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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT REVEREND AL SHARPTON'S BIRTHDAY RALLY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning everybody.

Audience: Good morning.

Mayor: What a beautiful day it is in our city and what a perfect day to say happy birthday to Reverend Al. Rev, we're all joined here to celebrate with you, in appreciation for you, for all you've done over so many years for this city, for this whole country. I was listening to Rev there a moment ago, they said great, great message, who decides who is controversial and who is influential? Well, the problem, I believe, Reverend Al has always had is he is ahead of his time. He was saying things we all needed to hear, but too many people heard it as controversial, but now he is undoubtedly influential. Am I right?

[Applause]

But Rev, I want to say from the heart, you saw things ahead of a lot of other people. Today, you hear leaders all over the city, all over this country, say what we should have said long time ago, we should say out loud, structural racism, institutional racism. Rev was saying that long before it was "fashionable", and it takes leaders to help move everyone else to understanding. And that's what he has done. That's why we celebrate them and we thank him. And we thank you for building up generations after generations of leaders, many of whom are in this room who got their start working with Rev and NAN.

[Applause]

And hate to tell you an experience I have had with Rev, and I have had this so repeatedly, it's very striking to me. I call Rev, I want to update him on something, I want to ask his advice on something, and when I call him, he's like, I'm in Detroit between flights I'm catching a flight to Atlanta, then I'm going from Atlanta to Philadelphia from Philadelphia to Houston. I'm like Rev, when do you sleep? Every day, I call him he's here, he's there. People want him in one place, another place. It occurs to me that Rev has a kind of Benjamin Button thing going on at this point in his life. He is reverse aging. He's got more energy than he's ever had, but that's because his cause is just.

[Applause]

And that is his energy and you give him energy. So I want you to do something for me today, that is celebrate Rev, and I want you to look around at your neighbors. I want to look around everyone who helped make this movement strong. Give your neighbor a round of applause.

[Applause]

Because one thing Rev has been clear about, it is about a movement, and it's not just one leader. It is about the movement, and how pertinent in this year, 2020, a year like no other, a year of profound and deep challenges, but also a year of transformation. A year of transformation, that we remember it takes a movement. Rev was steeped in the greatest movement of our times, the Civil Rights movement, and he knows it is about building something bigger and before you today, you see the evidence of that. Last thing I want to say to you, I want to celebrate everyone in this room and everyone in New York City, because this week in New York City we did something together. And this is very resonant with Rev's life because how many times has Rev been told he couldn't do something, but he went and did it anyway. How many times has he just been told something was impossible, but he made it possible? Well, all of you made something possible in New York City, we were told time and time again, after everything we went through with the coronavirus that we could not come back. We were told we could not reopen our public schools, but guess what happened on Thursday everybody? Every single public school in New York City was open for our children.

[Applause]

Every single one, 1,600 schools in every neighborhood, because our children have suffered, especially in this crisis in this year. Our children have been traumatized. Our children have been through a pain that we don't yet fully understand, but I'll tell you one thing, if we don't open our schools for them that pain will only grow. If they don't have that love and support of the school community, they will be isolated further. If we believe we must fight disparities, then one of the first things to do is to get every child back to a classroom where they can be supported because I'll tell you something, if everyone's left home, those disparities only grow. We will not allow that. So again, New York City came together in common cause and did what they said could not be done. So again, give yourselves a round of applause because that's something to be proud of.

[Applause]

But Rev, thank you. Thank you for year after year after year lighting the way. And Rev, since I do believe it's a Benjamin Button situation, here's to many more years. God bless you, everyone. Thank you.

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