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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO AND CHANCELLOR FARIÑA TO LIFT SCHOOL
CELL PHONE BAN**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good afternoon, everyone. Well, it is a pleasure to be here at the High School of Telecommunications Arts and Technology. As the principal and I were just discussing when I came in, the proper ways of talking about that school in our family – our kids having gone to M.S. 51 in Brooklyn – this school was referred to as “Tele” – “Tele” – not that whole long Telecommunications Arts and Technology. I want to thank the principal, Xhenete Shepard, for her great leadership, and she has continued an extraordinary tradition of leadership, here at this high school. It’s a high school that has gotten better all the time. And a lot of that was due to – then principal – now Deputy Chancellor Phil Weinberg, who did an extraordinary job here and has passed the torch to a new generation of leadership. And Phil, thank you for your service here and now for the great job you’re doing as deputy chancellor.

This is an announcement that I am truly excited to make. It is something that I’ve talked to my fellow parents about for years and years. And this is really an example of the kind of thing parents want to see more of from their city government – responsiveness to the needs of parents and an understanding of the lives that everyday parents live. So, for so many of us – when the cell phone ban came into effect, my daughter, Chiara, was in middle school and we saw the cell phone as something that was fundamental to our ability as parents to keep in touch with her, and make sure she was doing the right thing, and make sure she was where she was supposed to be. And we saw it as an extension of our ability to be good parents. And then we saw our city government stand in the way of that. And I heard from parents all over the city, then and ever since, that they looked forward to the day when the policy was changed, and when good parenting could be supported with a smart and sane policy on cell phones. So, it’s been a long time coming, but it is time now to take a common sense action, which will give parents a lot of peace of mind, a lot better ability to do what is, I think, our most important and most sacred job – those of us as parents – the number one job in our lives is to be there for our children. And it’ll allow parents to do that better, and it will keep kids safer in the process and nothing is more important than that.

This city, in terms of the policy of the previous administration, was simply out of touch with the reality of modern parenting. It is very tough to be a parent in this city. It’s very tough to be a parent in the modern day. I think I have a group of experts behind me. I want to thank all of them for being here because it’s tough. Parents are working longer and longer hours, a lot of people are having more and more trouble making ends meet, while trying to be good parents in an ever more complicated society. When I was growing up, there weren’t the challenges that came along with social media, for example. There are so much more information available to kids, there are so many more temptations, so many more problems. Cell phones are an example of a form of technology that cuts both ways, but the plus side of it was it gave parents an ability to stay in touch with kids that we previously didn’t have. And that was a crucial tool. We needed it. We needed it in this day and age, and I can remember many a time – and for those of you who have teenagers or no teenagers, you might get them on the phone to talk to them, but you would get them by text – the preferred methodology of all teenagers. And just that – where are you, what time are you coming home, what are you doing – just getting those simple answers means so much to parents, and allows you to take action if you need to, to keep your kids safe.

So, we used to have a policy that didn't understand the reality of parents. We're now going to make this a policy that works with parents so they can do their most important job. And we're doing it in a way that really respects the needs of our educators to do their job and we spend a lot of time striking that balance. You'll hear about that from the chancellor and others. Again, safety – you think about everything we do – safety comes first. Safety is a prerequisite to making sure our kids get a good education. You have to secure their safety first, and this is about amplifying a parent's ability to keep kids safe. And I have to say that when you think about it – think about what it means to know where your child is, know they got to school safely, know where they're going after school – they're staying for an afterschool activity, they're going to a friend's house – just knowing those basics – or they're coming home from school and, God forbid, they got sick or they got in trouble – that they can reach their parents right away. It makes a world of difference. There are so many good reasons, as parents, to reach out to our kids and find out what's going on and get that information. We need to hear from our kids. This guarantees we can do it.

Now I will also say, as parents, from time to time, we may want to reach out to our children to let them know that we're running late. Just a personal reference – I wouldn't personally know about that. Now, a lot of parents have expressed this feeling to me. For years, it's one of the things I've heard the most passion – the most emotion from parents about, because it really gets to the core of their own lives. And you're going to hear from Rosemarie Crowder in a moment. She's had three children here at Tele. And she really understands, especially when you're trying to juggle the lives of multiple children, how important it is to stay in touch with them. For example, her son Matthew, who is on the track team – last October, his practice ran late – didn't have his cell phone, couldn't call home. Normally, he gets home by five. In this case, he didn't get home until after 6:30. So, she spent 90 minutes worried to death where her son was, and not knowing. And that is a very difficult feeling for a parent. The simple ability of a parent just to know what's going on makes all the difference. And you'll hear from Rosemarie in a moment about her experiences.

The other problem was that this policy was applied so unevenly and so unfairly. A lot of times, I equated it to Don't Ask, Don't Tell. It was a policy that didn't make sense in the real world. And each school had a different approach. And so, parents might have multiple kids in different schools with different policies, and it was just not fair. And it was particularly unfair to students at the 88 schools with metal detectors. What happened with them? Well, a lot of parents would naturally say, I need you to take your cell phone. And the kid would say, I can't take the cell phone into school. The parent would want the kid to have the cell phone. What would end up happening is they would pay a bodega or a storage place to keep their phone for them. For a lot of kids, a lot of families, this meant a dollar a day or even up to five dollars a day so a phone could be kept, so the parent could eventually be in touch with the kid. Families that didn't have any money were paying this out. So, it was an economic burden that just didn't have to be, on hardworking people who didn't have a lot of money. What we need is a fair and universal approach.

We are moving to lift this ban. It will take effect – the change will take effect on March 2nd. Now, what we're saying to each school is, we want each school to do this the way it makes sense to them. We want parents to be able to reach their kids, kids to be able to reach their parents in the appropriate way, at the appropriate hours, with ground rules. And we're giving schools a lot of freedom to figure out what works. But the basics are that kids will be allowed to bring their cell phone up to the point that the school day begins.

There's a couple of different options of what a school might choose. They might, for example, say you can use your cell phone during lunch time but no other part of the day. They may say, you can use your cell phone during the school day if it's for instructional purposes and the teacher approves it. They may say, you can keep your cell phone in a designated location within the school or in your backpack, in your locker. There's all sorts of different ways of going about it. But the bottom line is, the child will have the right to bring the cell phone.

Now, we saw, in experiences with some schools, that they started out with a ban and they saw all of the problems of the ban. They saw kids paying money out of their pocket to leave the phone somewhere. They saw

kids fighting over whose phone was which when they went to retrieve them. One of the examples was at Maxwell Career & Technical Education, a high school in East New York, which is a school I've gotten to know well and a school that's been doing better and better over the years. The principal, Jocelyn Badette, came up with a check in/check out system – a very straightforward system that kids can come in, and leave their phones at the beginning of the day, pick them up at the end of the day. It was consistent and it worked, and then there was a clear rule, that if a child violated the policy, the cell phone got taken away – as summarized by the simple phrase, “if you misuse it, you lose it”. And that registers with our children, because a cell phone is really important to them.

So the deal is, follow the rules, you get to have your cell phone the appropriate way. You get it before school, after school – you get that consistency and continuity. But if you do something that violates the rules, the school will take that cell phone away. That gets the point across. So we believe we can set up clear boundaries, and checks and balances, to make this work.

The bottom line –this will empower our parents. This will strengthen our parents' ability to protect their children and be there for our children. And this is a policy that actually responds to the needs of our parents.

Just a few words in Spanish before I bring up the chancellor.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, I just want to say, it is a pleasure to be doing an event like this with the chancellor for the first time in 2015. She has a lot to be proud of in 2014, and I think you say immense progress in our schools already – in so many of the new programs that are being put in place, like pre-k, and afterschool, and what we're going to be doing with community schools and renewal schools. And the energy that she has created in the Department of Education – I hear it everywhere I go from parents, teachers, principals – such a belief that they have a leader who understands their work and is moving them forward. And so, Carmen, you have a lot to be proud of, and let's get ready for a great year together – Chancellor Carmen Fariña. You can clap for her.

[Applause]

Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña: Thank you. I want to be clear that this decision, in terms of lifting bans, will be handled differently in every public school in the city. First of all, this will be decided by the School Leadership Team. School Leadership Teams are – consist of the principal, parents, and teachers. And I anticipate some really robust discussions on these SLTs, and the discussions will be which process to use to be able to implement the policy. So, in some schools, I anticipate, there will be a collection point as they walk in the building and there'll be a place where, as you leave the building, you take your phone with you. And now, these schools, I anticipate, as long as you turn it off and keep it in your knapsack – perfectly okay. There will be other schools that may think of other ways and we're open because that's part of principal autonomy, in consultation with the SLTs, which is why we're not implementing it until this March 2nd, because we want to make sure that there's plenty of time for that discussion. And eventually when the SLT makes a decision, maybe having an open PTA meeting – and I certainly anticipate an open assembly meeting for kids to let them know, not only what their rights are, but what the consequences are. There's got to be a very clear line – this is what we're allowing you to do, but now if you don't handle this responsibly, this is what's going to happen. So, we're assuming that the time we're giving them is really going to be able to help them in this direction.

I also know that it's just a common sense. It is the way of the world, but I also expect that it'll be different whether you're a high school person, a middle school person, and an elementary school principal. Because the reality is – in the cases where you're going to want to see this more robustly is in places where kids have to travel to school – you put a kid on a bus, you put the kid on a train. I know someone in my personal life whose daughter goes to school – she's in high school – by train and her instructions are to call him at 8:30, the minute she gets in front of the door – and she's two minute late, he's already frantic. And I think that is a reasonable

use of the phone. I think you're going to see it somewhat in middle school where kids have to travel. I think you're going to see it a lot less in elementary schools where many parents take the kids to school, and leave them at the door, and then come back and pick them up at the door – but the fact that kids have the phone to call home at the appropriate time.

I anticipate there's going to be a very strong list and we're actually going to give recommendations from the DOE of the things we don't want to see. We want to nip in the bud any cyber bullying that may even occur to a person. And, as the mayor said – and I totally agree – nothing is a bigger loss to any student than not having their phone for a while. And I think that's definitely a consequence I anticipate seeing a lot of, but that's not going to be allowed. I think also one of the other issues – and certainly I've done enough focus groups on this – is what happens during test time. I anticipate one of the recommendations is, during test time, we use a much more extensive prohibition on phones and they would probably be locked up in another way so that no answers can be shared or whatever. We will anticipate every problem that can come up and give a recommendation on how that will be handled. But I do think we do need to become part of the modern world and I also know that a lot of technology is good instructional tools. And I've gone to a lot of schools where I'm seeing iPads and what would be the new iPhones being used for teaching lessons, for individualizing instruction, for also – one of the new superintendents just shared with me – she developed an app for her entire district, where any parent in her district can actually program in her school and learn everything there is to do about that school. We're thinking about replicating that. So having that kind of information readily available, where kids can go on and get their homework assignments, if that's what they need to do. One of the issues we have in New York City is attendance. If there's a way to make sure that kids who are not in school on a certain day can catch up with some of their work and it can be done through a cell phone, we're working on that too. So I do see a cell phone – like an iPad – is a tool. It's not an end in itself. So how do we use it as a tool in a way that's most important and, again – also, for me, I know, I wasn't born a techie, but when I go to a shopping mall, for example, if I don't have my cell phone, my husband doesn't know where to find me. It could take us an hour walking around the parking lot. So, how do we have something that works and use it for the purpose that it's meant to?

So, I do feel this is a long time coming. I also know that parents are particularly grateful. And I just now know that our challenge is to make sure that students understand that this is a privilege and not a God-given right, and that they use it appropriately, or else.

Mayor: Could you summarize en español?

Chancellor Fariña: Oh God –

[Schools Chancellor Fariña speaks in Spanish]

Question: [inaudible]

Chancellor Fariña: Excuse me?

Question: [inaudible]

Phil Walzak: We'll do the Q&A after.

Chancellor Fariña: Okay.

Mayor: You'll get your chance when she comes up.

Chancellor Fariña: Okay.

Mayor: Okay, gracias.

[...]

Mayor: All right, we're going to take on topic questions first, on this topic – and then we'll take others.

Question: Chancellor, you mentioned you were [inaudible] cell phone bans. I'm wondering how the bans will fit it with the new [inaudible] that I know you're drafting? And if you don't yet know, I guess, what the consequences are for a kid [inaudible] cell phone? Could you give us a status update –

Chancellor Fariña: I would say there'll be postings in every school about what the rules are on around the use of cell phones. There will be assembly programs around that. There'll be letters going home to parents. And certainly the easiest consequence that I can imagine is taking away a cell phone. And we can determine whether it's a week, a month, depending on the infraction. I think, also, there's going to be some feeling of peer pressure because if there's enough kids who do it, we could say we may decide to change the rules for the entire school. So that's why we're not going to have a final decision until March 2nd, because these are some of the decisions I hope schools will do on their own. But there's certainly going to be guidance from us on what are the some of the consequences around this.

Mayor: I just want to add, the stakeholders here – the parents, again, overwhelmingly, the parents I've spoken to – want this change. Kids want this change. They want to not have to pay money at a bodega to leave their phone or not bring their phone. So once you have a situation where people believe something is right and is necessary, then those checks and balances, those penalties really matter. And I guarantee – I heard plenty of stories from my own kids – that when they saw someone's cell phone taken away, it very much registered with them. And it's something they did not want to have happen to them. So, I think this is going to be an effective deterrent.

Question: You mentioned – you and the chancellor mentioned a couple of issues that you can foresee like, for instance, cyber bullying, which you're going to cover in the “misusing it, you lose it” policy and cheating. I was wondering, one of the potential problems brought up to me earlier today was the potential for sexting in school and I was wondering if that was something that you guys might cover, or have to look into further with this policy?

Mayor: I'll start and pass it to the chancellor. Yeah, I think that's a real concern but, again, I think when you start from the reality – we put the safety of children first and the parents need to guarantee their children's safety first. That is the thing to me that supersedes all other considerations. Then you say, okay, how are you going to make sure people don't do inappropriate activities? Well, you have real checks and balances in place, and there's real penalties if they do. And that has to be communicated consistently and people have to see the results. And that's what will, I think, constrain behavior. But let me let the chancellor go into some more detail.

Chancellor Fariña: First and foremost, we're certainly going to make a list based on discussion with our principal focus groups of all the things we absolutely do not want to see. I do not expect that any of us will ever walk into a school and you're going to see every child on their cell phone. That is not our plan. Our plan is, how do they carry a cell phone to school and use it appropriately so they can get home from school. The use in school itself is going to be largely determined by each school. I can see in high school, in particular, the cell phones being used for research. I can see them for lessons. I've actually been in a school where they were also using it for reading levels, where each child had an access to an app where they were reading the same topic but on different reading levels. So, I think we need to see – cell phones are not just about making phone calls, or sexting, but all the uses that they can get out of it. And I think our students will be smart enough to figure out what some of those are. So, that's really how I see it. I see it being used in emergencies only selectively because we're still going to have protocols on who makes any school-wide alerts. It's not going to be every child calling every parent for everything. And I also do not expect the phones to be used in a way that parents can call their kids willy-nilly. With all due respect, as much as you love your child, I wouldn't want you calling at 10 o'clock

in the morning, saying, sweetheart, did you have breakfast this morning. So, it's not that kind of cell phone use. It's about being really – doing it correctly, and that's why we feel having this amount of time to think about it – I'm going to be discussing the policy with the superintendents on Tuesday and I expect the superintendents, at their principals meeting – which I actually have one today – will be discussing with all their principals, what do we want to do, maybe we want to do this as a group. And all of us, kind of, agree on how we're going to handle it. So, there's going to be a lot of thought being given into it. Today, we're lifting the ban, we're not implementing it.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: Hold on a sec – I'm sorry, go ahead.

Question: Privacy concerns – I mean, these cell phones stream straight to the internet. How are you going to address those particular issues?

Chancellor Fariña: The way we would do anything else – common sense. You know, and kids have cell phones anyway. I mean, the thing to fear – we're not putting a tool in their hand that they don't have. They have it. What we're saying is, let's use it – common sense. It's actually going to give us an opportunity to do lessons in schools that up until now we've avoided because what are you going to give a lesson on something that you're forbidding? The more you forbid kids to do things, the more they want to do them. So, now we're saying – now that this is being lifted, we're going to actually teach you how to use it correctly. So, that's how I see this actually playing out.

Question: On designated locations – if they choose a designated location, who's going to collect and redistribute those to a designated location and who's responsible for it if it ends up –

Chancellor Fariña: That's going to be different in every school and that's something we're also discussing with principals in terms of some of the recommendations we give. But, like I said, there were schools that had already had done pieces of this, so this is not going to be foreign. This is not going to be totally different than...

Question: [inaudible]

Chancellor Fariña: [Schools Chancellor Fariña speaks in Spanish]

Mayor: Well said.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: Let me just start to make sure that we're clear, and then if Carmen wants to add – every one of the questions is fair. There's all sorts of – whenever you look at any public policy area – a lot of things you have to look at, a lot of unintended consequences you have to address. I just want to make sure we're not, you know, putting the cart before the horse here. We have a policy right now that makes it impossible for parents to communicate with their kids. Who brought these children into the world? Parents. Who's, first and foremost, responsible for their safety and their well-being? The parents, and the parents have not been able to communicate with their kids in a context where they have to. So, job one is to fix that. Now, you're right if you say, well, wait a minute, then that brings up all sorts of interesting, sort of, procedural issues and day-to-day issues. That's right, but I think we work from a simple assumption that if we're not protecting the safety of our children and we're not working with our parents, we're failing, and we've got to try something different. We do know that there have been good examples of these check-in and check-out systems. We do know that there have been good examples of setting real boundaries and real consequences that students have respected. So we've got some good examples to work with. But I think the liability question would simply be the same as everything

else that we deal with in the school day. Obviously, there's a host of liability concerns that are addressed by the Department of Education. I think we would just consider it the same as those.

Question: Well, what are the options for principals and the leaderships teams [inaudible] not in my building, no cell phones?

Mayor: Well, we said that there's not going to be a ban on cell phones. So they're working within the context that they can't ban cell phones. They can approach how they want to handle them in different ways but they can't ban them because, again, a parents has to have a right to be able to reach their child. Right now, when you look at how the ban is implemented in some places, it makes it essentially impossible for a child to bring a cell phone with them. If you can't afford to leave it a bodega or some other location, and you're going through a metal detector, you have no choice but to leave your cell phone at home. And then on the way to school, on the way back, your parent can't reach you. That's unacceptable.

Question: How does this apply to tablets and –

Mayor: Okay, you go first. Go ahead.

Questions: – tablets and iPads and to changing policies there?

Mayor: Tablets and iPads.

Chancellor Fariña: I mean, we have them in schools already. So I don't think there's any policy changes there whatsoever. But I think what they've taught us is how useful they can be. When we first brought them into school, it was the whole class doing the same thing. The more schools I visit now, they're using them for differentiating instruction. I was in a school recently where there were almost five groups of instruction in the same classroom, reading the same text on different reading levels – and that was on an iPad. So, I think that that's another way that we might use the phone. But I want to go back to one of the other questions that was asked and because when I was speaking before the students here were shaking their head “yes.” This is going to give us an opportunity to really have robust discussions on things that we've just taken for granted. It's one thing to have a phone, it's another thing to know how to use it and why you use it. And I think having a discussion between teenagers, their parents, teachers, and a principal, is something we really haven't done. And I think all discussions should be like that. It should be students saying, we think it should be this, a principal saying, well, I think it should be this – and a parent saying, well, for this reason – because the only way we're going to make really change and grow our kids towards independence – if they know why there are rules, why the rules are there, and they have a part in making those rules. So, I'm really encouraging principals to have these robust discussions, and not come to the table with pre-made ideas on how the discussions should go, and then learn from each other. And that's where I think this gives us a big advantage.

Question: I know that you had campaigned, Mr. Mayor, on ending this, so I'm wondering why it took a year to make this announcement? What were you looking at? What were you studying since you're going to leave it up to the individual schools?

Mayor: Well, I think the important point was – first of all, there was a sequencing question, where you saw some of the things we focused on in the beginning of the year, and we thought those were particularly, profoundly important for the future of the schools – pre-k, afterschool, community schools, renewal schools, et cetera. Second, we did know there were a lot of detailed concerns and we wanted there to be time to work through the different stakeholders and hear out those concerns before we made the formal move. So, to me, it was as soon as we felt we had gone through thorough consultation and really thought about the different angles and were ready to go, it was time to announce it. And that's what time it is now.

Question: [inaudible] teachers and how they feel about this? You talked about parents, you talked about principals, and the students, but how do the teachers who are actually in the classrooms feel about this [inaudible]?

Mayor: My experience talking to teachers, which is – I haven't talked to every teacher, obviously – but the teachers I've talked to recognize, first of all, the importance of parents feeling that they can do their job. And we've emphasized – and this is a really important underlying point – we have emphasized that the key to future of public education in this city is to get parents and teachers into greater alignment. That's why in the contract we focused on a lot more communication between teachers and parents. And we put a lot of time into that because we were missing – as a city – we were missing the strategic importance of that relationship. One of the things I've found is teachers get this. A lot of them are parents themselves and the last thing they want to be is out of touch with their kids. So, where I have heard some concerns is exactly the kind of questions that come up here. How do you set some boundaries? How do you make sure they're not being used inappropriately? But we are confident that those can be addressed at the school level.

A few more. Let me do one there, go ahead.

Question: For the chancellor, can you please spell out a couple more ways that you think [inaudible]?

Chancellor Fariña: What?

Mayor: Boost instruction.

Question: [inaudible] that you could actually help instruction inside the classroom?

Chancellor Fariña: Well, I certainly think the research capacity using, you know, Safari if you're doing a research topic in science class, and social studies class, having ready access. And where you don't have to do it all as a whole class, but individually, I think is really a tool that would work. I think on some of the other – you know, I have an eight-year-old grandson who wants a pet. He wants a dog. Unfortunately, he wants him to live with me. And I said to him, you have to research a dog that's of a certain size, that doesn't have to be walked 14 times a day, that I can hold, and he literally went – we're looking at tools that the kids are using at the age of four, and yet we're saying it has all the – we have to stop looking at the evilness of this and look at the positiveness. And I want to go back to the question about teachers. I don't think there's a teacher in the system that doesn't have a cell phone in her pocket or on her desk or near her somewhere. And I think we are actually just saying that this a courtesy we're extending, with much more limited use, to students because that is the world of today. So, I just think that makes sense. But I think once we start looking at the – and I would even suggest that the committees, the SLTs, start making a list of all the things that cell phones could be used for that we haven't even begun to think about.

Question: Has UFT expressed any concerns about the use of these cell phones in a class room to possibly video teachers in the classroom? Have they expressed that to you?

Chancellor Fariña: No. Remember, the purpose of the cell phone is not to have it in your hands during class time, and that's going to be severely limited. So, I don't see this – will people take advantage and do the wrong thing? Of course, but there will be consequences. And once that consequence is faced and is clear – what it is – I don't think it's going to happen over and over again. And also, I have a lot more respect for our students and our teachers than a lot of other people. I think [inaudible] explained that once they're part of the decision making, they're going to be the police in their own schools, correct? You're going to make sure that your – yeah, you're laughing – but your peers don't do the wrong thing.

Mayor: And I want to join in on that as a parent. I'll tell you why I think the young leaders with us today – I'll tell you why I think they will be part of it – because they don't want to lose the right for everyone. The

challenge here is, we're saying we're going to make a change that is going to respect parents, and kids who play by the rules are going to have an opportunity to have their cell phone the appropriate way. If kids abuse that, you know, we have a right to look at the policy anew. And certainly in a particular school they have the right to change the policy in different ways. So, I think the word will spread, if you do the wrong thing you'll lose your phone. I guarantee you that will solve the problem right there in the vast majority of cases. But if there were bigger problems, a lot of kids are going to turn to each other and say, don't blow this for the rest of us.

Question: Just to clarify the policy of actually confiscating the phones – would the school keep it at the end of the day? Or would it be returned –

Mayor: There's different ways of doing it but, you know, as part of the deal, the school would have the right to hold onto it for a set amount of time.

Chancellor Fariña: I think it depends on the infraction. I certainly see schools setting up different times for different infractions and, at least in my opinion, I would say that it would only be given back where the parent has to come to school and pick it up because I think that raises the ante and also lets the parents know – look, we tried to give them the freedom, they didn't use it the right way, both of you are responsible from here on in.

Mayor: Yeah, that adds an extra layer of – they would have some explaining to do.

[Laughter]

Okay, on-topic, last call. On-topic, going once. Going twice. Off-topic.

Question: [inaudible] Yesterday, and really quickly, I'm just going to bring it up here. Since you've been mayor, have either you or your wife smoked marijuana inside Gracie Mansion?

Mayor: No. I haven't smoked marijuana since I was at NYU.

[Laughter]

Question: This question is not on your drug habits.

Mayor: Thank you.

Question: It is a question – I wonder if you've had a chance to read the Daily News editorial today. It talked about, obviously, the tensions that are existing with the rank-and-file of the police department. And one part said that you have to accept responsibility for inflaming the police with remarks that – delivered in the context of the grand jury's refusal to issue a chokehold indictment – cast the Finest as guilty of racial abuse.

Mayor: I have not read the editorial, so I don't want to comment on something I haven't read. I think we have to move forward. I think we have to move forward. We've talked now for several weeks. There's been a lot of back and forth, a lot of rhetoric, a lot of emotion. I think the people of this city want us all to move forward. I think they want us to be mature adults and sit down and resolve differences and move forward. And my door is open. Obviously, Commissioner Bratton and I met last week with the police union leadership. Commissioner Bratton, as you know, is meeting with them again today. We want to resolve valid issues. We're going to continue on our program of reform. We're going to continue to do things that will bring police and community together. We're going to continue to make the kind of changes – which I'm very proud of – when you look at 2014, the reduction of stops, the reduction of marijuana arrest – these were profound reforms that the people of this city demanded. They're happening. It's making lives better, and I think it's going to reduce tensions between police and community members. But we're going to do that while keeping crime low. And I think the numbers announced this week are a great indication of that. And Commissioner Bratton said, and I said, on

Monday, we believe we're going to do even better in 2015 at reducing crime. So, that's what people want us to focus on. They want to repair the relationship between police and community. They want to keep up the work of reducing crime. They want people to work together and I'm certainly ready to work together with all the stakeholders.

Question: Do you feel that you have any – in the interest of moving forward – some people felt that you would apologize or say that you could've been more, maybe, different in your words recently.

Mayor: See, I don't – I respect the question, but the construct is about the past, and I just don't want to do that. I think this is about moving forward. I've always tried to tell the truth as I know it and I try to be respectful. And I think if you look at years of what I've said about the NYPD, I have immense respect for the men and women of the NYPD. I believe in them, and I've obviously directed a lot of resources to helping them do their work and be safe. And I chose – and this is something I think a lot of people in the NYPD would acknowledge, even if they disagree with me on one policy or another – I chose a leader for that agency that has the respect of people all over this country in policing. So I'm comfortable with the fact that I've always tried to tell the truth and stay consistent to my values. But I don't think it's about the past, and I don't think it's about what people said. I think it's about moving forward and getting things done together.

Question: I'm wondering, have any DNC folks expressed concern about your [inaudible] with the police unions?

Mayor: No.

Question: Do you support Governor Cuomo and Governor Christie's decision to veto the Port Authority reform bill?

Mayor: I have not seen the bill. I think we clearly need serious reform of the Port Authority but I haven't seen the bill and wouldn't comment until I have.
Sally.

Question: The City Council today is renewing its effort to get support for a home rule – a home rule resolution –

Mayor: Some members.

Question: – some members, right – for a resolution in Albany – to support a bill in Albany – sorry – that would increase police disability pensions. I was wondering – I know in the past, you haven't supported that, but you might have [inaudible] with the PBA. Have you reconsidered or looked at –

Mayor: I want to separate that particular bill, which I have some serious reservations about, from the larger question. I think, when one of our officers is injured, we have to make sure that their future will be okay, and we have to find the right way to do that. I think there are some real issues that have been raised that are valid – that we're looking for solutions on. I think that bill has particular elements to it that I think are problematic. But I'm very willing to have the conversation with all involved on how we can be fair to anyone who is injured in the line of duty.

Question: On the subject of the congressional seat held by former Congressman Grimm, two part question – first, your thoughts on that whole ordeal where he said he was not going to resign, and he was elected, and now he does resign. And second, what do you want to see, going forward, for that seat? Any particular candidates?

Mayor: I think we've all felt, for a long time, that we were waiting for the other shoe to drop. And sometimes, where there's smoke, there is fire. And that's what happened here. And I just wish the congressman had taken

responsibility a lot earlier. But that being said, you know – I obviously am a Democrat, I'm a proud Democrat, I hope a Democrat wins that seat, and I'm looking forward to that.

Question: Just a quick follow up – do you anticipate getting involved at all in the race?

Mayor: I don't have a plan to, at this moment, but I might.

Question: There seems to be a feeling that there's a police slowdown going on right now. Is that something that you're feeling, and if so, what can you and the commissioner do about it?

Mayor: The commissioner has been very clear on this and I support the commissioner 100 percent in his approach. Again, I want people to recognize that no one has had more success as a police leader in this country than Bill Bratton. And he's made clear that we had a very aberrant set of dynamics over the last few weeks – a tragedy, a profound tragedy, an almost unprecedented tragedy with the assassination of two officers; the holidays; a series of protests that we have not seen the likes of in quite a while – all at once. I agree entirely with his approach. We're going to look at this week. We're going to let this week pass, and at the end of this week, we will make judgments and we will act accordingly.

Question: Apparently, the two officers who were injured have expressed that they weren't eager to have you visit them at the hospital. And I'm just wondering what your reaction to that is.

Mayor: I haven't seen the specifics but I would just say, generally, I respect the choice of any officer or any family in their own personal circumstance to, you know, have any approach they want. My approach is, I went to the hospital to provide support. It's up to individuals how they want to handle that.

Question: [inaudible] I was wondering how you would feel if you weren't allowed to hold the animal at the ceremony this year?

Mayor: How do I say this in words?

[Laughter]

I must say, last time, with – there was no an overwhelming amount of preparation before I was handed – may he rest in peace. [Laughs] I think reform is needed. [Laughs] I welcome a new approach.

Question: What do you hope comes out of the meeting between Commissioner Bratton and the police unions?

Mayor: Look, I think the meeting is an extension of the one we had last week. And again, whenever the topic is officer safety, that's a meeting I'm ready to have anytime anywhere. Commissioner Bratton, again, after 45 years in policing, I think, we can safely say he cares deeply about the safety of his officers. And I thought his comments earlier today at the swearing-in ceremony were really powerful, because he talked about his own personal experience – starting out as a rookie and how people – cops have to look out for each other, how people have to be smart about helping each other along the way. So, I think he's profoundly committed, as I am, to the safety of our officers. So, anything about officer safety, we're ready to talk about any time. I believe – and Commissioner Bratton believes – that the investments in technology are going to have a huge impact on officer safety, because if there's a perp on the loose, every officer – simultaneously, in this whole city – will have a smart phone or tablet in their vehicle that will show them, instantly, who that perpetrator is and a description and all the information about them. I think it's going to allow officers – if they're going into a building, they're going to know a lot more about what they're going into. It's the kind of thing that officers deserve. I certainly think the emphasis on training is going to help. A lot of that is tactical training – how to handle different situations, how to diffuse situations, when to wait for backup, how to approach things in a way that offers the least chance of anyone getting injured, including the officers. So I believe, as these new policies

come into place, that more and more officers are going to recognize how much the safety orientated policies are helping them, very tangibly, in their own lives. But we're willing to always talk about the things that will make our officers safe. So, I believe that that's a productive conversation today. And clearly, look, we want to get everyone on target, continuing the work of driving down crime in this city. And we have so much – this set of data for 2014. I don't think any of us would've said, a year ago, that would be quite as good as it was. It's extraordinary, and the NYPD did that. The men and women of the NYPD did that. They have a lot to be proud of. Now, the mission is to show people there's a chance to set a new record. And I think a lot of officers will be excited about driving crime down even further.

Question: Why weren't you included in the meeting today between Commissioner Bratton and the unions? And do you have any plans, going forward, to actually sit down with them? I know you said you're open to [inaudible]?

Mayor: Well, again, I'm open to it and we'll decide according to this next meeting and other things – what makes sense. But I do want to say one thing I've heard very clearly from all the police unions – and some of the leaders I know for quite a while and they've been very clear about this. Commissioner Bratton has communicated with them nonstop from the day he was named. It is his hallmark. That was not always true in the past. He makes it a point to call them constantly, update them, have meetings with them. And it's something I think, even when there's differences, people appreciate. So, the vast majority of the communication with those unions, of course, comes from the commissioner and his leadership team. That would be normal with any agency and that will continue. But as we see – if we think there's an opportunity for a productive additional meeting, I'll be ready to do it.

Question: How does this end? You're interested in, you're saying, in moving forward, you know, you talk to rank-and-file officers and police unions. They're interested in revisiting some remarks you made that really offended them.

Mayor: I think things move forward because human beings tend to move forward. I think the people of this city want us to move forward. And I think everyone will feel that desire from the people. We all work for the people. You know, one thing that is true of everyone you just named – we all work for the people. People want us to all move forward. They want us to get together and figure things out and move forward, and we'll do it. So, I have confidence. I've seen lots of conflicts in the past – of labor conflicts and others that got resolved because people kept talking and they found a way forward. But the reality is, again, the work – the work has been done very well in this last year. In the end, the vast majority of people who get involved in any profession – cops, teachers, any profession – do it because they care about the work. They want to make a difference. I believe the vast majority of our cops want to get back to work and do good work protecting the people of this city. They have a lot to proud of last year. I think we're going to have even more to be proud of this year. Thank you very much.

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