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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT THE LABOR LUNCHEON

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Everybody, this is a good time to be together. It is a very good time to be together because the year 2018 is going to be a year of change all over New York State and all over this country. Are you ready for it?

[Cheering]

Everybody – everybody has to be part of this moment and you know, do you have the experience I do that when you turn on the television or you go online, it is not always a positive experience? When you see the news? But we have to remember as upsetting as things are coming out of Washington, D.C. the change will be made on the ground here in this state and all over the country.

We are the ones who get to decide the future.

[Applause]

And we get to show people an example of what a fair and good and decent society looks like. I want to talk to you about that very quickly but first I got to say to the folks being honored – there's some extraordinary labor leaders who are being honored who have done so much for New York City, so much for New York State. I want you to thank them all again.

Linda McPherson of 1707.

[Applause]

A man with a whole lot of personality, Anthony Wells, Local 371.

[Applause]

The wonderful Maria Castaneda of 1199.

[Applause]

Show our thanks to Santos Rodriguez of the Building Trades Council.

[Applause]

And one of the most energetic and forceful labor leaders I've known. It's really – I always say it's smart to do whatever she says – Evelyn DeJesus of the UFT.

[Applause]

So, here's what I want to remind everybody. Even though we are up against the Trump administration, even though we are up against so many things that try to hold us back look at what's happened in the last year. Look at the ways people have fought back. Look at the Women's March, the biggest demonstration in the history of this country.

[Applause]

Look at what happened at the grassroots, those town hall meetings that helped to save the Affordable Care Act. Obamacare was saved.

[Applause]

Look at the amazing movement all over this country to defend our DREAMers and that's a movement that we have to make sure wins.

[Applause]

All of that is happening at the grassroots and labor is in the forefront of all of those efforts and we have to recognize that even in the tough moments we get to show people the way it should be done. And I say about New York City – New York City has to be the antidote to what is happening in Washington. I have said that our city has to be the fairest big city in America. We have to be a place where fairness and decency and justice become stronger and stronger. And here's what I want to say and I need your help to do this.

If we are going to fight for fairness, then we have to do something very fundamental. We have to make it easier for people to vote in this state.

[Applause]

Brothers and sisters, so many people in this room have worked so hard for change and to protect the rights of working people. But you've had one hand tied behind your back. There are two million people in New York State eligible to vote but not registered to vote. Two million. One million of them are in New York City. And part of why those people are not participating is our voting laws are some of the most regressive and backward and exclusionary in the entire country.

And let's not let this state off the hook. We get sick to our stomach when we see in some very conservative states efforts to repress voting, right. When we see these bills passed, the I.D. laws and the other things that are trying to overtly exclude people from voting, it makes us feel angry and we know how unacceptable it is.

But you know what, it happens a lot more quietly in New York State but it is the same result. It's too hard to register to vote. You have no right to vote early like they do in so many other states. This state unfortunately over years and years created a culture where people don't participate. That is holding back all of the progressive changes that we believe in.

So I presented, this week, a plan I call DemocracyNYC and one of the most important elements of it is this year here in Albany changing the voting laws, making sure New Yorkers can vote again. Who is with me on that?

[Applause]

There's one more thing I want to tell you. I have a lot of hope when it comes to our young people. I have seen – and it starts with my own two children Chiara and Dante – but I've seen it with so many young people. They feel passionately that we need a more just society. They see the overt discrimination and exclusion and they won't accept it. They see the threat to the planet from climate change, they will not look away from it, they know they have to fight it. They see economic injustice. They see the rich get richer. They see the one percent constantly getting enriched further, and this new generation will not accept that.

We have to help them and one of the things we're going to do in New York City – we're going to teach young people in our public schools not the old civics lessons but a new kind of civics that shows them that they can get involved, that they can be the authors of their futures, that they're going to learn to vote. We're going to register every young person when they're 17 so they're ready to vote when they're 18.

[Applause]

And I ask everybody, in your lives you see those promising young change agents. Support them. Encourage them. Because they're going to help us make the change in this state and in this nation we need. We can do that brothers and sisters.

Thank you for all you do and get ready for a great year in 2018.

[Applause]

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