



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

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CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO PARTICIPATES IN PRESS CONFERENCE ON
TRANSPORTATION AT U.S. CONFERENCE OF MAYORS SUMMIT IN BOSTON, HOLDS Q&A
WITH REPORTERS**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you, Marty.

I've got to tell you, it is exciting for all of us when we get to gather with colleagues from around the country in common cause. We have prominent mayors from the south, from the west, from the Midwest, and those of us from the northeast – and we are forming a coalition to make a change on the issues that affect our communities.

The whole idea of this task force was to address income inequality head-on. Today, we are particularly focused on the transportation bill and what it's going to mean for our communities.

But I just want to say – express my appreciation of all my colleagues, and particularly to Marty Walsh, who's been a tremendous partner in this work. Marty speaks with a powerful voice on these issues and he is turning his ideas into action here in Boston. And we all watched – and I think every single one around me feels this – we all watched as Marty got handed the kind of crisis in the last few months that mayors only see in their nightmares, but Marty handled it with extraordinary skill, and I know all of us were watching with you in solidarity, a lot of us were talking to you, and you took an impossible situation and made something from it, so I just want to thank you for your leadership here in this past [inaudible].

[Applause]

The – the idea of standing here [inaudible] Faneuil Hall, reminds you of the fact that the rules of the game can change. Whenever I walk around Boston, having grown up in Cambridge and spent a lot of time around here – when you walk around Boston, you are constantly reminded of the fact that history has a habit of going through unexpected changes when people act. Certainly, those who gathered in this part of town a few hundred years ago had an idea of a different kind of society. And lo and behold, they achieved it. So it is a reminder to us to be audacious and not assume that the current political context, which is paralyzing – the political context we're living in right now that does not address the issues of income inequality, does not address the issues of our cities is paralyzing. We don't accept it. We believe we can make an impact on it. We're going to go to Washington together to make that impact.

I'll describe that in a moment, but I just want to say, there's another reason why it's so powerful being here – because this is one of the great cities of our nation, and it's one of the great cities in large measure because it had a transportation system that allowed it to grow and be great. When we think about the transportation bill and the fight coming up in these next few months, think about the city of Boston – very near to us here, in 1897, the first subway in America was opened at [inaudible] station.

The fact that this city innovated a whole understanding of mass transit – an idea at the time that was unlikely and, I’m sure, to some, impossible – well, again, people here decided that something had to change and they made it change and now it’s an example for us all.

So, we believe that with our combined actions – with mayors all over the country, working with our larger metropolitan areas – because each and every one of these mayors is not just a leader within the boundaries of their city, they are a leader within their larger metropolitan areas – they relate and involve and coordinate their business communities, their labor communities, their civic communities, their faith communities – the mayor is in the core in each area of this country of a much larger group of people who can have an impact in Washington – and we particularly talked about deepening our efforts with our fellow mayors in smaller cities and suburbs all around us to build common ground on the question of the transportation bill, because if this country doesn’t invest in infrastructure, doesn’t invest in transportation, we will literally fall behind.

Mayor Walsh said powerfully yesterday, the status quo means falling behind. And that’s one of the most important points we’re going to bring to Washington – that if we’re funding the transportation bill at the same level that it’s been stuck at for 13 years, for a lot of these cities, we will be falling behind. We will not be competitive. Our nation will not be competitive.

So, two things – on April 9, there will be events – simultaneous events – all over the country – these cities and many other cities – where we’re going to go to our elected representatives in Washington in their home districts and we’re going to organize all those people I said – mayors from metropolitan areas, business, labor, faith groups, civic groups – to all in a coordinated manner all over the country simultaneously go to our elected representatives in their districts and say how crucial it is to fund the transportation bill at a higher level.

Then, in the week of May 11, we will be going as a group in large numbers to Washington to lobby together – again, with all those other core parts of the equation – with business, labor, civic groups, and faith groups. We intend to have a strong presence in Washington to try to open up this situation once and for all, and get this country back in the business of infrastructure investment.

If we don’t do it, we should not be surprised that we keep falling behind.

We believe these two actions will happen on a scale that has not been seen in many years in terms of coordinated actions between mayors. We believe it will register in Washington deeply. And we believe that we have the moment in history to make an impact.

Wherever you go around this country, more and more people are recognizing that the failure to invest in transportation, the failure to invest in infrastructure is holding us back. We believe we can bring that consciousness that’s going around the country to bear in Washington, D.C. in the name of change. And again, being in this building gives us every reason to remember history and be hopeful. Thank you.

[Applause]

[...]

Question: Mayor, does it matter whether it’s a one- or two-year temporary reauthorization versus the full six-year bill?

[...]

Mayor: [inaudible] quick point – I think the most important – I agree with Mayor Walsh – and I think the most important point is we have to have an increase in the funding. Again, 13 years of flat funding, and what’s happened in those 13 years? The cost of everything has gone up and our infrastructure has aged rapidly – and,

for a lot of us, our populations are growing. So I think we want long-term funding – that would be the most sensible thing – but I think for a lot of us, the most important thing right now is to get that number to finally start to grow and get the federal government investing in infrastructure.

Question: Mr. Mayor, what size increase are you looking for and what would be the minimum amount [inaudible]?

Mayor: Look, you know, it's been stuck at this level – just around \$50 billion now – and we're looking for [inaudible] that we can achieve, but I think the point here is the one thing that we know would be a defeat for this country is if the funding remained flat. So we're going to push for the highest number attainable. And, again, previously, there hasn't been this combined effort by mayors, working with our entire metropolitan areas, working with business and labor – all of these are factors that could really help move this equation and push for a sizeable increase that then changes the basic rules of the game.

Question: Can you say what dollar amount you're seeking precisely?

Mayor: Again, we're all working on that together.

[...]

And the other [inaudible] – obviously, the president's put forward a plan, which is really the ideal reference point for this debate. The president's plan talks about a truly substantial increase over a long period of time. That's where we should – to question before about [inaudible] – if we really are serious about infrastructure investment, we would follow the president's vision, which is long-term funding and substantially increased funding, and a higher share of [inaudible].

Question: If it isn't expanded, what's the – what does that mean for New York?

Mayor: For New York – and I – again, my colleagues can give you their own fabulous examples, because Betsy had a bridge fall down in her city and Marty's had to close down bridges, etcetera – for us, it means – we all know what's happening to our streets. We know that we have bridges that are in real distress. We know what's going on with the overcrowding of our transportation system. It means we can't continue to grow the way we need to. And it also means that somehow we're going to have to find a way to keep patching up things that need more fundamental resolution. So, if you think about what growing economies do, look around the world at our competitor nations – they are investing in new, shiny infrastructure, whereas we're trying to just patch things up. It is not a formula for long-term success.

[...]

Mayor: Just one other follow-up on the previous question – so, I just want to get my facts straight – the president's plan – the Grow America plan – six years, \$80 billion per year. So compared to the \$50 billion per year now and what has typically been, you know, one-year allocations at a time – also a greater emphasis on mass transit.

[...]

Mayor: Nicely said. Just – on the bipartisanship point, you know, we believe that we're going to get real collegiality from fellow mayors [inaudible] metropolitan areas, because we have all talked about some of the mayors that we work with locally and what we think they're ready to do to join us. We also believe that there are a lot of members of Congress – a lot of members of the Senate and the House – who are listening. Mayor Warden talked about the situation in Tennessee, and the impact that his voice in Memphis and the other cities in Tennessee have on two Republican senators in Tennessee who are crucial to the equation. Mayor Becker of Salt

Lake City – who I don't think is with us at this moment, right? – okay – Mayor Becker talked about what just happened in Utah, where a consensus over the question of transportation was achieved within the state of Utah, and people who had not previously seen eye to eye believed it was so crucial to address these issues that Democrats and Republicans came together and turned away from the state government to invest more in infrastructure. So what you see at the local level is more and more people are working across partisan lines [inaudible]. We are going to go and reach out to our fellow mayors, both Democrat and Republican, [inaudible], gather them together for both the event in April in our districts and the event the week of May 11 in Washington to show a truly national and bipartisan effort.

[...]

Mayor: One last word, if I may – I just want to say, Marty, I came wicked far to this meeting.

[Laughter]

But it was worth it. Okay? It is worth it to be here with you. Thank you, everyone.

[...]

Mayor: ...when we were in Rome – Rome City Hall was even cooler. [Laughs].

Unknown: I'll go back to Rome.

Mayor: You'll go back on that one?

Unknown: Rome is pretty cool.

Mayor: Okay. [inaudible]

Question: So what steps is the administration planning to take to prevent another tragedy like the one that took place this weekend from happening?

Mayor: Well, we're still investigating the fire to fully understand what happened. And as we get more information, we'll be looking for ways we can change our approach. The – today, as we speak, at the fire department, there's a meeting with Jewish community leaders that was previously planned in anticipation of Passover. And certainly at that occasion, Commissioner Nigro is talking about some of the key safety actions that people have to take – the most important being that everyone needs smoke alarms. So I can certainly say we're going to be redoubling our public education efforts around smoke alarms. But we'll look at other lessons from this tragedy and find ways to work closely with the community – you know, this was – having literally stood in that house and seen where these children were lost – it's an unspeakable tragedy and there's got to be something that we take from it and learn from it and something that helps us do better, so we're progressing –

Question: Does the city think it's not advisable to leave either, you know, a hot plate or an oven burner on –

Mayor: Okay, we'll have some clear message to the people of the city on what we think about that, but we first want to really complete the investigation.

Question: Are there any updates on the investigation?

Mayor: I don't have anything for you right now, but soon we will.

Question: Can you tell us a little bit about the letter [inaudible] – talking about bipartisan cooperation between mayors – you and Rudy Giuliani authored a letter today or recently calling for an extension of permanent mayoral control – what – how did that even come about? And what are you hoping to achieve?

Mayor: Well, we obviously disagree on many things, but we have still, you know, from time to time, seen each other at events and talked about things. And clearly, this is an area where we fully agree. It's something he worked very hard to try and achieve and wasn't able to. You know, I think we did this very explicitly to show that two people who often disagree are unified when it comes to mayoral control to make the point – it's somewhat similar to what we're talking about today – that some things transcend partisanship – and mayoral control of education is a proven reform. And the previous system was a proven disaster – and we can't go back. And I think – and I appreciate Mayor Giuliani joining with me, because I think it's a statement a bit to shock people in a good way and say, look, when who people disagree on a lot of things can agree on this, it really says we're talking about something unusually important. And the reform to our educational system achieved by mayoral control has to be preserved for the long-term, and we have to take the politics out of the equation and really allow mayoral control to work to fundamentally change our schools. So I think that's the – that's the message.

Question: Any plans for him to go to Albany with you? Will we see him?

Mayor: We don't have a particular plan, but, again, I do appreciate him working with me on this.

Question: Did you ask Mayor Bloomberg to participate in that at all?

Mayor: In this case, we specifically wanted to do it with Mayor Giuliani to, you know, literally show two people who have had very, very real disagreements on a lot of other things but fundamentally agreed on this issue. That was a specific plan.

Question: Mr. Mayor, how do you balance the very real needs of the Hasidic and Orthodox community, especially through the Passover season, with the fact that the devices many of them use, like hot plates and slow-cookers, may not be safe for [inaudible]?

Mayor: Well, again, starting literally today at the fire department, we're beginning a deeper dialogue with community leaders and rabbis about what we can learn from this tragedy and what we can do better. The first thing to know is that we need smoke alarms in every home – you know, as the law dictates – and this is fundamental to saving lives. We are also going to have a deeper conversation with the community about other things we can learn from this, but again, until we have completed the investigation, I think it's appropriate to get all those facts in and then we'll begin that dialogue.

Question: Are rabbis worried about excessive regulation by the city?

Mayor: I think in this issue and public safety and certainly judging from the conversations I've had the last few days, everyone is receptive to working together on public safety. I don't think there's any resistance.

Question: The police in New York City have started a pilot program on body cameras, which is something in Boston here the commissioner has been against and said he didn't want to actually do that. I just want to ask – I don't know if you can say yet how things are going – why you really supported that and if you have any thoughts for us here in Boston about whether or not that kind of thing might be a good idea?

Mayor: Look, every city is different. But what I'd say for us is it's a great idea because we need to build a stronger bond between police and community – and people need to see more transparency and more accountability – and a body camera achieves that – and by the way, it works for everyone involved. In many police forces, as body cameras have been tried out, officers like them. I've spoken to some of my fellow mayors

and certainly to Commissioner Bratton about his conversations around the country. Officers like them because it provides their point of view in absolutely objective manner, and oftentimes prove that the actions that they took were correct. So there's a lot of dialogue going on this topic around the country, and more and more, I think you're finding that police officers believe this is a reform that's helpful to them. Our pilot's just begun. I can't give you great conclusive evidence yet from it, but we're very, very hopeful about it. We think it's going to work. We think it's something we're going to be able to expand on a much bigger level. And we think it's going to be part of bringing police and community closer together.

Question: Would you advise Boston to do the same thing?

Mayor: I don't advise other cities – and I have immense respect for Marty Walsh. But I would say, as we get evidence from our pilot, I'll certainly share it with him and then it'll be up to him to figure out what makes sense for his city.

Amy Spitalnick: Last question.

Question: Some Democrats in Albany are calling for a reauthorization of mayoral control for seven years. Is that something that you think is good?

Mayor: I believe that it should be done permanently. I think, again, it is a reform that is proven. We've had more than a decade now and we know that the school system has worked much better under mayoral control. The previous system, which I saw up close, worked in some districts, was a disaster in other districts, and unfortunately was prone to corruption in many ways. That's not acceptable. So mayoral control of education is a fundamental reform. We cannot go back. It should be permanent. If, for some reason, the legislature does not want to make it permanent, of course they should make it for the longest possible timeframe so we can keep doing the work we need to do.

Amy Spitalnick: Great, thank you, guys.

Question: What's [inaudible], governance- or policy-wise? Today and yesterday.

Mayor: I – I appreciate the question. See, that's a deep, thoughtful question, Amy.

Unknown: See?

Unknown: It's very deep.

Mayor: Amy, why are you repressing –

Unknown: Amy, really!

Mayor: – repressing them when they're trying to ask thoughtful questions?

Unknown: Stepping on democracy!

Mayor: I'm – I'm so sorry you guys had to see this.

Unknown: Yeah, it's ugly.

Mayor: The – first of all, I honestly – whenever I gather with my fellow mayors, I am impressed by the caliber of the people – I am not saying this, you know, as flattery – it's true. I'm – I'm really impressed with the kind of people who are mayors around the country – many of them from untraditional backgrounds. Many of them were

community organizers or things other than just the traditional political [inaudible], and I find that very compelling. But I'd say the experience that was most striking to me was hearing from Mayor Wharton who talked about the work done by mayors along the Mississippi River. And he said that they used to have a lot of divisions and could not get their issues addressed – and they decided to band together – and that 68 mayors – small towns, big cities, Republican, Democrat – from along the Mississippi River banded together and actually have been able to create a coherent coalition that's had an impact on those issues. I had no idea about that – nor did – and the second one, I would say, is the Utah story – Mayor Becker tell us about how the state government of Utah – the state legislature of Utah decided to increase the gas tax and index it because they just came to the conclusion that the absence of infrastructure investment was hurting them. And you know, when you – you hear these stories that, bluntly, never – and this is not a comment on the media, it's a comment on sort of the way the world is – that we should be talking about. These are very powerful examples of something changing, but I wouldn't have known them if I hadn't come here and gathered with these colleagues. So I actually found it inspirational because people gave real examples of ways that change is being created in different parts of the country.

Question: Anything you might apply to New York City governments?

Mayor: I think it's all inspirational to keep trying to break through on the investment question. So I think yes, apply it in the sense of it is further example of we have to crack the code and, you know, get all levels of government into the infrastructure business. We're about to do our capital plan. We're going to be investing a lot in infrastructure. I'm going to challenge the state to do a similar amount and I'm going to challenge especially the federal government to get back into the infrastructure business.

Question: To – to what extent is this one of the keys – I know one of the things – one of the big themes you've been talking about is income inequality. Getting this infrastructure investment right and transportation right – to what extent is that one of the keys?

Mayor: Oh, I think it's totally key. You know, he's still there, so when he moves, we'll move – how's that?

Unknown: That's great.

Unknown: Wow.

Mayor: Okay, so, I think this is – this is the heart of the matter for so many of us. So we came to this through the prism of inequality. In other words, this task force, as Marty said, formed originally at the Dallas meeting had its first gathering in August at Gracie Mansion and it started out with the mayors talking about our own efforts to fight inequality locally – increased minimum wage, living wage, paid sick days, pre-k, broadband access – and it quickly morphed into a discussion of how we change things on a more foundational level. And that's where people started saying, look, let's go at the federal government, particularly on transportation – the other topic we're going to discuss today is affordable housing – and start the process of getting the federal government back in the game. I think what you're hearing is – and I used my, you know, elegant, romantic description at the beginning of what happened to this city history, you know, but I think it's a reminder. We – the politics we have now in Washington, D.C. are not set in stone. If you go back in time 20 years, they weren't there – they literally weren't there. No one ever heard of the Tea Party 20 years ago. This is a moment in history and a countervailing trend is starting, because the national debate on income inequality is deepening all the time, and you see a bipartisan dynamic where we know our colleagues on both sides of the aisle – and business and labor – all together want to make a breakthrough on infrastructure. So the original conversation on inequality has deepened, and now we're talking about the fact that if you don't invest in transportation, if you don't invest in mass transit, if you don't invest in affordable housing, you can't address income inequality. It's really deepening and it's more focused on Washington than ever before.

Have I exhausted you?

Question: What does May 11 look like? You said it was going to be sort of on a scale that we haven't seen –

Mayor: Well, we certainly haven't seen mayors come together from all over the country to lobby together for something in a coordinated fashion – and bringing business leaders and labor leaders and civic leaders and faith leaders with them. So, our goal is to do something game-changing before the decisions are made [inaudible], to really show a united front like Congress has not seen before, and bring the question of infrastructure to the fore in a way that dramatically affects the equation.

Thank you.

Question: Mr. Mayor, do you agree with the Boston Globe editorial that Elizabeth Warren should get into the presidential race?

Mayor: I don't talk about potential candidates. People have to decide if they want to be candidates or not – and then we can talk about them.

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