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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January 24, 2018

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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Everybody good? Okay. I came here to Washington this afternoon in good faith, expecting a serious and bipartisan dialog at the White House regarding the infrastructure challenges facing our city and our country. I came here on behalf of 8.5 million New Yorkers to have a real conversation. What I confronted was something very, very different, and it all has to do with this press release that was put out by the Department of Justice this morning, the very morning that this meeting was supposed to occur, with no warning whatsoever.

This press release refers to a program the federal government sponsors called the Edward Byrne Grant program. Let me explain what that means to New Yorkers – this grant program is named after Eddie Byrne – Police Officer Eddie Byrne – a member of the NYPD who was murdered 30 years ago while in the line of duty. He was murdered because he was protecting an immigrant who had come forward to the police and testified against criminals. An immigrant New Yorker put his own life on the line to help our criminal justice system who had been threatened and had police protection. Eddie Byrne was that police officer protecting him that night, and he was killed by those very same criminals. This grant program was named for him to honor what our officers do and to honor the fact that our federal government has to support cities in keeping us safe.

Now, New York City is the safest big city in America. We're very proud of this fact – the safest big city in America – something we've worked on for decades to achieve. We achieved it by working with all communities, including our immigrant communities. Our police force is dedicated to building bonds with immigrant New Yorkers. This is the only way we stay safe. We had a reduction in crime in the last year that literally has taken us to the levels we had back in the 1950s. We had the fewest murders in New York City last year that we had had since 1951. This was a result of our police force believing in building a partnership with all New Yorkers, including millions of New Yorkers who come from immigrant backgrounds. And our police force, for decades, in both Democratic and Republican administrations, has refused to ask New Yorkers their documentation status when encountering them. And this is one of the reasons immigrant New Yorkers trust the police and will come forward to the police. God forbid they've been a victim of crime or they're a witness to a crime, immigrant New Yorkers, documented and

undocumented feel safe going to the police and working with them, and we will never let that change.

A year ago, the Trump administration threatened our funding and we made very clear that that threat was unconstitutional. When the immigration executive order came out, it was aimed at the heart of law enforcement in cities all across America. And my police commissioner said at the time, that we would never allow a federal policy to compromise our abilities to keep our people safe. We made very clear that the executive order was unconstitutional and if the Trump administration wanted to try us, we would meet them in court and beat them there, because we knew in 2012 Justice Roberts – the Chief Justice – issued an opinion that said the federal government cannot hold funding hostage because of the ideological preferences of any administration. So, we've been fighting this battle. But look, while we've made our city safer and safer, while we've created an atmosphere of police and neighborhoods can work together, this administration has been trying to undermine those efforts.

So, why does this matter so much today? Because the very day where we were told there would be a good-faith dialog, a bipartisan dialog on a crucial issue – infrastructure – that's the day they decided to single out a group of America cities and, once again, threaten them. This letter explicitly threatens our funding once again, threatens to subpoena our personnel on the very day where in principal they were telling us they wanted to have an honest dialog. This proves there was no intention to have an honest dialog. I came down here ready to have a serious meeting, and what I got was a publicity stunt from the Trump administration. And it just proves once again that they're not trying to work with America's cities, because, if they were, it's the first time in a year President Trump invited America's mayors to come and meet with him. And here's what he did to a group of mayors – he said, come over to my house but I'm going to take your wallet while you're there. It's an immediate affront that showed bad will.

So, look, it's astounding to me that this opportunity was undermined by the President and his administration, because if he's serious about his infrastructure plan, he should want to have mayors working with him. But, for so many mayors today, it was a slap in the face to our cities and our people, and a lot of mayors, even if they weren't one of the ones listed in this letter – a lot of mayors felt it was a slap in the face to the entire U.S. Conference of Mayors and were unwilling to meet under those circumstances. That's what happened today. I'm really sorry to tell you all this because this is not what I expected, and this is not what I think any of us as mayors think is normal, and this is not what the American people should think is normal.

With that, I want to welcome your questions –

Question: Have you gotten any response from the Trump administration?

Mayor: There was some kind of press statement, I believe, put out. But again, this has been incoherent. Originally, when the meeting was called, some mayors were invited, others weren't, and it was not clear. I know I was not on the original invitation list. And, you know, from my point of view, if you're not going to invite to a meeting, you don't invite me to a meeting. Then, they invite and do this the very same morning. So, I mean, the whole approach has been incoherent, but I have not heard any response that makes any sense.

Question: This is the White House response – earlier today, the press secretary, Sarah Sanders, said, the White House has been very clear, we don't support sanctuary cities. If the mayors have a problem with that, they should talk to Congress, the people who pass the laws. What is your response to that?

Mayor: Then they're simply trying to demonize immigrants as part of their current congressional strategy. That's what that says to me, if that's the game they're playing. So, why – if they say they wanted to have a meeting with mayors and you've literally got the vast majority of the mayors in this country – of the biggest cities in this country, right here for this week only – they really wanted to have that meeting – then why play that game in the middle of it? If this is about their efforts to divide and play racial politics, then, again, they were never serious about the meeting to begin with.

Question: What [inaudible] boycott [inaudible]

Mayor: You can't even call it that because we came here to have a meeting. And again, our cities were affronted purposefully the very same morning. You know, it reminds me when Senator Durbin and Senator Graham went to have a serious conversation about a compromise on the immigration issue, and that was the meeting where Trump used horrible, derogatory language towards other nations of the world, and people were outraged – it was a purposeful effort to divide and somehow to destroy what would have been a productive effort at compromise and consensus. Here were mayors – a lot of us don't agree with Donald Trump, but we were willing to go and try and have a dialog on infrastructure – why is that the day they single out a group of American cities and, once again, threaten our funding. It makes no sense.

Question: [Inaudible] telling President Trump what you're telling us now had you gone to the meeting?

Mayor: If there had not been this obviously premeditated attack on these cities, I would have gone to the meeting. If the meeting was actually a dialog about infrastructure, here's what I would have said – I would have said, President Trump, you said on the campaign you wanted a billion – excuse me, a trillion-dollar effort. On the campaign trail, President Trump repeatedly said he wanted a trillion-dollar infrastructure effort. I would say, let's do that. Show us that plan. Show us the money and let's get to work. What we've seen so far – the leaks that have come out about the infrastructure plan – it sounds like a plan to help financiers and the private sector. It sounds like a lot less than a trillion dollars. It sounds like something that's not going to work any time soon. So, I would have challenged him. I'd say, live up to your original vision – put a trillion dollars in federal money on the table. Let's get to work. That's what I would have said to him.

Question: [Inaudible] relationship with President Trump – you haven't spoken to him very much during his administration. Tell me a little bit about your relationship.

Mayor: Look, I met with the then-president-elect days after the election. I attempted to have a dialog. I had seen any follow-through on that dialog from the beginning. A lot of us hoped we

would see some honest moderation when he took office – we saw the exact opposite. I have not had any consistent dealings with him since. I have met, however, with numerous members of his administration. And when I've met with the members of his administration, we have had a serious and substantial dialog, which at least gave me hope that this invitation was a real invitation to dialog on infrastructure. Again, it makes no sense to me. If I was inviting someone to come meet me, I would not attack them and their city that same morning.

Question: [Inaudible] you know, about infrastructure now? By sitting this out, what are you going to do about your crumbling roads –

Mayor: We obviously are going to fight for huge federal investment in infrastructure. I worked on this several years ago with Republican and Democratic members of the House and Senate. We actually got a real increase in the Highway Bill because Democratic and Republican mayors got together and pushed the Congress, and we actually found some success. I'm going to go work with the Congress and try and get the changes we need. But if the administration doesn't want to have a serious dialog, we'll keep working in New York City to fix our own infrastructure and we'll work with the Congress.

Question: Mr. Mayor, I wonder if you think you could accomplish more for New York City by being inside the tent than outside the tent?

Mayor: Obviously, Marcia, whenever there's a real dialog, you want to be in the room trying to have an impact on the policies. But this, clearly, was not going to be a real dialog. Again, no one invites someone to a meeting and attacks their city the same morning. It does not make sense.

Question: So, are you saying that this was premeditated? That he knew he was going to do this –

Mayor: This went out – I don't know what he personally knew, but I know his administration did something premeditated because this went out first thing in the morning, and this is from the Department of Justice, and we can safely say what Jeff Sessions does is clearly a leading edge of the entire administration. So, they did this this morning. They could have done it on any other day – they chose the morning – the very first and only time they've invited Americas mayors to come to the White House, they attack literally a list of American cities and say they're going to take away our funding.

Question: So, when you saw it, what did you think? What did you do?

Mayor: I was shocked. It made no sense that this was happening and I immediately believed it suggested the whole thing was a charade, and I heard that a number of my other colleagues had the same response, had decided – the mayors of New Orleans, Chicago, Los Angeles had decided they could not go to the meeting under this circumstance, and I joined them.

Question: How many mayors didn't go?

Mayor: We don't know yet. We have to find out.

Question: Mayor [inaudible] and also how much money are we talking about?

Mayor: Look, if you're talking about the Byrne grants and the other federal funding – this money goes to fight terrorism and to provide our police with support for day-today crime fighting. The cuts that have been proposed are, at minimum, in the tens of millions of dollars and would have a very serious impact on our efforts. What's shocking is we're the safest big city in America, our crime fighting efforts are working, you would think the federal government would say, how can we help you do even more? Not, how can we take away from you? We're also the number-one terror target in America, and this money, in-part, supports our anti-terrorism efforts. So, it's appalling to me that they would think about defunding the finest police force in the United States of America. And I said – this is one thing – when I did have an opportunity to have a dialog the then-president-elect – I said, on this issue of how police work with immigrants, please talk to the police chiefs of this country. If you don't want to talk to the politicians, I can understand that, but talk to Commissioner Jimmy O'Neill. Ask him what's the best way to keep communities safe, and he will say by showing respect for immigrant communities.

Question: Are you willing [inaudible] arrested [inaudible] sanctuary cities –

Mayor: I think if they attempt to take away our funding, we will go to court immediately. We said this last year – if they attempt to take away our funding for the NYPD, we will go to court and we will prove their actions are unconstitutional.

Unknown: Last question –

Question: [Inaudible] in documents today revealed that he pleaded guilty to bribing Nassau County Executive Ed Mangano, and the unnamed New York City official. I was wondering if you knew who the unnamed official was, or if he's way in, or if your office has –

Mayor: I don't know anything about that specifically. I only heard about Nassau.

Thanks, everyone.

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