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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT NAN ANNUAL
CONVENTION RIBBON CUTTING, HOLDS Q&A WITH REPORTERS**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you so much. I want to welcome you all to New York City. It is an honor for us to have the NAN convention because we honor what NAN has done now for almost a quarter-century. And Rev, you are right – you could've chosen a lot of names, but you put the word action – you put the word action in the title, and you lived up to it.

I want to say to everyone that it's a time that calls for action. I'm sure that those of you who were part of the founding almost a quarter-century ago hoped and prayed we would go farther – hoped and prayed that the progress made on civil and human rights would keep expanding and be joined by progress on economic justice. And the sad reality is we are fighting a number of the same battles that you confronted at the beginning of NAN. And in some ways, the economic struggle has grown deeper.

But NAN has stood for action. And NAN has been indispensable. And Rev, I want to thank you, because you had the audacity to believe you could build an organization of this importance, of this conscience.

[Applause]

And I know our country would not have made some of the progress we have made if it weren't for your leadership and NAN's leadership. So, thank you for that.

[Applause]

I want to thank all the leaders of NAN who are here. I want to thank all of the elected officials who are here in solidarity – and they are many. And they are people who hold important roles around this nation, who believe that having an organization that stands up for people's rights and mobilizes – even when that call comes in the night – mobilizes in favor of those who have been victimized is absolutely necessary to a strong democracy.

And we – we're all feeling some pain today, I would imagine. I certainly am. We watched a video yesterday – once again, we are watching a video – we watched a video that is so disturbing and so painful. You can't watch that as a human being and not feel pain. It makes no sense, according to what our core notions of humanity and decency and justice are. And it is tempting – when you see something that painful, it is tempting to feel despair – not just pain, but despair.

Part of why I think it is so important that you are gathering here at this moment in history is because we can't let the despair get the better of us. It's tempting to always – it's been tempting for decades, and decades, even centuries. And we know that those who came before us dealt with even greater pain, and more reason for despair, and yet they were great examples of fortitude and belief, great examples of strength, despite the challenges. We have to remember that every day.

And so, at a moment like this, we could feel like we're going backwards. But it's important to take stock of the things that are moving in the right direction, because they came from the strong and energetic efforts to

organize people all over this country for years and years. The progress came because of moments like that march down Fifth Avenue. Change – all of us who are elected officials, we like to believe that we lead the way. Sometimes we do, but so often change comes because the people mobilized. The people lead their leaders on the right path.

And so, I push back the despair and I take stock of the good. I take stock of the progress we have made because people stood up. I also am reminded that this organization, so strongly grounded in the teachings of Dr. King, would remember one of his core notions was that change is based on hope and not despair. You can give the litany of the pain – it's always appropriate to do so – but what really motivates people is when they see that door opening, that possibility beginning to take hold.

And so, we had that march a few years ago in New York City at a point when there were over 700,000 stops and frisks of people in this city, the vast majority of whom were young men of color – the vast, vast majority of whom were innocent in every way, shape, and form. And this year, that number is 40,000. And the people being stopped are people who've done something wrong.

[Applause]

You can look at that as an example of progress. You can look at the fact that since we changed our policy on marijuana arrests – 65 percent fewer marijuana arrests in this city. That came –

[Applause]

That came from the demands of the people as well. That came because people said we didn't want to see decent young men and women saddled with an arrest that would follow them throughout their lives because they made one small mistake. Those changes happened, and they happened quickly because people mobilized.

In this city, right now, we have begun to use body cameras for our police officers – a measure of accountability and transparency.

[Applause]

By the way, a few years ago, body cameras were considered something out of reach. But now they're becoming a norm in more and more police departments around the country. It's because people demanded change. And technology gave us a chance to create a kind of transparency and accountability we had never known before. We've seen these painful moments captured on individual citizens' cellphone cameras. We are going to move more and more to a society where the cameras on police officers – for the good of all, so the truth comes out. As Rev said, whether that truth indicates fault on the part of the officer or the citizen, what we're seeking is the truth. What we're seeking is a transparency so we can all believe in that common set of rules.

We've got to keep our focus on those changes that we all are making. It is propitious that even against the backdrop of the sorrow we're feeling today, we get news this morning of elections in Ferguson, Missouri that changed the composition of that city council to represent that city.

[Applause]

And as Rev said, for all of us who watched over decades the growth of the civil rights movement, there is something powerful in the fact that the officials in South Carolina acted speedily – acted speedily to address a tragedy, acted forthrightly. They didn't pull any punches. They said something was fundamentally wrong and they applied justice. That indicates something changing that not so many years ago would have been very hard to imagine. And it is because of the work everyone in this room has done. I want you to remember that at the moment when you feel despair, at the moment when you don't want to go and speak at one more gathering, and don't want to knock on one more door. Take stock of the progress that's been made.

This organization fights against inequality. And so often, that fight is involved in dealing with issues of the criminal justice system. As I said earlier, the fight more and more is now about economics as well because economic inequality sadly is growing in this country. What Dr. King was acting on in the last days and weeks of his life, when he devoted himself more and more to questions of poverty and lack of opportunity – questions of economic fairness – this now is the cause we have to take up more deeply than ever, because we can see with our own eyes our country going in the wrong direction. And we know that you can't have civil rights without economic rights. It's as simple as that.

[Applause]

So I'll conclude with one more thought. We're embarking now on a great national debate. Every four years we get a chance to take stock. This year going into next year, it'll be a discussion about the future of this country. I hope the voices of everyone in this room are loud and clear in that debate on the fact that a country that is growing more and more unequal cannot be a strong country, can't be a country that realizes its potential, can't be a country that's looked up to in the world. If you want to be more practical – a country that is becoming less and less equal can't compete in the world because the message to our own people is there isn't opportunity for you. How do you win a race when your own people don't feel they belong? We have an opportunity –

[Applause]

We have an opportunity to change that. We have an opportunity to demand a society that is inclusive, not just in terms of civil and human rights, but in terms of economic opportunity for all – a society that actually rewards work again – rewards work by hardworking people.

[Applause]

That's what this discussion in our nation will be about. By the way, as is so often the case, this should also be a way we push back despair and we embrace hope. Brothers and sisters, the majority is already with us when it comes to fighting inequality. The majority of this country can feel that they're slipping backwards economically. They know that there's something wrong with the rules of the game. They know that this society is less and less about them and their families. The majority is there, waiting to be reached and energized and mobilized. Take with you from this convention that the people are already with you. They simply await your leadership to bring about the changes we need.

Thank you and God bless you.

[Applause]

[...]

Mayor: ...[inaudible] we've got to figure out how to create the right relationship between police and community. The vast majority of police officers do their job well and want to work more closely with the community. Obviously, community residents want to work more closely with the police, but we've got to create more of a national standard that says we all have to be on the same page. So, I think it's the right impulse. It's not [inaudible] but I think it's the right impulse.

Question: Mr. Mayor, given what happened in South Carolina and your reference to the use of body cameras, can you tell us more about the city's pilot? Is it expanded? Is it something that you think there should be universal?

Mayor: Well, again, we have to see what the pilot brings back. We'll be doing it over the course of a year. I think we're going to learn a lot from that pilot, and certainly there's some very good indications from body camera use around the country that it can change the whole equation, that it gives you an immediate level of transparency and accountability for everyone involved. Again, if the citizen has done something wrong, that's

captured on film. If the officer's done something wrong, it creates accountability. I also – as I said when we unveiled the pilot program out of the police academy – it changes the way people think about their work, knowing that every single piece of it is being recorded when they have a confrontation with an individual. This is all about reducing the use of force, respecting the crucial work that police play in our city, the crucial role they play in our society, but also reducing the use of force in every way we can. And I think body cameras are a key part of that. Obviously, the re-training of our police force is also absolutely fundamental, and that's something that we're doing on an unprecedented scale.

Question: Mayor, what's the latest on the East Village explosion investigation?

Mayor: Yeah, we're waiting, obviously, on additional results from that investigation and the decision on next steps will be taken by the DA. So, we'll work and cooperate in any way we can with the DA.

Question: Mayor, there's legislation being introduced in the state senate that would require public relations firms that have significant contact with government to disclose their client list, much in the way lobbyists are required to. I'm wondering what you make of, sort of, that idea. I know you don't know the specifics of the bill. And also – what your response is to critics who have said that your relationship with advisor Jonathan Rosen is problematic because he represents so many private clients, many of whom have business with – before the city

Mayor: But, again –

Question: – and doesn't have to disclose who they are because he's not a registered lobbyist.

Mayor: Not having seen the piece of legislation, I can't comment on the specific piece of legislation. My broad approach throughout my career is to believe in disclosure on many levels. Jonathan is someone I worked with for years. He is a close friend, a close advisor, going back many, many years, and he'll continue to be.

Question: Is there – is there any problem though?

Mayor: No, he doesn't represent the interests of his clients when he talks to me. He is someone who I turn to advice on a whole host of issues that have nothing to do with his clients.

Question: [inaudible] Twitter handles now on cruisers, how do you hope that would help combat police brutality, especially amongst youngsters and low-income residents?

Mayor: I don't know enough about that initiative to be honest with you, but I think anything that increase communication and transparency [inaudible].

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: I am – I have been for years and years – going back to his time as the mayor of Burlington, Vermont – I've been a fan of his. I think he spoke about the issues of income inequality long before it was part of the core of the national debate. [inaudible] respect for that. You know, I'll certainly look forward to talking with him.

Question: The federal government says that wages in the city are going up. I'm wondering what you think is the cause of that, and if that can [inaudible] conversation about income inequality, about the haves and have-nots?

Mayor: It doesn't change the conversation at all because if we are experiencing some short-term increase of wages because, obviously, the economy has had some rebound [inaudible], well, that doesn't solve the core problem. The middle class has been in decline for decades. People's earnings have, in real terms, been in decline over a long period of time. People have not even begun to catch up from what happened in the Great Recession – and even before the Great Recession the middle class was in decline. So I think – I'm glad there's

some good news, don't get me wrong. We'll have all the good news we can get, but there's something much more fundamental going on here – you know, an imbalanced society, an imbalanced economy. And we have to address the issue of income inequality very, very forcefully or things are going to get much less – I'll say it better – the future possibilities for this country will be undermined if we don't address income inequality.

Question: Mr. Mayor, what is your response to parents who are upset with you and the administration with respect to the policy on half-day pre-k?

Mayor: Look, I'm a public school parent myself. Obviously, I went through the search for pre-k, first with Chiara, then with Dante. What I've said is a matter of policy, and I ran on this as my number one agenda item – is we need full-day pre-k. It is transcendent. It's what will prepare our kids for what they need in the educational reality of today and the economic reality of today. So, that's what we are going to orient our system to. There'll be a small amount of half-day, but the goal – often-stated goal of this administration was to make this a system based on universal access to full-day pre-k.

Question: [inaudible] one size fits all policy?

Mayor: It's the right policy. It's – because what our children need to be able to perform in an evermore-demanding educational and economic context – they need full-day pre-k. It's – you know, once upon a time, this country decided there would be first grade for all. And then they decided there would be kindergarten available – although, in some place, not even full-day kindergarten is still available. In this city, at this moment, full-day pre-k should be the norm for our children.

Question: [inaudible] when you were in that room you called marijuana use a mistake. Was your marijuana use a mistake in NYU?

Mayor: I'm sorry, wait, what room?

Question: In the room – in the speech.

Mayor: [inaudible] young people made one mistake.

Question: Yeah, so do you consider your marijuana use a mistake?

Mayor: Yeah, I think was a youthful mistake, and I didn't continue it.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: All right – wait, are you in your professional capacity?

Question: In a sense. I noticed you chatting amiably with Mayor Ras Baraka from Newark. Are there any collaborative projects that you guys may be working on? Something –

Mayor: Well, we certainly look forward to working together. You know, I think we share a lot of the same goals and he has begun to work with us on some of the national efforts to organize mayors around immigration reform, around achieving a new transportation bill in Washington. So, I look forward to working with him.

Question: Mayor, in the case of Ariel Russo, there was – the city was able to escape some of the negligence because of a – you know, the law which says that if they didn't personally – the family or the victims – didn't personally call 9-1-1, the city – didn't have a special relationship with them – they couldn't allow them to be held negligent. Some people are saying that law should be changed –

Mayor: I don't know the specifics of the case. I mean, obviously a settlement was achieved, and from my understanding, it's one that the family approves of. But I don't know the details enough to comment on that, but we'll certainly look into that.

Question: It was a very – it was a relatively small amount – about \$150,000 dollars –

Mayor: Again, I just don't know the details. But we'll look at that. I will say that I think the laws that have been passed to create much more consequence for drivers who don't yield to pedestrians have already been making a big difference. And we're going to continue to deepen our Vision Zero [inaudible].

Question: Yale or Brown?

Mayor: Good try. I'm going to tell you all, for those of you who want to know about the fascinating topic of Dante de Blasio, the decision will come at the end of the month.

Question: Can you tell us about your decision to appoint a new chair of the Board of Correction and what you're hoping for?

Mayor: Mr. Brezenoff – Stan Brezenoff is an extraordinary public servant and I thought it was time to bring someone in who could bring additional heft to the effort to transform the Department of Correction, and specifically our work at Rikers Island. Look, I've leveled with all of you that what we found was a situation far worse than we ever could have imagined. And it will take a lot of work to dig us out of this hole. And it's just an absolutely unacceptable situation right now at Rikers Island. So Stan Brezenoff is really one of the most accomplished leaders in the history of recent local government. He's the kind of guy who we think can make a very, very big impact from the position of chair.

Question: Mayor, you ran Hillary Clinton's senate campaign. As she prepares to launch a presidential bid, what are some lessons that you think she should take from eight years ago as she prepares to run again?

Mayor: Well first of all, as I said repeatedly and I'll say again – until she makes a formal decision, I won't speak about her as a candidate and I do that with anyone who might be a candidate. They're not a candidate until they're a candidate. But I would say, a broad point would be that all candidates should speak to the issue of income inequality. I think this is what's being felt so deeply around this country. And I think a forthright message on how we will address economic unfairness and create a more balanced society again in terms of economic opportunity is absolutely necessary for anyone running at this point for 2016.

Unknown: A couple of more guys.

Question: Mayor, do you have any comments about Reverend Calvin Butts' demands on policing? He wants you to reopen the Garner case. He wants you to stop a bill that would allow people to be arrested if they resist arrest – your feelings about it?

Mayor: Well, on the Garner case, the U.S. Department of Justice is pursuing that matter right now. And that's the appropriate way it should be handled, and once that determination is made – whatever it is – then the NYPD will follow through on its investigation. I have a lot of faith in Commissioner Bratton and the rigor with which he has handled internal investigations. Excuse me a second. So, I think – I have a great deal of respect for Reverend Butts. I've worked with for many years – many years – and over many years, and I will certainly be talking to him. But I think those who are following the case need to recognize that the Department of Justice is the one that will make the next decision in this matter.

Question: But what about all the other things he's asking about for changes in policing, from Broken Windows to new – you know, some of the new laws he wants you to get behind?

Mayor: Well, Broken Windows is a strategy that's worked. And it's also a strategy we continue to refine. And this is something that I think needs to be amplified in the public debate. You know, as I've said, look at what happened with marijuana arrests. That is an area that, under a Broken Windows strategy in the past, got handled one way. Under this administration, it's being handled very differently – the number of marijuana arrests is down 65 percent. On the other side of the coin is Vision Zero. There's an area where the enforcement on quality of life was probably less than it should have been and now we are improving that enforcement – beefing it up, and obviously we've added new laws as well. You know, from my point of view, Broken Windows is a living, breathing idea. It's not static. It changes with the times. But what it means is that we take every kind of crime seriously – and it's part of why this city has become increasingly safer, and we need to continue that process.

Question: Do you have any message for Reverend Butts about his demand that you meet with him?

Mayor: I certainly look forward to meeting with him. I don't – there's been some claim that there was a meeting we didn't make. I don't know anything about that, but I certainly look forward to meeting with him. I've met with him many times in the past. I certainly look forward to meeting with him [inaudible].

Question: Tech question over here. How do you feel about diversity – lack of diversity in technology right now, as we are here in Silicon Alley – in reference to getting more African Americans, Latinos, and women into tech – into the tech market in large numbers?

Mayor: A lot of work has to be done. And I think a lot of people in the tech sector are coming to that realization and are being open about it. We've put together a tech advisory committee that is diverse. The leadership of our administration, in the area of technology, is a diverse group and overwhelmingly women. And I hope that that's sending a positive message about the kinds of changes that need to be made. But look, this industry plays a big role in New York City. I think it's going to grow a lot. But one of the things I believe it needs to do is hire more and more New Yorkers of every kind of background from every neighborhood. And again, I found a lot of receptiveness in the tech community to making those changes.

Question: Can you speak to us about the incident in South Carolina – you did so in the other room, but just tell us what goes through your mind?

Mayor: You know, it's one of those things where you look at the video and your heart skips a beat. It's very painful. It's very difficult to look at something like that and watch someone's life taken away before your very eyes. You know, we all watch movies and TV, and we see images of people being shot, but you know it's fantasy. You know, this was the real thing. It's very, very painful. You know, we find out, of course, as we always do, here's a human being with a family, Coast Guard veteran, and that just makes it all the more painful. But in this case, as I said, that despite the pain, the authorities in South Carolina have really acted in a very commendable manner. And I think that's sending a powerful message.

Question: But what about the fact that the story changed? When video came out, the account of what happened changed.

Mayor: Well, I think that's cautionary. I think this is part of why we're very hopeful about what the body camera pilot program will mean. Because we're seeing things in a different light now that we have so much more on video. You know, let's face it – technology complicates society, but it also opens up a lot of possibilities. And so, we've now seen things that in the past might have been mischaracterized portrayed very starkly and very honestly. I believe that will lead to progress. I believe it will force all of us to come to grips with a bunch of challenging dynamics that we have to deal with. And in this case, again, here's a state with its own challenging history, but once the video was shown, authorities there acted very, very swiftly, and I think that sends a powerful message.

Thanks, everyone.

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