

SPEAKER 1: So join me in welcoming Mayor de Blasio and Symone Sanders.

[APPLAUSE]

It's all yours.

SYMONE SANDERS: Thank you.

SPEAKER 1: Mayor, thank you.

BILL DE BLASIO: Thank you.

SYMONE SANDERS: Hello, hello. Y'all keep that rattle clap going for Mayor de Blasio.

[APPLAUSE]

BILL DE BLASIO: Thank you. Thank you.

SYMONE SANDERS: Let me sip my espresso. Y'all a little quiet today. Well, Mayor, thank you.

BILL DE BLASIO: Thank you, Symone.

SYMONE SANDERS: Thank you for having me. Thank you for having us here at Harvard. It's always great to be back at the Institute of Politics. I'm actually a fellow this semester at USC Center for the Political Future. But I do miss you all on a regular basis. Don't tell Bob Shrum.

But I'm excited we have a Mayor de Blasio here today. So we're going to have a really robust conversation. I love the Mayor. He's one of my favorites. And then we're also going to take some questions later. So think about your questions. And we are taking questions, ladies and gentlemen not, soliloquies. Questions, not-- questions, not--

AUDIENCE: Soliloquies.

SYMONE SANDERS: I teach a class on Mondays, OK? All right. So Mayor de Blasio, I have to go with-- I have to start off talking about Amazon. The news about Amazon broke today. I just want to read folks your statement. The statement from Mayor de Blasio on Amazon Headquarters 2, HQ2.

The Mayor says, "you have to be tough to make it in New York City. We gave Amazon the opportunity to be a good neighbor and do business in the greatest city in the world. Instead of working with the community, Amazon threw away that opportunity. We have the best talent in the world. And every day we are growing a stronger and fairer economy for everyone. If Amazon can't recognize what that's worth, its competitors will."

So talk to us a little bit about this statement but also some of the-- I mean, there were critics in the community that the Amazon HQ was planning to be in, that they weren't necessarily excited about Amazon being there. So talk to us a little bit about that.

BILL DE BLASIO: Yeah, and that's democracy. And that's OK. And this is why this whole thing is so strange and so distressing to me. But before we talk about Amazon, Happy Valentine's Day. Happy Valentine's Day. They didn't send me a Valentine, but I can send you a Valentine. Happy Valentine's Day, Symone.

SYMONE SANDERS: Thank you. Did you bring me a gift?

BILL DE BLASIO: It's back there.

SYMONE SANDERS: Oh, OK.

BILL DE BLASIO: It's back there. So stall for a few minutes while I get a gift. But I think the point about that statement begins with, it's a tough city, and we're proud of who we are. It's a place with a lot of energy, a lot of creativity, a lot of entrepreneurship.

No one said it wasn't a tough place. And it also is a very democratic place in every sense of the word. People have strong views, and they're going to fight for what they think is fair. So what I don't get is, we made an agreement with them. They chose New York City.

We were keeping the agreement. Guess what? Some community activists wanted to see something else. They wanted changes or they had differences. That's part of life. And instead of an actual dialogue to try and resolve those issues, we get a call this morning saying, we're taking our ball and we're going home. I've never seen anything like it. So we are putting them in our past, and we're moving forward.

SYMONE SANDERS: We're moving forward. How about that for a Valentine's Day treat?

BILL DE BLASIO: Yeah.

SYMONE SANDERS: Well, Mayor, before we start, I know we want to talk about you've had-- you just got reelected--

BILL DE BLASIO: Yes.

SYMONE SANDERS: --recently. Claps for re-election.

BILL DE BLASIO: We love re-election.

SYMONE SANDERS: We love re-election for some people.

BILL DE BLASIO: Yeah.

SYMONE SANDERS: So I want to talk about all the success that you've had, Mayor, some things that you've learned. What are you taking into this next chapter in your administration. But first, I have to ask you, are you running for president?

BILL DE BLASIO: I have not ruled it out.

SYMONE SANDERS: You've not ruled it out.

BILL DE BLASIO: I have not ruled it out.

SYMONE SANDERS: What would push you to make a decision?

BILL DE BLASIO: Now, you wouldn't want me to deal in hypotheticals now, would you?

SYMONE SANDERS: The press secretary in me likes your original statement.

BILL DE BLASIO: Symone, we are at Harvard University. They would not want us to deal in hypotheticals here.

SYMONE SANDERS: Of course not. Of course not.

BILL DE BLASIO: No, look. The bottom line is, I have a desire to go out and talk about real specific changes that we're making in New York City that are an indicator where we all need to go.

And I don't mean that with any hubris, because every city is experimenting and trying to get it right. So for example, in my recent State of the City Speech, I said we're going to guarantee health care for all New Yorkers.

We are not going to wait on single payer. We believe in it. I believe in it. I believe in Medicare for all. But we can't wait. People need health care now. So the city is going to take it upon itself and guarantee health care for everyone, including undocumented New Yorkers. They deserve it. They need it.

[APPLAUSE]

And they're part of our community. And I also said, we're going to do something-- that this scares me when I even tell you this fact.

SYMONE SANDERS: Uh-oh. Lean in.

BILL DE BLASIO: Lean in. Every industrialized country in the world believes that human beings need some time off, that people need some time for their families, for self-care, and there's only one country that guarantees nothing. And so since we live in the United States of America, in New York City, we're going to pass a law that guarantees every working person two weeks of paid vacation.

SYMONE SANDERS: Wow.

BILL DE BLASIO: So they can take care of themselves and their families and actually regroup and have a life.

SYMONE SANDERS: You all can clap for that. I heard some claps.

[APPLAUSE]

I mean, I think it's important. I think the conversations that we're having right now are, in fact, conversations I believe folks are having in communities across the country.

BILL DE BLASIO: That's right.

SYMONE SANDERS: So we'll wait. We'll wait on your presidential announcement.

BILL DE BLASIO: You'll wait? You'll wait? Thank you.

SYMONE SANDERS: We'll see what you're talking about.

BILL DE BLASIO: I appreciate your patience.

SYMONE SANDERS: We'll circle back. We'll circle back.

BILL DE BLASIO: Circle back.

SYMONE SANDERS: These questions tonight, I want to say thank you to the students of the IOP. They helped compile some of the questions we're going to ask you.

BILL DE BLASIO: OK.

SYMONE SANDERS: But I want to start off actually with maybe a more sensitive question. I think I'd like to know and some people in the room would like to know, what have you learned since the death of Eric Garner? And concurrently, if Erica Garner, the daughter of Eric Garner, was sitting here today, and as folks know, Erica Garner was a very outspoken critic of yours--

BILL DE BLASIO: Yes.

SYMONE SANDERS: --is there anything you want to say to her?

BILL DE BLASIO: I did not know Erica Garner. I do know Eric Garner's mom, Gwen Carr. I've talked to her many times. And what I would say is, your son should not have died. It was wrong by every measure. And there is not closure, and that is wrong too.

And I'll tell you what I think of our Justice Department in a moment and, unfortunately, across two different administrations. But the other thing I would say is, he died, and I wish deeply he was still here.

But the world changed after his death. It really changed people's understanding. And so our goal now is to never let this happen again, which is why we have retrained the entire police force. I mean, every single officer has been retrained in de-escalation. Every single officer is getting implicit bias training.

The number of-- I'll give you an example-- gun discharges in New York City last year, 36,000 officers, 8.6 million people, 365 days, there were only 17 adversarial gun discharges in all of 2018. Because we're constantly retraining officers do the least that can be done safely to address the situation. So things have changed very, very meaningfully.

But to the point about the Justice Department, I have no explanation for you. How over two administrations, to this very hour, the Justice Department has not decided that it will or will not pursue the case, it's almost five years. It makes no sense.

SYMONE SANDERS: It makes no sense. Hmm. So in terms of-- I hear that there are institutional changes that happened in terms of training, which I think is very important. I don't think we talk enough about the training of police officers. We talk about police accountability and police community relations. But what do you think the City of New York has learned? What do you think folks have learned since the death of Eric Garner?

BILL DE BLASIO: I think it was an extraordinarily searing personal reality for all New Yorkers. And after it, when originally the district attorney and the grand jury in Staten Island did not bring charges, it was a very painful night in our city. And I spoke that night, trying to tell New Yorkers that the city at least understood the world had to change. And I talked about my son.

I talked about my son because, to the eyes of anyone, he is a multiracial child, but anyone who looked at him would say he is a young man of African descent. And my wife and I had to teach him from literally about the age of 11 that he had to comport himself in a very particular way if he ever had an interaction with police.

And I made very clear this was not a statement of any disrespect towards our officers, who protect us every day and the vast majority of whom do it exactly the right way. It was statement of reality. It was a statement of American reality. So when I talked about that, I was

trying to let New Yorkers know we get it that something must change, that we can't think this is an acceptable state of affairs.

And particularly for folks in the African-American community, I thought it was very important to send a message, because I know people were in such pain that this would be a watershed moment. We wish it had never happened, but it would be a watershed moment. And it would be a different and more fair city going forward. That's what we're trying to achieve.

SYMONE SANDERS: He's uncomfortable. I felt like that night you had an uncomfortable conversation for all of New York to see and, frankly, America. And I think oftentimes we are much better if we have these uncomfortable conversations that move towards action.

BILL DE BLASIO: That's right. And I have to say, some of the unions involved in the police department, they're-- each one's different, but some tried to suggest it was negative and disrespectful.

And I said, how can something be disrespectful if it's parents trying to protect their children, and it's an American reality that tens of millions of Americans have been a part of that conversation, either hearing it as a child or giving it as a parent or guardian?

How can we deny that's happening? How can we act like that's not a part of our national experience? It's not disrespect, it's reality. But if we could surface all that, it might be part of how we change.

SYMONE SANDERS: It might be part of how we change. Baby steps. And so you think the discourse has, in fact, changed over the course of your mayorship when it comes to police accountability, when it comes just to the conversation about policing communities?

Because I know you talked about you got it from the police unions, but you also got it from the activists. You were criticized from all sides. And I think there were valid conversations to be had on each side of the argument. And so how do you think the discourse has changed?

BILL DE BLASIO: I think it's a very different city. Today, in New York City, we have a very different kind of policing. And we set out to do it purposely. It's called neighborhood policing, and the entire concept is to develop relationships between police and community, very humanly, like right down to people knowing each other's first names, saying good morning to each other.

We have a big focus now on officers working in a small part of a neighborhood and staying there long term and developing relationships. And I can't tell you how many people have told me, both officers and community residents, how different it is to have a human being.

So I'll tell you a vignette that one of those moments when you think, wow, something's really breaking through. I came down from a police graduation ceremony at Madison Square Garden. I went down into the subway to go to my next meeting, and there was an officer down there.

And I just engaged him. I said, how's it going, What's up? And I will tell you that I didn't know him. I didn't know what to make of him. So I asked him a few questions. He had been five years on the force. He lived in Long Island. Strong-looking guy, young man, happened to be Caucasian. And I didn't know what his politics were.

And he just offhandedly said, things have changed a lot around here. And I didn't know if he was saying it with edge or with approval. So I said, well, what do you mean? He said, well, people are talking to us a lot more. I said OK. That's great. Why? He said, people will talk to you if they're not afraid of you.

SYMONE SANDERS: Well, there you go.

BILL DE BLASIO: Yeah.

SYMONE SANDERS: Baby steps, ladies and gentlemen. Baby steps.

BILL DE BLASIO: Amen.

SYMONE SANDERS: I think that's amazing. OK. So let's talk a little bit more about New York City. So New York is renowned as one of the most diverse cities in the world as well as one of the most populated. I just came from New York earlier today. Can we talk about doing something about LaGuardia Airport?

BILL DE BLASIO: Just for you.

SYMONE SANDERS: Just saying, OK? I literally can't walk from Terminal C to Terminal B, Mayor. It's a problem.

[LAUGHTER]

So amidst all of these differences, what has been your approach to celebrating diversity and each individual's background/culture? And also, what have been some challenges in doing that?

BILL DE BLASIO: Look. It's a challenge because all of the communities are trying to move ahead, and sometimes people feel there's not enough for everyone. For example, we have these very impressive high schools, and there's a group of particularly renowned public high schools, but increasingly, they have ended up being undiverse.

And I came out with a policy and said we cannot have the very best public high schools that are the places that a lot of our great leaders come-- Stuyvesant High School is a great example.

David Axelrod went there, Eric Holder went there. I mean, literally the proving ground for great leaders. But it doesn't look like New York City. Last year's class was-- I think it was 3% Latino and 1% African-American.

SYMONE SANDERS: Definitely not New York City.

BILL DE BLASIO: Correct. And I said that's not unacceptable. So I said, let's borrow a model that Texas has, University of Texas system, where they take young people from every high school in Texas, the highest-achieving in each high school across all demographics, all regions.

I said, let's do some variation on that. New York City, kids from all different middle schools get to come to these great high schools. And they will be our future leaders. And it will be academically rigorous, but it will be inclusive. Of course, that started a massive debate.

And some people felt they would lose in the equation. There was one professor, I think she was at CUNY, who wrote a very powerful Op Ed in The New York Times, and she happened to be Asian. And a lot of the focal point of the energy and anger was coming from the Asian community, feeling like there might be some loss for their children.

I understood it. Folks who work so hard to get the best for their children, they felt they might be losing something. And the headline of the-- the title of the Op Ed was, The Mayor's plan for the specialized high schools is not anti-Asian, it's anti-racist. Simple as that.

So I think that kind of epitomizes the challenge we face. It should not be about losers and winners. We have to create an inclusive society, but it also has to be one where people understand we actually have so much commonality. If there's something that unites us, and I believe this fundamentally, it is our economic reality.

SYMONE SANDERS: Oh, absolutely.

BILL DE BLASIO: We're all struggling to get by except for the 1%. And that's something that I think actually gets to the bigger discussion across the country too, that you can relate to Asians, Latinos, African-Americans, Native Americans, white working class, everybody by making clear the immigrants are not your enemy, the immigrants did not create economic insecurity. The 1% did.

It's a purposeful agenda for concentrating wealth and power. I think the more people understand that, the more we don't have this sense of armed camps, community versus community, struggling over what small gains they have made. But we start to talk about, there's a lot out there.

I have a very simple phrase I use. I said, there's plenty of money. There's plenty of money in this country. It's just in the wrong hands. And I think that is about helping people understand that

we have a huge commonality. If we would recognize that commonality, we could actually change things.

SYMONE SANDERS: That's, I believe the conversation folks should, in fact, be having. For some people, I was saying that equity feels like oppression, because they've never been forced to share in an equitable situation before. But I think about Dr. King in these moments. And right before Dr. King died, he was waging the Poor People's Campaign.

BILL DE BLASIO: That's right.

SYMONE SANDERS: And talking about this exact idea of uniting folks, poor black people, poor LatinX folks, Asian-American/Pacific Islander, Native Indigenous communities around this issue of addressing economic inequality, economic equity. And so how can we have more intentional conversations, if you will, in communities?

How are you making these-- how are you having these conversations in New York? And then how can we take this as truly a national conversation? How can we broaden this thing out? Because I do think that is the crux of it, an economic conversation, but that is not in a vacuum.

BILL DE BLASIO: That's right.

SYMONE SANDERS: Because economics does not exist irrespective of race, irrespective of class, irrespective of education. All of these things are compounded in someone's economic situation.

BILL DE BLASIO: I agree with that entirely. And to your point, I think I often say a lot of people out there in the, whatever, the public discourse let's say, have desiccated Dr. King and try to take the economic justice warrior out of him, forgotten about the Poor People's Campaign. And not recognizing--

SYMONE SANDERS: Oh, yeah. Mike [INAUDIBLE] was saying that was his best friend last week.

BILL DE BLASIO: Right. That really is someone who's tried to airbrush history in so many ways. But Dr. King, the Poor People's Campaign, was a recognition of that commonality. By the way, Fred Hampton in Chicago was organizing poor white people from Appalachia who were living in Chicago and people of African descent in common cause. And he was killed in the middle of that struggle.

This is something that has been an area of tremendous potential for decades and decades. But whenever there's momentum for it, one way or another, it's squashed. To your question, I would argue that what we've done in New York City is we've put the economic fairness issues up front. For example, one of the first things I did with the city council was we extended paid sick leave to half a million people who didn't have it. Five days paid.

SYMONE SANDERS: I'm sorry. Paid sick leave is important.

BILL DE BLASIO: For a lot of people, if you don't have it, you are either going to work that day sick, you're leaving your sick child home, or you're giving up a day's pay. And for a lot of people, they don't have a day's pay to give up. So five days guaranteed every year. That was across all demographics, people who didn't have it.

I told you about the proposal we just put forward on two weeks paid vacation. That is millennials, that's older workers, that's people of every background, that half a million, again, people in the New York City don't have paid vacation.

When we did pre-K for all, this was really important. I said, every family deserved pre-K for their child for free. That was a statement of educational aspiration, but it was also an extraordinary lifting of a burden, because in New York City, if you have to pay for early child education, it was \$10,000 a year, \$15,000 a year.

And for a swath of the city across every ethnic background, if you were poor, if you were working class, if you were middle class, you didn't have 10 or 15,000 per child per year. And so we had tremendous commonality of support for that idea and people shoulder to shoulder fighting for it.

There is a lot more to do to break down the barriers that you indicated. But I will tell you when progressives come forward with ideas that everyone feels, and they can touch and they can really experience, it is the beginning of a different kind of change, because it's personal. It's not something you're reading a book or hear in a speech, it's personal.

If progressives are giving you and your child pre-K for free, you're going to feel something different about the role of government, about the progressive vision. You're not going to feel that tension towards your neighbor or another ethnic group. If your needs are being satisfied while their needs are being satisfied, then there's no us and them. That's a vision I think we have to pursue.

SYMONE SANDERS: What do you say to folks that say, oh, these are handouts?

BILL DE BLASIO: That's ridiculous. These are investments in the most foundational sense. Look, here's what's wrong in this country when it comes to education. And this is the norm, unfortunately. It's pretty well established that kids 0 to 5, that's the profound intellectual growth era. What did the American education system decide to do as a norm? Start education at 6.

SYMONE SANDERS: Does that's make sense?

BILL DE BLASIO: Right? There's a lot of places in this country there's no pre-K, there's either no kindergarten or half-day kindergarten. The first time you are guaranteed a full day of public

education is first grade, even in New York State. So think about how backward that is. So what we said in New York City is, we're actually going to flip the script.

We're going to provide full-day pre-K for every child, literally every four-year-old for free. And we saw immediately the seismic impact it was making in terms of kids' intellectual capacity being unleashed and what it was going to mean going forward. We're now on the way to doing the same for three-year-olds.

This coming September 2020 actually, we'll have 20,000 three-year-olds who get free early childhood education, full day, and eventually we're going to make that a universal right. And what teachers will tell you is the kids who get that are able to move so much more quickly.

And what so many research studies have shown is you want to avoid incarceration, you want to avoid dropout, kids dropping out, you want to avoid homelessness, you name it, give kids an education when it can actually have the fullest effect and also the amazing socialization that occurs and the hope it engenders.

I will tell you one other vignette, because I think it speaks to this. I was in the South Bronx a few years ago. We were doing a gun buyback program, and we were going around door to door in public housing giving people the leaflets and say if there's anybody you know who's ready to turn over a weapon, we'll buy it back and no questions asked.

And so we're doing this door to door. And I come out of this housing development, and a young man walks up to me, maybe 20, 25 years old. And he's just this huge, strongly built guy. And he says, I want to talk to you. I said, OK. He says, I need to tell you up front, I'm formerly incarcerated. And he said, I was in a gang. I went on the wrong path. I've turned my life around. I'm working with young people now.

And I said, well, I really appreciate you telling me. I appreciate what you've achieved. And he said, but here's why I want to stop you. He said these kids are going to be able to do great things if they have hope. He said, for so many kids in this community, they are sent a message that they don't have value, they don't have value, and when you get that message too often you stop having hope.

And if you are not valued by your society or by your school, you're going to look someplace else. And then a gang actually looks kind of logical, because someplace someone will accept you and give you a sense of belonging. And his point was, if we don't invest in these young people, we should not be surprised what we get.

So my view of 3-K and pre-K is, it is communicating to families and to kids consciously, subconsciously, we value you because we're going to put a lot of resources into you because you are the great potential of our future as a city, as a country. We value you. When you tell people you value them, their entire view of the world changes. So it's not a giveaway. It's a foundational investment in the kind of society we should have.

SYMONE SANDERS: A foundational investment. Someone needs to take that messaging and run with it.

BILL DE BLASIO: Well, you being an expert, I'm inspired.

SYMONE SANDERS: No, it is.

BILL DE BLASIO: I'm going to talk about it more often.

SYMONE SANDERS: You do. You should talk about this more often. Look, I am a firm believer. I talk about this-- we talked about it when I was here at the IOP a lot in my class. Shout out to everybody that knows about the Democratic Party Apparatus.

But we talk about how that our conservative friends have been really great at framing the conversations that folks-- that we are having in politics in the world. And we on the left don't do a great job at framing the conversation. So we often end up having the conversation using the language of our conservative friends. But what you just said is, it is an investment. Yes, absolutely.

BILL DE BLASIO: My wife, Chirlane, likes to talk about you cannot use the tools of the oppressor.

SYMONE SANDERS: Well, come on now, Mayor.

BILL DE BLASIO: So--

SYMONE SANDERS: You said it now.

BILL DE BLASIO: I'm sorry.

SYMONE SANDERS: I tried to dress it up, but OK.

BILL DE BLASIO: You know, but let's be real. But no, you're exactly right. The conservative movement paints these very broad emotional pictures. And progressives and democrats somehow think, oh, that's beneath us. And we must be something more exalted. But you know what? That's actually, I think, disrespectful of everyday people, because everyday people want to hear our hearts.

They want to hear that we care about them. It's not just some mission of self-gratification we're on. But we care about them. If we cannot speak a language that makes sense to them, if we're not talking about their lives, we're wasting our time and their time.

And I think this is a tremendous problem, but I think it's a surmountable problem. I tell you when you say to people, we understand your life. Your life is here. Here's what working people

are going through in this country. They are struggling to make ends meet, their lives are more stressful than ever before, their hours are longer. How many people are working not one job-- that's long enough-- but two jobs, et cetera? It's difficult.

It's not like the American dream of you're going to do your 9 to 5, you're going to go home, everything's stable. Next generation's going to be better. It's the reverse now. And people are hurting, and they're feeling that, and they want to have that acknowledged. And they want to know that status quo is not OK. The 2016 election, if you had to boil it down, you know a lot more than I do about the 2016 election.

SYMONE SANDERS: Don't get me started.

BILL DE BLASIO: But if you had to boil it down, the party that was supposed to be the party of working people, to too many people's eyes was the party of the elite that had caused the problem to begin with.

And it was the party of a kind of centrism that was closely associated with the status quo that instead of a righteous indignation that we had a status quo that was broken, that working people were suffering and we were supposed to be their representatives and their tribunes, and the warriors on their behalf. And they could not identify that in our party and our candidate. So I don't think it's illogical, and it's not just, I think, sometimes a stereotype. The white working class [INAUDIBLE].

SYMONE SANDERS: I'd just like to say, I think people in the audience don't like-- I know that you're also talking about black, brown--

BILL DE BLASIO: Hello.

SYMONE SANDERS: Asian-American, Pacific Islanders, and there's, like, working people, in fact, by 2032, according to Census Bureau data, will be majority people of color by 2032.

BILL DE BLASIO: Right? It's going to be a majority minority country. But in Wisconsin, to take one example, members of the white working class who had been Democrats, many of whom voted for Barack Obama, could not identify their Democratic party and what they were hearing. And they either stayed home or they voted for Trump, hoping that something might change and there'd be disruption. I think a misguided hope, but I understand it.

But African-Americans in places like Milwaukee stayed home. Latinos stayed home. Young people stayed home. Bernie Sanders supporters who would have been willing to come out and vote if they heard change didn't hear change. So I actually think there's more logic and fairness to this equation. I don't wring my hands and say, oh, we were robbed. No. We didn't do our job.

And if you go talk to me, one of the thing that really strikes me is, another thing is people know if you're talking to them or not. And what happened I think over the years with Democrat party

was, whole swaths of the United States of America were just ceded like it didn't matter anymore. Like, oh, that's like collateral damage.

If you are not coming into every community and talking about what matters, talking about their lives and saying we care, and we want to make things different, we want to change things, and we're here to talk to you, we don't care if this is a Republican district or Democrat district, we're here to talk to you because it matters, and you matter.

If you just abandon the ground, then you're absolutely confirming to people that you don't care about them and that you're not on their side. If you cared about them, if you related to them, you would show up.

SYMONE SANDERS: You would show up, whether you thought I liked you or not. Come to the community. OK. We're going to take some questions in the second. Mayor, so I go to New York regularly, OK? But I have to tell you, I do not take the subway because sometimes it's not reliable.

BILL DE BLASIO: This just in, Symone.

SYMONE SANDERS: OK. Like, what is going on? I got down there the other day, and I was like, see? This is why I don't get on the subway. So if you had a magic wand--

BILL DE BLASIO: Oh.

SYMONE SANDERS: OK?

BILL DE BLASIO: I'm ready.

SYMONE SANDERS: What would you do to fix the subway?

BILL DE BLASIO: Millionaire's tax.

SYMONE SANDERS: Come on now, what does that mean? A millionaire's tax.

BILL DE BLASIO: OK.

SYMONE SANDERS: Talk to me about that.

BILL DE BLASIO: I'm going to tell you, and I want to put in a quick frame, because there's this whole raging debate in New York right now about, oh, don't scare away the millionaires, which I think is the most ridiculous--

SYMONE SANDERS: To be clear, they're not going anywhere.

BILL DE BLASIO: Thank you. So one, what's the millionaire's tax? It's a tax on New York City millionaires and billionaires that will not be onerous to them, but that will allow everyone else to get around, including to go to the jobs at the millionaires and billionaire's businesses and have our subway system work again, which is in the interest of the whole region.

And I swear, what I'm getting now all the time is, how dare you? You will scare them off. You'll kill the golden goose. Now, I said, first of all, this is a country where the 1% has increasingly taken all the wealth and power.

Working people work harder and harder and harder to get very little back for that hard work, almost no economic advancement. 1%, more wealth, more power all the time. And they have created a set of policies that made that happen. Most of those were tax laws that were favorable, and they were doing just great.

And then they passed another law a year-plus ago, the biggest giveaway to wealthy corporations in our history. So then I hear, well, but wait a minute. Some states' state and local taxes are no longer deductible and therefore the millionaires and billionaires are suffering. I said, you forgot the fact that--

SYMONE SANDERS: Millionaires and billionaires are suffering.

BILL DE BLASIO: Oh, yes. That's the narrative. I said, you forgot the fact that, yes, they didn't get to deduct their state and local taxes, but they got a lower tax rate overall from the federal government. They're doing fine. In fact, in New York, our estimate is most millionaires and billionaires net gained in that equation from the Trump tax bill.

So my point in all that is, why do we keep suggesting we cannot change? And if we dare to change, they will prove to us their might and their power and all move to Tampa, Florida. And my view is, no, they're not going to for a variety of reasons.

But if we're so scared to create a fair tax rate, then we're going to be stuck in a very unequal, very dangerous situation. The social fabric in this country is starting to fray. And I'm amazed, by the way, that more people in the elite don't see the danger they're creating for themselves. The social fabric is starting to fray. This level of inequality is unsustainable.

If you want to know what might actually work, I would love to go-- if I have a magic wand again-- I'd go collect from the afterlife, Dwight D Eisenhower. I'd bring him back. We'd put another chair here, and I'd say, General Eisenhower, when you were President of United States as a Republican, what was your tax rate?

The highest marginal tax rate then blows by anything that progressives today are talking about. It was a higher tax rate on the wealthy during the '50s than even what the most audacious voices today are saying. And there was, in the relative scheme of things, relative income

equality. There was a sense of social mobility. There was a sense that the next generation would do better. There was investment in science and transportation and universities.

And the country was actually doing pretty nicely, until the Reagan Revolution and Newt Gingrich and all of the very clever, purposeful things that concentrated power in the hands of 1%. And by the way, Republicans led that, but Democrats too often were complicit as well, which gets us back to why too many of our people cannot recognize us.

SYMONE SANDERS: Come through, Mayor de Blasio.

[APPLAUSE]

And so my last question, and then we're going to go to Q&A. So there are mics in the room. So if you have a question, we have two mics down here, we have two mics up there. Please line up at the microphones, and then we'll go to questions in a second.

The last question I want to ask is about public advocate, OK? New York is about to have its election for its fifth public advocate. And I do believe you were the third person to hold that role?

BILL DE BLASIO: Indeed.

SYMONE SANDERS: You were the third person, and you helped shape a lot of what the public advocate role really is. So what do you see as the future of the role? And what do you think the next advocate should prioritize?

BILL DE BLASIO: I think it's a role that has to be a voice of the people, forcing government to recognize what's really happening on the ground. When you do that right, it can be a very powerful role. I'll give you a very simple, quick example. We had children with special needs, and their parents were saying all over the city, we're trying to get help for our kids. They need special services.

And the City of New York keeps finding a way to not give it to them just to save money. Our school system would literally just reject whatever parents needed, say, well, if you want to challenge us, you have to go to court. We did a whole report with public advocate saying this is just inhumane. And bluntly, it was a kind of a game to save money.

I'm proud to say now, as mayor, we've reversed that policy. And we're giving parents what they need for their kids. But that's the kind of thing that needed to be brought out in the open. And we needed to show that government was not listening to people and not recognizing what was happening on the ground. So I hope the next advocate really prioritizes things like that, particularly what's happening with children and families because they're struggling in the city.

SYMONE SANDERS: There's like 100 people running for Public Advocate.

BILL DE BLASIO: Yes.

SYMONE SANDERS: Much like 1,000 people running for the Democratic nomination. So we'll see--

BILL DE BLASIO: Yeah, we'll see.

SYMONE SANDERS: --how that thing shakes out. I want to ask you about your favorites. Let's go to the questions. I'm going to start right here. What's your name, what year are you, and what is your question?

AUDIENCE: Hi, my name is Sam. I'm a master of public policy student in my first year and also a native New Yorker.

BILL DE BLASIO: You're OK with me.

AUDIENCE: I'm sorry?

BILL DE BLASIO: I said you're OK with me.

AUDIENCE: Thank you. So you've talked about the importance of righteous indignation with the status quo. You've also talked about Democrats being the party of the working class. But two major points of contention in the Amazon deal were, one, provision of \$3 billion in state and city tax credits to a company worth a trillion dollars. And two, allowance of Amazon to skip processes for public review.

BILL DE BLASIO: Yeah.

AUDIENCE: So I was wondering if you could talk about those decisions, how they were made and how you view them now in retrospect.

BILL DE BLASIO: Well, Amazon's gone. So I'll answer the question, but I just want to say it's, in this case, it's academic. I am at Harvard, though. I guess that's OK.

SYMONE SANDERS: It's always OK.

BILL DE BLASIO: It's always OK. Here's the bottom line. So for progressives in governance, we have to think about what we need for our people. And my view is, what do working class people need? They need jobs, and they need a government that's going to be forceful about creating equality and fairness and doing the kinds of things that actually take a lot of money to create a more just society.

I said pre-K for all. We're now creating 3-K for all. That's about a billion dollars a year to create a new grade of school, if I had to round it off. But these are foundational investments in equality. When Amazon came along, we understood that for every dollar in incentives, we would get \$9 back in revenue to fund those very same kind of compassionate social programs that help us create a more equal society.

As to the process point, look. I'm elected by the people of the city. The governor is elected by the people of the state. And the nature of this particular project, there was no way we were going to come to an agreement if we had to say there would be a variety of public approvals with no end in sight and no guarantees what would happen.

This was a practical move. And I'm very open. I've said this very publicly. Progressives have to be pragmatic without losing our souls or forgetting what we're here to do. But it's not an abstract exercise when you're serving people. So when I thought about 25,000 to 40,000 jobs, half of which, we believe, did not require a four-year degree.

So we wanted them to go to kids coming out of public housing, to folks who came out of our public schools, kids coming out of our public schools, students in our public university system. We saw that as strategically necessary to our future. But in the end, we had a chance to do something very positive here, would have made a world of difference if Amazon took the attitude of, OK, we want to be a good neighbor. We're willing to give back more, but they weren't.

I don't think there would have been the level of controversy if they had said, what would it take to show people that we actually want to be a part of this community and want to help it become a better place in a more clear fashion? I think that would have changed things quite a bit.

SYMONE SANDERS: Thank you. Yes, right here.

AUDIENCE: Hi. My name is Ben [? Voltra. ?] I'm a Harvard alum and a grad student. And I have a sister at Harvard. I have kind of an imaginative, more theoretical question for you.

BILL DE BLASIO: All right.

AUDIENCE: As you know, there's a lot of people that, say, live in Rhode Island or live in New Hampshire and commute through gridlock to work in Cambridge or in New York City and might live in Newark and commute to New York City--

BILL DE BLASIO: Or Pennsylvania.

AUDIENCE: --and live and could have worked and lived most of their day in New York City or Greenwich, Connecticut. So my question is, if we think about what it means to have a political

identity in 21st century, people of course want to vote where they sleep, but should they have a more active political voice where they work and where they live for most of the day?

Now, I'm not saying that you should vote twice in the same place, but you clearly have an interest in, let's say, Newark where you might rest. But you also would have a political voice or political interest in New York City where you spend most of your waking day. How do you balance that in a modern 21st century?

BILL DE BLASIO: That's a great question. I think you're the first person I've ever heard ask that question. I give you originality points. Look. It's ironic. My first response to you is, we're still trying to get the part right about people voting where they live.

SYMONE SANDERS: Well, I was about to say. OK?

[LAUGHS]

Come on now.

BILL DE BLASIO: I'm like, could we perfect that and then we will take your-- no. I really would say just part one, in a country that has gone absolutely backwards on voting rights and participation, I'm very proud of the fact we just passed a referendum to reduce money in politics because this is one of the reasons people are not participating, and to increase the amount of public matching funds.

So now, truly a candidate for office, city council member, mayor, whatever, can run just with local donations. They are matched eight to one. 75% of the money it takes to run for office is public funds. You could never talk to a big donor and have all the money you need to run for office.

The reason I say that in answer to your question is, I think that we need to re-engage our people across the board. We need to show people that money goes out of politics, there are reasons to participate and engage again, and that your participation actually results in outcomes. And we need people to be voting in their home communities.

You're sort of, I think, second-stage very fine question is, well, what about this more complex reality? I think you could start by acknowledging it. I think it's a good message to me, as someone who has, I think it's about three million people come in during every workday, to start to think about how we can start a dialogue at least to hear the things that people are concerned about. I don't know really how to bifurcate the vote. I really don't.

But I do think if people are engaged at work, at home, if their kids go to school, if everywhere you turn there was opportunities for real public engagement, it's kind of the medium is the message. If people were engaged, the participation levels would shoot upward. And I think some of what you're talking about would be addressed. Thank you.

SYMONE SANDERS: Thank you. Plug for we need to restore the Voting Rights Act.

BILL DE BLASIO: Yes. That would be nice.

SYMONE SANDERS: That would be nice.

BILL DE BLASIO: We like voting rights.

SYMONE SANDERS: You like voting rights?

BILL DE BLASIO: It just sounds good.

SYMONE SANDERS: Access to the ballot box for all Americans.

BILL DE BLASIO: Yes.

SYMONE SANDERS: You're very traditionalist. The Founding Fathers, they were thinking about me when they wrote the Constitution.

BILL DE BLASIO: They had a picture of you in their mind.

SYMONE SANDERS: Or somewhere else. Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE: Hi, I'm Joshua [? Sofer. ?] I'm a senior at the college. Two months ago, another public figure who had not ruled out running for president voiced his support for a version of selective service that would allow individuals to either serve in the military or serve doing community service or help with public works. What is your position on selective service? And does a version of it have a future in America?

BILL DE BLASIO: I think warmly of it. I don't have a formal policy position. But I think there's several things to be said for it. One is, I think for a lot of people early on in their lives, they're looking for opportunity. They're looking for direction. They're looking for experience.

And I also think there's objectively much more sense of social consciousness, much more idealism in the best sense of the word, much more sense of shared destiny in recent years, in recent upcoming generations. So it taps into all that very nicely. I think the second point is, the universality.

So my dad served in the United States Army in World War II. And it's unfortunately, a very painful story of what happened to him. But what he said, he came back from the war missing half a leg, fought in the battle of Okinawa, and he came back with what we now know as PTSD and suffered quite a bit, and our family suffered quite a bit.

But the reason I mention it is, before he was attacked and wounded, he said that for years in the military, what was so striking to him was the camaraderie but also the sense that all the divisions melted away. And he said he met people he never would've met from every region, from every background, economically and otherwise. And people felt a bond. And he was honest with me later in life that he never felt something like that again. And my mother said the same thing.

She worked in the Office of War Information during World War II, and she said she never felt the same sense of purpose and connection to others in the rest of her working life. So I think a powerful argument for some kind of national service is it might make us a nation again. So again, I wish I had a formal position paper for you, but I can tell you I think there's a lot to be said for it.

AUDIENCE: Thank you.

SYMONE SANDERS: Thank you. Yes, I'm coming up to the top. Not new to this.

BILL DE BLASIO: Wow.

SYMONE SANDERS: [INAUDIBLE]

BILL DE BLASIO: Is that like the elite balcony seats?

SYMONE SANDERS: These are--

BILL DE BLASIO: Is that were the 1% is?

SYMONE SANDERS: This is the top 1/10 of 1%.

BILL DE BLASIO: Whoa.

AUDIENCE: This is the only mic that matters.

[LAUGHS]

Hi. My name is [? Esker. ?] I am a physician and a graduate student at the Public School of Health. So my question is two parts. The first one is, we just finished a huge government shutdown. There were some helpful federal workers in New York, and I was hoping you'd speak specifically on what initiatives you personally supported and you personally were involved in.

And then the second part is to also talk about I love that you brought up the topic of PTSD. And we've been dealing a lot and seeing the greater awareness of the need for mental health services across the nation and the world.

Are there any specific initiatives that you believe with a population of about eight million and with a lot of kids that are there and a huge immigrant population that you could possibly increase the access to mental health services? So the shutdown, you specifically, and mental health services.

SYMONE SANDERS: Let's talk about shutdown first.

BILL DE BLASIO: So shutdown, your question is on point, because I never in a million years thought I would have to help my own people survive their federal government. That's what it became. We literally had to say publicly, if you can't pay your mortgage because you're a federal worker or you're a contracted worker with the federal government, you can't pay your mortgage, call us.

We will try and negotiate with your bank. If you can't pay your rent, if you're about to be evicted, we will talk to your landlord, we will provide you a subsidy to tide you over. If you don't have enough food to eat, here are the food pantries that we will support to make sure you have food.

It was as if the government was unleashing plagues on its own people. And we had no choice but to step up. And I will say there's probably a bit of a parallel here that local governments in America every day are doing what the federal government used to or the state governments used to because there is no choice. And I think it's happening all over the world.

But it was very painful, and people felt a lot of fear. They had no idea it would end. One thing we can say about President Trump is, he gave you every confidence that the shutdown could go on for years. There was no reason to believe he would come to his senses. So people are very fearful. Thank God it ended then. We don't know what comes next now.

On the question of PTSD and mental health, first of all, I just want to say that unfortunately I can say from the experience of my family and my wife Chirlane's family, we've seen a lot of mental health challenges. In my dad's case, it was unquestionably because he went through some of the worst battles in human history and had to see so much death and so much loss of his friends and his comrades in arms.

And I don't know how a person comes back from that and is the same person. And it manifested in very, very tough ways for him. He became an alcoholic. He chain smoked. Just he was not the same person. It got worse and worse over the years.

And so that's one of several examples I could say for my family. And my wife, Chirlane, has been very open about experience in her family. And the fact is one in five Americans, one in five Americans suffers from some kind of mental health illness at any given point. And that means almost everyone in terms of family and friends is touched by it.

So my wife led an initiative that is growing every day in New York City. It's called ThriveNYC. And it's revolutionary because she acknowledged, after she did a lot of study and talked to mental health providers and talked to everyday people, that there was no true consistent access to mental health services. It is the other half of health. Physical health, you break your leg, you know where to go, you know what to do, you're not stigmatized.

Mental health, just as human, just as much of the human experience, just as pervasive, people are stigmatized. They don't know where to go for service. There's not enough service available. It's backwards. It's broken and so Chirlane said, we will have the audacity in New York City to create a mental health system.

And she created a set of initiatives to train more mental health providers, to have them in communities that didn't have enough professionals to make sure it was culturally competent, to make sure classrooms, every school had access to mental health professionals so we could identify with our kids where there were challenges. Here is something she learned in her research-- in America, the typical timeframe between the manifestation of a mental health challenge and its treatment is 10 years. And during that 10 years, the condition gets worse and worse.

But the plus side, the good side of the reality is that all mental health conditions are, in fact, treatable. It's just a lot harder if you ignore them for the first decade. So she did a lot of things. I just want to say two more, because they moved me very much. One, she created a very simple methodology called-- it's actually an 800 number. It's 888-NYC-WELL. So you dial 1-888-NYC-WELL, you get a trained counselor 24/7.

Any kind of mental health problems, substance abuse, opioid, anything. They not only talk you through, help you figure out what to do, but then they get on the phone the person who will make your next appointment. And they literally on the phone, if you need therapy, if you need drug counseling, whatever it is, they literally set it up while you're on the phone.

SYMONE SANDERS: Wow.

BILL DE BLASIO: So it's revolutionizing how we get care to people. The other thing that she has done is this amazing community outreach approach and organizing approach. And she's doing it with the business community. She's doing it through schools. She's doing it through sororities and fraternities.

One very powerful initiative is Sisters Thrive. And Sisters Thrive is with African-American sororities, which have incredible reach in the community, and they're now promoting mental health services in common cause. She's doing things called Weekends of Faith in every faith tradition.

We had this last time in New York City 2,500 houses of worship in a single weekend from the pulpit talking about mental health, with the purpose of the clergy member saying it is

something that should not be stigmatized. You should come forward for help. Here's how you get it and creating a commonality of experience.

So this is-- I'm sorry to go on so deeply here. But this is how you change things. We say it is a broken status quo. We're going to create a set of new approaches. But we also have to go to the people with them. We have to go people where they are and show them that they can get the support and that the stigma will not be accepted.

SYMONE SANDERS: I believe in mental health professionals. A professional cuts my hair. A professional does my nails. Why don't we have professionals for our mental health?

BILL DE BLASIO: Well said.

SYMONE SANDERS: OK. I go to my therapist on a regular basis. But now I might be calling 1-888-NYC-WELL.

BILL DE BLASIO: NYC-WELL. Very good.

SYMONE SANDERS: Cut my bill down.

BILL DE BLASIO: That's right.

SYMONE SANDERS: Economic inequality. We'll take a couple more questions. I'll go right up here, then we'll come back down here. Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE: Hi. Thanks for being here. My name is Corey [? Dahara. ?] I'm an MPP 2 student. I'm originally from New Zealand, and I've been to school for a year and a half. And I've never actually asked a question in the forum before. So I thought I'd give it a go.

BILL DE BLASIO: You're like long-time listener, first-time caller or first-time asking.

SYMONE SANDERS: Welcome.

AUDIENCE: Thank you. So a number of candidates are enthusiastically jumping into the Democratic primary race, traveling to Iowa and New Hampshire, a bunch of other places, getting their face in front of people who ultimately make the decision about who the president will be.

It seems to me that if you really believe that you are the person that could take on Donald Trump in a general election to really help Americans tackle the big problems that are facing this country and to be the President of the United States ultimately, that you would have already been one of those people to throw your hat in the ring and got in there. So given that you haven't done that, why am I wrong in thinking that maybe in your heart of hearts, you don't really believe that you can be the president?

SYMONE SANDERS: Well, that's a-- I'd like to know-- that's what the streets would call shade. And I'm not going to let you be shaded up here on the stage, Mayor, but I do think to frame it better, if I could put my communications hat on, I do think there are people that are wondering why are folks waiting?

And I'm somebody that believes that there are a number of people that have the luxury, in fact, of waiting to get-- I mean, you got a little name recognition-- just a little bit. But I mean, why wait? The question is, why wait? If you think you might want to be president, if you think you could do it, why wait? It's a little less shade.

BILL DE BLASIO: That was nice. And thank you for showing our New Zealander cousins some manners.

[LAUGHTER]

SYMONE SANDERS: The old Nebraska values. I got good Midwestern values.

BILL DE BLASIO: But I called him a cousin. Now look--

SYMONE SANDERS: We're family.

BILL DE BLASIO: I would say this to you. I think, first of all, do not underestimate in anything where people are involved in public life. It's an exceedingly personal decision how to proceed. It's personal in terms of your family. It's personal in terms of feeling if you have the right moment for what you want to do, et cetera.

But I would also say that I think there's a strange obsession right now in some of the debate and some of the coverage with everything must happen at a certain time. And I don't think that's the way the world works. I really don't. What we are seeing in these last weeks is not the norm we saw in previous years. And I would just caution that there's more than one way to do things.

Now, I'd say to your challenge and I accept it. I think it's obviously a very fair question. So a reporter asked me on Tuesday, I think it was, that said, well, you have a very demanding job as Mayor of New York City. You all may know, there's a sort of phrase out there for the last few decades. Second-toughest job in America. It's like a phrase to recognize the particular reality of New York.

And so the reporter said, you have a very demanding job. And it would be hard to go and campaign and, therefore, don't you think the race for president should be left to others? I said, well, are you saying that people who should run for president should be people who have a lot of time on their hands?

[LAUGHTER]

And are you saying that you don't want folks who have demanding jobs and have had to achieve a lot and had to run big operations to run for president? So I think it is fair to say that anyone who in any way, shape, or form considers it has to have confidence.

They should not consider it-- shouldn't even consider it if they don't think they could do the job and they don't think that they could make a foundational contribution to the country. I think anyone who is even letting across their mind and doesn't believe they could do it should just stop playing games.

But I would not mistake the fact, and I'd say this about a lot of good people, who are out there very openly saying they're considering, I don't think ill of them because they are going through a process to make a decision on something so momentous. There's probably nothing as challenging as it.

In the meantime, I'll tell you, though, the kind of dialogue we're having here, I mean, it matters deeply, regardless of the one office of President. It's something Bernie Sanders used to say, and I thought it was a very powerful point. You can elect a president. That's a piece of the equation, but we also have to organize people at the grassroots for change or the president will not be able to achieve a whole hell of a lot.

We also need to keep making change at the local level. And so what I'm going around the country talking to people about at this point is that we are proving in New York City there's a very different way of doing things. And we are basically cutting ourselves free from the limitations of the past.

I mentioned a different approach to mental health. We have a different approach to policing. We have pre-K for all. We're going to soon have the same for three-year-olds. These are things that were not supposed to be possible. We're giving everyone two weeks of paid vacation. We're going to have health care for every New Yorker. We're showing there's a different model. It's progressive, it's inclusive, it's respectful.

And we're going to be doing that regardless of all the other things happening. And we need everyone else around the country to do it. Another way to make change is if everyone at the local level makes these changes, then it doesn't matter if they pass a bill in Washington. The change is already accomplished. And that's part of my mission too.

[APPLAUSE]

SYMONE SANDERS: Mayor Bill de Blasio, ladies and gentlemen. Mayor of New York City. Unfortunately, that is all the time we have. I am a very-- I'm a stickler about sticking to the time. So I appreciate you all for coming tonight to the forum. Please give Mayor de Blasio a huge round of applause.

[APPLAUSE]

AUDIENCE: Thank you.

SYMONE SANDERS: OK, he handled that shade amazingly well.

BILL DE BLASIO: Kept cool.

SYMONE SANDERS: You got to always keep it cool, man.

BILL DE BLASIO: I kept it cool.

SYMONE SANDERS: It's always a pleasure.

BILL DE BLASIO: Hey. Hey, kiwi. I'll see you outside.

[LAUGHTER]

SYMONE SANDERS: It's always a pleasure. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

BILL DE BLASIO: Thank you, Symone.

SYMONE SANDERS: We hope you come back soon.

BILL DE BLASIO: Everyone, Symone Sanders.

[APPLAUSE]

SYMONE SANDERS: Thank you.

[MUSIC PLAYING]