

2015 Disability Pride Parade

COMMISSIONER CALISE: Hello, everyone. This has been an amazing day. We have an amazing line up today with everyone. Give everyone a round of applause here. (Applause). I have the pleasure of introducing someone that everyone here admires. I know I certainly do. My family does. And we admire because he's doing so much for the City of New York. He's looking at inequality, and people with disabilities know a lot about inequality. That's why we're here today. I have the pleasure to introduce our great Mayor, Bill DeBlasio. (Applause).

MAYOR DEBLASIO: You said that with passion. You know, I have to tell you there are many good things we get to do in government. And one of the best is bring the best people to the work. I have talked to so many people in this community and I hear passion, resolve, and appreciation when I say the name Victor Calise. Let's thank him for all he does. (Applause).

Well, brothers and sisters, this is an amazing day. Sometimes you get to say you were at a first. You were at a historical moment. We are sharing a historical moment together. New York City's first ever disability pride parade. That's pretty good, isn't it? (Applause)

Today together we will walk, we will ride, we will roll together. We will roll and ride and walk together for a more just New York City. We will address every form of inequality, and every way that we have to include. This parade is all about that. There's a lot of people here who want to be part of this, which says something about how much commitment there is, and this administration among elected officials to this cause. I just want to take a moment to thank people. In addition to Victor, the Commissioner for Veterans Affairs, Loree Sutton, Mark Peters, Commission to the Mayor's Office to combat Domestic Violence, national media sensation, Commission for the Office of Emergency Management, Joe Esposito, Chair of the Human Rights Commission. Department of Transportation commissioner Polly Trottenberg. Just in time, our Taxi and Limousine Commissioner Meera Joshi, leading the way to more

accessible taxis. Thank you. So many great elected officials, let's thank them as well. Public advocate Tish James, assembly member Walter Mosley, chair of the assembly task force on people with disabilities, David Weprin, Council Member Rosie Mendez, Helen Rosenthal, Council Member Ben Kallos. By the way, they have under the list of dignitaries, Tom Harkin, ladies and gentlemen. We would only be so lucky. I'm going to speak about Tom in a moment, but there is no greater honor for all of us in New York City than to have you here, Tom. It means the world to us. You're going to hear in a moment from Mike Schweinsburg. We thank him for his great leadership as well.

This is a day of celebration for the people of New York City. But as we showed on Friday we'd also like to remind people if you're going to celebrate something about this great nation, you really should do it here. Don't you think? We are celebrating the 25th anniversary, one of literally the greatest civil rights laws in this city -- excuse me, this country's history. The greatest civil rights laws in this country's history. (Applause). And the Americans with Disabilities Act, you cannot underestimate. This has had such an extraordinary impact on the lives of people

all over the country. And at the time, I remind you 25 years ago, what a breakthrough in consciousness it was to get this law passed. What a change it made in people's thinking and how it helped move people forward. Senator Harkin made that happen. Let's be clear. There are many great mothers and fathers -- but sometimes it takes that one great leader to make a breakthrough. This great achievement 25 years ago had one father, one leader, Tom Harkin. Let's give him a New York thank you. (Applause).

He called it at the time the 20th century's proclamation for all Americans with disabilities. I think that says it all. The ADA -- remember brothers and sisters, we are proud when America leads the world as a beacon of freedom and hope. This was literally the first national law to respect people with disabilities and make their rights clear. The first ever anywhere in the globe. (Applause).

It sparked a new consciousness. It sparked action all over the world. We all remember what it was like before the ADA, how many people were excluded, how many sidewalks could not be accessed, streets crossed, we remember that. We remember what it meant to people, not just in their lives, but what it meant to their hearts and

souls but their own rights. ADA changed that and changed that profoundly. Every time you see a curb cut, every time you see a kneeling bus, every time you see accessible seating in a stadium, that is because of the ADA. You see it everywhere, thank God. (Applause).

And you see something else that is about people's rights and respect and about their livelihood. You see all of the laws put in place. We're particularly proud of our human rights laws in New York City. All the laws that ban discrimination in the workplace against people with disabilities. That too came from this extraordinary moment. (Applause).

Tom, I think you would agree, you created something great. But you meant it to be a start. You meant it to be a living, breathing idea. So here in New York City we're taking the torch from Tom Harkin and going forward to more. We are on the way to making 50 percent of all New York City taxis accessible by 2020. (Applause).

We're making it easier for people to get affordable housing. People with disabilities, we want to give them every opportunity for affordable housing. (Applause).

And yes, it's important to put things in the budget. Don't you agree? So in our budget we have put funding for tripling the number of accessible pedestrian signals installed each year. (Applause).

Now, again we're proud of what we're doing here. But when we have a pride march, it is to celebrate what has been achieved; to remind us of what we have to do right now, and to then look forward to even more, to hold that bar high, to hold others to hold that bar high. I hope today is the beginning of even more resolve to achieve greater inclusion. This is true all over the city. We are far from done. All over the nation we are far from done, and we will not rest until everyone has the access they deserve, the opportunity they deserve, the rights they deserve, the recognition they deserve. That is our commitment. I hope you hear that loud and clear in English. I'm going to say it in a few sentences in Spanish as well to amplify my point. (Speaking Spanish).

Almost a million people in this city were uplifted by the law passed 25 years ago and who we will continue to uplift every day, every year. Brothers and sisters, now, sometimes you get to introduce a hero. Sometimes you

get to introduce someone who made an extraordinary difference. And if there was ever a role model, he's right here with us. Ladies and gentlemen, the father of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Senator Tom Harkin. (Applause).

>> SENATOR HARKIN: Thank you. How come I always have to take the mic after these tall guys? Thank you for having me here. It's a great honor for me to be here in this great city. I want to thank you, Victor Calise, your whole team here for what you're doing to make New York City the most accessible city in all of the United States of America. (Applause). Thank you!

I don't want to give a long speech because it's too hot and we have to get on with the parade. But I do want to say this. As the Mayor said, we're here to celebrate 25 years. And we made some great progress in this country in many ways in terms of the rights of people with disabilities, accessibility. You know, there were four goals of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Whole participation, equal opportunity, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency. On the first two, we've done pretty good. As the Mayor mentioned, our stadiums, our

ball parks, our theaters, are pretty well accessible. Our curb cuts, ramps, buses, trains. We have a ways to go on subways in a lot of places in this country. But I have to tell you, the last two is what we've got good. This is a celebration but also a commitment. A commitment to pick up and carry on. We've got to make sure that every single person with a disability who wants to live in his or her own home and not in an institution has the ability to live on their own. (Applause).

Secondly, it is a blot on our national heritage that so many people with disabilities are unemployed. Think about this. Every time you read the statistics on unemployment, what is it five and a half percent -- actually it's more than that. But among young African Americans it's 15 to 20 percent. Latinos and Latinas, about the same. But think about this, over 60 percent of adult Americans with disabilities who want to work and who can work are not in the workplace. That is a shame. So we have to -- the next goal, and to get that done you have to have better mobility. You have to have mobility in all its forms.

I want to congratulate the Mayor and Victor for what they're doing on taxis. The 50 percent goal is great. We

have to do that in other cities around America. The goal of every taxi in every city in America is fully accessible. (Applause).

I have to say this, that company Uber, fine. Private company, making a profit. But as long as they use our public streets and they use the Internet and everything else to provide services, they should have to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

(Applause) (cheers). I want to congratulate MV-1 for their accessible taxis. I've ridden them in the past. When I go to London, Mayor, and I hail a cab, every cab is fully accessible in London. Every single one. That should be our goal here. I want to compliment MV-1 for their design and marketing of the cab. I'll close on this. It is way past time when young people with disabilities are given all the same opportunities for competitive integrated employment as every other young person in America. No longer are we going to accept that young people with disabilities are pipelined into subminimum wage jobs, dead end jobs with no opportunity for advancement. (Cheers and applause).

We know that when people -- when companies hire people with disabilities they get the most loyal workers, the most productive workers anywhere in America. So

now, congratulations 25 years -- seems like yesterday. I saw a picture of me at that time. I had dark hair, more of it. But I want you to know I'm retired from the United States Senate after 30 years in the Senate. I'm retired from the Senate. But I want to assure all of you and I want to assure my great friend, Mayor Bill DeBlasio, I'm retired from the Senate but not retired from the fight. Full participation, independent living, economic self-sufficiency for every person with a disability in America. Thank you. (Cheers and applause).

MAYOR DEBLASIO: Let's give an even louder New York City round of applause for Senator Tom Harkin. (Applause). I want you to know we are very, very committed already on the issue of accessible taxis. But all Tom Harkin had to do was say London was doing better to get my competitive fire going. We're really committed now. Let me tell you -- I just want to take another moment to thank them and acknowledge them. Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer -- and for those of you who love the parade for the US national women's soccer team on Friday, I said this publicly -- one of the people who came up with that idea was not me, it was Gale Brewer. Let's thank her. Assembly member Joanne Simon, and our commissioner for records services

Pauline Toole. Thank you so much for being here. As I said before, what Tom Harkin achieved and this movement achieved 25 years ago started something nationally and internationally. It was a spark to fundamental international change, and we are so proud it started here in the United States. To give you a sense of today's efforts to fully include everyone in this goal, it's now my honor to introduce Ambassador, President of the UN Conference for state parties on the rights of people with disabilities, distinguished diplomat for the voice of disabled, thank you so much.

>> Good morning, everyone. Good morning. On behalf of the United Nations convention of rights of persons with disabilities, I'd like to thank New York City, Mayor DeBlasio, Commissioner Calise, and all citizens of New York City for holding this incredibly important event today, the pride parade. New York is a visionary in -- naturally New York City should lead by example in the protection and promotion of rights of persons with disabilities. The UN convention of the rights of persons with disabilities is an international treaty that came into being seven years ago. We gather every year in the United Nations. Last month well over 1,000 people from the

government, disability community from all the world came here to discuss and to celebrate the convention and also to discuss how we can promote rights of persons with disabilities. CRPD, the convention, is a treaty on the rights of persons with disabilities. It's not about protection of disabled people. It's not about welfare for disabled people. It's about the rights of persons with disabilities, rights to equal conditions, information, and to living in the community for all persons with disabilities. (Applause).

The most important fact about CRPD in my opinion is the bright space approach. Many Americans don't know this, but the United States has yet to join this convention by ratifying it. We are all waiting for the US to ratify it as soon as possible and join international efforts to promote rights of persons with disabilities in terms of their accessibility, in terms of their inclusivity in society. In that sense, I think this parade is a very important step towards that goal, and in mobilizing support from people with and without disabilities. Thank you very much. (Applause).

MAYOR DEBLASIO: This must be a special day because dignitaries keep pouring in. Let's thank council member Cohen for being with us. (Applause).

I mentioned Mike Schweinsburg before. I have to tell you I've had the pleasure of working with him years ago when I was a city council member. He was tireless then, focused then. He is more tireless than ever now as a great advocate for the community of people with disabilities. Mike Schweinsburg. (Applause).

MIKE SCHWEINSBURG: Good noon time, everybody. Are we ready to get going? Just a little longer. It's going to be big. It's going to be beautiful. Please forgive any omissions. But of course at the top of our list, I want to thank our Mayor for his -- (Applause) -- for his level of support. I'm sure you'll all agree with me that we've never seen this kind of support before. Thank you kindly, Mayor. (Applause) now something I hadn't heard yet today but really touched me. The Mayor has made New York City the first city in the country to declare July Disability Pride Month. (Cheers and applause).

Next of course, our hero, our Commissioner Victor Calise. (Applause). I don't think anyone can have full appreciation for just how hard he has worked, how many doors he's kicked open for us. In thanking him, I certainly want to

acknowledge Deputy Commissioner Kleo King. And anybody who has had any contact in any of the series of month-long events we're going to continue to enjoy knows how hard Kleo is working on all of that. Yeah. Of course thanks must go out to our founder, Mike Ledonne. He worked tirelessly for four years to help get us to this point. He helped form the committee that in earnest began working a year ago to get us here today. Despite what so many people said, we may not make it, here we are. And that's because we went out and formed really strong coalitions with so many great groups that serve the disability community throughout the city, like art beyond sight. Hello, art beyond sight, and so many others. And we've achieved a unification in itself is unprecedented. What we are committed to doing is to keeping that coalition growing. Over the next year you're going to see so much of that. But you're all invited to let us know exactly what you think -- we'll take criticism as well. We want to build on this momentous occasion because we firmly believe that we are the dawn of a new era in disability rights movement, and the turnout today is testament to that. Because what all those organizations did was they all got all of you out here. All you thousands of people, were contacted by one organization or another.

And that's what today is all about. It's not about us. It's about you. Because look, as enjoyable as the day is going to be, it wouldn't be enjoyable if you weren't here to enjoy it. So I thank you kindly, each and every one of you, for coming out. Let's have a great day today and build on our tomorrows. Thank you kindly. (Applause).

MAYOR DEBLASIO: I got to set up this next piece. I start with this. How much do you love Victor Calise? (Cheers and applause). Okay. Victor, I hope you enjoyed that accolade and that praise because now your fame is over because your daughter is about to become the famous one. Victor, it was great while it lasted. The next generation is coming on now. She's going to be the star. Lola Calise, nine years old, bold, strong young woman standing here before the crowd. She has been a song writer since she was five years old. And there's lots of things you can write songs about, but this is a conscious young woman. She decided to write a song in honor of the 25th anniversary of the ADA. Let's give Lola a huge round of applause. (Applause). It's all yours, Lola. (Music).

LOLA CALISE: (Music). (Singing)

Thank You

I have to thank you all you've done.
You've helped everyone.
People out there in a wheelchair,
people who don't see,
people who can't hear.

Thanks to the people who have helped through the years.
They helped every way they could.
They helped as they should.
They helped with dignity.
They helped you and see.
You worked with them too.
They should also say thanks to you.
From getting rights for all of us so that we can ride a bus.
We worked together to make a better city for everyone.
(Cheers and applause).

MAYOR DEBLASIO: Beautiful. Well done, Lola.
(Applause).

Victor, the next generation has already surpassed you. That means you're a great parent. Congratulations. Well done. We're about ready to go. Let us thank and acknowledge our Comptroller Scott Stringer for joining us. Thank you so much, Scott. (Applause).

Is everyone ready to celebrate this extraordinary anniversary? Let's get this party started!

