



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10007

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**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS PRESS AVAILABILITY FOLLOWING  
GOVERNOR ANDREW CUOMO'S 2015 OPPORTUNITY AGENDA PRESENTATION IN ALBANY**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** I just want to note starting out – I think, very powerful juxtaposition last night and today. The president, last night, I thought, gave a really moving and important speech – not a typical State of the Union. I thought he framed the issue of income inequality in a way that was particularly powerful. And I think he provided a very clear roadmap of where this nation needs to go. I think the governor picked up on that today with making the question of income inequality central to his State of the State remarks. And I think this is further indication that this is going to be the dominant issue in our public discourse – this year and certainly looking forward to next year.

As some of you have seen, and I noted, it's a striking moment when even Mitt Romney is talking about income inequality – and there's some irony in that. But the president last night, gave us a very fulsome understanding of what we need to do as a nation. The governor today put forward, I think, a very powerful set of proposals to get at some of these same challenges.

We've talked about before that if you're going to address income inequality, there's a host of things that have to be done – some that we focus on in the here and now – increasing wages and benefits, and other things we can do to help working people right now. But some of the most profound things we have to do to address income inequality are the investments we make in the future, particularly around education. So, I want to just note how much I appreciate the governor's commitment to deepening pre-k spending throughout the state. It's clear that an issue that a few years ago was not on the front pages has certainly arrived. The governor made it central to his vision for the future of the state – I appreciate deeply that commitment.

I also appreciate that he's raising the question of where we go next, and the next steps we will be taking in terms of early childhood education. I think the fact that he's talking about what our three-year-olds need is very, very important for the future of this state. So, I thought that was an important the governor pointed to.

And I also just want to note – I think his framing around mayoral control of education – not just for New York City, but for cities all over the state – was a crucial acknowledgment of the reform that has to happen to improve education statewide. I can tell you, having experienced mayoral control for a year, what an extraordinary difference it makes to be able to move a school system rapidly forward. We were able to do so much with pre-k in part because we had mayoral control of education – same with afterschool, the same with the community schools effort. Buffalo, Albany, Rochester, Syracuse – they deserve that opportunity as well. All the large cities of this state deserve mayoral control of education so they can make the kind of profound changes they need. So I want to commend the governor for raising that.

And I'll just finish by saying – then open up to your questions – I was very touched by the ending, the juxtaposition that he put forward of the comments by the different first responders up in Buffalo and how they each talked about the experiences they had had in their parts of the state when others came to their aid. We were

really honored to support Mayor Brown, to support the people of Buffalo, by sending our fire department personnel and fire department apparatuses up there. It was the right thing to do. And yes, we benefited greatly in our hour of need during Sandy from emergency personnel from all over the state coming to help us – and I thought that was moving, to remind people, even in a very big and diverse state, that there is a powerful tradition of people being there for each other. And New York City intends to continue to always be there for our brothers and sisters around the state in their hours of need. So with that, let's first talk about the speech and then we'll talk about anything else on your mind.

Yes –

**Question:** You mention a couple of education initiatives that you're supportive of – mayoral control and pre-k – but talk a little bit about some of the things that I suspect maybe you don't agree with him on as enthusiastically – increasing the cap on the charter schools and also, you know, the tenure reform. What are your thoughts on these?

**Mayor:** Well, let me preface by saying, next week, I'll be coming back to Albany to do budget testimony and honestly will be addressing a host of issues at that time. So, a lot of the speech we're hearing for the first time, so I want to reserve detailed comments until we've had a chance to digest, and I'll be back to do a more thorough analysis next week. But I can say, for example, on the charter cap – this is something I've spoken to many times – I think the cap we have now is sufficient. I want to certainly work with charter schools in New York City, but as I've said many times, the key to improving education in New York City and throughout the state is to do a much better job at traditional public school education. That's where my focus is first and foremost, and that's where I think we need to keep our focus as a state if we're really going to turn the corner on education. So I think the cap we have now is sufficient.

Yes –

**Question:** What did you think of the governor's criminal justice proposals and did you have any input on those? Did he consult with you at all?

**Mayor:** Our staffs have been talking quite a lot the last few weeks. I would say, again, we'll get into more detail next week, but I want to give one example. I think the reform related to 16- and 17-year-olds is exactly right. I commend him. I think it's long overdue for New York state to catch up with the other 48 states, so I think that's a very, very important reform.

**Question:** Should teachers have to wait five years to – in order to get tenure? And should there be significant changes to the disciplinary and teacher evaluation [inaudible], as the governor proposed?

**Mayor:** Yeah, look – again, I'll get you more detail next week, but I'm – just a top-line point, I think the experience we're having in New York City may well be different from other parts of the state. I think we have seen recently improved ability to identify some teachers who should not be in the profession and move them along. That's something I believe is important to be able to do, and we feel we are able to do it, but I'll have more to say next week.

**Question:** Two questions. One, just a specific thing – do you have the amount on pre-k? Is it the same \$300 million?

**Mayor:** To the best of my knowledge, the proposal is consistent with last year, but we'll get back to you if there's any detail otherwise.

**Question:** Okay. And also, I was wondering, on the criminal justice proposal, could you talk about just the independent monitor aspect of it – if that’s something you think should be in place, if it’s something you would want to see in New York City?

**Mayor:** That’s the first we had heard of that proposal, so Ill just reserve my right to have a chance to analyze it, and we’ll have something more to say. I think what is important is the governor – and a lot of people in Albany – the attorney general and others – are looking for aw way to show greater accountability and transparency in the process. I think that’s something we obviously need, but what form it should take I think is open to question. I certainly want to look more deeply at the governor’s proposal.

**Question:** Mayor, what’s your position on the education tax credit? Are you in favor of it?

**Mayor:** I’ve always been concerned that it would ultimately take away resources from traditional public schools that need it desperately. And so, although I think it’s a well-intentioned proposal, I think it’s one that, unfortunately, has unintended negative consequences for traditional public schools.

**Question:** So you would oppose it?

**Mayor:** Yeah – again, I have not seen that there’s any new iteration or new wording, but my broad sense of it is I have not been comfortable with it.

**Question:** Mr. Mayor, what the governor proposed in an increase in the minimum wage to kind of a two-tiered – one for the city – but it’s not as high as what you’d like, and it doesn’t give you the authority to set it on your own. What do you think of that?

**Mayor:** I think it’s obvious that – and I’ve said this, obviously, for quite a while – the – what you’ve seen around the country is cities acting to address income inequality in a very forceful way. You’ve seen it in Seattle, in Los Angeles, in Chicago. I think the actions by cities around the country have been one of the crucial factors in forcing the income inequality question to the fore, and creating pressure on state governments and the federal government to take real action. I think, obviously, the efforts of fast food workers are another example of something that’s had a profound impact. In New York City, and with other cities around New York state, we do not have the same independent power that some cities around the country have to determine our own wage levels – and I think we should, or, as I think would be consistent with the discussion last year, have the state increase its minimum wage and then give cities the capacity to go farther using the state wage as a base. So when the proposal last year was for a 30 percent range of a potential additional increase, I think that makes all the sense in the world. I think localities deserve that right to determine what works for them. I also think indexing is profoundly necessary so that we don’t end up in the situation where the political process bogs down and what was an appropriate minimum wage becomes outmoded, which can happen very, very quickly. So I’d like to see more – I’d like to see that 30 percent capacity for cities to go farther and I’d like to see indexing.

**Question:** We haven’t heard – we didn’t hear much from the governor about expanding the rent laws. Do you have any thoughts on what you’d like to see? And have you had any discussions with the legislature?

**Mayor:** Again, there’s been a lot of discussion at the staff level. If we’re all going to get talking about this in earnest, obviously we have to protect our current rent regulation. I think it’s been one of the things that has preserved what affordability we do have in New York City – and we have an affordability crisis in New York City – it’s a lot of what we talked about in the last year – it’s a lot of why we have the most expansive affordable housing plan in the history of this country – to build or preserve 200,000 units of housing – because we have a profound affordability crisis in New York City. And you can’t address income inequality without addressing the affordability of housing, which is the number one expense. So, I’m going to work to protect rent regulation. I’m going to look for ways that we can expand upon it and strengthen it. We’ve had a huge number

of units lost from rent regulation or from other programs that protected affordability, and we have to address that – and I’m hopeful that we can get something done.

**Amy Spitalnick:** Two more, guys.

**Question:** You’re not happy with the minimum wage. You’re a little – you’re not happy with the charters. Do you still think the governor’s agenda is in sync with yours or do you see kind of diverging plans?

**Mayor:** Okay. I’ll have more to say next week on details. As I indicated at the beginning, I think there’s some very positive elements in his agenda that I agree with, and I’m sure there’ll be some other areas I have differences with, but what I’m pleased about is that some of the areas that are central to me – the fight against income inequality and focus on early childhood education – I see some important elements in this speech.

Anything else on or off –

**Question:** To follow that idea, do you feel that this – that the issues that the governor seems to be taking on – things like poverty, things like income inequality – that those are more kind of in line with progressive – his stated opinion of himself as a progressive?

**Mayor:** I think that we have to address these issues as a nation, and we have not very effectively addressed them until now, so I think it is good to see them front-and-center in the agenda. I think we’re all going to be judged by what we achieve. And in New York City, we have tried to very aggressively move an agenda related to pre-k, afterschool, paid sick leave, increasing wages and benefits in a variety of manners. So we’re at the beginning of a legislative process now. I think to answer that question we have to get to the end of that process.

**Question:** Mr. Mayor, I’m just curious – you have to be exhausted. Are you tired?

**Mayor:** I’m a little tired, Dominick, thank you for asking. *Merci beaucoup*. Yeah, I’m a little tired, but it was – I do want to say, it was a very moving visit to Paris on so many levels. Obviously, you know, one thing people understood immediately is that we in New York City have experienced terror in a way that no other city has, because of 9/11, and I felt there was a real sense of appreciation in that people understood that New York City was reaching out to Paris, offering support and solidarity. We obviously want to help them very practically in sharing some of our expertise in terms of security. But there was also, for me – what happened in Paris is an example of a larger struggle around the world to protect freedom of expression, to protect the freedom to worship as you choose – a whole host of values we hold dear. And I have to say, particularly in my visits with Jewish community leaders, to hear the fear that people in the Jewish community in Paris feel right now was really troubling. And one of the things I said to them is, we in New York City, we’re not perfect, but one of the things we learned long ago is to protect communities that might be embattled, and to provide extra support, extra security, extra support in their hour of need – and that is part of why people in a number of communities in this city feel welcome, and they feel they actually are protected. It’s not that the protection is only for some and not for others – and that’s something that a lot of the Western European countries have to do better at. Their Jewish communities need to know that they’re fully respected and fully protected.

**Question:** Mr. Mayor, the governor seemed to attach a big bump in education funding to his reform proposals to sort of, you know, it seems like, sweeten the deal for assembly democrats. Do you think that that tactic will be beneficial in the end? Do you think that Assembly Speaker Silver – you know, that will be appealing enough to him to go along with a lot of the reforms that don’t seem to sort of jive with the traditional assembly democratic –

**Mayor:** I don’t pretend to be an expert on the intricacies of Albany. I think each piece will be judged on its merits – I really do. And I think we’re just beginning this debate. I know the kind of things that we believe work

in education – and again, we’ve made that very central – particularly early childhood education – but I think this was just the opening of what will be, obviously, a much deeper debate.

**Amy Spitalnick:** Thanks, guys.

**Question:** What part of Cuba – what part of New York City should Cuba get to know best? What are the things in New York City –

**Mayor:** What part of New York City should Cuba – this is the most interesting question I’ve had in a long time.

**Question:** Businesses, or people, or products, and things that [inaudible] – with the governor’s trade initiative?

**Mayor:** Look, I think, first of all, the president did something – he was right. The expiration date of the embargo is long overdue. I think the president, to his great credit, did something smart and courageous and said it’s time to normalize relations with Cuba – I think that will be for the good of all. I think you’re right – there will be a big economic opportunity to that. And from my point of view, New York City – just look at what we have as strengths right now – our tech community, our film and television industry, our healthcare industry – there’s great potential for us in Cuba, as well as for the state of New York. So, this has been – there’s a lot of people in the business community who’ve felt for many years that opening up Cuba opened up real economic opportunity. There’s been a tension where a lot of folks in the business community really wanted it to happen and had to overcome certain political roadblocks. But now that the president took such a profound step, I hope we can move forward quickly, end the embargo, and I think it will [inaudible] to our economic benefit.

Thank you, everyone.

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