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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY ON THE  
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good afternoon, everybody. It is a very sad reality when the greatest nation on earth watches as its government shuts down days before the most important holiday of the year. This is a sad moment for America. But I want to assure all New Yorkers that all of the basic services of New York City government will continue. I want to assure all New Yorkers, they will be protected. All of our safety agencies, public safety emergency services – all will be operating as normal. NYPD, FDNY, OEM – all of the agencies that protect us – despite this very sad action by the federal government.

I have a message for President Trump at this moment. Mr. President, it's your Congress, it's your wall, it's your shutdown. it's time to own up to that fact. It's time to take responsibility and it's time to fix it right now, before Christmas. While so many people of this country are waiting for an answer from Washington, the President cannot delay in addressing this crisis.

Here's the reality of governing by tantrum, which is what we're seeing right now. In this city alone, there are almost 50,000 federal workers in New York City, not to mention all the many thousands of people whose jobs depend on the federal government being open. We're talking about ultimately tens of thousands of New Yorkers who literally are going to be going without a paycheck at the holidays, which is disgusting and insensitive and unkind. That's what's happening with no end in sight. In the short term, as I said, there's no question that this city will keep going and will protect our people and serve our people. In the long term, this could be a very dangerous situation not only for New Yorkers but for all Americans. There are a number of agencies here in this city that rely deeply on federal funding and will be affected if this shutdown continues for any appreciable amount of time. That certainly includes our housing agencies, like NYCHA, that includes our Department of Transportation, which we depend on to keep our roads and bridges and highways safe. All sorts of City agencies will start to suffer but more important everyday New Yorkers like everyday Americans all over the country will start to suffer.

Let's talk about those who need help to get food for their families. People rely on food stamps, including a lot of people who are very hard working and barely scraping by. 1.6 million New

York City residents rely on food stamps just to be able to feed their families. Those food stamps will be threatened, the ability to feed their families will be threatened.

We are blessed in this city to have managed our budget very prudently, to have substantial reserves, so we know we can weather a shutdown of a few weeks. And the longest we've ever seen in a federal shutdown is 21 days. But if it continues beyond that, then there are very real dangers for this city. My hope is that the new Congress that convenes on January 3rd will help to solve this problem if not solved before. But we have to be clear the discussion has to change if we expect to move forward. Right now, the President is obsessed with the border wall. Over \$5 billion that could be spent on the needs of Americans as opposed to his dream of shutting people out, \$5 billion that can be spent on pre-K for the children of this country, could be spent on helping young people with student loan debt, \$5 billion that could be spent to fix public housing, including the New York City Housing Authority. That's where the focus should be. And I hope the new Congress will act on those kind of very real human priorities. I want to thank the leaders in the House and Senate who have been trying to avert this shutdown, including of course our own Senator Chuck Schumer, and the House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi who offered numerous solutions. I also want to note that the Republican-led U.S. Senate passed a bill that would provide for a solution and avert the shutdown. It's all the more striking that the President acted as he did. There are adults in Washington on both sides of the aisle and we need them to step up right now and solve this crisis. In the meantime we will be fully prepared here in this city for any eventuality. It's our job to protect and serve all New Yorkers. We will do that regardless of the mistakes made in Washington.

Quick few words in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

I want to note before we turn to questions – I want to thank members of my administration who are here who have been preparing over the last few days for this horrible possibility and now we'll make sure that we manage our way through it. Of course our First Deputy Mayor Dean Fuleihan; our DOT Commissioner Polly Trottenberg; our Social Services Commissioner Steve Banks; the General Manager of NYCHA, Vito Musticelo; the Chief and Executive Director of the Personnel Bureau of the NYPD, Chief John Clune; and Charles Carey, the General Counsel of the Housing Recovery Office. I also want to thank the Chair of the Committee on State and Federal Affairs in the City Council, who is a partner we work with closely on these issues, Councilmember Andy Cohen. Thank you very much for joining us.

With that I want to take any questions that you may have on this shutdown and the effect on New York City, and if there is any other questions, we'll take a few of those as well.

Anything about the shutdown? Please.

**Question:** Mr. Mayor, [inaudible] 21 days, is the longest previous shutdown.

**Mayor:** Yes.

**Question:** What happens [Inaudible] less than 24 hours right now. [Inaudible]?

**Mayor:** We were certainly aware of the fact that we're in the most unpredictable times we've ever seen. So even if the worst we ever saw previously was a 21-day shutdown. We're in uncharted territory here. It could go longer. If it goes longer, it's going to start to undermine the ability of New York City to pay for the things that we do everyday. We have enough cash flow to get us a few weeks. But if it goes a month or more we're going to have some very tough choices to make. We're starting to develop that plan right this moment. We have time, thank God. So right now, we have reserves, we can keep things going. But if this shutdown lingers, it will start to affect everyday New Yorkers. I mentioned some of the people being directly affected like folks who depend on food stamps. A lot of non-profit organizations as well depend on direct federal funds and they turn around and provide health care services at the community level or housing support or whatever it may be. They will also feel the pinch very soon. So we are starting to prepare for the worst-case scenario.

Any other questions? Please.

**Question:** [Inaudible] insurance [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** It's a very real problem and Steve I don't know if you can speak to this question but this is – I want to just frame it by saying yes, this is the kind of thing we're worrying about, the domino effect. That people who are expecting some kind of support to keep going and barely make ends meet see a disruption. That's the food stamp example as well, there's a lot of families if they didn't have food stamps right now, their entire household budget would collapse. Obviously for folks – the same if they don't have unemployment insurance.

Steve, do you want to speak to that?

**Commissioner Steven Banks, Department of Social Services:** We haven't heard that with respect to unemployment insurance and we'll certainly be very much focused on it. I think what we're seeing in the food stamp area is instructive in terms of what could happen to people. Fortunately, for Social Security benefits and Medicare, we know that those will be continuing. We know that food stamp benefits will also be continuing in January, but the concern, as the Mayor said, that of those 1.6 million New Yorkers, there are more than half-a-million children under the age of 18, there are more than 400,000 seniors, and they're depending on about \$150 a month per person in benefits. So you can see the harm that really people are suffering, but we'll certainly follow up on what you're raising with respect to unemployment insurance benefits.

**Mayor:** Other questions regarding the shutdown? Any other related to the shutdown? And then if there's any others we can – on other topics. One last – shutdown – yes?

**Question:** [Inaudible]

**Mayor:** It surprised me entirely once the Republican U.S. Senate voted for a solution. I thought that was the signal that it was time to put aside the obsession with the wall and move forward. Look, everyone wants border security. I don't know anyone who doesn't believe in border

security. I know we need a safe border – progressives, conservatives, Democrats, Republicans. And the Senate reflected that reality with a unanimous vote in favor of a solution. I thought that was the end of the discussion. I think the President for some reason is not only obsessed with the border wall, he keeps moving the goal posts on what a border wall looks like and it's holding the whole nation hostage because, again, this is not an abstract idea – a shutdown. This affects real people. And again, it's going to affect families right now at the holidays who have to wonder when they're going to see their net paycheck. So, yes, I'm surprised, but I think a lot of people are really shocked in this country right now, including a lot of Republicans who are letting the President hear that they're not satisfied with this.

On the shutdown – one more call on the shutdown, going once, twice. Any other topics? Just want to see if there's anything else. Yes?

**Question:** [Inaudible]

**Mayor:** A little louder, I'm sorry.

**Question:** [Inaudible]

**Mayor:** No, not at all. That's obviously unacceptable behavior and there's clearly penalties for that. There's a lot of NYPD presence in the subways. In fact, under the leadership of Commissioner O'Neill and Chief Delatorre, we've been adding patrol strength in the subways. And no, that's not acceptable behavior, there are real consequences for it.

Please –

**Question:** [Inaudible]

**Mayor:** I obviously want to see the legislation before commenting in detail, but the broad point I want to make is, everything that happened in those negotiations is made public, has been made public. So, the nondisclosure agreement, as I understand it, is meant to protect the negotiation process while it's happening, which I think is understandable because if there's constant leaking coming out of a negotiation, it's a negotiation that will not work. And I believe fundamentally that those 25,000 new jobs are important to the future of New York City. But ensuring that all the information from the process at the conclusion is made public I think is very important.

**Question:** [Inaudible]

**Mayor:** Again, what I say is – not having seen the wording, I think there has to be confidentiality during negotiations. There has to be transparency after. We'll see what the legislation says, but that's the balance that I think has to be struck.

Last call if there's anything else on anyone's mind. Yes, please.

**Question:** On the L train shutdown, what is your level of confidence [inaudible] what are your chief concerns about [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** I'll start and if Commission Trottenberg wants to jump in, she is more than welcome. She's spent a lot of time on this and I want to thank her and her team because it hasn't been easy. Look, here's what I'm confident of first and foremost – let's not talk about the government, let's talk about the people. New Yorkers are resilient and adaptable – that's a classic characteristic of our people – is that New Yorkers can handle anything. People are going to make a whole set of decisions about how to navigate – they're going to take different subway lines, different buses, change their routines in a whole lot of ways. I think the effort by the MTA has been strong in terms of getting a plan out and communicating. We've tried to get our plans out, the way we're going to manage traffic, what we're going to do with ferries, the changes we're making in the streets. I think a lot of people are hearing the news and taking it seriously and preparing for the changes. I do think there's some things to work on. We have to – there's concerns – I was at a town hall meeting on the East Side where people were really concerned about some of the construction work and whether there's any health issues related to that. We're going to go look at that again to be a check and balance on the MTA to make sure everyone's healthy. I think a lot of people are concerned about, will there be enough traffic enforcement. We have to make sure we get it right, and what I've said is – if we need to add more officers as we experience it, we will. But I think the initial – the basic effort has been strong. There's going to be more to do as it develops.

Want to add? I know it's your favorite topic.

**Commissioner Polly Trottenberg, Department of Transportation:** We actually spent an hour together discussing it on Friday. I'll just add a little to what the Mayor said. I think a lot of you – we've obviously put a lot out about the plans, the MTA to increase subway service, bus service, a bike network, the ferry service. I think coming up at the beginning of the year, and I know the Mayor's had an interest in this, is a real public outreach plan – make sure we're having a countdown, that we're getting the word out, that the apps and the public information are up and running. I think both DOT and the MTA are going to have a lot of people on the ground, taking questions now. We want to make sure when D-Day comes, the public really knows what their options are and they have a game plan.

**Mayor:** Well said.

**Question:** [Inaudible]

**Mayor:** So first, health and safety – that comes first. So, whatever is done has to account for the health and safety needs of all New Yorkers, and especially the folks in the area most affected. But second, of course we need to do this work. The MTA needs to do this work. We've got to keep our subway system running. It is, as I've made very clear, a State responsibility, but we want to support getting the job done quickly. Very interesting – you know, New Yorkers in Brooklyn were asked about whether they wanted the longer shutdown with the subway on sometimes and off other times, or whether they wanted to pull the bandaid off and just get it all done at once – and they voted for the latter. And I agree with them because I think New Yorkers are realistic. So, we've got to get it done but there are real health and safety issues – that will be our first concern.

Let's see if there's anything else – yes?

**Question:** [Inaudible]

**Mayor:** Say again?

**Question:** [Inaudible]

**Mayor:** What do you mean?

**Question:** [Inaudible]

**Mayor:** You mean how the shutdown affects it? I think that's a real problem, that the shutdown could affect a whole range of services that people depend on, including immigrant New Yorkers. Different agencies are affected in different ways – obviously, some agencies are fully funded, others are not. But what we can do is, if we think about this carefully, that the agencies that are affected – the Housing Authority, all of our other affordable housing efforts, Department of Transportation, some of our security funding, which is all about fighting terrorism – every New Yorker could be affected by this if it lasted long enough. I think that's the way to understand it. This shutdown in the first days we are generally not going to feel the effect, thank God. If it stretches on, we're going to feel a real serious effect. But for the folks who are getting furloughed right now and, as I said, that's 50,000 jobs – 50,000 federal jobs in New York City. There's a lot of New York City residents who right now just found out they will not have a paycheck for the holidays and potentially weeks more. Those folks are hurting right now.

Last call, if there's any other question. Going once, twice –

Very Happy Holidays, everybody. Thank you.

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