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RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR BILL DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT AFFORDABLE HOUSING RALLY HELD BY AARP, UNION MEMBERS, AND SENIOR AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Alright, we're going to make this work. Can you hear me everyone?

Audience: Yes!

Mayor: Alright, brothers and sisters, thank you so much to everyone for being here. I see so many friends, so many people fighting for a New York that can be afforded by everyone, a New York for every kind of person. That's what we believe in. Right?

Audience: Yes!

Mayor: I want to thank Stuart Applebaum. Thank you so much for your kind introduction. That you for all you have been doing. You have been fighting for working people, for an affordable city, for living wages. Let's thank Stuart for all he has done. And thank RWDSU.

[Applause]

Alright, who is here from labor?

[Cheering]

Seniors? Seniors and retirees? Let me hear you.

[Cheering]

Seniors and retirees, you can do louder than that.

[Cheering]

Clergy and community activists, let me hear you.

[Cheering]

Very good. Now, I got to tell you there are so many people who have been fighting for a New York City for everyone, for a city that can continue to be what we've always known it to be – a place where everyone has possibility, a place where everyone has a shot. When we lose that, it's not New York City anymore.

[Cheering]

That's what we're fighting for. And I want to thank everyone who is here today. There's some special thank you's to people who have shown exceptional leadership. I want to shout them out, and shout out some of the great organizations that are a part of this.

I have to say a special thank you – Reverend Fred Davie, here. I know he's been emceeding today but he also is very important to Chirlane and I because he is the minister who married us in 1994.

[Cheering]

Reverend Fred Davie: Did a pretty good job too.

Mayor: Fred, I want you to know, it worked out beautifully.

Reverend Davie: Great.

[Laughter]

Mayor: I have to say there are so many great organizations but one that has done absolutely awesome work has been AARP. I want to thank Beth Finkel, and everyone from AARP.

[Cheering]

I want to thank Denis Johnston, vice president of 32BJ, and everyone from 32BJ.

[Cheering]

I want to thank [inaudible] Hotel Trade Council member, and everyone at HTC.

[Cheering]

Audience: HTC. HTC. HTC. HTC. HTC

Mayor: They are here. I want to thank everyone from Selfhelp who is here.

[Cheering]

Everyone from 1199.

[Cheering]

Everyone from CWA.

[Cheering]

Everyone from DC-37 AFSCME.

[Cheering]

Everyone from LiveOn NY.

[Cheering]

Everyone from the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce.

[Cheering]

So many organizations that represent so much of this city, together in common cause – a livable city, an affordable city, a city for everyone. That is what we're here to achieve.

Now, brothers and sisters we have work to do. We have two bills that we have to pass in the City Council. Our time has come. You need to make your voices heard. You need to make sure every City Council member knows this is about our families.

[Cheering]

This is about our neighborhoods.

[Cheering]

We know that the status quo in this city will not do. We know that for too many years people were pushed out of their neighborhoods and the city government didn't do anything about it. And that has to change. For too many years the real estate developers called all the shots in this city. And that has to change. It is time to put some rules into this game. It's time for the public's interest to come first. One of these bills is called Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning. No, it's not the sexiest title you've ever heard but I want you to focus on the word mandatory.

Audience: Mandatory.

Mayor: Thank you. Mandatory. Because it says to real estate developers, you must build affordable housing if you want to build anything. You have to build affordable housing.

[Cheering]

The days of giveaways are over. It is time to put the public's interest first. And this legislation would be the most progressive in the United States of America.

[Cheering]

It would require the private sector to put the public's interest first for the very first time in the history of this city and in the history of this country. That's what we're fighting for.

[Cheering]

Now, when you think about why this is so important, when you think about it, think of the people you know. Think about your family members, your neighbors, your co-workers, the ones who haven't been able to stay in their neighborhoods, the ones who lost their homes. Think about them. We owe it to them to fix this situation. Think about the people hanging on by a thread worried they're going to lose their apartment. We owe it to them to get this right. And we all know them. We all know people who are so worried about being forced out of the neighborhood they love and the city they love. We've got to stop it now.

This is what we do. With Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning, we create more affordable housing than ever before. We change the rules of the game.

With ZQA – Zoning for Quality and Affordability – we create affordable housing for seniors more than ever before because our seniors need affordable housing.

[Cheering]

And the status quo has not been working for our seniors. This is the fastest growing part of our city – the demographic that’s growing the fastest is seniors. Seniors need a place to live they can afford but the status quo is not working for them. So, we have to change the rules. Change the laws. Create more affordable housing for seniors and we need to do it now.

[Cheering]

Now, you will find people who say, “Maybe change is scary, maybe there’s reasons to keep the status quo in place.” And everyone here has to take on those conversations and those debates. Everyone here has to stand up for this legislation.

Here’s what I want you to say – we’re changing the rules of the game. We’re going to make it mandatory to create affordable housing for the first time ever. We’re going to make it possible to create senior housing – senior affordable housing more than ever. That’s the beginning.

And then people will say, “Well, wait a minute. Will that be enough to keep people in this city? To protect our neighbors?” Here’s what you say to them – first of all, this administration has done something that was never done before. We have devoted ten times more money to fighting evictions, to giving people the legal services and legal aid they need to stay in their apartments.

[Cheering]

And what do we find? When you give someone a free lawyer – and I want everyone to remember, tell everyone you know, if they feel they’re on the verge of eviction, if they feel they’re being harassed by a landlord, if they feel the heat or the hot water, or the repairs are not being given to them, what you do is you call 3-1-1. You call 3-1-1 and a city lawyer – a lawyer paid for by the city will be given to you for free to defend your interests. That’s never been possible before but now it is. Ten times more money for legal aid and legal services. What has that caused? A 24 percent decrease in evictions since this administration came in. 24 percent fewer evictions.

[Cheering]

So, it’s working and we’re going to be doing more and more to protect people. So, that’s one way we protect people who are already in affordable housing and need to stay there.

Another thing, for all the people who are rent stabilized in this town, they used to get rent increases that were very arbitrary, that were based on the landlords’ interests, not the tenants’ interest. So, we said, “Let’s make it based on the actual facts.” And we looked at the numbers and for the first time ever in the history of this history, we had a rent-freeze for folks in rent stabilized housing – this year a rent-freeze. That changes people’s lives.

[Cheering]

And then we looked at 400,000 New Yorkers who live in public housing – 400,000 people who need to know that that backbone of affordable housing will be protected. And we put resources into the Housing Authority to protect it, to make the repairs that were needed, to fix the things that have been broken for a long time. And we said very clearly, our public housing – NYCHA – will be protected. It will not be privatized. It will be kept for the people of this city. We will protect it.

[Cheering]

So, look at these pieces together – the legal aid and legal services that keep people evicted, our rent-freeze to make sure people weren't being overcharged, protections for all the people who live in public housing, and then add to it the strongest laws to create affordable housing anywhere in the country. That's what we're going to achieve together. Add to it the clearest laws to create senior affordable housing that we've ever had. When you add that all up we can keep this a city for everyone. When you add it all up we can make this a city where a hard working family or a senior who's paid their dues, actually can stay in the city they love. That's what we want to achieve. Right?

[Cheering]

Brothers and sisters together we're going to make sure the voices of working people, the voices of seniors, the voices of every neighborhood are heard in this building. We're going to let all the good people in the City Council know how much this matters.

Between you, you represent hundreds and hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers. AARP alone – vast, vast constituency of seniors. Between all of you, you represent the voices of this city. We need the City Council members to understand the time is now.

[Cheering]

It's urgent. We cannot wait for affordable housing. The time is now.

[Cheering]

Let me hear you say it. The time is now.

Audience: The time is now! The time is now! The time is now! The time is now! The time is now! The time is now! The time is now!

Mayor: I think they'll be able to hear you.

[Laughter]

Let me say with your help, these two crucial bills are going to win the day. We're going to get across the finish line. We're going to change this city forever. With your help people are going to look back on these days in March of 2016, and they're going to say that's when an affordable city was saved. That's when we stopped this city from going over the brink. That's when we turned the tide in favor of working people, in favor of families, in favor of seniors. We're going to look back and know this was the moment. And every single one of you were the people who helped make it happen. Every single one of you were the authors of change.

So, I want you – I need you to give yourselves a rousing round of applause.

[Applause]

Now, I just want to say –

Audience: Thank you, Mayor. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you brother. Thank you. Now, I just want to say a few words in Spanish. Who wants some Spanish?

[Cheering]

Alright.

[Mayor speaks in Spanish]

The city that people created, the city that was created by so many people here, and all the people you represent must still be the city for them.

[Cheering]

Not just a city for those who are wealthy, not a gilded city, not a gated community, a city for everyone, and that's what we will achieve with your help in the City Council.

Brothers and sisters make your voices heard and let's win a great victory for New York City.

Thank you.

[Cheering]

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