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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO AND FIRE COMMISSIONER NIGRO
ANNOUNCE PRELIMINARY FDNY STATISTICS AND DISCUSS PREPARATIONS
FOR CELEBRATION OF FDNY'S 150TH ANNIVERSARY**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Okay, good afternoon, everyone. Well, it is always a pleasure to be in a firehouse. As a lot of you know, I had the honor of going to all of these –

[Siren wails]

– you can see, the action comes to you, right? I had the honor, while back in the City Council, of working closely with our firefighters and our fire officers in efforts to preserve this extraordinary department. And some of you got to see my more recent arrest last year when a hospital was about to be closed, but my original arrest was in defense of Engine 204 in Carroll Gardens and Cobble Hill. And when I'm in a firehouse, it reminds me of the extraordinary work this department does, and it reminds me of how much we depend on it as New Yorkers.

There is something in this city that is an unspoken reality, but we should say it more often – especially in the holidays, which should be a time for reflection – that our fire department protects us, often under the most adverse situations. And we all know that firefighters are always there – it's something as New Yorkers we know – that protection is there, it's the highest quality – it's the finest fire department in the world. And it's something we should take stock of and it's something we should appreciate every day of the year.

So I am proud to be here today to mark some really impressive achievements by this department this year – and it's an extraordinary year – the 150th anniversary year of this agency, with such an extraordinary record of accomplishment.

And I want to say – under our great commissioner, Dan Nigro, this department keeps getting better. I have seen it with my own eyes. This is a department devoted to not only a history of having been the best, but to earning that title each year and continuing to improve in so many ways. And the brave members of the FDNY and EMS keep New Yorkers safe, and – the statistics show – are keeping us safer than ever. This department is on track to respond to a

record number of emergency calls this year – projected to be over 1.6 million calls by the end of this year – the highest ever, literally, in the history of this city.

At the same time, thank God, there were only 68 fire-related deaths in New York City this year – 68 – which caps off a record low five-year period. This is the best five-years in the department's history, and that goes back to when records were first kept in 1916 during World War I – so, again, an extraordinary achievement over these last five years.

What makes this possible? The professionalism of this department. It was a special honor to be at the graduation ceremony a few weeks ago. And you can tell, when you meet these young people, and you hear them talk about what they went through – the most rigorous training – and that professionalism, that sense of camaraderie, that sense of mission imbued from the very beginning – and it works.

So next year, reaching 150 years, speaks volumes to all that has been contributed over the years to making this department so great.

I want to thank a lot of friends who are here – thank them for the work they do. I want to thank Vincent Variale, the president of the Uniformed EMS Officers Association; Izzy Miranda, the president of the Uniformed EMTs, Paramedics, and Fire Inspectors; and a long-time friend of mine going back to our days with Engine 204, Nancy Carbone, the executive director of Friends of Firefighters – Nancy, thank you for your extraordinary work; and the leaders around me here – Commissioner Nigro, you'll hear from in a moment; our first deputy commissioner, Robert Turner; our chief of department, James Leonard – great leaders, bringing this department forward.

Now, remember – remember how this department started – in the 1600s. That's actually the earliest – even though we're talking about the 150th anniversary next year, the origin, the precursors go back to the 1600s, and the Rattle Watches – people who walked around in New Amsterdam to alert people and alert their fellow citizens when there was a fire. From the Rattle Watches – a guy walking around, making noise when there was a fire – to today – the most advanced equipment, the most advanced training, the most sophisticated department anywhere in the world – this is the ultimate, state of the art, 21st century department today.

And Rescue 1, which we have the honor of being in here today, is a fantastic example of what this department does. An elite that takes on the most difficult and daring rescues – and we saw it with our own eyes last month. Two window washers, dangling from 68 stories above the ground at the Freedom Tower – we all watched with tremendous concern and trepidation at what might to those two individuals. And lo and behold, Rescue 1 came through and got them to safety. That is something that 150 years ago we couldn't have even imagined the tower being there, let alone the capacity to save someone up on the tower, but we have come a long, long way. It takes bravery, it takes professionalism – we see it every single day from the FDNY.

Now, this very day, we think about what happened last night. A firefighter fell down an elevator shaft while battling a three-alarm blaze in the Bronx – heavy smoke, literally zero visibility, goes down the elevator shaft. And here's the measure of the people who make up this department –

after the EMTs got to the firefighter, made sure he was okay, cleared him, the firefighter insisted on returning to the fight against the fire, which is extraordinarily admirable. And I want to commend him and commend the FDNY for that sense of mission.

We saw equally, during a moment – a few months ago, this city had never faced the Ebola crisis – it literally had never touched us – and there was such concern here and all over the country about what it would mean. And then suddenly came the day when Dr. Spencer was stricken. It was EMTs who went to bring him to Bellevue Hospital. It was firefighters that helped to decontaminate the suits afterwards. We see it time and time again – answering the call, whatever the call is. We saw it after the East Harlem gas explosion – extraordinary effort to protect people in that neighborhood in a very tenuous situation.

As I said, there's a lot to be proud of, but the department keeps moving forward. And we appreciate deeply the FDNY Foundation's help. The FDNY Foundation helped distribute thousands of smoke alarms and batteries to help people stop fires and be aware of fires immediately. They've educated over half a million New Yorkers in fire safety and trained over 13,000 of our fellow New Yorkers in CPR, which is absolutely extraordinary.

And this department is attracting the best talent from every part of this city – and Commissioner Nigro has put a premium on reaching out to every neighborhood, people of every background, bringing the best to this department, making a department open for all if they have the drive and the commitment and the capacity.

We now have a record number of female firefighters, which is another step forward. I want to thank our new chief diversity and inclusion officer, Pamela Lassiter, for her great work in helping to recruit and retain even more. That work will grow in the coming years. We're making sure that our firehouses also have the proper facilities to welcome women firefighters.

I also want to thank our new chief of training at the academy, Stephen Raynis, for an emphasis on not only the highest standards, but also an emphasis on diversity and inclusion. You know, that's going to keep bringing in generation after generation of great members of this department. It's also going to deepen the bond between the FDNY and the communities it serves. This is something Commissioner Nigro and I have talked about. I've heard you talk about when you started out – your early assignments and that sense of connecting the firehouse to the community around it, and welcoming people in and giving people a chance to understand just how important this work is and how to be safe, and how to have to not need the FDNY to show up by doing the right things to avoid fires to begin with. That connection, that communication, has a huge impact. And this summer, for the first time, the opening of firehouses for block parties – kids and families will be able to meet local firefighters in their neighborhoods, which will be a tremendous step.

I'm grateful for the skill, the courage, the professionalism of the men and women of the FDNY. In the 150th year, this department will only get better.

And with that, it is my honor to introduce our commissioner. He has done extraordinary things this year. He has built upon a legacy. It began with his father – I want to get it right now – Class

of '46 from the academy? And you're Class of '69? – '69 from the academy. And then what Dan Nigro did in the first part of his FDNY career, including what he had to do to lead this department on 9/11 and in the year after, bringing it back after such tragedy and such pain – extraordinary service that he provided then and what he is now doing to take this department even further. It is extraordinary to have a leader of this capacity. Ladies and gentlemen, Commissioner Dan Nigro.

[Applause]

Commissioner Dan Nigro, FDNY: Thank you, mayor. Good afternoon, everyone.

As the mayor said, 2014 has been a very busy year for the department – our busiest on record. I'm very proud of the work by our members. Despite the record number of incidents, we have worked hard to keep fires and fire deaths at historic lows – and that's a true accomplishment.

Now, in 1970, which was my first full year with the department, hundreds of people died each year in fires. It was actually – the highest number of people died in 1970 in New York history. But now, that is truly a thing of the past – that's the testament to the brave and dedicated work of our firefighters, paramedics, EMTs, fire marshals, inspectors, and civilians who are absolutely committed to the safety of our city.

And a large part of how we accomplish our mission is through education and community outreach. Education plays an important role in preventing fires and fire deaths.

There are two key points to remember when it comes to fatal fires. First, in two thirds of fatal fires, we find there is no working smoke alarm. By having a working smoke alarm, changing the batteries twice a year and checking it regularly, you dramatically increase your chances of surviving a fire. The second point is that a third of fire-related deaths are seniors over the age of 70 – a small percentage of the population, but a large number of those killed by fire. That's one reason we created a new program this year to actually install smoke alarms in the homes of seniors and home-bound residents in neighborhoods in all five boroughs.

Each death is one too many, and we will remain vigilant and work hard to reduce these numbers again next year.

Now, in addition to working hard to save lives next year, as we have done for the last 149 years, we are also going to celebrate a bit, as it is our 150th anniversary. We are proud to partner with the FDNY Foundation and our friends at NYC & Company to celebrate this important milestone. The FDNY Foundation is critical to funding the educational efforts that keep our fire deaths down, despite the record number of emergencies.

So next year, we're going to see quite a bit of the FDNY at parades, festivals, sporting events, concerts, and attractions – events that bring energy and tourism to our city. I'm especially proud of the community events the mayor mentioned. We are going to bring New Yorkers into firehouses like never before, in many diverse communities we serve, because we want everyone to know what this department is all about.

Now I want to show you a video created by NYC & Company that showcases the great work our members perform day in and day out, and why FDNY 150 is so important.

[Video plays]

[Applause]

Commissioner Nigro: As you can see, we've come quite a long way since the Rattle Watch and Bucket Brigades the mayor was referencing. We're excited and we hope you are to. It's going to be a great year. And this is truly a great department and a great city.

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