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RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO LAUNCHES SHELTER REPAIR SQUAD TO ADDRESS URGENT HEALTH AND SAFETY CONDITIONS IN CITY SHELTERS

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good afternoon, everyone. We're here at the Corona Family Residence here in Corona, Queens. This is a facility that serves homeless families and ensures that they have a good place to live while they deal with such great challenges. This is something we, as a city, are committed to ensuring that we protect the interest of homeless individuals and families, while we help them on a transition to something better.

Today, I'm going to talk about a new initiative where we will be deploying hundreds of special SWAT Teams to accelerate critical repairs at homeless shelters all over the city. We're going to help ensure that every shelter is safe and healthy for all of its residents. Before I go on, I want to talk about the people who are part of this effort and those who have joined us here today because this is going to be an all-hands-on-deck effort. You've seen this administration previously – for example, in the case of pre-k development last year. In this, we bring all the relevant agencies in and we work as a team, and I want to thank all my colleagues who have a tremendous spirit of teamwork and work well with each other to get things done for everyday New Yorkers. This is another case where all of these agencies are working in unity to create these SWAT Teams so we can solve problems very quickly and help the residents of these buildings.

First Deputy Mayor Tony Shorris is an integral part of this process. He could not be here for this gathering, but he is proving a crucial leadership role along with Deputy Mayor Lilliam Barrios-Paoli. With us as well – homeless services Commissioner Gilbert Taylor, DOI Commissioner Mark Peters, FDNY Commissioner Dan Nigro, HPD Commissioner Vicki Been, DOB Commissioner Rick Chandler, HRA Commissioner Steve Banks, and DOHMH Deputy Commissioner Dr. Oxiris Barbot. I also want to thank the advocates who we have been working with regularly to ensure that we can provide the best support for homeless individuals and families in this city, including the Legal Aid Society; Mary Brosnahan, the president and CEO of the Coalition for the Homeless; and Raul Russi, the CEO of the Acacia Network. I want to thank all of them, and the elected officials who are here. You're going to hear from them in just a moment.

So, these SWAT Teams are necessary because we're not dealing with a problem that just started in the last year or two, we are dealing with a problem that is decades old and has gotten worse for several reasons. Obviously, the effects of the Great Recession, and the effects of the housing crises in this city have deepened the dynamics of homelessness. But as I said at the budget presentation on Thursday, another key factor has been mistakes by the federal government, by the state government, and even the city government – choices – decisions that unfortunately exacerbated homelessness. We've had a lot less in the way of resources to address homelessness. It's not a surprise that homelessness has increased in this city. So we're digging out of a hole here, trying to protect so many families and individuals even though there have been years of disinvestment in all levels of government. And we're talking about, in many cases, aging buildings. We're trying to create a positive environment for the residents, but these are aging buildings with very tough conditions that we are trying to overcome every day.

This city has seen a homelessness crisis that in the last decade went from a very troubling level to an absolutely unacceptable level. The record we reached some months back – almost 59,000 people in shelter – would have been unimaginable a decade ago. We’re making some progress – and I want to be blunt about this – we’re making some progress, but we need to make a lot more. The high point was over 59,000 – we’re now over 56,000 – about 3,000 fewer people in shelter than a few months ago – but much, much more to be done and, again, against a very tough backdrop with the cost of housing in the city and the economic reality facing so many New Yorkers.

You know, you’ll remember around the time that I came into office, the New York Times did a very important profile – and powerful profile – on a young woman named Dasani. I think for many of us, it was a moment of recognition what the homelessness crisis meant for our children in particular. And the shelter that Dasani was in has been fundamentally changed since that time, and as have some others like it. That was the beginning of a series of changes, but we knew a lot more had to be done. I’ve always believed – and I felt this when I was the chair of the General Welfare Committee in the City Council a decade or more ago – that we had to focus more and more on preventative programs. And these are the very programs that were cut in 2011 by the city and state. Again, that’s one of the reasons we’re in the situation we are today. The programs that prevent homelessness to begin with, the programs that help get people out of shelter and into stable housing are the way forward. So you see in the budget announced Thursday – \$100 million in additional funding for anti-eviction legal services, for rent assistance, and other key efforts to reduce homelessness. Also, \$4.7 million added for 100 beds specifically delineated for homeless and runaway youth. That’s an additional 100 beds for that population that particularly needs our support.

But even though we’re making the investment, it was clear that a lot more had to be done and we had to find a way to not repeat the mistakes of the past. So, shortly after I took office, I instructed the Department of Investigation to begin an investigation into our homeless shelters, and particularly the health and safety issues in the shelters. Two months ago, I received that report and it was a damning report, and it helped us recognize the pathway we have to take to make real changes. And we started immediately to make changes in our shelters. The report tells too many stories of conditions that were not healthy enough or safe enough – of rodents and other dangerous condition, lack of furniture – things that families should not have to put up with, particularly as they’re going through the challenge of being homeless.

As a result of the report, there was a focus on 25 shelters that required immediate attention. Those shelters have gotten that attention and almost all the violations cited in the DOI report have been addressed and completed. But there’s much more to do because beyond the shelters that DOI looked at, which were some of the worst of the worst, there’s many others that need work. And we intend to get to each and every one.

In the past year, we ordered an in-depth review of the entire shelter system to understand what we had to do differently. And now a series of reforms have been put in place, including more rigorous inspections, stricter compliance measures, stricter maintenance policies for the shelters – today, another big step forward with the initiation of these SWAT Teams. And again, I want to thank all of the agencies that are participating and participating energetically in this effort. We will be deploying hundreds of city employees to over 500 shelters across the city as part of our new Shelter Repair Squad. There’s going to be a huge effort involving many agencies, many members of our administration, going to each and every shelter to make the changes we need.

The SWAT teams will specifically be composed of representatives of the fire department, buildings department, homeless services, HPD, and department of health. So they’ll work as teams to resolve a host of challenges quickly within each shelter. The typical violations that we encounter can and will be fixed within seven days of being identified. That will be the most common category. Some others obviously are more complicated – involve capital repairs. But in each and every case, we will move aggressively to address the issues that – let me emphasize – we have put money in the budget, both for this fiscal year and for next – the one that starts July 1st – to provide the resources for these repairs. So these teams will go out, identify the problems, identify the solutions, and there will be resources to back them immediately that can be implemented.

The teams will work very aggressively to make sure that any backlog repairs are made. They will work closely with the providers who support our homeless individuals and families on a host of core concerns, obviously with particular focus on health and safety. Seven days will be the norm on the majority. On the major capital changes – the things that should've been done years and years ago in these aging buildings – those will begin within 30 days. And the plan is to complete them in the course of this calendar year. In some cases, we should be able to complete them in a 30 to 60 day timeline – in other cases, in the course of this calendar year.

There will be an accountability system. It will be a public system maintained by the Department of Homeless Services. There will be a public tracking system so you and members of the public can identify where we stand with each of the facilities. There will be a scorecard made available publically. That will be up later this month. The providers – the nonprofits that provide so much support to families in crisis all over the city – they're our partners. We honor them. We appreciate their work. It's never easy work and they've been great partners and we believe with this support that's long overdue, we'll be able to make a lot of changes quickly. And the Corona Family Residence is a great example.

It's a facility that the DOI investigators found over a dozen violations in. Despite the good work of the people here, there were still challenges that need to be addressed – smoke detectors, rodent infestation, broken ovens, electrical wiring issues, a broken water gauge. We worked with a provider to fix each and every one of those problems. And the providers are obviously in a very difficult situation economically. They've been asked to do so much for people in crisis, often with very little in the way of resources. We're providing the extra resources so this work can be done quickly.

Thousands and thousands of New Yorkers are depending on us to get this right. We take responsibility for that. We know that we all have to break through here and make these repairs and make them quickly. That is consistent with the values of this administration – to not leave people behind and not leave them in a situation that is unacceptable. Just a few words in Spanish before I introduce some of my colleagues –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

[...]

Mayor: Thank you very much. We'll now take questions on topic, followed by questions off topic. We're going to do on topic first.

Question: You mentioned the seven-day window [inaudible]?

Mayor: I'll pass to Commissioner Taylor to say – the most typical, surely the majority of the problems we find, thank God, are not overly serious and we can address them generally in a seven-day window. So Commissioner Taylor will explain examples of what those are.

Commissioner Gilbert Taylor, Department of Homeless Services: So some examples of the issues that we would find that can be fixed within seven days include smoke detectors that may be malfunctioning, or that may not have batteries in them. The batteries may have actually gone out. There may be some instances where window guards need to be reinstalled, and they need to be further secured. These are pretty much things that we know we can fix very quickly, and so, if we have a DHS staff member who is equipped to actually do this for one of our inspectors and one of our repair people, they can just go out and actually take care of it. Or the provider can do the same as well.

Question: There are – there's a family shelter not too far from here and other family shelters that are built in former hotels. One is in the former Pan Am Hotel. These families don't have access to kitchens, which is

actually in violation of the city's administrative code. Is there a plan in this new SWAT Teams to renovate this hotel – the 216-room hotel – and provide kitchens for the families there?

Mayor: I'll turn to either the deputy mayor or commissioner but I'll say again, the goal on the capital – capital issues that we'll face – is we'll get started within 30 days. We think, in the overwhelming majority of cases, we're going to be able to finish this calendar year where there's capital challenges. Do you want to speak to –

Commissioner Taylor: So our plan with respect to the Pan Am Hotel is – we are actually providing three meals a day to the families who are there, absent them having cooking facilities installed. We don't have a plan yet to install cooking facilities in that location. We're not certain that that would be actually the best thing for us to do. But we do make sure that every family who is in shelter has either the facilities – the facilities to cook their own meals, or we will deliver meal – three meals a day – for every family so that they are fed, so that they have food.

Mayor: Okay, on topic. On-topic questions, yes.

Question: Mayor, with the shelter populations so high, do you feel that the state is doing enough to help the city?

Mayor: No, absolutely not.

Question: Even with transitional housing?

Mayor: Absolutely not. The state, obviously, and the state budget, cut back on some of our emergency homelessness funding. While we're dealing with a crisis that we've never seen before, in terms of the magnitude, the state actually cut back on our resources. We also said to them that we needed help with longer-term solutions. I'm obviously committed to an affordable housing plan that will build and preserve 200,000 units of housing. We've said to the state, could we please take the New York, New York Program, which has been successful in the past at building supportive housing – that's a good, permanent alternative for families who would otherwise end up in shelter. Could we do 12,000 units of that? The state came back with many fewer – less than 4,000. And it just doesn't make sense with a crisis of this magnitude that the state of New York would not take more responsibility here. Also, as I said during the budget presentation, the city's own mistakes in 2012 via cancelling the Advantage Program – and the state did the same thing. I think it was a very unfortunate moment for homeless people, and all people in this city. The one thing that had actually worked effectively, the Advantage Program, was cancelled by both the city and state in the spring of 2011. That action, as we saw at the budget presentation – and we'll distribute the graph again so you can see it – was one of the big contributing factors from us having an increase in people in shelter of almost 20,000 New Yorkers in just the time from 2011 to present. So, the state has a lot of work to do to really be a partner with us. Look, we're ready to start tomorrow. We could do so much more if the state would join us in this effort.

Question: Have you spoken to Governor Cuomo about that?

Mayor: Several times before the budget was passed – and obviously, you know, I'm disappointed that we didn't see more in the budget, but I will continue to look for every opportunity to work together. And my hope is that as more consideration is given, the state will act as a true partner and join us, particularly in terms of bringing that New York, New York Program up to the 12,000-unit level.

Question: What percentage of the city's homeless shelters currently you think are not meeting the standards? And what percentage are overcrowded?

Mayor: We can talk about the number of violations that we're tracking right now and how we're dealing with them – that'd give you some sense of it. You can – either Lilliam or Gil can talk to the overcrowding.

Commissioner Taylor: So, you know, we – we have a very large shelter system. We have over 600 buildings in which we're sheltering individuals and families, and we're looking across all of our portfolio to get a sense of exactly what the needs are at each one of these sites. And so, the work of this squad – you know, this repair squad – is actually going to be tremendous in terms of helping us to get out to every single site in order to assess what the violations are. So that, you know, in the DOI report where 25 buildings were inspected, there were over 600 violations that had been found in those 25 sites. And we were successful in curing – you know, when the report was released, we had cured over 300 of those violations. So, as we find issues, as we find violations, what we're doing is we're going out – very aggressively taking them on. And this resource – this squad will actually help us to do that much more rigorously.

Question: And what number is overcrowded?

Commissioner Taylor: So, because we have so many shelters, I mean, we're not really facing overcrowding but we are pretty much at maximum capacity at the vast majority of the shelters that we're in. But we're at a place now where we've been able to – as the mayor has spoken to – we've been able to turn the tide somewhat in terms of our census. We've been able to decrease it over 3,000 individuals since a few months ago, and that has opened up more capacity in the system. We're very thoughtful that in order for there to be a flow, we have to prevent new shelter entries and keep people stably housed, and have opportunities for people who are in shelter to exit to permanent housing, which is what we're focusing on in doing.

Mayor: Yeah, and I want to emphasize the most important thing we can do with the new funding – the \$100 million dollars we put in the budget – is to stop people from ending up in shelter to begin with. We think the preventative efforts, again, were proven. Programs like Advantage that provide rental subsidy that kept people in their apartments. The LINK program now that we have is a new version of that – certainly the anti-eviction legal services that stop people from being wrongly put out of their apartments so they don't end up in shelter. We're doubling down on those approaches. We think they make a big difference. Wait a minute, is there someone that hasn't gone yet? On topic –

Question: Obviously, leading up to the DOI report, some violations were overlooked by the providers. Within the SWAT Team, will providers be given any training, so that they can identify problems in the future?

Commissioner Taylor: So we recently reissued our shelter inspection protocols within the agency. We did it [inaudible] by the information we had gotten from the DOI report. In order to give providers notice and to tell them exactly how quickly they needed to remediate conditions and let them – let us know that they had done so. And so, in this particular engagement, every provider will be informed simultaneous with us understanding what the issues are, that there are issues, and they will be required to correct the issues. The city will also stand ready to repair those issues in the event that they're not able to do it in the timeframe that we've described today. So, it's going to be a collective effort across our network. But we have clear policy guidance in place to inform how things should be getting done.

Mayor: And I think the obvious follow-up is we want – once the corrections are made, we want to keep it that way. So we expect an ongoing dialogue with the providers. If any new problems emerge, we want to deal with them immediately and obviously, as you suggest, work with them to try and prevent problems in the first place. On topic –

Question: [Inaudible]

Mayor: We're going to show – I'll let – I'll let Lilliam and Gil elaborate, but we're going to show each facility where there's a problem to have an indication of the status of the problems.

Commissioner Taylor: So for providers – there will be what we’re calling a score card. That score card will start with some assessment of all of the buildings that they currently have in their portfolio, and will have a clear delineation of any outstanding violations that are at those buildings. We’ll also show the progress that’s being made to prepare those violations. We’re going to do it as an aggregate for each provider so we won’t be listing – we won’t be listing specific addresses because confidentiality rules would prevent us from doing so. Our clients are, by law, entitled to some confidentiality in terms of their locations. But we’ll show you, by providers, their progress in making remediation and making the necessary repairs at all of their sites. And that’s going to start before the end of this month.

Question: Mr. Mayor, just wondering if you could give us an update on the LINK rental assistance program. My understanding is that you’re about one-third of the way toward this year’s target with the fiscal year coming to an end next month. I’m wondering what some of the challenges have been. And if not mistaken, you might be seeking a higher target next year. I’m just wondering why you believe you’ll be able [inaudible]

Mayor: I’ll start and, again Lilliam or Gil might want to jump in here. I would say that we’ve initiated a whole host of new efforts, again, to stop people from becoming homeless in the first place or get them from shelter to good, stable housing. We recognize that we had to fire on a lot of cylinders at once, so we’ve got a host of new initiatives. Some of them take time to ramp up, some of these obviously involve working with private sector landlords – and that doesn’t happen overnight – that takes some developing of a common agreement about how to proceed. So, we set ambitious goals, but with so many different efforts in play, we know some will work faster, some will work less quickly. The important thing is to get them all going and ramped up as best we can. We are very hopeful about each and every one of these tools having a big impact. Do you want to add?

Deputy Mayor Lilliam Barrios-Paoli, Health and Human Services: So, you know, part of the unintended consequences when Advantage stopped is that a lot of landlords couldn’t trust that whenever we did rental assistance again, that we could be in good faith, paying and staying for the long-run. And I think it’s taken a while – the mayor himself has reassured them. And I think now we’re on much better footing, and we expect that now we really will get going.

Mayor: Okay. Anyone else with on topic? On topic? Yes?

Question: Mr. Mayor, of the hundreds of people who will be hired for these SWAT Teams, will they be pulled in from other agencies or will they actually be new hires for the city?

Mayor: By and large, I think we’re using existing – all existing resources, existing personnel.

Question: [Inaudible]

Mayor: The total number on the teams? Hundreds I said – yeah, hundreds. Okay. Last call – on topic. Going once, on topic. Going twice, on topic. On topic – go ahead.

Question: How will these SWAT Teams be sent out? Will it be a systematic – maybe we’ll go to the Bronx one day, or will you go to – how will it be decided where they go on a certain day?

Mayor: Let me just emphasize that we had a fantastic experience with a similar approach with pre-k last year. And we actually had a press conference very similar to this where we talked about the extraordinary cooperation. I have convened all the relevant commissioners. These are the keys agencies, but other agencies help as well. And we’ve agreed in the case of pre-k now, what it’s going to take to get this done. We’re doing a similar effort now with homelessness. I think what we’ve found is the agencies actually are very happy to be working together, solving problems, and figuring out the division of labor, and they’re working very comfortably together. In terms of the sequencing, who wants to speak to which building’s first –

Commissioner Taylor: So, the Department of Homeless Services – DHS – is actually going to be working very closely with the Mayor’s Office of Operations to coordinate the deployment. And so their leads from each of these agencies that are working closely with my leadership team. And what we’re doing is, we’re going from – we’re actually going to take it from the inspections that were most recently completed. Whatever’s been identified, we will then deploy within the seven-day timeframe in order to repair. But we’re going to do based upon the inventory of shelter stock that we have, and just pull in the necessary partners to help us get the work done as quickly as possible.

Mayor: Okay. On topic – last call. Going once – going twice – off topic.

Question: You’ve only gone to Staten Island for two public events this year, and yet you’re going on a national tour to various states around the country to promote income inequality solutions. I was wondering – first, why not go to Staten Island to promote a progressive agenda more often, since they are your constituents. And second, do you have any plans to go to Staten Island in the near future?

Mayor: Well, as you know, I’ve regularly gone to Staten Island, and will continue to. On the question on where I go to talk about the problem – I think the people of this city in 2013, and ’14, and now into ’15 have heard me talk a lot of income inequality and I think there’s tremendous concern in this city that we need to address it, and that we’re using the tools that we have very aggressively. What we don’t have is the help we need, particularly from the federal government. So the work that we’re going to do in the next couple of days in Washington DC is to press the federal government to actually help us with the bigger solutions to income inequality. A lot of the members of media and a lot of other folks around the city said in 2013 and since, you can only do so much with the resources of one city. That’s a true statement – I’ve always said that’s fair. Our job is to do the best we can with the tools and resources we have, but we need a federal partner. So we’re going to create, I think, some real critical mass tomorrow, pushing for these bigger solutions in Washington, which require things like progressive taxation to be achieved. On Wednesday, we’re talking about one of the most tangible things needed for this city, which is a strong federal transportation bill. You saw in our budget presentation, we’ve put an unprecedented level of resources into capital funding to address roads, and bridges, and highways in this city. But we’ve had federal transportation funding nationally that has remained flat for 12 years, and we have a real bipartisan effort by mayors around the country on Wednesday, working with the business community, working with Chambers of Commerce around the country, working with folks whose businesses depend on better transportation to push the Congress for more funding for mass transit, for roads, for highways, and more reliable funding. If we achieve progress on that front, it will have a huge impact on the people of New York City. So that’s where the resources are, and we’ve got to get those resources for our people.

Question: Senator Mike Gianaris said this morning that the State Senate Democratic conference is not making any play right now to try to take the majority in the State Senate with the current disarray being created by Senator Skelos – charges against Senator Skelos. You worked very hard to try to elect a Democratic majority. Should, in your opinion, the Democratic Conference be tried to use this as an opportunity to take control of the state senate?

Mayor: I’m certainly not going to speak for them. They understand their circumstance better than I do. It’s a very sad moment in Albany – let’s face it – and a moment that’s somewhat unstable. Right now, we’re focused on getting what we can get done over the next six-seven weeks in Albany for the people in New York City. You know, the future – obviously there will be an election next year that will determine the fate, but I think that State Senate Democrats are dealing with a situation as best they can right now.

Question: [Inaudible] they say that it doesn’t show leadership, and that you should stay in the city and deal with these problems.

Mayor: I think the thing we have to do is get the resources we need for the work we have to do in this city, and make the changes we need. And let’s face it, where so much of the energy is, where so much of the resources

are – they're in Washington. The situation currently in Washington is unacceptable. It's not helping New York City. It's not helping cities around the country. We've got to break through in some way. So my efforts working with mayors around the country and working with other elected officials and other leaders all over the country – is to try to break through so we can actually get the resources we need to make the changes we need here in this city. I can't think of anything more important. I'll be doing that for the next few days because this is the right moment to do it. Obviously, the transportation bill – we are just says away from the decision on what's going to happen with the transportation bill. It's exactly the right time to be there. But I think this is how we change things for the long haul for our city, and I feel that we are doing what we need to do, day to day, to make this city work better – as this press conference is an example. And I'm very proud of what is being done here with the SWAT Teams. I'm very proud of the budget that we announced on Thursday. I'm very proud of what we're doing with the OneNYC plan and what it means for our future. We've got to do both at once – that's the answer. We've got to change the dynamics so we can get the federal support we need, and we've got to do the work here every day. And my job is to do both. And I think mayors before me have understood it the same way. They have to speak to national issues while making sure things work here every day.

Question: [Inaudible] four days in a row.

Mayor: I think the important thing is getting the job done and this is what I believe will help get the job done.

Question: [Inaudible]

Mayor: Well, there are other things we're doing in California that matter too. We're obviously going to be speaking at two different places on the question of income inequality. And in the case of my remarks at Berkley with one of the leading national voices on this matter, the former Labor Secretary Robert Reich, is about building a national consensus that these issues have to be addressed. And again, I want to hold people to one standard here. If you say we can solve all these problems with just the resources in New York City, well that's great. If someone wants to argue that case, I'd be interested in having that discussion. I think you all rightfully said, aren't there limits to what you can do with just the resources in New York City? And I've always said, yes, that's true. I've got to use the tools we have here to address income inequality, and a host of other issues. But I also have to participate in changing the national debate and changing the reality in Washington in a way that will support the people of New York City. We've got to do both at once.

Question: In an interview with Rolling Stone magazine, you said that you thought that people outside New York City have a better understanding of what happens in the first year of your mayoralty than people inside New York City. So what you were trying to convey with that statement, what you were trying to say, and how it came to that point – why do you think that is and how –

Mayor: I think it's a human – no, it's a human reality. All I'm saying is, when you're in the middle of something, you see it a certain way and people who are removed, see things a different way. And I think, as I've talked to leaders around the country, they recognize some of the extent of what's happened here. I think, for every day New Yorkers – and for all of us who do this work – we're caught up on each issue day to day. That's natural. That's normal. Folks who see, you know, thinks in a different way – in a different timeline, sometimes see some of the bigger strands more clearly. I don't think it's such a big deal. My accountability is to the people of New York City. And they have a really good way to judge me – they get to have an election in 2017. They'll decide what they think of the work. I simply think it's a human reality that sometimes observers farther away see some of the strands differently than people close up to the action.

Question: How are you?

Mayor: Good. How are you?

Question: I'm well. Thank you. [Inaudible] There's no doubt that you have interactions with the public, but I'm wondering live, unfiltered opportunities to question, like in a town hall or radio. You did some of this as public advocate [inaudible]

Mayor: We do it in a lot of ways. And I'm certainly [inaudible] to doing it a lot more ways. But you know, both with every day New Yorkers who I see all the time, whether it's walking down the street, or in the subway, or wherever it may be at different gatherings – but well, it's amazing how many conversations I have with people every single day because they're not shy about coming up and starting a conversation, I assure you – every time I'm on the subway, every time I'm walking down the street and whether it's the Upper East Side or Park Slope or anywhere else. But beyond that, I talk to people who represent a whole host of communities all the time. I met with a very large group of City Council members on Thursday for about an hour – an hour and a half to talk about the budget, but it ranged into a whole host of other matters. This is part of the job, so I will be regularly talking to every day New Yorkers and their leaders in a host of different manners.

Question: You talked about the different perception of how people in New York see things and outside. How do you think people outside of New York see you? And how do you want them to see you?

Mayor: I'm not too caught up on that. I think, simply to say that what I've heard from a lot of leaders around the country is they appreciate some of the models we're creating here. They appreciate the affordable housing plan. They appreciate pre-k for all. They appreciate what we're doing with afterschool, municipal ID, paid sick leave. I think the message I get from a lot of people is that this is opening up a lot of possibilities for other locales around the country to build on those kind of models, because it's being proven here to work on a very big scale.

Question: Mr. Mayor, two questions. In your 2013 mayoral campaign, you discussed income inequality quite a bit. There was little talk then, though, about taking it to a national stage. Do you wish you had explained it a little better to New Yorkers?

Mayor: I think it's historically very consistent with what other mayors have done. This is a bully pulpit to speak in many ways on the issues of urban American. It always has been, going back to LaGuardia, who was one of the founders of the U.S Conference of Mayors. The U.S Conference of Mayors was created in response to the Great Depression. And you know, I try and take a lot of inspiration from Fiorello LaGuardia. He understood that he had to not only deal with every day issues right here, but he had to speak to the bigger issues and the bigger changes necessary that would also effect New York City. I'm trying to, in my own humble way, emulate that. Conference of Mayors has been a place where I put a lot of energy because it has the possibility of making bigger changes if we can unite enough mayors around the country in common cause. It's one of the ways we make change in our national discourse that ultimately changes policy.

Question: The second part is [inaudible] you're going to Washington and California. What other travel plans do you have?

Mayor: After that, there's no specific plan. The only thing coming up in June that I'm still trying to make a decision on, depending on whatever else is going on, is the U.S Conference of Mayors annual meeting in June. And we'll have to make a decision on that as we get closer. But there's no other travel plans.

Phil Walzak: Last call, guys.

Question: Mr. Mayor, I'm just wondering, how many fundraisers are you holding this week during your travels? And how do you see fundraising, and meeting with donors as a component of, you know, bringing this national conversation to inequality.

Mayor: One is the answer – and I think it’s part of the work you do in public life. Obviously, there’s various ways to get your message out and that’s one of the elements that’s necessary for it. I heard a voice. Yes?

Question: [Inaudible] stop and frisk [inaudible] federal court order [inaudible]?

Mayor: Well I think the fact is that I’ve said it many, many times – there was an extraordinary movement starting with the Silent March in 2012, which I was very honored to participate in with my family. The debates and forums, many of which you attended in the 2013 election – many, where that issue really was crystalized in some additional ways. Yes some change had begun before January 1st, 2014, but we amplified that change and crystalized it, and obviously ended the legal actions to stop the change. So I’m very, very proud of what we’ve done. And stops came down greatly in 2014. They continue to come down. We’ve added to that by reducing arrests for low-level marijuana arrests – or offenses I should say. So I think this team has done a lot.

Phil Walzak: Last call, guys.

Question: Mr. Mayor, does your trip to Washington speak to any larger ambitions? And just to ask you – you’re appearing –

Mayor: No.

[Laughter]

Question: – you’re appearing with Elizabeth Warren –

Mayor: Yes.

Question: What should we read into that?

Mayor: Elizabeth Warren is one of the most important progressive leaders in the country, and I think she’s been an extraordinary voice on income inequality. She has said very clearly, she has one job – senator from Massachusetts. And I’ve said I have one job – mayor of New York City. I look forward to running for reelection in 2017. But I think it’s very natural that kindred leaders will work together. We’re both going to be working with Joe Stiglitz, who is one of the greatest economic minds in this country – a Nobel Prize-winning economist who has put out, I think, some of the most powerful analysis of what’s wrong and how we have to fix it if we’re going to save the middle class in this country, and if our government is going to actually create policies that address income inequality. So, I think it’s normal for like-minded leaders to join forces to push for the changes we need. And that’s what we’ll be doing. Thanks, everyone.

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