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RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY WITH NEW YORK CITY CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION FOLLOWING BREAKFAST AT GRACIE MANSION

Mayor Bill de Blasio: All right, welcome, everyone. Well, we just had a very productive meeting with members of our congressional delegation.

I want to thank all of them – every time we get together, a very thoughtful, constructive conversation about the things we need to do in Washington to help the people of New York City. This delegation has distinguished itself by coming to the aid of our city and going to bat for our city so many times. I want to remind you that some of the challenges we've faced in recent years – Sandy being one of the most obvious – were – this delegation as a whole – and a special thank you to Senator Schumer – got us the fairness in the Sandy response that so many wanted to deny us in Washington, but this delegation achieved that for the people of New York City, and have been there every step of the way with us since. As we faced the threat of Ebola, the same tremendous support and follow-through that helped us to deal with that crisis – the same, obviously, on many, many occasions when it's come to issues of homeland security and fairness for our first responders.

So this is a accomplished group in terms of protecting interests of New York City consistently in Washington no matter how tough the backdrop, but today we want to talk about something that I think for a lot of us is really beyond the pale, which is the notion that Republicans in the House of Representatives are standing in the way of homeland security funding for our entire nation.

And for all of us in New York City, this is a particularly troubling dynamic, because we're the number one terror target – we know it. We are fighting this battle every single day. We're applying huge amounts of local resources to fighting terrorism because we know that we are targeted all the time. We expect our federal government to stand with us, and so, even though all of us are a bit jaded about the paralysis we see sometimes in Washington, we thought – I certainly thought – that homeland security was an area where there should be a real consensus, and partisanship has been – would be put aside.

Well, the House Republicans obviously don't feel that way. They have been attempting to link homeland security funding to other issues inappropriately, unfairly, and, I might add, dangerously, because anything that would undermine our ability to protect ourselves goes against the very notion of what government is here to do.

I emphasize that we have the world's finest police force here in New York City, and we apply immense resources and personnel to fighting terrorism. We know we can do a lot to protect ourselves, but we never thought we'd have to protect ourselves without the partnership of the federal government. And if this situation is not reversed, that's exactly what we'll be dealing with.

We believe there's no reason in the world to link homeland security funding to other issues like immigration reform. I'm going to work for comprehensive immigration reform, as is everyone here – we're doing a lot with mayors around the country to prepare to implement the president's executive action on immigration – but that's a separate discussion by definition. Homeland security should stand alone because it has everything to do with our core responsibility for protecting our people.

Just want to say a couple words in Spanish before turning to Senator Schumer and Congressman Rangel, and then we'll open it up for your questions on these issues.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, a man who I have to say, over these last 14 months, has been an absolutely extraordinary and consistent partner in all we've done – a lot of the great things that have happened to New York City in the last 14 months are because of our senior senator – Chuck Schumer –

[Senator Charles Schumer speaks]

Mayor: Thank you very much, Senator.

Now I want to call forward the dean of our House delegation, Congressman Charlie Rangel.

[Congressman Charles Rangel speaks]

Mayor: Thank you very much, Congressman.

We're going to your questions on any and all federal matters, and my colleagues will jump in as they see fit. Yes –

Question: Mayor or senator, you guys mentioned the TSA and some other homeland security areas. If this is not renewed next week, let's say, what will – what will be there still and what will disappear, as far as security?

Mayor: I just want to emphasize before I turn to the senator – look, again, every day we don't have federal support is a day we're less safe. Again, the city of New York has tremendous resources we apply – almost 1,000 counterterrorism officers, a tremendous amount of hardware that we put into keeping our people safe – and we're going to keep doing that regardless of what Washington does – but we can't do it as well without constant federal support and partnership. It's part of what Commissioner Bratton has really emphasized – the partnership with the federal agencies. It's hard to have partnership with an agency that's shut down, and it makes us all less safe. Senator –

Senator Charles Schumer: Yeah. Well, first of all, large parts of the department would simply not be paid. So, here we have TSA agents who are supposed to be very careful about making sure guns, explosives, and other dangerous things don't go through the security lines – well, when you're not getting paid, is that going to affect things? Then we have money for different grants. Our firefighters, our police departments depend on various monies for grants. Those are stopped. We have biometrics at the border to prevent terrorists and others from coming across. The moving forward on that ends. Secret Service reform – we all saw what happened at the White House – that stops. There are so many different areas – FEMA money that our people depend on – stopped, and FEMA is not regarded as an emergency – you know, the kinds of FEMA money – some of them that are going to us are not emergencies, so those stop altogether. Homeland security is one of the most important departments with one of the greatest effects on New York, and everywhere you look – water, air, land – you will see funding stopped involving our security.

Mayor: Congressman Joe Crowley.

Congressman Joseph Crowley: Let me first of all applaud the work of the Senate – and Senator Schumer and Gillibrand from our delegation. But I also want to thank Mitch McConnell for recognizing that holding hostage homeland security because you don't like the executive action the president took wasn't just stupid and dumb, it was dangerous. He recognized that.

Senator Schumer: Took a little while.

Congressman Crowley: Took a little while, but I believe a number of our colleagues now on the Republican side of the aisle in the House are coming to that same conclusion, although we've had a much more difficult time convincing members of the Republican House of Representative leadership as well as the rank and file members of the Republican party to support a clean bill. But I believe, when all is said and done, we will have a clean funding bill for homeland security through the rest of this fiscal year, which would end in September.

Mayor: Congressman Jerry Nadler. Hold on – let me bring this up for you.

Congressman Jerry Nadler: Thank you very much. I also believe that we will have a clean bill by the end of this week, after a lot of sturm and drang. But I just want to comment on one thing – what you have here, up until this point, is the Republicans playing government-by-blackmail. They say that what the president did, which we think is – on immigration reform is a good thing – they say that it's beyond his powers. Well, that's why we have courts. We have courts to determine whether a government official acted beyond his powers or not. It's in court. But they have chosen to blackmail the country by saying we are going to make you less safe, we are going to make you more susceptible to terrorist attacks until we get our way, and in order for you to feel safe from terrorist attacks, you have to vote to change the president's policy because we don't trust the courts and we don't trust the constitutional process. We believe in government by blackmail. We're going to put people's lives at risk – many, many people's lives at risk – in order to get our way, rather than go through the normal constitutional ways. That cannot be allowed to stand on the merits. It cannot be allowed to stand in terms of the risk to the public. And it cannot be allowed – and it won't stand – we're going to win this week – but it cannot be allowed to stand in terms of the way that we do business.

Mayor: Questions – other questions – yes –

Question: Prime Minister Netanyahu is going to be speaking to Congress tomorrow –

Senator Schumer: I know.

Question: I'm just wondering if you [inaudible] each of you wanted to speak to this? If you could each talk about whether or not you're going to be attending this speech and why or why not?

Mayor: The Netanyahu speech?

Senator Schumer: Okay, and first I just want to say – you know, with the House Republicans, nothing's a sure thing here. We're hopeful that things can get passed this week, but we're not sure, and we are urging them to stop playing games with homeland security, particularly at this dangerous time. I am going to the speech. I've been going – I said I was going from the very beginning. I didn't like how Speaker Boehner handled this. I didn't like the terms by which it was set up. But there are two issues that transcend any back-and-forth about how the speech came about. One is the American–Israeli relationship, and I am going to show it is strong and vital to both countries. Both countries are in the lead in the fight against terrorism. And the second is preventing a nuclear Iran, which would be a catastrophe. I want to hear what the prime minister says. I want to hear what the president has to offer, and then we'll have to weigh it. But I am certainly going to the speech and never had any doubt that that was what I should be doing.

Congressman Rangel: Let me –

Mayor: Hold on, one second. Let me get this up. Charlie and then Jerry –

Congressman Rangel: I want to make it clear, I am not boycotting this speech. I am just not going to the speech. There's nothing that's going to occur next week that should interfere with our relationship with Israel in recognizing that we are joined at the hip, not only as friends but as it relates to national security. I am shocked – I am hurt that the House of Representatives has really reached a point that it would take the national security of the United States and that of our sister – friend, Israel, and make that a partisan issue. Indeed, from what I read in the press, it's even becoming a racial issue as to whether or not members are members of the black caucus,

whether members are Jewish, whether they're Republican, and whether they're Democrats. In all of the many, many, many years that I've been in Washington and the issue of the survival of Israel has come up, none of these other side questions have ever come up. I think that for me to attend this would be violating the rules of the House of Representatives. Yes, the speaker invited on behalf of the House, but half of the House are Democrats – that is, in terms of being partners in the legislative body – and there was no one on the Democratic side that was a part of that invitation. So, I don't blame outsiders for doing whatever they think is in the best interest of their party, their politics, or their country, but I do not think that the House of Representatives should be used as a arena for the debate of international politics. That is why we have a president of the United States. That is why we have a secretary of state. And so, I hope the word boycott is never associated with those that respect the rules of the House, the bi-partisanship we enjoy, and the affection and support we have for the government of Israel.

Mayor: Thank you. Congressman Nadler –

Congressman Nadler: Thank you. I intend to attend the speech. I'm very disturbed, as I've said, by how it was brought about, by what the speaker of the House did. If the speaker of the House were giving a speech, I might be more tempted to boycott it. Because – but to listen to the prime minister of Israel on an important topic, I will certainly go. I want to add one thing, and that is that I am very disturbed at a different thing. And that is that the controversy over the speech – and we all know the controversies, and all of it – the controversy over the speech is ultimately not that important compared to the real question, which is how to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear weapon state. That is the real question. That threatens Israel, existentially. It threatens the United States, militarily. They are developing – Iran is developing an intercontinental ballistic missile, which has no purpose other than to deliver a nuclear warhead to North America. They have missiles that can deliver it to Israel and to Europe. So, it's a tremendous threat to the United States, as well as to Israel. The way the debate is being structured, if a deal is reached – and I hope a good deal is reached – but if a deal is reached, people really aren't really looking at the details. And what it's going to become politically, I'm afraid, is – if you like and trust President Obama, it'll be a good deal. If you don't like and trust President Obama, it'll be a bad deal. Instead of looking at – what do we need in a good deal, what makes it an adequate deal, or an adequate agreement, to assure us that Iran won't become a nuclear power. That's what we ought to be debating and that's what we're going to, hopefully, be debating. But we have to get to that issue – the merits of whether we have a deal that will be safe for Israel and the United States, or not, rather than a controversy that ultimately is far less important.

Mayor: Okay. Who had it back there?

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: If anyone – if anyone else wants to join in – anyone else have a view they want to offer? Whoever wants to join in, feel free.

Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney: I will be attending out of respect to the state of Israel. I regret that Speaker Boehner has made this a partisan issue. It should not be a partisan issue. He took the inappropriate steps of inviting a head of state without consulting the president of the United States, without consulting the vice president, without consulting the secretary of state, or anyone in the state department, and without consulting Leader Pelosi. He took the extreme step of sending a letter with Leader Pelosi's name on it, inviting a foreign head of state. She never saw the letter. She never signed off on the letter. She had nothing to do with the letter. This is a breach of protocol. It is inappropriate. I will be attending. I support the state of Israel. It should not be a partisan issue.

Mayor: Thank you.

Congressman Crowley: I – let me say this – I, for the sake of brevity, maybe, I think just about everyone here – I don't want to speak for everyone – I'll also be attending, and they can speak for themselves.

Mayor: I'm sorry, Marcia, this is not really what this press conference is about, so you can talk to them afterwards separately.

Congressman Crowley: And the one point I will make is, I also intend to – I also intend to attend the address. Just on a light note – Jerry Nadler mentioned speeches by the speaker. The only speeches the speaker gives lately is on attire of members of Congress on the House floor – that's about it. We don't see much of him. But we do feel a reaction of his – his movements –and that's behind the scenes. And I agree wholeheartedly with what Jerry Nadler and what Carolyn Maloney just said. I do believe that the work of the speaker has been very unhelpful, but at the same time, we also recognize the importance of this relationship between the United States and Israel – two incredibly important – an incredibly important partnership. Israel finds itself in a sea of undemocratic states. In many respects, we are her best and most reliable ally. I do want to hear what the prime minister has to say on this issue, and I hope we can get past the politics of his speaking on the floor, and get to the issue of a nuclear Iranian state, and that's the biggest issue I think.

Mayor: Okay. Yes –

Question: I'm just wondering if you guys at all discussed the 11th Congressional District? And as a follow-up to that, if potentially a Republican wins the seat, would that actually be a good thing for you guys? You complained a little bit about the House Republicans not being willing to listen. Where, if you had some sort of emissary on that side of the aisle, it might helpful?

Mayor: I – I think I can summarize for the group – we did not discuss it, and I think we don't take any wooden nickels. So, I think we believe that that is a seat that, if represented by a Democrat, more would get done for the people of this city.

Congressman Crowley: How did that work so far?

Mayor: Yeah, you're right, you're right, you're right. [Laughs] Not a great body of evidence. Okay, anything else – going once – yes –

Question: [inaudible] Israel issue [inaudible]?

Congressman Hakeem Jeffries: Well, thank you. I did inform the people I represent over the last few days, beginning last week, that I will attend the speech. I look forward to hearing what the prime minister has to say. I assume he will deliver a strong, but respectful address. And then we look forward to hearing from the president, hearing from the P5+1 nations, seeing what comes out of the agreement, and then Congress is going to have to make a decision about our prospective – but we all agree that a nuclear-capable Iran and their opportunity to weaponize uranium is problematic for the entire world.

Mayor: Last call, one or two more. Sally?

Question: [inaudible] get your thoughts on this whole issue [inaudible]?

Mayor: I think Speaker Boehner made a huge mistake, and I think it's – you don't politicize the platform of the House of Representatives in the context of another nation's election. It's absolutely unacceptable. We – there's been a tradition – and this is where it's something I think – I'm probably preaching to the choir with my colleagues – but there was a tradition for many years in this country of some actual bipartisan rules, and one of those rules was you don't offer the platform of the opportunity to speak before the Congress of the United States in the midst of another nation's election season – that that was a no-fly zone – and for a good reason. We don't – it's not appropriate for us to interfere in the politics of another nation, any more than it would be appropriate for them to interfere in our politics. So I think the speaker did something that was really inappropriate and unfair to all concerned, and it should never happen again.

Question: Mayor, just to follow up on that, [inaudible] politics in Israel. They're also frustrated with the Obama administration's policies as pertains to Israel, so is that not a valid reason for him to [inaudible]?

Mayor: Oh, it's valid to have a debate, and it's valid to – I think Congressman Nadler said it perfectly – we – we should be exceedingly concerned about Israel's safety and security, and about what a potential deal with Iran would look like, and if it's enough to keep us safe – those are very, very serious issues. Treat those issues specifically from the perspective of the debate we have to have here in this country, but don't confuse it with an election in a foreign nation. We don't belong in the middle of that. Congresswoman Grace Meng – hold on one sec – you're up next.

Congresswoman Grace Meng: I do want to just echo my colleagues' statements – I will be attending Prime Minister Netanyahu's address tomorrow. I disagree strongly with the process that Speaker Boehner used. I disapprove that he used the friendship between Israel and the United States as a political football, and the friendship and security of the Israeli people are too important, so I will be attending.

Mayor: Congresswoman Velasquez –

Congresswoman Nydia Velasquez: Good morning, everyone. For me, it is shameful and frustrating that the speaker of the House, with total disregard to protocol and decorum of the House and rules, got us to this point. There's no question in our common goal of making sure that we don't have a nuclear Iran, but the way that the speaker has gone to do this is disrespectful to us as members of Congress, to say that this was a bipartisan invitation, which it was not. To –to disrespect the process – how do we know the policies of this administration? Those negotiations are secret. Yes, I'll be attending, but I am very frustrated as a member of Congress to feel that we – that the speaker of the House, with total disregard, has put us into this predicament. The emails – hundreds of emails – telephone calls that we are getting – from one side and the other side – it just – this is not the way to do the people's business.

Mayor: Amen.

Congresswoman Velasquez: Shame on the speaker.

Mayor: Okay, last call – last call – go ahead –

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: Say again?

Question: [inaudible]

Congresswoman Yvette Clarke: So, I'm probably the only one here who is not decided – I'm conflicted. I'll be meeting with some of my constituents in Washington, D.C. who are there attending the AIPAC conference, and I will be issuing a statement shortly thereafter.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: We're going to work with Senator Schumer – we're just deeply, deeply concerned that, you know, people have been ripped off here. So we're going to work closely with Senator Schumer and our colleagues in the delegation to – to figure out what happened here and how to protect the homeowners involved. I think there's a lot we have to do to find out what happened to make sure it doesn't happen again.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: Of course – and any time – look, these are people who went through hell after Sandy, who've had enough trouble as it is, and to find that they may be now victims of a crime against them – and we particularly

need to understand what the role of the insurance companies was in this – I think it would be particularly heinous if insurance companies took advantage of people who were hurting so much after Sandy. Jen – last call.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: Say again –

Question: [inaudible] relationship with Governor Cuomo [inaudible] –

Mayor: Your story – I haven't read it yet, but it strikes me as based on some thin evidence. The bottom line – I've said this many, many times, and I think we should move on to the substance rather than talk about the personalities – I've been a friend of the governor's for 20 years. We work closely together. There's a lot of areas we agree, there's some areas we disagree. I went to Albany on Wednesday – literally laid that out – appreciated his support for mayoral control of education, for example. I appreciated some of the important reforms he's put in his budget – I think his juvenile justice reform is absolutely historic and crucial. Disagree with him on some other areas – disagree with him on putting more emphasis on high stakes testing in education, disagree with some of the actions that the state has proposed vis-à-vis homelessness, and the support that we're lacking from the state in terms of combatting homelessness. So I think that's pretty normal, and I think that the personality issue is not the concern here. The concern is what are the interests of the people of New York City, and are they being attended to in Albany. And I'll give you another example – I talk about the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. This is something I would hope all of you would look at – you know, we had a decision by the State Court of Appeals, the highest court in New York state, in the last decade, that said New York City had been short-changed on education funding by a huge amount. For one year and one year only, that funding was adjusted in our favor by Governor Spitzer. Then the economic crisis hit, and there was a broad consensus that it would take time to address the goal. You've got a state right now that claims openly an \$8 billion dollar surplus, but is doing nothing to address the historic inequity in education funding, and the fact that we have been shortchanged for so long. That's what we should be talking about. It's not about personalities. It's about whether the people of New York City are being treated fairly in Albany.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: Hold on, just finish – just let her finish. Go ahead.

Question: Do you personally feel that he's trying to do little things like hold –

Mayor: Again, I don't get into the personality discussion. I just – Jen, you can ask all the times you want. I'm focused on the substance and getting things done for New York City. Thank you. I've said it so many times, guys. Come on.

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