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RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS ON THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW

Brian Lehrer: I think we have Mayor de Blasio on the line. Mr. Mayor, are you there?

Mayor Bill de Blasio: How you doing? Happy New Year.

Lehrer: Same – same to you, Happy New Year. And I was just telling the listeners that you and I have something in common on New Year's Day. I don't know if you saw it, we were both on a New York Times list of New Yorkers and their New Years' resolutions, and mine was to use this show not just to point out conflict, as the media loves to do, but to engage in some conflict resolution, however imperfectly on some issues. And I see that yours was to spend more time in the neighborhoods of all five boroughs listening to what New Yorkers need. Have you made concrete plans yet to that effect?

Mayor: Oh yes, absolutely. We're going to be doing – first of all, I like your resolution, I commend you for it, and I think it's what we need to do not only in the media, but throughout our society. In my case, we have more town hall meetings coming up this month. Last night, a different kind of approach – I went to the Bellevue Men's Intake Shelter to listen to a number of the shelter residents to hear what they were going through. I'm going to be doing a lot of different things to, you know, go all over this city, and understand what people need, and figure out how this city government can do the best job we can to serve our people. And, look, I think for this first two years of this administration we had to build out a very, very aggressive program to change a lot of things, and I'm proud of that, but it's very, very important to constantly go out and understand what's happening on the ground and figure out what we have to do.

Lehrer: Did you make that resolution because you felt you hadn't been listening to certain neighborhoods enough?

Mayor: I made it because I felt that what I had to do the first couple of years kept me very much in City Hall, dealing with a whole host of issues, often times having to manage, you know, very specific initiatives that we were trying to move. And these were big things – obviously, what we were trying to do, for example, with the expansion of pre-k or the affordable housing plan. They took a lot of time and energy. And let me be clear, I have a great team of people who do so much of the work, but a lot of it does take hands on work by a mayor. But now, it's time to really spend much more time in our communities both articulating what we're doing, but also hearing what's working, what's not working, what people need, what we have to do next.

Lehrer: You know, I almost never ask you about polls. You say polls are like cotton candy, and I agree, but, as you enter year three, there is a consistent finding in many of your job approval polls that show a racial disparity. A majority of black New Yorkers approve of the job you're doing – a majority of white New Yorkers disapprove. How do you explain that consistent disparity? And do you plan to do anything specific to address it in 2016? Is that one of the reasons that you mentioned getting out to more neighborhoods?

Mayor: I think that that disparity has existed for a long time. It doesn't mean it's something to ignore, it just means I think we need to be honest about it. It's been there for me and for other leaders previously. But the point is, I'm mayor for everyone, and I want to get to every kind of neighborhood. I want to listen to every kind of person, and I want to try to solve problems across the board. So, you know, the polls reflect what people are feeling at any given moment. I think it's a very different issue how you're serving them over the long haul and what they see happening. I ultimately believe people respond to results. If we provide affordable housing; if folks get pre-k; if they see, you know, the economy improving – and it has. We have 200,000 – almost 200,000 more jobs in this city since the day I took office. These are the kinds of things that, of course, lead people to make their ultimate judgements. But I think my job is to, one, better articulate what we're doing; but, two, listen to what people feel isn't working and show the ways we can address it. I'd love to give you a great example, I spent a lot of time in Staten Island over the last few months listening to people who were very, very concerned about the quality of the roads. We've, you know, doubled down on repaving roads in Staten Island and all over the city since the budget that we passed in June. You know, I think a lot of folks who still have disagreements with me do appreciate that their city government is getting something done now that didn't happen for many years, and that's important to show people.

Lehrer: You mentioned pre-k and housing. I think it would be accurate to say – correct me if I'm wrong – that you had a top policy goal for your first year in office, which was universal pre-k, and one for your second year, which was launching the affordable housing program. Is that accurate? And do you have one for years three?

Mayor: That is accurate, and in year three we're going to say a lot more at both the budget announcement and in the State of the City address. I can say broadly that the core idea of fighting the affordability crisis and addressing income inequality is going to pervade everything I plan to do in year three. We were very proud of the way we started both with increasing the wage to \$15 an hour for 50,000 of our city employees, and our contracted social service workers. And you know that reaches many thousands more of their family members as well – and very proud of our new paid parental leave policy for a number of our city workers. So, it's very consistent with the things that, you know, I said I was going to do in office, and I came here to do. So, in the vision for year three, we're going to deepen those commitments, particularly around the affordability issue.

Lehrer: And I see that one place – well, you mentioned that one place you visited yesterday was the men's homeless shelter called the 30th Street Intake Center in Manhattan. And you said you didn't see one situation that couldn't be fixed, but isn't being fixed. Did you mean with people's personal situations or the shelter itself?

Mayor: Look it's quite clear – look, let's be blunt about that facility – there were a lot of notices on the wall. I went with my wife, Chirlane, and our new Deputy Mayor Herminia Palacio, and our HRA Commissioner Steve Banks. We all were struck at the various notices and messages on the wall – and we were trying to decide in some cases whether they dated from the Bloomberg era, the Giuliani era, or the Dinkins era – and it was quite clear that that was a bit of a metaphor for the fact that that place has not been, you know, updated physically and, in many other ways, in many years and we have a lot to change.

I think the folks who work there are working hard. I want to make sure they're getting things done and they're serving their clients as best possible but I meant to say that those individuals – everyone one of their stories had a point that, either they could have been helped to stay in the housing they were in, or the job they were in, or they could have gotten the mental health services they needed at the right moment – and the system failed them. And every one of them is recoverable.

We talked to a lot of veterans. The good news is – and we've made a very special focus, as with President Obama, on veteran's housing – and a lot of veterans said to us that they had seen the apartment that they were going to go in or they knew, you know, that there was a pathway to an apartment and that had started for them.

So, it's clear some things are beginning to click but at the same time, you know, I heard so many people who had been working and wanted to work again, and all they wanted to do was be connected to a job – and we've

got to do better. We've got to do better at getting people – these are decent people, in some many cases who just fell through the cracks – we got to do better at helping them get connected back to a better life.

Lehrer: On the facilities – Comptroller Stringer, as you know, found 18,000 open violations at the city's family shelters including rats, no heat, peeling lead paint – and Governor Cuomo, this week, said, bad shelter conditions are a reason that so many people choose to sleep on the street. How much do you agree with the governor on that?

Mayor: Well, I agree that our shelters are not in the condition they should be in, and I feel they have not been for years and, in fact, decades. And, Brian, I give you credit and a lot of folks in the media who are looking at the bigger history here. The homelessness crisis has been with us for over 30 years, and, let's not kid ourselves, these issues have not been addressed. For years and decades, our shelters have not been the kind of quality they should be. Well, I don't accept it. I just don't. On my watch we're going to change this.

The fact is that there are some good shelters – and it's very important to, you know, we've got all sorts of providers – Women in Need and Catholic Charities and all sorts of providers who help the homeless – who are wonderful and do very good work in their shelters. We can't paint it with too broad a brush but there are certainly some that are not safe enough and not clean enough. Now, we added 200 new police officers to our shelters to make them safer. We're obviously putting a huge amount of resources into the repairs. They should have been done a long time ago, Brian, they should have been done years ago but we're going to do them. So, the – I asked my commissioner of investigation to go and look at the shelters last Spring. He came back with a report saying, here are the problems, here are the violations – we solved 83 percent of the ones from the first report. We're continuing to deepen it. We've said now – we're going to have a hotline that any shelter resident can call that will allow us to send out an inspector and send out a repair squad within 24 hours, and we're going to very, very closely monitor to make sure repairs are being made rapidly – much more rapidly than in the past.

So, I agree that there are some homeless folks who won't come off the street because they are not comfortable with the shelters. We're going to both fix the shelter condition, but we're also giving those folks Safe Havens – those are smaller facilities, usually in faith-based locations, that are cleaner, more conducive, safer in the eyes of many people who are living in the street – and I think that's one of the ways we're going to really change the equation.

Lehrer: Mayor de Blasio with us – and let's take a homelessness question from a New Yorker calling in. Yvonne in Manhattan, you're on WNYC. Hello, Yvonne.

Question: Good morning, how are you?

Lehrer: Okay, thank you.

Question: Yes, my question to Mayor de Blasio – in Utah, the mayor of Utah decided in 2012 that he would try to resolve the homelessness problem –

Lehrer: The mayor of Salt Lake City, right?

Question: Yes, exactly, exactly – and up-to-date, he has eradicated it by 78 percent, which is almost the entire problem. He calls it Housing First, where a set of case workers goes out into the field and talks with these people and houses them before anything – addresses their drug problems, addresses whatever problems that they're having. As-to-date, the veteran problem is almost zero. So, there's no more vets, almost, on the streets of Utah. What he did was build housing for these people. Can you give me some sort of, you know, is there some sort of resolution that you find that you're going to be able to build these housing for people because where are you going to put them?

Lehrer: Yvonne, thank you.

Mayor: Thank you very much, Yvonne, I appreciate the question. Look, we look at what's happening around the country. We're always looking for the things that are working – and we just committed, now, to 15,000 apartments – supportive apartments, meaning apartments for folks who have mental health and substance abuse and other challenges. That's a big part of our plan.

Our overall affordable housing plan – 200,000 units being built or preserved – that's enough for half-a-million people – that will part of the solution as well and that's moving along very rapidly. But, yeah, absolutely, the new initiatives we've created – and it's the biggest that any city has ever created – it's called HOME-STAT. This is where we're going to have outreach workers go all over the city, particularly in Manhattan between Canal Street and 145th Street every day, checking in with the homeless who are living on the street. Now, it's about 3,000 or 4,000 people and we have got to find a way for each and every one of them to get them off the streets – and what it's going to literally come down to is knowing their – not only their name, but their whole life story, knowing where they spend their time, knowing what they need to get their life back together, and getting that help to them, including housing. We've shown with veterans – we've got a couple thousand veterans over the last year that we were able to get to housing – more all the time. We have to make it a priority. That's what it comes down to.

Yes, there are – it's hard to create housing in New York City, there's no question, but we're making this a priority because we've got to get people off the street.

Lehrer: I saw your new deputy mayor for health and human services on NY1 last night – and that's Dr. Herminia Palacio, of course – and, Errol Louis asked her what her goal with respect to homelessness would be, what impact in her first year in office with you – and here is 24 seconds of what your new appointee said.

Deputy Commissioner Herminia Palacio, Department of Health and Human Services: I hope that what I can say is that the biggest impact that we've made as a team working together is to drastically reduce, in a year, the number of homeless people including transitioning people into permanent housing, and reducing the number of people who are homeless and on the street.

Lehrer: Drastically reduce in one year is a high bar. Do you have a numerical goal for 2016?

Mayor: We are working on a vision for 2016 of what we think is realistic to achieve. I think Dr. Palacio is saying the right goal. You want to make a big difference, but we've done in this administration over and over again, whether it was pre-k or affordable housing or many, many other areas – we put out a metric when we have a goal that we believe we can achieve, even if it's a tough one to achieve. On this, we've said what the tools are, Brian. We've got HOME-STAT, which is, again, going to be an extraordinary – you're going to see it very visibly – an extraordinary outreach effort engaging the homeless on the streets every day. We've got the supportive housing units. We've got 500 more Safe Haven beds. We put a lot of tools on the table. They've never been on the table together like this. I think this is going to be a powerful combination, but to figure what it's going to mean numerically, we're still not there yet. I am happy to say, you know, our shelter population has stabilized recently, which means that a lot of the efforts, you know, the anti-eviction legal services that are helping the people to stay in apartments; the rent subsidies are helping us to keep people in apartments or get them out of shelter and into new apartments. These pieces are beginning to work more effectively, but, you know, I'll have more to say when we really see how these big initiatives like HOME-STAT are working.

Lehrer: Sally, in Inwood, you're on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio. Hi, Sally.

Question: Hi, can you hear me?

Lehrer: I can hear you.

Question: I had a couple of questions. You're doing the speed rezoning in our neighborhood, and it's right on the river – the Harlem River. And as you know, if you spent any time in Inwood – and I know Brian has – we have the most beautiful park in the city, which is Inwood Hill Park. And we also have the most beautiful river. And my concern – as you build this housing you bring all these people up, what is it going to do in terms of the impact on the water quality given that we still – DEP basically doesn't come here to do water sampling now. And I'm worried about the outflows when it rains with the combined sewer system dumping all sorts of garbage into our water. So, I want to know what you're doing to make sure that the water front development is development that will increase the [inaudible] to the waterfront and the water, and improve water quality.

Lehrer: Are you familiar enough with the specific rezoning plan up there?

Mayor: Yeah, I mean, I can certainly speak to Sally. Thank you for the question, and I agree. It's an absolutely beautiful neighborhood with beautiful parks. And, you know, that we want to make sure that that is protected, obviously. So, look, one of the things we did that was not done in the past, when we have an area that's going to experience a rezoning, and there's going to be changes in the neighborhood. Obviously, there's a very extensive process with the public that is being worked through, but what we've done is we put in our budget, in June, a very substantial amount for infrastructure for wherever there's going to be a rezoning. There's a path, bluntly. Some rezoning – some big land use changes were made to neighborhoods without the infrastructure necessary to support them. We've said upfront and we're working with the City Council close in this, and Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez has been a crucial part of this – that when we're deciding on the growth or change in a neighborhood we have to lock in the infrastructure changes necessary, for example, [inaudible] sewage capacity or any other kind of thing that will support any changes in the neighborhood, we're baking that into the beginning of the process. And the City Council is really demand of that, and we're making sure the resources are there for it. So, I'll make sure, certainly, that our department of environmental protection is actively engaged to make sure we're protecting water quality as part of this.

Lehrer: I see that you announced yesterday, and you mentioned it briefly before – six weeks of paid parental leave for thousands of city workers. I want to ask you a big picture question about that. Do you and the governor have also been implementing \$15 minimum wage for more and more public sector workers. I feel like in recent years there's been downward pressure politically on public sector benefits like pensions and healthcare that were seen as too expensive because taxpayers said I have to contribute to my own premiums; I have to live with a 401K instead of a pension; I'm not going to pay extra taxes, so public sector workers can have better than me. But now it looks to me like you and Governor are trying to use the public workforce to set an example of higher standards, again, for the private economy. In a big picture way do you feel you're doing that consciously to influence private sector standards?

Mayor: A couple parts to your question – first of all, I believe it's the right thing to do for every part of our society to raise wages and benefits. And we were able to do that for everyone, for example, through the paid sick leave law two years ago. That was something that New York City had the ability to mandate across the board including for private sector employers. But when it comes to things like raising minimum wage, obviously, that can only be done by the federal government or state government. So, the big picture answer is I think we need a higher federal minimum wage; I think we need a federal parental leave policy; state higher minimum wage; state parental leave policy, etcetera. We need a change across the board or both public and private sector workers. Now, I think you're absolutely right to say do we believe these actions are the right things to do for our workers and have a bigger impact, absolutely. What we did the other day – 20,000 of our workers will have paid parental leave. We look forwards to working with our unions to extend that, ultimately, to hundreds of thousands of folks. The way we do it here is through finding other savings. So, this does not cost the taxpayers more. When it comes to raising the minimum wage, of course, there is ramifications for tax payers, but I think it's a perfectly fair one. If our workers have a decent wage I believe they'll be with us longer, and I believe they'll be able to do a better job. And also that money will recirculate and strengthen the economy and create new jobs. If the public sector shows that the wage levels must go up it is a [inaudible] for the private

sector. It does put pressure on the private sector to move as well. And it's – In think the national debate has moved in an extraordinary fashion just in the last year or two, where \$15 an hour used to be considered impossible, now it's being talked about everywhere. And that's the minimum people should be getting if we're going to have a decent standard of living for people.

Lehrer: Nicole in Manhattan, you're on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio. Hi, Nicole.

Question: Oh, hi there. Thank you for taking my call. My question is about schools and special need kids in New York City. I have a daughter with autism, and she attends a public school in Manhattan. And every year it's a real challenge finding related service provider so that she can get an education in a neighborhood community school setting. And specifically this year, there's a real [inaudible] shortage of occupational therapist. And I'm not sure how familiar you are with autism, but this is the kind of therapy that gives kids on the spectrum the sensory input that their bodies need, so that their brains are primed to learn. So I was wondering if you have any plan, any actions to try to relieve this chronic shortage?

Mayor: I appreciate the question, Nicole. And I've talked to a lot of parents of kids of special needs over the years, and I really do feel the challenge you face. I had two kids who were in general education programs in, you know, our public schools, and a lot of challenges go with just being a parent every day, but if you have a child with special needs it adds intensely to that. So, I want to just say I understand what a struggle it can be. The school system, in my opinion, I was, you know, I was very involved in education for years. Before I became mayor, the school system was not helpful and conducive to parents who already had a burden. A year-and-a-half ago we changed the policies, and we still have a ways to go, but I have heard from a number of parents that now there's much more likelihood that our Department of Education folks are trying to find a solution; find the right program or right school that fits the child. With children on the autism spectrum, I think we now have identified problems on a much bigger scale, and we've tried to respond by building out more schools that have that other capacity to serve kids, and we've had some really great examples of schools that do a great job, and have specific programs in them for kids on the autism spectrum. But I'm not going to pretend we have enough those. There's more we have to do. I have not heard about the occupational therapist shortage, so I'm going to look into that, but I certainly want you to know if you're talking to our Department of Education folks, we are committed to finding a solution for you and your child. That is the governing philosophy now.

Lehrer: Andrew in the Bronx, you're on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio. Hi, Andrew.

Question: Hi. Good morning, Brian, and hello Mayor de Blasio. It is an honor to speak with you.

Mayor: Good morning.

Question: Good morning. My question and – it's a two part question – one is about affordable housing and maintaining the inventory that we currently have. I, as tenant leader of my building, just took on, with the help of part of your office, Letitia James's office, DHCR up in Albany – we just challenged [inaudible] who was forcing tenants last year and the year prior to sign non-stabilized leases and also, bring a ton of us to housing court [inaudible]. With the investigation that we just completed, we were able to maintain 220 apartments of affordable housing back to full-stabilization. Now, my first question is, for your [inaudible] what is it that you'd like to do, or you can tell me, you'd like to do or possibly can do, to make sure this doesn't occur with other landlords in other boroughs?

And then the second question is, when it comes to affordable housing, is there going to ever be subsidy system for New York City teachers who are allowed to live in the neighborhoods that they teach in? Because my mom is a teacher and we were blessed to have two incomes in our home and [inaudible] so she could be a full-time teacher and now my sister is a teacher – and she's having [inaudible] because she's a one-person income in her house. Her husband does not work, he's a house-husband. So, I'm wondering, do you think New York City is anywhere [inaudible] to do that, where we can maybe try and maintain our teaching [inaudible] because we

would like to give them subsidies – and, then, you know, all these 20 buildings, 80 buildings that are [inaudible] that could be teachers who are trying to make [inaudible] –

Lehrer: Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you, Andrew. Thank you, first of all, for being a leader in your building and for achieving that victory. A couple of answers to your question – we tried to change the approach in many ways. It's not only the affordable housing plan to build and preserve 200,000 units, again enough for half-a-million people – and that is moving along very, very aggressively – it's also, we had for the first time ever, a rent-freeze in this city – 40, I think, 45 years it been a rent-guidelines board covering our rent-stabilized apartments – the first rent-freeze that has happened in almost half a century and why? Because the facts required it – we looked at the real costs that landlords were experiencing, those costs were actually going down, cost of fuel was going down. We said that there's no reason that tenants should have to pay more. So, for, you know, I think it was more than a million units – rent-freeze for one year or they chose a two-year lease, it was a two percent rent increase which is obviously very modest. So, that was a game changer right there.

But, the other thing we've done is, we're investing now, \$60 million – that's literally ten times as much that's been invested ever in the past -- \$60 million in legal aid legal services for tenants who are being harassed or illegally evicted – and it literally is, all it takes for any New Yorker who believes that they are being subjected to illegal harassment or eviction, is to pick up the phone and call 3-1-1 and we'll connect them to a legal aid lawyer and we'll pay for it because we don't tolerate harassments, illegal actions by landlords to force people out. So, that's a brand new tool.

To your question about the teachers, we don't have that plan in place. I don't know if that's something we're going to reach in the near term. We are paying our teachers a lot better than we used to and that's a good thing. That was done in the previous administration – I give them credit. But, you know, for example, I went to the police graduation a week or two ago and went to the swearing-in of our new police class yesterday – in the majority, in both cases, now living in the city, which I think I good for everyone – I know it's tough for people to find decent housing but, you know, I hope if we continue to pay our work force well and with good benefits, that will lighten some of the burden and if we do enough to keep creating affordable housing, obviously, our teachers can apply for that as well.

Lehrer: I know we're almost out of time. Can I get a comment from you on the city's settlement on the surveillance lawsuit? I see you'll have a civilian monitor on how the city uses informants in religious communities plus new policies against religious profiling –

Mayor: Yes, it's a civilian – let's be clear because I think the word monitor has a certain legal connotation – it's a civilian who I'll be naming, who will be part of the internal process, and will add to that process. It's not a monitor in the classic [inaudible] federal sense. Look, this agreement I'm very satisfied addresses outstanding issues that needed to be resolved, while keeping us safe. You know, again, I always give Commissioner Bratton credit, whether it's, you know, fighting terror or fighting crime – he has an unparalleled career.

You know, our numbers, in terms of crime, down again at the end of 2015, down 1.7 percent overall crime – 5.8 percent reduction in serious crime over the last two years – we're very proud of that. And we've beefed up our anti-terrorism forces – over 500 new anti-terror cops as part of our Critical Response Command.

But we are convinced the way to keep us safe is not only those physical measures, and through the men and women of the NYPD, and the work they do – but also deepening the relationship with all the communities in this city and every community, that is the key to safety. And in terms of our Muslim-American community, people, I think, legitimately felt that there were mistakes done in the past that had to be addressed and as you know, we ended the previous surveillance program and we have really changed our relationship to the community – very important fact, Brian, doesn't get talk about – 900 Muslim-American members of the NYPD

who do a fantastic job protecting us and also serve as a great part of deepening our connection to the community. So, this settlement is both fair, in terms of civil rights and the law but it's also, I am convinced, is part of how we keep ourselves safer for the long-term.

Lehrer: Just one follow up on that – the part of the agreement – taking a document off the city's website, the document called "Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat" – there is some radicalization in the west and there is a homegrown threat. Critics say taking down the document is politically correct denial.

Mayor: No one is denying that there is a challenge of terrorism both directed from overseas and through lone-wolves here and "inspired people." That is why, in fact, we must deepen the relationship with all communities and if you're talking in particular about the Muslim community, you know, there's a lot to be done to offer a positive opportunity for deeper connection with the community – that's why we did, for example, for every reason fairness and also deepening the relationship with the community – we changed the school calendar and we recognize the two Eid holidays – that should have been recognized long ago by any normal measure because they're just as important in their tradition as the key Jewish and Christian holidays are.

So, we're doing a lot of things to change that reality but no one is denying the threat, that's why added 500-plus anti-terrorism officers – first time we've had a full-time anti-terrorism unit in the NYPD that's armed and trained in this fashion – the Critical Response Command. So, there's no denial that we're vigilant every day. We know we're the number one terror target in America but taking down that video is something that, you know, we came to the conclusion was the appropriate action – and we do not want to stereotype and we do not want to send an exclusive message to our Muslim community. We want to send an inclusive message.

Lehrer: Mr. Mayor, thank you very much.

Mayor: Thank you, Brian.

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