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MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT ASSOCIATION FOR A BETTER NEW YORK

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Bill Rudin, Chairman of ABNY, for the introduction.

Want to acknowledge admin here: Tony Shorris, First Deputy Mayor; Alicia Glen, Deputy Mayor Housing & Economic Development; Bill Bratton, Police Commissioner; Gabrielle Fialkoff, Senior Advisor to the Mayor; Maya Wiley, Counsel to the Mayor; Maria Torres-Springer, Commissioner, Department of Small Business Services; Julie Menin, Commissioner, Department of Consumer Affairs; Kyle Kimball, President of the New York City Economic Development Corporation.

Also want to acknowledge: Mayor David Dinkins; all elected officials here, including Public Advocate Tish James; all the great business and labor leaders here.

17 months ago, I was honored to address an event hosted by this organization -- just about a month before the 2013 mayoral election.

At that time, there were some pundits who wondered exactly how ABNY would receive me.

After all, my campaign was built around progressive change – about taking aim at inequality and helping rebuild our middle class. Surely – the cynics argued – progressive ideas would be met with the sound of crickets – or perhaps worse – when presented to those who have dedicated their lives to growing businesses and the economy.

But knowing this organization, and many of the individuals who comprised the audience that day, I wasn't the least bit worried.

That day, I said: "We cannot resign ourselves to the mindset that says rising inequality is a necessary byproduct of urban success." No one booed or hissed or left the room. Instead, that call was met with resounding agreement.

That's because ABNY understands – as do I – that rising inequality isn't just a problem for those of modest means... not just a threat to those barely hanging on to their place in the middle class. You and I understand that inequality is a crisis that impacts all of us -- including those who have enjoyed great personal success.

If New York cannot be a city of genuine opportunity for all – regardless of the circumstances of their birth – then we not only lose a part of who we are – we risk losing our place as a global center of innovation, diversity, and progress.

That is why we refuse to accept the false choices that for too long have defined the way that some have viewed our city:

That sustained economic growth is fated to only help some, while leaving so many behind;

That more development inevitably means that everyday New Yorkers will be priced out;

That New York cannot be both a growing city and a city of opportunity for all.

We know that sort of myopic thinking should not, and will not, define our future.

A progressive agenda – one that seeks to reduce the cost of living for working families, as well as boost their wages – is not in conflict with fostering a thriving economy. In fact, it can and must be the foundation for a sustainable, growing economy.

We've just begun to implement our agenda, but if 2014 is any indication, policies promoting fairness and equality are not inhibiting economic growth in the slightest.

Just take a look at the good news from last year.

Last year, New York saw:

95,900 jobs added;

More than four million private sector jobs – an all-time high;

An unemployment rate down nearly two points in less than a year – with the third quarter experiencing the largest three-month drop in unemployment on record;

The expansion of an entertainment industry that produced a record 46 television series and over 240 films right here in New York;

And the continued growth of a booming tech sector that now employs nearly 300,000 people.

Our city is growing, both in terms of our economy, and the number of people who want to call New York home. By 2040, we will be a city of 9 million people.

And so we remain focused on a critical challenge: growing our economy in a way that is broad-based and guided by expanding opportunity for every New Yorker.

We know that the best and brightest come from every neighborhood, in every borough – and those with the grit and determination to succeed come from all walks of life.

So if families can't afford to stay in our city, then we are all denied the contributions offered by those unrealized success stories.

That is why we are so focused on the crisis of affordability that confronts New York City.

Now, there are two sides to the affordability equation: finding more affordable places for families to live, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, helping grow New Yorkers' incomes -- through higher wages, better benefits, and more steps to reduce the squeeze that so many of our families feel.

In the State of the City, I talked about my Administration's affordable housing plan: the boldest municipal affordable housing plan in U.S. history.

To repeat, our housing plan means:

For the first time ever, a requirement of affordable housing as a condition of new development resulting from rezoning;

Fighting to protect and strengthen rent regulations to ensure that housing units that are currently affordable will stay that way;

Dedicating \$36 million to protecting tenants from harassment, and cracking down on predatory landlords – those landlords who want only to make a quick buck at the expense of their tenants' well-being, at the expense of our city's affordability.

We more than doubled the 10-year capital budget for affordable housing to \$8 billion and will leverage private dollars for a total investment of over \$40 billion to produce more units for a broader range of New Yorkers.

All of that adds up to 200,000 units of affordable housing created or preserved over a decade...units built at double the average annual rate of the last 25 years.

Additionally, we're catalyzing 160,000 new market rate units to help housing supply keep up with a growing population.

And as we re-zone to add more housing capacity, we are committed to investing in infrastructure, so that communities don't have to wait years for new schools, parks, playgrounds and other open spaces.

These are the hallmarks of responsible development...and priorities to this Administration.

Because making housing in New York more affordable is so critical to keeping this a city of opportunity and innovation.

But housing is only one side of the affordability equation.

That is why we are also working to grow our economy...to expand new job opportunities, and drive wages in our city up.

This Administration is fighting for smart, inclusive, five-borough economic growth... growth that benefits all New Yorkers -- not just those at the top.

The partnership of the people in this room is critical to making New York a stronger, fairer city for all who call it home. It is critical to keeping New Yorker a city defined by openness and innovation -- a special place to start or grow a business.

So, the City will do its part -- first, by investing in our people, so that businesses don't need to look far and wide to find the most skilled, best qualified workers in the world.

Specifically:

We're starting early, with more than 53,000 students enrolled in full-day pre-K last year. This year, we expect that number to be up to 70,000 kids, meaning that every child that needs a pre-k seat will get one.

We have already more than doubled the number of middle school students in afterschool – and we’re adding even more this year – to keep kids off the streets and out of harm’s way, giving working parents peace of mind during those critical hours between the end of the school day and the end of the workday.

And our commitment to making New York a place where everyone is prepared for opportunity – that goes much further.

We are making a \$29 million investment to expand academic intervention and STEM at CUNY community colleges, because everyone in New York ought to have access to an education that includes the knowhow needed for 21st century jobs.

For too long, our City has focused a half-billion dollar training and workforce development budget on initiatives that led to temporary, low paying jobs that offered only superficial opportunity.

Over the past few years, less than 10% of our workforce development investment has gone into skills training. Now, we are tripling that investment.

And we’re moving forward with a plan to redesign our Career Pathways system to arm up to 30,000 New Yorkers annually with the skills they need for quality, stable jobs of today and tomorrow.

We’re working with companies across many industries – from health care to construction – and we recognize that each industry has different needs. The technology industry, for example, desperately needs talent.

That’s why we created the Tech Talent Pipeline: to support the growth of New York’s booming technology sector, and train New Yorkers to be those companies’ premier new hires.

3,000 New Yorkers will benefit from our action this year. Not sometime in the distant future -- this year.

Another example is modern manufacturing: new businesses that utilize technology and the ingenuity of New Yorkers from every borough to quickly turn exciting ideas into tangible products, regardless of their scale.

That means using technologies like 3-D printers, which are revolutionizing production, so that great ideas can come to life right here/right now in New York City. It’s a sector that offers opportunities for a diverse workforce, and is critical to our future.

We’ll partner with modern manufacturing companies to make sure that our training initiatives are offering New Yorkers the skills needed for their industry. We’re also securing commitments from businesses to hire New Yorkers who complete this training.

The City will also do its part by making significant investments in the so-called “built environment” -- so that businesses have the physical prerequisites for growth. New York City understands how important infrastructure is to economic growth, and that is why we are putting our money where our mouth is.

We’re investing in City-owned assets...so our innovative businesses can grow.

For example, Brooklyn Navy Yard is a \$140 million redevelopment project that will transform a previously underutilized warehouse space into a modern manufacturing facility that will create 3,000 good jobs. Because of our investment, a cold, empty space is becoming a hub of opportunity -- filled with exciting, creative businesses...and with job training and placement services on site to ensure new opportunities are open to people from surrounding neighborhoods.

We're taking what works at the Navy Yard – capital investment, job training, and a bold approach -- and applying it to the Brooklyn Army Terminal, where we're opening half a million square feet for modern manufacturing businesses. This means 1,000 new jobs....permanent jobs...representing smart, inclusive growth, in space that was unused for decades.

Today, I want to announce our new plan to invest \$150 million over 12 years to revitalize Hunts Point -- fortifying a vital aspect of our infrastructure: our food supply.

It will modernize the buildings and infrastructure that are currently at Hunts Point and open up new space for small businesses. More than that, this is a bold vision, with a major financial commitment that will make the site resilient and sustainable, improving New York's readiness for natural disasters like Superstorm Sandy.

It's hard to overstate how important this facility is for our city.

It occupies 329 acres and supports 115 private wholesalers that employ over 8,000 people.

These are good, decent-paying jobs for New Yorkers at every education level.

Our plan protects those jobs and positions the site to create many more jobs for New Yorkers in the future.

And it will include dedicated space to better link us to food that is grown and produced in Upstate New York -- strengthening our city's critical partnership with Upstate communities, farms, and businesses.

As you can see, we're investing in training the best possible workers, fortifying our infrastructure, and jump-starting growth for businesses.

We're also making investments to improve our transit system through citywide ferries and expanded bus rapid transit.

And we are reducing unnecessary red tape and regulations that deter innovation.

And we're not just talking about these measures; we're dedicating our own balance sheet to them.

That's why – now that I've talked about how the City of New York will do our part to tackle our inequality crisis -- I want to call on you – the business leaders gathered in this room – to do your part.

I need you to take responsibility for providing the great people of this city with the opportunities... the wages... and the chances for advancement...that they need and deserve.

That means hiring New Yorkers from every neighborhood...giving them the chance to put their skills, their drive, and their determination to work for your company.

It also means raising wages for your workers.

Companies across our city should move as quickly as possible to raise their minimum pay to over \$13 an hour – that being the level we're fighting to achieve in Albany.

Businesses across the country -- like The Gap, Aetna, and Costco -- have already made positive progress on this front -- by raising their wages above the national minimum wage.

And keep in mind -- they are not doing it to be charitable.

Indeed, studies have shown how increasing workers' wages has a powerful upward pull on entire economies, because higher wages means increased consumer spending.

Raising wages is good for business. David Bolotsky – CEO of UncommonGoods, an innovative retailer based in Brooklyn...a strong advocate for raising workers' wages put it like this:

“We see higher productivity and lower turnover when employees are fairly compensated.”

It is time for New York City businesses to take bold action -- not only because hardworking New Yorkers deserve a path to the middle class, but also because giving them one would do so much to help our economy for everyone.

To that end, I am calling on major investors and lenders to put their money in companies that pay good wages. Leaders of our finance industry have a very real impact on our city's economy – and they should use their power to benefit the people of our city - middle class, working class, and poor families alike.

Think of the all the success stories in this room that wouldn't have even been possible without something paying off – a reward for those who struggle with a singular sense of purpose.

That idea... that promise... one that has paid huge dividends for so many here today... is now at risk.

And so we must take action.

Now, our work to tackle the inequality crisis...and keep New York City an open, innovative place – it won't be easy.

But there is so much we can do on our own as a city, if we – this Administration, the people in this room, and everyday New Yorkers across our City – all work together.

So today, let's recommit to making our city a place not of exclusive opulence...but a place of opportunity and innovation.

It's a big job, but the stories – big and small – of those here, and those in every corner of New York -- demonstrate that it is a task well worth undertaking.

And we will do it...together.

Thank you!

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