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NY AP TOP NEWS

Applause, skepticism greet NYC mayor's anti-poverty plan

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NEW YORK — New York City aims to lift 800,000 people out of poverty's clutches within a decade — nearly as many people who live in San Francisco — by launching a program that has drawn both applause for its ambition and skepticism about its feasibility.

Mayor Bill de Blasio put the nation's largest municipal anti-poverty plan at the center of his revamped OneNYC program, a blueprint for making New York more resilient and equitable by fighting income inequality, the same message he used recently as a platform to stride onto the national stage.

Administration officials on Thursday outlined the goal of pulling nearly 10 percent of New York's 8.5 million residents out of poverty or near poverty, a sweeping plan that will utilize a potpourri of proposals, not all of them yet well-defined, and a significant reliance on a steep minimum wage increase that is far from guaranteed.

More than 45 percent of New Yorkers live at or near the poverty line, which is defined by the Center for Economic Opportunity as \$31,156 for a family of four in 2013, the most recent year available.

About 100,000 people are expected to be lifted above the poverty line thanks to a series of administration efforts enacted since de Blasio took office in January 2014, according to City Hall's calculation models. Among those plans: new living wage legislation, redesigned job training programs aimed at preparing workers for higher-paying jobs,

and an expanded free pre-K program that is estimated to save parents \$10,000 a year in child care costs.

The city also already announced a massive affordable housing program — de Blasio pledged to create or preserve 200,000 units by 2024 — that would create construction jobs and tamp down skyrocketing housing costs.

Other programs have more of a tangential link to the anti-poverty plan. For instance, the mayor signed off on creating a new municipal ID card that aides say, among other benefits, allows access to libraries where job research can be conducted. De Blasio also has signaled a hope to expand access to broadband Internet and to cut the average New Yorker's commute time to 45 minutes.

"This is a holistic approach and the right approach," said Dr. Jeffrey Sachs, director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University who consulted on the plan. "The 800,000 number may seem big, but this is a realistic and manageable goal."

But many of those concepts — including a commission to study an extremely expensive new subway link in central Brooklyn — have not yet reached the drawing board (De Blasio declined comment on the cost of most of the new programs, saying they would be addressed in next month's budget presentation).

The biggest weapon in the anti-poverty arsenal would be a minimum wage increase. About 73,000 New Yorkers will be lifted out of poverty once the minimum wage is raised to \$9 an hour on Jan. 1, according to an administration report released this week.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo has said he wants to raise the minimum wage to \$11.50, which officials say would lift 238,000 residents out of poverty. De Blasio wants to raise it to \$13 and index it to inflation so it will rise to \$15 by 2019.

That hike, when combined with the administration's other announced steps, would eventually bring the total to 848,000, according to city officials, eclipsing the mayor's goal. But Cuomo has signaled no support for a raise that high, leaving the plan open to criticism that it is unrealistic.

A mayoral spokeswoman said de Blasio would continue to rally for the increase to \$13 — and that his goal was obtainable even without it.

"Over half of the goal is achievable through initiatives that are already underway," Amy Spitalnick said. "The impact of these anti-poverty initiatives will continue to grow over time, and we'll also continue to build on them with additional strategies to tackle income inequality."

The uncertainty over the minimum wage underscores some experts' concern with the plan — that many economic factors are out of the mayor's control.

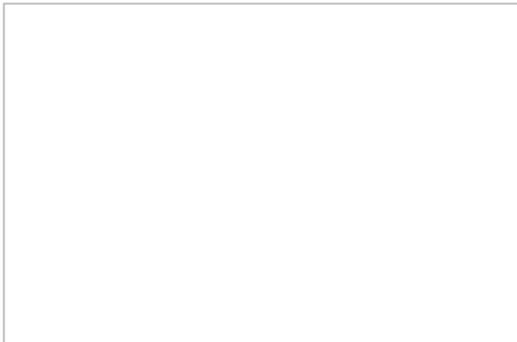
"The mayor can help create an environment in a city where job growth can happen, but so much of it is up to outside forces, like market conditions or trends in technology," said Mitchell Moss, professor of urban policy at New York University. "New York City does not operate in a vacuum."

But de Blasio administration officials expressed confidence in meeting their goal, whether through a successful lobbying effort for the wage hike or other programs to be drawn up in the years ahead. And the mayor himself jokingly acknowledged when he announced the plan Wednesday that some people feel his administration has a tall mountain to climb.

"Look, I don't blame anyone that's cynical," he said. "I represent 8.5 million jaded people."

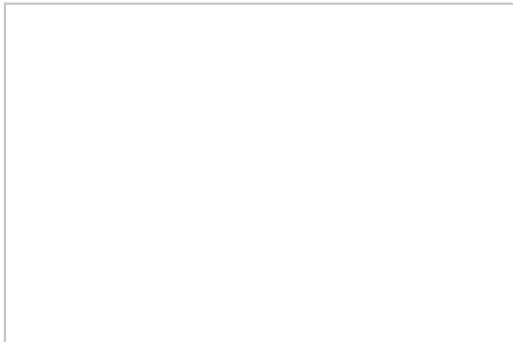
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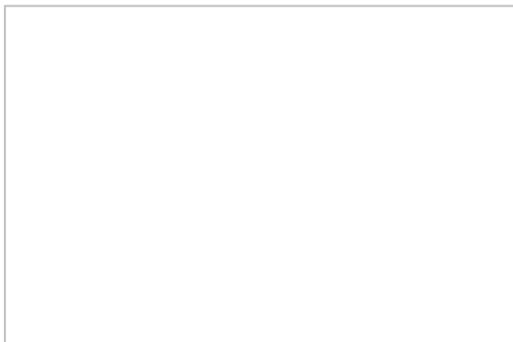
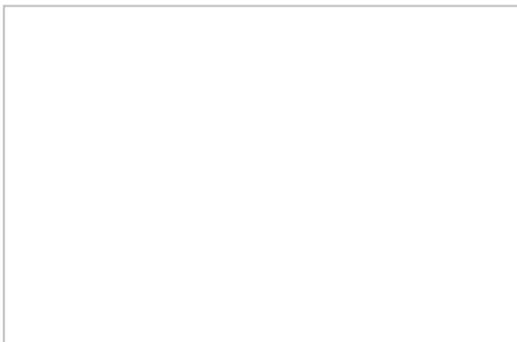
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