



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 HOSTS RECOGNITION CEREMONY FOR
LIEUTENANT ADAM VILAGOS AND CORRECTION OFFICER DANIEL LEITES AND DELIVERS
REMARKS ON SECURITY, TERRORISM AND SYRIAN REFUGEES**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Well, this is a day to celebrate some New Yorkers who really remind us of all that's good about this place, and why we are admired all over the country – all over the world.

We are going to talk about these two very brave folks who have done such good, and then afterwards, after we talk about them and hear from them, we want to – or hear from the commissioners, I should say – we want to spend a few minutes after just giving an additional update on how we are addressing the terror threats directed at this city, and taking your questions on that particular topic. But let's first start with this very good news.

Today, we honor two really fantastic New Yorkers – two exemplary New Yorkers – who, in the past three days, have literally saved lives. And we need to spend a little more time focusing on the fact that there are good people every single day, saving lives and not looking for recognition – just doing it because it's the right thing.

We are blessed to have them as part of this city. We are blessed that they called – they answered the call, I should say, of duty, and chose to serve the people of this city. And on behalf of all 8.4 million New Yorkers, it is my honor today to honor and to commend Correction Officer Daniel Leites and FDNY Lieutenant Adam Vilagos.

And I want to, at the outset, thank a number of people here who are really excited about this day, because they are so proud of these two men and all that they have done. You will hear from a few of them in a moment, but I want to also thank FDNY Chief of Department Jim Leonard; I want to thank DOC Acting Warden Clement Glenn; Acting Assistant Chief at DOC Karen Collins. I want to thank Deputy Warden at DOC Robin Beaulieu and Correction Officer Gregory Jean Lewis, also from DOC.

I also want to say to the family members who are here, and colleagues of these officers, that there's so much to be proud of, so much to appreciate in what they have done, and I know it's a day of pride for you.

It is so typical of this city that literally as we're here to celebrate two exemplary individuals, we just got news a short time ago of two more heroes, who took the can-do attitude of New York City and took it 3,000 miles away to Los Angeles. Yesterday, two off-duty NYPD officers subdued an assailant who had stabbed a tourist in Los Angeles, and certainly saved that tourist from much worse harm, possibly even from death – so, another life-saving action by the NYPD, in this case on the other side of the country. And we thank those officers and look forward to thanking them in person. And we share our pride in what they have done, and I know their families are very, very proud.

Let's talk about these two good men, starting with Officer Leites. Three days ago, Officer Leites, a four-year veteran of the Department of Corrections, stationed on Rikers Island, was off duty in Queens. He spotted a

woman wandering, and she was wandering aimlessly on Woodhaven Boulevard. And his instincts and his training told him that something was wrong.

So, as we know in this city, sometimes you see people walking by, passing by, and in a big city like this, there can be some anonymity. But Officer Leites had that instinct that it was time to step in and take responsibility.

And then he saw this woman literally starting to walk into oncoming traffic. He threw himself in front of her; got her out of harm's way; saved her life right then and there. And he realized quickly that she had a deeper challenge – that she literally didn't even know her own name.

Officer Leites noticed her medical alert bracelet, realized that she likely had Alzheimer's, and immediately dialed the number. He spoke to her family, learned that she had been reported missing. Imagine how that family felt – a loved one missing and no knowledge where she had gone.

Officer Leites waited with this woman for the family arrive – for the family to arrive, and then, while waiting, decided he wanted to do one more thing to help her – gave her his sweater, bought her a hamburger, treated her with the respect and dignity she deserved, even though her life was going through such a distinct challenge.

There's so much to be proud of in Officer Leites's actions – his instincts, his attitude, his actions. It is exactly what we rely on from our public servants and those who serve us in uniform, and it is emblematic of the best of our corrections officers – compassionate, focused, strong action at the time when it's needed most.

So, it is my honor to present to Officer Daniel Leites a certificate of recognition on behalf of the people of New York City.

[...]

Mayor: You have a career ahead in motivational speaking.

[Laughter]

Let me tell you about another hero, and this – this is so powerful because it really gives you a little window on what the FDNY deals with every day.

So, two days ago in Corona, Queens, a fire breaks out, spreads rapidly, and a family fearing the worse is about to happen. The FDNY arrives on the scene within minutes – Engine Company 316 arrives, and a lieutenant, Adam Vilagos, an 18-year FDNY veteran, sprints up the stairs of the burning home. And he hears something that probably is the last thing any firefighter wants to hear when they enter a burning building – the anguished screams of parents saying, there's a baby in the attic.

The attic was filled with thick black smoke – you could barely see, but the lieutenant could hear the baby's whimpers. Within moments, Lieutenant Vilagos found the baby, who was only three weeks old. This baby literally beginning life – found the baby in the crib, carried him outside to safety.

Right there, you would say that would've been enough – that would've been something you remember the rest of your life. You would have been – for your entire life known you had saved a life, and everything you could imagine you could do on this planet for another human being, you had already done.

But for Lieutenant Vilagos, the job was not done. He handed the infant to a fellow first-responder, then turned right back around and ran back into the burning home to finish putting out the fire.

Thanks to the lieutenant, this baby now will grow up. This baby will live a full life that would have been cut short in such a tragic fashion otherwise. And one day, the baby will learn the story of what happened that night, and perhaps that baby will be inspired as an adult to do the same thing, and join the FDNY, and protect others.

Now, the lieutenant gets all the credit in the world for his brains, and his drive, his focus, his bravery, but I also think he's got a little bit of genetic assistance here, because he happens to be Commissioner Daniel Nigro's nephew. So, the gene pool is very, very good. And it's my honor now to present, on behalf of the people of New York City, a certificate of recognition to Lieutenant Adam Vilagos.

[...]

I want to thank both of you. And now I want to offer to each commissioner – well, actually, let me just do a few words in Spanish, then I'd like each commissioner to come up and speak to us about what they feel on this day. I know how proud they are.

First, just a few sentences in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

[...]

Okay, I want to see if our colleagues in the media have any questions for either of these great officers or any questions about these incidents otherwise we'll move on to other current events.
Any questions for either of them?

Alright, let's go to the situation that – I just want to reiterate what I said last night with Commissioner Bratton in Times Square. Again, and I know people are asking this question and over. I understand a lot of New Yorkers have real concerns and they want to hear what's going on, so I want to keep repeating what people need to know.

There is no credible and specific threat against New York City. We have the strongest and best police department in this country; we have the best intelligence capacity of any police force in this country in terms of detecting and preventing terrorism. You can tell – 14 years of success since 9/11. That's what the NYPD brings into battle every single day – a proven track record of [inaudible] these terrorist attempts time and time again.

What has gotten even stronger is the ability of the FNDY – excuse me, the NYPD – the ability of the NYPD to coordinate with our federal partners – the closeness now to the FBI, Department of Homeland Security, and other agencies; literally, the highest level of coordination and sharing of information that we've ever experienced.

Secretary Clinton in her remarks earlier today made a key point that in the past in this country and we still see it in Europe – one of the profound challenges was a lack of information sharing and coordination between intelligence entities and public safety entities. Here we are proud to say there is a seamless relationship between the NYPD and our federal partners. And I've had this conversation with Secretary Johnson of Homeland Security; I've had this conversation with Director Comey of the FBI. They all affirmed to me they have never seen a good and strong relationship. And on top of that the NYPD's own intelligence gathering capacity all over the world – NYPD had officials already stationed in Paris before this attack. NYPD studied the last Paris attacks and other attacks to learn how we can continue to succeed at preventing terrorism. So there should be great faith in the capacity of the NYPD to begin with, but on top of that just in these last week's you've begun to see the results of the decision we made back in June with the City Council to add additional officers including what will now be a 500 plus officer counter-terrorism force specifically trained armed, equipped for counter-terror activities – our Critical Response Command.

You saw just a few days ago the first wave of those officers hit the streets. You've seen how heavily reinforced areas like Times Square have been. We have the ability not only to prevent terror, but we have the strongest terror – anti-terror capacity. We have the strongest ability to respond to an incident of terror of any city in this nation. As Commissioner Bratton said the other day, even as many as two dozen incidents could be responded to simultaneously by the NYPD if God forbid that day came. Most important thing for New Yorkers to remember is the terrorist want you to change. They want you to be afraid. They want you to change your way of life. They want to undermine our democracy. We will not let the terrorists win. We will not change who we are. We have to be resolute. We have to show we are stronger and better than them by not changing our American values.

What people can do is be vigilant. That is a productive, positive thing to do. Be vigilant, and if you see something, say something. If you see anything that you think is suspicious or you have information that you think would help the NYPD, immediately tell an NYPD officer or call 9-1-1. That is the practical and productive thing to do.

Otherwise, as Commissioner Bratton said so powerfully last night – don't be afraid, be aware. Continue our lives. Continue showing this is the greatest city in the world and the greatest nation in the world through our actions.

So I am going to take questions, if there are any questions on that topic specifically. Any questions on our follow up actions? Go ahead.

Question: [Inaudible] Mr. Mayor [inaudible]. My producers would like to know if you are adding extra measures because of the release of this new video?

Mayor: No. The video, although, obviously, for every New Yorker and particularly for New Yorkers who live and work around Times Square and Herald Square, I understand that it causes real concern. But it is important to understand, as Commissioner Bratton clarified last night, it's not new material. This is taken from previous videos that ISIS has put out. It's an attempt at blatant intimidation. I always say New Yorkers don't take well to intimidation – we're not going to be changed by it. There is no real and specific and credible threat. So, that video was simply, in effect, boiler plate that ISIS uses to draw attention. ISIS is, if anything, a very effective propaganda machine. And they want the eyes of the world on them, and they want to convince people that they are calling the shots. We don't let them call the shots. So, no, there are no – there's no real and specific and credible threat. Therefore, life should go on as normal. But what we are doing as a preventative measure is ensuring that some of our busiest parts of the city, like Times Square, you will see plenty of police presence.

Yeah.

Question: I was wondering if you could give us your thoughts on the encryption applications that have been criticized by law enforcement. But, you know, some civil libertarians have said this is necessary, you know, to keep messages private.

Mayor: No, I – I – look, I believe in our civil liberties, I believe in our constitution, but it is unacceptable that law enforcement cannot access information it needs to protect people. This is not consistent with the discussion that was a very real and honest discussion, for example, around the Patriot Act, where there was bipartisan concern about setting certain limits on the government's capacity to gather information. But even within that discussion, there was an understanding, a clear consensus that when it was necessary to protect human life and to facilitate the work of law enforcement, of course they needed access to that information. Here we have evidence already that terrorists are using the products of technology companies and social media companies to facilitate their work and to hide it from law enforcement and from national authorities. That's unacceptable. Those companies have to take responsibility and work with governments to either change their products, so that

that kind of encryption is not available, or to show governments how to overcome the encryption and come up with new methodologies for doing that. This is a matter of life and death. It's not even close – it's a matter of life and death.

Jonathan.

Question: Mr. Mayor, [inaudible] mention of visible police presence in Times Square, Herald Square. The attacks in Paris, they were centered on 'soft targets' – restaurants, nightclubs. New York has a lot of those.

Mayor: Of course.

Question: Can you talk a little bit about what security measures are being put in place there? Is it visible police presence, or is there any kind of communication with restaurant owners or nightclub owners about what they should be looking for?

Mayor: Look, the bottom line here is we – again, we cannot change our fundamental behavior. In a city of 8.5 million people, if you want to take the concept of 'soft target' to its fullest extent, that could be any diner, that could be any bodega. It could be, you know, any place that people gather in one of the largest cities of the world. The important thing to understand is NYPD is constantly monitoring – again, we have a tremendous intelligence gathering capacity – constantly monitoring, ensuring that preventative measures are in place all the time, according to the information we receive that is actually credible and specific. On top of that, as you have seen for years, and it's being intensified now, there are a number of disruptive things the NYPD does in terms of showing visible police presence in a number of locations – some of our most prominent, and some that might be the most obvious targets, but other places as well. But what everyday citizens can do is that simple notion: carry on with your lives, but be aware. Be vigilant. If you have information – again, always give the benefit of the doubt to telling the police if you think something might be suspicious, if you think you see an unattended package, or suitcase, or anything that you think is truly out of the ordinary – overhear a conversation that worries you, tell the police. That is the best way to address the situation. That kind of vigilance is now a part of our lives. And in the world we're living in we have to understand something. This will take a while – this phase we're going through will take a while there's no two ways about it. The fight against ISIS will go on for years, but I believe ISIS will be defeated. We've seen other terror movements defeated in the past. There's a lot of history that shows it can be overcome, and they could be made a thing of the past. While we're going through this period of vigilance people have to be resolved to go on with their lives, but recognize that everyone potentially has something to contribute if they do see something out of the ordinary.

Yeah?

Question: Mayor, some of have said that when threats come about they are hesitant of going places such as New York or Paris or wherever that may happen. What is your opinion on that?

Mayor: Don't live in fear. Think about it for a moment. Look, as human beings we understand all the challenges we face in life. We face domestic challenges. As law enforcement will tell you, the biggest threat to law enforcement in the United States in terms of the safety of law enforcement from organized forces is actually from the militias around the country – the right-wing militias who target law enforcement. College students understandably after this horrible string of campus massacres over years should be concerned, but we have to recognize that law enforcement is everyday trying to prevent these tragedies, and what we are – putting forward a huge amount of resources to do so. And we can't change who we are. We can't change our lives. I think the important thing to recognize is once you know your enemy wants you to change everybody has a choice to make. Do we want to play their game? Do we want to give in to them? I was out in the middle of Times Square last night and it was filled with people who had made their choice. They were going to live their lives, and they were not going to let the terrorist win – very powerful photo on the cover of one of newspapers I think it was yesterday of Parisians in cafes, such a key part of their culture, they were there after two horrible attacks in

January and now. They're not going to give in. If our society shuts down, the terrorist have won without ever coming here in any force they will have won. And we are not going to allow them to win. We have to defeat them militarily – we have to defeat them. I think Secretary Clinton laid out a very good plan today – defeat them ideologically. Defeat them through internet and other mass communications. But we cannot let them change who we are, and some voices in this country are playing right into ISIS hand – calling on us to close the borders and start discriminating against certain religions. Go check the U.S. constitution, there's nothing more powerful on the topic of religious respect and tolerance than the U.S. constitution. And one more point on this, when this country was founded who were the minorities in this country religiously? Catholics, obviously, Jews, Muslims, Quakers. The vision of this country was they would all be respected and they would all come together to form a country, and that it would work. That was an audacious vision 200 plus years ago. Why are we the greatest nation in the world? Because they believed in that vision and we stuck to it. We're not going to stop now.

Yes?

Question: Do you regret [inaudible]?

Mayor: I'm very comfortable with the fact, obviously, it was a very painful difficult moment in Israel when I was there – very comfortable with the fact that I wanted to show concern for people not movements or governments, but people. And spent time with both Palestinian and Israeli parents and children who are nobly trying to find some way forward out of their conflict, and we in this city believe fundamentally in showing respect for all communities. And our Muslim communities are a crucial part of this city – overwhelmingly law abiding people; people who have suffered from terrorist attacks as we saw on 9/11; the Muslims who died on those attacks as we saw in Paris – the Muslims who died at the hands of these terrorists. So, in our Muslim communities overwhelmingly law-abiding good New Yorkers who want to help fight terror. And we are adamant about reaching them, working with them ever more closely. We're proud that the city decided to honor the Muslim holidays in our school system. We're going to deepen our connection to our communities. And I think that's what all over the country – is the realization of our leadership. The FBI director spoke very powerfully about this; our Homeland Security secretary spoke about this. The way forward is actually to do the exact opposite of what the extremists are calling for. And draw all Americans closer of all religious backgrounds.

Last call, anything else on this topic?

Thanks, everyone.

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