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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DESIGNATES LUNAR NEW YEAR AN  
OFFICIAL SCHOOL HOLIDAY**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Alright, good morning, everyone. It's great to be here at P.S. 20. This is a positive school, as you can hear from the response back here. We want to thank, especially, the young people for being here with us for this great announcement. P.S. 20 is known by its principal, Victoria Hart, as the "Yes School". And we thank the principal for her great work. When she calls it the "Yes school", she means it is a place where everyone who works here listens – listens to the community, listens to the students, and the families to understand how to serve them best, and is always open to innovation. And that is certainly a fitting idea, and a fitting setting today because today, we say yes to Lunar New Year as a school holiday in New York City.

[Applause]

This is something that I pledged to do years ago. And I want to tell you, we got here today because of the extraordinary advocacy of the people standing around me. You're going to hear from a number of them. But this is, really, a victory for the leaders standing around me who fought for this issue, who raised it to public attention, who have been resolute. And there are so many things happening any given day in New York City, but these leaders kept this issue on the front burner. They said it was very, very important to their community, and something that we had to focus on. And we're here today because of their leadership. So, let's give a round of applause to all the leaders standing here who made it possible.

[Applause]

We believe in celebrating this multicultural city, and in this case, starting on February 8th, 2016, we will celebrate Lunar New Year. We will become only the second major U.S. city to add Lunar New Year to our calendar, and we're proud of that fact.

[Applause]

Now, we know at the same time we have an obligation under state law to achieve at least 180 school days. And we know that every one of those school days matters for our children, for their learning, for their growth, for their development. So, there was a lot that we had to balance to get this right because we had to make sure we kept that school calendar intact. And we had to be

ready, of course, for the kinds of things that happen each year – the snowstorms and other challenges we face. It took some work, but we got there. And we know that this is something that, again, adds to the celebration of everything that makes this city great. And that is particularly going to be deeply felt at a place like P.S. 20, where nearly three-quarters of the students are Asian American.

So, this is a day – it took work, but like so many great things, it was worth it to get us to this day, and to honor this great community. Now, I had a similar experience when we talked about the Eid holidays – we were talking about a holiday that is not associated with the language Spanish, but as I said at the time, because it's New York City, I'm now going to talk about Asian Lunar New Year in Spanish. What would be more New York than that?

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

There – that was a true New York moment.

Now, it is my honor to bring forward the chancellor of our schools. She is an extraordinary leader, and someone who has been committed to the highest quality education for all our children, and the celebration of the diversity of this great city. Chancellor Carmen Fariña.

[Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña speaks]

Thank you very much, chancellor. I want to just take a moment to acknowledge – we are going to hear from some folks – but I want to acknowledge some of the folks who have gathered with us. I want to thank, also, from my administration, our Department of Youth and Community Development Commissioner Bill Chong. I want to thank Assembly members Nily Rozic and Ed Brownstein for being here with us. And, again, you're going to hear from a couple of our other leaders – and first, we're going to hear from our congresswoman. I can tell you there have been many times when Congress Member Grace Meng has raised this issue to me. She has been resolute – fought for it when she was in Albany, and has continued since she's gone to D.C. It's my honor to introduce Congresswoman Grace Meng.

[...]

Alright, we're going to do some on-topic questions, followed by some off-topic questions. First, on-topic questions. Yes?

**Question:** [inaudible]

**Mayor:** I feel like I saw you just a few hours ago.

[Laughter]

**Question:** I'm wondering what are you going to say to the next cultural group that asks for a day off? And second, would you consider extending the school year either into June or earlier in September?

**Mayor:** Well – let me first talk about the school year, and then go to your first question. The chancellor and I have worked on this issue from the beginning. We’ve thought about the different requests in terms of the holidays. And we’ve, obviously, thought about the reality of weather – because we have learned the hard way about the reality of weather. We have a pretty sacred obligation to hit that 180 days a year – both for the educational needs of our kids, and because of state law. So, everything we’ve done is with an effort to not just plan for the next year, but plan years and years ahead. And that’s been deliberative, and that’s part of what’s taking some time here – to really make sure we can get this right. I said well before this year, that I believed we needed to recognize the two Eid holidays, that I believed we needed to recognize Asian Lunar New year. And that’s all I’ve ever said, and that’s where we will stand. There are many wonderful communities in this city. I understand anyone’s impulse to add additional holidays, but at this point, I’ve kept my pledge, and I don’t intend to make any additions anytime in the foreseeable future because we’ve worked very hard to create a balance in the calendar, and to protect those 180 days. And it has taken a lot of work, and I think at this point, we need to stay with what we got. On topic?

**Question:** Just following up on that, Mr. Mayor, if you’re doing this out of cultural respect [inaudible]. How can you say it’s going to stop there? Why would one religion or culture [inaudible].

**Mayor:** Well, it – look, there’s a combination of, obviously, larger philosophical issues here, and practical issues as well. We’re talking about, in both the case of the Eid holidays with the Muslim community, and the case of Lunar New Year with the many communities that celebrate it – cumulatively very large communities, and growing communities. And that was also part of the consideration. How big are these communities? And what do we project the community size to be going forward? There are some other communities I think can make a perfectly strong argument, but we have to take into account the size of the community. We also have to take into account the very practical matter that we have physical limitations in the school holiday – excuse me, in the school calendar that have to be recognized. You know, we can’t – Labor Day is a fixed reality, and the end of June is a fixed reality. And there are a lot of other things that go into the mix. So, again, I’m very comfortable that we made the right decisions. I have fulfilled the pledges I made, and I intend for us to stay at this point. Last call, on topic? Yes?

**Question:** Did you feel any pressure because of what was going on legislatively in Albany to make this decision right now?

**Mayor:** Yes, I think there’s two realities. One – over the last year and a half, we’ve been regularly meeting about the calendar issues, and about the holiday issues. We’ve heard from a lot of advocates. I said consistently it was something I intended to do, but it was taking us time to figure out how to do it right. Look, our friends in Albany were very aggressive, and that’s part of the legislative process. You know, they were moving to send a strong message. Ron Kim and I talked among others and said, look, this is something we want to do. Let’s find a way to do this together. And we were able to resolve that, and get to this today. So, of course, we listened to the legislature when it’s something where there are shared values. And the question was how we got there. We never doubted getting there. It was a question of how, when we were able to resolve that – and that brought us to today. On topic?

**Question:** [inaudible]

**Mayor:** Again, we are – we’re talking about, in this case, a holiday that will not occur until February 2016. We have time to make adjustments. But I remind you, every year will be different, because of when holidays fall. The Eid holidays, for example, can fall on very different dates, depending on the year. So, each year is going to look a little different. We’ll make adjustments accordingly. But the bottom line is, we’re going to ensure the instruction days are there for our kids. On-topic?

**Question:** [inaudible]

**Mayor:** It’s just a full – regular, full holiday, like any of the other school holidays.

Last call on-topic.

**Question:** [inaudible] have a lot of Asian kids, or for the whole school?

**Mayor:** It’s a – again, it’s an official school holiday – like Christmas, like many other holidays – official school holiday for everybody.

Was there any other question – media questions, on topic? Going once, going twice. We are off-topic.

**Question:** Mr. Mayor, I wanted to ask one on-topic. What [inaudible] to celebrate the Lunar New Year?

**Mayor:** I’ve had the honor of being part of a host of celebrations before, and Grace and Ron and many other friends – Peter and Margaret – will tell me all the right celebrations to take part in. I look forward to it.

**Question:** [inaudible] the budget last night, you added 300 police for counterterrorism. Can you specifically explain, like, what [inaudible]? Is there any particular reason we need [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** There remains no specific, credible threat, but we are constantly vigilant. We obviously are concerned about lone wolf activity. And this was a decision that we’ve talked about for quite a while with the Commissioner – that we needed a dedicated group – it’s going to be 300-plus – 350 or so – with our Critical Response Vehicles, that will be specifically trained for anti-terror duty, that will only do anti-terror duty, that will be equipped with the appropriate equipment and weaponry for anti-terror duty. And it’s something we decided made sense in today’s environment. Rather than borrowing officers from precincts – you know, catch as catch can – we wanted a dedicated force. So, this is something we’ve been talking about for a while. It made a lot of sense to me. It made a lot of sense to the Council. And obviously, the commissioner and his team will be laying out more details in the coming days.

**Question:** On free breakfast in the classroom – in the budget, I know there were some logistical and funding concerns initially. Can you kind of talk about how those got sorted out, and how the [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** Yeah, there's still work being done on that, but the bottom line is we felt that school breakfast was an area where we could really make an impact. As the Chancellor often notes in our many meetings, school breakfast is available before school in all of our schools, but it wasn't getting enough usage, and a lot of kids obviously were not necessarily getting the food that they needed to learn best. So we thought it made a lot of sense, particularly at the elementary school level, to make this a universal reality that will be achieved by Fiscal '18. There are still logistical issues being worked through. There are still union issues being worked through. But we put the money in the budget because we were confident that we were on the pathway to resolving those issues.

**Question:** I was wondering if you could explain an interview you gave to WNYC on June 5th. You said: "There are so many other challenges [inaudible]." What did you mean back then?

**Mayor:** I mean what I would say today as well. We have a host of challenges. We've obviously invested a lot in them – and you can see that in the budget, as well. But what I said last night – and you were there – what got me to this point is that we had, I thought, an extraordinary combination of features that made our choices in this budget correct. The strong views of the City Council, the real reforms that we got in terms of overtime and in terms of civilianization, and the fact that over the last weeks, there's been a much deeper conversation with Commissioner Bratton about how this vision could establish neighborhood policing for the first time on an ongoing basis in this city. We have those other challenges and we're putting a lot of resources in them and we're going to continue to, but I thought we had a moment here where we could do something very big and lasting.

**Question:** To follow up, were those realities untrue two weeks ago?

**Mayor:** No, it's the same exact point. We have continued to invest in the things I've cited before. We're making unprecedented investments in corrections, unprecedented investments in homeless services, and we will continue to. But again, what has evolved since the Executive Budget is the combination of the cost savings that were not there at the time of the Executive Budget – and that matters deeply in any budgetary decision. The evolution of the commissioner's vision for how we could achieve neighborhood policing, which was not clear at the time of the Executive Budget, has been part of an ongoing year-and-a-half re-evaluation of our force. And, it's a legislative process. The Council kept coming back, time and again, to this being their top priority, and we wanted to honor that while investing in other areas.

**Question:** The Rikers Island deal – are you happy with the outcome? And are you confident that the [inaudible] reforms are going to make a difference? And how will you measure the success?

**Mayor:** Yes, I'm comfortable with the outcome. We're going to work with the federal government to make the reforms necessary. Yes, I'm confident we're making progress already – and we're going to deepen our progress. The measures are quite clear. We need to see a reduction in violence. We need to see a reduction in weapons and contraband getting into the facility. The proposals that we've put forward, for example, on visitation, we think will make a huge difference. The way we're going to change how we recruit and train our correctional officers is going to make a huge difference. I think we are getting closer and closer to the goal of a fair and humane Rikers Island.

**Question:** [inaudible] changes?

**Mayor:** Again, we have invested a lot. You guys have seen the last two budgets. We've decided to do what wasn't done in the past. We've invested in fixing the problem. We'll continue to.

**Question:** Mr. Mayor, back to the police [inaudible] – was there a moment of epiphany when you were sitting with, say, the police commissioner or somebody [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** I think there were several moments, is the honest truth. There was not, like, a light shone down from the heavens. But there were some meetings with the commissioner in the last few weeks where we went from a broader discussion of his vision to a much more detailed one that became very, very compelling to me, because he proved to me, to my satisfaction, that this vision of neighborhood policing that so many of us have wanted to see realized for years and years actually could be reached with an investment that we could find a way to achieve. But second, the cost savings issue went back and forth for weeks and weeks. And I said last night – and I remember this from my time in the Council – the Council's been pushing civilianization, the Council's been pushing overtime caps for years. And, bluntly, it didn't happen on a very big level previously. We got progress on civilianization last year, but there was clearly more that could be done. As those conversations ensued between me and the Council, and obviously with the police department, we found options to go much further on civilianization – this is literally over the last week or two – much further on the cap on overtime that literally had never been achieved before. And that was a crucial factor to me in this decision. So, it has been several points over the last few weeks.

**Question:** What was the reaction in the room when you said yes?

**Mayor:** In the room?

**Question:** In the room or in the home, I don't know where it –

**Mayor:** Who are we talking about, brother?

**Question:** I don't know who was in the room or –

**Mayor:** I've been in a lot of rooms. You need to – you need to ask your question in a way that the answerer can understand. Let's try again.

**Question:** Was there a reaction, in whatever room it was, whatever place it was –

**Mayor:** [inaudible] [laughs] Look, I assume what you're asking is how did the Speaker feel. We had worked long and hard on this issue – an extremely collaborative process, but meeting after meeting, this went back and forth, back and forth. I think what's important to understand here is this is not based on one conversation or two conversations. It's based on dozens of conversations. Obviously, she believed that we had hit the balance point and she was very gratified that we had come to an agreement. Equally, the commissioner, who had put forward a very powerful vision, but one based on, again, a year-and-a-half of study – the more he explained the depth of it and what it could do, the more convinced I became. And I think for him, it's a chance to take a lot of what he has worked on for years and apply it here in a way that I wish we

had done decades ago. I mean, if we can achieve sustained neighborhood policing, which I am convinced will bring police and community together in a way we've never seen before, this'll be an extraordinary moment for New York City. Thank you, everyone.

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