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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT WORLD AIDS DAY  
EVENT, HOLDS IMPROMPTU PRESS GAGGLE**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Thank you all so much for the chance to be with you on this day.

It's an incredibly historic place. It makes us remember – thank you – it makes us remember so many noble struggles, so many struggles that were won. And I ask Wanda to stay a moment because I always say to people, it's very kind when you acknowledge a leader who followed through on her promise, but let's face it, change comes from the grassroots.

[Applause]

Change comes from activists like Wanda. I'd like you to give her the standing ovation, for what she has done and all the activists like her.

[Applause]

So many activists, so many organizations, so many everyday New Yorkers fought for years and years for change. It's the only reason it's happened. And Wanda and her leadership, with all of her colleagues at VOCAL, have all played a very special role. Yes – yes, they have made their voices heard. Let's thank them for that.

[Applause]

Because that's the right thing to do. It's what a democracy is supposed to be made of – that energy, that focus, that urgency. Yes, you're supposed to track down people like me in Albany and anywhere else you could find me. And let us know what you think, because that's how things change – as the essence of how things change. And we are blessed right now in this city to have some elected leaders who understand that, care about that, feel that. One of the reasons we've made the progress we've made is the speaker of our City Council, Melissa Mark-Viverito – I believe is here with us today.

[Applause]

One of the reasons we've made progress is our Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer. Let's thank her.

[Applause]

One of the reasons we've made progress is Council Member Corey Johnson. Let's thank him.

[Applause]

This is a day that means many things to us. It is by definition, a day of taking stock. It is by definition, a day of recommitting ourselves to a struggle that continues. It's also a day of remembrance – a day of pain when you think of people who you've lost. And so many people here in this room have felt this epidemic in such personal terms. You can think right now of family and friends and fellow activists who we've lost along the way. This day is for them but not in mourning alone – a celebration of them. And in doing that thing that we should always do for those we've lost, living as they would have us live.

[Applause]

Remaining active and focused as they would have us be. For years I've had the honor of working shoulder to shoulder with so many people, who have fought this epidemic. It's been one of the things that's defined so many of our lifetimes. I remember, just as I was finishing my years as an undergraduate at NYU, the first time someone died in one of the dormitories, no one knew what it was. And there was a mystery. There was a fear. There was a confusion – 1983. And this has framed so many of our lives – this fight – again, such a horrible enemy. But again, it's a reminder of the need to constantly recommit ourselves. I worked with people, like so many of you did, who showed me something about this fight. I worked in my time around the City Council with Phil Reed – may he rest in peace.

[Applause]

And he was one of the leaders who was HIV positive. He showed us that you could be HIV positive and continue your life and continue the fight. Someone who showed us something we needed to learn.

I'm proud to borrow from his lessons as so many here today are borrowing from the lessons of good people we knew. Now, some things have changed. One thing that's changed is that HIV and AIDS are not getting the headlines and the focus that they once did. But it does not make it any less a problem that you don't see it on the front page. It's still a tragically large problem – 35 million people worldwide with HIV, over 1.2 million in the United States of America alone.

So we have to keep this a priority. We have to keep fighting. Now New York City has a special responsibility because we've always been at the core of this crisis. Astounding figure – that I think we all know emotionally but sometimes it's hard to take in this number – that we have lost in these years over 100,000 of our fellow New Yorkers – an astounding reality. And here, this very day, in our city – over 100,000 people living with HIV. We've been at the forefront of the crisis. We've also been at the forefront of the solution, not just in terms of the activism – which focused the attention of the nation and the world and led to change, but what we've done medically, what we've done in terms of reaching people at their community, what our hospitals have done, what our medical schools have done in research. This has been a place that has felt this crisis so deeply and a place that has tried to respond with all we have and now we will go farther because there's more to do. Look, we're going to, as with any other crisis, have things that we see that give us a sense of progress and a sense of hope, and we're going to have moments of realization that there's a long road ahead. So I can keep both those thoughts in mind, as I know all of you can.

Health department of New York City is announcing today that new HIV diagnoses in this city are at a historic low. And that is something to be proud of.

[Applause]

That is something to be so proud of, and so many people here today have contributed to that progress. And yet, a long fight ahead and a particularly tough fight because we know this disease, particularly, is afflicting our brothers and sisters who are African-American, who are Latino, who are LGBT. So, we understand this is a

priority. Yes, yes something we had to do – something we had to do was the 30 percent rent cap. That was necessary as a precondition for all other progress.

[Applause]

And I want to thank all of you for helping us get there. I want to thank Steve Banks for his great role in both achieving that and now implementing it so more people are reached. I want to thank Dan Tietz, the director of HASA.

[Applause]

Because with their good work – it's one thing to change a law, but then you have to make it real – and with their good work, over 10,000 New Yorkers with AIDS no longer forced to decide between paying the rent or buying medicine.

[Applause]

Let me offer one – one example of one New Yorker that really says it all. Jim Lister, HIV positive since 1989. He worked – he worked in his catering business until he couldn't because of AIDS. Then for 11 years, he got disability payments. It took three quarters of the disability payments just to pay his rent. It left him with less than \$11 dollars a day for everything else in his life – \$11 dollars a day in New York City for all the other expenses in his life. He couldn't afford clothing. He couldn't afford a whole host of basics. Jim's one of the people – like so many of you – Jim's one of the people that took that crisis and turned it into action. He used his own example to ensure that change would come for so many. It's because Jim stood up – so many stood up – that we have the rent cap.

[Applause]

And Jim is now able to stay in his home of 35 years and actually have enough money to get by. That's what it means in human terms. He is living proof of something Harvey Milk said. It was a promise to all of us – "Hope will never be silent." Hope will never be silent, and that's what you've all proven. And your voices have reached Albany and I commend Governor Cuomo for last June, setting the goal of ending the AIDS epidemic by 2020.

[Applause]

And the task force is being put together to achieve this. And I want to thank so many of you who are part of that effort because this is the kind of goal that galvanizes us. And we will be working with community leaders. We will be working with health care professionals – everyone who has something to offer in that fight to achieve that goal. And we know there's so many elements to making people's lives better, to helping them on their path to strength. And it still keeps coming back over and over again to affordable housing. And we've got a lot more to do to make sure that everyone challenged with this disease has the housing they deserve. That will be our focus, always. And in this same vein of recognizing our progress and yet feeling the need to keep fighting on. We can stock of the fact that some things have changed medically that are powerful and positive. We have good therapies – better therapies than ever before. But we still have people who don't learn the reality of their own health, who don't learn whether they are even HIV positive. We still have more to do and you're going to see a campaign from this city called NY Knows. It will encourage all sexually active New Yorkers between the ages of 13 and 64, to get tested – to do that most fundamental thing and get tested.

[Applause]

We're going to make it easier than ever for people who never got tested to have that chance. Offices and programs starting in the Bronx and Brooklyn are going to expand out to all five boroughs. We want this to be something that people know is there for them. You know what? There's often been fear about the HIV test. Let's face it. There's been a sense of pause when people even think of the notion of getting the test – a reluctance. They stand back from it. But I'll tell you, the only HIV test to fear is the one you don't take.

[Applause]

Because if you don't know, you can't get the help you deserve. Our job is to help everyone know that they can get the help, but first they have to take a step and learn what their own reality is so we can all be there for them. That is some of the work ahead that we need all of you to help us achieve.

Well, brothers and sisters, I just want to thank you. Thank you for gathering. Thank you for strengthening each other. Thank you for what you've done over these years. Thank you for what you will do in the years ahead. I want to say a special thank you and congratulations to all the honorees today, who have done so much.

And now, I get the honor of introducing someone very special. You know, the notion of what you can do through public health efforts to educate, to organize people, to bring them to help they never knew was there for them – it can change the whole course of things if you have the right public health leaders. We saw that in these last weeks where our city was faced with something we never could have anticipated. With Ebola reaching this city, we saw our health commissioner as a voice of conscience, and reason, and clarity, and science – not only for the people of New York City, but for the people of this nation. And I'd like to also take stock of the fact that when Ebola did come to this city, our people reacted with calm and clarity, with incredible strength and maturity in the face of something we had never known before – something that was fearful but something people believed could be overcome. That belief that we can overcome is so crucial to all human endeavors. We got some of that strength because our health commissioner gave us the facts and a clear, powerful voice that gave people hope. It's my pleasure to introduce her to you today – ladies and gentlemen, Dr. Mary Bassett.

[...]

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** So, I just want to say at the outset – I think the president is right to convene a national discussion. We have a challenge right now that we have to face head on. And this country right now is in pain. We've lost so many young men of color – young men who should still be alive and with us today – and it's clawing at us. It's clawing at people of all backgrounds. There's a sense that something is wrong in this country that's going unaddressed, and I think the president is doing the right thing to say we have to come together right now and we have to take responsibility for it. We know these problems are based in not just decades, but centuries of racism, but we have to take responsibility. That's what our generation has to resolve. We have to find a way to end this cycle. And I think it's a somber moment, but a purposeful moment. So I look forward to gathering with the other leaders from around the country and each offering what we are going to do, which we are doing a lot right now in this city, but we have more to do. We're retraining our police. We're strengthening our oversight mechanisms like the CCRB and the inspector general. We're reducing marijuana arrests. We're moving towards body cameras. There's so many things we have to do, but it's still just the beginning. And it's time for purposefulness in this nation. We have to see a day when this is no longer a commonality that these tragedies will occur. So we have to find a day when it will just no longer be – and that's our obligation.

**Question:** Mayor, are you worried about the possibility that we could see a Ferguson-type situation on Staten Island when the grand jury decision comes?

**Mayor:** I think we – I think every place is different, every situation is different. I think we have to address the underlying reality – I think that's the most important thing to do right now. I think that's what people all over the city, again, of all backgrounds are looking for – actual solutions so that these tragedies won't keep happening. So that's where my focus is.

**Question:** Mayor, can you talk about your plans to introduce a horse-carriage ban bill?

**Mayor:** Just what I've said all along – that we think it's time to end horse carriages in the city and we're going to act on it.

**Phil:** One more question on Ferguson.

**Mayor:** Or –

**Phil:** Sorry. All right –

**Question:** What do you hope to accomplish in Washington today?

**Mayor:** Look, I think – one – it's very important to get with other leaders to see what's working and what we can learn from. Again, this is a moment where everyone is seeking solutions and they can't be solutions too far off in the future. We need things that will start to change the dynamics right now. So, gathering with civil rights leaders, gathering with local leaders to find out what we can do now to end this scourge. And I think, obviously, the federal government can help us in a variety of ways, including in getting at some of the root causes of some of the division in our society. And I talked last year about the tale of two cities – the tale of two cities means many things. It also refers to a racial divide that we still experience that can be addressed by more fairness and better education, by more jobs – things that really matter at the grassroots. So, hopefully we can find a renewed federal partnership to do that.

**Phil:** Thank you, guys.

**Mayor:** Thanks, guys.

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