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

**Errol Louis:** Welcome back to Inside City Hall. There's been a growing concern, which we have reported here on NY1 about the rise in homelessness and disorder across parts of Manhattan. Especially in Midtown, which has more hotels converted into shelters than any neighborhood in the city due to the coronavirus pandemic. Joining me now to talk about the homelessness crisis and much more from the Blue Room Inside City Hall is Mayor de Blasio. Welcome Mr. Mayor, good to see you.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good to see you, Errol. How are you doing?

**Louis:** Just fine, thanks. To jump right into that issue, we've been out there with cameras. We've been out there multiple days. I'm sure you've seen the reports. You know, the, the issue of placing people in hotels. We know that there's a health reason that lies behind it, but there seems to be a concentration and there seems to be a lot of disorder. What can you tell New Yorkers about the plan to deal with that?

**Mayor:** Well, Errol again, as you said this was a result of the coronavirus. We had homeless New Yorkers in congregate shelters. And look, no one's ever happy about the fact that anyone ends up homeless. I always say there, but for the grace of God go we. So someone who ends up homeless needs a place to live and that's the law and that's the right thing to do. But we used to be able to use shelters where people could be together in a group setting. When the coronavirus really hit in March and April, there was a lot of concern about the health of those homeless folks in those facilities. We decided to move people out into other hotels, other spaces, so we could actually create more distancing. Thankfully Errol, the health situation's improved a lot. And we're in a situation now to start figuring out the pathway back, it won't happen overnight, but we will be able to over time, if we can hold onto this very positive health situation, bring more and more of the homeless back to the shelters. We don't want to be in hotels. In the meantime, we got to do everything between Homeless Services, NYPD, Health Department, Sanitation Department to address concerns in any community where there's shelters and issues come up and that work will continue.

**Louis:** Some of our reporting was from hotels in the West 30's, like right around the corner from Midtown South. It seemed pretty clear that the police either at their discretion or on orders from above, were not really getting involved in a lot of trying to police that situation. Are they out of the business of trying to keep order on the streets when it comes to say the homeless?

**Mayor:** No, of course not. There's a shifting of priorities and resources to the most urgent problems we're facing. Because clearly the number one concern we have when it comes to public safety is stopping violence. And there are fewer officers because of the budget situation. But no, every department that I mentioned has to be a part of the solution, including the NYPD.

**Louis:** Going in fact into that area when it comes to the shootings, huge numbers triple or 10 times what we've seen in comparable periods of time a year ago. Do you have a strategy? Do you have a sense that you can tell people when these numbers are going to start coming down?

**Mayor:** Yeah. We have a couple of different pieces that have really been increasingly clear in the last week or two. So first of all, the strategy, again, move officers off of other duties to frontline duties in the neighborhoods where the biggest shooting problems are. It's pretty pinpointed Errol, where most of the problem has been. NYPD continues to shift officers where they see the persistent problems. Second, more work with the community, with clergy, elected officials, community groups, Cure Violence, all that's been a bigger piece of strategy. And then more gun arrests. The gun arrest numbers continue to go up. They're similar to where we were this time last year in terms of what's happened in the last week or so. So we're seeing that number come up more and more. That's crucial. And then the court system. I've talked to you about the perfect storm of everything that's gone wrong at once with the coronavirus. So many things that are thrown off that are helping unfortunately, to fuel this crime situation. One of the things we needed most was the court system to start re-engaging. We saw the beginning this last week with grand juries coming back for the first time in months. And that's a very hopeful sign. The more that court system comes back to life, the more consequences for folks who have committed crimes, the more I think the NYPD is going to be able to do.

**Louis:** Whether it's justified or not, it seems pretty clear that there's something akin to a slowdown that is happening with the NYPD. I mean, the numbers are just so dramatically down from what we'd seen in the past. Is there a plan or a recognition that something needs to be done about that?

**Mayor:** Well, again, there's a crucial fact that I just mentioned, the gun arrests have come up and certainly in this last week, they're very similar to the exact same week last year. So I think there was a rough patch there for sure, when there was a lot of other things going on in the city NYPD was dealing with. I think there's been a lot of tensions that had to be addressed. That's why it's so important for the NYPD to work more closely with community leaders. And vice versa for community leaders to work with NYPD. I think the leadership, the NYPD has been working up and down the line to get clear instructions out of how to deal with newer realities. It takes time when you go through a lot of tumult, when you go through a lot of change. But what I'm seeing, certainly again, for the most recent statistics is more and more activity where we need it.

**Louis:** Next topic is one where I know you have a personal stake, which is we heard from the Governor today that New York is primed for gyms and health clubs to reopen. Have you got a taskforce? Have you got a timetable? What can you tell us about when folks will be able to go back to, I don't know, the YMCA?

**Mayor:** Yes. So we're waiting for more clear guidance from the State. We haven't seen the exact language of the pertinent executive order. Over the last few days, City and State officials have been talking constantly. Look, we're very cautious on this one because we remember how bad it was just months ago. And we're very concerned about indoor settings. So, in fact, the back and forth was all about how to calibrate this properly. I think the State was right to make sure that there was local decision making on a lot of important specifics. We're going to be cautious with that local decision making and choose to take a conservative approach. We also have a real open question around timing of inspections because our first priority in inspections right now for the Health Department is childcare facilities and schools, as we get ready for September. So we'll work through all that, but it was, you know – I think a good back and forth with a State that allowed this outcome to be one that we can certainly work with.

**Louis:** So it would be the Health Department that would do inspections to give the okay to different health clubs and gyms.?

**Mayor:** Yes. And again, that's important, but even more important is schools and childcare centers.

**Louis:** Right. I got it. Then that'll come first. Real briefly before our break. There's been some stories about this, but anecdotally, I'm sure you've seen it. The streets are filthy. So are the parks. We know that Sanitation pickups are being reduced in part for budgetary reasons. But you know, nothing says decline of New York like feeling like you live in a garbage can. Is there something that can be done about that?

**Mayor:** Yes Errol I respect you, you really know New York City. I don't agree with your, respectfully don't agree with your way of characterizing it. I think we have some problems for sure. I don't think anyone who keeps saying that the state of city's in such a dire state, I don't see that. And I travel around all the time. I talk to people all the time. We've got a challenge to face because of the budget. We also had a particular reality in the last few weeks where a lot of attention from Sanitation Department and Parks Department was dealing with the aftermath of the storm. That energy is going to come back now and be applied to residential streets and commercial streets again. So it'll be tough until we get some relief, a stimulus or borrowing from Albany, but you know, I'm certain the Sanitation Department is going to do everything they possibly can with what they have.

**Louis:** Okay. Stand by Mr. Mayor. We're going to take a short break here. I'll have more with Mayor de Blasio in just a minute. Stay with us.

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**Louis:** Welcome back to Inside City Hall. I'm once again joined by Mayor de Blasio from the Blue Room. And Mr. Mayor, I wanted to ask, let's talk politics – I wanted to ask if you'd seen the stories of the controversy over the Democratic Socialists of America, the DSA, circulating a questionnaire for candidates who want to run for City Council in 2021, asking whether they would pledge not to travel to Israel and whether or not they would join, or at least not attack I

guess, the BDS movement. That seemed pretty heavy handed. I've seen a lot of questionnaires, but as a former City Councilman, how did that strike you?

**Mayor:** I think it's wrong. And I look – I truly feel some affinity with the DSA and what they stand for, but I think that question in that questionnaire is patently wrong. I think every candidate should say no to that, that they don't accept that requirement for endorsement. It just doesn't make sense. First of all, Israel is one of the countries in the world New York City has the closest relationship to. It does not make sense to tell people they can't visit there. Israel is a country that was formed to respond to oppression. And I always say, as a progressive, the entire concept of having a refuge for folks who were oppressed for a millennia is inherently progressive. So, you can dislike the Israeli government at this moment or specific policies, but to suggest that people shouldn't visit there, I think is wrong, to support the BDS movement, is wrong. That would rob Israel of its economic ability to allow for people to have a livelihood. And, by the way, I think peace in the future – I do believe in the two-state solution strongly – I think it's going to require a major economic element, including a strong economy for the Palestinian people. So, no, I think this is just mistaken all around and I don't think it's going to win them a lot of support as they should be trying to broaden their movement, not push people away.

**Louis:** You know, I've been over twice. And one thing I found striking about the whole conversation was the first time I went there, we're sitting now for our very first dinner, I was with a group of journalists, and a torchlight parade came by. They were marching to the home of the prime minister, it was Ariel Sharon at the time. It was, you know, it was peace now – they were protesting the government. And so, a bunch of us, you know, dropped our dinner and ran over and sort of, you know, tried to write about the story and find out what was going on. And our host didn't do anything to stop us. You know – I mean, there's a – I guess the point being, there's a very broad range of debate over there that you'd never know about if you just stayed in New York.

**Mayor:** Oh, it's entirely different. I've been four times. I've been several times with the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York City. Clearly, they have a pro-Israel view, but I heard from plenty of other voices that had criticisms of the Israeli government and you gain such perspective on the reality on the ground when you see things. It actually, to me, was inspirational to try in any way to work in favor of peace and, you know, a better future for Israelis and Palestinians alike. It's not abstract when you spend time there, it's an incredibly moving experience. So, I just – I don't think telling people, you shouldn't experience something, you shouldn't hear from people you shouldn't learn that doesn't really conform with progressive values from my point of view.

**Louis:** Yeah. You know, I think the devil's in the details. Like I went with the JCRC as well on a different trip. And they send us – you know, we went to the West Bank. They couldn't accompany us because of the politics of the situation. They handed us off to a different tour guide of Palestinians. And what I saw was shocking. I mean, I – you know, I've read about this my whole life, but to see it up close and to be able to talk to people, you get a real sense of how unacceptable the situation is and how something has to change. I hope that –

**Mayor:** Yeah, I think what you said is very resonant for me. When you go there, you realize the status quo there is unacceptable. And, again, I'm a believer in a two-state solution, but we know something better has to be achieved there. So, going there actually gives you a sense of urgency to change things. And that's another reason why people should not be kept from seeing it and experiencing it. They should see it and experience it to become committed to finding a peaceful path forward that respects Israelis and Palestinians alike.

**Louis:** Well, now a local candidate here who wants to get elected and wants the support of, say, the DSA or, frankly, any other group, this is kind of a generic problem, I guess, that you've had to encounter, I imagine. You want some group's endorsement, but they're asking you for things that, you know, might make you a little bit queasy. What would you say to candidates who have to try and figure that out, whether it's, you know, a union or a real estate group or DSA or any other organization?

**Mayor:** It's a profound question. It really is. And I thought about this a lot over time and the more I've lived life in this work, the more I say, actually say what you feel and if any organization can't deal with your truth, your beliefs, you probably don't want their endorsement anyway. I mean, look, if a DSA chapter, if someone came in who believed in all sorts of progressive social change, but believed the State of Israel was important to protect and disagreed with BDS, I would hope and pray that no DSA chapter would decide not to endorse a local candidate over an international affairs issue. If they do that kind of thing, they're just, again, pushing people away. But the same with a union or anything else. A lot of questionnaires I found that, you know, there was just certain areas I disagreed, you just say it, you say where you disagree and mainly organizations are going to respect your honesty.

**Louis:** Let me switch to a different political topic on this first night of the convention. How come they didn't give you a speaking role? Did you ask?

**Mayor:** No, I didn't. It's really – yeah, I really didn't even know the convention was coming up this week, is the truth. I have just been focused on what I got to be focused on right now. We have just extraordinary challenges we're working on right here, keep this health situation good, get ready for schools, try and reopen our economy. Politics is not my focus right now.

**Louis:** Well, you, presumably, if things had worked out a little bit differently, you'd have been there as the nominee. What do you hope the convention will do tonight or this week?

**Mayor:** The conventions – you know, conventions typically are past the point where the real work has happened. What I'm happy about is the platform work did represent the progressive voices in the party. I think Bernie Sanders and his supporters did a great job of pushing for very progressive platform planks to be included. Look, it was a back and forth with the Biden team, obviously, but something got done there that was real progress from my point of view. And it happened the same in 2016. I think Bernie Sanders and his movement, people are going to look back and realize it really changed the debate in this country and changed the Democratic Party profoundly. So, that was the important part. Now we'll have speeches, and speeches are good, but really the goal here is just to show the people of this country that the Democratic Party is

looking out for working people, and, obviously, Donald Trump and the Republicans are not. And I just hope that is successfully communicated in these next few days.

**Louis:** Has the ticket asked you to go out and campaign or otherwise help out between now and November 3rd?

**Mayor:** Again, I think we're in a really aberrant situation. And this state here, I think we can safely say, notwithstanding Donald Trump's delusions, is clearly going to go for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris in a very big way. So, no, I would do anything they need, if they need anything. But right now, again, I've got a pretty profound mission right here, focusing on the health and safety of New Yorkers. That's where I'm going to be.

**Louis:** That is true. You've got a lot to do. We'll let you get back to it. Thanks so much for spending some time with us. We will talk to you again next week.

**Mayor:** Thank you, Errol. Take care.

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