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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DISCUSSES ZADROGA ACT AT WTC HEALTH PROGRAM STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** I know it probably doesn't get the attention it deserves, but let me just thank you on behalf of the people in this city, particularly on behalf of the first responders, who you serve, and their families, who I know value your work so intensely. I want to thank our fire commissioner, Dan Nigro, and FDNY Chief of Department Jim Leonard for joining me. You'll hear from Commissioner Nigro in just a moment.

And the work of this steering committee – the World Trade Center Health Program Steering Committee has literally been a lifesaver. I don't think that's an overstatement. It's a lifesaver within the five boroughs and beyond. You've helped to ensure care for first responders and survivors of 9/11, many of whom developed medical and-or psychological issues following their exposure at the World Trade Center site. So, I think it's fair to say that you have served our heroes, and that has been a heroic act onto itself. I want to thank you for all you have done with your vital work for more than 72,000 – it's a figure I think needs to be talked about more often, and it certainly – you know, it needs to be heard more often in our nation's capitol. 72,000 9/11 first responders and survivors from across the country – they all depend on your work, and they also obviously depend on funding through the James L. Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act. And I know we are all frustrated in this room. We're all frustrated that such a crucial piece of legislation is now stalled. A gridlocked Congress let it expire at the end of September. A piece of legislation that so many people and so many families depend on – still hanging in the balance. And what does it mean for the good work you do? It robs you of the ability to perform your necessary and noble work, and therefore puts the health of tens of thousands of our heroes in jeopardy. It's as simple as that.

Congress must act now to remedy this unconscionable lapse in coverage, and to permanently reauthorize the Zadroga bill this year. Let's be clear, this should not be political [inaudible], this should not be something that has to be rethought year-in and year-out. It is necessary, so long as the need is there. So, we need a permanent reauthorization of the Zadroga bill. This would be the kind of thing that Congress could do that would begin to restore a bit of faith that people want to have in the federal government, but have had cause to doubt in recent years – here's one that I think should be one of the most universally agreed upon.

It's disappointing, to say the least, that people have been working now for months to save a bill that saves so many lives. The effort has been extraordinary and intense to ensure that the Zadroga bill is finally passed. It's disappointing, it's frustrating, but I do want to say there have been a lot of people who have stood up. You stood up. There have a number of people, including in Washington, who have made their voices heard. And it has been a bipartisan group, and this is part of why we should have some cause for hope, but part of why we should also realize that this bill has passed every measure – every conceivable standard that normally would lead to the quick passage of a piece of legislation. There's bipartisan support for the permanent reauthorization of the Zadroga bill in both the House and Senate – especially strong support from the New York delegation, and we thank them for that – and that is 100 percent bipartisan support. We see local leaders from all around the country, because there are leaders all around the country in both parties who understand that this is a patriotic issue, who understand that not only is what happened on 9/11 was – that it was an attack on the entire United

States of America, and therefore we owe it to the first responders and their families to be there for them. There's also a realization the first responders came from all over America – amazing fact – from 50 states, and from all but two of the congressional districts in this country – that's where the first responders came from. Obviously, the vast majority are from right here in our area, but people came in to be a part of it. It was a national response to an attack on our nation. And there's a lot of local officials on both sides of the isle who understand that, and they've been fighting side-by-side with us to get the bill reauthorized. The national police and fire unions have stood up strongly on this issue, and many of our local unions have been deeply involved in Washington. Lobby – in fact, today and tomorrow are lobby days in Washington where a lot of the union leadership, representing our men and women in uniform, are [inaudible].

It's amazing that the commonality of the cause is so clear, and yet we still have to fight for this legislation. But I believe, in the end, part of why there is such a common understanding across our country is people don't see the Zadroga Act as a political issue, they see it as a humanitarian issue, they see it as a patriotic issue. That's what everyday people think. They don't believe something as sacred as this should be caught up in the normal partisan back and forth. 9/11 was a day that everyone remembers. It's so intensely seared into our memory not just for those of us who were here who felt the smoke in the sky and knew people were lost, it was felt all over this country, and that is part of why there's a deep resolve around the country to be there for those who answered the call.

Remember what it felt like in those days after 9/11. Remember the confusion, the fear, the sense of having entered into a new era of unknown possibilities. We all weren't sure what was going to come next, and it was a time when we were tested, and the people who showed us the way where those first responders. The people who showed us resiliency, resolve, an unwillingness to give in to the enemy were those first responders, and they helped us all to begin to heal. They helped us all to become more resilient and to get back on our feet. And this country did unite. This country did have a clear sense of resolve in the weeks and months after. And it showed the world an indomitable American spirit.

First and foremost, we associate that with the first responders, with all the people who took part in the rescue and recovery. We have to honor what they did for us, and we have to honor the way they lead us through their actions. And that's why it's time for the permanent reauthorization of the Zadroga Act. We will always remember the example of the first responders – we won't forget it, and we won't forget what you all have done on their behalf – again, a quiet heroism of your own, being there for them.

You're doing your part. You're showing what it looks like to uphold our moral obligation to 9/11 first responders, to survivors, to the families. You're showing the way it must be done. Now it's time for Congress to do its part. And I can say, I will not rest – and I know so many people in this room will not rest – until Congress finally acts. We are committed to getting the Zadroga bill reauthorized, and we will not rest until it's done.

With that, I want to turn to someone who was so deeply affected by the events on that painful day. He was right there at the front. He lost his dearest friend that day. And despite all the pain, Dan Nigro was one of the people who helped the FDNY to regain its strength. And now, he is serving us brilliantly today as our fire commissioner – Commissioner Nigro.

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