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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS PUBLIC HEARING AND SIGNS FOR-HIRE VEHICLES LEGISLATION

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Hello, everybody. Welcome. Very good day here at City Hall and I want to thank so many people who are present here today for all the hard work that led to this day, and you know who you are, everyone. This is something, really, to celebrate and a victory for people and a victory for the drivers of this city. Today we look at five bills that will bring fairness to the for-hire vehicle and taxi industry of New York City.

Intro. 144-B requires us to stop issuing new for-hire vehicle licenses for 12 months with an exception for wheelchair accessible vehicles. It mandates the study of congestion and other aspects of the industry. After the study, it authorizes TLC to establish vehicle use standards and to regulate the number of for-hire vehicles.

Intro. 634-B waives license fees for wheelchair accessible vehicles.

Intro. 838-C creates a new class of license for for-hire services that handle over 10,000 trips a day.

Intro 890-B directs the TLC to establish rules to provide minimum payments for drivers of vehicles who work for services licensed to take over 10,000 trips per day.

Intro. 958-A lowers a prior increase in penalties for unauthorized street hails.

I want to thank from our administration TLC Commissioner Meera Joshi who is represented here today, and thank you for being here, and I want to thank Commissioner Victor Calise of the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities.

And now, it's, as I said, a great day for this city and day where something very, very important is happening for working people. And I want to give credit where credit is due and we're going to be having a separate piece of this ceremony in just a few minutes out in the Rotunda. My great pleasure to welcome and thank Speaker Corey Johnson –

[...]

Did we get everyone? Okay. I'm just going to say a few quick summary words in Spanish from this hearing and then we're all going to go over to the Rotunda to complete the mission. Just a few quick words –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, everyone, thank you for being a part of this hearing and we'll see you in just a few minutes in the Rotunda.

[...]

Everybody, everybody I have a question for you all. In this city we love, do we let big corporations tell us what to do?

Audience: No!

Mayor: Do we let the big oil companies or the big pharmaceutical companies tell us what to do?

Audience: No!

Mayor: So, are we going to let Uber and Lyft and all the other big companies tell us what to do?

Audience: No!

Mayor: Here it is about the powerful of the people.

Audience: Yes!

Mayor: And every one of you are such a powerful example of what it means when people get together and they organize and they fight for their rights. This victory is yours.

[Cheering]

Well, there's a lot of thanks to go around and we're going to be hearing from Speaker Johnson on behalf of the City Council in just a moment but I have to tell you for me, very personally – I know a lot of us here feel this today. This is a victory that has been a long time coming and it has been three years in the making but today we have struck a blow for working people.

Audience: Yes!

Mayor: So many people deserve credit and I want to thank, in my own administration, someone who has fought to ensure fairness and inclusion his whole career and he's doing so much, our Commissioner for the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, Victor Calise.

[Applause]

And I want to thank everyone at the TLC. Meera Joshi is not here. I hope she is somewhere getting a rest on a beach because she has worked so hard to get us to this day. But I want to thank Deputy Commissioner Bill Heinzen who is here. Thank you so much, Deputy Commissioner.

[Applause]

The members of the Council who led the way as sponsors of the legislation – Council Member Steve Levin, thank you.

[Applause]

Council Member and Chair Ruben Diaz Sr., thank you.

[Applause]

Council Member Brad Lander, thank you.

[Applause]

There are so many fighters for justice standing behind me and could thank each one by name but I think everyone would agree with me that in calling out one name in particular, that she represents the aspirations and the passion of everyone else. Bhairavi Desai, thank you.

[Applause]

And we have been talking about the human cost of this crisis and I want to really commend Speaker Johnson because he has spoken with such humanity and such passion about those we have lost, and we honor them all today. This is one of those days where those who are no longer with us, we hope and we pray, can feel what is happening here, can know that justice was served.

One person who is here on behalf of his family and on behalf of his brother who was lost – but I have to say this family stood up and carried on the family name and sought justice. Let's thank Richard Chow for all he has done.

[Applause]

Now, here's what we could see even three years ago. We could see that app-based cars were flooding this city and it became increasingly clear this was part of a very cynical plan to oversaturate this city, to oversaturate this market on purpose because of corporate greed.

And a number of us said, watch what's happening here and look where it's going to take us, and I'm sad to say it's taken us some place we could not have imagined – 40 percent of those for-hire vehicles drive our streets empty. No one wins in that equation only a few big corporate titans win. But everyday people don't win. New Yorkers don't win. Drivers don't win. Customers don't win. No one else wins.

And it's bad enough that our streets are clogged. What's even worse is the wages of hard-working drivers have been driven down and down and down further because of a very cynical strategy. This is part of why we have seen these horrible tragedies over the last year.

And I have to tell you, it is particularly painful because you know for generations, being a driver was considered one of the ultimate ways to the middle class. It was a guarantee if you worked hard you would do well and you could build your dream.

Now, a study recently showed – and this is so painful to note – 85 percent of for-hire drivers making a poverty wage, not even the minimum wage for all those hard hours of toil. And in the meantime, people, literally – they are people laughing all the way to the bank. The executives, the wealthy investors, people who have made billions off the backs of working people. That is what we're standing up against today.

Now, here's what's so powerful because it is true the whole world watches New York City and in a world where people have every reason to be cynical and every reason to wonder if their voices will ever get heard, we here in New York City today are sending a message that the voices of the people really do matter. That they can win the day; that they are where the power really resides. Here in this city, fairness is more important than profit and we're proving it. So, there are some powerful people who may not like what I'm about to say but it's time for the big corporations to take a back seat—

Audience: Back seat!

Mayor: -- and for working people to take the wheel.

[Cheering]

So much credit goes to the City Council; they really listened, they really cared. They passed the first in the nation legislation regulating this industry, the first in the nation. Freezing new licenses for 12 months except for accessible vehicles, creating minimum compensation for drivers and that's going to help over 80,000 drivers and their families. So, I commend and thank the City Council for doing their job and doing it so well and now I'm about to do my job and sign these bills into law.

[Cheering]

And this is another big step for New York City, another big step toward being a city where a hard day's work earns you a fair day's pay; another step towards being the fairest big city in America. A few words in Spanish:

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that—

Audience: De Blasio for president!

Mayor: No, no, no. This is all our victories.

Council Member Ruben Diaz Sr.: B-plus –

Mayor: B-plus? Wow, that's very generous.

[Laughter]

B-plus – I'm going to work on it. The City Council really, as I said, really cared, really listened, really went out into the neighborhoods in this city and decided this was the right thing to do. They faced some very powerful opposition and I credited Speaker Corey Johnson before and I need to do it again, because we had conversation after conversation. And there are people in this world that if multinational corporations were bearing down on them and I dare say threatening them, they might have felt that heat. But Corey Johnson didn't flinch, he was focused on working people the whole way through and this is a great example of leadership. Let's welcome Speaker Corey Johnson.

[Cheering]

[...]

Mayor: Alright, I have a question, everybody. Is it time to sign these bills?

Audience: Yes!

Mayor: Maybe you didn't hear my question. I'll repeat it. Is it time to sign these bills?

Audience: Yes!

Mayor: I mean, if you really, really cared you would respond passionately. One more time – is it time to sign these bills?

Audience: Yes!

Mayor: Okay, let's do it.

[Applause]

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