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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON INSIDE CITY HALL**

**Errol Louis:** Welcome back to Inside City Hall. It's Monday, that means that Mayor de Blasio is here for our weekly discussion. Good evening, Mr Mayor.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good evening.

**Louis:** This is bombshell news. I imagine you haven't had a chance to digest any of it either. Any initial reaction?

**Mayor:** No, I mean – I literally have not seen any of the details. I don't think it's appropriate to comment.

**Louis:** We'll leave that for another time then. Let's talk a little bit about marijuana. There are a lot of people as we reported tonight who are laying pretty substantial financial bets that full legalization is around the corner so much so that there's this place downstairs in this building and a number of other places. What's your sense of that? Is it inevitable? Is it desirable? Where do you think this is all going?

**Mayor:** I think we need to study based on the places that have already done it in this country and particularly from the New York City point of view, we need to look at the bigger cities which include Denver and Seattle that now have a few years under their belt, and understand what it's meant for them. What has it meant in terms of drug usage, in terms of crime? What pros and cons have come out of the experience? And you know really use that to decide where we think we should go.

And I think a lot of people around the country are probably having a similar discussion about looking at there's finally a body of evidence, right, that could tell us something. But I think it cannot be considered an easy issue because there are a lot of different kinds of ramifications. I've talked about not wanting to inadvertently see a new corporate sector like we had with tobacco pushing young people in particular to become addicted to yet another substance.

So, big, complicated issues. So to your question – do I think it's inevitable? Not quite. I think there's more that has to be resolved before it could really be widespread around the country. Do I think there's momentum for it? Of course.

**Louis:** Yeah, when it comes to, you know you're a parent, I'm a parent – when it comes to raising kids, what's your sense of whether or not it's good, bad, neutral for someone to say in their early teens to start dabbling with marijuana?

**Mayor:** You know I have only my own set of experiences to draw on. I think it raises questions when any child dabbles with any kind of not only controlled substance but alcohol obviously as well, anything that can be addictive, anything that could undermine their ability to discern what's happening around that. And that could obviously have other ramifications in terms of safety particularly if they're in a circumstance where their safety might be compromised or driving or anything like that.

Those things go without saying as a parent. There's something to worry about. And you know alcohol is legal across the board but there's supposed to be an age limit. Well, we've seen what's happened with that –

**Louis:** Sure.

**Mayor:** It hasn't been particularly effective. And then there's illegal drugs that unfortunately there's too much access to as well although illegality affects the pattern clearly. So, as a parent it all worries me. The legal and the illegal substances all worry me. Anything that addict children, anything that can undermine their health, anything that can create an inability to see when something's unsafe, it all worries me.

**Louis:** When you talk with your fellow officials, do you get a sense that they've thought this through? Because I hear a lot of folks grabbing one point like saying, hey, there's the disparity in the arrests, that's no good, let's legalize it, and then that disparity will go away. As if that's the sum total of the relevant consideration.

**Mayor:** That's what worries me. I agree with your analysis that we have to think about this – and this is something Chirlane talks about – health terms first. And even people who may be in favor of legalization, you know, need to look at the health ramifications if a lot more people had access to it. What would that mean?

Again, you could say, well, legalization might end certain criminal dynamics, it might open up others. There's a lot of pieces to the equation and I think it needs to be looked at carefully. But again we have an advantage now that we didn't have before of having some control models, of having some places we can look at and compare their experience against ours and see what it tells us.

But, no, I agree with your point. If you look at this from just one piece of the equation, you're going to miss a whole lot of other ramifications for our society and for our young people that need to be taken into account.

**Louis:** Let me – a somewhat related issue. I don't want to sort of conflate them. But safe injection sites. You came out with the request and the formal study the other day, asking the State to undertake a research process which I guess would be the [inaudible] under which some of these issues would be worked out over the course of the next year. One thing I'm not clear on after talking with your Health Commissioner, is that if this is akin to a public emergency, meaning there's over 1,400 deaths last year and it was a record number and it was up by some ungodly percentage from the year before –

**Mayor:** Yes.

**Louis:** Why not go full-steam with it? Why not put it in all 11 public hospitals and just get on with it?

**Mayor:** It's a very fair question and I think it comes back to the legal complexities we face and the strong parallel to the history with needle exchange. When needle exchange was first established in the city, it was not yet legal federally. I don't believe it's even legal on the state basis. And my understanding is the City of New York pioneered the approach, the State eventually supported it, and that helped to create the environment where this could be done on a wider level.

Needle exchange played a major, major role in reducing deaths related to drug use and related to the HIV/AIDS crisis. Here we have a situation with a federal government that to say the least is unpredictable but a clear – there is one clear piece in this puzzle. The federal laws are clear, this would not be allowable on its face. We think if the State Health Department authorizes the one-year study on a pilot basis that that's a situation that would allow everyone to proceed knowing that they would be treated fairly and safely and that we could really see how it works.

And if it's what we've seen in other parts of the world, in Canada, in part of Europe, and Australia where a lot of people got to treatment because they were in a safe place with those services available. And from everything I've heard including of course from our Health Department, there's not been a single death in one of these facilities and many, many people are safe from overdoses because the reversal drug was available there.

That's a strong argument to try it and see how it works here but I think because of the legal reality, we can only do it on that kind of study or pilot basis.

**Louis:** You know what concerns me the most, Mr. Mayor, is the notion that we might never get to the real sort of treatment. I understand you have to keep people alive or there's nothing else to talk about, on the other hand I'm thinking, you know, you get a safe injection site, folks coming craving and folks leave high and nowhere in between do you get a chance to really try and get at the root causes of the addiction and take them in a different direction.

**Mayor:** Well, I respectfully disagree, Errol. We're calling them Overdose Prevention Centers for a reason because job-one, you just said it. If someone dies alone in their bedroom or in a

bathroom of a Starbucks, they're high and no one even knows they're overdosing, that person's gone forever. You can't help them.

If you keep people alive while moving them to treatment to the maximum extent possible and helping them address the underlying problems that cause the addiction – there's a lot of people who were addicted but get treatment and live very productive lives once they're in treatment.

This is a way to get them into an atmosphere where not only do they stay alive but they're given that support and there's a lot of evidence that for many drug users it's the place where they finally turn to treatment once and for all.

It's not happening enough right now. You're absolutely right. We have a crisis on our hands. It's everywhere in the country, urban, rural, you know, high-income, low-income. Addiction is a human reality but the most dangerous situation is there's no opportunity to intervene, no opportunity to help people towards a better path.

This is a very imperfect option but it is an option that's saved lives and it's also an option that has gotten people to treatment. That's why we think it's worth trying.

**Louis:** Okay, we'll find out more. I think – I personally want to hear a lot more from people who have beaten their addictions. I have an uncle, he's deceased now, but he basically aged out of drugs. He used all kinds of stuff for most of his life and at some point, and I've noticed this in my neighborhood with other folks too, at some point around age 40 people just get tired of it. The physical and social cost of it just kind of gets the better of them and they say to heck with it which I understand at least from some research, it's maybe how most people beat their addiction. That all of the treatment programs we all want to throw money at don't necessarily do as good of a job as maybe just keep them alive until [inaudible] for themselves.

**Mayor:** Look, that – I don't know the facts of about how many people, if you will, naturally get to a different reality. I would say, you know, treatment helps to ensure that people can live long enough to make the life change also. Treatment is one of the things that gets people away from this horrible random reality especially with fentanyl now in the opioid supply. You know, one bad moment, one bad session of shooting up and you can be gone forever.

We've got to get people into safe spaces and we've got to get them to treatment because for a lot of people that is what sustains them long-term and gets them away from dangerous addiction.

**Louis:** Okay, we've got a lot of stuff to talk about. We're going to take a quick break here. I'll be right back with Mayor de Blasio in just a minute.

[...]

**Louis:** We're back Inside City Hall and I'm speaking with Mayor Bill de Blasio. And Mr. Mayor you've been through over a dozen budgets, I imagine you know how this goes.

**Mayor:** Yes.

**Louis:** You put out the executive budget. The complaints start to roll in. One of the first ones says that instead of making this the fairest city in America you're making it the ferry-est city in America.

**Mayor:** Very clever.

**Louis:** You see what I did there?

**Mayor:** Yes.

**Louis:** That the money that's being paid to subsidize an expanded ferry service is money that should go to the Fair Fares proposal to subsidize use of the MetroCard system for the very poorest in the city.

**Mayor:** So the goal of this second term is to make this the fairest big city in America, and in fact all of these pieces come together in this discussion. The reason I believe in expanding the ferry system is that it has brought access to a whole lot of people and a whole lot of communities that were underserved for a long time. I challenge anyone to tell me the Rockaways and Red Hook, Brooklyn, and Soundview in the Bronx had enough transportation options. A lot of people were cut off from opportunity. That's not fairness.

Nor is it fairness if the only option people have is to be on a clogged highway or a crowded subway train. We have these extraordinary waterways available that we don't try and create alternatives and give people better options. Especially with a city that is now 8.6 million, will be nine million people very soon.

So I stand by this decision for that reason. But if you then do the comparative question about the Fair Fare, I believe in the Fair Fare as an idea. I think we can get there through the millionaire's tax which also is an example to me of fairness. Ask those who are doing the very best in our society to pay a little more in taxes, New York City residents only, so we can fund the Fair Fare and provide an ongoing revenue stream to the MTA so they can fix their bigger problems for the long term. That, by the way, I think is more viable than ever given some of the political changes we see in Albany.

**Louis:** But isn't that sort of a big and maybe unfair burden to put on this one proposal. There are a lot of different things that you've done to make life better for the very poor. Why this – why does this one have to be hardest to – a tough proposal that you haven't been able to get passed in the last five years?

**Mayor:** Well, again, the situation in Albany is changing rapidly. We're seeing it before our very eyes. We have – what was it five Republican State Senators have announced their retirement in just the last week or two. I think we can safely say change is coming and this kind of proposal, which is very popular, Quinnipiac did a poll on – listed the millionaire's tax, it got about 70 percent approval. So, I think there's some real objective reasons why this could be not only the

solution on Fair Fares but to the much bigger problem of the need for ongoing financing for the MTA.

But the second point I'd make is we, in New York City, have now seen a couple of time, you know, in 2015 \$2.5 billion that we gave in capital to the MTA. We did not have to. We made that decision. Obviously recently the State legislature mandated that we give over \$400 million to the Subway Action Plan. Let's face it, you know, there's an ongoing effort to get more and more New York City money to the MTA. New York City taxpayers, New York City straphangers already pay the vast majority of the costs of subway and bus service. City government pays a lot towards it.

**Louis:** But – isn't – I mean Fair Fares is different though, right? I mean this is subsidizing the passengers not the system.

**Mayor:** But it goes, first of all, its money that would have to go to the MTA. And then second of all, it would be an ongoing expense. The estimate is about \$200 million. Look, the goal is laudable. I believe there's a better way to pay for it on an ongoing basis. But folks who believe in it, and I think they do with a whole heart, earnestly, should recognize if we agree to any kind of expense like this or anything else that's going to be ongoing we have to be ready to pay for it for years and years ahead. And I am simply suggesting I think there's a better, more reliable way to get the same thing done.

**Louis:** Okay. Another budget item that is drawing some attention is the bill for Homeless Services, now over \$2 billion in your latest budget. More than for the Fire Department, more than for Sanitation, more than for Health Department. Is there any point at which this gets capped –

**Mayor:** Yes.

**Louis:** – or even starts to go down?

**Mayor:** Well that's the exact plan we put out last year, just over a year ago. And you know, I think that when we get to about this time next year if what we're seeing right now continues to hold you will see the beginning of a real reduction in our shelter population and the cost savings that go with it. Our goal is to get out of the cluster sites that have been notorious, get out of the hotels – the pay by the day hotels which are very costly and certainly not where we want people. We're consistently putting new shelters into place that will make those other types of facilities obsolete. And ultimately compress the shelter system, some of the shelter buildings turning into either permanent affordable housing or permanent supportive housing for folks with mental health issues for example. We actually now see the outlines of the starting to come together.

And that's the way forward in addition to the biggest affordable housing plan, overall, that the City has ever had which is going to be 300,000 apartments when it's done. It – I said when I announced it a year ago, Errol, this is going to be a long, tough battle. It will be incremental. We'll have to make step after step. But I do feel more than ever we're going to see the beginning of actually shrinking the system as early as a year from now.

**Louis:** Okay. There was a little spat – new topic – spat over the weekend where the CCRB put out what I felt was a pretty innocuous message saying hey, if you think your rights have been violated we're the place to complain and here's how you do it. And it lead to this kind of, you know, sort of, well from the Sergeants Benevolent Association they tweeted out, 'you all a disgrace. You sit on you a– and target the NYPD growing up on the nipple of what's easy". You've heard this kind of talk before. It's often put out there where – people claim to be public servants and the first time they think that they're questioned or their prerogatives are being looked at in some way, they go into this kind of, I don't even know how to describe it. It reminds me of like, you know, Jack Nicholson in A Few Good Men where they think that we're all supposed to just be grateful to lick their boots because they've done such a good job. It really seems completely inappropriate. I wanted to get your reaction to that.

**Mayor:** Yes it is inappropriate, obviously. I do not hang on the every word of the President of the SBA, obviously, nor do I get involved in a lot of Twitter wars. I think the essential point here is the folks at the CCRB were actually saying – they were celebrating on the element of the US Constitution and reminding people that they had a right against unreasonable search. Part of – our founding fathers put it in there. I don't think it was done in an incendiary or inappropriate fashion. I don't understand the response.

In fact, you know, we've seen in recent years is that we've speed up and improved the CCRB process. We've seen over the years many fewer complaints against our officers, a lot more trust between community and police because of neighborhood policing. I think the rhetoric you're hearing from the SBA is kind of lost in time, it's not relevant to today's reality when more and more our communities are working closely with our officers. And our officers, I think, can see a system that's based on fairness for everyone involved. So –

**Louis:** Sure. I mean, look, yes I don't know what's in the patrol guide but, I mean, they do swear an oath to uphold the Constitution which includes the Fourth Amendment. If the – if that also means we're never supposed to mention the Fourth Amendment or evoke the Fourth Amendment they may need to take a second look at the oath. Before I let you out of here, before I see you next time it will be Mother's Day, any plans for the First Lady?

**Mayor:** Well absolutely, and number one plan is to organize her children into a gathering. So that's going to be my number one focus between now and Sunday, getting everyone in the same place. I get Dante back from New Haven, see if I can make this work.

**Louis:** I bet you don't have problems getting a reservation. I had to wait on a line in Park Slope once, it was unbelievable. I almost regret it.

**Mayor:** It's not about the reservation, it's just about everyone being together.

**Louis:** Okay. And of course you have a nice house and everything, right? With a cook. Okay. Great to see you. We'll see you next week.

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