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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT THE RACIAL JUSTICE COMMISSION'S VIRTUAL JUNETEENTH EVENT

Jennifer Jones Austin: We wouldn't be in this moment right now talking about racial justice and racial equity – and not just talking about it but seeking to do something about it in a meaningful way, but for Mayor Bill de Blasio. And so, he's here with us and I'm going to ask him to share a few words with all of us at this moment – or, as many words as he'd like.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: There you go, thank you. No, I'm going to keep it – I'm going to keep it brief and, hopefully, very, very pertinent. First of all, thank you, Dr. Scott. I appreciate everything you've done. I appreciate the passion with which you spoke. And we have got to – I think this is what this moment is all about – feel the history fully, deeply to get us inspired to a higher level of action. It's not enough – I don't think anyone here in this gathering wants to talk about history in abstraction or in a mournful manner without a sense of purpose and transcendence. I think that's the whole idea of the Racial Justice Commission, is to be a transcendent force, to look at the very laws, the very foundation of our city, our charter, our constitution – and then everything else we do, our policies, our laws across the City of New York, our institutions – and question them in a noble, and positive, and productive, and pointed way, in the sense that we will make change in the here and now; to question what is the legacy of the racism that we've all lived with for generations and how it plays out right now in our city, in our institutions, in our government, and to change it.

And to me, as we went through last year, which was a revelatory year, it became clearer and clearer that we should shine the light inward on the City of New York. And I think with the right people – and the right people are those gathered in this commission – fearlessly looking at what is wrong and needs to be fixed, and then how to fix it – and name it and present the specific, tangible ways to make change.

Jennifer, thank you, you've been leading this commission with a tremendous sense of purpose and energy as with everything you do. And to all the commission members, it's going to be a lot of work. I know you took on – I talked to all of you before you accepted the assignment, you all understood you were doing something unprecedented for the history of – in the history of this city, you were doing something unprecedented – actually, in this nation. You know, we have all heard powerful discourse about Juneteenth, powerful discourse about reparations, about Tulsa, so many things that are coming to the fore, but I don't know any place else in the country that has formalized a commission of leaders to say now we are going to name the very specific institutional racism that must be stopped right now, the practices, laws that are wrong and can be fixed here and now, and then the actions that will change them. What you're doing, to me, is

sacred and it is going to set a pattern for this city, this state, and this nation. I don't need to patriotically tell you that when New York City does something, the rest of the country watches, the rest of the world, watches – that's something we're all proud of as New Yorkers. I can tell you that in this year 2021, this year that must be about rebirth and recovery, and a sense of profound change that you have an opportunity to imprint on this city a path forward, and then that will be a shot heard around the world, because what you do will become a template. I think people will ask themselves in every city in America, in every county and every state, even to the national level, where is our equivalent commission? Where is our process? Where is our pathway of change?

I want to especially thank you today that, as you thought about Juneteenth, you thought about some of the greats of the movement here in this city, in this state. And I see Hazel Dukes, and I see, I think, Una Clarke is with us. I see Reverend Daughtry, Reverend Scott, people who have made a life's work of creating change – and so many others, I'm not seeing everyone on the screen and – forgive me, but I know you're out there. Others, you have made a life's work of fostering change and who had to do it, bluntly, in much more difficult conditions than what we're experiencing now and now's not a walk in the park. But the folks who did this work 20, and 30, and 40, and 50 years ago opened up many, many doors for what we need to do now. But I call upon all of us now to walk through the door and reset the equation and go farther.

In that vein, Jennifer and I talked earlier today about the need to codify, the need to take the changes that we've been making and make them permanent, and then look beyond the changes we've made to the others that need to be made and make them permanent and not allow the backsliding. The history is filled the backsliding. Juneteenth could be – in addition to its noble and positive elements that we honor, it could be a painful lesson in backsliding too. People told me they were emancipated only to be in a different way put through a system of oppression, losing what they had, having the rights stripped away. Juneteenth, I don't think I have to say to anyone here, is a beautiful yet bittersweet holiday. And I think in that vein, the notion that this commission is a commission of justice, it's a commission to ensure that there isn't greatness and progress that slips from us, but that we codify it in a way that no one can assail and no one can undermine. I think we can do that in this city, especially in this moment in history, but it will take really good minds and good hearts putting together the ideas for change.

Now, even in the creation of this commission, ideas started to flow. And I want to thank a number of you I know care deeply, especially special shout out to Darrick Hamilton for promoting so deeply the baby bonds idea. And our Task Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity, look at that and a number of other ideas, what we could do here and now with City investment in our Juneteenth. The task force – and I want to thank Deputy Mayor Phil Thompson, because he's a part of both these crucial elements of the equation – the task force, leaders of color in the administration, who are working on, right now, changes, complementing the work of this commission that's going to work on the permanent, big, strategic, and structural changes for the City.

The task force looked at the options of what we could do to honor Juneteenth and came back with three ideas. We announced them yesterday – a recovery task force based at Medgar Evers College, our one of historically Black college – a recovery corps of young people who are going

to get opportunities, paid opportunities to make an impact on the community in the recovery and to learn and grow as leaders and professionals in the process; an initiative to provide four-year CUNY scholarships for thousands of young African-American students, so they can create an opportunity to get through CUNY and succeed and have the resources and the support all the way through; and then, most powerfully, the opportunity for a scholarship fund – excuse me – scholarship accounts for individual children. And this idea, we decided to go big and go fast. You know, popularly known as baby bombs, we said, we need to start right now in this year of revelation and change, 2021. Starting in September 2021, every New York City public school student who goes into kindergarten will get a savings account open for them – every single one. We're going to have a process of building those up with contributions from foundations, nonprofits, business, community, and local communities to build that into a powerful force. Those accounts will grow rapidly so that those young people will know by the time that they leave high school, they have a direct, clear pathway to college and to the creation of generational wealth, which is the crying need in this equation. The economic justice part of this equation is the crying need and what I really hope that everyone will focus on, on Juneteenth.

So, I have said enough. I just want to thank everyone. I don't think any of the folks who have been around for a while will mind if I call them the elders, the folks who have really fought the struggle and created this opportunity for all of us, thank you. The members of the commission, who are taking on a historic task, and you are up to it and then some to create profound change. And everyone is going to participate – because one thing you know, if you ask New Yorkers, do you have an opinion on how we make change? The answer will be, yes, every single time. You will not lack for strong views and good ideas. But, in the course, of this year, I think you're going to really profoundly changed the course of New York City history. And I want to thank you, and I can't think of a better thing to think about, and talk about, and do to celebrate Juneteenth than the work of this commission. So, thank you, everyone.

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