



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO ANNOUNCES FIRST NYC HEALTH +
HOSPITALS URGENT CARE CLINICS TO OFFER FASTER SERVICE, EASE
DEMAND ON PUBLIC HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOMS**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Everybody, before we get to the topic at hand today. I want to talk about the ongoing investigation by the NYPD related to the letter bombs that have been sent to several locations in New York City and, obviously, we know, to locations around the country.

So today, at approximately 6:30 am the NYPD Bomb Squad removed a device from the offices of Robert De Niro in the Tribeca neighborhood. I want to empathize and thank everybody at the NYPD who is doing an outstanding job. The device was removed successfully. Thank God there were no injuries. The really quick witted work of a security guard there at that facility there in Tribeca is to thank for the fact that nothing happened and no harm was done to anyone. But that device – very similar to the other devices that have been located in the last 48 hours, and it all appears to be from the same sender. That investigation is ongoing.

Now – right now, that specific device has been taken to the bomb squad’s facility at Rodman’s Neck and obviously will be analyzed by the NYPD, working with FBI and our other federal partners.

This is clearly an effort to terrorize people politically, to choose people for political purposes and attack them because of their beliefs. That is the kind of thing we have seen before in this city, and we reject it and we will not be intimidated by it. I was very struck by how New Yorkers showed their resiliency yesterday, showed their unwillingness to bend in the face of terror, kept going about their businesses. Everyone knew about what was happening. But they refused to let anyone terrorize them. And that is something all New Yorkers should be proud of.

Also we know we have the finest police force anywhere in the world and they have done an outstanding job protecting us. But we have to help the NYPD and I want to really emphasize. It’s true here; it’s true all over the country. Everyday people – everyday people can play an incredibly important role helping law enforcement by getting any information you have on who may be involved in this plot to law enforcement and by being very vigilant about any packages that come in. The pattern of these packages has been extraordinarily consistent. But that does not

mean that if something comes in that looks a little different people shouldn't take it seriously if it's suspicious to them. So, we need people to use their common sense. If a package looks suspicious, there's any kind of chemical smell, any wiring showing, any indication of something out of the ordinary don't open the package. Alert the NYPD immediately, call 9-1-1 – much better to be safe than sorry in these situations.

The question on everyone's mind of course is – how long will this go on? It's important for people to recognize that until a full investigation takes place, we can't tell you how long this will go exactly. We have to be ready for any eventually. It might be hours, it might be days, it might be weeks. The vigilance we need to show in the meantime is what has to be consistent.

We're going to be updating people in the next few hours. There will be a press conference at One Police Plaza. So we'll have an opportunity there to get into detail about the latest on the investigation. But the bottom line here is again anybody who sees something anybody who sees something suspicious that causes concern call 9-1-1. Anybody who has the information about the people who are behind these letter bombs, you can call our tip line 1-8-8-8-N-Y-C-S-A-F-E. New Yorkers are showing that we will not be intimidated, and New Yorkers are showing the goodness and the decency that's true of this city, and true of people all over this country. And this is ultimately, it's a very painful moment, it's a very frightening moment. But in the end the goodness of everyday people is what's going to see us through this. I am absolutely convinced to that – people helping each other out, people having each other's back. That's how this city works. This is a city where 8.6 million people live in a practical kind of harmony that's extraordinary and something we should all be proud of. It's an example to the whole world. Nothing that's happened in the last day or two has changed that. We're going to keep being New Yorkers and we're going to keep showing that we can get along with each other and we can make things work. Just a couple of words in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

So please, everyone, I'll just conclude on this and then we'll go to talking about what we're here for today in Queens. But any information you have, share it with the NYPD and as I said in a few hours we'll be having a press conference at One Police Plaza to update everyone on the details of the investigation. With that, let me now turn to Susan.

[...]

Mayor: Susan – I want to give you a lot of credit, Susan. You have given us vivid examples of why this is so important. And thank you, I appreciate that you're a conscious mom and you've dealt with pretty challenging situation there with your son. But thank you for acknowledging the great work of everyone here at Elmhurst and for being really involved in the community and thank you for making clear to people why this is so important.

Look everybody, we all have this challenge in life. Something happens and we're trying to figure out where to go to get the care we need. And every one of us has spent a whole long time in an emergency room. I can tell you many stories of my own. And the fact is our emergency rooms carry a huger burden, see a huge number of people for matters small and really, really severe.

But what it all adds up to is really long waits and a challenging environment. And up until now there really haven't been the kind of options that people need.

We believe that healthcare is a right. We believe that it is the job of our city government and all levels of government to make sure people get the healthcare they need. And to make sure it's convenient and to make sure it's as fast as possible. And the idea of getting decent treatment, fast treatment shouldn't be a luxury. It should be something that people know is part of their everyday lives, that's why this is such an important development and such a step forward for Health + Hospitals. To pick up on the examples that Susan gave. You know, everyday things that happen maybe not quite dramatic as the toe example, but like your other example from your walk or you sprain an ankle, you have a fever, you're in the kitchen working with a kitchen knife and cut something. These are the kinds of reasons that people go to the emergency room particularly in the evening hours, in the overnight hours. But, what they're confronted with often – again is a very long wait before they get the care that they need. Good people here at Health + Hospitals have been trying to come up with a solution to that. And they did look at the example of the private urgent care centers and they said wait a minute, we in the public sector can do that as well and we can do it in a way that in some ways is even better because we can put the urgent care right next to the emergency capacity and be able to draw upon whichever one is needed in each case.

So this is going to respond to about the 70 percent, the estimate is about 70 percent of emergency room visits are for the kinds of things that actually could be handled by an urgent care facility. Like the one that we just toured a few minutes ago. Well, right now when everyone has only the choice of the emergency room that adds to the waits for everyone. That means a lot of times that people are getting a more costly form of treatment than they need. When you separate the two ideas, and you say we're going to have urgent care and we're going to have an emergency room and make sure people go to the right one for what they need, it makes things faster for everyone; it also saves a lot of money for everyone involved. As you said, you paid more than you should have because you had only one choice. This is going to be a way to save money for everyday New Yorkers and of course for our public health care system so that we can serve more people.

We know that if people come into an urgent care facility and get help quickly it's going to encourage them to get help when they need it. Unfortunately the average for an emergency room is over five hours. That doesn't encourage people to come in. If it's something really horrible they will. But a lot people try and resist going for the care they need because they hate the idea of the long wait on the hard plastic chair. And we want people to get care; we want them to get care as quickly as possible. That's how you stop things from getting worse. So now that people can think about a place where the goal is to get people in and out within an hour that's going to encourage people to get the care they need in the right setting. This is going to be one of three facilities. Three new express care clinics for the City of New York and in three of our currently busiest emergency rooms.

Again, we think this is going to take a lot of pressure off those emergency rooms which will be a great thing. Here in Elmhurst and there will also be at Lincoln and Jacoby. That's the first three, but overtime we will have facilities in all 11 of our inpatient hospitals. Look, the idea here is to make sure people get the care they need when they need it. We believe this will reach tens of

thousands of New Yorkers and make their lives better. And we also as always is the case with Health + Hospitals. We will see all patients, no one will be turned away, something we really believe in. If someone does not have insurance, they will be offered payment plans, they will be offered financial counseling or if they're eligible for insurance we're going to sign them up for insurance as soon as they get in the door. One of the most important priorities is to get the insurance that they qualify for.

We believe it's going to be a big step forward for our public hospitals, it's going to save a lot of money as I said, reduce a lot of unnecessary emergency room visits, and unnecessary hospitalizations. And this is part of how we create a better life for New Yorkers. We talk about fairness and what we want to do in making this the fairest big city in America. One of the hallmarks of fairness is people being able to get the help they need when they need it. And I think these express care facilities are really going to be a big step forward for all New Yorkers. Just a few words in Spanish on this –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, one of the innovators of this new approach who's bringing it here to Queens, my pleasure to introduce the CEO of Elmhurst hospital, Israel Rocha.

CEO Israel Rocha, Elmhurst Hospital: Thank you, Mayor de Blasio for everything that you have done to make this possible. The Mayor continues to give New York City Health and Hospitals a challenge – that our hospitals should be continuing to transform in a way that best serves the patients and brings higher quality. I think today's innovations is thanks to his support and his vision for a New York City hospital system that is being able to get better care to patients across New York City. Thank you for everything that you are doing to make that possible for us. And thank all our staff, our team, here at Elmhurst Hospital and at the – across the system at Lincoln and at Jacobi who are working to create these innovative clinics that will have new meaning for New Yorkers so that now that they can enter all of the hospitals and they can enter our clinics, they can enter our services, and that they will be seen quickly and expeditiously, and that our system reflects their needs. It is a continuing vision of our commitment to New York City to transform our system to better meet the patients and to ensure that when you think of New York City hospitals, you think of somewhere where you can get the right care, at the right time, in the right setting, and that we continue to be more efficient and good financial stewards of the investment that the city puts in our hospitals. So thank you very much.

Mayor: Thank you very much Mr. Rocha. I appreciate it very much, and now I would like to introduce the man who will be heading the express clinic here at Elmhurst, Dr. Phillip Fairway.

[Applause]

[...]

Mayor: Thank you, doctor.

[Applause]

And those are definitely examples of success. I think you are right, as the word spreads more and more people are going to take advantage of the services being provided here at Elmhurst. I want to say there's been a lot of energetic support from our elected officials for this idea of providing faster service to their constituents, and I want to thank them for advocating, always, for Elmhurst Hospital and making sure it gets the support it needs. I want to acknowledge and thank to of the representatives who serve in Albany representing people of this community, Assemblymember David Weprin and Assemblymember Jeff Aubry. Thank you both very much.

[Applause]

And now turning to the Queen of Queens –

[Laughter]

I want to thank her. The – we're in the middle here of Queens Week, and there's always a long agenda for all the Deputy Mayors, all of the agency heads, pursuing an agenda that is richly dictated to us by the Borough President. And this is the kind of innovation I know you believe in for your borough and you've been fighting to make sure that the resources flow to Queens and people have access to the care they need. So, my pleasure to introduce Borough President Melinda Katz.

[Applause]

[...]

Mayor: Thank you. She's next up to bat and as I turn to Councilmember Carlina Rivera, I want to say City Council has been really supportive of the work that we've done over the last years to turn Health and Hospitals. I think everyone will remember a few years ago the budget situation was really troubled and a lot of policies at the federal and state level were unfortunately having a negative impact on Health and Hospitals and it took a lot of work and a lot of innovation and a lot of reform to put this organization back on a firm footing and the City Council was very supportive of making the investments necessary to bridge to this day. So, Councilmember I want to thank you and all your colleagues, and I know how much you're a believer in these kind of innovations that allow us to serve people at the grassroots better. It is my pleasure to introduce the chair of the Committee on Hospitals in the City Council, Councilmember Carlina Rivera.

[Applause]

[...]

Mayor: Thank you, Councilmember. Okay, we're going to take questions from the media on this announcement and then we will turn to other topics. Anything on this announcement on the express care clinics? Anybody? I know there's a lot on their minds today. Okay, I'm going to give you a chance. Going once – media questions, express care clinic, going twice.

Okay, let's go to other topics. Other topics? Go ahead.

Question: Mr. Mayor, I wonder if you've been briefed on the DOI report on the Commissioner of DOI. It found fairly serious charges against him; that he might have misled City Council in testimony, that some of his investigators gave inconsistent testimony to the investigators of that probe. Just wondering what you make of it and what steps you might or might not take in response?

Mayor: I've received a briefing but I have not read the full document, I've read a piece of it but not the whole document, I need to do that. As you know, I've been under the weather for much of the last few days so I have not had as much time. But I will do that and after that, we'll think about what the meaning of it is, but I can't give you a conclusion yet. Other questions, yes?

Question: Can I get your thoughts on the demise of the New York Wheel project on Staten Island.

Mayor: Sure.

Question: What do you expect to happen at this site going forward? Obviously there's been some construction. They've laid the pedestal. Who's responsible for moving that and what are you going to tell people on Staten Island who are maybe worried they might have like a half built thing there?

Mayor: Look, I don't know all the technicalities of what we're going to do to prepare the site for other development but I'm sure we can do that on an expedited basis. It's a really important site for Staten Island. The outlet mall is opening soon, that's going to be I think a big boost for the economy of Staten Island. Here we have another site that can be a difference maker and one of things I want to do is talk to the borough president, and the councilmembers and all the elected officials and stakeholders about what would have the biggest positive impact on the future of Staten Island. What would help to build the economy and create jobs? And look it's unfortunate that this didn't work out but we still have a tremendous site to work with under public control and we're going to make it something great for Staten Island. But that's a process we now have to go through with local stakeholders. Yes?

Question: What advice do you have for city mailroom workers who are opening mail with the possibility that there could be an explosive or other dangerous item in there?

Mayor: To be very cautious. As you heard yesterday NYPD has provided a lot of guidance, literally to tens of thousands of different businesses and organizations as to how to handle their mailroom operations in the times we are living in. I think the abundance of caution is the approach people should take. If anything seems out of the ordinary as I said if there is chemical smell, if there are any wires showing, if something doesn't seem right, don't open the package. Alert the NYPD immediately, get guidance from them. I think that people need to exercise caution. The packages we've seen so far have followed a very, very specific pattern but that doesn't mean everyone will follow the exact same pattern. That doesn't mean there won't be

copy cats. So the best thing is to be very cautious and if there is doubt, reach out to the NYPD immediately. Yes?

Question: Mayor, just given what we have learned about Vice President Biden this morning and Mr. De Niro, do you have any concerns yourself about possibly being – I don't want to say a list of potential targets, but that's the best description of it. Any reason to worry that you might [inaudible] yourself, receiving one?

Mayor: Look, my family and I a long time ago understood that we are living in a time where unfortunately some people target public figures. This is not the first time we have experienced something like this as a city or as a country. It shouldn't be that way but it is that way. So I worry for my family always but I know the NYPD is providing tremendous protection and you know it's something that it follows the same point I made about how the people of this city are reacting. I'm not going to be paralyzed by this. No one in public life should be paralyzed by this. No one in the media should be paralyzed by this. I gave a lot of credit to CNN for the fact that they kept all their programming going, they did not let this throw them off. I think that's how you defeat terrorism. We got to go about our lives. We got to show that we are resolute. So, am I aware of it? Sure. Am I concerned for my family? Absolutely, but I'm also confident that really extraordinary work is done every day by the NYPD to protect us all. Thank you. Go ahead, Gloria.

Question: Mr. Mayor, your administration testified before the City Council this week on the commercial rent bill. They raised some concerns. What do you plan to do in order to help this problem if you are not supporting the bill that's before the City Council? Do you have any other plans to deal with the problem of retail vacancy in the city?

Mayor: Gloria, it's one of the thorniest problems that we face because it has to date, defied a really clear public policy solution. And I've said this at a whole lot of town hall meetings to everyday New Yorkers who raised a concern. This one is challenging because the things that have been talked about historically that might work like zoning changes. We really haven't seen the results there that we hoped for. You could do a major subsidy program but I don't think that's right given the other needs of the city and the people of this city. So, you know what we have tried to do is work any piece of the equation that could have a positive impact. We obviously lowered the commercial rent tax for parts of Manhattan that were particularly affected. We've reduced the amount of fines that small businesses are receiving by over 40 percent. We are providing legal assistance to small businesses in their lease negotiations. We are helping small businesses to get tax breaks that they may deserve and other low interest loans and other opportunities.

But it's still not solving the core problem. Some of this is the changing consumer patterns that we are all experiencing. Some of this is obviously the extraordinary rental costs that we are seeing now that we didn't see in the past. But so far in the proposal that's before the City Council – the impulse is a good one but we haven't been able to resolve that there's an approach that's actually legally sustainable and really will make a difference. The other thing I would note is the vacancy tax idea. I still think that's a very live option. That would require Albany approval. But what I like about it is – I'm going to give you an example, let's say three years. If a landlord

keeps a storefront vacant for three years, that's really having a negative impact on community. They have a right to do that, even under a vacancy tax scenario but there should be some kind of sanction. There should be some kind of penalty for doing that. And that money can be put to a positive use for the community. So that's something I'm hopeful that we can make some progress on in Albany. Who has not had one? Yes?

Question: There was some protests this week by homeless activists wanting you to increase the set asides in your affordable housing program to 15 percent for homeless individuals. Why is that not option for you?

Mayor: I just disagree with it. I've talked about this consistently publically and I want to say it again. I think the affordable housing plan works for the people of the city because it is for everyone. It is meant to reach working class people, middle class people, low income people. We've heard throughout the last five years, various demands to make the plan more about one community or another, I've said that's just not what I believe in philosophically and I've said – I've been transparent from the time we introduced the plan, we've talked about how it will serve a broad band of New Yorkers and how we are trying to achieve economic diversity in as many communities as possible. And I think that's what works. We do vigorously get folks who end up in shelter opportunities for affordable housing. It's been over 90,000 people in the last five years have benefited. So the other thing I've said to the advocates is those numbers – that actually happened, that's not theory, that's happened and that will continue to happen but I don't believe in setting aside more of our growing supply of affordable housing for just one piece of the population. I think it has to be a broad approach.

Question: Record number of homeless and the fact that you yourself have said there's been a shift and why people are homeless in terms of jobs and you know the economy.

Mayor: Yes.

Question: Why wouldn't there be an effort to help the group that some people believe are suffering the most?

Mayor: Because I think the approach – first of all, remember what we're doing for those folks. One – stopping people from becoming homeless also in record numbers. The number of evictions has gone down markedly because of free legal services. The amount of people getting subsidies to stop them from becoming homeless has gone up.

You know the history. The watershed moment was in 2011 with the cancellation by the City and the State of the Advantage Program, that's really when the homeless numbers in shelter got supercharged. We've been able to recoup some of that by creating a strong subsidy effort to keep people from losing the housing they have.

But again the proof is in the pudding. If 90,000 people have benefited from affordable housing programs with the way we're approaching it now, I say that's proof that we really are serving the needs of those folks. But the bigger goal is to just expand the affordable housing options across the board for the people of this city.

I don't want to send a message that the only folks who can get affordable housing are folks who end up in shelter. I think that's wrong for everyone. The message that we're sending is we're building the maximum amount of new affordable housing, we're preserving the maximum amount of affordable housing place. The plan will ultimately reach 300,000 apartments which means 600,000, 700,000 people will benefit. That is a better approach for solving this problem at its core.

Unknown: We have time for two more.

Mayor: Yeah.

Question: Mayor, do you think it's fair to blame Trump before the completion of the investigation for the attacks, for the mail bombs?

Mayor: I think we have to have an investigation and know exactly what happened, and I don't think – I think it's simplistic to say everything is about Donald Trump. I've said this constantly. We've got to stop talking about Donald Trump all the time. There's other things going on in our society besides the President.

The hatred that's out there has existed in this country for a long time. He has given it license, he has given it permission, he has made it easier for those voices of hate to come forward. That is a fact, and it's coming from the top, and that makes it particularly unfortunate.

But the hatred's been there and we have to address it at its root which is really all of our responsibility. So, no, I don't think it's right to connect the dots so perfectly until we know all the facts. I do think it's right to say the President really should change his tone, show respect for people of different beliefs, show respect for the news media, stop encouraging violence.

That said, he will not change. I'm happy to say what he should do and I have no illusion that he'll change. Last call, Gloria?

Question: Mr. Mayor, I want to go back to the emails that your administration released a couple of days ago. We had a story last week that showed that your administration, early on, devoted a lot of time and taxpayer-salaried employees' time into making sure that the plans you had for your national agenda were underway. Do you have any – do you want to respond to that at all and do you have any regrets about that considering the many needs that there are in the city, and having used time and taxpayer-funded resources to focus on something that [inaudible] –

Mayor: No, and I mean – I feel like we've had this discussion many, many times. I'm a little confused why folks keep bringing it up when it's been answered. I'll answer it again. Do I think that I personally made every decision as well as I could have in retrospect? No.

Do I think there were mistakes in the concept and implementation? Yes. But I don't have a regret about what we were trying to achieve. The – again, guys, you can ask it another thousand times but I would really ask you to dig deep and be objective here.

The things that affect the people of this city, so many of them are controlled in Washington and Albany. This is a fact, and if we left the political circumstance the way it was, we would continue to not get the help we need.

Go across the board, the issues we're talking about – the Affordable Care Act reached 1.6 million New Yorkers. If it were gone, their lives would be made worse. The infrastructure spending that we used to get from the federal government that we don't get anymore – if the federal government had a substantial infrastructure plan, New York City would benefit greatly from it.

I can go down a whole list of things. Those all come back to the political debate, they all come back to what happens legislatively, and what happens in elections. I think it was right to put forward an agenda and try and galvanize support for it in the way that actually could have led to change, and we had some examples that worked.

I use the example of the highway bill in 2015 where mayors around the country gathered together to push for an increase in spending and we actually got it. That's had a very positive impact on New York City.

So, no, I do not regret trying to change the debate and trying to get the actions we needed on a federal level that actually could have helped the people of this city in ways we could not just do for ourselves. Last one.

Question: I just wanted to get your thoughts on the agreement to provide unlimited sick time for 9/11 first responders who were in a handful of unions that weren't covered. So [inaudible] people who weren't also unionized. I know there's a population of them in the city and they're looking for unlimited sick time. And what took so long? Why did it take so long to reach this agreement?

Mayor: Look, I – on the specific question of the non-unionized, I want to be careful because I have not been briefed on that approach. But our goal is to make sure people get the care they need, period. This is a situation rooted in pain. Let's just say this from the beginning.

People who were affected by 9/11 need our support, period. A lot got support but it turned out there was a group of people who weren't getting it. As that issue became clear, our goal was to settle it in a way that made sense through collective bargaining. It did take a while to work out. There were some thorny details but we got there. Everyone said from the beginning, we got to get there and we got there, and we're going to make sure that people get the care they need.

So, I think it just came down to things that had to be worked through but our intention has been to make sure people get what they need and they will.

Question: [Inaudible] I was at a press conference earlier this week, sort of at the same moment as it was announced that this deal had come together and people were still kind of angry that they had to – they felt, you know, they shouldn't have had to hold press conferences, or they shouldn't have had to ask.

What would you say to the first responders who feel that way?

Mayor: Well, again, from my point of view, once it became clear there was a need going unmet, we started working to fix it. So, I want to make sure people get all the care they need. I'm not happy if anyone went through any kind of trouble. That's not what I would have wanted for them.

This issue emerged over time. I'm thinking back over the years. It was not front and center a few years ago. When it came up, we resolved that we had to fix it, and now it has been fixed.

Thanks, everyone.

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