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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 5, 2014

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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT THIRD ANNUAL LOCAL
PROGRESS NATIONAL CONVENING**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning. Welcome, everyone. Welcome to New York City. Welcome to our City Hall. As we say in New York City, *mi casa es su casa*. We're glad that you are having this gathering here where so much of this exciting and extraordinary work is happening. And I want to talk for a few minutes about what we're doing, but much more importantly I just want to talk to you as colleagues and people who believe in a lot of the same things that we're working on here, and I want to spend a couple of moments thank you and encouraging you in the work you do. But first, giving credit where credit is due – it is a very a good idea, if you want to make progressive social change, to elect a progressive mayor.

[Laughter]

But a progressive mayor only gets you so far. You need a progressive City Council if you really want to make fundamental and lasting change. And I have to tell you – the partnership that I've experienced with Melissa Mark-Viverito has been extraordinary. It's been everything I could ask for in terms of a sense of commitment, a sense of shared vision, and a relentlessness. One thing I deeply appreciated about Melissa – and you'll see this in her work – she is not patient when it comes to the problems we face in our society. She feels urgency. And to have a partner in government who matches our urgency and pushes us, in fact, to keep focused and go father has been one of the reasons we've achieved what we've achieved. It's not just that with her leadership this City Council has moved so many important pieces of legislation and moved so many important acts in tandem with the administration – it's that Melissa's been a voice of conscience and a real clarion call to progressive in this city. And I want to just thank her for that leadership – it's been indispensable to the changes that we've made in this city. Thank you, Melissa.

[Applause]

And I want to thank Brad Lander. I know Brad's been deeply involved with this organization. You know, there is nothing more personal than who takes over the City Council district you represent – and Brad has done a great great job as councilmember for the district that is still my home – even though I'd like to say I have been temporarily relocated to government housing in another facility.

[Laughter]

The – my home and my heart are still in Brooklyn. And Brad is doing a great job as the representative of that district, but he's also been a great progressive leader on a host of issues – and someone who understands the power of organizing progressives, both locally and nationally. Let's thank Brad for all he is doing.

[Applause]

I want to thank a colleague who's been also a great progressive voice in the City Council, and we've partnered on many many important pieces of legislation and other actions – Corey Johnson of Manhattan – thank you.

[Applause]

I cannot tell a lie – I do not know Nick Licata. I know he's a council member from Seattle. I know he is the chair of Local Progress – and I thank him for that – but I can tell you that what – just judging from what Seattle's achieved, I already like Nick Licata.

[Laughter]

[Applause]

And I like Nick Licata's name. I just have to say that, Nick – a little solidarity moment here – calling out the ancestors.

I want to thank all of you and welcome all of you and just thank you for the work you do. We all reference each other. We all build upon each other's work. Seattle – I'm going tip my cap – and I hope – I hope Seattle – and I've said this to Mayor Murray as well – I hope you appreciate that we bow before you here in the largest city in the country, and we look with great respect at what you've achieved. But I think it's true with so many cities – what we have been able to do here has largely been informed and energized by actions taken in other cities. And I hope we're doing that and helping some of that to occur elsewhere as well.

There's an incredible sort of implicit collegiality and an implicit movement that has been created among progressives all over the country through actions at the local level. I think we need to organize it more deeply. I know I'm preaching to the converted on that front, but it's happening – it's happening every day implicitly, it's having huge impact, and so many people in this room are a part of that – I want to thank you. But I also want to thank colleagues that we've turned to here in this city as allies, who have helped us to organize on a host of issues – particularly want to thank Andrew Friedman, the executive director of the Center for Popular Democracy, for all the work he's done on this convening. And you'll be hearing from a lot of folks who are part of the work we do here – I want to single out one of the panelists you'll be hearing from later this morning – my counsel, Maya Wiley, who is lurking in the back, who will tell you a lot about what we are working on.

But let me just say something very brief, but I think to the point about this work. The reality for progressives – I've felt this throughout my entire life – is, implicitly, history's on our side; the people are on our side; sometimes the only problem is we have trouble seeing it – and that's not an indictment of us – that's more acknowledgment of the challenges we face in the trenches because there's a whole host of messages that we receive every single day, telling us that what we see before our eyes can't be possible. And I've often felt that that's not surprising. When you fight against the status quo, it is not surprising that the status quo will tell you you're crazy. They'll tell you what you're trying to do is impossible. They'll tell you what you're trying to do won't work. It's natural – it wouldn't be the status quo if it didn't have that combined weight to continually undermine and belittle the efforts you make. But that core point I begin with – history's on our side, the people are on our side – I think is unquestionable. I think it's been proven time and time again.

There are so many examples in this nation's history of when a good progressive idea crystalized – how it came to the fore and gained momentum and won the day – often in very short order. And we have to remember that. Sometimes it is a burden – and I don't mean this to be in any way maudlin about the reality, but it is a burden and a challenge to fight for social change. Sometimes it wears you down a little. But what we're trying to do is not only right, it's what the people would ask of us. And in fact, sometimes we don't experience as much support as we'd like – not because the people don't agree, not because they don't need this change – because

they've heard those voices telling them it can't happen, and they've seen too many things that didn't work, and they've had too many experiences that gave them a right to be cynical.

So we face a double burden – we have to overcome sometimes some of our own hesitancy and our own sense of being a little tired from these fights. We also have to overcome the valid cynicism that people felt when too many injustices occurred. I believe – not withstanding those facts – that every time we succeed, it builds strength for each other. Every time one city acts, it builds momentum for another city. Every time a number of cities act, it builds momentum for our nation. And when you think about it, we wish, naturally, that we could see the kind of progressive movement, the kind of progressive progress from our nation's capital that from time to time in our history we have seen. I think a lot of us grew up with the notion of a just and energetic federal government leading the way – on economic justice, on civil rights – and we should continue to aspire to that – that is what our federal government should be – and we, I think, are part of how it will become that again.

I know at the state level, so many of us have had our challenges – and that's true of all urban areas, trying to get their state governments to be supportive and to move in a more progressive direction – but when you think about what democracy can and should be, there's something quite honest and just about change coming from the grassroots and working its way up. In a sense, we would love it if our national government lead the way, but it's not surprising that when it doesn't, it calls upon us to do more at the grassroots – to find more partnership, to reach farther out across our states, our metropolitan areas, and deepen those alliances. Because real change - actually, lasting change - comes from the grassroots from definition. It doesn't come from a single piece of legislation or a budget process. Those things are important but real sustained lasting change comes from the grassroots. A change – it comes from a change in the way people think and what they demand.

We talked about in these last days here in the city the changes we're making in the relationship between police and community. And I've said to people — even in some of the pain they felt in recent days — I said look at this host of changes. Just take stop and frisk as such an obvious example. In 2011, just three years ago, 700,000 stops — 90 percent of those stopped innocent in every way shape or form – overwhelmingly young men of color. This year we will have under 50,000 stops and they're going to be much more stops of actual criminals.

[Applause]

How's that?

Now the reason I give you that example is to say I'm proud of what policies I've bought to bear and proud of the work that the City Council has done with us, but it changed well before I was elected. It changed because the people demanded it – because there was a crystallization of a movement in this city pushing for change. So, change began – we took it to the next level, we're deepening it in so many ways. But the change was with the people. The change was at the grassroots and our job in a sense is to always – not just be elected officials, but to be organizers.

Again, I know I'm preaching to the converted but in a funny way it gets us back to our origins, if you will. You know, when the republic was formed they did not have a notion of a professional elected official or professional politician. They certainly did not have consultants and campaign managers and all – it was the citizen-soldier and the citizen-public-servant and the farmer who went to go serve in the congress for a while. Well, think about it from our perspective. So many people here – as you serve in local office you're closest to the ground. A vast majority of who've served in local office did something else before, or do something else at the same time to support our families. We have that connection or maybe a little closer to the original idea, but think about the whole concept. Change was always supposed to come from the grassroots and we were supposed to be shepherds at the most local level and you add up enough local actions and that becomes national action. And we almost have to retrain ourselves, in my opinion, in that reality given the politics of Washington that we've experienced in recent years.

I actually think it's also antidote to some of the defeatism that one can feel looking at Washington. Because interestingly as Washington has gotten slower and slower, and more paralyzed, and more divided, cities are galloping ahead in terms of progressive social change. Yeah, look what happened in so many cities on minimum wage and living wage. Look what happened on paid sick leave. Look how paid sick leave started as something that seemed hard to reach and started just moving from city to city rapidly. What we're doing on municipal IDs, which Melissa referenced. That's because a couple of cities boldly decided to try something that had never been tried before. And that same spirit that I deeply honor from the New Deal, not just that sense that we had to change things fundamentally and answer people's pain and respond to the reality, but we had to experiment. What's more progressive than experimentation, then a willingness to try that which has not been tried again in light of changing circumstances.

So, the laboratories for change are in each of your cities right now. And the beauty of it is we can act together in a way that was never possible before. There's much less that disconnects or divides us as localities than in the past. Our ability to communicate — our ability to coordinate is greater, by definition, than ever before because of technology and so many other factors. We can create this new reality and the speed with which it is done is breath-taking. A decade ago in America, gay-marriage – marriage equality — was something that was considered so difficult to reach. Look how states and localities change that dynamic in a decade. Fundamentally, the people spoke, the local leaders spoke — the whole national dynamic changed. It changed from the grassroots up.

So, my only concern is that we are only beginning to tap our potential. My only critique of all of us is we can go farther. We found it here in New York, every time we were told something was impossible – and by the way, in my personal view, if you tell me something is impossible it just makes me want to do it more. I bet I have a lot of people in the room who feel the same way. That we are not going to accept the notion that we can't raise wages and benefits, or we can't give kids full-day pre-k, or we can't treat our immigrants with respect. We're just not going to accept those notions and those boundaries that were repeated and repeated and repeated so constantly, but really never were particularly real. It was perception over reality. So, I think, the next frontier is the ability of progressives around this country to build a truly national movement — to take these extraordinary local actions and knit them together more coherently. We in this city are trying to provide some of that leadership. I gathered mayors from around the country in August to take on the issue of income inequality — to talk directly and forcefully about the things localities can do to address that issue. Things that are right now, like raising wages and benefits and making sure more people get paid sick leave. Things that will frame the future, like early childhood education for all. Things that will bring so many of our citizens – that is not a metaphor.

[Laughter]

By the way, whoever you are with your foot, good – good catch there. Alright, we're back.

Things that will offer real economic opportunity in a changing world, like broadband access for all. These issues we put before mayors from around the country and we said lets organize together with these concepts. And there was incredible energy in the room because the mayors, across the board, feel the income inequality crisis. And I know local legislators feel it so deeply. We feel it – it's not an abstraction to us and we know it has to be addressed, and we know if it's not addressed it will hold this nation back profoundly. We know it's as important as any other national security concern. So, to have all the mayors together starting to come up with some ground rules and some common concepts is powerful.

This coming weekend we're gathering mayors from around the country to support our president on immigration reform. And this is necessary – by the way, the president's action is crucial to creating a more just country. We have to support him. And we have to organize to support him. It's great to have a leader who steps up and does the right thing – let's build a movement around it. Let's create momentum from it for the larger comprehensive immigration we need our congress to achieve. And by the way, if you ever here that sentence and react as I sometimes do – well that won't happen any time soon with this congress – it's a natural reaction. Again, we

have to remind ourselves why don't we change the rules of the game from the grassroots up. A lot of things that weren't supposed to be possible – a lot of things seemed politically unreachable happened because the rules of the game changed because the people demanded it. People of this country understand the need for comprehensive immigration reform. They have eyes to see. Let's take this moment of the president's executive order and use it as a moment to build a deeper national movement. That's what we're going to be starting this weekend with mayors from around the country.

So, I just want to finish by saying I am so appreciative of the work you do. Again, to many of you, a profound thank you because a lot of what you did helped us to move this agenda here. The doors in New York City are always open to all of you in terms of sharing our ideas — offering strategies that we hope can work for you as well. This connection, this synergy, will change the future, not only of our cities and towns and counties. It will change the future of this country. I don't have any doubt about it. We have that critical mass point. I want to thank Local Progress for seeing it and creating a venue for deepening this work. I'm very, very optimistic about where we can go together. But again, it's about us communicating through our actions, through our words, through everything in our being. And we know the people are on our side. We know the people demand these changes and we will be their representatives in every sense. We will represent their reality and turn it into action.

Thank you so much.

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