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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** July 30, 2018

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

**Errol Louis:** Good evening, welcome to Inside City Hall for Monday, July 30th, 2018. I'm Errol Louis. The week begins as a major policy fight is making its way to a vote at the City Council. Three years after a failed effort to regulate ride hailing apps like Uber, the Council is once again is preparing to take action as soon, possibly, as next week. Now over the last few days, Uber has been pushing back and now the stage is set for round two of a political fight that is being closely watched by law makers, taxi drivers, and New Yorkers just trying to get around town. Joining me now to talk about that and much, much more, somebody who is going to play a pivotal role in this issue. Mayor Bill de Blasio is here for his weekly interview. Thank you for joining us, always good to see you.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** My pleasure.

**Louis:** Let me put up just a couple of numbers for my viewers. The number of monthly trips that people are taking has really exploded – six million, February of 2016, up to 17 million February of this year. Meanwhile medallion trips, 11 million in the month of February of 2016 has fallen by more than half since then, and we know that they are hurting over on the yellow taxi side. There are more app-based vehicles than ever before. The estimate now is something like 80,000 compared to 13,000-plus medallion taxis. The simplest sounding solution is to just put a cap on it. Is that something that makes sense to you?

**Mayor:** Well that's the direction the Council is going in and I think they are headed in the right direction. The Council is trying to grapple with an issue that has many elements but I tell you the numbers you point out there get to one of the most important things – the constant pressure downward on wages for people who drive vehicles. Here's what's happening and I think your numbers are powerful. It's unfortunately become a race to the bottom. The model employed by companies like Uber and Lyft has been to flood the zone with more and more vehicles, more and more drivers. What we saw recently was a study done by the University of California Berkley that showed that now most of these for-hire vehicle drivers are at subminimum wage and it's really become an unacceptable state of affairs in terms of the kind of standards we as New Yorkers expect. We expect people to make a decent living. There's been a whole fight over \$15 minimum wage and a lot of other things in the state but when it comes to for-hire vehicles it's actually literally gone steadily in the opposite direction. And that's spilled over to the yellow

cabs as well. That's been again a race to bottom. So the Council is I think trying to do some common sense things to say how do we create some order here and restore a decent standard of living for these workers.

**Louis:** Now the issue that concerns me most, and I'm not an economist but it seems to me that –

**Mayor:** But you play one on TV?

**Louis:** I'll occasionally, I'll reflect something interesting that I heard which is that if you put a cap on, even if it's a fairly high number 70,000, 80,000, you basically recreated the same problem that lead to the crisis in the medallion taxis, meaning once you have a cap it's then in the interest of those drives to go where the most lucrative fares are which is the central business district in Manhattan and the airports, which is right back to where we started and guys like me can't get a ride anymore. I mean, it seems to me that, that's where that would be heading.

**Mayor:** So let me say two things – one, anyone who is not being given a ride is an unacceptable state of affairs, I just want to be very clear about that. There are really clear penalties, anyone – if you are talking about the question of discrimination there are very clear penalties and we intend to get even tougher. It's clear right now that is someone – a driver acts in a discriminatory fashion and we find out about it, we have real sanctions including at the time of the third offense, revoking their license to drive a for-hire vehicle. So this is something with real teeth that we want to work on even more. But on the question of what the cap does economically, look I would argue that right now the current system, the constant flooding of the market with more and more vehicles, more and more drivers by, let's face it, huge corporations, that's part of their effort to grab market share. It's absolutely done without any consideration for the workers themselves, thus you see these ever decreasing wages but what it means also is lots of empty vehicles circulating around for no purpose. It's a cynical business model that's hurting us in a lot of ways. So I would much rather see a situation where we created some order. And again the Council will be looking at a variety of options. They are showing a lot of leadership here. But the status quo is unacceptable, that's the one thing I know.

**Louis:** So do you intend to weigh in with the City's plan to lay alongside whatever the Council arrives at?

**Mayor:** Right now we are looking very carefully at what the Council has put together, I like the direction they are taking, we are in regular communication with them, but I expect they are going to get to a good plan.

**Louis:** Okay, let me switch topics to something that we have all been reporting on, we all have been talking about and of course that's the migrant crisis. The families that have been separated in some cases, reunified, we just missed one deadline, there are remaining issues that are out there. Where is the City in all of this now?

**Mayor:** So Errol it's astounding the Trump administration still does not have a plan for reunifying these kids with their families. We believe there are still a hundred or more kids in our city. We want to take direct action to try and address the situation. New Yorkers have come

forward. They have been very generous, they want to help. We came up with a new plan that I think will make a big difference. We got 16 city employees, some are lawyers, some are social service workers who are going to go down to the border to one of the key reception centers in Dilley, Texas and provide direct support to immigrants seeking asylum, to immigrants trying to reunite with their kids, to folks who have been reunited but don't know what's going to happen next. They need legal support, they need social service support, clearly the federal government is not supplying it so New Yorkers are going to take matters into our own hands and go down there. Now the Mayor's Fund has been collecting resources that New Yorkers' have donated trying to help these kids, we're going to use those resources to send these professionals down to the border to help, to pay their expenses. They're volunteering their own time, so they're using their own vacation time but it's going to make a difference because right now we have a situation – if someone doesn't have a lawyer, if they're someone seeking asylum or a parent trying to get reunited with their child and they don't have a lawyer, it's not going to happen, but we are now going to give them the professional support they need to make their family whole again.

**Louis:** Is there going to be a connection to New York that's sort of a requirement of this? I understand from what you're saying this doesn't sound like it's going to cost personnel time or even travel resources from the City, these people are doing it and there is a charitable effort to send them there. Are they going to go and sort of look for people who have a New York connection or is it going to just be help to whoever might happen to need it?

**Mayor:** Although I'm sure there will be some with a New York connection, the first obligation is to help those who don't have the legal, don't have the social services, particularly the parents who are trying to find their kids. It may turn out some of those kids are right here, right now, but again we're still playing this extraordinary game of connect the dots because the federal government won't come forward with information or a plan. That said, I think this is in the American spirit to say if our government is not serving us, we're going to go and help people directly in our own way.

**Louis:** Not that it would necessarily change the way anybody in the administration feels about you or New York City, but in some ways is that sort of like a thumb in the eye to the federal government?

**Mayor:** Look, if there is any thumb in the eye it came right from Washington towards the values of the American people who clearly do not like what they see, do not like seeing children separated from their families, and do not like the degradation of the asylum process which is something that has been honored by Republicans and Democrats for decades. No I think original sin is quite clear with the family separation policy and the "zero-tolerance policy". New York City has been clear, I've been clear, we're going to stand up for immigrants, we're going to respect their humanity, I think that's where the majority of American people are. As to standing up to the Trump administration, one I'm proud to do it, two it sure couldn't get worse because we've made our views quite clear.

**Louis:** Well that's true, right? Like I said it's not like you're going to get a - I think a Christmas card from Donald Trump or an invite to the White House.

**Mayor:** I'm not coming off the Christmas card list because of this.

**Louis:** Yeah, fair enough. Okay, let's take a short break, we've got more to talk about, we'll be right back with the Mayor in just a minute. Later on tonight we will turn to the race for governor where the Democratic candidates have been busy picking up some support on the campaign trail. We'll tell you all about it in just a minute, stay with us.

[...]

**Louis:** Welcome back to inside City Hall, I'm once again joined by Mayor de Blasio, and Mr. Mayor I wanted to talk about Airbnb. I understand there's been – there's some legal action, your administration is looking into some purported possible bad actors who were using a lot of their property to allow folks to use Airbnb in violation building codes.

They're pushing back though and they are partly saying, look Airbnb itself is just a platform, if there are bad actors who are using it, it's sort of established law that you don't sue Facebook, or YouTube, or Google because somebody who is using those avenues is doing something illegal. The pressure on Airbnb to divulge the names of their users and information about their users would seem to violate that and I'm wondering what you make of that?

**Mayor:** Well I certainly understand why some people make a parallel. I don't think there is a parallel and I'll speak to that. First to say on how you started, the Office of Special Enforcement I think has done an outstanding job. We've been providing more resources each year and the Council has been very much in favor it too to crack down on some of the extraordinary situations. First of all – were basically some bad actors have created de facto hotels, which is absolutely against our local laws and our state laws and a lot of other situation. For example, folks who are in affordable housing have stipulations, they are not supposed to making money off this situation, there are all sorts of examples.

Office of Special Enforcement I think has really been a game changer because they've been aggressive and they've sent a message that illegality will not be tolerated and we're going to deepen those efforts. To your point, I think the difference here is that Airbnb and other similar services clearly are facilitating, in a very active way, the business transaction. They have standards they keep, they have to certify in effect both the seller and the buyer. They promote the service, they connect everyone financially and otherwise, you know, the idea of comparing that to say going online and finding, you know, some place where you can buy tickets for something. I think they are very different realities. The latter is much more passive this is much more active.

But we need that data, we need that data – I agree with the City Council on this – because we have to protect people. Unfortunately what we've seen where there has been abuse of these rental dynamics is that we've seen some unsafe conditions, we've seen situations where people live in the same building don't even know there are strangers in their building, there is a host of issues that are raised that we really have to come up with proper regulation on and we can't do that without data. I'll make the parallel to the hotel industry stating the obvious, here is an industry where it's buildings, we inspect them, we know what revenue they make, we tax them, there's a whole series of regulations so the public has assurance that the public is getting their fair share of

revenue but also that we know what is happening in those buildings and we can keep them safe. We don't have that ability with Airbnb until they give us the information that allows us to protect the public interest.

**Louis:** Okay, let me – let me switch to the topic of public housing. There are a lot of different things that are going, I wanted to take these one at a time. First off, the Department of Investigation – your Department of Investigation – is investigating whether or not the Department of Health and NYCHA were in proper communication about possible lead exposure and the danger of lead exposure within their units. And I guess the main question I have is all of these are City agencies and I'm wondering if there was ever a point at which you sort of personally told Health Department and NYCHA, hey get your act together, coordinate, make sure the information is flowing properly.

**Mayor:** Look, throughout these last months as we've learned more and more, my message to all the pertinent actors in our government is to get this together and come up with a single, unified approach that could move us forward and I think we're seeing the results of that now. The settlement we reached with the federal government was very comprehensive. It really included a clear sense of how we're going to address a lot of these issues. Obviously a huge amount of new investment, but also the announcement we made ourselves, a few weeks ago, that we're going to go back into NYCHA, to a 130,000 apartments that never were definitively screened for lead. We're literally going to use X-Ray technology to look through all the layers of paint that exist to see if there is any lead and then at the end of each inspection be able to say, this apartment has no lead whatsoever, it will never have to be inspected for lead again, this other apartment has the presence of lead: we have to make sure it's remediated in the proper fashion. That's never been done before in the history of the Housing Authority. So we're going to be very aggressive. The problem you raised: it's unacceptable; it is and has been addressed. There was a gap, there's no question, not acceptable, but now we have the Health Department and NYCHA on the same page. And again, against the backdrop now, we're finally, after the gap that started in the previous administration, we have now caught up where there's regular inspections, regular remediation under our Local Law 1, and that will continue every year from this point on.

**Louis:** But why is DOI looking into it if it's resolved at this point?

**Mayor:** Um, I think – I can't speak for DOI, but I can say they do look at retrospective situations, um, you'll have to ask them specifically why, but I can say that this issue now has been resolved and the two agencies are coordinated.

**Louis:** Let me talk about the No Smoking rule that takes effect today. This was passed, I didn't realize this, by the Federal Government in February of 2017—

**Mayor:** Yep.

Louis: So every public housing authority in America had about 18 months to figure out how to implement it and so forth.

**Mayor:** Yep.

**Louis:** Once specific scenario that I've heard kicked around that that makes sense to me is that in certain places, because the neighborhood is dangerous frankly, it's actually risky to go outside to have a smoke, right. This then leaves people with the choice of either, breaking the rules and facing sanctions for staying in the house and smoking a cigarette, or coming outside to smoke a cigarette and getting at least 25 feet away from their building and exposing themselves to other kinds of dangers. I was wondering what you make of those kinds of—

**Mayor:** We have to – first of all, the mission is to address all of the challenges to health and safety, so when it comes to the safety of NYCHA residents, we have clearly more work to do but I do want to note, not so many years ago in this city, crime in NYCHA, shootings in NYCHA, were a really constant topic of discussion. Since the first year I was in office, I want to give a lot of credit to NYCHA, and the NYPD, for driving down crime in public housing [inaudible]. It's really a different situation than it was, say, a decade ago certainly. We've got more work to do, but we – I wanna be very, very clear, a lot of the NYPD's resources are going into protecting the people of NYCHA, we've got a lot of support from the people of NYCHA, and the neighborhood policing program, which now has our NCO officers in NYCHA developments where they get to know the neighborhood residents and the residents of the developments. It's a whole different approach that I think is more promising.

On the health side, we protect people against the dangers of smoking. I want to give Michael Bloomberg a lot of credit; he changed the paradigm of the city for the better. We tried to add to that, including in public places, you know, in parks and in other places there's no smoking zones. It's taken a lot of education, a lot of effort to warn people not to do it. It tends to work on the basis of education so I think as this is implemented, it won't be magical, it won't instantaneously take effect. But I think with constant education, constant efforts to remind people, you will see the amount of smoking in public housing go down. For folks who want to quit, they can call 311 and get real support to quit. So to your scenario, look, I never wanna see anyone do something they think puts themselves in danger, but I do want see them quit smoking for their own good, and for everyone around.

**Louis:** Is this an unwanted outside federal mandate or do you sort of embrace both the logic and the endpoint that HUD is trying to push everybody towards?

**Mayor:** The logic and the endpoint I embrace. The how you get there, I think it's gray and I think we have the clearest guidance on how you actually make it work, and we're going to have to find our way, we're talking about 400,000 people; it's a city within a city. But I do think the great lesson of the last decade or two is setting the bar, and the public education that goes with it, changing the idea about smoking, goes a long, long way. I think people constantly hearing this is not something you should do in public areas has really changed people's behavior. And I think the message will spread, and I think it will protect people, but it will take work.

**Louis:** The Brevoort Houses, this is a situation where the water was just out for at least 10 days, and people, the thing that I think affected me the most was that notion, even seniors were out hauling their own water, didn't even think that there was a place that they could go to sort of

raise a cry of urgent alarm, which to me spoke to I guess a situation where I guess they just didn't feel like the city was there for them.

**Mayor:** Well, look, the Housing Authority is its entity and we try and support them in a lot of ways, but that said, this was an unacceptable situation. It derived, as you know, from an attempt to repair the water system that, somehow, lead to a breakdown. So some kind of normal maintenance as far as I understand that lead to a breakdown. I don't have all the specifics about the response, clearly no one should have had to seek water that way, I'm going to find out what happened, from my point of view it's not acceptable. There needs to be a clear paradigm to get people water in their homes and not have to go looking for it. The situation has been resolved, the situation is fixed, but I don't take that lightly, that's the kind of thing we can't see happen again.

**Louis:** Okay, before I let you go, you're going to New Orleans this weekend?

**Mayor:** Yes.

**Louis:** You never need an excuse to go to New Orleans but there is this thing called Netroots Nation which is a – a sort of a left-of-center political gathering, skews a little bit towards younger people. What are you going to be doing there?

**Mayor:** So Netroots is one of the preeminent progressive gatherings every year in this country and it's a chance to talk about how we build a progressive movement that's going to have a huge ramification for New York City and beyond. I'm going to go there and talk about some of things we've done in New York and the impact it's making and get to know a lot of other people who are trying to create the same kind of changes around the country because, you know, while we're fighting the political battles at the national level, a lot of the most profound change is happening very locally and we all need to share those ideas and figure out what works. So, to me, it's a very important place to keep furthering a progressive vision.

**Louis:** Okay, bring back some beignets—

**Mayor:** There we go. Okay, just for you Errol.

**Louis:** We will see you next week! Thanks a whole lot.

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