

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO, FIRST LADY MCCRAY DELIVER REMARKS
AT THE PUERTO RICAN HERITAGE RECEPTION**

First Lady Chirlane McCray: Good afternoon, everyone. *Hola, buenas tardes.* I can't hear you. C'mon – *hola* –

[Cheers]

That's a little better. Now, anyone who knows me well knows that Puerto Rico holds a special place *en mi corazon*. When Bill and I started dating our first travels, where to Ponce, Luquillo, Utuado, and we love the beauty of the island. We love the mofongo. But, most of all, we fell in love with *la gente* – with the people, the rhythm, and the passion for [inaudible]. So much of New York City's culture, New York City's personality and strength can be traced back to the island and our Puerto Rican community.

[Inaudible] We wait for the train. We need that strength now more than ever as we recover from this pandemic. So, what is strength? Sometimes being strong means getting up and going to work when you don't want to. Sometimes being strong means getting vaccinated, even though you're afraid. Sometimes being strong means having the courage to talk to someone when you might be experiencing anxiety, or depression, or drinking a little bit too much beer. Now, anyone can reach out to a grandparent, a friend, a priest, and anyone can always speak to a trained counselor in New York City for free, in confidence. Someone who speaks your language and listens with compassion. All you have to do is call 1-8-8-8-N-Y-C-W-E-L-L. Can you please say that number with me?

Audience: 1-8-8-8-N-Y-C-W-E-L-L –

First Lady McCray: You've got to do a little better than that. All right –

Audience: 1-8-8-8-N-Y-C-W-E-L-L –

First Lady McCray: Much better, but going to ask you to do it one more time –

Audience: 1-8-8-8-N-Y-C-W-E-L-L –

First Lady McCray: Much better. I want you to remember that number, because it is a sign of strength to ask for help if you need it. And you can call for a loved one, someone, you know, close to you, a child, a parent, a spouse. If our communities are to come back stronger, we need everyone to be healthy in mind and body.

Now, I want to introduce a man who has done an incredible job of making sure every New Yorker has health care, that includes mental health care, through our NYC Care program. He's also my traveling partner and I know he can put down some mofongo.

[First Lady McCray speaks in Spanish]

Our mayor, Bill de Blasio –

Mayor Bill de Blasio: *Muchisimas gracias a todos.* Everyone, it is a joy to be back together, isn't it? This is the beginning – the beginning of things getting better and better in this city, opening up, getting back together. This is the beginning of the Summer of New York City.

[Applause]

Now, I'm going to talk about this community in a moment, but I will divulge to you for the first time ever that when Chirlane and I went to Puerto Rico in 1992, we engaged in a very controversial exercise. It was our personal mofongo tour of Puerto Rico, comparing the different kinds of mofongo in the different parts of Puerto Rico, the different toppings you could have on your mofongo. I ate a whole lot of mofongo and I was a better person for it. Mofongo is a health food, I want you to know that. Don't listen to the doctors, okay?

[Laughter]

Everyone, we have some great guests with us. We are so appreciative that folks are here to celebrate the Puerto Rican community and all it means to this city, and especially what it has meant during this crisis we faced together. I want to thank those gathered with me on this stage – Council Member Diana Ayala, former Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Senator Brian Benjamin, and Borough President Gale Brewer. And a special thanks to two members of my administration here – our Commissioner for Community Affairs Roberto Perez, and our Director of the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice Marco Soler. Also, representing the City of New York, the NYPD and the amazing band, let's thank them.

[Applause]

So, here at La Marqueta, where is there a better place in New York City? This is the ultimate place to feel the spirit of the Puerto Rican community and all it has meant. This place has been a part of the heart and soul of the community from 1936 until now, just as the community was starting to grow and as it flourished in this city. We have to understand that this city went through the greatest in our history. Last year and this year, the greatest crisis in our history. Why did we make it through? Why did we persevere? Because of our people. Because our people are strong. And the Puerto Rican people are the essence of New York City. Hundreds of thousands of people who kept this city going, no matter what.

[Applause]

I don't need to tell you a Puerto Rico has been through so much itself lately. COVID, and the earthquakes, and Hurricane Maria – too much for one island to bear and yet the Puerto Rican people thought through. And we, as New Yorker said, we needed to be there for Puerto Rico no matter what. And we sent our employees to help, and we sent medicine, and we sent support, and we said we will be with Puerto Rico no matter what and always – *siempre*.

So, today, we celebrate that amazing feeling when you go through hell and you come out the other side, that's what we've done together. We've proven more than we ever knew what we meant to each other, what we could do for each other. And now, you see New York City coming back to life. You see East Harlem coming back to life. You see neighborhoods all over the city, the energy, the spirit. And what is abundantly clear is there's no stopping New York City, never. There is no stopping New York City. And we knew a long time ago, there's no stopping Puerto Rico. There's no stopping the Puerto Rican community of New York City. *Que viva Puerto Rico*.

Now, I'm going to tell you a quick little story. I love this, and it's going to lead into our honoree. And we could – literally, we could not have a better honoree today to celebrate this community and all it means not just to the city, but to this country. COVID hits, and there's confusion, and there's fear, and there's concern. And then we get the vaccine and there's confusion about the vaccine. And the very thing that we need to save us, people are hesitant about. And I don't blame a single person. So much was happening. We've been through so much. People had fears that they needed answered, concerns. They needed to have a voice to be there for them to see them through. We knew in the Latino communities of this city, this was a real need. And if we had ignored the fear or the confusion, we wouldn't have been serving people. Someone had to answer that. We tried as the City of New York in many, many ways, but we needed some friends to help us. And we needed some voices that people would hear and feel deeply.

So, a few months ago, the idea came together to put out videos that would reassure, that would answer the questions and concerns, that would spread truth. And one of the great voices in these videos is the Executive Vice President and Chief Medical Officer at Wyckoff Heights Medical Center in Brooklyn. He does great things for this city. I want to first thank him. He happens to be related to our honoree, but I want to thank Gustavo Del Toro for all he has done for this city.

[Applause]

And the video spoke with a truth and an honesty that helped people to feel better, to feel clear, to come forward and get to a vaccine, to know the vaccine was safe, and free, and effective. It helped – hold on, only takes a second. You can keep talking over it, but I'm going to give it a second. Keep talking – okay. It helped that Dr. Del Toro had very, very powerful things to say as a medical doctor. And it helped that one of the hosts of the videos was Zoe Saldana, that never hurts – an incredible actress and someone of incredible social conscience. But the person who brought this all together as our honoree. And he has acted out of his concern for his community he loves, and this city he loves, and did something great for this country in the process too, because by spreading the truth back the vaccine, by helping people to understand what works with the vaccine, we are saving lives and he has helped to save lives. He has had an amazing career, but I will say, personally – I could cite some accolades, but I'm going to make my own personal accolade. I was mesmerized – this is my word – mesmerized by his performance in the

movie *Traffic*, one of the great hero or antihero portrayals of our time for which he won an Academy Award. He later won a Palm Door, the best actor award at the Cannes Film Festival for his portrayal of Che Guevara. Whatever he does, he leaves an incredible imprint. And you see his performance and you can't forget it.

He is a proud son of Puerto Rico who studied acting right here in New York City. If you're born in Puerto Rico and educated in New York City, that makes you about as good a human being as you can be. And so, I have a proclamation now that we'll present as we bring them on stage. Ladies and gentlemen, my pleasure to introduce to you Benicio Del Toro.
[Cheers]

I'm going to read one part of this. Benicio, I don't need to go over all the wonderful things about you. The world knows what you've contributed as an actor and the things you're doing to help people today. I just want to tell you the last line, because it's my favorite line. It says – now, I, Bill de Blasio, Mayor of the City of New York do hereby proclaim Thursday, June 24th, 2021 as Benicio Del Toro Day in New York City.

[Cheers]

The floor is yours.

[...]

Mayor: The NYPD salsa band has been officially endorsed by Benicio Del Toro. It's a big moment, Chief. That's a big endorsement.

Everybody, look, how wonderful to have a proud son of this community go so far, an actor celebrated around the world. But listen to the humility in his voice when he talks about the generations that came before and he talks about what he wants to do to help people here and now through this crisis. I personally found that beautiful and moving. Let's thank Benicio Del Toro.

[Applause]

Amen. Everybody, beginning of an amazing summer together. And this is going to be a year to remember, a summer to remember. The Summer of New York City, the beginning of the greatest comeback in the history of New York City. And you're going to be the ones to make it happen. Congratulations to everyone. Have a beautiful day. And *que viva Puerto Rico*.

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