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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 12, 2018

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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT THE NATIONAL
LEAGUE OF CITIES SPRING MEETING**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: ...this opportunity to spend some time together and talk about the impact you are going to make on the future of this country. And I'm going to channel Tom Donohue in a moment, which I never thought I'd say.

[Laughter]

Amazing things are happening at the NLC, let me tell you.

[Laughter]

First, I just want to thank Mayor Stodola. He is a fantastic leader of his city, and I know this because I get this exciting email every Monday morning. Do any of you get Monday Mornings with the Mayor? Do you get [inaudible] email? I haven't even had my coffee and I'm figuring out everything that's going on in Little Rock, and it's very inspiring.

[Laughter]

Now, I give him a lot of credit – he started the week right for everybody. But, thank you for your great leadership, Mayor. I want to commend your [inaudible], we are looking forward to her great leadership – [inaudible] for her leadership, all in her city and beyond. And, of course, the inimitable, the unmistakable, Clarence Anthony, who does so much for the [inaudible].

[Applause]

So, here's what I want to say to you – the National League of Cities is having a very big impact already, but you're going to have a much bigger impact, going forward. We're in a time in history where the rules of the game are changing constantly, and we are learning new ways of doing things that we're understanding our power in a different way. And I can say that we as leaders on the ground, where the rubber hits the road, where things have to get done – we have an ability to speak to people all over the country and move them in terms of the kinds of changes we need. We also have an extraordinary ability to move the Congress. And honestly, we have not

even begun to tap into our potential. And that's [inaudible] and, again, I was listening to Tom there, and he – I've got to give him credit – I've got to give him credit, he was hitting that same note, that we can go up to Capitol Hill and change minds. And we can change those same minds in our communities by organizing our people and our leaders – our civic leaders, our faith leaders, our business leaders – in common cause for the amount of changes we need.

We are never surprised when things don't happen in Washington D.C., right? Right?

[Applause]

So, we have no illusions. I mean, what a blessing to have no illusions.

[Laughter]

We can see clearly. We come here to meet because of our nation's capital, but we don't here assuming this is a place of action. But we can help it become a place of action because we're a people of action.

[Applause]

And we have the ability – and each and every one of you do it all the time – we have the ability to bring people together in our community, and their voices to be heard in a way that's unmistakable to the representatives here. Remember, everyone in this room knows something about the political process – when enough of your constituents start speaking, when enough of those voices that you truly respect, or maybe even fear a little, start speaking up, it changes your mind, it opens your eyes.

Our collective ability to speak up for the people of cities all over America and move the Congress is potentially extraordinary, but I know for a fact that it has not been tapped into, it has not been built the way it could have been, and, now, in this moment in history – in this sharp, intense moment in history, we have that chance to do it, and this is one of the places where it has to happen.

So, I want to talk to you about another piece that makes us powerful and that's the fact that we all sit in a room together. Now, I just actually came up from a U.S. Conference of Mayors meeting in Austin – the same exact reality. We sit in a room with each other, we get along, we work together. Oh, by the way, some of us are Republican, some of us are Democrats, some of us are Independents. We think it's normal to work together.

[Applause]

So, for us, bipartisanship is not some strange, mysterious, exotic thing. It's something we live every single day – now, maybe a rare commodity in Washington, but it's something we're really comfortable with, and that gives us a power. In a nation yearning to see people actually get results and actually find a way to get along and get something done, we already know how to do it. And that gives us a moral authority. When we speak in our communities or when we speak to

a broader audience, we're speaking from the position of people who are actually modeling good behavior.

[Applause]

Now, I did not know the power we had until just a few years ago, and one of the people who taught me – this is another moment where I'm going to break character a little. I'm a progressive Democrat, I'm proud of that. But my teacher in that particular moment back in 2015 was – an unlikely source – Senator Jim Inhofe, of Oklahoma. And I went to his office, and we were there to talk about the Highway bill. It was a group of Republican and Democratic mayors, urging more federal spending on infrastructure. And I sat down, Inhofe fixes me with a look, and he smiles broadly. He says, you know, I'm considered one of those most conservative members of the U.S. Senate. And I said, yes, Senator, I know that. And he says, well, but I'm also going to tell you why I believe that the federal government has [inaudible] work to do to address the infrastructure challenge. And he said to me, you all – all of you Mayors, Council Members, local elected officials – you need to get together with your business community, you need to get together with your farm community if you're in a farming part of the country, you need to get together with all of your local leaders and send a unified message and it will be heard by people in the Congress.

And we proceeded to do that [inaudible]. And in – at that point in history, the Highway bill, you know, whether it was funding mass transit, roads, bridges, highways, it barely moved year to year. It was almost [inaudible]. In 2015, we had a breakthrough. We got a longer-term bill, we got a lot more money in it, because that bipartisan coalition, built from the grassroots, kept going to Washington, kept coming back, and went – Senators and Congress Members went to their district, they saw those same people right there. And it wasn't the typical one extreme or another group in front of their office, it was a truly bipartisan group. It was public and private sector together, and I started to see the power of that. And in no time will that be more important than this moment as this country's finally talking about infrastructure in a more serious way. And look, it doesn't matter what you think of each plan, or where you are on the political spectrum, one thing we can say, and it could be a real blessing, is – the issue is on the front burner. We – for us, every day it's on the front burner, right? In our lives, infrastructure and the things we struggle to deal with when it comes to infrastructure – we think about it all the time. We know what we could do to build our cities, build our economies if we actually had the resources to invest. And we know the danger if those resources never come. We know it could set us back. So, we feel it. We know it.

Finally, it's on the front burner, so it's a moment of opportunity for all of us. Now, look, we need the understand and we need to communicate to our constituents and to the whole country, and certainly to the Congress, what ever you do, there's one thing you can't do. You can't leave this status quo in place. The current status quo on infrastructure in this country will leave us all behind.

[Applause]

We can't grow if we don't get some help. And we don't accept a reality in which so many other leading nations are growing and growing, because they're building bridges, and roads, and tunnels, and railroads, and everything they need they're investing in – and watch their economies grow – and we sit here, the greatest nation on earth, watching ourselves falling behind – that's not the American way.

Look at the – a lot of people in this room can relate to the crisis of Amtrak. Amtrak's one of the things that actually unites this country. While Amtrak's crumbling, our competitor nations are building bullet trains all over the place. And we're watching, and we want to break that status quo, we want to get the nation moving forward. I have heard just as much passion from Republicans as from Democrats, smaller cities as from bigger cities. But here is our chance to change the equation. It won't change itself. The equation will not change within the boundaries of the Beltway here in Washington. It will only change if we change it.

The power is in this room, because we represent the grassroots and we can show the members of the Congress that if all they do is reinforce that status quo, they're literally saying to their constituents – your lives can't improve, you can't get more jobs, you can't get a better standard of living. We've got to make it as plain as that. And this moment is powerful, and here's what I think. Again, everyone's going to have a different view, I'm going to give you mind. The jobs and infrastructure put forward by the Senate Democrats has profound advantages that, I think, every one of our cities can feel. It's a trillion dollars in direct federal spending. It focuses on local control – I think that's something we can all applaud.

[Applause]

If you want to get the job done, send the resources to the most local level.

[Applause]

There is not a requirement in the Senate Democrat bill that you have to provide matchable money.

[Applause]

Remember, for so many cities big and small, it's a death knell. If you have to come up with a huge amount of money in order to get more federal money, it's a non-starter – and, by the way, it's not fair.

[Applause]

Because, by that theory, then only the jurisdictions that happen to have a lot of resources will ever get ahead. So, the rich get richer. We need – there are cities all over this country, big and small, in every region that if they got some investment, their economies can start to surge. But if they don't have that initial money and they're left behind, that's not fair and that's not right. So, we have to fight for that [inaudible] and the Senate Democrat bill does that.

[Applause]

And it avoids the danger – and look, there is a danger if we think infrastructure and there is a door open for privatization. Here's what I've got [inaudible] when there is privatization involved, too many times the resources don't arrive; too many times the project does not prove to be “profitable” for the private sector; too many times you're left holding the bag.

I don't want an infrastructure bill that helps Wall Street and leaves out main street.

[Applause]

So, we have to insist on the right kind of bill. And I saw it in 2015 – I saw the power of localities. I saw what cities could do together, showing the Congress that they have to do something different. And, lo and behold, it actually worked. We've got to do that again, but we've got to do it even more intensely. It's one of those hours of decision. I know we can help our constituents to understand that if the federal government gets back in the business of building up this country, everyone benefits. And, I remind you, history is on our side. There's a beautiful bipartisan history to this too. A lot of it started with Franklin Delano Roosevelt, but in the heyday of our national government actually investing in all of us, a lot of that happened during the administration of Dwight Eisenhower – the Interstate Highway System, a great example. So, there was a bipartisan consensus. You had to invest to build up the country. You had to spend money so everyone else could make money, could have a decent standard of living.

That was a time in our history when every-day working people actually thought they would do better. That they over the year would have a better standard of living, that their kids would do better than they did. Remember those times? Isn't that what we want again?

[Applause]

So, history teaches us it can be done. History teaches us it was the American way, and it worked for Americans all over the country. The solution will not come from this city. The solution will come from your city. If you feel the power, if you understand that you can be the difference-maker, this will be the time to break through, this will be the time that things change. And, because of you, your people will be better, and your people will realize that they're a great potential. There's great potential in our cities, there's great potential in our nation, if only we invest in what matters, which are the things that actually help our people.

Let's do that together. Thank you, everyone.

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