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RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO PARTICIPATES IN AARP TELE-TOWN HALL ON IMPORTANCE OF RENEWING AND STRENGTHENING RENT REGULATION LAWS

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you very, very much, Chris. And I want to thank everyone for joining this call. It's a crucial moment for this city and for all New Yorkers, and especially senior citizens. So, it's absolutely vital that we all act now, and I want to thank you for joining this call and joining us in the effort to get Albany to finally do the right thing by the people of New York City, the tenants of New York City, and the seniors of New York City.

Chris, thank you for your leadership and thank you to all who are involved in the AARP. AARP is an extraordinary force for good, looking out for the needs of our seniors, making sure their rights are respected, and building a more fair society. So I really, really want to thank you for pulling together thousands and thousands of New Yorkers to be a part of this conversation. Look, I'll make this simple and quick. And then I'm looking forward to taking questions from some of those who are on the line.

Here is my basic view – the history of New York City tells us something very clearly. This city only works if it's a city for everyone. The greatness of this place is based on the notion anyone has a shot here – anyone can come here, find a place to live they could actually afford, build a family, build a business. And that's all threatened now for the first time in our history. It's threatened because of greatly increased housing prices. It's threatened because of some of the problems that come with gentrification. It's threatened because the Great Recession and all the horrible impacts that are still being felt by so many New Yorkers, and that's especially true of seniors. And for those who had lower incomes at the beginning of the recession, they're hurting now more than ever. We have about 46 percent of the people in this city at or near the poverty level – so, that's the magnitude of the crisis. And the only way we resolve this crisis and protect the future of New York City, and make sure this is the New York we all love – the New York we believe in – is by addressing issues like affordable housing. We've got to lower the cost of housing for all those we can't and protect the affordability of the units we have. I have a plan to build and preserve 200,000 units of affordable housing – enough for almost half a million people.

But that plan will be profoundly undermined if Albany doesn't extend rent regulation and, in fact, strengthen rent regulation. We know, over the last few decades, we've lost literally several hundred thousand units of affordable housing out of rent regulation, out of Mitchell-Lama. All of those things we depended on have been undermined, and they've been undermined because governmental leaders let it happen. And now it's a chance to right those wrongs. So, we're going to move forward energetically with our affordable housing plan. By the way, one key part of that plan is 10,000 units of housing specially focused on seniors and available for seniors over the next 10 years. And we're going to do a lot more than that. But that plan, again, requires us to also get support from Albany in terms of protecting and strengthening rent regulation. What's the magnitude of the situation? A million rent-regulated apartments – over two million New Yorkers living in them. More than a quarter of the folks who live in rent-regulated apartments are seniors. At least 270,000 seniors living in rent regulation – rent-regulated apartments. Many of those seniors are lower income folks who are struggling to make ends meet. Many of those seniors have been in those apartments for decades. And it's crucial to their lives and their connection to their family and their neighborhood. And we've got to protect that.

So, my call today is that we put the clear message out to Albany and put the pressure to Albany that needs to be felt in this moment. Albany has to act. It's Friday. This coming Monday, the rent laws are set to expire. And there's no resolution coming from Albany right now. There's no guarantee that these rent laws will be continued, let alone strengthened. So I'm asking everybody on this call to make your voice heard. Call your state assembly member, your state senator. Call the governor. Let them all know that we not only need rent regulation extended, we need it to be strengthened.

And there's three obvious areas. We've got to end vacancy decontrol. That is the way we've lost so many affordable apartments – landlords being able to take them out of rent regulation when they reach a certain rent level. We've got to end that practice. We've got to end the vacancy bonus. That's the way that landlords get a huge uptick in rent whenever an apartment turns over that's rent regulated. We've got to end that practice. And we've got to stop the giveaways to landlords. When they do capital improvements, sure they have a right to make sure that those capital improvements are paid for in the rent, but that's all they should get. The cost of those improvements, nothing more – no permanent rent hikes when the whole idea is only to pay for the capital improvements they made on the apartments.

So, those fundamental changes to the rent law are needed. If we do that, tens of thousands more New Yorkers will be protected. If we fail to do that – even with an extension of rent regulation – we'll keep losing ground that we can't afford to.

So, I'll summarize quickly. We are doing everything we can right now to protect and strengthen rent regulation; on top of that, our plan to build and to preserve 200,000 units of affordable housing; on top of that, our plan to stabilize and strengthen the housing authority for the 400,000-plus New Yorkers who live in public housing; on top of that, our plan that we have put forward in Albany to stop giving tax breaks to developers for luxury condos and private market housing; and change the program called 421-a – make sure that every unit developed – excuse me, every building developed under it has affordable units, make sure there's no tax breaks for luxury condos. And then one more thing – a tax on those who buy high values homes and that money going to create affordable housing. Our plan before Albany right now – on top of preserving and strengthening rent regulations – our plan around the mansion tax and 421-a would create additional affordable housing for 160,000 New Yorkers – 160,000 New Yorkers – and that would include so many seniors. So we need people on this call to support our call for a mansion tax, support our call for 421-a reform, so that we can make sure that tax payers aren't continuing to line the pockets of developers, but are actually demanding affordable housing back whenever we give a tax break, and demanding that those who are doing very well pay a little bit more in taxes so we can have affordable housing for so many people who need it, who are struggling to hold on in their neighborhoods, struggling to stay in the city they love, who deserve a dignified retirement without the threat of being displaced from their home. We need you to raise your voices and make sure the Governor, the State Senate, the Assembly know that seniors in this city are demanding action and are demanding it now. With that, I look forward to, Chris, taking some questions.

Chris Widelo, AARP: That sounds good. So if you recognize that voice, that is because it is New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, who is joining us today on this AARP telephone town hall. We are talking about rent regulations and the proposals that are before us as the legislature looks at renewing and strengthening rent regulation laws, here, in New York City before they expire on Monday. You heard the mayor. If you would like to get more information or take action on this, you can just press one right now on your telephone keypad. You just press one, and that will register you, and we will be back in touch about ways that you can get involved. So Mr. Mayor, if you don't mind we can certainly go to a couple of questions. We have some folks that are interested in asking you a question. And were gonna go to Betsy, in New York. So Betsy you've been on the line for a while, you're on live with myself Chris, and Mayor de Blasio

Question: Good morning.

Mayor: Morning

Question: My question has to do with – I know that this law was going to expire since the law was passed – and my question is, why has it taken so long for this issue to be addressed? Not to be addressed, because it's been addressed, however, I find – I apologize beforehand – that the mayor – you have dealt with the issue too late in the game.

Mayor: Well, Betsy, let me set the record straight on that. I could not disagree more with you. I appreciate the question, but I want to be very clear. I put forward the plan very clearly to strengthen rent regulation and extend rent regulation when I went to Albany to testify on the state budget in February. And I have been working with so many people around the city, advocating for these changes for months now. Folks in Albany know exactly what needs to be done. The Assembly has already passed the right legislation to strengthen rent regulation. The governor says he agrees with that idea, but we haven't seen yet action from the Senate. We need the governor to push the Senate hard. But I want to say something else about this notion of when things are being done and if things are too late. That's a smoke screen from Albany. Let me give you another example. I talked about the mansion tax and the 421-a reforms. We put that plan forward to Albany a month ago. They had plenty of time to act on it. They've dealt with the 421-a issue for years and years now. You know when the governor wanted to pass the Gun Safe Act a few years ago, he passed it in three hours using the emergency powers of the governor's office. And I think that was an important piece of legislation, a good piece of legislation. But I gotta tell you, if ever there was an emergency, it's the affordable housing emergency in New York City, and right now it's time for that same kind of urgency. When the Governor put forward the Gun Safe Act, a lot of legislators didn't even get the chance to read it. But they still had to vote on it, and they did. I want people to understand, obviously, the details of what we're talking about. That's why we've been telling about it for weeks and weeks. But now it's time to act. Now, it's time to act. This is a housing emergency, and folks in Albany have time to act and they should not hide behind the smoke screen of the schedule.

Chris Widelo: Bill, thank you. You just heard from Mayor de Blasio here in New York City and we are speaking live to him about rent regulations today. Mr. Mayor I know you're on a tight schedule, but we have another call from Saul in Brooklyn. If you can hear us, please make your point with Mayor de Blasio – Saul, in Brooklyn.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Saul, are you there? Alright, Chris, try someone else.

Chris Widelo: Sure. Well, you know, he actually had a pretty good question. Right, so –

Mayor: Alright. Speak for Saul.

[Laughter]

Chris Widelo: Yeah, yeah – so you know fortunately our screeners did speak to him earlier, and he and his brother live on Social Security. And their concerned, you know, what would happen if these rent regulations were not renewed?

Mayor: Well, I appreciate Saul's question, as that's the heart of the matter. Let's be very blunt about this. If rent regulation is not renewed, and that comes up this Monday, then everyone who has a lease in New York City under rent regulation would only get to keep their apartment with the current rent level through the end of that lease. At that point, all apartments would go to market rate. And it would be whatever the landlord chose to charge. And that means, literally, tens of thousands of people, maybe hundreds of thousands of people, will ultimately be displaced from their apartments. That's how bad it is. If every rent regulated apartment in New York City – one million-plus units, two million-plus people – if all those went to market rate in the next year or two, the level of displacement will be like nothing we've ever seen before. It would be devastating to working people in this city and it would be the beginning of the end of New York City as we have known it as a place for everyone. And so, that's the stakes in Albany – that's why it's outrageous that anyone in Albany to say that there's not enough time to get to a deal.

Chris Widelo: Thank you, Mayor de Blasio. So, Saul, I hope we did your question justice. We have another caller from here it looks like in Manhattan. It looks like it's going to be Roxanna. Roxanna, can you hear my voice?

Question: Yes, I can perfectly.

Chris Widelo: Great. Go ahead.

Question: Mr. Mayor, the question I put was how can we close the loophole that allows landlords to use an NCI as an addition to the rent? And cause it to be a permanent part of the rent?

Mayor: Well, Roxanna, I appreciate that question. I've got to say I believe you're exactly right. There should be no more loopholes that allows for any addition to rent to [inaudible] made permanent for a cost that was temporary. You know, if you go and stick something in an apartment it costs a certain amount of money, okay, the landlord has a right to recoup that specific investment, and then it's over. So I have proposed reforms that make that a temporary addition to the rent, not a permanent addition, I know the assembly feels the same way. I believe the governor has said some supportive things as well. Again, now it's time for action. And this is one of the biggest areas of abuse right now, where landlords get a lot more money back than they deserve for any changes and improvements they make. Let's close that loophole right now, and that's what I need everyone to demand of the legislature and the governor.

Chris Widelo: Thank you, mayor. So we are joined by New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, you probably all recognize his voice, and we are talking about rent regulations. My name is Chris Widelo and I'm with AARP, and we are talking about the fact that rent regulation laws here in New York City will be expiring on Monday and what can be done to make sure we have stronger rent regulation laws for New York City residents that rent. We have another call, Mr. Mayor, we have Renee from the Bronx. Renee, if you can hear us, go ahead and ask your question of Mayor Bill de Blasio. Renee in the Bronx –

Mayor: Well, Chris, do you have Renee's question?

Chris Widelo: Yeah, you know, so Renee was asking, you know, she's about 74, so she's a little bit older and has an income of around \$800 dollars, which – and her rent is almost that. And so she – it seems like she was asking how she can survive? You know, how does she make ends meet with having that little income and having a rent that is almost that much?

Mayor: Well, Renee – if you can hear me – Renee, this is exactly why we are fighting so hard to make sure to begin with that that rent regulated unit you have is protected. And, in fact, that we strengthen the protections so that it won't go out of rent regulation. We got a lot to do to help to help people, particularly seniors, be able to make ends meet, but the first thing we have to do is protect the affordable units people have now so situation does not get worse. In so many other areas we're trying to lift burdens on people and find ways to, you know, lighten the load. But in this case, job one right now is to make sure we protect the affordable housing we have. It's the number one expense in people's lives. It's the number one expense by far for our seniors. And every senior loses an affordable unit – it's the most undermining thing for their life and for everything that they care about. So, we've got to protect the affordability right now. If we don't make these changes in rent regulation to strengthen it, then a lot of units that people on this are in right now will ultimately come out of rent regulation because the current law is too porous and too friendly to the landlords. We got to strengthen it if we are going to protect the needs and rights of our seniors.

Chris Widelo: Thank you. So hopefully, already, we did your question justice as well – an important one for sure. Chris Widelo here with AARP, and I have been talking for the last 15 minutes or so with New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio and we're discussing the issue of rent regulation. We have a – another caller that would like to ask their question. It looks like it's Loretta from Brooklyn. Loretta, if you are able to hear us, go ahead and ask your question. Loretta from the Mayor's home borough of Brooklyn, if you can hear me it's a good time now to ask your question.

Question: Hello?

Mayor: There she goes. Loretta, can you hear us?

Question: Yes I do.

Chris Widelo: Go ahead Loretta.

Mayor: What's your question?

Question: Oh, I live here in Brooklyn on Eastern Parkway under Hill and Washington, and all these big buildings are being built, built up. And every time I apply for rent stabilization apartment I get rejected because I'm middle class. Me and my husband are in the middle class income, and they're saying that we make too much. And when they put the rent out there of \$2,000-3,000 dollars a month for one bedroom, we can't afford to pay for it. And I don't understand – what is middle class? What is \$60,000 dollars a year, and you can't even get into none of the rent stabilization apartments? We always get rejected. They tell us that we make too much. Really, we don't. And if this thing goes through, we'll be paying way too much money for one bedroom apartment, and we won't be able to afford it, and we'll be out on the street homeless.

Mayor: Well Loretta, thank you very much for the call. And that's exactly why I'm fighting for these changes in Albany and why I need everyone on this line to join me in that fight, because you're right. People who don't get to affordable housing are people who lose the affordable housing they have. They're getting up in a horrible situation. Maybe they're going to end up living with other family members, doubled or tripled up. Maybe they're going to end up having to leave their neighborhood or leave the city altogether. And God forbid some will end up in homeless shelters. And that's how urgent this matter is and why it's so galling that Albany isn't acting.

But let me tell you, I think you're talking about two different ideas at once. What we're trying to do to protect rent regulated apartments and strengthen our rent law is one piece. But the other piece is what we are doing to create and preserve affordable housing, ultimately again for half a million New Yorkers. Now, absolutely, someone who's making that kind of range you talked about – \$60,000 for a family – absolutely qualifies for some of the affordable units that we'll be creating. I'm not going to lie to you and tell you that we have a perfect number of units and that there is enough for every single human being who needs one. That would be – that wouldn't be the truth. But there is going to be a lot. There is going to be a lot and people who make \$60,000 dollars absolutely can qualify a number of those units. So I want you to call 3-1-1, and we'll make sure that when you get connected to our housing department at HPD – Housing and Preservation Development – that you can get information about how to apply for the many, many units that we created over the coming years. Right now, we got to protect – we've got to protect rent laws and strengthen rent laws. But we're continuing to build more and more affordable units every year, and people like you do qualify.

Chris Widelo: Mr. Mayor I really want to say – to reiterate the value of calling 3-1-1 – that if you have different issues with rent, with aging services, things like that, 3-1-1 is your one stop. And I will tell you that I every so often try it, just to see how it works, just so I know what I'm talking about when I mention it. And I've never waited more than five minutes to get connected where I need to go. So that should be everyone's first stop. And I don't want to digress too much. So I think you'll probably have time for one more question and then I want to give you a chance to wrap up. So we are going to go live to Denise in Kew Gardens. Denise, you're on live with Mayor Bill de Blasio.

Question: Oh, good morning and thank you. We seniors need affordable housing. We need it desperately. We're on fixed incomes. [inaudible] – we're on very, very fixed incomes. I live in a building that [inaudible] owned and they – they said, well, we want to try and co-op, but if you vote non-evict, we won't – you won't lose anything. And they lie and there's no penalty. We no longer have access to the super. We have to call in Monday through Friday between 10 and four. You don't even get a human being, you get a recording. And

maybe two or three days, and four calls later, is when they finally, maybe get back to you. Oh and we'll have to send someone to inspect your apartment to see [inaudible] like doing, you know, the repair or whatever the service is. It's – we – I've been in the building since 1976. I am bumped by the owners and I no longer have the right to parking in the building that –

Chris Widelo: So, I mean, that's the name of the game – right, Mr. Mayor? It's about how we can preserve affordable housing by strengthening these laws.

Mayor: Well, that's right, and Denise, thank you very much for your call. And I – it really pains me to hear that, like so many people, you were sold a bill of goods about, you know, what you would get if the – if the building went private. And this is the story of the last couple of decades in New York City. You know, for many decades we had the right protections in place for all New Yorkers, and particularly for seniors. We had Mitchell-Lama, we had strong rent regulation, we had a lot of section 8 vouchers – you know, a lot of things were working right and people could get to affordable housing. And that was before the cost of housing went absolutely out of control.

Now that we're in this new environment, sadly, there are lots of landlords who have taken advantage. There's plenty of decent landlords out there too, but there's too many who took advantage of people. One of the things we're doing is, when it comes to rent-regulated tenants, if we see instances where people are being harassed by their landlords, pushed out illegally – we put \$36 million dollars into the upcoming city budget to fight the harassment of tenants by unscrupulous landlords. Now this is a crucial piece. It's time for government to weigh in on the side of tenants in a very muscular way, and that's what we're doing every day. And certainly, whether you're in rent regulated housing or not, if you think your landlord is doing something illegal or wrong, you can call 311, you can get connected to the appropriate city agency. And we're going to do everything we can to help.

But, I think the bigger point here is we got to stop the bleeding here, when it comes to the loss of affordable housing. As I mentioned, again, almost 200,000 units lost over the last 20 years because of units going out of rent regulation, going out of Mitchell-Lama, and other affordable programs. That kind of loss of affordable housing has fundamentally undermined our neighborhoods and our families and our seniors. And that's got to end now.

And that's why your voices need to be heard in Albany, because if Albany doesn't get it, they're the only ones at this moment – I wish, I wish we had all the power here in New York City to solve our own problems, but because of the state constitution, for better or for worse, Albany makes this decision. Well, they've got to be responsive to the 8.5 million people of New York City – and over 2 million of whom are in rent-regulated apartments – and recognize it's their obligation in Albany to protect affordable housing and not to see us continue to lose it at such an alarming rate. So that's where, right now, if we strengthened rent regulation, closed the loopholes, we'd be in a position to keep many, many people in affordable housing for the long term. But if Albany doesn't act, we're going to keep losing affordable units. And if Albany does literally nothing, then there's a real nightmare coming where the rent regulated units we have today will no longer be regulated and therefore will no longer be affordable. And that's going to affect literally hundreds and hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers.

Chris Widelo: So thank you, Mr. Mayor, we do, you know – I'm told that you might have time for one more question, so I'll let you answer this question and then if you want to give a closing statement. Oops, looks like she dropped off, so, I am, I am sorry. Mr. Mayor –

Mayor: Do we have the question?

Chris Widelo: The person who had the question unfortunately is no longer in the queue.

Mayor: Alright. Do you have another one ready or not?

Chris Widelo: No. I want to just be respectful of your time and your schedule, and give you an opportunity to, you know, just to make a last statement. And I know you have a busy schedule, and we just appreciate your time to join us today and talk about this important issue.

Mayor: Thank you very much, Chris. Well, again, I know, I believe the calls going to continue after I get off with some other important information. And Chris, thank you to you, thank you to AARP for your leadership. I want to tell you, for all the members of AARP, one thing for sure – your voice gets heard as an organization. It's done a great job being a powerful advocate for seniors. And boy, AARP is listened to in Albany, and no time like this moment to make those voice heard. We got to – we got to shake the situation in Albany. The complacency up there is unacceptable. This is an urgent housing crisis and it needs to be treated like such. And there is time – there is definitely time – for Albany to resolve these issues and protect affordable housing, particularly for our seniors, so the time is now. Please make your voices heard. And thank you to everyone who joined this call.

Chris Widelo: Thank you very much. You just heard from New York City mayor, Bill de Blasio. He was our guest for the last 25 minutes or so, and we talked about affordable housing. My name is Chris Widelo, Associate State Director for AARP here in New York City.

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