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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO ANNOUNCES \$8.9 MILLION RESTORATION  
OF GRAND ARMY PLAZA**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Well, everybody, good morning. First I want to say I miss living in Brooklyn. We hit a lot of traffic coming over here from Manhattan. I'm looking forward to returning to my beautiful borough. But this is a great way to conclude what's been a great week in Brooklyn. And I just want to say at the outset, the reason we do City Hall in Your Borough is it brings the government closer to the people, and allows the voices of the people to come forward. And that's what I found throughout this week. We had a great town hall meeting last night in Canarsie. We've had all sorts of wonderful gatherings all over the borough. And hearing from people about what they need, what they think, their ideas to how to solve problems. And, the Borough President, I want to thank you, you've been a wonderful host. And you know what we find in each one of these weeks in each borough is we get things done. And so today is another good example of getting something done that really speaks to the whole borough, because I'm partial as a resident of this community, but I think I can say it accurately. This is the heart and soul in all of Brooklyn, Prospect Park.

[Applause]

And I want to thank everyone here who loves this park, and takes care of this park, and supports this park. Let's give a round of applause to all of these people for all the great work they do.

[Applause]

Because this park – if you want to know everything good about Brooklyn, just walk around Prospect Park. And see the whole world, every kind of people together, making it work together in such a wonderful way and for us, for my family this park – I think we have – its fair to say a particularly deep experience with this park. It's not just that our kids used to play on the play grounds of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street or 9<sup>th</sup> Street. It's not just that they used to play just little league in the park. It is that Chirlane and I got married under a tree here in this park.

[Applause]

So, we love this place. But I'll tell you what we're announcing today is great for the park; it's great for everyone who comes through this place – the gateway to so much of Brooklyn. And I want to thank everyone who has been a part of this – special thank you because we're going to

be talking about the arch here and everything around it. A special thank you to our Transportation Commissioner Polly Trottenberg for the great work she's been doing.

[Applause]

And I just want to also remind everyone the park – you know some people think of the park as just a nice back drop, but in fact for so many Brooklynites this park is absolutely essential to their lives. And I remind people there are a lot of folks who work really hard, and don't have a lot of money and this park is the closest thing to getting away for a summer vacation that they have. And that we have to really respect that, and that's another reason why we have to always be there for Prospect Park. For a lot of people it's the only break they get, and that's pretty sacred. But you know the fact is this park, even though it's gotten a lot of attention, and it's gotten a lot of support. There are still things that need to be done in this park, and there are still inequities that have to be addressed. And we've talked about this over the last four years, and we are going to talk about it throughout this term too. Every place we find an inequality that needs to be addressed, it's our job is to do something about it. And we know that there have been parts of the park that did not get as much investment as they needed. And that's part of what we're trying to solve here today. To make sure that some areas that were overlooked get the support they need for new pathways, new benches, new lights. This whole park needs to be great for the whole community. And then I mentioned the arch and the plaza behind us. This is iconic, it's one of the great symbols for Brooklyn. But even iconic symbols need help. This arch for a long time everyone looked at but didn't actually think about what it took to keep it going, something that's been such an important part of our community.

So, we are going to make a major, major investment to make sure this arch is strong and restored, to make sure the plaza around it is beautiful and something that everyone could use. And I am happy to announce to today a \$9 million investment in Grand Army Plaza.

[Applause]

And like every good thing this came from so many community members who raised their voices and pushed hard, and fought hard to make sure this got done. So, I find this and this is another point I found in City Hall in Your Borough, and in town hall meetings and everything else. So much of what we do, we do because people raise their voices and focus us on something. So again, to everyone who has been working for a long time to get this investment, this is your victory. And we've got to make sure that this arch is here for a long time and it's something that people can enjoy and celebrate and the park around it. But we also have to remember the meaning of it.

This is the last thing I want to say. You know most of us, and I've lived here since 1992, walking distance from where we are right now. But I have to tell you most of us don't really stop to reflect on what the meaning of that arch is. And it's pretty powerful at this point in history. The arch is dedicated to the Union soldiers who fought and died in the Civil War. They were fighting to end slavery, they were fighting for an idea of universal freedom and they gave their lives for it. The pertinence to our time in particular is that in that moment in history things felt so horribly divided. You can imagine if you were living there in the 1860s you were thinking how is this ever going to come back together? How are we ever going to overcome this division? How are we ever going to overcome this hatred? How are we ever going to be one country? You would

have been right to have those worries, well in our time we have a lot of those same fears. And we see division, and we see hatred, and we see racism, and we wonder how are we going to overcome it.

One of the things we should feel when we look at that arch is that our fore bearers took on a much greater challenge and managed to forge something from it. They managed to create a country that slowly but surely unified and moved forward in common purpose. So as we restore this arch, and the park around it. As we make it a place so people can visit. I hope it will also inspire us. It's our turn, all of us in this generation to travel that same path to create healing and unity. And there is no place that represents the human possibility and the possibility of this country more than Brooklyn.

[Applause]

We show what unity looks like, and we show what people working in harmony looks like and that's why Brooklyn is now I would say very, very objectively Borough President, the center of the universe, okay. I feel that way. Just a few quick words in Spanish.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that the man we are going to turn to work with everyone at Prospect Park to make sure these great improvements happen, Commissioner of Parks, Mitch Silver.

[Applause]

**Commissioner Mitchell Silver, Department of Parks and Recreation:** Good morning everyone and what a beautiful day to celebrate the Grand Army Plaza and the iconic Soldier and Sailors Arch. Please give a round of applause for this beautiful, low-humidity day in August.

[Applause]

As many of you know the interior of this arch had not received major restoration in almost 40 years. Now I had the opportunity a few years ago to actually take a tour inside the arch and walk to the top but it is no longer safe and many of you I'm sure would like to take a tour inside. And now, very soon, in a few years, you'll be able to do just that. So needless to say, it is long overdue for tender love and care.

I want to thank Mayor de Blasio for securing nearly \$9 million to restore Grand Army Plaza to its former glory. Like the Mayor, I grew up here in Brooklyn and lived here for many years, and I still do today, and I live right down Flatbush Avenue as my father crossed the Brooklyn Bridge, we knew were home when we saw this iconic arch because we were just basically a 15-minute walk from here.

So I am very delighted that the Mayor has committed these funds to restore this incredible, iconic, landmark here in Brooklyn. I would also like to thank, of course, the Borough President who is a key partner and was here when we announced that we'll now be introducing two new entrances on Flatbush Avenue as part of our Parks without Borders Initiative, so for the first time

the Flatbush Avenue side of the park will have two entrances, one not far from Grand Army Plaza, and the other one just north of the Zoo.

I also want to thank the Prospect Park Alliance and our volunteers. We have James Snow here, and we also have Christian Zimmerman. We all know we have a number of volunteers and staff to make sure that we keep this incredible park beautiful because of course it is Brooklyn's backyard. We also want to recognize that Christian Zimmerman, the Vice President of Capital Landscape Management, is going to help us with the design of making Grand Army Plaza is returned to its glory.

He'll be - also Christina, just raise your hand - Christina will be leading a tour around the plaza after the speaking program so if you want to learn more about the history of this plaza and how this added on after Olmsted and Vaux designed this park, Christian will give you that history. This arch is the first impression of Prospect Park for countless of visitors so naturally we want to make sure it always will look its best. And more importantly we want it to stand proudly for generations to come. This funding will not only be used for improvement for the interior and exterior of the arch, but it will also re-plant the landscape berms, frame the east and west sides of the plaza, replace fencing and broken bluestone pavement, and add new lighting for the arch.

Prospect Park and Grand Army Plaza is so special. If you all – if you did not know, I'm training for the marathon so I'm in this park at least once, if not twice a week, and so this is the park where I grew up and now I'm spending even more time here as well. Also I want to give a shout out to happiest commissioner in Brooklyn, Marty Maher, who literally works in Prospect Park.

[Applause]

So I am so thrilled to see this park flourish. To see the investment in Grand Army Plaza and the arch, and with that I thank you. We will look forward to one day taking the tour inside the arch. Thank you all very much.

[Applause]

**Mayor:** So as we conclude this, again, I just want to say, I know I've watched now since 1992 the incredible work that has been done. You go back to those years, there was a lot of challenges in the park, the reason this park got stronger and stronger in a place for everyone, is a lot of people here really put their heart and soul into it. Directly helping the park, and volunteering, and being involved, people work in the park, folks who demanded more investment in the park, people who demanded a Brooklyn that worked for everyone. I am very, very clear about grassroots democracy. What happens that changes the world comes from the bottom up, not from the top down, and Brooklynites help bring Prospect Park to its greatness.

So I want to thank everyone for that, and now I want to say we're – some of us are about to take a little bike ride, and I want to just do a survey of everyone here. How many of you have biked the entire way around the park? Raise your hand. Okay, okay, very good, now I've done that many of time, although I have not done it so recently.

I do want to say that this park is really interesting because if you start here especially and you're going that a way, south, the park lulls you with the nice gentle – you know you're – it's flat, it's

even going downhill, and you're feeling good, and then you get that nice long downhill stretch, and you go by the lake and everything is feeling really good, right? And then, I have had that experience, when you come around this way, and your whole life starts passing before your eyes, and it's very hard to get the oxygen you need as you - I don't know who created that hill, okay, I want to - I wish I could go back to Olmsted and all of them, and say why did you need quite so much hill right there?

But everyone here still survived our way through it, and persevered, isn't that a metaphor for Brooklyn? Even though the hill was steep, we persevered. So everybody, we're going to take a gentle bike ride just to start the day, it's too early to be strenuous, we'll take a gentle bike ride, but everybody thank you, again we're celebrating more investment in the park, but it's only happening because of all of you. So thank you everyone and congratulations.

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