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New York mayor tells Dems Walker won in Wisconsin by peddling falsehoods

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MILWAUKEE -- New York Mayor Bill de Blasio said Saturday night Gov. Scott Walker has won elections in Wisconsin by "peddling a series of falsehoods," but has to be taken seriously in his bid for the presidency because he presents himself in a likable way.

De Blasio spent a good portion of a nearly 40-minute speech at the Democratic Party of Wisconsin's Founders Day Gala talking about Walker.

"He told you teachers were the enemy. He told you that unions were the problem. He told you that up was down and down was up in so many ways, and in the process, he took Wisconsin backwards and that will be more and more visible to people," de Blasio told party activists.

Afterward, de Blasio told reporters, he nonetheless takes Walker "very seriously" because he is able to "present himself as something other than he is." He said Walker portrays himself as a friend of the middle class but then pursues policies that harms their interests, calling the governor's cuts to education "the most striking of them all."

Still, de Blasio added: "I never mistake the fact that a good politician's a good politician. He's a clever politician, he presents himself in a likable way, and he has to be taken seriously."

De Blasio, who became New York's first Democratic mayor since 1993 when he was elected in 2013, told Wisconsin Democrats they need to focus on income inequality in their campaigns to win back a majority in the U.S. Senate and to retain the White House. He drew the loudest applause when he called for raising the minimum wage.

But de Blasio, who joked that he's sometimes greeted by New Yorkers with expletives and "waves that only use one finger," stressed that Dems need to work harder to present a clear message to voters.

"This time, it needs to be clear, sharp and progressive," de Blasio said.

Afterward, de Blasio told reporters the Dem Party has to do a better job.

"Ultimately, we've seen the average American family going in the wrong direction economically. Both parties have a lot to explain and a lot to do differently," he said. "Democrats have to be humbled that we have to do better, too."

De Blasio, who managed Hillary Clinton's successful run in New York state for U.S. Senate in 2000, told reporters he's traveling the country and trying to help the Democratic Party "to have

a bigger impact.”

“I don’t think its voice necessarily is heard the way it needs to be,” he said of the party.

Asked what Hillary Clinton can do to win presidential votes in Wisconsin and the Midwest, de Blasio repeated his advice to communicate better.

“I think what’s crucial is a vision, a very sharp, tangible vision of economic change,” he said. “I’m hopeful that we’ll hear that from her. I think that’s what people are waiting for.”

Other speakers at the annual event included U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin of Madison, Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, U.S. Rep. Gwen Moore of Milwaukee, Assembly Minority Leader Peter Barca of Kenosha, Senate Minority Leader Jennifer Shilling of La Crosse and state Rep. Mandela Barnes of Milwaukee.

Baldwin told the crowd, “Scott Walker has turned his back on us. He wears the divisions he’s caused like a badge of honor.”

Baldwin said Wisconsin has a proud history of reforms. She noted Wisconsin was the first state to have collective bargaining for public employees, unemployment compensation laws and to ratify the 19th Amendment, giving women the right to vote. She also noted former U.S. Sen. Gaylord Nelson created Earth Day.

“Wisconsin respects its environment, or at least we did until Scott Walker came along,” she said. “Wisconsin respects its schools and its teachers, or at least we used to until Scott Walker came along.”

Barca described Wisconsin politics since Republicans took control of the Legislature as “government by ambush.”

“We work on packages after packages, whether it be green energy jobs, entrepreneurial support, technology, development or workforce training programs,” Barca said. “All of a sudden, they announce they’re going to have right-to-work and eight days later, it’s the law of the land.”

By Kay Nolan
For WisPolitics.com