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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT THE
CONGRESSIONAL PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS CENTER STRATEGY SUMMIT**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you, everyone. It is just so good to be with a room full of progressives.

[Applause]

Feeling good tonight?

Audience: Yeah!

Mayor: My brothers and sisters, first of all, I have to tell you Nydia Velázquez has been such a powerful progressive voice in our city and I really want to thank her and honor her for everything she's done for us. But I have to say in the last year she has stood up, she has been the most passionate voice in this nation in defense of three-and-a-half million Americans in Puerto Rico.

[Applause]

And my friends, I have to say Nydia is a truth-teller and she has been very, very clear some people are profiting in the midst of disaster. A lot of people are being ignored in the midst of the disaster.

I always like to make the analogy – there's another part of this country that also has about three-and-a-half million people just like Puerto Rico. If the hurricane had hit and devastated the state of Connecticut the entire U.S. military would be there right now helping them back on their feet.

So we go to be very clear and very honest that not all Americans were treated equal and that's not the world we believe in. We're going to keep fighting for the people of Puerto Rico, Nydia. I assure you, all of us will be with you.

[Applause]

I want to thank everyone in the Progressive Caucus. A special and deep thank you to Raúl Grijalva and Mark Pocan for your tremendous leadership making this organization such an important part of the dialogue in Washington and beyond. To all the members of the caucus, to everyone here, this is how change begins, when like-minded people gather together and work toward action. This caucus – I remember when it was a new thing and people regarded it as a kind of small thing. It's not a small thing any more.

[Applause]

Almost 20 percent of all members of the House of Representatives are in this caucus and I predict to you that the second week of November, you're going to have a lot more coming.

[Applause]

So I want to say to you what I think we are experiencing right now and when you're in the middle of history, sometimes it's hard to see the contours. Sometimes it's hard to understand fully, of course, what we're living through. And I'm not going to dwell on what we all could say about Donald Trump and his administration. I want to talk about what we're living through. We are living through a once in a generation opportunity to make change. That's what we're living through.

[Applause]

This is a blessed time. Despite all the challenges, despite the setbacks this is a moment and I will be audacious but I feel this deep in my heart – I will tell you today this is the dawning of a new progressive era.

[Applause]

And you can see it all over the country in every kind of city and town, in urban areas, in rural areas, in red states, in blue states. You can see that people are taking matters into their own hands. They're not accepting the status quo. You can see that there's an incredible energy and the energy is with us, my friends.

You can talk to people on the other side. Ideologically, they hardly even try to make the argument that the energy is with them anymore. The energy is with us and it's happening in all sorts of ways and many of them you didn't even expect, many of them were not projected or expected.

A couple of weeks ago did you expect that teachers in West Virginia would strike and that they would win?

[Applause]

In this progressive era, things happen that we don't even see coming, good things, powerful things, expressions of the people's will.

A few weeks ago we didn't even see it coming and now it's come and it's gone already. They got that pay raise because they stood up.

Now I just want to remind you what I just spoke, the place I just spoke about, West Virginia – and I'm going to borrow a New York phrase here. That famous song from Frank Sinatra that says, "If you can make it here, you can make it anywhere." If you can strike and win in West Virginia, you can do it anywhere.

[Applause]

But it is about being bold. It is about being resolute. It is about being who we are, being comfortable in our own skins, being clear about our own beliefs, and never being ashamed to be a full-throated progressive.

[Applause]

I'm going to tell you my story very quickly. Nydia hit a couple of the notes but I'll frame it this way. When I ran for mayor, the message out there from a lot of the mainstream was that if I were to prevail, chaos would ensue.

[Laughter]

You let a progressive run things, watch out. Of course there would be more crime. Of course there would be disorder. We would be well on our way back to the 1970s. Remember those apocalyptic movies about New York City? They literally put images – one of my Republican opponents put images on TV ads suggesting we were just a step from going back to the bad old days.

But here's the truth, when progressives win the opportunity to govern, when we govern on behalf of the people, when we have a bold vision things start to move, things start to change, and people start to feel that change.

And I'm going to tell you something about New York City today. After four years, I can say it safely something very different is happening in New York City. Something big is happening. Something important is happening because the changes are taking root.

Nydia Velázquez talked to you about pre-K. That was an idea we had and I can't tell you how many times the editorial boards literally said – and so many other pundits they said – overly ambitious, can't be done.

It became commonplace to assume that this wonderful, empowering idea for our children and our families must be quaint and naive because it would help so many everyday working people. So, the day I walked into the door, there was about 20,000 kids already going to full-day pre-K. Two years later in New York City, 70,000 kids were going to full-day pre-K for free.

[Applause]

When I started my administration there wasn't a single three-year-old getting full-day early childhood education through our public schools. There are now thousands. By 2021, it will be a universal right in New York City.

[Applause]

And let me tell you when you create new universal rights, people respond. As progressives we have something that's really underestimated. We actually want to see equality. We want to see opportunity for all. When we provide it, when people touch it, when they feel it, when they taste it, they don't want to go back. They believe in our vision. It's our job to make the vision real.

Let me mention one of the thorniest issues we face – criminal justice, safety, creating a society where people are safe but there's also fairness, we were told for years that you had to choose. When I ran for mayor, what I heard from so many of my opponents and again the conventional wisdom purveyors – you have to choose, which one do you want? Do you want safety or do you want fairness? You can't have both. The ultimate false choice in our society. Well guess what, in New York City today safety and fairness walk hand-in-hand.

[Applause]

We ended a discriminatory and unconstitutional policy of stop-and-frisk that was denigrating our young men of color.

[Applause]

And as we ended this policy we got safer the first year, then we got even safer the second year, we got even safer the third year, we got safer the fourth year. We are now the safest big city in America.

[Applause]

We know that what people want is fairness. If one thing defines progressives, it is that constant quest for fairness. When we give it to people and they experience it, they know what they were deprived of and it wets their appetite for more change.

Let me tell you something else we're doing in New York City. I'm so proud of it. My wife, Chirlane McCray, is leading the way. We are not allowing people to be ignored and stigmatized and kept from the help they need simply because they have a mental health condition.

[Applause]

And it's the same scenario once again. My wife said, we are going to go and address the mental health crisis, we're going to bring it out in the open, we're going to tell people it's okay to talk about it and that they deserve the care they need, and it's our obligation to help them get it.

Our First Lady, she went all over the city, she organized houses of worship – literally thousands of houses of worship to all speak on the same weekend about mental health, to bring it out of the shadows, to tell people whatever they were dealing with it was okay and they could get the help they need.

The concept was called Thrive NYC and today in New York City every single day thousands of people are getting access to mental health that used to not be there for them but now it is their right.

[Applause]

So, these examples are to make a point. We have to be bold. We have to be uncompromised. We have to show all those looking to us that we're not interested in half measures. We learned some painful lessons my friends. I don't know about you but I think all those years when the voices of the DLC dominated the debate, too many times people fell for it. But talk about a world view that has been totally invalidated –

[Applause]

– when we come forward and say, you know what, we believe in labor unions. Period.

[Applause]

We believe in organizing. Every time there's one more person who joins a labor union our society becomes stronger.

[Applause]

That's what people need to hear. They need to hear us be clear about our devotion and our love for public education. We're not ashamed of it. We believe in it.

[Applause]

They need to know that we are unafraid. We don't care who has the power, who has the money. So you can tell a real progressive very simply when they can say this simple sentence – we should make sure the wealthy pay their fair share in taxes.

[Applause]

And they are paying less of their fair share than they have in generations. All the things that we believe in, all the good we could do in this world, some of it costs money. I know where the money is. The one percent, they have it. They ain't giving it back but we need a people's movement that demands a repeal of those tax cuts that just got passed for the wealthy and the one percent.

[Applause]

Progressives say clearly, we're never going to go back and have another Great Recession. We are not going to allow Wall Street to run wild. We're going to protect the reforms. We're going to go farther with the reforms to make sure we are never the victims of a crash again.

This is what defines us. Now, I'll tell you something, people, when they hear those messages, they relate and they care and they feel it's about them. And there's opportunities coming up this year to tell people the difference between a true progressive vision and a compromising vision.

Someday there's going to be action on infrastructure and I for one will tell you the American people will not accept and should not accept a "infrastructure plan" that's just another privatization plan.

[Applause]

A real infrastructure plan – and it was proven by Franklin Delano Roosevelt and if you want bipartisanship, it was proven by Dwight Eisenhower as well – a real infrastructure plan is when the federal government spends money to fix our mass transit and our railroads and our roads and our bridges and our tunnels all over this country.

[Applause]

I am telling you if we make it plain for people, they will respond because they can tell the difference and they can see what's happening in their own communities. They can see what's crumbling around them and they know it's not going to be fixed because of the [inaudible] big corporations.

Look, I think for a long time we were told not to be ourselves. We were told to somehow be ashamed of being progressives and you know what if people see you being ashamed of yourself, they don't get inspired. But when we are who we are, it moves people.

And this year, this is a year that we've been waiting for. 2018 is a year so ripe for change. And it's not just my optimism speaking. It's evidence. It's evidence gleaned from places where we weren't supposed to be able to find that kind of hope.

Remember that night last November, not November 2016 – we're going to put that night out of our minds. Let's talk about 2017. Remember that there wasn't a single person predicting the outcome in Virginia and everyone woke up –

[Applause]

The people of Virginia had another idea and I love it – I love it when the pundits and the pollsters and the purveyors of conventional wisdom don't even know there's a possibility of change. No one said the House of Delegates in Virginia could flip and it came this close to

happening. And we saw progress that was more than expected in New Jersey. We saw it in Washington State.

But of course it could not happen in a place like Alabama, could it?

[Applause]

No. I'm sorry that's just impossible, my friends. But you know what – you know what has not been given enough attention? In Alabama with those restricted voter laws, with every tool being arrayed against every day Alabamians who wanted change, progressives turned out, people organized on the ground, people would not be held back. That result in Alabama is something that should speak volumes to every one of us.

[Applause]

And every time you start to wonder, can we take that next big step, someone comes forward to teach us a powerful lesson.

Now, I wish it hadn't happened because of tragedy but brothers and sisters, these extraordinarily noble students from Parkland, Florida –

[Applause]

They are teaching this whole nation a lesson in how to organize and how to educate and how to move people's hearts. They are changing this country and no one could have even conceived of it just a month ago.

These are the times we're living in. They're perilous times but they're magical times also because the people are feeling their own power and when the people feel their own power things change.

So I conclude with this – we have an opportunity here. The Progressive Caucus is going to help lead the way in Washington and I want to thank everyone in that state legislatures – great organizations like SiX that are helping to organize progressive action in the state legislatures.

[Applause]

I want to thank our brothers and sisters in LocalProgress who are doing so much on the ground.

[Applause]

We got to pull these pieces together and we got to encourage everyone in our communities to come out, to push for change, to organize, to register, to believe in their own power. And that power will sustain us and when this Election Day is over in November, we don't want the rallies and the organizing and the door knocking and the registration efforts – we don't want them to

end on Election Day even if we are victorious. We want them to begin to get stronger that next day.

[Applause]

We want people to stop playing by the old rules. Those good people in Alabama decided they were not playing by the old rules anymore. Those teachers in West Virginia decided they were not playing by the old rules anymore. Those students in Parkland decided they were not playing by the old rules anymore.

[Applause]

It is a new day and it is our time. Thank you. God bless you all.

[Applause]

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