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RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Everyone, what's on your mind?

Question: The carriage horses, Mr. Mayor. Can you flesh out the agreement – or the tentative agreement? What's involved?

Mayor: Yes, we're very pleased we've gotten to an agreement. In principal, there's still details obviously to be worked through with the City Council and the carriage drivers, represented by the Teamsters union. We think this is going to be a solid change for this city on many levels. For a long time, I've talked about the fact that we need to get horses off our streets. Horses do not belong on the streets of the biggest city in the country in the middle of midtown traffic. It's not fair and humane to the horses. It's not fair to drivers – it creates congestion. There's a lot of reasons why this has to change. So, this agreement will achieve that. Horses will get off the streets of our city. In terms of the routes that they go on, in the course of this year, 2016, they'll go into Central Park. Ultimately the stables will be moved and there'll be no more horse carriages anywhere on the streets. Everything will be contained in Central Park. And it will obviously lead to many fewer horses being used in this industry. So, it's a lot of progress. It's real progress. Look, it's not everything I wanted, I think I've been quite clear about that, but that's why we have a democratic process, and obviously an executive branch and a legislative branch. We work very closely with the Council, very cooperatively with the Council at –

[Background commotion]

Mayor: The Council had strong views, and I've said, you know, there's a tremendously good working relationship with the Council – there's a lot of give and take. We made some modifications based on their concerns, and I think we've gotten to something that will be real progress.

Question: So, Mr. Mayor, to pay for the building in the stables that are going to be built and –

Mayor: This is a capital investment for the city. This is a City-owned building right now that has become less usable over the years. We want to fix it up. And it's a great option to use it for a stable. Again, it takes away a big problem for this City – horses not just going on their routes with customers, but going all the way from the West Side over to Central Park, creating congestion and safety issues. We know there have been a number of safety incidents – crashes with cars, horses that were injured. That takes away the whole problem, so it's a worthy investment to fix up a building that we already own – put it in good, usable shape for the long-term.

Question: Mr. Mayor, does the City Council have to vote on this now?

Mayor: Yes, there's going to be a hearing, and the legislation will be shaped up based on this agreement. There will be a hearing and then there will a vote, hopefully as quickly as possible.

Question: And what about the pedicab part of it?

Mayor: That is – look, we’re obviously introducing a new element into Central Park with the horses, and I think it’s a good choice – I think that’s where they belong – but we had to make an adjustment in terms of the pedicabs for balance, and I think it’s a fair outcome.

Question: Can you tell us how much the stables are going to cost? I saw one figure was \$25 million, and, if that’s accurate, is that an appropriate amount –

Mayor: We don’t have a final –

Question: – of taxpayer money to spend on a private industry?

Mayor: We don’t have a final figure. We will get one as we do the research. But I can certainly say that we’re convinced it’s a good investment. Again, it’s a City-owned building already that needs to be fixed up anyway if we’re going to use it and not just leave it there as, you know, as a shell of a building. But the value we’re getting here for the people is to address the congestion issue. Again, when the horses are coming from the West Side to Central Park – to address the congestion issue along all the routes that the horse carriages [inaudible]; to address the safety issue, because there have been a number of crashes. I think it’s a good long-term investment to get the horses off our streets.

Question: Will you have to alienate any of the parkland in order to do this?

Mayor: No. This is already a City-owned building and City-owned land that’s being used for logistical purposes in the park. It’s not land that the public goes on already. It’s the logistical areas that we repurpose.

Question: So, it’s the 86th-Street building – that’s the one you’re talking about? The Parks Department, where the –

Mayor: Yeah, I’ll get the exact address for you, but it’s an existing City building, existing City land, logistical area.

Question: And what is the – when you said there’s like other things that are still outstanding, you know, in the deal – what are the other things that –

Mayor: Well, I mean, I’m not involved in the minute-to-minute negotiations. There’s obviously a lot of logistical issues that have to be worked through. But this agreement I’m quite confident in. It’s been obviously worked on for a while now, and I’m confident it’s going to hold and move forward. We’ll see a hearing very, very soon, and vote very soon.

Question: You said that there’s a plan to reduce the number of horses. What is that plan? And then what happens to the horses that are no longer in use?

Mayor: Again, you’ll see the details as soon as they’re ready from all the parties, but it will lead to a substantial reduction in the number of horses. What we’ve said all along, and we’ve heard very strong guarantees from the humane rights movement that there are good homes for the horses, and there are many donors who are willing to pay for the horses to get to other homes. So, I’m quite confident the horses will end up in a good situation. Michael?

Question: I was wondering when was the last time you visited Central Park?

Mayor: That’s a good question. I will have to get back to you. I have been there a number of times in the last year or two, but I have to get back to you as to the last time.

Question: Mayor, it appears from the government's – governor's – latest budget that the city is going to be paying the lion's share of the funding for the plan to end AIDS –

Mayor: [inaudible]

Question: – The city's going to be paying the vast majority of the funds. Do you believe that to be true? And do you have any comment on that?

Mayor: We are still analyzing the budget. There's still some areas where we need real answers from the governor's team, so, I'm not ready to comment on that yet. We are quite clear about our commitment to end the epidemic and the investments we will make, but, as in all matters – this would be true of many, many areas – obviously, it's something we've talked about a lot in terms of homelessness, for example – we will make substantial investments, but we need to see a fair response from the State, and we'd also have to recognize there are some areas that historically have been the State's responsibility. So, we'll have to get back to you after we get a better analysis of the budget.

Question: Mayor – question for you about elevator safety. Council Member Vacca has a bill he's introducing tomorrow, which would close what he calls a loophole where elevator technicians don't have to have a license, even though they're fixing City elevators. Senator Squadron has a similar bill in the State. I'm wondering – it may be even harkening back to your time as public advocate – do you think that the elevators in this city are adequately inspected? That the safety measures are where they need to be? And are you familiar at all with what Council Member Vacca [inaudible]?

Mayor: I haven't seen the new legislation. I look forward to seeing it. Look, I think this city in general has a very intense regulatory regime on a whole host of areas. This City, more than almost any other city, fights for the health and safety of its people in a very aggressive manner. We have lots of inspectors. We have very high standards. That being said, as you've seen, I think our Buildings department has done a great job alerting people when they think there's a specific problem, sending out inspectors rapidly, alerting the companies of changes we need right away for safety. So, as much as I very much believe in the way we approach it, I'm certainly open to ways that we can improve.

Question: Your speech today talked a lot about diversity and about incorporating all people together. There has been a lot of discussion about the Oscars – the lack of diversity within the Oscars – what do you make of that?

Mayor: I think it's unacceptable. Chirlane and I obviously made our views known. I don't understand it – I literally don't understand it. There are so many opportunities to honor actors of color, and we've all seen numbers movies that were highly acclaimed or great commercial successes with leading men and women of color, and tremendous supporting actors of color. What's going on here? It doesn't make any sense. And I said, you know, when we tweeted the other day – one of the things I said is, I'm sick of only one kind of America being celebrated. It's not good for this country. So, there are some industries in some parts of our society that have really focused on supporting diversity and celebrating diversity. Hollywood has a long way to go. The surprising thing is so much of culture [inaudible] off of Hollywood - it's a real issue.

Question: The Campaign for One New York filings came out on Friday. The number of donors over the last six months has gone to four from what was more than a hundred before – previously. Why did that happen? Why are people giving –

Mayor: Well, you obviously, you have to ask them. But the bottom line is the Campaign for One New York has done some very good work supporting important progressive goals, and obviously they're reaching out as they need to get resources.

Question: And can I ask –

Mayor: Yeah.

Question: I'm sorry. The last time around the Campaign for One New York was going to work toward advancing your agenda of affordable housing – it's our understanding that that's – they didn't actually do anything related to that and the focus had pivoted to working on The Progressive Agenda. Why is that?

Mayor: It does more than one thing – obviously, it always has. The Campaign for One New York, originally known – was known for its work in support of our pre-k initiative. The Progressive Agenda, as I've said, and I'll say it again, is about making the changes that will benefit New York – benefit many other cities, but will benefit New York. And we had a great example of that just in the last few weeks. We finally got to a highway bill for the first time in years that increased the amount of money for highways, bridges, roads, mass transit. That is exactly the kind of thing we're trying to foster – working with other progressives around the country, working with other mayors around the country. So that work is crucially important for our broader agenda. That's one of the areas obviously the campaign worked on. But, again, you'll have to ask them about their specific goal.

Question: 421-a – you put out a statement. Since the statement came out, what did you do over the weekend? Have you spoken to the governor? And what's next?

Mayor: I have certainly spoken to the governor, and I've spoken to Speaker Heastie. Look, I'm deeply disappointed that this plan that we believe fundamentally was better for the taxpayer, ended the subsidy – the large amounts of luxury housing by the taxpayers – achieve more affordable housing, cut the City subsidy. I mean, just look at the benefits of this plan. And it was something where there was a real consensus in this city that it was progress and reform. So, I'm deeply disappointed that the way it was pursued has failed in terms of the Albany process. And Albany has a chance to make it right and fix it because this is crucial to continuing the work we need to do to create affordable housing.

Question: Do you expect new legislation soon?

Mayor: I don't expect a particular outcome yet because we're obviously on a weekend since we've heard that the negotiations collapsed. But in the coming days, we're certainly going to push hard for action in Albany.

Question: How do you think the collapse of 421-a is going to affect your administration's affordable housing plan?

Mayor: In the short-term, in 2016, we're quite confident in our ability to continue to produce housing at essentially the same clip. We're very, very proud of the fact that we have over 41,000 units that have been financed and secured over two years – that, again, enough for over 100,000 New Yorkers. We have to keep that progress going to get to our goal of 200,000 apartments, but we have a lot already moving as we go into 2016, and we're confident we can keep up the pace. But, going forward, we do have to address this issue. And, again, Albany has a chance to make real reform to take a program that was unfair to taxpayers, that wasn't producing enough affordable housing, and fix it. That's certainly what we're going to fight for.

Question: You recently criticized Ted Cruz for his statements and accepting money from Wall Street. Bernie Sanders criticized Hillary Clinton for accepting speaking fees for Goldman Sachs. What do you think of that criticism that Sanders leveled, and how would you respond if you were still working on her campaign? What would you think an appropriate response would be?

Mayor: First of all, I think Hillary Clinton did a fantastic job last night. You could clearly see the next president of the United States in her performance. As always – extraordinarily knowledgeable about the issues, forceful, clear – so, I think she did a great job and helped move her campaign forward with a very strong performance. I

also would say, as a progressive and a Democrat, I was very proud of the fact that that debate focused on income inequality and how to address it. And boy, talk about Tale of Two Cities – you know, Republican debate after Republican debate that is divisive, negative, attacking immigrants, attacking Muslims, versus the Democratic debate that talks about how to restore the middle class, and raise wages, and tax the wealthy – incredible contrast that is both morally on the side of Democrats, but also unquestionably [inaudible] to the benefit of Democrats in the fall election. But on that point, I don't think it's at all relevant if she gave remarks and got compensated. I care about her policy. She has the strongest plan to rein in Wall Street, there's no two ways about. Don't believe me, believe Paul Krugman, who's the most important progressive voice on economic inequality in this country – or, I say he would share that role with Joe Stiglitz. Krugman has been very clear, and a lot of other press have been very clear – her plan in the most comprehensive at addressing the problems of Wall Street today and the dangers related to the financial system today. So, that's what I – that's another reason why I'm supporting her – she has the best plan to address the issue, and she has an extraordinary agenda for fighting income inequality. By the way, when she's president of the United States – when she walks in the door on January 20th of next year, the platform she will be coming into office with will be the most progressive of any candidate walking in the door in history. I believe that. Even FDR had to develop a lot of pieces of the New Deal in place. Her platform today is extraordinarily progressive, and will allow us to fight income inequality, and that's what matters.

Question: You wrote a joint piece with Governor Cuomo condemning Ted Cruz's remarks. Do you feel that that is the beginning of a warmer phase in your relationship with Governor Cuomo? Was there a conversation along those lines - Let's do more of these joint pieces, governor?

Mayor: First of all, Ted Cruz is bringing people together.

[Laughter]

Look, we were all outraged. That extended – I actually am proud as a New Yorker that everyone put down their partisan differences – Donald Trump, Rudy Giuliani, Hillary Clinton – you know, the governor, me – everyone put down any difference they had to defend our people, and to defend our values, and to defend the goodness of the people of New York. As you know, I like to shout out when any of the entities in the room do something that I find particularly pleasing, so I want to give special credit to the Daily News for identifying immediately the latest Ted Cruz fundraising solicitation, saying, New Yorkers, please give money to help Ted Cruz. I mean, it could not be more hypocritical and ironic that this guy does a cheap shot in the middle of the debate to score points with his base, while simultaneously setting fundraisers, appealing specifically to New Yorkers to help him. So, a lot of chickens are coming home to roost for Ted Cruz in my opinion. A lot of falsehoods are being uncovered. But to your question, look, it's the same exact standard I've talked about over these last months – what I've borrowed from Ed Koch. When the governor does something right for New York City, I will celebrate it, praise it, absolutely work with him. He did something very good the other day on supportive housing, or our homeless New Yorkers, and I commend him. When there's something I think is going to hurt New York City, like the original proposed cuts on CUNY or Medicaid, I'm going to say I will fight it, and I will help galvanize this City. I'm happy to hear we got a clarification on that front – that there's a way to avoid those cuts. But that's the right way for, I think, any mayor to approach the governor. I'm certainly open to working with the governor on many, many issues, and we were absolutely in common cause in fighting Ted Cruz.

Question: Who's idea was the joint byline on that one?

Mayor: I am not going to go into the details because it actually was not from either one of us originally. I'd like to say, remember the time of the Women's National Soccer Team victory and we had the parade? And I would have loved to say it was my idea, but it was Howard Wolfson and Gale Brewer's idea? So, I can't say this was my idea.

Question: Very quickly on the substance of the horse carriage deal – you mentioned congestion and traffic safety are two of the driving forces here. Is there some data from the city about the added congestion the horses might cause or the number of accidents that they've caused over the years?

Mayor: I'm sure we can get that for you, but I think anyone who drives in New York City – data's great, human experience is great too. I drove many times behind those horse carriages, and we've all seen the crashes and what they did to people involved and [inaudible] involved. This is a no-brainer – they don't belong on the streets of the city. It's just – it's 2015 –

Unknown: '16

Mayor: – So, one thing I think people should be able to agree on, even if you don't agree with my belief that ultimately we should not have horse carriages, we can at least agree they should be on the streets of midtown Manhattan.

Question: On that subject, where's NYCLASS in these conversations?

Mayor: Ask them. I mean, obviously we've tried to constantly engage them and hear their concerns, but I don't want to speak for them. You'll have to ask them.

Question: [inaudible] released a traffic study that said Uber was basically not responsible to congestion in Manhattan.

Mayor: Say again now?

Question: The City released a traffic study basically saying that Uber's not responsible for congestion in Manhattan. Some people are calling that study flimsy and saying that at a cost of \$2 million dollars, we should have gotten more than 12 pages.

Mayor: Look, the study was undertaken to resolve a set of important issues, and I would say a study that points out a truth that is different than some of what we assumed previously is a study that has real integrity. So, the congestion situation is different than some of what we knew it to be, and we have to address the congestion issue unto itself, and that's something we'll be talking about in the coming weeks, because there really is a challenge of congestion, particularly in Manhattan, that has to be addressed. But I will tell you one thing that the study points out, and I think it's a powerful point – that across the for-hire vehicle industry – whether it's Uber, whether it's yellow cabs, green cabs, any kind of vehicle, we have to address the disability issue. We have to ensure accessibility for all New Yorkers, and that's something that has to be consistent across the industry, because, right now, we're just not where we need to be. The accessibility is crucial for disabled New Yorkers, it's crucial for many of our senior citizens, who are a growing percentage of the people in this city. So, this is an area where the study points out the need for a much more clear policy across the larger industry.

Question: Mr. Mayor, the building that you're considering for the stables, is it big enough to hold all of them? And, if not, do you have to expand?

Mayor: To the best of my knowledge, it's big enough to hold all of them. Last call – go ahead.

Question: Since the governor's speech, have you spoken personally with Comptroller Stringer?

Mayor: I'm sorry, the State of the State?

Question: Since the governor's State of the State, have you spoken personally with Comptroller Stringer about the new audit potential happening given the governor's remarks?

Mayor: I've spoken – again, that audit's going to be lead by Comptroller DiNapoli, and that's the clear plan in the speech that – and I've spoken to Comptroller DiNapoli – that it is a statewide audit process. The continuity in the process will the State Comptroller. He will work in Buffalo with the city comptroller there. He will work in New York City with our comptroller, Scott Stringer. My team certainly talks to Comptroller Stringer all the time. So, look, that's something we want to work with obviously, and we want to solve these problems. If the audit helps us get at more problems that can be fixed, that's exactly right for everyone. We're putting in the resources for the repairs. Remember, the full challenge of the repairs didn't come out, you know, three years ago, four years ago, five years ago – the problems have been festering. They came out when I asked the Department of Investigation to do a full report. They came back and they identified the systemic problems and a list of violations that have to be addressed. 83 percent of those violations have been addressed since last spring, and we continue to deepen it. We created a shelter repair squad. We announced the other day that we are deepening that effort further. We have now a process for residents of a shelter to call, and there's a 24-hour guarantee that there'll be an inspection. If it's the kind of thing that can be fixed quickly, like extermination, that will happen within 24 hours. The Coalition for the Homeless will now be an independent monitor on the repair process for family shelters. And we're obviously putting very substantial resources into the repairs, and we're going to come forward with a plan on the some of the bigger capital changes that are needed in some shelters, because some of them don't have the kind of problems that can be fixed immediately – will take larger investments. Certainly, we're hopeful that some of the resources the governor outlines in his speech are going to help us to speed the process of the repairs. But, my view is that a statewide audit of all cities and shelters in all cities, working with, of course, our local partners as well, is just another part of us fixing a longstanding problem.

Thanks, everyone.

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