanks to the President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors my colleague Mitch Landrieu, the Mayor of New Orleans for his leadership. He has done extraordinary things in his city including powerful actions for equity and fairness and working with another man who had been a mayor in New Orleans a long time ago – Marc Morial I have the honor of introducing in a moment the President of the Urban League. They had a powerful vision of what this alliance could mean and we talked way back in New Orleans when you gathered the leadership for the Conference of Mayors about making this something permanent and lasting and that we would kick this off here at Gracie Mansion. I also want to give a special thanks to the Mayor of Columbia, South Carolina and the Vice President of the Conference of Mayors Steve Benjamin for his leadership.

Look, the reality is we understand we have to speak with one voice if we're going to have an impact especially given everything we have seen on the national on the national scene. And there is a lot that was discussed today and many different elements of the plan that we'll be working on going forward. And you'll hear more about that from Mayor Landrieu and from President Morial.

I want to talk about one issue we all discussed today that will affect all of us that is a danger to America's cities and is the kind of thing the often gets overlooked and we have to start working on it right now and that is the 2020 census. You'd think something as innocuous as a census couldn't do much harm. Well unfortunately the census is a true measure, whether it's done accurately or not. It becomes the medium through which major decisions are made about money and power. It's as simple as that. The census determines representation in the Congress; the census determines how federal funds will be distributed. The difference can be in the billions. An accurate census can lead to billions of dollars more funding; an inaccurate one can lead the loss of billions of dollars. In the case of New York City that's literally the magnitude we're talking about. In the case of New York State we're talking the potential of losing one or two house seats depending on the outcome of that census.

Now look, no one here would begrudge any outcome if it was based on the honest facts. Our problem is we've seen in previous censuses that there wasn't fair representation because it wasn't the right kind of outreach. And all of our people were not counted. And that was before the atmosphere that has been created by the Trump administration which is likely to discourage many immigrant Americans from coming forward and being counted.

So look, the stakes are very, very high. We are going to start working together starting now to both prepare all of our cities to get the count we actually deserve of our people to work with our civil rights allies to make sure all of their reach comes into play. And that we reach every corner of every neighborhood of every city of America. But we also are going to push the Trump administration despite the tone it set to do the things that are needed to make the census real.

First of all, a director for the U.S. Census needs to be named right away. It will be on us very soon. This work needs to start now to be able to get an accurate count of this entire country in just a few years.

Second, we're going to push the Congress to fully fund the Census outreach operation. Look, if it isn't done right – if we see a purposeful effort to undercount again the ramifications huge for every part of this country but also for any sense of fairness and justice. We've seen a very painful reality of this President trying to undermine the Affordable Care Act by not doing outreach. Well, if they try something like that with the census it literally means disparity will be created in this country based on not even portraying the truth about the American population. And we can't let that happen.

Here in New York I'll just note we're going to be establishing early next year a New York City 2020 census office to get to work on building the framework we need and we will appoint a census coordinator for the city. We're all going to make sure we're ready to get the job done. So this is one example of many things we talked about today and many efforts that we can work on together in this powerful coalition of mayors and civil rights leaders. And it couldn't come at a better time.

With that again it's a special pleasure because he understands a life of a mayor and has done outstanding work as the President of the National Urban League. It is a great joy to have Marc Morial here with us today at Gracie Mansion. Thank you sir, thank you.

[...]

**Question:** I wonder if for any of the mayors who are interested in weighing in – what you think of the apparent reluctance of Congress to ban bump stocks?

**President and CEO of the National Urban League, Marc Morial:** Look, it's a continuation of a reluctance to directly confront the need for gun safety regulatory overhaul, I'll call it. And notwithstanding that we should note that many states have taken steps on their own accord – for example, to require background checks. Some states have taken steps to make it more difficult for domestic abusers to get a gun in their hands, but the mayors I think – and civil rights leaders – have been, have borne great witness to the human pain and suffering of Las Vegas; the human pain and suffering of Mother Emmanuel church; the human pain and suffering of Sandy Hook; the human pain and suffering of Columbine, and Orlando, and San Bernardino. And need I go on? The gun violence is senseless, and the failure of our national government to act is a tragedy, but it's not stopping mayors, community leaders, some at the state level for doing everything they can to ensure that our citizens are safe, and that they take steps. And so I am – I am personally, and the National Urban League is, disappointed and to some extent outraged that Congress would not act to, in fact, ban a device, which is really designed to evade the law – and that's all it is, it's a device to evade the ban on machine guns, so that you can take a semi-automatic weapon and make it a rapid fire. It's disappointing, and it's a tragedy.

**Question:** Can you speak to that issue as well?

**Mayor de Blasio:** I agree with President Morial, and I think the bottom line is if you look at what's happening in this country, a clear majority of Americans would like common sense gun safety legislation. They don't want to see mass killings. They don't want to see assault weapons in the hands of folks who mean to do harm to others. They don't want to see folks with mental health challenges have access to weapons. Lord knows they don't want to see someone on the terror watch list and can't get on a plane still be able to walk into a gun shop and get a weapon. So I think that's the shape of things to come, but it's going to be a lot of work to get to that day in this country. We have to get to the day where the Congress catches up with the views of the American people.

**Question:** So, I'm just wondering whether you see this group as part of the resistance to the Trump administration given the things you've said so far, or do you think there's going to be some bargaining? I mean you describe yourself as bipartisan.

**Mayor Mitch Landrieu:** Well, let me address the – this group has come together as a group of individuals that represent a large number of Americans. In most of the cities in America, 85 percent of the people live now. And we recognize our responsibility to speak to Washington DC about what the executive branch of the federal government can do or the executive branch of Congress when they're doing things that we think will be helpful and things that would be harmful. And we recognize that, and we will do that. And the other reason we're here is because mayors across America – when we act in unity, when we act with our partners – can actually create national policy without the federal government even there. Now, we would prefer that they're there. We think that America works better when the federal, state, and local governments

are working in unison horizontally and vertically, but if they're not going to show up then the mayors of America, which are becoming the cities – the most immediate laboratories of innovation and change – can affect the lives of Americans in a real basis.

Mayors of America do not govern in principle. We govern in reality. We govern in real time. Congress can take two years to do something. We can't. Things we speak of hit the ground the next day, and so one of things that we're doing now is trying to use our collective power to actually impact the ground as we speak. We also, as President M said earlier, one – call the nation into awareness on the blueprint that Congress is setting. For example, on the budget this passed today – that's a hide the ball budget. Nobody knows where those \$1.5 trillion in cuts are specifically coming from because they did not say. But we know that everything rolls downhill, and every one of those cuts that are contemplated in that budget are cuts to things that people on the ground are going to need for health, jobs, safety, etcetera, etcetera, which is why we're calling on Congress to be open, transparent, and at least stand in the purpose that at least they speak. And we're hoping as the budget gets over to the Senate there will be more open, robust, and transparent communication. As we sit here on the issue of the DREAMers, this is a real and imminent problem. You have children in America right now who are afraid to come out of their homes. They're worried if when they come home from school they're parents are still going to be there. This is a major issue that the country, at least it seems to me from all of the polling data that we see, there is a broad consensus in the country that we have to protect the 800,000 DREAMers that are here. We ought to go ahead and do that and get that off of the plate. That's something that Congress – so we will continue to speak that truth to power. But in the meantime we'll continue to organize ourselves on the ground, so that we actually make things happen in the city that mayors have to pay attention to every day, and that's one of the reasons we need the partners who are here with us to help us get better.

**Mayor de Blasio:** Can I just add one quick thing? Rich, to your question – you know, there's different organizations out there that are part of the resistance, but this is something I think that's powerful in a different way because the Conference of Mayors is bipartisan. We're working with the civil rights organizations and the nonprofit organizations. But look at what commonalities have been found between republican and democrat mayors on the issues we're talking about here. Our republican colleagues were deeply involved in the effort to protect the Affordable Care Act. I don't know if you were on some of the conference calls we had for the media where just as many republican mayors speaking with just as much passion about what it would mean to their cities if the Affordable Care Act were lost. The same on the DREAMers – a lot of republican mayors have come forward shoulder to shoulder with democratic mayors and civil rights community calling for the DREAM act federally. So I think you're going to see something that's another element of this moment in history – the resistance organizations, I think, are doing amazing work, but here's another interesting phenomenon. Local governments bonding together with the civil rights community in a structural coalition, but that includes democrats and republicans both on a lot of these issues.

**Question:** Is there any specific type of alternative to state and local tax exemption that you all are looking toward and pushing through?

**Morial:** The state and local tax exemption – I don't want to get too complicated on this – but to eliminate it violates a basic principal of taxation. Why should an American pay a tax on a tax? Why should you pay a tax on a tax you pay to the City of New York or the State of New York?

All that means is that you are being double taxed. And it's surprising to me that anyone that labels themselves as a fiscal conservative would in any way associate themselves with such an absurd idea.

[Laughter]

**Mayor Landrieu:** You know, there are certain – Stephen Benjamin is going to address this, who is our leader on this effort, in a minute. But, you know, in politics people say things that are upside down like less is more. So, on this issue they're trying to say that a tax cut – this is a tax increase in a bill that's designed to cut taxes. This is a tax increase. It's a double taxation as Mayor Morial – so it's, again, another hide-the-ball initiative.

And of course the mayors of America have been standing up on this issue. Our leader has been Vice President Mayor Stephen Benjamin who will address the issue with specificity.

**Mayor Stephen Benjamin:** I'm not sure I can get more specific than Marc Morial's response because that just went to the heart of the matter.

[Laughter]

I think I'd take somewhat of a dispute with just the premise that this something that needs to happen, ought to happen. This is one of the pillars of the very first tax code passed in the United States in 1913. One that you'd find broad and strong support that this concept of double taxation just makes no sense.

And this effort being led amazingly by those who might characterize themselves as fiscal conservatives, to require a family in my community in 29204 in Columbia, South Carolina it's [inaudible] adjusted gross income earning \$48,000 a year, that they ought to pay \$2,000 more in taxes to give tax cuts to the various wealthiest Americans in the entire country, that they ought to not be able to deduct their state and local taxes but corporations are still allowed to do so.

There's something fundamentally unfair about that and we've pulled together a good and strong coalition of Americans against double taxation and we're actively advocating on behalf of working families and middle class families all across this country.

And we believe we're being heard. We're going to keep pushing and we're not going to stop.

**Question:** What can you say about people who are going to be afraid to participate in the census because of fear of being deported or [inaudible] –

**Mayor de Blasio:** Let me start, and I don't know if any of our colleagues want to join in on this one.

But the – look, it's a very real fear. We know right now around the country that there are good, hard-working immigrants who fear any engagement with local officials because of the fear of deportation. And, you know, we in this city and a lot of cities around the country have made really clear we're not going to ask documentation status starting with our police force. And that's been a rule in New York City for decades.

We want and need our fellow New Yorkers – and [inaudible] true in any city – to come forward and engage the police, engage the school system, our public hospitals, etcetera.

But we see real fear out there. So, imagine, if it's sometimes gotten hard to convince someone to convince someone to come get the healthcare they need or get their kid the education they need or come forward to the police if you've been a victim of a crime, well, how on Earth do we expect people in an immigrant community to feel comfortable when the census-taker comes to town? Right.

We've got to make clear that it's safe, that it's a valuable thing to participate in for all members of all communities. We've got to make clear that there's going to be real outreach to truly and accurately count our population.

I mean think about this – we're all very concerned about some of what we've seen around the country in terms of voter suppression. This is an even higher level of voter suppression if you think about it.

This is ignoring the actual number of people in any city or any state, acting like they don't exist if the outreach is not done right, and then lowering the representation level for that state. The suppression happens before people can even get to vote if you have fewer representative that you send to Washington.

So, this is real serious stuff and we're going to have to overcome this atmosphere to get an accurate count and that's something we're all going to have to work on.

Let me give you a little more height. Hold on. Hold on. We've got a little secret trick here. You're about to get – oh, wait, of course it's stuck. You're not going to get more height right now.

[Laughter]

**Interim Chief Operating Officer Sindy Benavides, LULAC:** Sindy Benavides with LULAC. I would say that right now, as we speak with many Latinos across the country and our immigrant community, there is real fear. When you have children who are coming home or going to school and they're so stressed that they're losing their hair, when you have parents that are afraid to send their children to K-12 because they don't know who will knock on their door – that's real fear.

And so when we're looking at the census and given the current political climate and the rhetoric and the target that we feel on our backs, we feel that we will be undercounted and it's because of the current climate. And then I want you to [inaudible] yourself, what about if you live in a rural community? What about if you live in a community that's not accessible?

So, when we're thinking about the census, it is a real challenge. It is a real problem. We are so happy that the mayors are coming together and looking for solutions to make sure that every American in the country is counted.

**Mayor de Blasio:** Alright, thanks everyone.

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