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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT UNITED STATES  
CONFERENCE OF MAYORS PLENARY PANEL**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Thank you so much, everyone. It's such a pleasure to be here with colleagues, and to – every time I come here, I have to tell you, I'll tell you – here, the extraordinary things each and every one of you are doing – I hope you feel what I feel when you come here. You get a sense of inspiration and energy from your fellow mayors, who in so many cases, are making things happen against all the odds. So I just want to thank everyone for being a part of this meeting.

Now, as to our leader, I always try my best with the president of this great conference, Mayor Kevin Johnson, not to refer to his previous career, because if you were to refer to it, you might say he is our point guard, and he dishes the ball generously to his fellow mayors – but I won't do that. I won't do that. But Mayor Johnson has been a great friend, and a great partner in the work we're doing, talking about the issues that really matter in this country today. Under his leadership, the Conference of Mayors is more crucial to that debate than ever. I also want to thank you, mayor, for bringing together these leaders of the federal government, who actually understand our lives and our work. And I have to tell you, I hope you've had the experience I have had, when I call Secretary Castro, or Secretary Fox, or Secretary Vilsack, or Director Abramson, you don't need to translate to them the issues you're dealing with. You don't need to explain to them the challenges and the pressures of what's going on in your city. It is so refreshing to talk to federal government leaders who instantly understand what we are facing, and actually want to creatively help us get to a solution. And I have to say, the president did us all a great service by choosing these leaders for the cabinet. It's made a huge difference.

And speaking of the president, I think the State of the Union speech was one of the clearest roadmaps we have heard in this country in recent years, as to how we address the underlying challenges we face, particularly when it comes to the crucial issue of income inequality, which I believe is the issue of our times, and which we, as mayors, experience and understand so directly, so personally.

Every time I have gathered with you, my colleagues, I have heard such powerful stories of what you see in your cities in terms of an economy that unfortunately is still not serving so many of our people, and what the decline of the middle class has meant; what it has meant for so many families, that they don't have the assurance that the next generation will do better than the current one; what income inequality has meant in terms of our ability to move our cities forward. We understand from the grassroots that if we don't address income inequality head on, we can't progress as cities, we can't progress as a nation. President Obama laid out, I thought, an extraordinarily comprehensive vision of the things that would turn this crisis around, that would reenergize our economy, that would create opportunity and fairness again, that would really underlie a positive future for this country.

And it's up to us now, I believe, to take the momentum created by the president's vision, and deepen it in the dialogue all over this country – deepen it, of course, by action, which is what we do by nature. To the credit of mayors, we are first and foremost interested in action that has tangible results at the local level. But we also

have voices that matter deeply in the national discussion, and certainly in the discussions in our states and in our metropolitan areas. And I think we have to use those voices even more incessantly and intensely in the years 2015 and 2016, because this time, there will be a fundamental debate on the question of income inequality.

You can see the tea leaves all over now. The president's speech, I think, will be the frame that will constantly be referenced, not only in the presidential election to come, but in the elections for Senate and Congress, and at all levels. You see candidates in both parties talking more and more about the challenge of income inequality and the lack of opportunity, and the concern that people have in the middle class that they're slipping out of the middle class, and certainly the concern that so many have who have not yet reached the middle class, that it may be out of reach.

These issues have now found their moment. And this conversation, done right, is going to lead us somewhere better. This conversation, if it's prosecuted properly, will lead to actual substantive changes of the types that the secretaries were talking about, that will affect our work day to day. But I think, for us, the price of admission is we have to demand that this be the core of the debate going forward. And I think we have extraordinary legitimacy in this discussion as mayors. I think that the – those who seek higher office, federal office, all over this country need to be asked – at the beginning of each election and throughout – how they will address income inequality, how they will address the opportunity gap, how they respond to the blueprint put forward by the president. I think with that simple frame, we have the opportunity to go a lot farther in the next few years than we have in the past.

Now, I won't go into an exhaustive explanation of the reality. I think we all know it from our day to day work. It takes a lot of forms. Some of the statistics we've seen recently, both in terms of the United States and globally, are more striking than ever. One recent study by the University of California – in the United States today, the top 0.1 percent of the population hold 22 percent of the nation's wealth. This is an example of a change – it was not this way when most of us were born. It was not this way when this nation was thriving for decades of growth and strength and inclusion. It's something we have to actively address with a series of policies – again, so powerfully displayed in the president's remarks.

Now, what we have in the way of legitimacy is not only the respect that people all over this country have for the leadership role that mayors play – not only the fact that we are closest to the ground and can speak to people's lives, as chief executives who actually deal each and every day with the constituents they serve, and address the problems, because they are immediate and real to us – we also, in so many parts of this country, have been leading the way on these kinds of changes at the local level, even when there wasn't federal or state support. So many cities around this country are actually grappling with these issues head on.

I was talking to my colleague and friend from Oklahoma City about what Oklahoma has done on early childhood education. It's been true in other parts of the country as well – even if federal and state governments haven't recognized the transcendent impact of early childhood education, city governments – in many cases – found a way to move forward. What cities have done on paid sick leave and other benefits that help keep families whole, that help avoid economic disruption; what cities are doing on broadband access to ensure, in a new economy, that there's actually economic opportunity for all – we have the legitimacy of action. We have the legitimacy, certainly, on an issue so central to people all over the country – what will our minimum wage be. We have the legitimacy of so many cities around this country having pushed farther – certainly well beyond what the federal government has done, well beyond what many state governments have done – recognizing the actual wages necessary to feed a family today.

This is why we have a special voice that needs to be heard in 2015 and 2016. This is why our Cities of Opportunity Task Force is working intensely to come out with some of the ideas, and some of the examples of what cities can achieve that we hope will have a big impact on the debate to come.

By the way, if ever in attempting to make this case, the argument is thrown back that somehow, we're out of touch with the mood of the nation – because I think there's a lot of prognostication and punditry that suggests somehow, the people aren't interested in this issue. The fact is, whenever you look at a chance for the people to speak through the most obvious tool the people have – when there's a referendum on the ballot – the evidence is overwhelming that people all over the country – red states, blue states, every region – want to address the issues of income inequality. There were four states and cities that had paid sick leave on the ballot in November. It passed overwhelmingly in all four. There were five states that had increases in the minimum wage on their ballots, including and mainly, Republican-led states and those ballot measures passed. When the people are asked, do they want new policies to address our obvious economic reality? They say yes, overwhelmingly, and we need to press the advantage because of that.

Now, just a couple other quick points because at the same time as we're addressing these core economic realities, we know from our own work the kinds of policies that would be transcendent for us. Another great example is what the president has put forward on immigration reform. I think there's a broad sense among mayors all over this country – again, all regions, all parties – because in our cities, we see the emerging America. And we see the impact of immigration, both from those who are documented and those who are undocumented, and we understand the need for comprehensive immigration reform. We live it. We know what it would mean for people who we see every day in our cities. The president, in the absence of congressional action, I think has done exactly the right thing with a forceful executive action. And it's important that we support it. This is one of those moments to be – to stand to be counted because I believe, that as the executive action moves forward, it will not only serve so many people in need in our cities, it will continue to make the obvious case why we need a bigger comprehensive action by the Congress.

Now, we gathered a number of mayors in New York City in December to start consistent organizing work among cities to support the executive action. We came up with a war room concept. We're going to work with mayors all over the country to help each other implement the executive action on the ground and to press members of the House and Senate in our areas to support comprehensive reform. We have the power to do that. And we have the power also, to support our president – who, as we all know, is under attack on this issue. Just after this session, right outside the door, I'd like welcome all my colleague mayors to join, if you can. We're going to have a press conference announcing that over 30 of us have joined together in defense of the president – put together a joint amicus brief, which we'll file shortly, to answer a court challenge that has been put forward to the executive action. We think it is crucial that when the administration is trying to help us address these core issues, and they come under attack, that mayors stand up and say, no, in fact, the executive action will help our people and we think it's crucial to move forward. So if you're able, join us in a few minutes, right after this session for that press conference. And we intend to help organize, together, a series of actions around the country to support the president on this.

One more point, and it's something so near and dear to all of us – what Director Abramson referenced before – transportation bill. In May – a crucial moment for all of us, when the previous transportation authorization ends and the fate of so much of what matters to our people hangs in the balance. One of the things that we talked about, as Mayor Johnson mentioned, with our Cities of Opportunities Task Force – is how to band together to press the Congress for fairness in transportation funding for our cities; fairness for a focus on mass transit that we all know is crucial for our economies, for any possibility of an inclusive economy, and for the future of our environment and our earth. We have a chance in these next few months, to turn the tide and create the kind of momentum that will get us a transportation bill that is more fair to all of us.

We are going to be working together on this when the Conference of Mayors meets in New York City next month. In March, we'll be in Boston for the next meeting of the Cities of Opportunity Task Force. We need, together, to create a momentum around this issue. And I think, as this crucial point that Jerry Abramson made – it's not just our ability to turn to the congress members who represent our cities per se, it is our ability to turn to the congress members who represent our entire metropolitan area, who represent our states as a whole – the senators from our states – and say, with one voice, that things like the transportation bill should transcend

politics. They're about our economic stability and our economic future. I believe, working together with our business communities, working together with our labor communities, with civic organizations, we can create a critical mass. And again, I think at this moment, the people are more receptive than ever to the kind of investments that will move the country forward. We, as mayors, have the ability – I think – to spark a different discussion locally. And we all know there will be some members of the House and Senate who may be a bit hesitant or may have ideological reasons for standing apart. I think, when they feel the full weight of our ability to crystalize support in our metropolitan areas, and point out that our metropolitan areas can't possibly thrive and compete going forward without proper transportation funding, I think we can make a world of difference.

And I'll conclude by saying this, you know, we – all over our cities in the last week or two – celebrated the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. We celebrated what he meant to this nation. We thought, obviously, about his achievements and the movement he helped to build, in terms of civil rights. But we all know that Dr. King was a passionate voice for economic fairness, as well. And I often think, if Dr. King were here today, he would be undoubtedly struck, favorably, by some of the progress that's been made in this society, in terms of inclusion, by some of the leadership that has developed around the country. And at the same time, I am certain Dr. King would look, with some shock and some pain, at how deep income inequality is in this country and how, in fact, we have not progressed on that front. It's the issue of our times. And we, as leaders, have a particular ability to break through on this issue in the here and now. We have an opportunity to take the concept of fairness and equality and freedom, and turn it into the kind of actual tools, actual policies that will uplift our people. This is the moment to break through, and I think the mayors of this country will be the leading edge in that effort toward greater fairness. I want to thank you all for what you do, every day. It is an honor to be your colleague, but I especially want to thank you for what you can do, raising your voices to make some of these changes for a fairer America. Thank you and God bless you.

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