

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
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NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 21, 2020, 7:00 PM

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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Bobby Cuza: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. We are turning our focus back to the \$900 billion stimulus deal reached by congressional leaders. Some New Yorkers will be receiving direct checks in the mail and the State will receive some funding for the MTA. And Broadway and entertainment venues will also see some relief, but will it be enough in this unprecedented crisis? Here now to talk more about this is Mayor de Blasio. He joins us tonight from the Blue Room inside City Hall. Good evening, Mr. Mayor. Thanks for joining us.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good evening. How are you doing, Bobby?

Cuza: I'm doing all right. So let's talk about the stimulus, which this morning you described as not a stimulus at all, but rather a short-term survival plan. Any kind of aid for cities and states fell out of the deal. I'm wondering though, whether there might be some good things in this plan. We see some enhanced unemployment benefits. There is some money for vaccine distribution. There are direct stimulus checks to New Yorkers, money for the MTA that we've mentioned. So, there is some relief here for New Yorkers, right?

Mayor: Yeah. Look, I appreciate relief and I especially appreciate direct aid to New Yorkers who need it. But let's not kid ourselves. It's just not a stimulus. Again, it'll help, you know, stave off the worst for everyday New Yorkers for a little while, but it's not that much money that's going directly to people. I appreciate any and all aid that might go to health care or education, but it's not enough. And it's totally not close to a stimulus. A stimulus means you put enough money into the economy, into the hands everyday people, obviously to the state and local governments as well so we can provide services to people. We can foster recovery. None of that happened. Let's be clear. The kind of level that you needed to stimulate, to move forward to recovery, it's not there. It's not there. The House of Representatives Bobby, months ago in the spring actually passed a true stimulus. We go more than half a year, things have gotten worse and worse and now we get not even half a loaf. So no, it's just not enough. And it's really now about whether Joe Biden can get us a true stimulus. I have a lot of faith in him. I need to see the Congress step up. Otherwise the impact on New York City and New York State is going to be that we will not be able to recover. It's as blunt as that. We cannot recover without a serious, real stimulus.

Cuza: We hear a lot about a doomsday budget. That's a term that kind of gets thrown around, but doomsday seems like it could soon be upon us? I mean, what kind of repercussions are we talking about here? I know back in the summer, you talked about the possibility for layoffs. Something like 22,000 layoffs. Are those back on the table? I also haven't heard you talk too

much about revenue raisers. Could we be looking at tax hikes possibly on property taxes or otherwise?

Mayor: Yeah, Bobby, first of all, on revenue, I've spoken actually many times about the need to tax the wealthy, even before the pandemic. But the pandemic has been, you talk about a tale of two cities. For God's sakes during the pandemic, the rich I've literally gotten a lot richer. Stock market's been booming. Everyday people have just been crushed. If ever there was a time for a more progressive income tax and to tax the wealthy much more fundamentally, to tax the wealthy, make them pay their fair share. I mean, this is the time in history for that. Remember what happened back during the New Deal? That's when people realized that something had to be very different and we needed to ask those who had done very, very well to pay their fair share. A lot of those have done really well have gotten a lot of breaks from the government, a lot of loopholes they took advantage of et cetera. So I really hope the Legislature will act and I hope they will act quickly to tax the wealthy. That's one of the things that might get us back on track. But in terms of layoffs, layoffs would be the worst thing in the world for New York City. We'd be causing families to lose their income, hard working people to lose their job. We'd be losing City services we depend on. But if we don't get some help, of course they have to come back on the table as an option for next fiscal year because we won't have any resources. I mean, this is a bad situation, Bobby. We were waiting all this time for a real stimulus. We didn't get it. So something's got to give between now and June when we will put together our budget for next year.

Cuza: One looming catastrophe potentially is an eviction crisis next year. You know, there's the State eviction moratorium, there's also a federal eviction moratorium. I'm actually not sure how much that affects renters here in the city, but moratoriums run out at some point. And then all of a sudden we could have tens of thousands of people here in the city who are kicked out of their homes all at once. We could have protests. Is the City prepared for that scenario?

Mayor: We're working to make sure that never happens. Look, I think in – let's give credit where credit is due. The federal government, State government, you know, for a period of time, they have had those moratoriums in effect and that's important. We need to extend them through the true life of this crisis which clearly is going to be until folks are really distributed you know, a very big majority of people vaccinated. And you have a much safer situation in terms of coronavirus. And then people have a chance to recover and get their incomes back. You know, we need to see the economy come back to life. We need to see people get their jobs back. And that's when you can talk about taking off a moratorium. But that's not for a while. So I'm going to push very hard to see those moratoriums continued. I also think, I have talked about this many times. We need legislation in Albany that says, Hey, you know, if you've got money, if you are still making an income and you can afford to pay the rent, you should pay the rent. But if you can't, if you just lost your income, you don't have any choice, you deserve to have a payment plan that stretches out your ability to pay well into the future. Stay in your apartment. No tenants should be forced out of their apartment because they simply can't pay in this environment. But the landlord deserves to know that at some point, you know, the tenant will start to make it up and we need a payment plan law that makes it very clear how to do that. And show respect for everyone in this equation, everyone's hurting. We've got to get that in place to get through 2021.

Cuza: Let's talk about the coronavirus. The indicators here in the city continue to point in the wrong direction. The seven-day positivity rate now above six percent, seems like not that long ago, we were worried about it hitting three percent. Let's talk about a lockdown. You've warned New Yorkers we could potentially see some further lockdown after Christmas. That's of course a State decision, but you do have some say in the matter. How would you prepare New Yorkers for the possibility now in terms of timeline? Would this be something we're looking at next week or possibly after the new year? What's the latest?

Mayor: I've been talking to the Governor about this regularly. My staff has been talking to his staff. Everyone's watching very carefully the numbers, the hospitalization levels. Thank God our hospitals are doing pretty well handling things. But we're watching really, really carefully. I think the most important point Bobby is, if you don't want restrictions, I don't want them. If you don't want them, anyone out there watching doesn't want restrictions, do something about it. Wear a mask, socially distance, do not have indoor gatherings, keep your holiday gatherings very small, do not travel. If you want to avoid restrictions, just follow those simple guidelines. And look, we really are hoping the worst of this second wave is done in January maybe going into February. We don't have a long time to wait to see this hopefully dissipate, but more importantly, to see the vaccine start to have more and more impact, protecting more and more people. Everyone who gets vaccinated you know, they're now off the table in a good way. They are not folks who are going to get infected by this disease. So with every additional vaccination, we get closer to a better situation. So Bobby, State I know is seriously considering fuller restrictions, but I would tell everyone do something about it. Take the actions you can take to help us avoid those restrictions.

Cuza: In terms of a vaccine, we'll talk more about the vaccine after a break, but just quickly I wanted to ask you, I haven't heard you say whether when you might take the vaccine yourself? Are you going to be in one of those first groups of priority or are you going to wait until later?

Mayor: Well, I can tell you one thing, Chirlane and I are looking forward to taking the vaccine and we're going to follow what Dr. Dave Chokshi, our Health Commissioner tells us in terms of where each of us is in the priority order. And we're going to wait our turn, but the second it's my turn I'm going to be there right, you know, publicly showing people how important it is to do it, how safe it is. I am very happy to lead by example. But I also think it's important to follow the priorities and wait for my turn to come like everyone else.

Cuza: I think you might qualify as an essential worker. I'm not sure though?

Mayor: It's in the eye of the beholder, but I hope I'm being essential.

Cuza: All right, Mr. Mayor hold it right there. We are going to take a break. I'll have more with Mayor de Blasio when we return in just a minute, stay with us.

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Cuza: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. I'm joined once again by Mayor de Blasio, joining us from the Blue Room inside City Hall. So, Mr. Mayor, we've been hearing a lot about this new strain of the coronavirus coming from the UK. It is apparently 70 percent more transmittable than the existing coronavirus. Do you think that this is something that is already here in New York? I know there's been no documented cases but it's certainly possible that it has already spread here. And I'm wondering if the city can do anything that it's not already doing to try to combat this.

Mayor: Look, we don't have perfect facts on this one. It's something that's only come up very recently. What we do know, you're right, it's unfortunately even more infectious by its nature. But what we got to do is really on the federal level, a travel ban from the United Kingdom and Europe. I think that makes a lot of sense. Just better safe than sorry, especially as we're trying to turn the corner here with the vaccine and the second wave, or at least require anyone who gets on a plane from Europe coming to New York City to have a proof of a negative coronavirus test. But Bobby, look, it well could be here. I think the answer is to do exactly what we are doing in general guys, get as many people vaccinated as possible. I mean, think about that for a moment. Every single person you get vaccinated is a protection against the coronavirus. I spoke to Dr. Varma about this earlier. We believe the existing vaccine will protect against this new strain. So, I think it's the same game plan – get the maximum people vaccinated as quickly as possible. And all those precautions still work, the social distancing, the mask wearing, not traveling protects against each and every strain of the coronavirus. So, we're going to keep reminding people that works and that will protect you.

Cuza: In terms of the vaccine rollout, it hasn't been totally clear to me that there's federal guidance from the CDC, there is State guidance, but is it ultimately up to the City, how to prioritize people? I know you've talked about prioritizing people in those 27 hardest hit neighborhoods, but how does that work practically speaking?

Mayor: Look, we follow both CDC and State guidance. The State has the most immediate role determining the rules, and then we work within those rules. But what we can certainly say, we know plenty of times when the rules favored the privileged and, you know, folks who had money, folks who had status got more than their fair share. What we're saying here is when it gets time to reach people in every kind of community, for example, folks over 75 or folks over 65 or folks with pre-existing conditions, our first efforts are going to be in those 27 neighborhoods, hardest hit by the coronavirus. It's only fair. Those are the places that were hurt the most. Those are the places that need the most help. They happened to be African-American, Latino, and Asian communities. We are not going to see them deprioritized. We're going to prioritize them. We want to make sure they are protected first because they bore the brunt and they are the most vulnerable still.

Cuza: Shifting gears a little bit. I wanted to ask you about the NYPD tow pound on the West Side of Manhattan. We did some reporting last week on a provision in the State budget that hasn't gotten a lot of attention, but it would actually fine the City \$3 million a month, beginning in January, until the City moves the tow pound off of that space on Pier 67, which is actually State parkland. Anything you can tell us about that situation?

Mayor: Look, we're talking to the State about this. I want to find a positive resolution here. It's an important issue, Bobby, but let's face it, this year has been dominated by the coronavirus. We haven't had a lot of time to think about the tow pound. We do want to get it done. I want the tow pound out of the park. I want to see that land used for a better public purpose. We are going to find a solution quickly and implement it quickly, but this has been made more complicated obviously by the pandemic. And I think it's fair to say our State legislators, they don't want to penalize New York City in the middle of a budget crisis. They just want to see the situation resolved and we will resolve it and resolve it quickly.

Cuza: There's an audit today from the City Comptroller about the condition of homeless shelters here in the city and being potentially dangerous for infants. There were deficiencies, including vermin and mold. I'm wondering what's your response to this and are families and infant safe at City homeless shelters?

Mayor: Yeah, look, more and more families over recent years have ended up in shelter. This is something that I've worked on a lot. We want to protect every family, protect every child. I care deeply about this as a parent. And so, in fact we came up with a series of changes that we needed to make in our shelters to make them safer. We've been implementing them. I have not seen that Comptroller's report, but what I've heard as a summary is it pretty much rehashes the things that we've already decided to do and are doing.

Cuza: Mr. Mayor, we periodically see some videos surface of New Yorkers not adhering to the guidelines when it comes to safety precautions for the coronavirus. Today, there was a video that we saw online, this was a Republican club in Queens, the Whitestone Republican Club. I don't know if you had a chance to see this video. There's a conga line. This is a holiday party, apparently at a restaurant in Little Neck. This was reported on by the Queens Daily Eagle. You know, nobody here is wearing masks. It pretty – it looks like a pretty festive holiday party, nobody observing guidelines. I wonder, your response and is there any action the City might take in an instance like this?

Mayor: Oh, absolutely, anyone who violates the State rules, we're going to go deal with, and we have been. We've been giving out really serious fines up to \$15,000 to people who organize events or host events. We'll keep doing that. So, I'm certain the sheriff and other City agencies are going to follow up. But look, I mean, at this point, what do people need to learn about the coronavirus to understand it can be deadly? And if you do what you just described, Bobby, if you go and take those risks, you're going to bring the coronavirus right into your home, right into your neighborhood, to all the people you say you love, and you're going to put their lives in danger. I mean, this is – come on. How much evidence do we need? So, anyone who does that, you know, they could say that they believe in freedom and liberty, but you know what the people that are going to get that disease from you, you're taking away their freedom and liberty.

Cuza: Mr. Mayor, only about a minute left, and this is a big topic to tackle. But last week there was the Department of Investigation report that came out, looking at the NYPD response to the George Floyd protests last summer. One thing I wanted to ask you about though was the recommendation to create a new police oversight agency. This was kind of at the end of the report, but it talked about combining the responsibilities that we see from the CCRB, the Civilian

Complaint Review Board, as well as the inspector general and another entity sort of combining it all into one independent oversight agency. Is that a recommendation that you're committed to?

Mayor: Look, I think there's a lot of sense in that, Bobby. It is something that could only be done either through a Charter change, through a Charter Revision Commission, which we're looking forward to next year or through the City Council. It takes some real work to figure out what's the right balance. But I think you could take those three different pieces and get them to work together under one roof. I think there's a way to do that productively. More to be worked through, but like all the other recommendations, look, this is the bottom line, the Department of Investigation did a very smart, very tough, very thorough report. And they came up with a set of recommendations. I think they're right. I think their analysis is right. I think the recommendations are right and I'm going to get to work bringing them to life. And I know the NYPD will as well. This is why we have oversight to help us see what we need to do better. They've shown us things we're going to do better, and we will.

Cuza: All right, Mr. Mayor, thank you so much as always for joining us. We'll see you next week.

Mayor: Thank you, Bobby.

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