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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT THE CUNY CAUCUS  
LUNCHEON**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Thank you so much, Lorraine. Everyone, this is one of the gatherings I look forward to each year because this is a group of kindred souls together in common cause. I want to thank everyone who's here and I want to start with a warm thank you to Lorraine for everything she has done on the CUNY board but also because she spearheaded so many of New York City's efforts to help the people of Puerto Rico after the hurricane. That help is going to be there for a long, long time. Let's thank Lorraine for that.

[Applause]

A thank you to everyone at CUNY for all you do and a thank you to everyone who has been a part of Citizenship Now! I know this is the 20th anniversary. What a success Citizenship Now! has been. Congratulations.

[Applause]

I wanted to – I'll be very quick but I wanted to pick up on the point that Lorraine made and this week I gave my State of the City and I talked about a goal that we should all feel and we should all act on.

I said we have to become the fairest big city in America. We have to be a place where people know they have opportunity, where they know that if they work hard it means something, where they know they will not be discriminated against. It's a very basic idea of a set of rules that applies to everyone equally which is sadly the exact opposite of what we're seeing on the national scene. Right.

In Washington, we see this aggressive effort to separate and create a set of rules that are different for different kinds of people. If you're wealthy, you get a tax break. If you're an immigrant, you're excluded. Right. I mean these sharp, horrible definitions that we see coming out of Washington.

We, in New York City – I said in my speech this week – we have to be the antidote because New York City has to show the way a fair society should be and we have a chance to do that.

Lorraine mentioned some of what we're trying to do on education and it is not easy. I want to tell you when we set these very high goals we do not do it thinking it's easy. By the way, it requires everyone to achieve these changes. And I know Rudy knows this from the time when he was our chancellor, transformation in public schools is exceedingly difficult but I know it only happens if you set high goals.

So, yeah, we said we would have Pre-K for All. There were lots of doubting Thomases. It's been achieved. The people of the city embraced it, the people demanded it. And now we will have 3-K for all our children. By 2021, every three-year-old will get a quality early childhood education.

[Applause]

And we need to follow that through because when I think of CUNY, honestly – and I'm looking at my good friend Barbara Bowen and we've had this conversation many a time – CUNY does such important work. CUNY is the exemplar of creating a fairer more just society. CUNY is one of the great institutions in America at taking a young person who is the first in their family to get higher education, taking a young person who has just come to this country and allowing them to fulfill the American dream.

CUNY is synonymous with that pathway but CUNY has one hand tied behind its back because our city schools too often were not doing all that we needed to do. So, my mandate to help CUNY is to get the foundation right. It starts with early childhood education with 3-K and pre-K.

And imagine a world where every single child got those two years of high-quality, early education. Then, as Lorraine indicated, getting our kids reading by third grade – getting them on grade-level reading by third grade, this is extraordinarily difficult. It's the kind of thing that educators will tell you is one of the most important indicators of whether a young person is going to succeed or not and yet it has not been the central goal for a long time.

So, we're going to make it the central goal to radically change that number for the better. And all the way up through high school where we're doing something now that you would have thought would have happened a long time ago, and providing Advanced Placement courses in every single high school regardless of ZIP code.

[Applause]

And this is happening now because thank God we have some resources to work with because we have mayoral control of education. Rudy, I do not envy what you used to have go through because you did not have those things. We're able to do some things now we weren't able to do in the past. But just focus on that AP for All point just for a second.

The message that was sent in the City of New York, the status quo was if you went to a certain high school in a certain neighborhood you could expect Advanced Placement courses and you were on your way to college. And in other neighborhoods it was the exact opposite message. There were no Advanced Placement courses, which was wrong to begin with in terms of tapping into human potential but also sent a very clear coded message – college is not for you.

By having a mandate that every single high school, everyone will have multiple AP courses, we're saying to kids in every part of the city, every background, we owe it to you to help you go to college if that's what you choose to do.

That's what we need to do for CUNY, give CUNY that kind of foundation to work from.

[Applause]

I just want to say one more thing and because we are celebrating both the power of education and the power of immigration to help us build our society, let me say one more thing and it's very personal.

So, you've seen the debate this week in Washington over the immigration bill and there's many things to talk about the most immediate being that we have to save our DREAMers and CUNY has been so wonderful at serving our DREAMers and I thank you for that.

[Applause]

We got 700,000 young people in this country, 30,000 in our city who are part of us. It's like tearing our heart out if those DREAMers are not allowed to stay. And we have to all feel that commitment. We are going to defend our neighbors. We're going to defend our brothers and sisters.

That was one crucial, crucial piece of the discussion but something that got less attention and this is where it gets personal for me and for a lot of people. It's this very pernicious phrase you hear the president – he loves to use it. He loves to say it. He loves to tweet it. He loves to talk about “chain migration.”

Let me take a poll of the room. Anyone in your family ever come here because another family member was already here? Anyone have that experience?

Okay. Let me tell you about my grandparents. My grandparents, salt of the Earth people, came from poor towns in southern Italy which in that point in history was a very, very troubled place, very economically challenged, someone who's now president would have used a really nasty phrase to talk about the country that my grandparents came from.

I'm very proud of where they came from just like everyone in this room is proud of where your ancestors came from, and I don't like hearing any place described that way. My grandparents came from a place that you would have to say at every measure was disadvantaged and

underdeveloped. They did not speak English. They did not have advanced degrees. They did not have technical skills to bring to this country.

They came here and did what so many others did and they worked with every fiber in their being to do something better for the next generation and I am the second generation born in America and I have the honor of having this office just like so many of you whether you're the first, second, third, fourth generation born in this country – look at what you are all doing and what it has contributed.

So when I hear an attack on chain migration, I hear an attack on all of our families. My grandparents came here because they had siblings who were here first. That's the only reason they were able to do it.

And I say this – and I've said it publicly and I have no problem saying it, I've got to speak to my fellow white people because there are a lot of people who look very – with great esteem and rightfully so – back on their Italian ancestors or their Irish ancestors or their Polish ancestors or their Jewish ancestors. They – when they hear the words chain migration they should be just offended as I am.

[Applause]

If we would not have wanted that rule applied to our parents and grandparents and great grandparents, then we should not want it applied to families of color today.

[Applause]

So I conclude with saying, look, thank you everyone for what you do. Thank you for the difference it makes. It's a tough moment in history, no doubt. But truth wins in the end and it's the power of education, the power of giving people the tools. It's still a democratic society last time I checked, something we've got to protect, something we've got to earn but what you are doing is empowering the generation that will move ahead and make it right. And I say God bless you for that. Thank you.

[Applause]

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