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RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY AFTER MEETING WITH TENANTS AT AFFORDABLE APARTMENT BUILDING IN THE BRONX

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Everyone, gather around. Okay, good, good, good. Okay, welcome everyone. Good afternoon. We just visited Shaydee Reyes and her family here at 2432 University Avenue, here in the Fordham section of the Bronx. This is a very good news story. This is a hardworking family – Dominican immigrants – been here for 20 years, been a part of the fabric of the live of the Bronx and our city. It's a family – Shaydee and her mom and her sister all in the same building. And they hung on in this building through some very tough times. The building behind me is almost 100 years old. And I talked to the experts here from Fordham Bedford – a nonprofit that's taken over this building. We looked at the renovations. Some of you were up there. This building has not been renovated in almost 100 years. This is a building that has been slowly but surely falling apart, despite the fact that there are hardworking New Yorkers in it. Badly needed repairs – the doors were broken. It was rodent-infested. The plumbing was faulty. The electrical was faulty. The roof was falling. So many problems and the families hung on and did the best they could under very adverse circumstances.

Well it was time for something different. The city of New York is very proud of the fact that we are now investing millions of dollars – millions of dollars in this building. So, Shaydee and her family and so many other families can live a decent life and have truly affordable housing. This is a building that – had the city not gotten involved – within a few years, this would no longer have been affordable housing. We would've lost this building. It would've gone on the private market. It would've been gone forever in terms of affordable housing. By intervening now, we are keeping this building affordable for decades to come for hardworking New Yorkers.

I'm going to give you an example of what affordable means in this case. For a family of four, or even a larger family – a family of five or six that needs a three-bedroom apartment – they will pay no more than \$1,247 dollars – \$1,247 dollars for a three-bedroom apartment in New York City. That's actually affordable for hardworking, struggling people. That's what's going to happen here.

I asked Shaydee about her old apartment. She told me, with pain in her voice, about the rats that were there all the time, about all the problems that went unaddressed. And then she showed me her new apartment. She's so proud of it. It's a whole new start for her and her family. It's a beautiful apartment. The folks at Fordham Bedford have done an amazing job giving this family the kind of housing they deserve to live in. And Shaydee said before this happened, she wanted to move – she desperately wanted to move. She wanted to find some place that she can live decently. She said now, now she invites everyone to come over and see her apartment because it's so beautiful and they're so impressed by the way she is living now.

We want to see a lot more stories like this across New York City as part of our affordable housing plan. And a lot of the people who are here today, who have made this possible, deserve recognition. I want to thank, of course, our housing commissioner – I'll turn to the right – our housing commissioner, Vicki Been; and our commissioner for the Housing Development Corporation, Gary Rodney. The two of them have been going all over the city making success stories like this happen. I want to thank the folks from Fordham Bedford – the

executive director, John Reilly; the senior project manager, Rosanna Viera. Thank you for your great leadership. I want to thank our elected officials who have been so supportive – Assembly Member Victor Pichardo and Council Member Fernando Cabrera.

It takes a village, and in this case, we were able to bring together people from elected life, the various city agencies, the neighborhood organizations, to make something happen here that was extraordinary and will really have a lasting impact. So again, an almost 100-year-old building – falling apart – was going to fail economically. It was just not going to be viable anymore. It was going to be sold. It was going to become market-rate housing. Now, it is affordable housing for years and years to come. Now, we have to do this all over the city because we have an affordability crisis. We have people all over this city who are being forced out of their neighborhood and cannot afford to live in the place they called home for decades or even generations. We have to fix that.

We also know that more than half of all New Yorkers spend 30 percent or more of their income on rent. Many spend more than 50 percent of their income on rent. That's not sustainable. We need to address what's going on. People's lives, economically – one of the best things we can do is to address their number one expense, which is affordable housing. There are some tenants in this building who make as little as \$25,000 dollars a year – \$25,000 dollars a year. You know how hard it is to get by in New York City on that kind of income. But here, it's going to be possible. This is a neighborhood where the median income is only \$34,000. This is a neighborhood where nearly 30 percent of families with young children are below the poverty line. This is a neighborhood that desperately needs affordable housing and it's happening.

There's four buildings as part of the Mount Sharon housing plan by Fordham Bedford. They are all 100 years old or so – total of 106 affordable units. That's 106 families whose lives will be changed positively and for decades to come – did not happen easily. The city invested over \$6 million dollars and also helped us secure over \$20 million dollars in private capital for these renovations to happen. Everything is being renovated – plumbing, electric, kitchens, bathrooms, windows, masonry. All of it had to be fixed – again, a building that had gone almost 100 years without any major renovation.

In exchange for all this investment, the developers are keeping this building affordable. Now, you know our plan for affordable housing is 200,000 units. But remember, 60 percent of that – 120,000 units – is achieved through preservation. This project here – a lot of you were out in Fort Greene – we showed you that co-op there – that low-income cop-op. There's so many examples where we're helping families stay in the homes they have right now. We're off to a strong start already. In our first 16 months in office – 11,000 units have been protected and will remain affordable. This is a beginning – there's a lot of other things we're going to be doing. We're going to be reaching more and more people. We're going to be using green-energy savings initiatives to find ways to make these buildings cost less for the people to run them – make them greener, make them more environmentally friendly, but also that being a way that we're going to invest in them, and keeping them affordable for the long-term.

We're working with tenants, we're working with landlords, we're working with community organizations, we're working with elected officials. Any place we could find a building that needs help, we're swinging in to do it. It is urgent because we have to keep this a city for everyone. Everyone knows this city, over the last decade, has been going in the wrong direction in terms of being less and less affordable for so many New Yorkers. It has to be a city for everyone or it won't be New York City anymore. And that's what we're doing with this initiative here today. Just a few words in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

So, with that I want to take questions first on this project on affordable housing. Then I have a second brief, brief set of remarks I want to give before we take off-topic. So first, on this project on affordable housing. Anything affordable housing? Anything related to this project here? Going once – going twice – okay.

So, before we go into off-topic I want to talk about the trip I'm embarking on tomorrow to Iowa and Nebraska. I've been invited to speak at Drake University in Iowa and at the University of Nebraska in Omaha. The topic of both speeches will be income inequality. And this is something that I'm going to speak about every chance I get, everywhere I go because this is a crisis facing our nation and facing our city. It's a profound crisis. It's a crisis that is not being addressed. And it is a dangerous, dangerous situation. Rarely, I think, in our history have we seen something so important go so under-recognized, go so enacted upon. And it's just getting worse and worse. And you'll remember in 2013, I said that we're living a tale of two cities. Well, it's happening all over the country. The income inequality crisis has gotten worse since I started talking about the challenges we face here. It's gotten worse, and yet no solutions. No serious solutions are on the table in Washington DC.

What does it mean for everyday people? For the median family in this country – their economic situation is worse today than it was 25 years ago. Their actual earnings per capita – their actual earnings adjusted for inflation are worse than they were 25 years ago. We've said that we're in a recovery from the Great Recession, but 95 percent of the income gain in that recovery has gone to the top one percent economically in this country. So, most people have gone backwards for years and years, and it's getting worse. And even as we see some economic progress, it's only going to one kind of people – the one percent. The statistics are overwhelmingly clear. We have the greatest income disparity since before the Great Depression, and it is literally getting worse. It has to be addressed. So I'm going to go around this country, talking about this problem, and I'm going to talk about the real solutions – progressive taxation; taxing the wealthy more so we can invest in infrastructure and education; tax fairness; closing loopholes, like the carried-interest loophole. I'm going to talk about the things we need to do to raise wages and benefits for everyday Americans and everyday New Yorkers.

All of these issues hit home here, especially with the cost of living in this city, with the amount of poverty we have in this city. All of these issues hit home here. Sadly, a lot of the solutions can only happen on the national level. And until we change the national discussion, we won't get the help we need for our fellow New Yorkers, nor will we change the course of this nation. So I'm going to use the bully pulpit I have to push this issue and to work with people who feel the same way. There are progressive leaders, elected officials, activists, union leaders all over the country who feel the same way and are going to join together to work on this issue. A group of us gathered at Gracie Mansion a couple of weeks ago to start this effort. We're going to be gathering in May with a larger group to announce what I call the progressive version of the famous Contract with America – a progressive vision for how we address income inequality and how we do it together. We're going to hold a presidential forum later in the year, specifically and only about income inequality because the issue is just not being addressed.

By the way, if you listen carefully you hear some of the Republican candidates starting to use language related to income inequality. You hear it – you heard it briefly from Mitt Romney. You hear it from time to time from Republican leaders like John Boehner and Paul Ryan. There's no solutions attached, but at least they're citing the problem. We need to get a national discussion going and we need to get to those solutions. And I will be adamant about doing everything I can to encourage this debate in this country and encourage real solutions for the people of the country, and especially for the people of this city.

With that – welcome your questions.

Question: Mr. Mayor, there was a lot of reaction to your appearance on Meet The Press on Sunday, and your non-endorsement of Hillary Clinton. Are you still not ready to endorse her? And if not, why? What are you waiting to hear from her?

Mayor: Not a lot has changed since Sunday morning –

[Laughter]

– it's Tuesday afternoon. But first, I don't think it's a surprise that this is the core issue to me. I've talked about it for years. And I've said Democrats and Republicans alike are not addressing this issue, and they need to. That's why we gathered progressive leaders at Gracie Mansion, because I think we all share the same concern.

What I said on Meet The Press I had said previously to Secretary Clinton and her team. And I don't think there's any surprise in it. But I think the important thing is we've got to have a discussion of the issues. And I believe we will. But until that time, I think it's perfectly fair for any leader or any American to say I'd like to hear what the vision is.

Question: Mr. Mayor, we're you surprised by some of the backlash to your comments on Meet The Press? Some other prominent Democrats have spoken out and said perhaps you should have endorsed Secretary Clinton. Congressman Sean Patrick Maloney today said on the radio that you should your head examined. So – just wondering if you were surprised by some of that backlash and what you make of it?

Mayor: Well, I'd like him to know I appreciate his concern for my health.

[Laughter]

I'm not surprised by much. For those who feel ready to endorse, that's their choice and that's absolutely fine. I said I want to hear a vision. I think that's a normal thing in the political process – to want to get a sense of where a leader is going. And I think we have an unusual situation here. And I said this a bit on Meet The Press, but I want to just amplify – here we have a very well-known leader, an incredibly capable leader, someone who I said on Sunday is more qualified for that office than the vast majority of people that have ran for it. But she hasn't spoken to a number of issues for years for good reason. She was secretary of state and not in a position to address domestic issues. And then, since then, she's been out of the public eye – hasn't been a public servant. This is the first time we're really going to get to hear her talk about a host of issues. And by the way, from the last time she was in the – her previous life – as a candidate for president eight long years ago, the Great Recession had just begun, we had no idea how bad it was going to be or where it was going; the income inequality crisis was bad, but nowhere near as bad as this, and certainly not as deep as this; the wealth going to the one percent was a challenge, but nowhere near as bad as it is today. This is a different country we're living in right now, and I think we need to hear a vision that relates to this time, not eight years ago – this time. And I think it's perfectly fair to ask of any candidate to do that. I'm optimistic by nature. I think she'll have a lot to say. But until she does, I think it's fair for people to wait to hear it.

Question: Do you think others have been too quick?

Mayor: I don't judge anyone's endorsement decisions. Everyone has their own standard. Jonathan?

Question: Following up on your remarks a moment ago, you said you mentioned to Secretary Clinton and her team that you were not ready to yet offer an endorsement. Could you tell us a little bit – did you specifically say that I'm not ready to endorse? Could you tell us when that conversation –

Mayor: Well again, I don't get into specific private conversations or tick-tocks. I simply said this – everything I said on Meet The Press I had said previously to Secretary Clinton and her team, that's it.

Question: Have you said specifically to her team just about what certain issues you're looking for her to address?

Mayor: I have said in an abundant – in an abundant and clear manner what I care about and what I think we need to address. It's the same things I've said publicly – progressive taxation; rising – raising wages and benefits; investment in infrastructure and education; the willingness to tax the wealthy so we have the resources to actually change the dynamic in this country. I've laid it out very, very clearly in a number of settings, including in those conversations.

Question: Mr. Mayor, what would you say to folks who say that the decision to take this wait-and-see approach is disloyal given your history with the Clintons? And can you tell us today that after she expresses her vision, given what you know about where she's stood on issues in the past, do you have every expectation that you will ultimately endorse her?

Mayor: Well, I appreciate the hypothetical question. I think you know how I feel about hypothetical questions.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: Yeah, so I'll just go backwards from the second part. The – I said on Meet The Press, I think she's done some not only extraordinary things in public service, but some very profoundly progressive things. I think our early work with the Children's Defense Fund was exceptional and way ahead of the curve. I think the work she did fighting for healthcare reform in 1993 was gutsy. It involved taking on the big insurance companies, and she paid a price for that. And I commend her for her bravery. And she was right by the way, she was decades ahead of the curve on that. But again, this is a new day where there's a whole new set of issues, and we need to hear answers on those issues. It's a perfectly normal thing. It's April of 2015 – this is an election that's a year-and-a-half away. And a candidate who has not been in the public eye in this sense for almost eight years, and we're still beginning to hear what she stands for. It's normal to want to hear more, and I look forward to that. What was the other part of your question?

Question: The first part was, a lot of people say that your decision to take a wait-and-see approach is disloyal given your history with the Clintons. What's your response to that?

Mayor: Not at all. I have tremendous respect for both Secretary Clinton and President Clinton. I've been honored to work with and for both. I think they've a lot of good for the country. But that being said, as someone who represents the people in New York City and is obligated to speak to the issues affecting our people – and obviously to the larger issues of the country that absolutely will determine the fate of this city as well – I think it's right to hold a standard that I think is the honest standard. If we don't address income inequality, it will be extraordinary harmful for New York City, it will be extraordinary harmful for this nation. We will start falling behind our competitors, we will start being a less and less fair and just society. It's not a sustainable path. I think that's more important than anything. The issues are what matters. The things that a candidate is here to do for the people are what matter. By the way, I think that's a lot of what she said, to her credit, in the opening video. It's not about personalities, it's candidates, it's about what we're going to do on behalf of the people. So, I have a lot of appreciation for all of the good things the Clintons have done, and I have a lot of appreciate for my friendship with them, but I need to know what the vision is in terms of serving the people.

Question: Beyond income inequality, are there other areas where you the secretary don't necessarily see eye-to-eye – aren't yet in-sync on?

Mayor: I don't know on that question. I just want to be clear because I always will lovingly tell you guys when I think there's a little editorialization in the question. I'm not saying I do or don't. I don't know what the vision is yet. I am always hopeful by nature, but I'd like to hear the vision. The issues I care about most, obviously, is income inequality. I can't speak to every other issue at this moment, but that's the thing I want to hear about. We'll do a couple more here and we'll come over to this side.

Question: Mr. Mayor, just a general question – do you consider yourself to be a loyal person when it comes to politics? And do you find it hard when you have so many different interests tugging at you to stay loyal to one side or another?

Mayor: I consider myself a loyal person in life, first and foremost, in terms of family and friends, and also, absolutely, in politics. But yeah, there's times when you might have a situation where you consider someone a friend and you have deep respect for them, but you still have a substantive issue you have to resolve, and it's incredibly serious for the future of the country. We're talking about the state of the United States of America. We're talking about the direction of this country at a time of crisis. And by the way, if we were talking about many other issues where something is happening – I mean, juxtapose this with climate change, which is also a profoundly dangerous situation. But on climate change you can actually point to some serious policy initiatives that are addressing the issues, such as the recent agreement with China. On income inequality, someone find me something that's come out of Washington DC in recent years to address income inequality. Good luck with that.

We're really starting from scratch in addressing this issue. So, that's what matters – the fate of this country, the fate of our people. And even when you have a deep friendship and appreciation for someone, you have to put the people first. Grace?

Question: Do you think the Democratic Party, and Hillary Clinton in particular, would benefit from a tough primary campaign – a primary [inaudible] challenge her

Mayor: What I've said – I appreciate the question. I got a variation of that from Chuck Todd, and I said I think what's happening here on this debate on income inequality – and some of the similar debates about our economic reality – is achieving some of the same effect as what happens in a primary. The questions are being raised, people want to see specifics – that's what happens in a primary process. I've believed for a long time that a primary is not either a panacea or, you know, necessarily a bad thing. I've seen some candidates who've benefited from primaries. I've seen some candidates where the primary undermined their larger goal. What we need here is a debate. And we need to consider where we're going on these issues. And I think that there's a good back and forth happening right now that's drawing out a lot of that.

Question: [inaudible] get back to [inaudible] when there are two people running against each other?

Mayor: No, I think that's one way of doing it. Again, I think – and I certainly believe progressives all over the country are raising to all candidates these questions right now. Remember, when we gathered at Gracie Mansion a couple of weeks ago – we're not just focusing on the presidential level, we're focusing on people running for senate, house, governor, it all counts. And we're not just focusing on Democrats, we're focusing on Democrats and Republicans. When we do our presidential forum later this year, it's going to be about income inequality and all will be welcome. We're going to welcome Republicans too because there has to be a national conversation and they have to be a part of it as well. Gloria – we'll go to Gloria and then we'll come over to this side.

Question: Mr. Mayor, you were much quicker to endorse Governor Cuomo. Many would argue [inaudible] far from progressive. Can you explain why you were so – why that quick endorsement was okay and you're not doing the same for Hillary?

Mayor: I think they're very – yeah, close relations with both – I think they're very different situations. At the time I made that decision last year, I had been working with Governor Cuomo throughout the year on a whole host of issues. We had achieved a lot for New York City. I had some disagreements with him in the course of that, but we achieved a lot. And remember, he agreed to a platform that I thought was very powerful, including that we would have a minimum wage increase with the ability of localities to add up to 30 percent more with indexing. We talked about the DREAM Act. We talked about a lot of things I thought were profoundly important to the future of the city. So, there were a lot of specifics on the table. I don't have to agree with him on everything to say that there was a very substantial platform, and that we had done a lot of work, and achieved a lot right then and there in that year. Now, obviously, I would like to see more from him on the minimum wage. That's an area where he's come in with a different proposal this year, and I'd like to see him go back to the original proposal he talked about last year. But I think they're very different situations.

Question: Mr. Mayor, some leading Democrats are now saying [inaudible] going on Meet The Press the very day she was announcing, going to Iowa when she's in Iowa [inaudible]. They say it's created a distraction from [inaudible]

Mayor: Well, I think that's wrong and I think it's inaccurate. Like you, I didn't know what day she was going to announce for president or go on a trip to Iowa. Even late last week, I think for most of us it was unclear what was happening. I had, first of all, made the plan to go on Meet The Press as a result of the meeting we had at Gracie Mansion back on April 2nd. And we had reached out to Meet The Press, and this was the day that worked with no reference to when Secretary Clinton was going to make her choice. In terms of the two university remarks, Tom Harkin asked me back last September at the Labor Day Parade to come and speak at Drake University, and we've been working on it for months. In terms of Nebraska, one of my dear friends in

this work, Jim Crouse, asked me years ago if the time was right to come out to Nebraska and speak at a program he had helped to create there at the University of Nebraska, which is obviously pretty close to Drake University. So, these pieces came together over the last few months. Look, the important thing is to talk about the issues, and that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to talk about income inequality. I'm going to challenge all our leaders on all levels to address it, and I think that's healthy .

Question: Do you think there were [inaudible] that the timing [inaudible]

Mayor: I can't speculate. I can only say this – the issues has to be addressed, and I hoped – even before this particular timing – that these conversations were going to take on more weight as we got closer to the election. So I hope people are paying attention because it's really about the fate of this country. If we don't address income inequality, we're in a very dangerous situation, and more and more Americans are going to fall behind. So, I hope whatever the next days – however the next days play out, I hope the issue comes to the fore. That's what we're working for.

Question: [inaudible] have you heard any reaction [inaudible] today about what you said on Meet The Press, or since you said it. And also, has anybody called you – any Democrat [inaudible]

Mayor: I haven't heard any reaction from them personally. As I said, everything I said on Meet The Press I had said previously to the secretary and her team. Different people have offered their comments, but nothing particularly unusual.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: I don't overrate it, Rich. I don't overrate it at all. I think I've been speaking to the issue of income inequality. I've been speaking to a number of issues that progressives care about in this country, as have a lot of other important leaders, including the folks who gathered at Gracie Mansion. As someone who's run for office, I think all support is helpful, all support should be valued, but I don't think, you know, any one endorsement is so life and death. So, I'm just going to make sure that I am doing everything I can to get this issue to the fore. I think there's a lot of people who feel the same way around this country. I think you're going to see progressives – more than they did in 2014, for sure – go to candidates for president, governor, senator, and demand answers on this issue. I think part of what this stems from is the sense that in 2014 a lot of Democrats ran away from the issue of income inequality – would not address it – and it really hurt this country, and it also lead to a lot of their supporters being unwilling to support them. They didn't hear any message – didn't hear any vision. They did hear anything that actually affected their lives. And so, I'm going to keep raising this point strongly, and I hope it has an impact.

Thanks, everyone. Oh, we're back – Grace?

Question: Can we hear a little about your – your reforms to Rikers Island, and specifically changes to the summons process – now there'll be data, to my understanding [inaudible] can track based on race, connected to summonses?

Mayor: Look, what we have found is, a lot of people end up on Rikers Island for the wrong reason. We – and this is a profound problem – because we're trying to reform our Department of Correction, we're trying to change the culture at Rikers, we're trying to reduce the violence levels, and it turns out we have a lot of people who shouldn't even be there in the first place, and then, as we discussed before, we have 40 percent of the folks in Rikers – 40 percent of the inmates have mental health problems that should have been addressed, potentially, much earlier in the process. So we're making a bunch of changes here. One of the changes is to recognize that if you do a set of reforms around bail and around summonses, you can actually keep a lot of people from going to Rikers in the first place – absolutely legally and appropriately. A lot of people end up there for – because they just don't have a very small amount of bail for a minor offense. We can do something about that. Our coordination with the district attorneys could be much stronger. The way we allow people to respond to summonses can be much easier and more flexible, which means more people will respond to their summons,

handle their problem through the summons process, and not have to go and be arrested by our officers. So, there's a host of simple things we can do to reduce the population at Rikers, and that will make it a safer place.

Thanks, everyone.

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