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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS ON THE UPHOLDING
OF WATER BILL CREDIT**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you so much, Katie, and everyone. We're here today to talk about some very good news for homeowners all over New York City. For people like Katie who worked very hard and really have to watch every penny, we got some good news and right in time for Christmas. I'm going to talk about that and I will just say at the end I'm also going to talk about what happened in Washington yesterday, because unfortunately in my view some really bad news for the people in the City, but let's focus on the good news first.

And Katie, look, you know, I think you have been here for almost 20 years here in Greenpoint, and what you said is so important for so many homeowners in all five boroughs. The cost of everything has gone up. It's tough to make ends meet and just like you said, look at that growth in your water bill in just a few years' time that affects your whole family budget. And we understand that the job of government is to try to lighten burdens in any way we can. And we thought about that in everything we do, whether it is creating jobs that pay better, improving wages and benefits, taking burdens off of parents with thing for free like Pre-K and afterschool, it all leads to the same place trying to make it easier for working people to make ends meet in a City that has become very expensive.

Well, the water bill issue is one of the things people feel the most passionately and I heard it for years when I was a City Council member in Brooklyn, as Public Advocate, and now as Mayor, and I want to talk about what was wrong all those years with the Mayor – what was wrong with the reality of the water bills, and what happened in previous administrations that didn't get resolved, that finally gotten resolved in this administration because the bottom line is people were paying for something other than water. And it never made sense and it went on for a long, long time.

And I want to thank the people in my administration who understood that this was unfair to everyday New Yorkers and it had to be fixed. I want to thank our DEP Commissioner, Vinnie Sapienza, and I want to thank two people who really deserve credit because they were the lead lawyers on the behalf of the Law Department of New York City fighting against the landlord lobby in court, to make sure that these rebates could be given to homeowners and they won this case in the highest court in New York State. I want to thank Melanie West and Devin Slack, so homeowners everywhere should be thanking them right now, well done.

[Applause]

So, it's the holiday season and it is a time of year that we all love and it's also a time of year when people are pinching every penny and they are trying to take care of their family and get gifts and everything, and people realize that that's not easy. It is wonderful to be able to announce that hardworking families will be getting an extra gift at this holiday season, because the New York State Court of Appeals made it very clear that this rebate for homeowners was absolutely appropriate and could go forward.

And that means that there will be for over 664,000 households, a little bit of relief, a little bit of help, at a point they really, really need it and deserve it. 664,000 households and they have been waiting for many months for this decision. The landlord lobby sued after the Water Board, the Water Board made the decision that this rebate was the right thing to do and then the landlord lobby sued and we have been back and forth in court but now the ultimate decision has been made that these rebates can go forward.

Now as I said, this issue, I've heard about it for years because homeowners would tell me they couldn't believe how their water bills kept going up and it seemed like there was something beyond what met the eye, and you know what? They were right. Because what the City of New York did for many years was tacked on hidden taxes into the water bill. It's one thing to say we should pay for whatever it takes to get our water supply, that's fair, we need water. Got the best water in the whole country, sometimes you got to invest to make sure it will keep flowing the right, ok. No one is going to begrudge the fact that we as homeowners need to pay for water. But when I found out that homeowners also paying for other types of charges that had nothing to do with the water supply, but that was being tacked on the water bill, that was wrong and needed to end. And the water board agreed. And the decision was to end, once and for all, those hidden taxes and in fact return some of the money that had been taken from homeowners. To give it back to them.

This was a big long fight but it was a fight that was worthwhile because it's something that will now show people that what they see is what they get. No more hidden taxes, no more hidden fees, just pay for the water you use. And this allows us to provide a onetime rebate of \$183 for every homeowner in New York City. And I can tell you there is a lot of people in this City that \$183 will really help and matter to them in their lives. The money itself will help, but knowing that it also symbolizes the fact that they will no longer be paying those hidden taxes matters even more. It'll matter to them and their lives. The money itself will help, but knowing that it also symbolizes the fact they're no longer going to be paying those hidden taxes matters even more. So, this will finally become a reality. The Water Board is now able to follow through on their original decision and this money will get back into the pockets of hardworking New Yorkers.

This is yet another piece of a bigger strategy – to look in every way we can to lighten the burden, to take on the things that are unfair, to challenge all of the situations that people face – for example, when landlords treat their tenants unfairly, to give those tenants lawyers for free. This is the kind of thing that makes us a fairer city and I'm very, very happy that the court has made this decision just in time for the holidays.

So, I want to introduce to you in a moment a man who represents this community, but let me just say a few words quickly in Spanish.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, I know that Assemblymember Joe Lentol understands what the homeowners in his district go through. He has fought for them many, many times in Albany. And I know he understands how rare it is for government to actually recognize when something's unfair and to do something about it and give money back. So, it's a day to celebrate – Assemblymember Joe Lentol.

[...]

Mayor: Well, so that was the good news – some real good news for homeowners. But now, for the bad news from Washington DC – as Joe said, the President made a big deal about signing the tax bill before Christmas with the fiction that it was somehow going to be a benefit for every-day people. But what's more and more clear is it's a big Christmas gift for the wealthy and the corporations. And I'll tell you something, people all over the country understand this – it's amazing when you look at the public response, no one is falling for it. They understand what motivated this tax bill – it's of, and by, and for the millionaires and billionaires, and it's going to be very clear to people in the coming years it's one of the biggest giveaways to the wealthy in American history.

So, I have to say, I think with that clear understanding, that many Republican members of Congress are going to go back to their communities and find a lot of anger and a lot of frustration, and people are going to remember it because it's supposed to be the season of giving, not the season of giveaways. And people are going to remember that they were told this new administration was going to do something for working people, but, in fact, we're seeing the opposite. We know that this tax bill will end up hurting working people and middle class people. We know that some of the biggest burdens will fall on our seniors. We know a lot fewer people will have healthcare as a result this bill. We know that in New York City, well over 600,000 New Yorkers will see their taxes go up, and that's to the tune of thousands of dollars per family.

This tax bill is going to hurt a huge number of people in this city, in this state. And most of the people who will be hurt are working class and middle class people who make less than \$75,000 a year in household income. That's what's really going on here. So, you know, for years and years I've been talking about the income inequality crisis. This tax bill puts income inequality on steroids and makes it much worse – that's what's going on. And then, we have a danger up ahead – that as the effects of the tax bill get felt more and more, and there's less and less federal revenue, the next thing you'll see the Republicans in Washington start to do is talk about cutting back Medicare, cutting back Medicaid, cutting back Social Security, reducing benefits for people who have paid in all those years – that's the shape of things to come.

So, I wish I could say this was a happy story this week, but it's not. The only silver lining is that people understand it, they have not been fooled. No one has had the wool pulled over their eyes,

and as they see this tax bill play out, they're going to get angrier and angrier, and they will take their frustrations to the ballot box, and I think it's going to be one of the reasons that things will change in this country.

So, with that, everyone, some good news here, some bad news in Washington, but we're going to keep moving forward on behalf of the people of this city.

A very Happy Holidays to all, thank you.

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