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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO LAUNCHES COMMUNITY PARKS  
INITIATIVE TO BUILD MORE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE PARK SYSTEM**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** All right. Good morning, everyone.

[Cheers]

Whoa – I’m impressed.

[Applause]

Okay. I want to give the teachers credit – I did not see that coming. To our young people this morning, we welcome you. Because you’re here this is a much more wonderful event. And I want to just say to all of you, this is the thing that motivates us is you guys. We want you guys to have great parks and make it a great part of your youth. You look back on the wonderful time you spent in parks and playgrounds and all the great things that you did when you were a kid. So thank you to these wonderful children who are here today. Let me ask you a question – all the children – do you want us to spend more money on parks?

[Cheers]

I can’t hear you! Do you want us –

[Cheers]

There you go! The people have spoken. Because of their demands, we will now spend more money on parks – because that’s how democracy works. It was that simple.

So let me say something that we don’t probably think about enough here in our city but is true. Parks are one of the great treasures of New York City. We don’t sometimes stop to realize just how big a part of life here in our city parks are, but the number is amazing – 29,000 acres of parkland in New York City. It’s about 14 percent of all the land in the five boroughs is parkland. Mitch Silver has a big job on his hand as our parks commissioner, keeping track of all of that and making it work for the people of this city. It is a vast part of life in this city.

But it's also another example of inequalities that have plagued this city over time. Some parks did very very well, other parks didn't – didn't have the resources they need, didn't get the support they deserve. And we're here today to take a major step towards addressing those inequities and showing what a path is to a city where each and every neighborhood, each and every borough, each and every park gets the support they deserve.

You know, parks to us – and I say this as a parent in particular – parks are so many things to us. They're where our families gather – gather for birthdays and barbeques and athletic competitions. Parks are our playgrounds. Parks are another part of how we educate our children. There's so many roles that parks play. And I often like to remind people – for a lot of people in this city who don't happen to have a lot of resources, parks are where they go for their vacation, because they don't have the option to go out of town. So parks we depend on for so much in this city.

It's truly a necessity in urban life to have a great parks system. But again, not all parks have been treated equally. Not all parks provide enough, are maintained the way they should be. So for some people, the experience of the park is great. In other neighborhoods we have a long way to go – and that's what we're here to address today. And it will not shock you that this often aligns to the reality of demographics. It often aligns to the income level of the neighborhood. In many low-income neighborhoods, parks have languished without the support they deserve. They haven't gotten enough support from the public sector. They haven't gotten enough support from the private sector and non-profits. Again, we aim to change that with this announcement as a first big step today towards equality.

The vision we announce today will reach all across the five boroughs and will set a new pace for fairness and equality in parks funding. I want to thank the two key leaders of my administration who have been devoted to this mission – they feel it very personally, very deeply, and they're doing a great job at making this a reality. Of course, our parks commissioner, Mitch Silver, and our environmental protection commissioner, Emily Lloyd – let's give them both a round of applause and thank them.

[Applause]

For those of you who don't know, Emily has a major role in our parks because DEP has – does so much regarding the infrastructure of our whole city and our parks, but also Emily, before her current role, was the president of the Prospect Park Alliance. So she has a special passion for our parks. You could – yes, you could – yes, we can clap for Brooklyn here.

[Applause]

We like to have a Brooklyn moment wherever we are, don't we, Tish?

Now, I want to thank all of the elected officials who are here today. I want to acknowledge some. Others you're going to hear from a little later on. I want to say thank you to all of them for being

so supportive of our efforts. I want to thank State Senator Toby Ann Stavisky. You can clap for all these folks!

[Applause]

Assemblymember Ron Kim.

[Applause]

Councilmember Peter Koo.

[Applause]

And here on behalf of Borough President Melinda Katz, I would like to thank Barry Grodenchik of her office for his great support, her great support.

[Applause]

Melinda is one of the people who has invested in this initiative and we thank her for that. A lot of advocates, a lot of people who do so much to make our parks work, are standing here behind us and among us. And a lot of times, I think I can say, I've talked to so many over the years – sometimes I felt it was a lonely trying to make sure that the agenda of parks was heard at City Hall – I hope you feel a little less lonely today. Your agenda is being heard and acted on. Let's thank all these advocates, all the folks who work in our parks.

[Applause]

And another elected official has just arrived. We welcome Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh.

[Applause]

So the initiative that we are announcing as a major first step towards fairness and equality in our parks system – we call it the Community Parks Initiative, C-P-I. Community Parks Initiative. The focus is on parks in each and every neighborhood – especially where the need is greatest.

We're starting with \$130 million capital investment. \$130 million comes from two key sources. \$110 million from our mayoral capital budget and then another \$20 million in funding from the City Council, from borough presidents, and from foundation grants.

We set the goal of making sure this funding would reach where it is needed most – and Mitch and his team worked tirelessly to develop the right criteria. They identified 35 parks across the five boroughs that were the highest priority. What made them the highest priority? Well, this is a pretty astounding fact – each and every one of these 35 parks, over the last 20 years or more, has only received a total of \$250,000 in capital investment. So these are parks that over the last two decades or more only got \$250,000 in capital investment – tremendously needy for that reason. They are also parks that happen to be in fast-growing neighborhoods where the need is greatest –

in neighborhoods that often have a substantial low-income population, in neighborhoods that are often particularly dense in population. So there's tremendous need around these parks in addition to the fact that they haven't gotten the investment they deserve.

Using the same criteria, we've identified another 55 sites that need some immediate targeted improvement. So they will get that help as well – again, areas of particular need. That's the capital piece from the parks side.

It's also important to note that there'll be a major capital investment by the Department of Environmental Protection – and that additional \$36.3 million from DEP for green infrastructure improvements in our parks. It'll make our parks better, but it will also protect our environment and our future.

On top of that, there is an expense budget investment of \$7 million. You'll hear from Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito in a moment. This money is primarily from the City Council with some mayoral money included. This covers a whole range of needs, including recreation programs, maintenance staff, gardeners, and powerful efforts to work with the community and community organizations to get them to play a bigger role in our parks. So there's a very big investment being made here today.

Let's talk about this park as an example of why we're doing this. Bowne Park – Bowne Playground, I should say – next to PS 20, two blocks from JHS 189 – obviously this is a place where many many children come for recreation. It's a place that's going to be used constantly and needs a lot of support. In the last 20 years, this park has gotten less than \$60,000 in capital investment – again, over two decades. With very limited resources, parks department workers have done what they've always had to do in recent decades – make lemonade out of lemons, make something out of nothing. They've done an amazing job with very limited tools, finding a way to make parks work for all New Yorkers, particularly for our young people.

But 20 years is a huge amount of wear and tear – non-stop use. You can imagine how much investment would've been needed. We're trying to start making up for that now. And I want to take this moment to say, this is a first step, but, again, it's been decades of disinvestment in our parks – decades. And again, it did cut along demographic lines. So this is an important first step, but there's going to be a lot more to do in the future to make up for this history.

What kinds of things need to be done here? Well, there's cracked asphalt, there's old play equipment and benches, there's a lot of concrete – as you can see, there's not much greenery. What we're – one thing the parks department has been doing a great job on in recent years is replacing concrete with greenery, with field turf, with better options for kids. All of those upgrades are needed. Take this as one example of those dozens and dozens of parks that are going to benefit from this initiative.

We've made clear the goal of this administration is to create one New York, to create a place of opportunity for all and fairness. It includes, obviously, having parks that reflect those values. So today is a first step – and the public sector is putting our money where our mouth is. We will – I assure you – we will also turn to the major parks conservancies and ask them to make a

substantial contribution to this progress. It's the right thing to do so that we can address, again, decades of inequity. And we expect to get some real important contributions from the conservancies as part of this process.

I want to do a moment in Spanish and then I will bring up some of my colleagues to speak.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, I want to thank the City Council for their focus – their intense focus – on this issue and their willingness to make key investments – they've also put their money where their mouth is. And I'd like to welcome Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito –

[Applause]

[City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito speaks]

[Applause]

**Mayor:** Thank you very much. So the public advocate could not contain her enthusiasm earlier at the mention of Prospect Park. When we were young and we were council members in neighboring districts, a lot of our attention went into Prospect Park and parks in our communities because we felt very personally what it meant to families in our neighborhoods. Tish James has been a very active advocate for fairness and equality in parks funding, and it's very fitting that she is a part of this announcement here today. Our public advocate, Tish James –

[Applause]

[Public Advocate Letitia James speaks]

[Applause]

**Mayor:** Now I'd like to bring forward a true friend of parks, also someone who understands communities from the grassroots up – Grace Meng. I've walked the streets of her community with her. I know she knows what her constituents are feeling and what they need – and I'm thrilled that she's here today in support of this announcement. Congress Member Grace Meng –

[Applause]

[Congress Member Grace Meng speaks]

[Applause]

**Mayor:** Thank you very much, Grace. You know, there's been a real debate in this town the last couple of years over the issue of creating more fairness towards our parks. This has been a very important and very healthy debate – a very long-overdue debate. A lot of people, again, here today, fought for years to get this issue front and center. I want to call up State Senator Dan

Squadron because I think he deserves special credit for putting forward ideas that really gave some extra energy this discussion and focused attention on the fairness we need and the ways that we could get there. And I think that he played a very very positive constructive role in this debate. State Senator Dan Squadron –

[Applause]

[State Senator Dan Squadron speaks]

[Applause]

**Mayor:** So in the City Council, our parks chair Mark Levine has been a very powerful voice, a very persistent voice. He is a kind and decent human being. He is a gentleman – except when it turns to parks advocacy, at which point he becomes a pit bull. Chair of the committee Mark Levine –

[Applause]

[City Councilmember Mark Levine speaks]

[Applause]

**Mayor:** We've got one last speaker and I think she's going to give us the most important perspective because it's the most grassroots perspective. You know, all over the city, neighborhood residents have done all they could to make their parks work – work regardless of whether they had all the resources they deserved or not. They struggled to make things work locally and they deserve a lot of credit for hanging in there. And one of them who's been a real leader in this effort has been Martha Lopez-Gilpin, who is the co-chair of the Astoria Park Alliance. We welcome you, Martha.

[Applause]

[Martha Lopez-Gilpin speaks]

[Applause]

**Mayor:** Thank you. Now before we take our media questions, I just want – all the adults here, let's applaud these young people for being so patient.

[Cheers]

[Applause]

Now, I want to ask the children – would you rather be playing on the playground over there than listening to all of us?

**Children:** Yes!

**Mayor:** All right! Thank you for your honesty. Teachers, why don't you take them over there while we do our questions so they can have a little more fun? Follow your teachers that way.

[Applause]

I want you to notice my leadership ability. They – I said follow, they all followed – very impressive. Give the people what they want, right, Tish? [Laughs] All right, while they're moving over, let's take on-topic questions. On-topic questions – on topic.

**Question:** A year ago you endorsed Senator Squadron's [inaudible] public or private money?

**Mayor:** My thinking is consistent, because I believe we have to do a lot to address these inequities, and it starts with, of course, the public sector making its commitment, which we're doing today. But as I said, I expect the conservancies to play a major role here. There's a lot of ways to get that done, we've been in real conversation with them, and I hope we'll have something more to say on that quite shortly, but I do expect the conservancies to play an important role.

**Question:** [inaudible]

**Mayor:** All ideas are on the table. I think the opportunity has been put forward to conservancies to come forward with a voluntary plan that really addresses these issues.

**Question:** [inaudible] parks down the road, where [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** They, in most cases, could never take care of all the [inaudible], by definition. There's a few that happen to be very well-resourced. Again, we're all adults here – that has to do with geography and income level and demographics. But I think the point here is in most communities, there can be a very strong community involvement, and in some ways, they're getting some resources in on the community level, but it's going to come down to the city government playing an active role, and again – some of the better resourced conservancies, I think, have an important role to play as well.

**Question:** [inaudible] voluntary plan for the conservancies [inaudible] viable option now? What do you say to folks who say that urging private donors money [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** Well, first, on the point of the very valid concern that anyone would have, and conservancies, and all the advocates, and community residents – you know, if we want to see more investment, let's see the city part first. I think it was very important that we step up – again, put our money where our mouth is, and show that we are serious about this. Then it becomes a lot more pertinent and a lot more fair to turn to others and say, now we need you to be a part of the solution. My point is, I think the conservancies understand this is a priority for this administration. I think they understand that there's some real issues that have to be addressed, and I'm hopeful that they will, so let's let that process play out. I don't deal in hypotheticals, what

if. I'd say there's a process underway, we're going to let that play out – we're hopeful about a very positive outcome. If we find that we want to revisit other options, we'll determine then what makes sense. On topic.

**Question:** [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** There's endless need. And the fact is, it's the other way around. Because we are investing, it is an encouragement to others to invest. There is, as we mentioned already, some foundation money in the package we're announcing today. It certainly makes sense that private donors, non-profit donors, are going to be encouraged by seeing real action. So, I think that follows coherently. And again, we've been in discussion with the conservancies, and we think we're moving in the right direction.

**Question:** [inaudible]

**Mayor:** Louder.

**Question:** All five of the Staten Island playgrounds, as part of this initiative, are located in the North Shore of the island, or St. George [inaudible] South Shore –

**Mayor:** Mitch will come forward and talk about the details, but let me just emphasize the criteria involved – where there's a lot of population growth, where there's densely-populated neighborhoods, where there's a lot of low-income residents, where there's a lot of need in terms of lack of previous investments. So when you think about all those criteria, for example, where there hasn't even been \$250,000 dollars in investment over two decades – that's what pinpoints it. It's not saying, 'Are we doing a perfect geographical distribution?' It's where has there been disinvestment, or lack of investment, how do we have to address that? This is also part one. Again, we expect to be doing more on the public side over the coming years. We expect support from the conservancies and other players. So, this is part one, but it was about addressing these criteria.

**Commissioner Mitch Silver, Department of Parks and Recreation:** The mayor answered the question accurately. We started this assessment, of those parks in New York City, that received less than \$250,000 over 20 years. The number was 215 parks. But we then developed a methodology to look a bit further, to prioritize those parks, and we had to look at a couple of factors. The mayor mentioned what those were – it was population density, it was growth, it was poverty, and also, we looked at our maintenance records, and our capacity to really build some incredible parks and recreate them in the future. It so happened that in Staten Island, those parks were located on the North Shore. We also want to emphasize that we'll be addressing 55 other sites in addition to the 35 for some quick fixes – painting and fencing and some other things to get immediate needs in those parks. But to answer the question, those parks on the North Shore are the ones through our criteria that rised to the top of being the most in need.

**Question:** [inaudible]



**Mayor:** Mitch is going to answer part of that. I think this is a all-hands-on-deck dynamic. I think you heard leader after leader talk about how urgent the need is and how it's gone unaddressed for decades. So the point is, there's lots of people who we need to be a part of this. And the conservancies – the big conservancies – already have a tremendous amount of ability, capacity – capacity both in terms of their staff and their teams and their ability to get things done, also capacity in terms of a ready-made group of supporters and donors who believe in parks. But there's also other tools we're using right now. Mitch –

**Commissioner Silver:** Right now we have certain partners and they're here with us today. I see David Moore, the chair of the City Parks Foundation. We have the City Parks Foundation. We have the Mayor's Fund – and the first lady has a commitment to open space. And so there are opportunities for people that want to give that will help supplement the work that we're doing in parks. And so if people want to give, there are many opportunities. So we encourage them to give, because we believe that this is just one effort, but we could take as many resources as possible to create a great parks system for all New Yorkers.

**Mayor:** Wait, wait, I'm sorry – you had one before. Dave –

**Question:** [inaudible]

**Mayor:** Let's let the commissioner explain that. What is the DEP money there to do?

**Commissioner Emily Lloyd, Department of Environmental Protection:** We have a commitment to reduce storm water going into the sewers, so that accomplishes two goals. It reduces our carbon footprint because less money goes to our wastewater treatment plants. And during heavy rain, it reduces combined sewer overflows into the surrounding waterways. So for us, working in parks where there's a lot of open space to do rainwater landscaping – to do porous surfaces, to do storm water detention below the surface – there's a tremendous opportunity to address these problems.

**Mayor:** Okay. On topic –

**Question:** [inaudible]

**Mayor:** No, I think part of the idea is we're having a real conversation to figure out what makes sense. I think the need is tremendous all over the city. We want to ask the conservancies to help us out – again, there's lot of ways they could do it – through their donor base, through their capacity they have already on their staff. But the need is tremendously great, so we have to figure out what's a fair standard based on the needs we have and what they have available to help with. Okay, Dan and then Rich.

**Question:** [inaudible]

**Commissioner Silver:** I don't know the overall needs of the entire park system. We looked at the 215 parks. It was \$1 billion to address those parks that had not received funding – or at least,

under \$250 in over 20 years. That was [inaudible] significant estimate, but in terms of the whole parks system, I don't have that number. But in terms of just those 215 it would be \$1 billion.

**Mayor:** Rich?

**Question:** Mr. Mayor, the phrase 'benign neglect' [inaudible] Bloomberg administration [inaudible] benign neglect, woeful ignorance, or a focus on the bigger parks, or [inaudible] ?

**Mayor:** You know, I think we believe fundamentally in an agenda of fighting inequality. I think it's front and center in the philosophy of this administration and it applies to everything we're doing – doesn't matter if you're talking about schools or job creation or parks – it's the way we see the world. I think it's fair to say the previous administration didn't see the world that way. So it just wasn't a priority – I think that's the best way of saying it. It wasn't a priority. And a lot of these neighborhood parks went for years without the investment they deserve and we have a lot of making up to do. That's part of why – we're clear – this is going to be a multi-year solution with a lot of different players involved [inaudible] we expect to really get each park up to the level that the residents of the community deserve. Go ahead – one more.

**Question:** What is the role of the Parks Foundation in all of this [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** So I'll start and then pass to Mitch. Again, Mitch is right – the Mayor's Fund and the first lady are very focused on open space. The Parks Foundation is there to bring in resources for all of our parks. We want them to play a very active and aggressive role helping us solve this problem. Mitch can speak to the specifics more.

**Commissioner Silver:** Clearly the City Parks Foundation is a partner and part of this effort will be creating 14 outreach coordinators through the Partnership for Parks initiative. Many of them are right here with us today. They'll be going out to these 35 locations and each location will have an outreach coordinator to help build the stewards to make sure these parks really flourish going forward. The City Parks Foundation is a strong supporter in creating the programming in so many of our parks, and so they're committed to being a partner in this, but the real key is those 14 outreach coordinators that will help build strong stewards and caretakers for all of these 35 parks going forward.

**Mayor:** Okay, we're going to do – is that on or off? All right [inaudible]. Now we'll do off – great. [Laughs]

**Question:** [inaudible] metal detectors [inaudible]? And secondly, [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** Let the plane go by.

[Plane passes overhead]

That's my whole answer.

On the second question, our –

[Car horn honks]

On the second question, our information is the reverse of what you're saying – that our understanding is the employees were fired for cause and then spoke to the media. On the first question, we take the security at the sites very seriously. We have security plans in place at each site. We believe they're strong. We are working very hard to make the Build It Back program work better for people. I think a year ago, people had every right to feel they were getting nowhere. Today – and I've talked to a lot of people who are working through Build It Back and feel much better about the experience. We set the targets for Labor Day of over 500 construction starts, over 500 reimbursement checks – those targets were met and surpassed. Since then, there's been continued activity in another 120-plus construction starts, another 150-plus reimbursement checks over these last few weeks. More will be announced shortly. So, it's clear that Build It Back has been turning the corner rapidly and more and more people are being served more quickly. So I think the good news is that anyone who reaches out to Build It Back can expect a much more respectful, much more effective response than they received a year ago – but we always care about the people who do the work and we do protect them.

**Question:** [inaudible]

**Mayor:** Look, it's a broad question. So, I would say, I think in our society we need to be more mindful of where the boundaries should be. And when the dynamics do not involve anything that affects city business, I would agree with your question. I'm not sure it is the city's business when there isn't a pertinent reason to look into it.

**Question:** Mr. Mayor, Internal Affairs is now looking at another video [inaudible] have you seen the video? Are you aware of it? [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** A couple of different things – and thank you for the question. I must say – a lot of parts, so let me try to work it through. I have not seen the video. I have received a summation of what's in the video. Clearly, Commissioner Bratton has seen the video and reacted very aggressively in the sense of saying that there have to be consequences when anything is done the wrong way. There's a full investigation going on, as always, with Internal Affairs, but, as you know, one officer has been suspended without pay, another is on modified duty. Hold on a second –

[Siren wails]

What is this – the loudest corner in New York City today?

[Siren fades]

There you go. So, I think the commissioner has set a very clear standard and I commend him. I've said many times, Commissioner Bratton is the finest police leader in America. He has the most extraordinary track record of driving crime down and keeping it low. And he has the respect of police officers all over New York City – all over this country. But he also holds a high standard for the profession. If you listen to Commissioner Bratton talk about the profession – it's

been his whole life, he honors it – he wants everyone to honor it. He spoke very powerfully last Thursday about the standards he holds for the men and women of the NYPD. So I think it's been very clear, when the Commissioner sees something that he thinks is inappropriate, he acts very quickly and sends a message to everyone that we're holding a high standard here for how our police officers interact with our communities. As for the question of what does it mean – I think the fact is that we're getting a kind of information we didn't used to have before the age of the cellphone camera. And we're seeing some things that – maybe they existed in large measure before – we can't tell for sure because we didn't have the documentation. We do know now what we're seeing. And it's important that every time we get evidence of something that might have been done wrong that there's a full investigation and, where appropriate, that there are consequences. We're obviously acting, also, to ensure that we have a stronger Civilian Complaint Review Board where citizens can have the assurance that if they bring a complaint that there's a real outcome, and an outcome that's speedy and fair, both to the citizens involved and the officers involved. So, a lot of change is happening but I see these videos as another piece of information that we need to use to improve the relationship between police and community and, in many cases, to heal the relationship between police and community.

**Question:** [inaudible] Amtrak recently said that it can't repair the [inaudible] tunnel [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** A cross-Hudson rail tunnel is a priority for this region. It should have happened – it should have been begun years ago. With all due respect to Governor Christie, I think he made a mistake in pulling out of that project. We all have to be on the same page. You know, the two states, the city, Amtrak – everyone has to get on the same page and I'm going to be enthusiastically a part of that process. It's premature to talk about the exact role, but I can tell you it will be a priority.

**Question:** Mr. Mayor, what could you or the Parks Commissioner tell us about the bear cub that was found in Central Park [inaudible]?

**Commissioner Silver:** I don't have much updated information. I do know that NYPD was investigating, Central Park Conservancy was on the scene, our Parks Enforcement was on the scene. What was reported was we knew it was a baby cub, but we're not sure how it was placed there and that's just an ongoing investigation.

**Question:** [inaudible] apparently stabbed [inaudible]?

**Commissioner Silver:** I don't have all those details. I'm sorry I could not definitively confirm that.

**Mayor:** I'm just going to take a point of privilege – we've closed up on questions, but I just want to add on one more topic here because I think it's important. A lot of people paying attention on the enterovirus. As some of you may know, I happen to be an asthmatic – I have a mild case of asthma – my wife and daughter do as well. So, issues – respiratory issues – issues that might affect asthmatics are very much a concern for my family. And I just want to make sure the facts are out there because there has been concern in recent days of what this means for people in New York City. So, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene is monitoring hospital admissions all

over the city to make sure that we're looking for any trends that we have to act on. What they're looking for is particularly cases where people who have asthma or respiratory issues are experiencing severe symptoms, flu-like symptoms that are particularly severe. Here's the important part – and I'm going to ask our colleagues in the media to help get this out to the public. Parents with children, particularly children with asthma or other respiratory problems – it's crucial to make sure those children get the flu shot. It's time to get the flu shot in general, but it's particularly important as a defense against this virus. And any other vaccines that parents are not up to date on – this is a good moment to get those done to protect your children. And if you see your children showing symptoms, unusual symptoms – cold or cough or something that seems to be more sustained than usual – it's important to seek medical attention to make sure you get ahead of it. So, just want everyone to recognize that this is something that can be addressed, particularly if parents are proactive about getting the flu shot and the vaccines. But if they are concerned their child might be experiencing some unusual symptoms, it's very important to seek medical help. And people can call 3-1-1 if they need further information.

Thanks, everyone.

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