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RUSH TRANSCRIPT: ON EVE OF POPE FRANCIS' VISIT, MAYOR DE BLASIO AND CARDINAL DOLAN ANNOUNCE ARCHDIOCESE TO PROVIDE BEDS WITH SOCIAL SERVICES TO CITY PROGRAM FOR STREET HOMELESS

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you so much. Thank you so much, your eminence. And I want to echo your point. This is a week of faith in New York City as our Jewish brothers and sisters today worship on Yom Kippur, and as the whole city anticipates the arrival of Pope Francis. It's an amazing moment. It's an introspective moment. It's a moment to recommit ourselves. And I want to thank Cardinal Dolan for the extraordinary leadership he provides in this city every day, not just to the many, many followers of the Catholic faith who live in the archdiocese and beyond, but also to all New Yorkers.

Cardinal Timothy Dolan: Thank you. Would you tell my boss that?

Mayor: I will. In fact, I will have a chance to provide your boss with an update on your progress.

[Laughter]

Mayor: He actually asked me to schedule a job evaluation, so I told him –

[Laughter]

Mayor: The fact is this partnership with the archdiocese is so important to so much we do. And when Cardinal Dolan and I spoke, and we said not only do we have needs that we must meet to serve our people, but we said we have to honor Pope Francis. We have to heed his call. Pope Francis is calling us all to action. He's asking all of us – it doesn't matter what faith you are, it doesn't matter what country you live in – he's asking all of us to do more to help those in need. So when the Cardinal and I spoke, we talked about reaching farther, heeding His Holiness' call, putting it into action, and doing more together. That is what brought us to this day. And that is what frames this extraordinary initiative we're going to describe.

I want to take a moment before I get into this because there is another important thing that's happened that we're all feeling as New Yorkers. So, your eminence, with your indulgence – and you and I are both real baseball fans –

Cardinal Dolan: Yes.

Mayor: You will join – you're a St. Louisan by – by birth, so you'll appreciate this moment. The people of New York City have lost Yogi Berra – and one of the people I think defines life in this city. We all looked up to Yogi. We all felt a personal sense of connection. I think for so many of us, that felt like there's another member of our families – and that was Yogi Berra. And he – it's easy enough to talk about his career. It was absolutely extraordinary – 10 World Series – more than any other player has been a part of – 10 World Series victories, three MVP awards, 15-time all-star – an extraordinary record of accomplishment – Hall of Famer. But I think what is so – was so endearing about him was the warmth, and the wit, and the humanity, and, yes, the foibles.

There are many Yogi-isms, and they are often a part of our life in the city. My personal favorite – I quote it often – is the famous 90 percent of this game is half mental –

[Laughter]

– Which, I think could be said of public life, as well. But it's a day to celebrate all that Yogi Berra has meant to New York City. It's obviously a sad day, but a day to celebrate 90 extraordinary years, and a real part of our culture.

Well, back to this important moment and what we're doing together. St. Anthony's Shelter exemplifies what the church has done for those in need for centuries, taking in people no matter what their condition, no matter what life has dealt them, and helping them to a better path. His Holiness has reminded us to not denigrate or minimize people in pain or people who have found challenges that overcame them. His Holiness reminds us of our common humanity and he instructs us to think of people who don't have a home, first as human beings, not as faceless burdens on the society. And that's the spirit that brings us here today – to recognize that if we're really going to remember that there but for the grace of God go I – that homelessness is something that could happen to anyone. In fact, it has happened to some people who thought their lives were secure and thought their circumstances were strong, but then found themselves on the wrong end of a bad development and found themselves without a home.

Homelessness is something that can happen to anyone. And so we have to honor the Pope's vision by being there for those who are struggling. What we have agreed with the archdiocese – on top of so many other efforts we do together – is that together we will find 150 emergency beds for people who are homeless as part of our Safe Haven effort – 150 beds that will be in churches and in community spaces that are part of the archdiocese to help those in great need, and to help them come off the street into some place that is better and healthier for them. We are locating the sites and we will have these beds available for homeless New Yorkers as this winter begins.

This is a first of a series of things we will do together – the archdiocese and the city of New York – to address homelessness and to address the overall affordable housing crisis in this city. I want you to understand what the Safe Haven situation – or the Safe Haven approach means. And I'll take this occasion to say I'll give my exclamation but, if you have questions, we have a real expert here – our commissioner for homeless services, Gilbert Taylor. And I also want to take the occasion to thank Monsignor Sullivan for his extraordinary work at Catholic Charities; and thank Father Ignatius, who is a director of this wonderful facility.

Safe Havens recognize that there are some individuals who live on the streets and have not been willing to come into shelter. Remember, in New York City, we have an obligation to provide shelter for everyone in need. We do it every single day. And there are some individuals who are not willing to come into shelter – maybe they've had a bad experience in a shelter before, maybe because of some of the challenges they face, such as mental health problems, or substance abuse problems. They don't feel comfortable in a larger setting. But what we have found through real experience is that a smaller, more intimate, more supportive setting will actually draw people off the streets to where they can get help – and those are called Safe Havens. And what we've found is in the Safe Havens – these are often very small, sort of home-like atmospheres – in the Safe Havens, someone who was previously wasn't willing to accept mental health services, or wasn't willing to acknowledge that they had a substance abuse problem that needed treatment – then in that kind of more supportive setting, some individuals have had a breakthrough, they've turned a corner, and they've gotten their lives back together.

So, as we know about all of humanity – there's not a reality of one-size-fits-all. We need what works for each individual. And for some people, the Safe Haven is the only way that we can reach them and turn their life around, so we have to do it on a bigger scale, because we're devoted on getting people off the streets and into housing they deserve.

This initiative we're calling Open Doors because it suggests very clearly that all are welcome. They're not going to be judged. No one will be turned away. No one will be told that they have a problem that we can't

address. It's going to be an open-door welcoming situation. 500 beds will be a part of this initiative. Again, this is the Safe Haven approach that has been proven to work here and in other places around the country. So the Opening Doors initiative will be 500 beds from faith-based – faith-based organizations around the city – the 150 we announced today being the core of this effort. The church's commitment today builds upon the extraordinary generosity we have found from houses of worship all over the city through our clergy advisory council. A number of houses of worship from all boroughs have joined together and have pledged 300 beds over the five boroughs. So, we're getting close to our goal between these different efforts. And again, houses of worship of every denomination, every background, every faith, working together.

All of us can feel commonality in Pope Francis' vision of a more inclusive society. It doesn't matter, again, what faith you believe in – Pope Francis is a moral voice, speaking to all of us, calling all of us to action. And it's rooted in a respect for our common humanity. Now, we know that while so many good people are trying to serve those who have experienced misfortune, there are still to many times when homeless people are treated as less than human. They're ostracized, they're stigmatized, they're de-humanized, and that's part of the problem. Cardinal Dolan wrote an extraordinarily eloquent op-ed a couple of weeks ago that talked about his own personal path of realization. I think every one of us can admit to at times not seeing enough of the common humanity, but it's something we have to come to grips with. And what better time to do that than when we have leading moral voice on this earth in our midst over the next 48 hours.

The problem is not a new one. For decades, we've had a profound challenge with homelessness. But what is new is the huge weight of the economic reality we face today, and what that is doing to change homelessness as we know it. Yes, there are still many, many people who are homeless, first and foremost, because of a mental health problem or a substance abuse problem. But more and more we see people are homeless for purely economic reasons. The bottom fell out of their family budgets. They lost a job – they couldn't find a new one. The cost of housing, which has continued to skyrocket, overtook them. So, there's a lot of different challenges in the homelessness crisis and we have to address all of them, and we will do it with extraordinary partners like the Archdiocese. But in terms of the particular challenge of those who have some of the biggest problems, the most intractable problems – the Safe Haven approach and this Opening Doors effort will be essential.

In the end, we have to see each and every individual that's homeless as one of us – a fellow New Yorker who needs a helping hand, and who we can help. I mentioned the cardinal's op-ed – one of the most powerful passages in it – what he said, we can – this is, I think, a good admonishment to all of us – the cardinal said, what we cannot do is reduce these troubled people to a problem to get rid of – “a problem to get rid of.” We can't see our fellow New Yorkers as a problem. We have to see them as people who have not yet been redeemed and helped in the way we need to.

So, we'll continue to invest in addressing this problem. As you've heard, we've added over \$1 billion dollars in new investments to address homelessness over the next four years. And that will include rental subsidies to get people out of shelter, or to keep people from going into shelter to begin with; mental health services on an unprecedented level; and more and more outreach to people on the street to get them into places like these safe havens.

All of these efforts will allow us to finally address the true nature of this problem, and on top of it, the nation's largest affordable housing program, which we know more and more will allow us to get to the root of this problem. One point, and I think it's very important to note as a measure of hope – because one think we can say about Pope Francis is, even in a complicated and a difficult world, he gives us hope. And there's a relentlessness to the hope he imbues in everything he does.

We know, amidst the challenges – in the last fiscal year in this city, 38,000 people – thank God – left shelter and went to permanent housing. And I've talked about the 15,000 of them that were a result of brand new programs we've put in place just in the last year. So we have a big challenge, but we're also finding more and more ways to get people on a better path and to get them to the help they need. I want to finish with a brief quote from His Holiness and then just want to say a few words in Spanish.

I think His Holiness has done more than leader than I can ever remember to help us see a clear path forward. He said, “The measure of the greatness of a society is found in the way it treats those most in need, those who have nothing apart from their poverty.” I think that gives us our mandate, and a mandate worthy of a city we are proud of, and proud to call the greatest city in the world.

In Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that – before I bring up our elected officials, I want you to hear from Father Harold, who plays a key role in the efforts here. Because as the Cardinal and I were to Father Harold about why Safe Havens are so important to reaching people with particular challenges and problems, he defined, I think, better than I ever could what’s needed to get someone off the streets and on a better path. So, Father Harold, we thank you so much for what you do and we would be honored to hear you talk about the great work that is happening here.

[...]

Mayor: Alright. So we will now take questions about this initiative and how we’re addressing homelessness, and obviously about the Pope’s visit as well. Yes?

Question: Mayor, are the 500 beds being spread out across all five boroughs?

Mayor: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely, yes.

Question: Could you give a concrete example of the 150 that you spoke about that, I guess, that’s the first phase of it? What is it going to be like? Five beds here, four there – is that what you mean, like wherever-

Mayor: Yes, I’ll start, and Gil or Kevin – anyone who wants to join in, feel free. These tend to be, again, smaller facilities. For example, if you’re talking about a church or a church community center, you know that might be a position where you could have 10 people, 15 people – something like that – who you could accommodate in a fairly intimate setting, and give them the kind of support that they need. So the idea is that we’re looking for a variety of settings where we can maintain that kind of an atmosphere. If you want to add or – Kevin?

Commissioner Gilbert Taylor, Department of Homeless Services: So that’s – that’s absolutely correct, Mayor. So we’re looking at places where we can have smaller groups of people. We can connect them with services, social services that will come to them. We can also deploy resources that will meet them where they’re at. So we have psychiatrists and phycologists who work on our street outreach, work with us, and they would be able to be deployed to these different locations, and really engage our clients who are there around getting them back on their feet and getting them housed.

Question: So you have identified the one’s you’re going to [inaudible] outreach?

Commissioner Taylor: We’re still looking – we’re still working with the Archdiocese to do that.

Monsignor Kevin Sullivan, Catholic Charities: You know, I think working with – Catholic Charities working with Department of Homeless Services, a variety of sizes. But we’re not talking about the big 100-200 bed stuff. But the critical point is that there will be services and there will be the attempt to engage the individuals in a very interpersonal way so that they feel at home. There is a connection which will enable them to deal with some of the difficult issues that there are.

Mayor: So, again, I want to make sure to be clear – the overall initiative – the Opening Doors Initiative is 500 beds. 150 have been pledged by the Archdiocese of New York. Obviously, we work very regularly with the Dioceses of Brooklyn separately as well. But 150 have been pledged by the Archdiocese of New York. 300

have been separately pledged by a variety of faith leaders – many different faiths all over the five boroughs. So, again, we're getting close to that overall goal of 500 beds. Yes?

Question: Are any of these available today to be moved into?

Mayor: So we're just starting the initiative now. Do you want to talk about the timeline?

Commissioner Taylor: So our timeline is aggressive. I mean, we're looking to start getting these beds up and running within the next few weeks. You know, we're preparing the spaces, we're, you know, thinking about exactly what the program will look like, and really just working to move fast and quick to really get the spaces up as quickly as we can.

Question: Mayor, although however broad the effort at the city level and the state level, as we know, when Reagan was the president National Housing Subsidy money was cut by almost 70 percent. I'm [inaudible] the homeless, and I'll confess I'm little disappointed that nobody here from the U.S. Congress that represents New York, because I don't think its fair for a governor and you to have shoulder this burden by yourself. I think we're going to need the support of elected officials in Congress to partner with the government and restore some of that –

Mayor: Thank you. We have had a lot of support from our Congressional delegation. But I think your question hits home on the point that the current environment in Washington has stood in the way of support for things like affordable housing in general, let alone for efforts to help the homeless. That's been going on for quite a few years, and I think you're right, the origins of it do go back to the 1980s. But I do want to say, our Congressional delegation I think has been fighting hard. I think they are fighting an uphill battle because of the overall dynamic in Washington. Yes?

Question: Mr. Mayor, at these facilities where these beds are going to be held, will there be security there –

Mayor: Yes.

Question: – I was just wondering how it will work logistically.

Commissioner Taylor: So, there will be security. There will also be social service staff. We're also going to have staff who will be mobile and who will go to these sites on an ongoing basis – as I had mentioned, a psychiatrist and a psychologist that are attached to our teams who can participate in the work. There's going to be cleaning staff, there's going to be, you know, the full complement of everything we would need to have a residential setting, I mean, really just to make sure that we are providing our clients with that they need at these locations.

Question: Will they be DHS employees?

Commissioner Taylor: It'll be a complement of non-profit providers and some DHS employees all working together to do this.

Question: The only drop-in center on Staten Island already sends homeless individuals to various sites around the island – faith-based organizations. But, some of those people who got to that center don't actually take them up on that offer, and thus the spillover effects has caused a bit of a problem in the St. George community in terms of the community not being appreciative of how –

Mayor: Go to the question.

Question: So, I was wondering, how are you guys going to get folks to actually take the city and the Archdiocese up on this? And whether or not you thought about how this spillover effect effects communities?

Mayor: Well again, I don't know if I would define it that way. So, I'll start and the commissioner and monsignor can jump in. I think the notion here is we know there's a certain number of people – the last formal count we had was over the winter – about 3,000 individuals who live on the street 24/7, as opposed to the much larger number of folks who are in shelter, certainly at night and in other parts of the day. This initiative is for anyone who has not come in, who has not chosen shelter, or a separate path and we need it to be wherever people are. That's why it is a citywide initiative. We believe the more options that people experience, and I thought Father Harold's comments were incredibly powerful – the more that we show that people have been resistant to receiving help – that they can receive help in a positive and respectful manner – the more people come in, the fewer people will be on the streets. We're also simultaneously trying to improve the reality in our larger shelters because there are some others who I think would go into larger shelters if they felt they were safer and a more conducive environment. So we've put a lot of investment in that as well. So that's the essence of this and that's how I think we get people off the streets in general. Want to add or – monsignor?

Commissioner Taylor: So, just to add, as it pertains to drop-ins – so these will work in partnership with our drop-in centers, with our outreach providers and there will be real connections in terms of how do we get the people who the beds, to the beds that will become available.

Question: Just the commissioner – can you speak a little bit about the situation on Staten Island, because I know there's been a lot of community complaints about drop-in centers specifically –

Commissioner Taylor: I can tell you, we know exactly where our clients are. We know where the needs are. We know that Staten Island is a place where we could benefit from having more resources. And we're looking very deliberately, as part of our Opening Doors – Open Doors initiative to find sites that would meet that need. So, Staten Island is squarely on our radar and we're looking at the programming needs of that borough.

Mayor: I want to also emphasize – and I think, again, it amplifies what Father Harold said. When I call the commissioner whenever I see a homeless individual on the street, many times after a few minutes, he'll me back and tell me exactly who the individual is, because his outreach workers have had such regular connection that individual. They know who he is, or what the background is, what the history is. We're a city of 8.5 million people. There are 3,000 people living permanently on the streets. That number, obviously, I think has grown a bit over the summer. But it's a finite number of people. So finite that the Department of Homeless Services literally has a profile on many people and is trying to figure out the best way to bring them in. What we've lacked is enough of these Safe Haven beds to be able to say in any given moment – if you're willing to come in, we can get you in right then while you're willing, while you're open. And then that gets to Father Harold's point, it is about persuading an individual – and an individual in many cases who is dealing with some big challenges – to believe, to have faith, to have trust that they actually can and should go into this location. That means having the beds available and having the right people talking to them.

Question: I have a question for the commissioner. Once someone has been identified as a needing help for the Safe Haven, is there a maximum amount of time that they could stay at the shelter? Or what's the process to helping them get back on their feet after they've been checked in?

Commissioner Taylor: And so, our outreach teams that are working with all the street homeless individuals, will identify clients who would be appropriate for referral to the beds that will be opening up. And those clients, once they're engaged and willing to come in, we don't tell them that you have to be out by a particular date. They can stay in and receive the services until such time as we can graduate them to more independent living or to bring them into a more traditional shelter center. The reality is, it takes some time. It takes some time for an individual to settle, to kind of really distress from having been on the street, and then to begin working with us around what is a go, what is a housing plan for that individual. So, there's no time limit, but we really try to work aggressively with every client to make sure that what that concrete service need is is addressed when they come inside.

Question: One quick follow up question – how confident are you guys that you'll get the remaining 50 beds that you've asked for?

Mayor: Very. Very. Look, the response from the archdiocese is extraordinary. And I want to thank the Cardinal because it just speaks volumes to the willingness of the Archdiocese to always answer the city's call to help us solve a problem. I can't remember a time when you said no, and I thank you. Whether it was pre-k, affordable housing, homelessness – and I thank you on behalf of the people of New York City. And the rest of the faith community as well – this is a conversation we've had just over weeks and you see where the numbers have gone already. So, I'm absolutely confident we will hit the final number.

Unknown: One more question.

Mayor: Let's see who else from this side – and in the back, Nikita.

Question: Do you think the Pope's visit – you talked about him a lot today – do you think he's going to help boost your agenda when it comes to the homeless – getting people to be more sympathetic and [inaudible]?

Mayor: I will borrow from history for a moment. There is a story that's told, I presume it has a basis in truth – that during the Civil War, there was a gathering of Abraham Lincoln and his generals. And at the end of the gathering, as they were breaking up and going off to battle, one of the generals said, gentlemen, let us pray together that God is on our side. And the story goes that President Lincoln said, no, gentlemen, let us pray together that we are on God's side. So, we're amplifying the Pope's agenda. We are answering his call to action. And I think leaders all over the nation and all over the world are doing the same. I had the honor, in July, of being at the Vatican, where the Pope called together dozens and dozens of mayors from around the world to act in common cause on Climate Change. He has a moral authority to do that. And there is no other leader who is able to call people to action in that way. So, I would argue that a lot of us are trying to answer his call to action on issues like income inequality, on poverty, on climate change, using the tools we have locally to do all we can do to create a more just society.

Thanks, everyone.

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