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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY FOLLOWING
MINORITY AND WOMEN'S BUSINESS ENTERPRISE STAKEHOLDER MEETING**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Okay. So, we're going to first talk about the meeting we just had here, and take your questions on the topic of our M/WBE efforts. Then I'm going to give you a weather advisory, and then we will take questions on weather and everything else.

So let me start with the group we have here. It's a wonderful group of business leaders and advocates and activists who have really been, over years and years, driving forces in the effort to get the City of New York to do what it should do to support minority- and women-owned businesses. And I have watched with great concern for many, many years as the city left many opportunities on the table to promote and support and open the doors for real opportunity for these businesses. And the reason it's so important is that it creates economic opportunity that really reaches all over the city, all over the five boroughs, every kind of community.

I've talked plenty about the tale of two cities, and one of the ways that we address historic inequalities is to open up opportunity for folks who haven't had as much – and certainly have not had the kind of welcome and embrace from government that they deserved. That's why the M/WBE program of this administration is so important.

It has departed in many substantial ways from the previous administration's approach, and the one before that. And we're very proud of those efforts, but what's important is to work constantly with community leaders and business leaders who are at the forefront of the efforts to encourage and support minority- and women-owned businesses to give them every opportunity, including many that were denied to them in the past.

So I want to thank all the members of this group for the advice, for the encouragement, for the – the ideas they pushed us to act faster on. And it was a very, very productive meeting, and a group of people we'll be working a lot with going forward.

I want to acknowledge my colleagues from the city government – Maya Wiley, my counsel; Maria Torres-Springer, our Small Business Services commissioner; Lisette Camilo, our Director of the Mayor's Office of Contract Services; and Kerri Jew, the deputy commissioner at SBS. All of them of them have been leaders in the administration's efforts to correct a lot of these policies and make an impact in the short term.

As I said in the State of the City, we're very proud of some of the immediate progress made last year – \$690 million dollars in procurement through M/WBEs, a 57 percent increase from the year before – that's one indicator of progress; a lot more to be done.

We believe this will be the best – in the best interests of the future of New York City, not just in terms of fighting inequality, but also in terms of building a strong and diversified local economy. So these efforts fit our broader economic growth efforts as well.

We're going to be taking some important steps coming up. We're announcing that we will –tomorrow – release the RFP for the new disparity study. This is the methodology that will determine how we go about a lot of our efforts to support M/WBEs. It's an important reset moment for this administration – to create our own disparity study to get a real look at what is happening right now – where opportunity is and where it isn't – and that will help us have the framework from which to proceed.

We know that given how our laws work, this disparity study is the underpinning of everything else that we need to do – and we need an up-to-date and accurate disparity study to be able to advance these efforts. And we'll certainly be working with everyone around this table and many others beyond in that effort.

We will be seeking changes in state law as well. For us to be able to increase opportunities more consistently, pervasively for M/WBEs, we need more tools – tools that the state of New York does provide itself, but doesn't provide local governments. And we need to make that change so that we can do more to address to the inequality gap. And we have made clear to all of our friends and colleagues here that we're going to need their help in achieving those changes in Albany.

So, again, very productive meeting – important agreement on some of the things we need to do going forward – and we are focused on making real progress in this area.

So let's take questions on this first, and then we'll go to the other topics.

On the M/WBE efforts – yes –

Question: I'm curious, if in – in the conversation here, [inaudible] did you guys at all discuss the effects that a veteran-owned business procurement contract would have on [inaudible]?

Mayor: In terms of the discussion in the room, no. In terms of our priorities, we care deeply about a number of efforts we have to make to help our veterans. I talked about some of that in the State of the City remarks in terms of housing, but we also think employment opportunities are a crucial part of what we need to do to help our veterans. I don't know if anyone wants to add?

Commissioner Maria Torres-Springer, Small Business Services: SBS, in concert with the Mayor's Office of Contract Services and the Mayor's Office of Veteran Affairs – we actually have a road map for looking at veteran entrepreneurship across the city. So we'll be implementing over the course of the next several months a number of programs that help the veteran community get on a path to entrepreneurship.

Question: Well, do you feel that by having that other procurement [inaudible] – even for other disadvantaged groups – it would dilute the opportunities available for M/WBEs?

Maya Wiley, Counsel to the Mayor: No. I mean, the short answer is that – remember, first of all, that there are women and people of color who also veterans, so that, actually, should be a net gain. And no program that targets businesses that have been underutilized hurts businesses that are not those businesses. I mean, in other words, it's not a zero sum game – everyone has an opportunity. We spend a huge amount of money in this city to get the work of the city done. There's more than enough opportunity for everyone.

Mayor: On topic – yes?

Question: Mayor, can you talk a little but more about the disparity study and whether that's going to examine other parts of city government – whether there is still inequality there that you seek to rectify?

Mayor: I'll open and then turn to my colleagues who can give you more of the chapter and verse on the disparity study. We think there is inequality that we have to address in many, many forms. Obviously, we've tried to make sure in the top leadership of this administration that we have a leadership group that looks like New York City – that is an ongoing effort. We will continue – in everything we do with hiring – to look for opportunities to encourage opportunity for people of all backgrounds. In terms of our M/WBE efforts, we're going to be very clear with all agencies that we expect constant progress, and we expect them to recognize the need to work with M/WBEs in a way that is very, very different than in the past. So there's a lot of work we have to do, if you will, in our own house. But in terms of the study and what it means – who wants to take that?

Commissioner Maria Torres-Springer, SBS: The focus of the study is looking at the disparity between the availability of the M/WBEs in the market and their – and the utilization, or the number of contracts that are awarded to them. And so, it is – it is that basis and that discrepancy that will inform our efforts moving forward to the extent that we are looking to amend goals – I mean, really, our opportunity to reset the program to ensure that we use every lever in terms of contracting to address issues – issues of inequality.

Mayor: On topic – going once. Anything else? Going twice – okay, let me do this weather update for you. So, we've been to this movie before – subzero wind chills and dangerously cold temperatures expected tonight through tomorrow. So this problem we have – it's been a little bit off and on the last few days, but we all experienced a couple of those times when it really, really got cold. You could tell immediately the dangers that could come with that, particularly for folks who might have challenges – seniors and others. So, we really want people to take this seriously.

Again, here are the details – tonight, temperatures will be around 2 degrees – 2 degrees with wind chills 5 to 10 degrees below zero – so, 5 to 10 below tonight. Tomorrow, the high will be 20 degrees during the day – wind chills between 5 and negative 5 – around 20 degrees also going into the evening Tuesday. Wind chills will be a little bit better then – the wind will calm down as we go into the evening, at least, based on what we know at this point. So it's really the next 24 hours, plus – very, very cold – dangerously cold out. People should minimize their exposure.

We are not, at this moment – I emphasize the words “at this moment” – seeing a lot of prospect of snow – a low chance of snow showers predicted for Tuesday night into Wednesday, with very limited accumulation. But as I like to preach, that is something we check constantly – it can change rapidly but, right now, thank God, not a problem. A key point with this kind of bitter cold – stay indoors if you can. Limit your time outside. I will keep saying this one about 3-1-1 – if anyone doesn't have heat and hot water, call 3-1-1. Call early, don't call late – let people know – let 3-1-1 know immediately if you have a problem so we can act on it. And again, please, please check in on your neighbors. If you've got any neighbors – seniors, folks who may have an illness, anyone who may need particular help – please check in on them and offer them that help.

With that, questions on weather or anything else. Two categories – weather and anything else – go ahead.

Question: This is about the race for the congressional seat that's open. It's going to be on the fifth of May. Just wondering your opinion – you've worked with him – of Vinny Gentile. He's going to be the Democratic nominee.

Mayor: I think Vinny's a great public servant. I've known him almost 20 years, and I think he has a lot to offer that district.

Question: How concerned are you that the funding for the Department of Homeland Security is going to run out? How frustrated are you? And are you taking any precautions?

Mayor: Very concerned, very frustrated – this should be something that is above the partisan fray. This is literally a matter of protecting our nation. And I am going to remain hopeful that cooler heads will prevail and

this will get resolved by the end of the week. I think the difference – if it is not resolved, there’s a big difference between short term and long term. In the short term, I think, you know – again, particularly in New York City’s case, we have a lot of tools to protect ourselves, but I think if this is not resolved by Friday or soon after, it starts to undermine the defense of this nation. It becomes a huge problem. So again, I hope – I hope cooler heads will prevail.

Question: Mr. Mayor –

Mayor: Wait – over here first. I’m sorry.

Question: Am I correct in understanding that you have no objection to religious organizations holding prayer meetings or services in public schools and other public facilities owned by the city of New York? And if I’m correct about that, will you explain to me why you have no objection, and why the city is still defending in court the defense for allowing the city to prohibit such activity?

Mayor: I’ll have the – the law department can answer your second question – and it is a very convoluted answer, I can tell you upfront. It’s a complicated, technical answer, but we’ll happily give you that. On the first, let me say it in my own words – this issue I’ve worked on for a number of years. And it was brought to me originally by folks up in the Bronx who had had the right to have, not just their services – their faith services – but also to do a variety of charitable work and community work in public school buildings that they rented, that they had waited on a waitlist to rent, and then they were being told they would no longer be able to do that because of the change in the city’s approach. I thought that was wrong. I thought these were important parts of the fabric of the community. And so, my message has been simple. What I believe in is that there is a single standard for everyone. You’re talking about a public school building – there’s almost always a waitlist for the opportunity to rent the space – the rent has to be the same as it would be for any other nonprofit – but just because a group is a faith group, I don’t think they should be excluded. And I think a lot of faith groups play a crucial role at the community level.

Question: But do you see a distinction between a group using it for prayer and for a religious service, and a group using it for a basketball league –

Mayor: Again, this is something that, for years and years, went on in our schools without contradicting the separation between church and state – based on a group having to apply, having to wait its turn on line, having to pay rent. In that context, I’m absolutely comfortable.

Question: Police officers have criticized the new training, with one saying he was instructed to close his eyes and breathe deeply in a tense situation. What are your thoughts on that? Is that something that needs to be looked at?

Mayor: What paper was that in again?

[Laughter]

Mayor: Sorry, what paper?

Question: It was in the Post.

Mayor: The New York Post! And interestingly, all of the sources were unnamed, which the New York Post seems to prefer. So, I don’t think I’m being presented with anything in those reports but some disgruntled individuals. We are at Commissioner Bratton’s – with Commissioner Bratton’s vision, we are retraining our police officers. This is the single most accomplished police leader in the United State of America – who turned around the crime situation in New York City, then went to Los Angeles, turned it around again, then came here

– pushed down crime further here, even after, thank God, crime had been going down already. He believes – and I couldn't agree more with him – that retraining our police officers in how to work more closely with the community and how to deescalate violence is absolutely crucial to the future of this city and to our ability to fight crime, because we need a different and better relationship between police and community in a lot of our neighborhoods. That's what's going on here. The Post persists in taking some unnamed individuals and trying to cast dispersions on a program created, again, by the greatest police leader in the country. I am just – I don't buy into that. It's ridiculous. What we have heard, based on the initial training sessions – I went to one – I think a number of you were there – where we saw important work going on to teach officers how to approach an arrest in a smart and careful way – what we've heard from the internal work being done to survey officers is actually a lot of satisfaction, that there's a lot of value added in this training. And, like everything Commissioner Bratton and his team does, it's something that will be worked on constantly and be added to and improved over months and years. So I have total faith in this approach.

Question: Are you saying that that hasn't taken place in the training? Or that that's not something that police are instructed to do?

Mayor: I – I am not in the training sessions. You can ask the NYPD about the specifics of the training. I'm saying I believe the training is important and valuable and it's going to have a transcendent effect. And it doesn't surprise me that people who oppose change are trying to find any conceivable disgruntled individual who opposes change to speak out against it. And frankly, it just doesn't represent much. The fact is a vast majority of our officers are looking for ways to work more closely with the community, and understand that this training can be a valuable part of it.

Question: [inaudible] terrorism threats in Minnesota, and Canada, and England, and [inaudible] English and Spanish version [inaudible]?

Mayor: I can't do Spanish today. I apologize. I need to warm up, but – in every way – that was a weather and language statement. Look, we take every threat seriously. And I could not agree more with Secretary Johnson when he says that – that we take every threat seriously. Everywhere in the world, NYPD and our intelligence division is constantly monitoring and making adjustments in our approach all the time. That being said, we do not have a specific and credible threat directed at New York City right now. But I always remind people, we're on such a – in such a state of readiness and vigilance every single day – literally everyday – that we feel ready for anything that we may encounter, even on very short notice. But thank God, no specific or credible threat related to this new information.

Question: Just a follow up to another question that was asked – if Councilman Gentile asks you to actively campaign with him, would you? And do you think that your help would be helpful – do you think it would be appreciated on Staten Island and in southern Brooklyn?

Mayor: I would be happy to. I leave it up to him to decide what works best for his campaign.

Question: Hey, Mr. Mayor. The Lunar New Year started five days ago. Normally, during this time of the year, we often get greetings from the Mayor's Office, translated in Chinese sometimes to publish for our readers. And some mayors – the previous mayors also attended the New Year's Parade, which was yesterday. We didn't see you there and we didn't see a greeting.

Mayor: I – I know I recorded a greeting, and I don't know if that has gone out yet, but we certainly – if we haven't put out one, we will right away. We certainly want to honor this important moment. I have had the honor of being at some of the parades and events in the past, and I'm certain will be in the future. There were some family activities this weekend, but in general, it's something I've done and look forward to doing in the future.

Question: This morning, Governor Cuomo termed the relationship between you and the governor as the best or greatest mayor-governor relationship in modern political history.

[Laughter]

Do you share that view? And what's your reaction to that?

Mayor: I do not have enough sense of modern political history to fully analyze, because I – I don't know enough, honestly, about the relationships between the – the particular governors and mayors. I've said many times, I've known the governor now almost 20 years – good working relationship, and I think we've gotten a lot done.

Question: On a related note, are you planning to spend some time with the governor on Wednesday during your trip to Albany? And I guess, you know, what are you hoping to come away with after the morning's testimony?

Mayor: Yes to the first question. In terms of the testimony, I think – look, it's an opportunity to lay out what New York City is doing right now, what our city government is doing, and how it connects to the needs that Albany can support us in. And what's clear to me is we – we have a lot of areas where, if Albany supports us, we can get a lot more done for the people of this city. If Albany doesn't, it's just that much harder. And then there's some areas, like education funding, where there's historical realities that need to be addressed very squarely in terms of fairness and equity and funding. So we'll be reviewing all that, and – and, you know, as with any other testimony, hopefully it – it is well received and helps frame the thinking of our legislators.

Phil: Time for one more. Sorry.

Mayor: You don't even have one more, Walzak – oh, wait – wait, I saw a hand back there. I see a hand. Come forward, please. [Laughs]

Questions: Now, regarding HUD and [inaudible] Sandy funds, why is it taking so long to get federal rebuilding money to people?

Mayor: I would say – I haven't read the specifics of the report earlier today, but in general we feel very good about our relationship with HUD. And we feel very good about the progress we've made in terms of Sandy recovery – over 1,000 construction starts, over almost 2,500 now reimbursement checks. You know, we've moved a very aggressive effort, and it is succeeding increasingly, with greater and greater speed. So, I think, given that track record, we are going to be able to resolve any outstanding issues with HUD. I feel, you know, very hopeful that any concerns can be addressed well.

Thanks, everyone.

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