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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT BETHEL GOSPEL ASSEMBLY SERVICE

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you, good morning everyone.

Audience: Good morning.

Mayor: Wow, wow. Bishop, they are awake. Or as the kids would say they are woke. Maybe they are both, awake and woke. Amen. First I want to give honor to God, without him this day would not be possible.

[Applause]

And I want to congratulate everyone at Bethel for this beautiful new sanctuary, this is extraordinary. Bishop congratulations.

[Applause]

I have been to Bethel before but I haven't been to this Bethel before. This is a whole new experience and it's absolutely magnificent. Everyone, I try every day to count my blessings, very consciously. And I ask you to count a blessing. You have Bishop as your leader.

[Applause]

You can clap for that.

[Applause]

Bishop Brown has done so much for this congregation, so much for this community but I want you to know he has done a lot for this city too because he was called to do the work of the lord. He was also called to do the work of educating our children. And he spent years teaching our children in our public schools and I want to say thank you for that, Bishop that means so much.

[Applause]

And Bishop has helped to create other schools around the world where they are needed to help uplift our children. So that's an extraordinary history of understanding and doing something about his beliefs, his faith, and his understanding that children need us, they need us in so many ways. We want them to be everything that they can be but we have to do something about it. Bishop you have done that. And I always say when you look at someone who has accomplished something great, happens to be a man in this case, when you look at a man who has accomplished something great, you have to look at the partnership that made it possible.

[Applause]

There is a phrase that a lot of us were brought up with – we were told behind every great man stands a great woman.

[Applause]

Well okay. But in my household at Gracie Mansion, that phrase has been banned. There was an edict brought down by the First Lady and it's now beside every great man stands a great woman.

[Applause]

And that great woman is Pastor Lorna Brown.

[Applause]

We entrust every day, as parents, as grandparents, we entrust our children to the schools every day. We send them forth with faith that our teachers, our educators will embrace them and help them and guide them as we would. That's what we aspire to, we want the same reality in our school as would exist in our home for our children to be cherished. Imagine if you had responsibility not just for the children in your household or in your larger family but for 1.1 million children. Well this man here, our Chancellor does that every day and he does it with heart and he does it with such caring for our children and he does it with a sense of justice and fairness and we are lucky to have him, Chancellor Richard Carranza, thank you.

[Applause]

And he has a first lady too, Monique Carranza, thank you.

[Applause]

Finally we can't do any of this work on behalf of our children if we don't have legislators who make it their priority to serve our children, and to feel deeply their commitment to our children. And one of those leaders is here. He has done so much already. He's only been in the State Senate a short time. He's already marked himself as a great leader of today and tomorrow, Senator Brian Benjamin, thank you.

[Applause]

Now I will be quick, but Bishop I want to just do my own effort to invoke scripture and scripture, have you noticed scripture is very, very clear on the question of justice? Very urgent, very adamant when it comes to justice. Simple phrase from scripture – blessed are those who act justly. That is a call to all of us, when we see injustice we cannot tolerate it. But right now in this city there is a monumental injustice happening every single day and we can no longer tolerate it. We know we have in our public schools some of the very best high schools not only in the city, in America, some of the very best. We know that children that get that caliber education will be destined to fulfill their greatest potential. But we also know that right now the way you get into one of those schools is just not fair. It's not fair, it's not inclusive, it's not open to all. It reflects, unfortunately, a division from another time but we are living with it in this time. Here is the fundamental problem and I'm talking about Stuyvesant High School, and I'm talking about Bronx Science and I'm talking about Brooklyn Tech, and the eight specialized high schools, the ones we put on a pedestal that should be open to children of all backgrounds, all races, all incomes.

[Applause]

These schools are where our leaders are made. These are the breeding ground for the future leaders of this city and this country. These schools should look like the city. And if they don't it means we are continuing, we are continuing the habits of the past, we are continuing the division of the past, we are continuing to decide early in life who succeeds and who fails. We can't tolerate that any longer.

[Applause]

The reason this is happening is because of a test. A test created long ago, a single test – you sit in a room for three hours, you take a test and that is all, that decides if you get to go to one of these schools...

The reason this is happening is because of a test. A test created long ago. A single test, you sit in a room for three hours, you take a test, and that is all. That decides if you get to go to one of these schools or not.

I want to ask the congregation how many of you believe your entire life, your knowledge, your wisdom, your ability, can be fully captured by taking a single test, does anyone believe that?

Audience: No.

Mayor: Would you want your future determined by a single test?

Audience: No.

Mayor: It makes no sense. It's 2018. It makes no sense. So here's what I say, the test has to go.

[Applause]

I'm going to tell you things that pain me. Our very best high schools accepted 5,000 young people, 5,000 eighth graders the last time they admitted children in this city, 5,000. Only nine percent were black and Latino, combined. A city that's over half black and Latino, and yet only nine percent of those seats went to children who represent the majority of this city. Does that sound right to you?

Audience: No.

Mayor: I'm going to say something else that pains me even more deeply and when you hear it you'll probably be like me, when I first heard it I could not believe it. Stuyvesant High School, renowned all over the country, all over the world, the last time admitted students, one percent African-American, three percent Latino.

Can you imagine that in 2018? One of our finest high schools and only one percent of the children admitted come from a community that makes up almost a quarter of the city. It's intolerable. And how can anyone look a black or Latino parent in the eye and honestly say that your child has a fair shot in getting into one of those schools. You can't because the numbers speak for themselves. It's time for change. It is time for a change. And we're going to make that change immediately.

[Applause]

We are immediately initiating a new plan to offer admission to young people who just missed the cutoff, to give them another chance, and we know this plan will allow a lot more kids to get into those schools. Twenty percent of the seats will now be reserved for disadvantaged students to give them a chance at this type of education.

[Applause]

That's the short-term. Let me tell you what we want to do next and we'll need Senator Benjamin and everyone in Albany to help us. We want to change the entire way young people are chosen for these great schools. We want to get rid of that test all together. Get rid of it.

[Applause]

We want to look at more than one thing when we decide which children would be great because you know what? There are great and talented children in every single community and every single school.

[Applause]

And that test actually weeds out some of the most talented kids because their skills show in so many other ways. Some of the most brilliant people just aren't good at taking a single test. Some of the greatest artists, some of the greatest leaders, some of the greatest scientists, we would

never have known if all that they had to do was take a single test. So our new system gets rid of that test. We look at the grades that a child has gotten in all their subjects.

[Applause]

We take what every child takes, not just those who are all the way down taking the specialized high school test, that's just been unfortunately for a small sliver of our kids. Every child takes the State math exams, every child takes the State English exams, that's a level playing field. Everyone does it. We're going to look at how kids did on that, we're going to look at their grades, we're going to look at how they combine, and you know what it's going to mean? Not only a more diverse set of schools, but schools that have a richer base of talent.

[Applause]

When this plan is in place, we project 45 percent of all seats in our specialized high schools will go to African-Americans and Latinos.

[Applause]

Does that sound like justice?

Audience: Yes.

Mayor: It's what we have to do. Now I'm going to finish with this, Bishop, I think scripture also tells us a lot about the naysayers and the doubting Thomases, we talk about doubting Thomas because he is in the bible.

The whole concept of working from a faith, a belief, a vision, and yet those around you will tell you it isn't possible. So this proposal came out in the last 24 hours and the doubting Thomases have already emerged. Now the first criticism will be familiar to everyone in this room. This will somehow bring down the academic level, we're being told. Somehow these great schools will be less great if they look like all the people of New York City. Nothing could be farther from the truth my friends.

[Applause]

They will be greater because they look like all of the people in New York City.

[Applause]

All those gems, all those amazing young people who are being left out will now get their chance. Don't believe the hype because that's a way of just defending a broken status quo. I guarantee you in the years to come, with your help, because we have to go to Albany and we have to win this vote and we have to make this change, with your vote we're going to do that. And then you are going to come back and you're going to see classrooms full of children, bright with promise, children who got the chance at the very best, children of every single background, and children

who earned it through years of hard work. Justice has been delayed for a long time when it comes to our best high schools. But if we don't work together, justice will not be denied.

[Applause]

Thank you, God bless you all.

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