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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO ANNOUNCES TARGETED RAT
EXTERMINATION AT 10 NYCHA DEVELOPMENTS**

Mayor de Blasio: Thank you Marisol. Well Marisol is saying what we have heard from not only NYCHA residents but we've heard from New Yorkers in some of the neighborhoods that are really hit hard by the problem of rats. Some of the NYCHA developments hit very hard, and as I said New Yorkers who don't live in NYCHA also feel this very, very deeply. And I was talking to Councilmember Reynoso coming in about how much this is the kind of thing that his constituents care about. And I think Marisol said it really simply and powerfully, you know, if you can't go out and have your kids on the playground because there are rats, something is fundamentally wrong. That's no way for people to live.

So today we're talking about a whole different strategy that we think is going to make a huge difference in Marisol's life and the life of her neighbors here at Bushwick Houses and in the entire community. Now we're going to talk about how to eradicate rats. This is a tough fight. Unfortunately our city – we love our city but our city is associated for many generations with the problem of rats. So a lot of people have tried to win this war haven't succeeded. But the good news is we have some new weapons. We have a new approach that we think is going to make a huge difference.

And we have some good people who are fighting this battle and I think they are the unsung heroes of the war against rats. So I want to thank them. First and foremost, our Deputy Mayor for Operations Laura Anglin who has really made this a central mission for her team, to focus on how, once and for all, to defeat the rat problem in New York City. Second, I want to thank one of the great experts, and she's been doing extraordinary work with her colleagues at the Department of Health. She's the Director of Neighborhood Intervention for Pest Control Services, Caroline Bragdon. Thank you so much. And of course, the Sanitation Department plays a crucial role. I want to thank the Chief for Brooklyn North from Sanitation, Jarrit Scotti. Thank you to you and to all of your colleagues who are fighting this war.

Now, what Marisol said, this is a daily challenge for so many people. And it's something that people have gotten used to and we don't want them to be used to it. We don't want people to think this is something that's acceptable, because it's not acceptable. The reality for so many people in this city is you wake up in the morning, you go out on your way to work or school, and

a rat crosses your path. That's like your good morning New York, right? There's a rat right in the middle of your life. You don't want that. It's not acceptable. We don't want to live that way. We don't want to have kids on the playground think it's normal to see a rat on the playground. It's not normal. It's not acceptable.

And our vision is how to get to the core of this problem. This is what we're talking about today. Not just exterminating. Extermination is something you have to do but it doesn't solve the problem. We want to go a lot deeper. Now you guys were out there, a lot of you before, seeing the demonstration with the dry ice. This is a whole other approach, and one we've been waiting to use for a long time and we're finally getting to put into this battle. And we think it's going to be a game changer.

Here's the reality when you think about it. We've talked a lot about wanting to make sure this city is all it can be. We love our city very deeply. New Yorkers are so proud. We believe, and we believe for good reason, this is the greatest city in the world. Well we want to make sure that the greatest city in the world is the worst place on Earth for rats. That's the bottom line. We want to make this place that was too easy for rats to live in the worst possible place for rats to live. And it comes back to this new plan we put in place.

So we announced last year a \$32 million attack on the rat problem. And it's very clear, I want to make sure everyone understands this, you can't just exterminate your way out of the problem. You have to go deeper, and that's why we're going at the root of the problem which is where the rats live and where their food comes from. You got to go at all three realities – the food, where they live, and you also have to exterminate on top of that. This is what you're going to see us do more and more from this point on.

Today we're announcing a major step in this fight, and it begins with a massive extermination campaign underway right now in key NYCHA developments. We are focusing on the ten developments that have had the worst rat problems in the city, and there's going to be wall to wall extermination going on, a very intensive effort. But that's just the beginning.

Much more important is going to the root of the problem, and that's going at the burrows – and that's spelled in this case B-U-R-R-O-W, not like the five boroughs, the burrows where the rats live. And the new tool, the new weapon we have is dry ice. You saw that demonstration. Dry ice is the rat's worst enemy. And we have been seeking the opportunity to use it. We needed certain approvals to do it. We got them, and now we're in action with the dry ice. It's going to make a huge, huge difference.

That is a crucial part of this strategy, but we've also got to take away the food that the rats eat, and that means we have to handle trash differently. So we're going to distribute in these NYCHA buildings new trash bins that will help the residents – when they put the trash in the chute to make sure all the trash goes down the chute, nothing is left out on the floor, nothing spills over and becomes – thank you. Thank you Vito. This – we love a good visual. This is the new very sleek trash bin and when residents use this they can put the trash right into – whoa – they can put the trash right into the chute and it will not have any of the trash spill over and it will keep –

General Manager Vito Mustaciuolo, NYCHA: Maybe we'll present this to Marisol?

Mayor: Marisol would you like your brand new trash bin?

Marisol Robles: Yes. This is very nice.

Mayor: You're supposed to say it's every girl's dream.

Robles: Oh, and it's every girl's dream. It's my favorite color.

Mayor: Excellent. Thank you – thank you Vito.

So that's another big part of the strategy. The last part of the strategy, and this one blew me away when I first heard it, I could not believe my ears.

The last part of the strategy is to cover over and put cement where there used to be dirt floors in NYCHA buildings. So the basements of some NYCHA buildings – this is how long ago these buildings were built – the basements of some NYCHA buildings are dirt basements. There's nothing between the rats and the rest of us but dirt. So these big dirt basements in a place where a lot of people live, where there's a lot of trash, it's like the penthouse apartment for rats. It's like the perfect environment for rats. I don't know how decades and decades passed and these basement floors were never covered over. I don't understand how that is possible, but that is, in fact, the reality.

So the plan we have: we'll cover all of them, we'll make sure that there's cement under all of these buildings so there's no long dirt floors anywhere. We'll do half of them this year, the rest will be done next year. There will be no longer any dirt basements in these NYCHA buildings when we're finished. And that's going to close off one of the most important paths that rats use to get into the buildings and to do such horrible things in terms of peoples' lives.

So, look, I want to be very, very clear, long battle ahead against rats. They've been here a long time, they've been a bad part of New York City life, but we finally are figuring out some of the fundamental solutions. We finally have some of the tools we need and some of the weapons we need, and we're going at it with all we've got because we want to end the rat problem.

We don't want Marisol and her family to see rats. We don't want anyone in NYCHA or any New Yorkers to have to deal with rats. And if we can prove that this strategy works here in one of the developments that has had the biggest problems, we will then be able to apply the same strategy all over this city.

So we're very, very excited about what this means today. This is a beginning – major step towards a rat free life for New Yorkers. And Marisol you deserve it, and all of your fellow residents deserve it.

Let me just say a few words in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

Free of rats – that is the city we want.

And I want to now turn to a man who is battle tested in the fight against rats. In his previous work at the Housing Department Vito had to lead the way many, many times to get landlords to fix their buildings and make them decent and habitable for people. And many a time that meant taking on the rats. He is a proven rat fighter. The new General Manager of the Housing Authority and someone who is up to the task at hand, General Manager Vito Mustaciulo.

General Manager Mustaciulo: Thank you very much. Hopefully there's no correlation between you announcing me as the General Manager and the topic?

Mayor: Yes, we didn't plan that.

[Laughter]

General Manager Mustaciulo: Appreciate that. So good afternoon everyone and thank you for joining us here today at Bushwick Houses home to over 2,800 NYCHA residents. Mr. Mayor, welcome back to Bushwick Houses, I understand that this is not your first time here.

Mayor: Correct.

General Manager Mustaciulo: As a matter of fact in 2016 the Mayor was here for the completion of over 300 LED new light fixtures that were installed under MAP, which resulted in a 21 percent reduction in crime here at Bushwick. In addition to this particular center, you also announced that we had extended hours, so those were two major announcements, this being the third. So welcome back to Bushwick –

Mayor: Thank you –

General Manager Mustaciulo: - Houses.

Mayor: Yes, not the neighborhood, the houses. We are officially in Williamsburg –

General Manager Mustaciulo: Yes we are.

Mayor: Someone has got to figure that one out, but that's okay.

General Manager Mustaciulo: So I can't begin to tell you how excited we, at NYCHA, are about today's announcement. Mr. Mayor, your commitment to improving the lives of all New York City residents, especially residents of public housing, is unprecedented and it isn't just about providing dollars, it's actually about getting work done. And I believe last week we did another event where we highlighted the work of another capital – capital investment that you provided NYCHA for new roof replacements.

So, and here today, as we witnessed, work is being done with the money that you are providing to NYCHA. That work translates into better living conditions and a better quality of life for all of our residents but to my colleagues at the New York City Department of Health and to the New York City Department of Sanitation, I cannot thank you enough for your continued support and to Councilmember Reynoso, as always you've been a real true partner and a supporter in all that I've been doing, thank you.

So our announcement and our commitment today is to be a real partner in the Mayor's Rat Reduction Program, addressing conditions in ten developments, identified by the program, our goal is to reduce the rat population by 70 percent. Wouldn't it be great if we can e – rat – icate, rats entirely?

Unknown: That was a dad joke.

General Manager Mustaciuolo: You had to throw one in there, I'm sorry.

Mayor: Don't give up your day job, Vito.

[Laughter]

General Manager Mustaciuolo: So to be clear though, our staff, our exterminators, our caretakers, have been doing an incredible job, and if I can, there are a number of NYCHA staff here that I would really like to recognize them all for their incredible efforts. So if the NYCHA staff could please raise your hands or stand up –

Mayor: Stand up, stand up NYCHA staff –

General Manager Mustaciuolo: It's important to recognize them.

[Applause]

General Manager Mustaciuolo: So the application that we – that you just saw today of the dry ice is a humane, EPA approved treatment that we will be using at each of the ten developments that the Mayor mentioned. But treatment alone is not enough. Rats labs, as the mayor mentioned, where dirt floors exist, new interior and exterior compactors, as well as new bulk crushers are all on the way thanks to the Mayor's commitment and the money he has provided us.

Resident participation in the form of the new trash receptacles will also assist us on the war on rats, that we will be providing trash containers to each of the households in the ten developments, and just in conclusion, sir, I wanted to just personally thank you not only for your support of the NYCHA residents, the NYCHA staff, but also to me personally. It's been a real pleasure and honor to work under you and thank you for the new appointment.

Mayor: Well, Vito, thank you, you are the right man for the job and as I've said I spent most of the last ten years I've worked with Vito very closely, in different capacities, and he's a legend in City government for getting things done and for taking on previously bad landlords and making

them actually have to take care of people's apartments and buildings. You are exactly the right man for the job so I'm so happy that you will be the General Manager going forward.

And I want to thank also all the NYCHA staff, I've said many times, your job is not easy, you've done extraordinary work, you had a really tough winter, you kept things going despite tough, tough odds and old equipment, you guys did a great, great job and I want to thank everyone. And you know, it may seem like thankless work, but let me be one of the people to say thank you to all of you for what you do.

I want to turn now to Councilmember Antonio Reynoso. He has been a big ally in this effort, a big booster of what we're doing here, he also has been the sponsor of a crucial piece of legislation that will help us fight the rat problem and he's an expert because he spent four years as the chair of the Sanitation Committee, so he knows a lot about what it takes to keep this city clean. Tough job, but we are finding a way, Councilmember Antonio Reynoso.

...

Mayor: I like that. I like that vision brother. Thank you very, very much. Alright we're going to take questions about today's announcement and then we are going to go to other topics after, right back there.

Question: Mr. Mayor, is there someone who can explain the – how the dry ice works?

Mayor: Sure.

Question: We did see the rat scurry out in the hall and I'm wondering if there are going to be dead rats around just lying on the street? Or how does it – what happens?

Mayor: We have the ultimate expert, one of New York City's great rat fighters.

Director Caroline Bragdon, Neighborhood Interventions for Pest Control Services, DOHMH: So, my name is Caroline Bragdon. I'm the Director of Neighborhood Interventions for Pest Control Services at the Health Department.

Question: Spell the last name please?

Director Bragdon: My last name is Bragdon, B-R-A-G-D-O-N. So the way that dry ice applications work is that, first of all typically you'd do multiple applications over time, the dry ice is inserted into the rat burrow where rats are living, then you would cover the burrow and as the dry ice evaporates they are asphyxiated and they die. You may have to go back for a series of applications, as in that rat escaped, you know they will go back to their nest at a later time, you come back the next day and do another application.

Question: So the idea is they die underground?

Director Bragdon: Exactly. In their nest and decompose there.

Mayor: And how quick – how to just clarify – how quick from – because I heard it outside but I'd like you to describe it. If they are in the burrow and the dry ice is put in and they get exposed to the fumes or whatever you would describe it, how quickly does it all happen?

Director Bragdon: Maximum, a couple hours, but really not a long time at all. So, it's a short amount of time that they will pass away and then whichever rats escaped or wherever the application isn't working, you would come back the next day and do a second application. You would continue that series until no burrow open up again or until the burrows are eliminated.

Question: About, because a year ago when you had the initial kick off in Chinatown one of the things that was rolled out than were the trashcans the State closed when they are in use, and almost immediately following that press conference I remember seeing pictures New Yorkers posted on Twitter in parks of those trashcans being full and then garbage being loaded up next to them. So, do you have any update on how successful that has been working, I know that's been sort have been a broader part of the rat reduction program and how, you know, measures like these trash bins, etcetera, they only go so far when trash is piling up?

Mayor: So I'll start and I'll turn to the Deputy Mayor. The – so first of all I wanted separate that, that's a very good question but I want to separate the sort of strategic approach here is somewhat different because here we have the problem of the basement floors, we have the problem of the trash chutes that needed to be addressed, and obviously we are using the dry ice because we have very specific sites that we can use that in. So that's the thrust here.

On that previous part of the announcement, remember the notion of those bins is they compact, so they have a lot more capacity than a typical bin, but we also – it's on us to make sure that if for any reason that they need more frequent pick-ups, or we need more trash bins, that we keep up with that. So, Deputy Mayor.

Deputy Mayor Laura Anglin: That's it exactly. We saw the same thing, especially in certain parks with high population and visitors, so we work with the Parks Department to do more pick-ups, they had more staff that they hired, and we will do the same thing this summer. We also do it on intersections where we know are very busy with tourists or workers, so we are monitoring that and we deploy as needed.

Mayor: Okay, yes, Erin?

Question: This is part of the \$32 million, do you have how much specifically is being spent on the ten NYCHA developments?

Mayor: Laurie, you want to speak to that?

Deputy Mayor Anglin: I don't have the exact number on the ten NYCHA developments but we can get that back.

Mayor: So within the 32?

Deputy Mayor Anglin: Within the 32 – oh, I’m sorry. So with NYCHA, \$16.3 million is being invested in rat pads, and then \$8.8 million for the interior compactors, exterior compactors, and bulk crushers – so roughly \$16.3 million plus \$8.8 million.

General Manager Mustaciuolo: So if they can add to that, what that equates to, that’s 42 rat pads in the developments that the Mayor mentioned that currently have dirt floors. That’s 228 interior trash compactors, 43 exterior trash compactors, and 5 exterior bulk crushers, and they are all on the way.

Mayor: Amen, amen. Yes?

Question: Okay, we’re live on Facebook again, big complain among our viewers, and they are all listening and watching. Now we were at the [inaudible] Houses yesterday, you know, rats are taking over their development, 30 buildings strong, from those here at [inaudible], what is taking so long? I know \$32 million, ten developments, but so many people right now need this. What’s the strategy after the ten developments?

Mayor: Well, we want to make sure this strategy works and if it works, we are going to go further. It’s – costs real money, we have to make sure we have the money to support it, but our goal is take this approach and spread it as widely as possible.

Question: Is it a health hazard in these communities?

Mayor: The rats or the dry ice?

Question: Rats.

Mayor: It’s very clear, I think you heard my opening, we don’t think rats are acceptable. We have to make sure this strategy works and if it works we are going to take it a lot farther.

Question: Mayor de Blasio, good afternoon.

Mayor: Good afternoon.

Question: Two quick questions, first of all how did you identify these ten developments, what type of “rats census” is there? Or how did you assess the number of rats at each of these developments. And secondly, you alluded to the approval process that which you all are able to institute the dry ice, [inaudible].

Mayor: Yeah, I’ll turn to the Deputy Mayor on how the assessment was done and where the biggest challenges were, and obviously the General Manager as well. I just wanted to finish the approval, I mentioned, you know, I think this was true when we made the original announcement that Grace eluded, we have been wanting to use the dry ice, we needed – I think it was EPA approval, is that right?

Deputy Mayor Anglin: It was, we had to get EPA approval.

Mayor: Right, and that's been a game changer, now we have the formal ability to use this on a wide scale.

Deputy Mayor Anglin: So if you – just on following up on that Mayor, if you recall a couple years ago we started use dry ice along with Boston and a couple other cities, hugely successful until the EPA found out about and said that is not a registered pesticide, you cannot do that anymore. So when the Mayor asked us to look at how we could create a program, we said it's been a couple of years, let us go try ask the EPA if they would work with us on this, so we worked with the State Department of Environmental Conservation, and I've never seen something get approved so fast and allowed to be registered as 'rat ice', which is what it is registered at, and the manufacturer said we weren't prepared to produce it. So it took us a little – we got a little bit delayed, but it was very superfast to get that done.

Question: Is it done now?

Deputy Mayor Anglin: Oh it's done now.

Question: [Inaudible].

Deputy Mayor Anglin: Oh I think it was about eight months maybe? It wasn't that long, but we were so excited we got it done immediately so I think that was just one thing they wanted add on top of that. So the next – back up question was?

Question: Rat census.

Deputy Mayor Anglin: So, you know, we look at burrow counts is a big thing also surveying, you know, residents. And I'll turn it over to Caroline, but when we talk about these ten developments there is over 60 that are within this program, but we chose these ten highlight an alternative – over to Caroline – to discuss how that process occurred.

Director Bragdon: Yeah, so back in June and July when we were preparing to launch the Neighborhood Reduction Plan, Health Department deployed inspectors to survey 62 NYCHA developments and we used those surveys to determine those that had the highest burrow counts but also other signs of rat activity.

Question: How many rats do you think are in a development like this one?

Director Bragdon: You can't really do a rat census, there is no way to count rats, what we do is count burrows and burrow systems. So in any burrow system there could be anywhere from zero to 12 rats living there, so you can estimate the number of rats in the location.

Question: How many burrows then?

Director Bragdon: Right now they've actually have made huge strides at this development already. They started off with a burrow count of 129 and they are way, way down, I think we were at 19 in our April survey. So -

Question: So 129 is pretty much the average for the ten?

Director Bragdon: 129 burrow systems were counted, we usually get - kind of guestimate there could be about ten rats per burrow -

Mayor: No, the question was when you think about the ten developments -

Director Bragdon: Oh I see.

Mayor: It's 129, would you say that's typical, if you had to do your best to estimate, or high, low -

Director Bragdon: You know I would say NYCHA developments range massively in size, so as the Councilmember noted, Highland is one building, Marcy is - Marcy Houses - which is another one of our priority sites is many, many more buildings than that. So it really depends on the size of the development.

Mayor: This one started again at 100 ...

Director Bragdon: 129 burrow in June -

Mayor: June, in June last year, and what now do you think?

Director Bragdon: 19.

Mayor: 19 left, so -

Director Bragdon: Due to this -

Question: Dry ice has been used [inaudible] -

Director Bragdon: It's not just dry ice, it's all the efforts that NYCHA staff have made in terms of cleaning, garbage management, traditional burrow baiting, rodenticide treatments, and overall infrastructure and maintenance.

Question: [Inaudible] I'm sorry, just feel comfortable giving a range of these, like of burrows so they know they vary in size, so we can kind of aggregate that for our [inaudible] you know, what's the range of burrow count -

Mayor: Let me say this one, this - I ask the same kind of questions when I'm in budget meetings and things. What's the least you've seen at one of the NYCHA developments that we are focused on, what's the most you've seen?

Director Bragdon: The least is zero to five burrows. Most is 800 plus.

Mayor: 800 in a really big development.

Director Bragdon: Yes.

Mayor: But the amazing thing, this example here, to go from 129 to 19 in less than a year, I want to emphasize, is also taking away the food. This is really important to the equation, because they won't stay if there is no food. I mean you can use the dry ice, it's extraordinary, but also if there is no food, that's another sure way to get rid of them. I just want to say that's an extraordinary success rate.

Deputy Mayor Anglin: It is, and if I could just add to that, sir, is our goal when we created this program last year it was by the end of 2018 we wanted to see a 70 percent reduction across the three rat mitigation zones and we've already achieved that here. So we are ahead of the game and like Caroline said, it's due to the new technologies that we have as well.

Question: I'm wondering if I might be able to talk to Marisol again quickly –

Mayor: She's sitting right here.

Marisol Robles: Hi.

Question: Sorry to put you on the spot, thank you so much but –

Robles: You're welcome.

Question: Can you describe again what it's like for you to raise your child in an environment where this is a concern? And do the rats ever come inside the building, inside your apartment? What is your daily life like?

Robles: Okay so they have never been in the building or in my apartment but when I go outside I joke a lot about how much I have to stay on Instagram because just in case one of these huge rats kidnap me they know where I am. You know, they know what happened. But they are like ferocious. It's like a rabbit had a baby with a wolf.

[Laughter]

And it's scary because it's like you stare them down, you're stomping and they are like, what? And it's scary and something, anything needs to be done, you know?

Question: Do you notice fewer rats around in the last –

Robles: I have but it's like they are not in front of my building directly, like they move to a better location where the park is. You know swings, slides, more food, and family orientated. So

it's like I said, it's better in front of the building but you know then where are the kids going to play? You know –

Question: [inaudible]

Robles: Robles.

Question: Is it with an I or a Y? Marisol?

Robles: An I. Almost forgot.

Mayor: Spell it out. Spell it out

Robles: M-A-R-I-S-O-L and my last name is R-O-B-L-E-S.

Mayor: Hold on, let's get people who haven't had a chance. Go ahead.

Question: Mayor, what do we [inaudible] about outside when the rat appeared to get away, considering –

[Inaudible]

When the worker [inaudible] tried to step on it. I think another one tried to kill it –

Mayor: I like their – I give them an A for effort. I [inaudible] those are gamers, they want to get that rat.

[Inaudible]

I liked what they were doing. I was like you know, look if you are putting poison into the burrow it makes sense that the rat might try to escape and I like the fact that they used whatever they had to try and get that rat but you know – the bigger fact is I heard all of these specifics for the first time of you know, once you put that dry ice in there, rats are not going to live through it. You know if they get exposed to it, they ain't coming back. And that was very reassuring to hear. Rich.

Question: So, not to get too far into the weeds on the chemistry but what is dry ice made of? And what gas is admitted when it evaporates? And is this the same kind of dry ice that you'd see in the food store? Are you going to have –

Deputy Mayor Anglin: Exactly the same.

Question: How much is it? Is it expensive?

Director Bragdon: I mean dry ice is carbon dioxide and it's not expensive. There was a process where EPA registered the label – the label that we are using is rat ice. So we are buying it not as

you know, going into a bodega, buying dry ice. We are buying an EPA labeled, registered product called rat ice. The primary ingredient is carbon dioxide.

Mayor: Just explain again what it does to rats, help explain it.

Director Bragdon: As the dry ice evaporates the carbon dioxide is asphyxiating the rats in their burrow. That's why it has to be covered but that's also why there are label restrictions for use so that you use them in in closed, earthen burrows, away from buildings, away from subway grates and things like –

Mayor: But Caroline just so we can – so it evaporated means it spreads out through the burrow—

Director Bragdon: It's dissipating through the burrow –

Mayor: Right, so basically, and they just can't breathe.

Director Bragdon: Right.

Mayor: They breathe it in, they go to sleep, they can't breathe anymore.

Director Bragdon: Exactly.

Mayor: So it's quick.

Question: Why the masks?

Deputy Mayor Anglin: Safety precautions.

[Inaudible]

Director Bragdon: An abundance of caution.

Mayor: Right because remember they are handling it all day long.

Question: You are often critical of the Trump Administration and it sounds –

Mayor: Okay where is this going?

[Laughter]

That is true but I'm like show me the bridge to this question.

Question: Okay well it sounds like the EPA—

Mayor: Ah, okay.

Question: This president has swiftly approved the use of dry ice and I'm wondering if you have any praise for the EPA –

Mayor: Yes.

Question: For their decision –

Mayor: I do.

Question: And if there is some area of common ground –

Mayor: Thank you for asking.

[Laughter]

You know, even a broken clock is right twice a day right? The – no, look, I disagree with a lot of things the Trump Administration is doing. That was to the Trump Administration, not to you.

[Laughter]

I disagree with a lot of things the Trump Administration is doing. I disagree with a lot of things the EPA is doing in terms of, you know, reducing regulation that protects the environment. I think that's a huge mistake. But I think in this case to approve something that is safe and is effective for killing rats, rats create a real health problem for people in New York City. We have to do something about it, this is the best way to do something about it. I'm very happy they approved it so fast and I commend them. This is a good thing they did because it is now allowing us to make people's lives better. So yes, I've always said – same thing I say about Albany, I'll praise them when they do something good. So, they did something good here.

Question: Does it kill other things besides rats? I mean like roaches or –

Mayor: Good question.

Question: Or other things you would want to get rid of?

Mayor: It goes in the burrow so that's the only –

Question: [Inaudible] could you use it against roaches or other pests?

Director Bragdon: No, I mean and actually the reason why we are so excited about dry ice is because there's much less of a risk of secondary poisoning for other kinds of wildlife than with traditionally burrow baiting so we are actually thrilled that there isn't a risk of harming other wildlife.

Question: It wouldn't work on let's say on a rabbit or squirrel or anything like that? A pigeon?

Director Bragdon: No.

Deputy Mayor Anglin: If they were underground and buried in a burrow and we –

Director Bragdon: If they were in that burrow system then yes, maybe.

Mayor: Yes.

Question: It was at the Patterson Houses in the Bronx, dirt floors as well where –

Mayor: A little louder.

Question: At the Patterson Houses in the Bronx there were dirt floors and they found dozens on rat burrows. I don't think that one is on the list. I'm just wondering, is anything being done there or has it been handled separately?

Mayor: Let's clarify. What's the total that's going to get the – dirt floors covered over?

Deputy Mayor Anglin: 11 developments and then there's various buildings within those developments.

Mayor: Right, a lot of buildings.

Deputy Mayor Anglin: A lot of buildings within those developments.

Mayor: So these are the ones with the biggest rat problems.

Deputy Mayor Anglin: Within the rat mitigation zones for the plan that we kicked out last year.

Mayor: Right. And then we would go farther.

Deputy Mayor Anglin: Correct.

Mayor: So again, I want to emphasize this is a very important priority but also costs a lot of money but our goal is to keep going farther. We believe this strategy is going to prove itself to work and then we will keep investing in it and go farther and farther throughout not only the NYCHA buildings with things like putting the cement floors but all the other strategies we want to apply to more neighborhoods as well. But this is something ultimately – I just want to give people context, if you keep applying this all over the city, you're talking ultimately hundreds of millions of dollars. This is a very big challenge. Go ahead.

Question: So then that's what Janet Jackson – not the singer – is asking on Facebook. Lower Eastside, she's hurting and she also wants to know who's the project manager? Who's going to be the go to person? Is it Vito that's going to oversee this?

Mayor: In terms of public housing, in terms of public housing all operational activities are supervised by Vito. In terms of the Health Department? Caroline. But Lower East Side is one of the areas that is –

Deputy Mayor Anglin: Within the zones.

Mayor: A priority for New York City writ large. It's one of the three most important areas where folks are in terms of need.

Question: Mayor de Blasio, when this was implemented in Chicago there was a little push back –

Mayor: Which piece, when you say this?

Question: I'm sorry, the dry ice component.

Mayor: Okay.

Question: PETA has been known to protest this as an inhuman way to approach the rat infestation. What would be your response to any type of PETA protest?

Mayor: I have a very respectful relationship with PETA. I think they have raised really important issues. That doesn't mean I agree with them on everything, but, you know, this is one where I'd say to them, you know there is a real health cost here to these rats. It's obviously a horrible reality for quality of life, but also for health, and this is of the choices, I think the most human and effective approach. Caroline can speak to it more specifically but I think it is the best choice we have.

Deputy Mayor Anglin: If I could just add too, prior to this we were using poison and bait and baiting in the burrows. And I think a larger concern that PETA and other organizations had was when the rats then ate the poison, they were running around because they didn't die immediately – or then died. And hawks or other wildlife ate them –

Mayor: They got poison

Deputy Mayor Anglin: Those hawks would then you know die as well. So, I'll let Caroline add but this is a much more humane way for the rats I would say but also safer for other wildlife within our developments and our parks.

Director Bragdon: Yes, 100 percent agree.

Mayor: Okay, other questions – going once. Rich?

Question: Are the rats vectors for any particular diseases? We know in the Middle Ages they were doing a job on the population of Europe –

Mayor: Yes.

Question: But are they currently a vector for any particular disease?

Director Bragdon: Yes, the Health Department does surveillance on a number of communicable diseases and there are some rat-borne illnesses that we conduct surveillance for and monitor throughout New York City. Reports of diseases related to like rat-borne illnesses are extremely low in New York. Rats are mainly a quality of life concern. But we do collect data and monitor for rat-borne illness.

Question: [inaudible] leptospirosis you talk about –

Mayor: That what?

Question: Remember the leptospirosis outbreak in the Bronx? This would address that? The leptospirosis –

Mayor: Right, right.

Deputy Mayor Anglin: Yes

Mayor: I am impressed that you can say that word because I can't say it. Okay.

Question: I know you are announcing this initiative today but when do you actually begin it?

Mayor: Well, the three priorities zones obviously that began last year and this specific development as you heard the number of burrows has been greatly reduced already. So the work is already happening here. But in terms of clarifying that we will take this approach, apply it to the most needy developments and on top of that do the floors and the whole piece – talk about the timeline, Laura.

Deputy Mayor Anglin: I think the floors have been all designed, which we need to do because not everyone will be the same. We're looking to have half of the floors, I believe, in by this year and then the other half by next year. It's a very difficult process to retrofit all of these –

Mayor: But in terms of – or, Vito, in terms of the dry ice in these key developments, what's the timeline for the others?

Deputy Mayor Anglin: I think it's already being used.

General Manager Mustaciuolo: That's being applied now.

Mayor: Right now – underway.

Question: Today wasn't the first day that you started –

Deputy Mayor Anglin: No, no, no – it started a few months ago.

Question: In all 10 buildings [inaudible]?

General Manager Mustaciuolo: We're rolling it out to all 10 developments. So, not all 10 have had applications of dry ice to-date, but that's what's planned for this summer.

Mayor: None of the basements have been done yet, so half this year, half next. So, that is a new element. The dry ice has been started in some, but now will be applied in all of them. And the trash cans will be distributed – what's the timeline on that?

General Manager Mustaciuolo: Hopefully, within the next month.

Mayor: Okay.

Question: On the trash cans, they're very small. Do you – I assume if people don't actually use them, then they won't have the effect you want. So, have you considered, I don't know, making the garbage chute bigger? Or have you –

Mayor: Well, wait, I want to challenge your assumption. They are small, but, remember, people are very used to using the garbage chutes. I don't know if you've ever been in a building with a garbage chute, but if you've lived in one of them or been to one of them you know that's how you get your garbage out of there. So, you actually do have an interest in getting it all in the chute and not letting it spill around. We're giving people an easy way to do it – soon as it fills up, just go out and drop it in the chute that's on your floor. So, I actually think – I mean, you can speak for your experience – I think people, if they've got something that's easy to use, are going to take advantage of it.

What do you think?

Robles: I agree totally.

Mayor: I have an expert.

On NYCHA, and on this – go ahead.

Question: A hunk of dry ice is what temperature? Do you know?

Mayor: Oh, science guy –

Question: Just curious, because it might be dangerous to handle it, obviously.

Mayor: That's why – I mean, there are careful rules about how the workers handle it.

Deputy Mayor Anglin: They have to be trained and certified.

Director Bragdon: The staff that you've seen applying dry ice are all certified in pesticide applicators. You have to go through a 30-hour course, and they wear PPE to make sure they're safe.

Mayor: They wear what?

Director Bragdon: Personal Protective Equipment.

Mayor: Thank you for speaking English.

Director Bragdon: And they wear gloves to make sure that they are protected.

Question: And just to clarify, if somebody sees this and thinks, oh, I can use that in my home or I can use that in my backyard – not a good idea?

Director Bragdon: No, not a good idea.

Mayor: Don't try this at home.

Director Bragdon: Yeah, exactly.

Mayor: Go ahead, Vito –

General Manager Mustaciuolo: Oh, I don't –

Mayor: Vito used Google to get his answer, I just want you to know.

General Manager Mustaciuolo: So, dry ice is frozen carbon dioxide. It has a surface temperature minus-109.3 degrees, or minus 78.5 degrees Celsius.

Mayor: That's pretty damn cold.

[Laughter]

Question: Mr. Mayor, a lot of this was announced last year. You said that you were going to put in the rat floors, or whatever we're calling them – rat pads, and they would be – insulation would begin in 2018, the dry ice stuff was announced last year. I'm trying to figure out what's new in this announcement besides the 10 developments and are you making this announcement, or highlighting the NYCHA portion of it because you've been under pressure from the Governor?

Mayor: No, as was just indicated. Long before the Governor took any interest in NYCHA – and, remember, it was about five years between the last time he went to a NYCHA building and his recent interest. I, and members of my administration have been out of NYCHA buildings for four straight years, and we've been making major investments for four straight years, starting with our first preliminary budget, which was about six weeks into the administration when we ended the practice of NYCHA having to pay for police services. So, you're a smart person, I think you

already know the answer to your question. No, it's not in response to the Governor. We've been doing this for a long, long time.

I would argue there are some very specific new elements of this announcement, because we're saying where we're going to do it, we're putting timelines to it, we're adding the trash cans – we're fleshing out things that we previously committed to broadly, and giving them very specific timelines and goals, and we're going to keep doing that.

Question: Are you concerned that by going after the rats here the Governor will come and try and maybe go after raccoons or something harder?

[Laughter]

Mayor: We welcome – we welcome his interest in addressing any of the problems. I mean, look, any time the State or the federal government want to offer us more support, we would welcome it, but not – you know, what I don't want to see is short-term interest for political purposes and then we never see people again. I want to see sustained support from the federal government and from the State government for solving the underlying problems at the Housing Authority, which, as I said, there's a new estimate coming out. We're going to know for certain what the figure is, but it's going to be well over \$20 billion worth of need, which cannot be met by the City alone, has to have federal and State investment if we're ever going to give the residents everything they deserve. So, my only hope is that the interest is sustained and not once every five years.

Is there anything else? Go ahead, Gloria?

Question: On NYCHA, Mr. Mayor, the judge today has ordered the City to conduct lead inspections. I just wanted to get your reaction to that. That's one lawsuit, there's also another lawsuit from Legal Aide that's suing for rent abatement. So, if we could just get your reaction to all of that.

Mayor: Look, I'll just turn to Vito because he's more knowledgeable about the specifics, and I will caution that I never go into too much detail when talking about a lawsuit against the City or any agency. But, fundamentally, we have committed a huge amount of resources to solving these problems. Obviously, we've inspected every pertinent apartment that we knew of, twice over now, and we've done – we're not in a second round of mitigation, and that will be annual from this point on. So, I don't know what the judge specifically is looking at. I only know that without anyone instructing us to do it, we're just doing that. We believe it's the right thing to do. We believe it should have happened and should not have been discontinued in the previous administration. So, it's very clear, as long as I'm here, you'll have annual inspections, annual mitigation. We'll pay whatever it takes to do that. We also are trying to solve the heat problem at its core, but I think the fundamental reality is, every resource we have needs to go into fixing the problems. I think that's the best way to use the resources.

You want to add anything?

General Manager Mustaciuolo: So, I'm not aware of a specific court proceeding with respect to lead, unless you're talking about the [inaudible] –

Question: [Inaudible]

General Manager Mustaciuolo: Okay, so there was a motion today and we were expecting to hear back from the courts, but I understand it's being delayed until next week. Right?

Question: My understanding is that the judge has ordered lead inspections.

Mayor: Okay, I think we shouldn't comment until we see the judges –

Question: The State Supreme Court Judge said, get it done. She used the three words, get it done. And she ruled that the proceeding would go on. And I just want to know, just from your perspective, when she used the words, get it done –

Mayor: Again, we're not conjecturing on something we haven't –

Question: [Inaudible]

Mayor: I'm sorry, respectfully. You're not my information source. We'll see what the judge has put forward formally and we'll respond to it.

Let me see if there's anything else –

Question: The State Supreme Court said so far you have not reached out to the City Council or the Governor to get the State monitor to –

Mayor: Again, we've said very clearly –

Question: [Inaudible]

Mayor: Allow me to answer, respectfully.

Question: Yes.

Mayor: We've said very clearly that we have a couple of different piece now. We have the federal government, that we're working with on a broader settlement that we are hopeful will be resolved soon. That does connect to the question of the State action, we have to see how those pieces connect. We are working – we'll certainly meet specifically with the Council and the resident leadership on who would be the right person to be the manager, but we also have some concern that we're still working through on the executive order. So, all of those things are moving simultaneously and they all inter-relate.

Let's see if there's anything else on this topic before we go to other topics. On this topic, last call. Other topics –

Question: Mr. Mayor, today, the statue of Marion Sims was removed from [inaudible] Central Park, and I have two questions. The first is, what [inaudible] historically correct plaques – what do you want to see on those plaques that people should know about him?

Mayor: Both sides of the story – I mean, you’ve got a – I’m not an expert on this guy, but I have a basic understanding of someone who experimented on women without their approval because they were slave women. People – they need to understand that, they need to understand that somehow once in our country that was something that happened and, you know, the people justified it and rationalized it no matter how inhumane it was. At the same time, he’s someone who in the totality of his work made major advances for women’s health, and that has to be recognized as well. It’s very complex, it’s not pretty, it’s in some ways very painful, but it’s not just one or the other side. So, I hope – and I hope that’s true for everything – that we just show the whole picture.

Question: The second question I have is – since the statue is being put near his grave in Greenwood, how do you think his descendants will feel reading these signs if they go to visit his grave [inaudible]?

Mayor: You know, I don’t know, but I can just tell you Greenwood Cemetery is obviously a working cemetery, but it’s also a major historical site and a lot of people come there because of all the history that happened there – there was a Revolutionary War battle there, and obviously because of all of the well-known people who are buried there. So, I don’t think it’s sort of the same as if you were talking about a private, secluded cemetery. This is a place that has a lot of visitors because it is a major historical site. I think this is a fair way to address a very thorny situation.

Other questions? You wanted to finish?

Question: Yeah, I just wanted to ask you – so, do you think that the historical benefit to telling the whole story are weighing in [inaudible]?

Mayor: Yeah, I think this is something that needs to be done, going forward, when we have one of these situations and try and show the whole history. But also, remember, what the Commission came forward with, which I think was an important contribution, was the notion of adding more positive to the equation too. For example, if you look around this city, and you look around at all of the monuments and statues, what do you see? You see a piece of our history, primarily the history of white men. You don’t see women’s contributions that often. You don’t see the contributions of people of color that often. You don’t see the contributions of working people that often, as opposed to, you know, famous leaders and generals, or whoever it may be. So, I think the Commission did something very important to say, let’s start showing our whole history, and that’s a good thing, and that will help future generations to see our society in more balance.

Go ahead, Erin.

Question: Public Advocate Tish James today [inaudible] called for the legalization of marijuana. She said that she doesn't think you can be a true progressive and opposed that at this point. I'm guessing you might disagree with that, but –

Mayor: I disagree with that.

Question: Okay, why?

Mayor: I think it's a complex matter. I take some of my thinking from Chirlane, who – some of what she said the other day was covered and other pieces were left out. I think what would happen in a legalization dynamic is it would become another corporate reality where a very lucrative trade became corporatized, and then, as we've seen with tobacco – generations before – there'd be a consistent effort to try and hook young people, and you know, potentially spread something much more widely even than it is now. That worries me. Obviously, the criminal realities worry me – what would it mean in terms of criminal activity. How – you know, if there's going to be taxation, which there would be, how would people try to get around it? All sorts of things concern me, that's why I'm just not there. And I think you can be a very good progressive and really have those concerns. But I've also said, look, we have some cities and some states in America that are doing this now. We really need to delve into what their experience has been. If it's more positive, that might be a reason to move forward. But I don't want to move until I'm thoroughly convinced – that's my view.

Question: So, the Working Families Party has endorsed Cynthia Nixon. I'm wondering what you think that means if you're concerned at all that a Republican can win if she remains on the WFP line. And also, how this endorsement influences your thinking, moving forward?

Mayor: My thinking, and I've said it many times, when I get to the point I want to speak about the 2018 elections in New York State, I will – not there yet. A lot of respect for the Working Families Party, and a long, positive experience with them. But, you know, I'll make, of course, my own decisions. I think we shouldn't conjecture about the fall election, it's a long way away. First of all, we don't know who the nominees will be in each party. What we think – I think we know it's probably going to be a very strong Democratic year, but we have to get closer to fully assess that. So, I'm not – it's not something I think about now, it's something that can be looked at later on in my view.

Question: And then also, you know, [inaudible] the Governor threatened some unions who support liberal community groups that have already backed Cynthia Nixon. Does that concern you at all?

Mayor: Sure.

Question: I mean, the Governor's denying it, but –

Mayor: Yeah, it's not – first of all, that's the way to do things. I wasn't in the room, I don't know what happened, but you shouldn't threaten organizations that are doing good work at the community level because they have different political views. That's the kind of things that

happened in dictatorships, not in democracies. So, I think we've got to respect that if a grassroots, political organization is working in the community and has a different viewpoint, just respect that. And I think it would be really sad if these groups were defunded because they stand up, in many cases, for some of the most vulnerable people in our society. But again, I don't know who said what to whom, I'm just speaking about my broad views.

Yes, David?

Question: Just to follow up on the Cynthia Nixon-Cuomo race, I mean, is there a chance that you would just sit it out?

Mayor: I'm not going to conjecture because I haven't decided what to do. When I decide, you'll be the first to know, David.

Question: [Inaudible]

[Laughter]

Mayor: What'd you say?

Question: I was going to be the first to know!

Mayor: Marcia, you will be the first to know.

[Laughter]

Mayor: Rich, in fact, you will be the first to know.

Unknown: We've got time for a few more.

Mayor: Any more? Go ahead –

Question: I have a serious question on that through. I mean, do you get the sense that you are being punished for things that she's doing by the Governor?

Mayor: No. I mean, I don't think there's anything particularly new in my relationship with the Governor, and I keep coming back to what I'd like to see if fairness for New York City and the people of New York City – just keep coming back to that – and it should not be about anything else. It shouldn't be that what I think on any particular issue or any particular statement I make is the way these decisions are made. It should be about what's right for the people of New York City, and I wish that was the coin in the realm in Albany, but that is not the case right now.

Question: When you're saying you haven't decided what to do, that's a little different than saying, you know, when I have something to say, I'll say it. Can you tell us –

Mayor: I don't actually think it's that different.

Question: You haven't made up your mind about who to support?

Mayor: It's literally the same statement – when I have something to say about it, I'll say it.

Question: Can you tell us at all about how, sort of, you intend to make that decision and if you'd draw on your –

Mayor: I have a matrix, you'll be the first to get it.

[Laughter]

Question: – your experience in endorsing in the Democratic primary in 2016 will have any bearing on how you view this race? Or you're thinking about it?

Mayor: Look, I think it's fair to say that every election year I go through teaches me lessons. I think it's not about my experience with the endorsement in 2016, it's my experience with 2016 has really changed a lot of the way I think because I think the whole country changed. I think the whole approach to politics changed. And I didn't see it coming – I'm very confessional on this point, that when Bernie Sanders starting running I did not think for a moment it would turn into what it turned into. But our politics has now changed and I think we have to understand that. And for a progressive like me, it's a time for tremendous possibility. I mean, for all progressives, there's an extraordinary moment right now and a lot of things are changing and the approach is changing to how we go about politics. That affects my thinking – that does not lead me to a specific conclusion. Again, I'm going to think about everything and I'll decide at some point to speak to the elections in this state. But I think 2016 changed the entire ballgame from my point of view.

Question: [Inaudible]

Mayor: I have not. I'd be happy to talk to him because I really think he should rejoin the Democratic conference, and, you know, I'd be happy to make that case, but I have not had that conversation with him.

Question: [Inaudible] 2016 question, Governor Cuomo's campaign spokeswoman says his views are in lockstep with Bernie Sanders. Bernie Sanders [inaudible] then came out and [inaudible] that wasn't true. What's your opinion on that? Do you –

Mayor: That's for them to define. I don't define that. I can't speak for someone else.

Question: Have you talked to, or have you had any conversations with Bernie Sanders about the upcoming Governor's race? Or if he should support Cynthia Nixon?

Mayor: No.

Unknown: Thank you, guys.

Mayor: Thank you.

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