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RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT NATURALIZATION CEREMONY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you so much, Phyllis. Phyllis has a great job, doesn't she?

[Applause]

She helps people – she helps people to become part of this great country. And what an amazing thing to devote your life to – uplifting others and giving them a chance to be a part of this extraordinary nation. Let's thank Phyllis for all she does.

[Applause]

Let's thank our wonderful MC, John Carrington, for his great work.

[Applause]

You heard and you applauded, rightfully, our wonderful Commissioner for Immigrant Affairs, because she's helping so many people each day to live life to the fullest in this city – a city that embraces and loves all immigrants. Let's thank Nisha Agarwal again.

[Applause]

Now, I just want to say a profound congratulations to you. I just want to let you know, from the bottom of my heart, how proud I am of all of you. I know this was not easy. I know it was a long journey. But you persevered, and I say congratulations on behalf of all 8.5 million New Yorkers.

So you're going to help me create the kind of sound that would happen if all 8.5 million people were here congratulating you. Let me hear a real celebration of your achievement. Congratulations!

[Cheers]

There we go. That's right. That's more like it!

As your first official act as American citizens, let's work on our flag waving. Everyone together, let's see it.

[Applause]

Excellent – very skilled group. Was that part of the test – flag waving skills? Yes?

So, I can now say officially, and welcome you and greet you with, the salutation "my fellow Americans."

[Applause]

You know, I heard you take the oath, and I thought to myself, of course – the first thing I thought of was my own family members who walked in your footsteps, and had the exact same moment that you had – my grandparents who emigrated from Southern Italy over a hundred years ago, and what it must have felt like at this exact moment in their lives, and that, had this nation not embraced them, had the city not embraced them, I wouldn't have the honor of standing before you today and serving you. So I thought, every one of us can relate to this moment.

But then I thought, what it must mean to see your life evolving right before your eyes – to take that great jump into the future just by raising your right hand, but knowing that, again, what the – on the basis of so much work and so much tough grit that brought you to this moment.

None of this comes easy. To come to this country, to establish yourself, to live up to the rigorous standards of citizenship – it doesn't come easy. But each and every one of you are worthy. By your very presence, you're making our city better and you're making our nation better.

So it's an amazing day for you. But it's a great day for all of us, because you're making us stronger, like every generation that came before.

You know, I mentioned my grandparents – my grandmother Anna came here in 1903; my grandfather Giovanni came here in 1905. I've been to the towns they come from – small towns in Southern Italy. [Inaudible] could not imagine the notion of coming out of such a small place – such an insular world – over a century ago, and coming into the middle of all this.

But one thing that you can understand from your own experience – there's something brave about immigrants. There's something strong about immigrants. Somehow you see that it can be done, no matter what the obstacles.

My grandparents came here, and they believed they could build something better. Where they came from, there was very little opportunity, and they knew it. They loved the country they came from deeply, but they knew it sadly, at that moment, didn't offer them much chance. They came here, and they lived the American Dream.

It was never easy. But they believed in themselves. They believed in this country. And they gave each of us who came after, and our families, a true belief in the greatness of this land – that the promise of America was real. They came here not knowing for sure, but then they saw themselves. You now will follow on that same journey.

Let me mention a couple examples from this wonderful group. Sara Amar – born in Serbia, now a flight attendant. She said she wants to feel like a full citizen in the place she has called home for the past decade. Sarah said, "I believe in this country. This is now my home."

That is the spirit of every immigrant who feels this is the place for them and wants to make it come true with citizenship.

And you heard about all of these wonderful individuals who serve in our military. I want to give you one story, of Davina Anderson. She came from Jamaica at the age of sixteen, and she had the impulse – she always wanted to protect people. So now she's a Private First Class in the National Guard, stationed on Staten Island. And let's once again thank Davina and all of those who serve in the military for what they have done for this country.

[Applause]

Davina has a dream job, and now that she's a citizen, she can pursue it. She wants to be a member of the NYPD and protect us all in this city. We say thank you for that, Davina. We look forward to that day.

[Applause]

I have to say, for all of you in the army – I have the honor of coming from a family that served our nation during World War II. My father served in the army in the Seventh Division in the Pacific Theater. And I have to say, my father believed deeply in the army. I'm not sure he could have imagined a day when his son was standing here with women members of our armed forces taking the oath of citizenship. But I think he'd get it, and I think he'd be proud of the fact that our nation has evolved, our military has evolved –

[Applause]

And I think if my father were alive today, he would go up to you and thank each and every one of you for making the army stronger and making our country stronger. Let's thank them again.

[Applause]

Now, every one of you has a great story. Every one of you traveled a journey, and every one of you, in your heart and soul, had the strength to do it.

You come from 34 countries, but you are united today. You united in common purpose – you had the same dream, and you achieved it exactly at the same moment on the same day. In a world that often seems torn by division, isn't this a powerful example? And maybe there is more possibility for unity than we know, because people of all different backgrounds can achieve their dreams simultaneously and have a common sense of purpose.

We want more people to have this experience. You know, I won't editorialize too much, but I'll just say this – every one of us is a child of an immigrant, the grandchild of an immigrant, the great-grandchild of an immigrant. Every one of us in this nation literally couldn't be here if someone hadn't done what you did. So, it should be the American way to invite everyone now who has a chance at citizenship to fully take advantage of it. It should be something that invites all Americans to say, "Every single individual who, like you, has reached that point of eligibility, should now follow through and become a part of us." And that's what today is about as well.

All over the country, there are events like this, where leaders of this nation and leaders at the local level are saying, "Join us. Become a part of us. Make us stronger." You know that citizenship does so much. You know it will give you so much opportunity to fully be involved in this society, to fully enjoy the benefits of this great nation, and to contribute to it in so many ways. We also know that the more people who achieve citizenship, the more we have to tackle the issues that this country has. We know there is a vast gulf of inequality we're trying to overcome – every single person who becomes a citizen takes us one step closer to a more perfect union and a more fair society.

You know what's not right is people being left in the shadows, and people being limited and marginalized. That's not the American way. We don't want people who have a chance at citizenship to not take advantage of it. We don't want people who are not yet on that path treated as if they are something less than human. We have to respect what this nation is about. We have to respect our values and our history, and that means respecting immigrants, respecting their hard work, respecting the drive they have brought to this nation, respecting that you have literally helped us build. Every part of this country wouldn't be what it is today if immigrants hadn't literally and physically built it up.

So, we are hosting the first ever New York City Week of Action this week to encourage all those who are eligible to become citizens. Hundreds of volunteers are fanning out across the city to spread the word. Now is the time. You can do it. Become a part of us, fully. We just partnered with the city's three library systems – as you heard before, this is a very, very important development. Our library systems have joined us in creating the

New York City Citizenship Program. I want to thank all of them – I know Tony Marx is here from the New York Public Library. Let's thank him because he's been a great leader in this effort.

[Applause]

The libraries, that are such a natural home and home base for so many immigrants, will join us in providing legal support, financial education, and help in submitting a citizenship application. And this builds on another great initiative, called New American Corners. that provide resources to help folks on the pathway to citizenship. These initiatives – this help is available at every one – listen to this – every one of the city's 217 library branches – every corner of this city. Now – now that you're citizens, let me let you in on the fact that with that great status comes an obligation to help make us stronger in so many ways, including turning to your friends, your family members, your coworkers, people who come from the nation in which you were born, and saying to them – “Are you eligible for citizenship? Have you taken the next step? What's holding you back? If I can do it, you can it.” I want each and every one of you to go out there and find at least one person in your life who hasn't yet taken that next step and has the right to. And help them realize it's the right thing to do.

You are now examples to so many other people in your lives, that it can happen. It can happen. Tell them your story. And this is something we have to do all over the country. So what we're doing here in New York City is part of a nationwide effort. We're working with mayors all over the country – folks at the local level who want to make sure that everyone gets opportunity. And we're united in every region of this country with the idea that people deserve a chance to become a part of us. Cities United for Immigration – a coalition that I'm honored to be a part of – Cities United for Immigration launched an action plan at the end of last year. Now there's 100 member cities and we're coordinating this nationwide effort with the White House, with Cities for Citizenship, and with other great organizations. Over this next week – and you were doing something amazing today, but listen to how this is growing – over the next week, over 36,000 people across the United States will take the oath in 200 naturalization ceremonies, including in fact, three ceremonies today in New York City – 36,000 new Americans.

[Applause]

You, in a moment, will say the Pledge of Allegiance for the first time as American citizens. Think about these words – you have a perspective, an opportunity to hear these words anew and to really understand the meaning of them. And look, every one of us who grew up in this country – we said it thousands of times in our classrooms and different occasions. It's important to stop for a moment on a regular basis and think about what it means – how much struggle went into creating this nation, how much struggle went into creating the greatest democracy on this earth and protecting the democratic rights of our people. It did not come easily. Many, many gave their lives. So when we sing the Star Spangled Banner, when we give the Pledge of Allegiance, we're remembering that history and we're trying to now make it our own and live up to that high standard. And yes, it means being involved. It means being active in your community and going to meetings that make your neighborhood better, and using that sacred right to vote that too many people don't have still all over this world.

You now are part of it. You're now an example. You now have to keep making it strong. You have to keep rejuvenating what makes this nation great and this city great. I know you're up to the task. You got this far. I know you're ready to take us even farther.

There are people here from many, many nations and this is the most international of moments – a classic New York City occasion where people come together from different continents. We think that's normal and good here in New York City. Maybe in some other places, it will be a surprise, but this looks like it's your typical New York City subway car. But since I know there are many, many people from Spanish-speaking nations, let me offer just a few words in Spanish.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, I offer you my deepest congratulations. Welcome – welcome to all that it means to be a citizen of the United States of America. Congratulations.

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