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RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT RENT REGULATION RALLY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Brothers and sisters, you are here for a noble cause. You are here to protect this city we love [inaudible] a city for everyone! We love New York City –

Unknown: We love you!

Mayor: – because it is for everyone. It has always been for everyone. But for the first time in our history, that truth is now threatened. For the first time in our history, there are too many people who cannot find a place to live in this city – people being pushed out of this city permanently, unable to come back – people being pushed out of the neighborhoods they love, the neighborhoods they helped to build.

Unknown: That's right!

Mayor: And we will not stand for it, will we?

Audience: No!

[Applause]

Mayor: Brothers and sisters, this is a chance. This is a chance to make history – to end this painful reality of all our fellow New Yorkers having to worry whether they can still live in the city they love. We get to be actors in this history. And I want to thank you all for standing up.

Now, let's be clear –

Unknown: Thank you, Bill! Thank you, Bill!

Mayor: Thank you, brother!

We only have – let's be clear – we only have a little more than a week – a little more than a week – before this decision happens that will affect millions. Let's be clear what's happening – in the next two weeks in Albany, a decision that will affect well over 2 million New Yorkers who live in over a million apartments. This is the magnitude of what we face. And Albany – Albany better be listening.

Audience: Yeah!

Mayor: Because this will never be forgotten. What they do will never be forgotten.

If they do the right thing, they will help to keep this a city for all.

If they do the wrong thing, they will damn thousands and thousands of New Yorkers to be displaced and not have an affordable place to live.

Let's be clear – let's be clear what this means. Brothers and sisters, we have a chance, but we have to act now, because the fate of over 2 million people hangs in the balance.

Let's be clear – if Albany chooses, it is in their power to end rent regulation.

Unknown: That's right!

Mayor: Let's be clear – to end it, what would that mean? That would mean over 2 million people unprotected.

So we've got to begin at the beginning here. We have to realize that if people in Albany do the wrong thing, literally every rent regulated unit in this city would revert to the market and hundreds of thousands of people would be defenseless. That's how dire it is. And that's how serious it is.

Now, we have to say thank you to the Assembly because the Assembly stood up. The Assembly did the right thing.

[Applause]

[Cheers]

The Assembly acted. And we have to say thank you to Keith Wright as the housing chair, because he stood up and he acted.

[Applause]

[Cheers]

But I – I don't even believe on one level – I can't even take in the notion that just days away from this decision, there are still people in Albany talking about ending rent regulation. That is a true and painful statement. And there are people in Albany in a very satisfied manner saying, well, why don't we just continue it the way it is, even though we've lost hundreds of thousands of units in the last two decades?

Brothers and sisters, listen to this – we have lost hundreds of thousands of affordable units in the last two decades. Everyone here has experienced it. Albany didn't act when they needed to. They watched. They watched as we lost those units.

But now it is decision time. They have a chance to actually strengthen rent regulation, to give it the teeth, to give it the power to protect these 2 million-plus New Yorkers.

Do we demand that it be strengthened now?

Audience: Yeah!

Mayor: Do we demand that 2 million New Yorkers be protected?

Audience: Yeah!

Mayor: Now, we are blessed to have so many good friends and allies here. I want to just take a moment, because you've got to take stock of the people doing the right thing. You've got to take stock of that.

Some of them are men of the cloth, and I want to thank my good friend, Reverend Herbert Daughtry, who's always been a leader for working people.

[Applause]

And then some of them are elected officials. Now, I've mentioned our chair, Keith Wright – thank you for your leadership – we need it.

[Cheers]

[Applause]

He's been there for us for decades – Congressman Charlie Rangel, thank you for your leadership.

[Cheers]

[Applause]

Comptroller Scott Stringer, thank you for your leadership.

[Cheers]

[Applause]

Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, thank you for your leadership.

[Cheers]
[Applause]

But wait, there's more!

Unknown: We love you, Bill!

Mayor: I see we've been joined by a young lady who has been known for standing up for rights over and over again – the head of the NAACP of New York State, Hazel Dukes – we thank you.

[Cheers]
[Applause]

We thank Council Member Inez Dickens.

[Cheers]
[Applause]

We thank Assembly Member Brian Kavanagh.

[Cheers]
[Applause]

We thank Assembly Member Guillermo Linares.

[Cheers]
[Applause]

We thank Council Member Ben Kallos.

[Cheers]
[Applause]

Did I get all the elected officials? Did I get all the clergy?

Oh – I know you. Why, here's an activist too! He's been known from time to time to speak up on issues – let's thank him for standing up for fairness for the people of this city – Reverend Al Sharpton, thank you.

[Cheers]
[Applause]

Now, I want to be very clear about what we need for our city. I want to be very, very clear, because I've talked to you many times about the tale of two cities. I've talked to you about the inequality crisis gripping this city. And we have a lot more to do if we're going to address it, if we're going to really make sure this is a city for everyone, a city of fairness, a city of inclusion.

Because right now in this city, over 56 percent of New Yorkers are struggling to pay the rent. 56 percent of New Yorkers are quote-unquote "rent burdened." That is not a city that is as strong and fair and inclusive as it needs to be. It's just not. And Albany, with the stroke of a pen – with the stroke of a pen – could fix that or could make it so much worse.

Unknown: Fix it, Bill!

Mayor: So let's be clear – we've seen before our very eyes the loss of affordable housing. We've seen neighborhoods transformed. And what we've been most pained by is so many of our neighbors, so many of our friends, so many of our family members who were displaced – and that's not what New York City's been about.

We've been a place of community and neighborhood and family – and that is being undermined because the laws aren't working for us.

So it's time for Albany to hear it. And if anyone in Albany says, well, wait a minute, New York City, why don't you do something about the problem? Let's talk about what we're doing here in New York City.

We have a plan to create and preserve 200,000 units of affordable housing in this city – that’s our plan.

[Cheers]
[Applause]

Albany didn’t create it. We created it – the largest affordable housing plan in the history of any city in the United States of America. That’s what you demanded. That’s what we have produced.

Unknown: That’s right!

Mayor: We know affordable housing is synonymous with the New York City Housing Authority. And one of the most precious assets we have is the buildings that are part of NYCHA. We know we have to protect the over 400,000 people who live in public housing – what is more fundamental to protecting affordable housing? Which is why this city – not Albany, not Washington – this city came up with a plan to protect the future of NYCHA and make sure those 400,000 people live in decent, affordable housing for the long run.

We are stepping up here in New York City. We are doing our share.

And by the way, have we failed to notice that there are some unscrupulous actors in each neighborhood, some bad landlords who take advantage of working people and poor people, and try and displace them using every means, including illegal means?

[Cheers]

We see it. And so, this city – in our budget, we are committing \$36 million dollars to legal services to defend –

[Cheers]
[Applause]

– to defend tenants who are being assaulted by unscrupulous landlords.

All of these things the city of New York is doing to address this crisis – and we are proud of each and every one of these steps.

But now, our friends in Albany need to be held to count. It’s decision time. It’s on them. Let’s be clear, brothers and sisters, it’s on them to make the right decision.

What do we need them to do?

We need them to end vacancy decontrol now!

[Cheers]
[Applause]

Landlords should not be able to take an affordable apartment and turn it into a luxury apartment just because the rent hits a certain level.

Unknown: Tell it! Tell them!

[Cheers]
[Applause]

Mayor: We can’t live with that.

Unknown: Talk about it, baby!

Unknown: School them fools!

Mayor: It’s time to get rid of the vacancy bonus for landlords!

[Cheers]
[Applause]

Why should a landlord be able to raise the rent 20 percent just because the apartment turned over? That's just another trick to take affordable units and make them unaffordable for the people of this city.

It's time to say no to the idea that a landlord can hike up the rent permanently just because they made an improvement. If they make an improvement, they can charge just the amount of money it took to make that improvement, but not make it a permanent windfall for the landlord!

[Cheers]
[Applause]

Now, I'm going to finish with this – and I do want to say a few words en Español, but before I do – let's get it straight. We have – we have just over a week for these decisions that'll affect over 2 million people.

The Assembly has acted and the Assembly has done the right thing.

What does that leave, brothers and sisters? It leaves the governor and the Senate.

Unknown: That's right!

Mayor: The governor and the Senate now have to act. It's on them now. And it's simple. If they act, they protect housing for over 2 million people. They protect affordability. They protect our economy. They protect our future. They keep this city the greatest city in the world.

If they fail to act, we start going backwards immediately. If they fail to act, our neighborhoods get undermined, our families get undermined, our affordable housing drifts away more and more with each passing day. If they fail to act, we go backwards.

Don't let anyone talk to about status quo being acceptable. Status quo means we keep going backwards – and we will not stand for that, will we?

Audience: No!

Mayor: Albany has to take responsibility. If they don't take responsibility, that tale of two cities will only deepen. This will become more and more a gilded city – a place that only some can afford to live in – and that is not New York City. That won't work. That will destroy the strength of this amazing place.

Unknown: And we don't play that!

Mayor: It's a moment of decision. And now, I will finish by talking about all of us, because it's a democracy, brothers and sisters.

Unknown: Hey, hey! Talk about it!

Mayor: It's a democracy, and it's time for our voices to be heard in Albany.

President Obama said very powerfully – reminding us of our responsibility, he said, “Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time.”

Unknown: Tell it!

Mayor: “We are the ones we've been waiting for.”

[Cheers]
[Applause]

“We are the change that we seek.”

Unknown: That's right!

[Cheers]
[Applause]

Mayor: We need to take that spirit and make it heard – make it heard in the hallways of Albany so that we get fairness for the city of New York, for the tenants of New York, for the people of New York!

Now is the time.

[Cheers]

[Applause]

En Español – I just have three paragraphs, but they say it all.

[Laughter]

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

Audience: Si!

[Cheers]

[Applause]

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

Mayor: Thank you, everyone!

[Cheers]

[Applause]

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