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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS ON AM 970's EFFECTIVE RADIO WITH  
BILL SAMUELS**

**Bill Samuels:** Welcome back to Effective Radio. Our first guest today is Bill de Blasio, the Mayor of New York City. I was very privileged to be at the mayor's State of the City, and what many of you might not be familiar with is the staggering list of accomplishments he has compiled over his first two years. A lauded universal pre-k, paid sick leave, crime down to historic lows, record job growth, municipal ID cards, more than 40,000 units of affordable housing, and the list goes on and on. But what I think makes this mayor truly special is the unique, heartfelt, emotional connection he and Chirlane share with our diverse city. It guides the development of his creative policies, which will have lasting benefits on our residents. Unlike so many of his predecessors, these guiding principles of his mayoralty are empathy and a real passion to improve the lives of all – and I mean all – New Yorkers. The mayor's leadership on these issues, like pre-k and the fight for \$15, hasn't just transformed our city – they've changed the whole trajectory of our state, by forcing our governor to begrudgingly – and I mean begrudgingly – follow his lead and adopt a more progressive agenda.

Recently, the mayor announced a historic step of making New York City the first city in the nation to take on a national problem, the key income inequality issue of offering a retirement security program to all of the private workers in New York that don't have any pension plan. And that's – if you can believe it – 60 percent of our workers, private workers, have no way to retire with dignity. It is this type of bold, innovative thinking, and demonstrated ability to turn these ideas into action, that have made – in my mind – Bill de Blasio a great mayor. So Mayor, welcome to Effective Radio and thank you for joining me and Morgan on our show.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Well thank you Bill, thank you Morgan. I really – that was a very, very much appreciated overview. And I thank you for understanding how much, for my wife Chirlane and I, this is really about that deep connection with the people we serve and an understanding of the challenges they face – particularly since the Great Recession – that have really changed the rules of the game for people. And I want to thank you Bill, because you have pushed the issue of improving retirement security for people in this city and beyond, and it is amazing – in an era in which we've seen retirement security undermined now for decades, that there have been so few meaningful solutions put forward. But you certainly fought here in this city to get this city in the game addressing this issue, and we're proud to be doing that now.

**Samuels:** Well I have to say Mayor, you listened. You're the only mayor, literally in the United States, that is willing to try to do something in our great city. You said in the State of the City, the following, "Fewer than half of all working New Yorkers have access to a retirement savings plan, and many who have started to save don't have much." And then I love this sentence, "We won't accept a status quo where people work all their lives, only to be left with nothing." So Mayor, can you take us through some of the highlights and specifics of your thoughts of how to solve this problem in our city?

**Mayor:** Yeah Bill, and I'll tell you, this is a beginning, what we've put forward, but I want to emphasize at the outset – the solutions, the bigger solutions we need to income inequality, and certainly the retirement security problem as one of those crucial elements, is a federal government – and obviously true of state governments

everywhere – that really address people’s fundamental economic needs comprehensively. And this is what a healthy society should be all about. This is what economic stability for the entire country should be based obviously on the stability of our families and our working people. So this is our contribution to New York City towards what I hope will be a much bigger forward march of history, and it certainly aligns on the other issues you talked about, like paid sick leave, and affordable housing, pre-k, etcetera. This is a package of things that have to change urgently, not just at the local level but up to the federal level. On retirement security –

**Samuels:** Well –

**Mayor:** Go ahead.

**Samuels:** No, your turn.

**Mayor:** I was going to say, on retirement security – we looked at the fact that we had more than half the people in this city who didn’t have access to a meaningful retirement security plan, and I obviously think Social Security is a crucial element of the national contract – our nation’s contract with people. But we all know Social Security ends up, for so many people, to be a very small amount of what they need. So thinking about pensions, thinking about the fundamental retirement security that so many Americans used to have and now, relatively speaking, so few have, we said okay, if we’re going to reconstruct that reality of actual, meaningful retirement security, what can the city do on its own? Well, we realized what we could do was require the employers of the city – in this case it’s any employer with ten or more employees – to have to offer a voluntary plan. That’s something the city would manage, and we would put some initial investment into, and it would give every worker an opportunity to join a retirement security plan that they could really depend on, would not evaporate, because it would be supported and backed by the City of New York, and yes, it would mean putting their own resources into it. But it would be in a way that was accessible, it would be in a way that they could have a sense of a guarantee and security with. And simply providing working people with that option would mean more and more would actually have a foundation for meaningful security later on.

Again, an important step, but far from all that we have to do, but what we know we could do right now.

**Morgan Pehme:** Mr. Mayor, that’s very exciting, and along with your retirement security initiative, another centerpiece of your recent State of the City address was the Brooklyn Queens Connector, or BQX, a state of the art streetcar that would run along the waterfront from Astoria to Sunset Park. Since I take the G train from Greenpoint to Long Island City every morning on my way to Manhattan, I’m painfully aware of the need for more transportation alternatives between Brooklyn and Queens. I’m curious, how did this idea come about? Did it take root in your days as a Councilman, representing a number of the Brooklyn neighborhoods the BQX will run through?

**Mayor:** Well, I want to give credit where credit is due: it really came from the grassroots. I certainly benefitted in this discussion from the fact that I had represented a number of communities – either in my time in the City Council or even before that, as a school board member, I represented communities like Sunset Park and Red Hook in Brooklyn. And I actually, once upon a time, when I was a young bachelor, lived in Astoria, Queens. So I had a good sense of a lot of the communities that would be served, and I certainly knew that in many cases, they just didn’t even come close to having the transportation options they deserve – Red Hook, Brooklyn is a classic example of a community that’s really been cut off in too many ways. So I knew the ground well, but the idea itself emanated from civic leaders and business leaders who I think very wisely looked at what was happening around the country. They saw that, you know, things had come full circle, and the streetcars that used to dominate our city, then were torn out without much forethought, were coming back in cities around the country. And here was an ideal circumstance: a 16-mile route, 400,000 people living along the route, about 40,000 who live in public housing, another 300,000 jobs right now along that route, so 700,000 people that would be affected. But we think there’s going to be tens of thousands more people living and working in this area in the years to come. So it really made all the sense in the world to add both something that would benefit

those communities directly, but also to recognize – just like you’re experiencing, Morgan – this is not a city today where the entire economy revolves only around Manhattan, and the only question is how to get into Manhattan in the morning and back out to the outer boroughs at night. This is a city now with a – with increasingly a five borough economy, people go from a home in Brooklyn to a job in Brooklyn, a home in Queens to a job in Queens, or a home in Brooklyn to a job in Queens, you know. There’s a whole different set of permutations, why don’t we build a transportation system that reflects the 21st Century and the five borough reality of New York City? And here was a place that we could do it ideally, where we could find the revenue to do it, and we had such density of people and jobs. I also think this one could be the template for other opportunities to have streetcars and light rail, including – there’s been a lot of call for it in Staten Island. I’m hoping that this example here in Brooklyn, Queens, opens the door for us to be able to use this model elsewhere.

**Pehme:** Mayor, last thing. On Friday, the city launched LinkNYC, a new program, which is transforming the city’s old payphone booths into slick Wi-Fi kiosks. These kiosks will create the world’s largest and fastest free public Wi-Fi network, and also enable New Yorkers to make free domestic calls, charge their electronic devices at no charge, and contact emergency services. By the end of July there will be over 500 of these kiosks in the 5 boroughs and 4,500 around the City by the middle of 2019.

I know that in some neighborhoods in the city, particularly lower income ones, it can be more difficult to get more reliable Wi-Fi service than others. Has your administration targeted the placement of these kiosks to address that concern and also – it’s my understanding that despite this being a free service for everyone to use, it will actually generate revenue for the city. Is that correct?

**Mayor:** That is correct. The beauty of this approach is really a public-private partnership, and the company that is going to run these kiosks is going to – over the course of the next decade provide about \$500 million in revenue for the city because they’ll have the opportunity to do advertising. They’ll be responsible for the maintenance of these kiosks, so there’s something in it for the company, but I think there’s so much more – I think – in it for the people in the city. Free Wi-Fi, free long distance calling, obviously total access to emergency services – 9-1-1 and certainly 3-1-1 as well.

The fact is – the charging stations for cell phones and other electronic devices – there are a lot of great benefits - and the beauty of these were the sites where we used to have payphones that were antiquated, that were no longer helping people, but we could update them for the 21st Century and make it a really multi-faceted tool for people.

It terms of the digital divide, your first point – it’s a profound problem. We have a city – I’ve talked about the tale of two cities for a long time – we have income stratification and other inequalities we’re fighting every day, but the digital divide is particularly pernicious because today, if you want to have the greatest opportunity for education or for economic opportunity, you need internet access and that cuts along economic lines – this is a rich get richer situation. The folks who have the most access are the folks who already are doing well.

We want to level that playing field, so the free Wi-Fi and the other services at these kiosks as part of LinkNYC are one part of the equation. We’re wiring public housing developments now in a whole new way and providing broadband access to places that really have had the least. We’re providing through our libraries, including mobile devices that folks can take to give themselves access – the Wi-Fi devices. There are so many different pieces of the equation, but with this piece – with LinkNYC we’ll have the fastest and biggest municipal Wi-Fi network anywhere in the world really. And it’s a big step in fighting inequality.

**Samuels:** Well, Mayor that’s really impressive. Do you have time for one more question?

**Mayor:** Yes, of course, Bill.

**Samuels:** You know one of my hot buttons is how the state is burdening New York City and our counties – especially Western New York – with the \$7.4 billion Medicaid allocations. It really irritates me that Cuomo is trying to charge New York City \$650 million more in the Medicaid cost over the next 10 years – 2 years, thank you Morgan – but what many of our listeners don't understand and should appreciate, no other city pays a penny – not Chicago, not Houston, not Philadelphia, and I could go on.

And in fact all 49 states except Governor Cuomo's New York match the federal dollars at the state level – they don't burden the counties or the cities with this money, and it's just outrageous. I'm going to actively work to get Albany to finally tell the voters the truth – that they should pay for this \$7.6 billion allocation in the state, and I wonder if you've given any thought, or would you be open to challenging Albany to phase out this local share of Medicaid entirely – whether it be in New York City or Buffalo, as a long term policy to challenge Cuomo who's trying to charge us more.

**Mayor:** Well look, I'll speak broadly about the question of what the city and state relationship is, and then I want to speak specifically about the surprising proposed Medicaid cuts we saw in the Governor's budget proposal.

On the broader point look – we have a lot of work to do to make the relationship between the state and the city to make sense for the 21st Century. Because right now the City of New York which is the economic engine of the state – one of the economic engines of the nation – there's still so many things we need to go to Albany for the approval on, which at this point in history we shouldn't. I've said it's a semi-colonial dynamic that really needs to be overcome at this point.

And so I would say in the context of many, many issues there has to be a rethinking of that relationship because we're trying to get things done for people, and it is – and I think this has been talked about on a number of recent issues coming out of Albany – there's a lot of recognition, certainly a lot of our editorial boards have noted this fact that for the City of New York to do what it has to do to go for 8 and a half million people we can't constantly be hindered by an often arbitrary approval process in Albany. That's come up recently on affordable housing and a number of other issues. So I would just say there's a bigger discussion to be had that spans many issues, Medicaid and beyond, about what a fair arrangement would be.

On the specific cuts that were proposed, they obviously came as a surprise to me – I expressed my opposition immediately and as you remember the Governor at the time said that the cuts would not cost New York City a penny, and my response has been one of appreciation for that clarification but I've also said I'll hold him to that commitment – and that's all going play out now over the next five, six weeks, and I think a lot of members of the Legislature take it seriously – they do not think it's fair that the State of New York to supplant and transfer more and more costs from the state onto the city, for Medicaid nor do they think it's appropriate for the City University.

So as they used to say back in the '60s Bill, the whole world is watching now on these issues. And I think we're going to be able to prevail in this case with the help of a lot of other people who feel as I do, but this is only the beginning of what needs to be a much bigger discussion about a more fair balance between the state and the city.

**Samuels:** Well Mayor, I want to thank you for taking your time in a very busy day to come on Effective Radio with Morgan and I. I have been lobbied to pass on a thought to you from Congressman – Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney and she said to thank you for being open to her panda proposals, so when I have dinner tonight with her, I'll tell her that I did what she asked me to do, and say thank you. But I –

**Mayor:** You're a good messenger. You're a loyal messenger.

**Samuels:** But I strongly believe that New York City is going to benefit the more they hear and get to know you and Chirlane. And the fact is I think you're a very unique mayor that will go down in history as a different type of thinker to have our city really be what it can be for all people, so thank you very much for talking with Morgan and I on our show.

**Mayor:** Thank you very much Bill. Thank you for what you do with the show, thank you for all your activism particularly on the issue of retirement security. Morgan, thank you as well, and it's been a pleasure talking with you.

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