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RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO AND CHANCELLOR FARIÑA DESIGNATE EID AL-FITR AND EID AL-ADHA OFFICIAL SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Before I begin, I want to thank Merilla for her great work as a teacher in this school, and I'm going to ask her to come back up and say this in the language of which she is a dual language teacher. We're going to put you on the spot, Merilla. Come on. There you go.

Merilla Deeb: You're putting me on the spot. Okay.

[Merilla Deeb speaks in Spanish]

Mayor: Thank you.

[Applause]

Well, it is a great honor to be here at PS/IS 30, the Mary White Ovington School. And this is a school that I hear such great things about – such great things about the school community, the involvement of parents, the sense of the school as being a centerpiece of this community, and the great success that's occurring here. Now, when you want to talk about a successful school, it's good to talk about a successful principal, so let's thank Principal Carol Heeraman for everything she does.

[Applause]

She has created a wonderful atmosphere in this school – an embracing atmosphere, a nurturing atmosphere – one in which the older kids, the middle school kids, are taught to look out for the younger kids, think of themselves as part of one big extended family. And that is a great example to this city of the way we need to comport ourselves for the good of all.

Now, I want to thank everyone who is here today. I am – okay, I was saying, where are my elected official colleagues? There we go – luckily my peripheral vision is working – I want to thank our elected official colleagues who are here, who have been key supporters of this initiative to make sure that the Muslim community was fully heard on an issue of great importance to the community in terms of the school holiday, and their support was crucial in getting us to this day. First of all, Council Member Daneek Miller, who is the only Muslim member of the City Council, we thank you.

[Applause]

The strong-willed chair of the education committee, who always makes his voice heard – Council Member Danny Dromm.

[Applause]

Mr. Borough President, you snuck in there – okay, that’s for later. We have other elected officials I’m going to introduce later when they speak, but I am told former Council Member Robert Jackson is here. Where is he?

[Applause]

There’s such a big crowd, I can’t even find people in the crowd – it’s wonderful! Councilmember, it’s good to see you again – and at the time, you were the only Muslim member of the City Council when we served together – so thank you for your support.

We’re here today to make good on a promise to our Muslim brothers and sisters that a holiday of supreme importance to the Muslim community will be recognized in our school calendar so that children can honor the holiday without missing school, so that families can be together on the holiday, so that our city respects and embraces this important and growing community. We’re making good on a promise, and it’s time for this promise to be kept.

Right now, I am announcing that the city is adding Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha as school holidays.

[Applause]

[Cheers]

And I am proud to say that this now makes New York City the largest school district in the nation to take this action, so this is a historic moment for our country as well, and it –

[Applause]

– Thank you. So many of you gathered here today, so many of you behind me have worked for a long time toward this goal, and I want you to know your hard work, your activism, your voices have been heard – it made all the difference.

And this is about respect. This is about respect for one of the great faiths of this earth – help me with my number – 1.6 billion Muslims around the world? This is about respect for the families of this city. Families are the fabric of our city. They’re the core of our city. All families deserve respect. Every kind of family deserves respect, and that’s what we’re noting today.

The Muslim faith is one of the fastest growing in this nation and in this city, and many, many city students celebrate Eid al-Fitr at the end of Ramadan and Eid al-Adha at the end of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.

For too long, again, families were forced into an untenable situation. Either the children went to school on those holy days because so many children, of course so many families devoted to education didn’t want their children to miss school. Sometimes those school days included important tests and milestones in the educational year. So either the child went and pursued their education and missed their religious observance, or the other way around – they participated in a sacred moment for their families and missed out educationally. That is a kind of choice that was wrong to have to make for these families. It was wrong that our school system left them in that situation.

Let me give you a real life example – and she’s with us today. Farzana Ali, an eighth grader – where is Farzana? There she is. She led me in – thank you, again, Farzana. And she would miss school to observe Eid, and she said – I’m going to quote you – she felt guilty, “because I’ve never been absent from school in my life.” Now that’s the kind of young person we should honor and uphold.

[Applause]

She asked her classmates to take notes. She did the best she could having missed school, and she said further – another quote – she said, “This holiday is really important and school is really important to me.” So, again,

what a beautiful thing that a child wants to be there for every single hour of the school year, cares that deeply. We need to support that.

And Farzana is far from alone. In the last years, so many children here at PS/IS 30 had to make that tough choice, and many chose to observe the holiday, and the absences were very noticeable here at the school. And it also was a burden for faculty. Half a dozen of the teachers here at this school observe Eid, and they had to make the same tough choice. They were deeply devoted to their students and deeply devoted to their faith. So, this is the kind of choice people shouldn't have to make, and we're doing something about it here in New York City because we're honoring the great diversity of this city.

Unknown: [inaudible]

[Applause]

Mayor: And I remind everyone, this nation is so interesting, so powerful, so unique in its origins because it is a nation built to respect all faiths. If you look at our founding documents and you look at the origins of this nation, there was an overt and clear embrace of all faiths, and acknowledgment that in a strong society all faiths needed to be respected. That is who we are as Americans. We're still working to create that more perfect union, but our foundational documents guide us clearly in this matter. We are supposed to be a nation for all, and this is a step to further deepen that progress.

Now, because it's New York City, and we are talking about the importance of the Muslim community to the fabric of our city, this great multiethnic, multicultural city, I will now talk about the Eid holidays in Spanish.

[Laughter]

Only in New York, brothers and sisters. Okay.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

Okay, you saw it here first. With that – with that, it is always an honor to introduce our schools chancellor, but I want to just give you a vignette that really summarizes what a great leader she is.

As many of you know, Carmen Fariña and I first worked together in District 15 in Brooklyn. I was a humble school board member. She was a lofty superintendent. And we worked together closely, and in the time we served together, a horrible and tragic thing happened to this city – the tragedy of 9/11. And in the aftermath, there was such deep pain in our communities. And there was fear that there would be violence, that there'd be division, that there'd be misunderstanding.

Real leaders take a moment like that and bring people together and remind people of our values and why we have to work together against any common foe who would try and hurt all of us. And Carmen Fariña swung into action, reached out to Muslim community leaders, worked together to ensure that in our district there was respect, there was information, there was embrace of all. There were people working together to deal with what was an extraordinarily painful moment in our city's history. That leadership she has continued constantly and deepened to this day that she is now our schools chancellor.

It's my honor to introduce Carmen Fariña.

[Applause]

Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña: I want to say that at that time also – since you brought it up, mayor – we had unbelievable support from the Muslim community and I want to particularly single out Debbie Almontaser, and her family, who is here –

[Applause]

– because within a day or two we provided a candlelight vigil for the community to come together, and we had roundtable discussions. And the other thing that we did – which was, I think, a first for New York City – we created people to meet students who were afraid to go to school in the aftermath and walked them to their school. And as a result, at that time – that part of Brooklyn – was a very large Muslim community. We had taken Atlantic Avenue, and that whole area around there, and as a result, I think, we were more strengthened as a community.

Why, it's such a pleasure to be here today. The more we celebrate diversity, the better we are as a city. When people think New York City around the world they think about our faces, and our faces are totally different. And I think what's really important is that as different as we may look, we really act a lot alike. New Yorkers tend to be pushy, we tend to rush things, we tend to think about a lot of other things, but, in reality, we're a lot more similar than we are different. And I think what's really important – and I had a chance to speak this morning – the students want to come to school, but they also want to honor their families and they shouldn't have to make those decisions. And one of the things you could not see from where I was standing – and I hope not to embarrass her – but the principal was crying while some of the things were being said. Well, I'm sorry Carol, you were, but in a very good way.

[Applause]

Because again – no, in a good way –

Mayor: Did she not embarrass you? [Laughs]

Chancellor Fariña: Because I do think that good leaders respect all kids and want to see all the kids being respected. This is not just an opportunity for a day off – because I don't see it like that – but it's an opportunity for teachable moments. I'm always looking – now we will have to, in all our schools, explain very clearly to all our students why they're going to have a day off.

[Applause]

And I think it's an opportunity for us to do the teaching that needs to be done. So I'm really, really excited about that.

The other thing is – I want to be very clear – we're not losing one instructional day. The day that is being used – that is a holiday, which will be September 24th – teachers will be having one day of professional development. Schools start the Wednesday after Labor Day, so not one teaching day is lost. And because of the fortunateness of our 80 minutes on Monday, we have a lot of PD into our schedule. But to me, the most important thing about this decision is that we can now say that we are multicultural, multiracial, multi, multi, mutli-everything city, and we're all going to be learning about this in our classrooms.

So, I thank you for this. I think this a momentous moment. But I think most importantly respecting people is something that we give a lot of lip-service to, but we don't often do. And making promises is easy, keeping them – much harder. So, thank you Mayor de Blasio.

[Applause]

And it is my pleasure to introduce Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, who's our next speaker.

Mayor: And I want to say, as we bring up the speaker, that you're going to hear from a group of people today, all of whom fought vigorously for this. What's going to connect all of the speakers coming up is they stood up on this issue for many, many years, and fought hard for this day, and we thank them for that. Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito.

[...]

Mayor: I always enjoy – I always enjoy hearing –

Unknown: [inaudible]

Mayor: I always enjoy hearing the Arabic chant, “Si se puede.”

[Laughter]

It is getting very multicultural around here.

Okay, we’re going to take questions on this topic. After that, I’m going to give our friends in the media a weather update, and then we’re going to take questions on all other topics. So let’s start with questions on this topic. Questions on this topic – yes, sir –

Question: [inaudible] two things.

Mayor: Yes.

Question: The chancellor said that one [inaudible] beginning of the year would balance this out. How do you balance the schedule for the second day?

Mayor: Let – let me emphasize – I’ll give an overview, and then you jump in. Yeah, but the point – the point being, each year, the calendar is different. You know, for the schools each year the religious calendar is different as well. So there will be times when both of the Eid holidays naturally do not occur on school days, or one occurs on a school day, or one does not, sometimes both may. So, we will adjust literally year by year according to need.

Yes.

Question: How will you determine the date of the two Eids, because some people, they celebrate one day, some people a different day. So, who will [inaudible]?

Mayor: We are going to work with community members to agree upon a formula for that.

Question: How many religious or cultural –

Mayor: How many?

Question: How many religious or cultural holidays are [inaudible] and do you feel there should be a maximum or limit?

Mayor: We have, obviously, a number of Christian and Jewish holidays on the calendar now. We can get you a whole list. We have a challenge always with the school year and accommodating all the days of the school year. There are state rules that dictate what we have to achieve. That is one of the things that we had to navigate on the road to this day, but we are convinced that this is something we can accommodate properly, and achieve the school’s – the school requirement – the school days requirement we need to each year. But it does take constant navigation to make all the pieces come together. And again, with some of the religious holidays, you have changes in the calendar year by year, obviously in different faiths, and we have to accommodate that in each case. So it’s an ongoing effort.

Yes.

Question: For lack of a better phrase – pioneers get the arrows, settlers get the land, so you're doing something that's –

Mayor: No, that's an interesting phrase – let's, let's, let's – that's – that's editorial. Hey, he is from Brooklyn. That's editorializing, though. What are you trying to say, brother?

Question: [inaudible] backlash, conservative right wing [inaudible] when you looked within, why did you say now was the time?

Mayor: Because it just was a matter of fairness – it's as simple as that.

[Applause]

I think we have a larger discussion that we have to have in this city and in this nation – a deeper understanding of the Muslim faith and its obvious connection to the other faiths for which we do honor school holidays. So – yeah, of course – so, there is a clear connection between Judaism and Christianity and Islam. The first two, we have appropriately honored crucial holidays. As a matter of fairness and consistency, we should honor the two Eid holidays. Second, this is a growing community in our city and in our schools, and we wanted to recognize that and work closely with the community. You know, people who will criticize it I think should go back and look at the Constitution of the United States, and recognize –

[Applause]

Again, we are a nation that was built to be multi-faith, multicultural. That was the concept of this country. That is why people came here to develop this country from the beginning. And we are carrying out that vision here and now. And those who seek to divide us are not going to make us a stronger nation or a safer nation. What we actually need to do is work, as I said earlier, on that more perfect union. There's a lot of work to be done. But we as a city need to do more to deepen our connection to Muslim communities all over the city, to work more closely with community leaders. As Linda referred to earlier, we've had a real dialogue about how to deepen that relationship. And it's a two-way street. The city has to do some important things to respect and embrace the community, and that's true on schools, that's true in policing – and by the way, I think Commissioner Bratton has done an outstanding job in terms of embracing the community, bringing in community leaders to One Police Plaza – there are a growing number of NYPD officers of the Muslim faith – over 2,000 – which is a very good thing for this city.

[Applause]

And I commend the commissioner for updating our policies and ending some policies that really did cause a sense of division. So, this is an ongoing effort to deepen the city's outreach and connection to our Muslim communities, but we also call upon all Muslim community leaders to – and clergy as well – to help us deepen those ties, and to do their share in that effort. And we're celebrating that today as well. But this is an example of true cooperation and people working together in a much more fundamental way than was true in the past. Chancellor, did you want to add?

Chancellor Fariña: Tolerance can only be developed when there's knowledge. And I am sure that there were many of you in this room who basically might've known the words about these holidays, but very little about them. But hopefully, you did some homework before you came here today so you could ask the questions and see – and put this in a certain way. And I think the opportunity to do this in our schools with our teachers and all our children – this is not something where we'll have dialogues in only schools where we have large Arab – Muslim populations, I apologize. This is going to be in all our schools. The discussion will be for everyone, because if we're going to move a tolerant society –

[Applause]

– this has be the same way that we discuss Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah, and the Christian holidays – you know, when we discuss Good Friday – Good Friday is a day off. It’s the talking in the school and getting the kids involved in dialogue that really will chance to make a difference. Otherwise, we’re stuck in the past, and we want to move towards the future.

Mayor: Thank you.

[Applause]

Any other question on topic? Yes, Michael –

Question: You've spoken in the past about recognizing the Lunar New Year as a school holiday. I'm just wondering if you can give us an update on that.

Mayor: I’m – I’m going to keep working on that with the chancellor. What we’ve found in this process is that we are in a very tight situation, as I said, with the number of days that we have to achieve each year, so it’s going to take more work to get to that. We remain focused on it, but it will take more work, because we have to balance a lot of factors.

Yes.

Question: Does this apply to [inaudible]

Mayor: Louder.

Question: Does this apply [inaudible]

Mayor: Does this apply – ?

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: Private schools? No. Private schools have to make their own decision, and I hope – but I hope they will follow our lead. Anything else?

[Applause]

Any other questions on topic? Yes, Michael.

Question: Just to follow up – just for parents' planning purposes, do you expect an extra day to be added on to the end of next year's calendar?

Mayor: So every year is going to be different, literally. And again, it’s not just the Eid holidays – we see this as well with other faiths’ holidays that they can vary, obviously, year by year. We – in some cases, we’ll have the school year begin on the Wednesday after Labor Day. In other cases, that might not be necessary because of the way the holidays fall. So that’s one of the things we’ll work out literally year by year, but parents should certainly be prepared for some years for school to begin on the Wednesday after Labor Day.

Yes.

Question: Summer school [inaudible]?

Mayor: An excellent question. Josh, you got the question we did not prepare for. We should give an award out each day – Phil, could we – could we formulate an award for the question we didn’t prep for, and whoever gets it – you know, if they – if they – if they add up enough points during the year they get free dinner or something? Chancellor, can you speak to the summer school issue?

Chancellor Fariña: At the moment, we would assume that that would be a holiday, but as of right now, it doesn't seem to fall on a day when summer school will be in session.

[Applause]

Mayor: Yes, sir.

Question: [inaudible] state Department of Education [inaudible] Eid holiday in New York City?

Mayor: What is the view of the state Department of Education? I will ask the chancellor to address – what is the view of the state Department of Education? I would start by saying, before the chancellor comes up, I think from the state – from the state – the Regents point of view and the state department – they care about us reaching our required number of days. They understand that we will have a lot of factors that we have to deal with, including snow days, but they want us to hit that number. That's the central concern. They leave us a certain amount of leeway in doing that. Do you want to – is that it? Okay.

Chancellor Fariña: [inaudible]

Mayor: Microphone – come on over.

Chancellor Fariña: 180 days is the New York state-mandated number of days. And always we add a few extra just in case there's snow. And depending on how many days we close because of snow, we have to adjust, but there's always flexibility in the schedule for those adjustments.

Mayor: Okay. On topic, last call. On topic, going once, going twice – okay, now let me give you a weather update. You know when I give a weather update it's not to say everything's okay. Okay? [Laughs] We should do that once in a while, just for the fun of it.

Okay, beginning at 7 pm tonight and going through tomorrow evening – you can stay, you can go, whatever you like – it's – off-topic's a lot of fun. Yeah, that's true. Beginning at 7 pm tonight and through tomorrow evening, we will be under a winter storm warning. Here we go – we may get up to 8 inches of snow, beginning around midnight tonight. Now, this is when I do my disclaimer. We have learned that weather reports sometimes change – it can get more, it can get less. But at this moment – from what we know at this moment, we will get up to 8 inches beginning around midnight. The heaviest will be late, late at night before we get to dawn. Currently, we have rain that will eventually become a mix of sleet and rain before it becomes snow.

We urge caution – on the roads and sidewalks, things are very slick already – they will only get slicker. We urge people to use mass transit. Be careful if you have to walk outside. Be careful as you're driving. Stay inside, if you can. Use mass transit, if you can. Once again, alternate-side parking – cancelled today and tomorrow. Alternate-side parking – cancelled today and tomorrow. Sanitation department out in full force – salt-spreaders – plows – ready. As you know by now, they need two inches of snow to accumulate before they could start plowing. DOT crews are out clearing bridges and overpasses. A moment in Español –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that we welcome weather, or other questions. Go ahead.

Question: I would like actually get the speaker before she leaves –

Mayor: Speaker.

Question: But to both of you – right now, in Chicago, there's a runoff election. A number of [inaudible] that helped elect you, the Working Families Party, the labor movement, are trying to help Jesus Garcia defeat Mayor

Emanuel. I want – Mayor Emanuel's policies [inaudible] oppositional to your own. I'm curious to find out who are you hoping wins that race?

Mayor: You know, it's a Democratic primary between two members – or in effect, I don't know what their exact electoral system is – but they're both Democrats. I have worked closely with Mayor Emanuel. I think he's done some important work on areas like early childhood education and raising the minimum wage, so I respect him a lot. But the bottom line is that's for the people of Chicago to decide.
Josh.

Question: Mayor, actually an educational question – I was wondering where you, and [inaudible] stand on trying to convince the state legislature to block the governor's plan to increase the reliance on testing in teacher evaluations [inaudible]?

Mayor: Sure, I'll start and then welcome the chancellor. Look, I think the bottom line here is that we – and I've said this for a long time, I said this throughout 2013 – we have overly relied on high-stakes testing. We have to move in the opposite direction. What high-stakes testing has done is it has discouraged a focus on teaching and learning. It has discouraged a focus on teaching critical thinking and reasoning skills, and the exact kind of skills needed in the modern economy. High-stakes testing over-focuses the educational process on test-prep, on memorization, on learning by rote, instead of learning to think critically. So, it is the wrong methodology to use more than we have to use it, according to current federal or state law. I've said in Albany at my testimony, I disagree with any measure, including the governor's proposal, that would increase our reliance on state tests. I think that's taking us in the wrong direction. I would also note – I said in Albany – that when you have that kind of overemphasis on high-stakes testing, it discourages teachers from teaching the hardest to teach kids because if their lives, and careers, and their schools are all going to be judged by high-stakes testing, who wouldn't say well, I guess it's going to set me back if I help the kids in greatest need. I think that's one of the fallacies of the idea of overemphasizing high-stakes testing. So, we hope that the legislature will recognize that. We've certainly talked to legislative leaders and we hope that they will protect the mix of measures that we think are necessary. Do you want to add?

Chancellor Fariña: I also spoke before the state legislature and I want to be very clear. 50 percent of the teacher's evaluation based on testing, to me, is not what should be happening. Teachers are not test results. Teachers should be assessed on many things. They should be assessed on their work with parents, their collaboration with each other, their ability to get better at their jobs by attending professional development. We have developed a framework that actually evaluates teachers on a wide range of things. So, just looking at 50 percent of the test score – the other piece of this is that it also takes away principal autonomy. No CEO in this city would allow an outside person or an outside force to tell them who to hire and how to keep them. So, I am fully – I believe in testing, I believe we do need to assess, but I believe the proportion that is being used in teacher evaluations is not the appropriate one.

Mayor: Thank you.

[Applause]

Mayor: Jonathan.

Question: Mr. Mayor, [inaudible] slated to speak at the Association for a Better New York, a group that does not always see eye-to-eye on all of your policies. Do you have a sense of what you're going to tell them tomorrow, [inaudible]?

Mayor: I'm going to – I'm not going to divulge my exciting speech, but I will give you just a broad sense. Look, I think it's an important organization in this city. It's one I've gone before several times to talk about my vision. I'm certainly going to talk about what we have to do to continue to address income inequality, I'm going to talk about the importance of our housing plan, and some of the things that we need to do to foster job growth and better wages in this city. But I'll leave you with that broad description.

Question: [inaudible] city government officials who rely exclusively on private email? And I also want to [inaudible]?

Mayor: I think you're offering me a hypothetical and I will speak to the specific. I have – I think it's not a great secret – I have immense respect for Secretary Clinton. I think she's one of the finest public servants that this country has produced. I think she's a person of extraordinary integrity. And what's quite clear is that when her staff was asked to produce all the emails that did document the work she was doing, 55,000 pages of emails were produced. So, to me, it's quite clear that measures were taken to comply with both the letter and the spirit of law, and I respect that. Every place is different. The City of New York has our own particular approach, our own particular rules. I do my official business on official email.

Question: [inaudible]

Speaker Mark-Viverito: There are times when we, yes, when we rely on private email. But we do use our government emails.

Mayor: You want to speak to it? Yeah, I mean, I – so, again, I certainly also use private email for private matters – or personal matters or non-governmental matters – but for governmental, I use governmental email.

Question: [inaudible] how many people reapplied, and how it's going on?

Mayor: I'm going to take a pass on that question for a moment to look at my email to give you the exact up-to-date number – it's an astounding number. I get a weekly report, so I'm going to come right back to you. Let's take another question.

Question: There was a report today about a letter that Commissioner Ponte sent to the staff after a correction officer was sexually assaulted that seemed to lay the blame on the officer. I was wondering if you could respond to that, and as a follow up, if you could speak to the city's current relationship with Corizon Healthcare –

Mayor: Whoa – wait, wait, wait – let's – we'll do the first one and then we'll give you the second, because I want to keep on the same topic at a time. First of all, I have immense respect for our corrections officers. They do a very, very tough job, and they do it well. This is a very troubling incident to have one of our corrections officers assaulted by an inmate. And I feel deeply for that officer and know it's been an extremely tough time for her and her family, and I wish her well. And I think the bottom line is, we are trying to take a series of measures to change profoundly the reality on Rikers Island. It is deeply troubled. You – you have never heard anyone of this administration say everything's okay on Rikers Island. It's not, and we have been left a very troubled legacy that we are trying systematically to fix. It will take time, but we are throwing a huge amount of resources and effort at changing the situation on all levels. The safety of our officers is paramount in that. I think Commissioner Ponte has done a great job in a very short period of time making profound changes. There's a lot more coming, and I'm going to be very personally involved, and I look forward to going out to Rikers again soon to continue to talk about the reforms we're making. As for his memo, I have not seen the whole memo. I have heard some – a brief summary of it. I know Commissioner Ponte – he started his career as a corrections officer. He is legendary for having reformed some of the most troubled jail and prison systems around the country. He has profound respect for the people he leads – he was one of them once – so I know in his heart he clearly meant to encourage and support his workers while also holding them all to a high standard, because we need change and we need it now. But I am certain he only meant to reinforce and support his workers.

Question: [inaudible] Corizon Healthcare [inaudible] Is the city considering ending that contract with them [inaudible]?

Mayor: I – I don't want to – I appreciate the question, there's just some editorial content in that question. I'm not going to agree to the assumption, respectfully. Everything on Rikers Island is being reviewed. Everything is

being reassessed. Everything is being changed. Literally, when you go through the list of things that are already in motion – the addition of the security cameras all over the island, the change in the screening process for people coming into their work, the end of punitive segregation for juveniles, later for 18- to 21-year-olds, the creation of new, high-security facilities for the most violent inmates, different training, different recruitment, different screening of officers, mental health programs being initiated with a lot of resources that weren't there before, capital investments – this is a high, high priority for me, and a lot is being thrown into it, and every single element of the work out there is being reassessed, so when we have something to say on the providing of the healthcare, we'll certainly share that with you, but that's another part of the larger situation that we're assessing.

Okay, now, I owe you an answer – hold on.

Through the miracle of the – as my children like to say, the Interweb – [laughs] – so, first of all, in terms of cards that are in people's hands or about to be in their hands, we're at 38,000. We've got another 5,000 behind that that have been processed and should be ready to get printed soon, so we're well on our way to 40,000 in hand at this point. We have 269,000 specific appointments that have been made. Again, we are working energetically to make it a 90-day standard from the time that appointment is made to the time in which someone is processed. We're going to push that down – we're adding resources, as you heard in the preliminary budget announcement. So right now, if you add that together, about 270 appointments, pushing towards 40,000 cards that will be in hand – that takes us to about 310,000 people in motion, and the pace has been extraordinary. We expect that number to keep growing. We're getting great, great response from people who are using the card, and we think that the system is getting stronger with every passing week.

Okay, who has not gotten a shot? Go ahead – you and then you.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: Well, we'll be announcing further details. I'll be going to Israel this summer, and for many reasons – of course, to express my solidarity with the people of Israel and the state of Israel, and because of the close ties between our country and Israel, and our city and Israel. But secondly, I want to talk about what I think is a growing scourge of anti-Semitism, particularly in Western European nations. And that is one of the things that led me to go to Paris. I am very, very concerned about the response of European governments to what's obviously a growing problem. I've held up New York City as an example of a place that protects communities when they are under attack, and embraces all communities. Today is another example of it. The way to approach a multicultural society is to embrace all elements of the society and to listen to their particular needs – whether it is the need for a Muslim school holiday or the need for physical protection because there are those who would do harm to the community, and that protection has to be done energetically and visibly. So, one of the things I'll certainly focus on on my trip to Israel is the need for European governments to step up and do a better job of protecting their Jewish communities.

Question: [inaudible] could you explain – it's a two-pronged question – apparently the hours for the Irish breakfast on St. Patrick's Day has been reduced, the number of invitees reduced, I don't know if that's correct.

Mayor: Yeah, I don't think that's correct. I'll get you – we will get you the formal response, but I saw emails this morning from my staff saying that neither of those assumptions was accurate. We have a template now that we're using for all of the breakfasts that we do to celebrate different communities of this city. We try and involve as many people as possible. If you've been to the physical space at Gracie, there's a space limit – it's just a reality. We can only invite so many people and actually accommodate them in that space. But I think that report was misleading.

Question: Have you made a definitive decision about whether to march on Fifth Avenue –

Mayor: Based on the information I have at this moment, I am not marching in Manhattan St. Patrick's Parade. I've made very clear that there has to be more progress for me to consider marching in the parade. I think a lot

of other leaders feel the same way we do. I certainly applaud the progress this year compared to last, but because it is one narrow delegation, I don't think it responds to the core concern. So, unless something changes, I'm not planning on marching.
Yes.

Question: [inaudible] Europe [inaudible] Islamophobia in the United States [inaudible]?

Mayor: Absolutely. And I think part of what we're talking about today, again, is the embrace of all communities. And any time our Muslim communities are under threat, we will go to extra lengths to support and protect them as well. There is a problem in this country with some in this country who negatively characterize our Muslim brothers and sisters. That is wrong – it's morally wrong, it's inaccurate, it's counterproductive. So I will always be ready to support and respect this community. And when the community has a special need that we can address, we're going to go do that. That is part of the point I made about Commissioner Bratton and the NYPD. They're doing an extraordinary effort – and I think a very important effort – to bring Muslim community leaders to One Police Plaza to talk about how to work together. As I said, a growing number of officers on our force of Muslim background; so much that's being done to embrace and involve the community in the work of our city government – that should be – in my humble opinion, that's the kind of model we should be using all over this country.

Question: Mr. Mayor, could you tell us [inaudible]?

Mayor: I'll only broadly characterize it – that we need a greater inclusion. I think inclusion of one delegation from one company doesn't answer the larger question here that's being – that's been before us now for many years. So, again, I – I have not seen a proposal from the parade committee that actually speaks to a larger kind of inclusion. I don't expect it at this point, but if one were to come forward, we would certainly entertain it.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: As I said, this is a trip for this summer – a long way before we plan the details, and we'll certainly be talking to a lot of people before we finalize the plan for that trip. Last call. Going once. Going twice. Thank you, everyone.

[Applause]

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