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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 13, 2021, 9:20 AM
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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON HOT 97

Ebro Darden: Rosenberg is in the building, and so is, friend of the show, Mayor de Blasio, back on the program again. Mayor, good morning. How are you?

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning. I'm feeling good to be with you guys. Notwithstanding the very strange world we live in.

Darden: Yeah, no you – it's been a hot week not only for some issues you're dealing with down there at City Hall and just being mayor, but just in the nation. I saw you tweet about the incident in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota yesterday, the murder of Daunte Wright at the hands of a police officer, a 25-year vet who claims that she was grabbing her Taser but grabbed her gun and shot him. And you had some words that you wanted to put out. So, I wanted to give you a moment to maybe express some of that sentiment.

Mayor: Yeah. It's just, it's disgusting and it's sad and it's painful and it's got to stop. I mean, it's a 20-year-old guy, gets pulled over for nothing and then an officer kills him. You know, any officer who doesn't know the difference between a gun and a Taser shouldn't have either, shouldn't be on the force. Shouldn't be allowed to be a police officer.

Peter Rosenberg: Well said.

Mayor: You know, we got to ask ourselves the question, what the hell's going on. Why are people allowed to be police officers if they don't know how to handle their weapon? And why is the assumption, in so much in this country, reach for a weapon? For God sakes, it was, you know – whatever it was, it was about a traffic issue, you know, or a vehicle registration. It's not something that a weapon should have ever been involved in. So, my view is there's a lot of people who are police officers who shouldn't be around this country and who should be moved out of policing. There's a lot of good people who are good, conscientious police, that's who we need, and we need a hell of a lot of training. We learned that here. You got to train and retrain and retrain all the time.

Darden: But de Blasio –

Mayor: De-escalation –

Darden: Let me ask you as somebody who stepped in and has dealt with the NYPD, and we've had plenty of conversations here and you know how I feel about the NYPD, and there has been

some changes made, there has been progress made. But we also see some retaliatory behavior that we hear about rumors in the streets from the NYPD. People want these changes to happen quickly. You were confronted with trying to figure out how to get people out of the force that were a part of the negative culture so that you could make some change. It's not an overnight process, correct?

Mayor: It's not. And there's – look, one of the things that we did recently, we had a whole process around police reform. And I really urge people, look at what came from that because it's very powerful the changes that are being made. And in the opening report, our Police Commissioner, Dermot Shea, does a formal apology for the history of racism in the NYPD. And I think this is really important because it's not – words are not enough ever but beginning with the recognition that there's a history of racism in American policing, going back to slavery days and that it still exists and it has to be systematically weeded out, that's one of the ways we change things, and recognizing that there are a lot of people who are really conscientious police officers, and there's too many people who should not be police officers and need to be moved out. And so, one of the things we're doing is a much stronger post-identifying anyone who's got the kind of record that says they should not be on the streets. And again, it's not that many, but it's those officers that have caused some of these tragedies. And I think we're getting at it, we also want to recruit more people from the community. I think this is one of the biggest questions. It's hard for people to want to be police officers if they perceive it as an institution they can't work with. And we got to change that because one of the most important things is to keep making the police force of and by and for the community. And it is a majority people of color police force now in New York City. And that's important, but we got to keep doing a lot more of that including more African American recruits and more senior leadership. And so, these are all the things that we're trying to move now. And I think it does take time, but I really believe it will make the change.

Darden: How do you articulate – you know, you're going to hear a lot moving forward and I've been hearing the rumblings of this language, where people are saying you can't reform, we can't reform our way out of this police problem. The sickness that plagues many police departments around the nation, it can't be reformed and there must be wholesale change. How do we navigate this, moving forward, specifically here in New York City?

Mayor: There does need to be wholesale change, but that's not inconsistent with working with the approach we have now. I really believe this. I think the – if you talk to working people all over the city of all races, all backgrounds, consistently, I've heard this for years and years and years, they want to be protected. They want to know there's police there when they need them, they want respect, and they want to be treated in a way that's not discriminatory. They want to make sure that police treat them as human beings and see them as human beings. But I don't know very many people who say, I don't want police around ever, or I don't want a police officer when I'm in trouble or my family's in danger. So, I don't think it's throw away the whole form, I think recognize the bad history, recognize the origins and go at it. If you have a thoroughly diverse police force trained constantly in how to approach things differently, de-escalate tensions, use the minimum force, I think you can have a very, very different environment, I really do, and a strong Civilian Complaint Review Board, which is something we believe in and we put a lot into, I think you can have a very different environment. But I do not agree with folks

who think, if you just get rid of the whole idea, everything is going to be great. No, you have to have some vehicle for safety. It's true in the history of humanity. I always say in villages, you know, we all come from villages, different parts of the world. And there was always guardians. The guardians were from the village and of the village and respected by the village and they respected there, you know, the people around them, that they were part of. And we've got to recreate that in policing. And we can, that's the way forward to me.

Darden: What role and – what role do you believe – you know, I know this is an isolated week, but reports came out that gun violence soared 257 percent the week of April 4th in New York City. It's an isolated week. But nonetheless gun violence, people are saying is – continues to be, it's been a problem in New York City, but it has highs and lows. Is what the changes that you're making in the NYPD exacerbating the gun violence problem? Are there people out there dealing with this? What should we learn from what's taking place right now? What should we know?

Mayor: So, I have to start on a very human level, Ebro. I've spoken to parents who have lost their children, and there's nothing more horrible. There's nothing more painful. And over the years, I'm not talking to just now, I'm talking to over years and years. And so, any gun violence is going up, I see it as a danger to our children, to everyone, but especially for our children. What's happening now is we had a total disconnect in our society last year. This time last year, everything was shut down. That caught with some of the statistics you see, but beyond that is the much bigger truth. As we went into 2020 more and more, especially with summer, just everything that was the glue of our society was gone. Jobs were gone, school was gone, houses of worship, everything was gone, culture, everything was gone. And that unleashed some very bad realities, particularly around gun violence. And I think the answer is a recovery, and the answer is bring back jobs, bring back schools, bring back everything, and deepening the bond between police and community, which I see happening again, because there's a lot more communication starting again. And I think we overcome this. I really do. And no, it's not, you know, reform means less policing. Reform means better policing. And so, we simultaneously did all these reforms, to create more discipline when officers do something wrong, more weeding out of people should not be on the force. And at the same time, the NYPD is doing more gun arrests than ever. So, you know, there's a lot of good officers out there doing their job, working for communities, getting guns off the streets, highest number of gun arrests in 25 years. So, you know, I think there's a real way forward. And I think people have to have some faith that we all get there because we've come through so much just in the last year. New York, I think New Yorkers have been heroic. I think they've been amazing overcoming COVID. We're going to overcome this too.

Darden: Qualified immunity. We heard there's been a step towards, I guess, reforming qualified immunity and how it's used in the NYPD. Can you articulate what that is all about?

Mayor: Yeah. The federal legislation is what we modeled it on that passed the House of Representatives, the George Floyd Justice and Policing Act. And that essentially takes away some of the shields that used to exist so there can be more accountability. It does not – I want to be very clear, the federal legislation does not, nor does the City legislation, put a financial burden on an individual officer. And I think this is real important because if we are telling people, working people, people of all backgrounds, immigrants, African-Americans, Latinos, Asians,

join the NYPD, we cannot say at the same time, you might be liable for a huge financial penalty regardless of, you know, what you meant to do. So, we did not include those personal financial penalty. But what we do have is a law that makes it much easier for there to be accountability, models what's in the federal legislation. And I think it's going to help. This is something we've worked on with the City Council. I think all the reforms are going to help because they all come back to transparency, accountability, a different NYPD and an NYPD that looks more like New York City.

Darden: So, what I'm hearing you say is stopping short of financial accountability falling on a police officer has more to do with attracting people to policing jobs than dealing with the fact that these mistakes continue to happen and they – us as the taxpayer feel like we shouldn't be footing this bill every time a mistake happens. How do we reconcile this?

Mayor: No, it's a real good question. But I think the way we reconcile is to try and go at the root cause to recruit officers and screen officers carefully to begin with, to constantly monitor, to make sure we have officers who are taking in their training and doing things the right way. Again, it's a very few officers who go down the wrong path, but we have to catch that early and get them out of the force. But I think overall, you want accountability mechanisms and that's what the law does, this new law does. But I really think we have to be clear about if you create disincentives for people who join, you're actually going to set back reform because one of the most essential elements of reform is having more and more officers who understand our communities, who are from our neighborhoods, understand the culture and the humanity of our neighborhoods, can communicate with people and we want to see more and more of those officers rise up in the ranks. You cannot create a disincentive to serve if you want to truly diversify the police department.

Darden: Yeah. I, you know, I'm not complete – I get both sides of this. I guess, you know, my problem is the continued payouts, the continued payouts of wrongful death, this continued money. And I just feel like some of these mistakes would stop happening if, and by – and I'm using air quotes with mistakes because you know, this can't be proven in a court of law, but just like the incident in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota, a 25-year vet. You mean to tell me, you don't know the difference between your gun and a Taser, 25 years into the game?

Mayor: Listen, I think –

Darden: But quickly, these officers know how to skirt around accountability by making it sound like they're confused, or they made a mistake.

Mayor: Some of the other things we did in the reform was called for the end – and this is what we need help from the State Legislature – end pensions for officers who commit particularly horrible acts, you know, with real lasting impact or God forbid, anyone dies –

Darden: I like that.

Mayor: And listen, that's a huge impact. Obviously, the ability to remove officers quickly and look at the discipline matrix, something we talked about before. The discipline matrix, everyone

who cares about fairness and policing should look at the discipline matrix. It's unlike anything that's existed in New York City, or pretty much anywhere in the country before. It says very clearly, if you do an offense, if you're an officer and you do an offense, you're found guilty, due process, it's very explicit what the penalties are. And in many cases, the penalties are termination. We don't wish for this. We hope this never is the case, but there are so many more tools now for making clear that if you do the wrong thing, you're going to lose your job, you're going to lose your pension. That's the way forward. It's not the – you know, you might get sued. That's nothing compared to the impact of these other realities.

Rosenberg: Mayor, what is the summer looking like in terms of the reopening of New York City? Are you feeling good about where we are? And do you have concerns about us reopening too quickly? What are your thoughts on the COVID reopening of Manhattan and the city in general?

Mayor: Yeah. Rosenberg, I feel good about the reopening. I'll tell you. We have seen now, you know, that the question has been for weeks and weeks, who's going to win the race, the variants or the vaccine. And right now, the vaccine is winning this race. We're over five million vaccinations from the beginning. This is a pretty amazing number of how many shots have been given in this city. It's clearly having an impact. Hospitalizations are going down. Thank God, deaths are going down. You know, we see a lot of good signs. We've got to keep the vaccination going. I want to see five million New Yorkers fully vaccinated, both shots, 100 percent vaccinated by June. I'm absolutely convinced we can have a very, very powerful summer, very energetic, especially outdoor, lots of cultural events, you know, restaurants coming back, everything. I think September is going to be that pivot. We are bringing schools back fully in September. Every child who wants to be in school will be in school five days a week. We are absolutely certain we can do that safely. So, I feel good. I feel really good. I think New Yorkers are ready for the comeback.

Laura Stylez: Absolutely. What are we doing for small businesses and all the restaurants and all the, you know, entrepreneurs and, you know, all the people who have been suffering because this – obviously, you've seen the effects? Are they getting any type of additional help specifically in New York City?

Mayor: Absolutely. First of all, for the restaurants, which means so much to all of us and also express our culture, express all the communities in the city. So, remember now they can do outdoor dining permanently. This is really important. They can forever have outdoor dining, that is making it so much better for so many of the restaurants. It means a lot more seating. It's going to help them now to prosper. And also, people love it. They just love the opportunity of outdoors. So, that's going to be a really good thing. [Inaudible] Open Streets are going to let restaurants, like, spread out into a bigger area. A lot of the small businesses, because of what Joe Biden did and the Congress did, are getting a lot more direct aid. That's a really good thing. State – also the State Legislature put a lot of direct aid to small businesses, and we're coming behind that with some additional help. I think there's a lot there. I think small business has been through hell. They are the pivot to bring him back to the city in terms of employment, but there's a lot of money now finally flowing to small business. I also think, Laura, there's a ton of demand that – people who used to go traveling all over the place are probably not doing as much travel in 2021.

They're going to spend their money locally, at restaurants, at stores. I think that's going to help us a lot too. And cultural events coming back. I think that's going to get people to come back from all over the metro area, all over the country are going to be coming in for our cultural events, when Broadway opens in September, and that's also been a spill over into lots of other small businesses.

Darden: De Blaz, how much of the 40 percent that, you know, it'll be a couple of years from now, but just for, you know, understanding the legalization law and what that tax implication and money made for New York City will mean. Is there any – do you have any intel on that yet? Because I know it's still being built out and what it – you know, what the actual locations for dispensaries and neighborhood commissions have say so over what goes into their neighborhoods, etcetera, etcetera. But is there any insight that you can give us and how much money will actually come in New York City through legalization?

Mayor: I wish I could give you something real specific, Ebro. But what I can say is I really commend Carl Heastie and Andrea Stewart-Cousins, and everyone in the Legislature. They realized it was time for legalization, it's needed, but they did it in a way that really focused on economic and social justice. So, my belief is that a lot of that revenue will help the communities, Black and Brown communities that were really oppressed by a previous [inaudible] –

Darden: They say 40 percent of that tax revenue will go specifically to Black and Brown neighborhoods,

Mayor: The fact that it is so clear and that's all going to happen starting next year, so I won't have the opportunity to be with you to tell you how it's going, but I can tell you in advance it's the right approach. It's going to help us build economic opportunity. The fact that the records are being expunged for so many people suffer from unjust drug laws is really important. That's also going to open up doors of opportunity for people. So, yeah, a lot to work out and a lot of the money that comes in, will go to making sure that everything's done in a safe and healthy manner. But it's just – it's absolutely the right direction. And I'm really, really impressed that they've focused on social justice, the way they did in the legislation.

Darden: Will you be smoking weed again, after you're done on the job? Like you were in your 20s?

Mayor: Let me tell you, those days are over.

[Laughter]

It didn't work for me, Ebro. It didn't work for me, but I'm high on life. That's the [inaudible] –

Rosenberg: It wasn't your thing. It wasn't your thing

[Laughter]

Darden: All right now, de Blaz, where's the money out for the kids this summer, where the jobs at? I heard about the cleanup crews cleaning up graffiti. Where are the kids getting jobs, man?

Mayor: We got a Summer Youth Employment coming back strong, 70,000 kids. We're going to be looking to do a lot of other things this summer. We're going to have an announcement soon in terms of opening up a lot of summer opportunities for kids in our schools. This is a summer we really got to pay attention to our young people. They have been through trauma. I mean, literal specific trauma [inaudible] –

Darden: Do we up to number on the youth jobs? Can we – can that happen?

Mayor: We're talking to the City Council about that, but we're starting with a really strong base, 70,000. We're going to see where we can go from there. But the – remember what kids have been through, remember how many kids lost someone in their family. So, this summer is part of bringing back and we want to do a lot of focus this summer and fall on our mental health, also for young people. But I am hopeful, I think – and I think it really does connect to also stopping the shootings. The more we can give young people positive alternatives, the more we can address some of the challenges they're facing that also contributes – you know, as you know addressing young people's needs across the board at the root is part of addressing crime also and keeping young people away from violence.

Stylez: Mayor, one of our listeners is asking, what's being done for people, essential workers, who are going through evictions, eviction court?

Mayor: Yeah. In general, thank God, the evictions have been stopped. There's been a moratorium. That work continues to protect people. But I want to tell you, Laura, anyone who thinks that they're being unjustly evicted can call 3-1-1 and talk to our Tenant Protection Office. And if they qualify, they get a lawyer for free. That's really important. We have a law that was passed years ago, very proud of this law, called Right to Counsel for lower income New Yorkers. If you're threatened with an illegal eviction, the City of New York will provide you a lawyer to protect your interest. And regardless of one's income, you can get legal advice and legal support. So, anyone who thinks that what's happening is going to lead to an eviction, or is an eviction that's illegal or unfair, call 3-1-1 and let's see how we can help.

Darden: And before we – I want to close on this because there's some amazing discussion around the Racial Justice Commission that you're rolling out. And it's a City Charter intended to correct imbalances in our city, working – it says here in the article in the New York Times, creating policy recommendations that can include baby bonds, a jobs guarantee, and even reparations for Black residents. Talk about this Racial Justice Commission, Mayor.

Mayor: The Racial Justice Commission is the first of its kind in the United States. I hope it becomes a model because every city, town, state, every part of this country has examined our history and act on it. So, Racial Justice commission, chaired by Jennifer Jones Austin, is explicitly charged with identifying where structural and institutional racism exists in City government, but also in other institutions. And I've encouraged the commission to meet with the business community, cultural community, academic community, every part of our society

[inaudible] and expunge structural racism. And it starts by naming it, and acknowledging it, and then saying what very specific things we will do to change it, what changes in policy, changes in budget, you name it. So, the commission has the power to send proposals to the ballot for the people who vote on, but then become the law of New York City and become part of our constitution, become part of our charter. And they're literally looking at our foundational laws of the city. The charter is our constitution. They're looking at our basic constitution to say, does it represent justice, or does it represent the thinking of the past and what needs to be changed to create racial justice in New York City? It's very big stuff. And it's an impressive group of community folks, and they're going to do something I think is going to change the history of New York City and then become a model for the whole country.

Darden: Well, they probably should start with all the work Robert Moses did some years ago, devaluing Black communities and putting the Cross Bronx Expressway through there and other things that happened.

Mayor: Well, you say, you hit you – Ebro, you hit the nail on the head again because what Robert Moses did baked in racism to so much of this country – excuse me, so much of the city so much in this area. And think about if the government systematically turned that around, because now it's time for that conversation. We don't have to live with what we were handed from the past. We can do things entirely differently. Everyone's minds are opened in a really good way. What do we do differently? But usually, we're all running around doing so many things, we don't get to stop and ask that essential question. This commission, the power of this commission is to get to ask the fundamental question. How do we weed out structural racism in this city once and for all? What will it take? What will it look like? That's the power of this. I'm very excited because I think they're going to help us do some things that would have been unimaginable a few years ago but are necessary now.

Darden: Mayor de Blasio, it's been great talking to you again. We'll keep an eye on a lot of these initiatives. I'm sure we'll hear from you before your job is done and maybe even a little bit after. Do you have plans for after you're done on the job? Has that work begun yet?

Mayor: [Inaudible]

Darden: You've already confirmed you've not going to start smoking weed, so we won't see you walking down Sixth Avenue, just blazing a Backwood. That's not going to happen.

Mayor: I'm looking for – I'm looking for an incredibly dynamic morning radio show to join.

Darden: He's coming for our jobs, y'all.

[Laughter]

Mayor: I was just looking for someplace that values the kind of intelligent, thoughtful discussion that I see every day.

Darden: Okay.

Mayor: [Laughter]

Darden: So, you'll be at – you want to be a radio personality.

Mayor: But not – I'm not wearing that cap.

[Laughter]

Darden: Why, are you still trying to be a Red Sox fan? You still try to be a Red Sox fan?

Mayor: [Inaudible]

[Laughter]

Stylez: Thank you, Mayor.

Darden: De Blasio, take care of, thank you for your time today.

Mayor: Take care guys.

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