



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10007

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**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON HOT 97**

**Ebro Darden:** ... it's also a confusing issue for some, who either, you know, I mean, look for many generations, weed was a criminal act. It was, you know, for some people – I've got aunts and uncles that think weed is as bad as cocaine and heroin. So, how are you balancing all of this for, you know, people who don't quite understand where the city and state is going?

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Well, Ebro, I really appreciate you leading in that way because I got to tell you – you know, I've got 8.6 million constituents and there is a broad range of views and some of it is definitely generational and some of it is the difference between say a parent and the view they may have about their child versus someone just thinking about their own life – that's really important to recognizing this. But when you really get to the core of this, it's time to legalize marijuana – too much injustice has been associated with laws against marijuana and we finally have proof that we can legalize in a safe way because we've seen what's happened in other states and that's what I really wanted to make sure that there was a safe way to do it. Here's what we have to avoid – we have to avoid this becoming another corporate payday –

**Darden:** Yeah.

**Mayor:** We have to avoid this becoming another situation where corporate America takes over and starts pushing a product. That's what the tobacco industry did, that's what the pharmaceutical manufacturers did with opioids. It had devastating negative effects, and if that happens then the money that should flow to the communities negatively affected by marijuana laws will go exactly the opposite way to the one percent, so part of what I want to make sure, Ebro, is we got it right, we have a chance to get this right at the beginning with the right laws and we did not end up just saying "okay, it's legal, good luck" in which case corporate America will undoubtedly take over.

**Darden:** I will say this from myself, being very close to this issue for many years, and knowing obviously both people who have been a part of the legalization process and also people in my family who were criminalized by this, and then even people who I know in my family that thought they could open a legal business and just – they're not business owners, so they ended up failing and their business got bought out and corporations came in anyway. You know, there are

several things to discuss here, the first one I want to get to is – while, I’m for, you know, the expungement of records of people who are locked up for non-violent, especially non-violent, first-time offenders, right, who are locked up for marijuana charges – how are we going to address, you know, either getting people out of jail or expunging old charges?

**Mayor:** So, Ebro. I want to speak to both the points you raised, expungement, but also the point before about the family members who tried to start the business. The only way we stop this from becoming a corporate takeover is to not only establish rules that say the communities adversely affected have the right, the first right, to the business opportunities by limiting the size of the kind of companies and the type of companies that come in, create an environment where this has to be based on small-business, community-based business, and then actually providing the capital, you know, providing the opportunity for people to get the loans or whatever they need to get started—

**Darden:** There you go, there you go.

**Mayor:** —it is, but we’ve got to be clear about this – we’re starting an industry from scratch. We’ve never had – I can’t imagine, sort of, the moment we have here, we weren’t able to do it at the beginning of the tobacco industry, the pharmaceutical industry, and the opioid – you know, even things like, very different things like Uber, Airbnb – they just, they were there, there were no rules, they were just suddenly there. This one’s entirely different.

**Darden:** Now, de Blasio? When – okay, first, when will this recreational legalization take place.

**Mayor:** So I think it’s going to take place on April 1st, in the State Legislature, but that’s far from certain, I just – what I would bet on, but what I’m saying to the state legislature is get these rules in place. Don’t just legalize and say “oh, we forgot to do all these rules and come up with some way to do it right.” Don’t vote for it until you put the rules in place, and they can do that in the next month, but it has to be about making sure the capital, the resources, go to the communities affected and then that money circulates in the community and empowers the community and helps people who are really victimized by this. To your point about criminal justice, we have to expunge the records, automatically, of low-level offenders, non-violent offenders, and for folks who are now incarcerated because of those same offenses, we have to determine a way to get them out and just erase that huge mistake, and I think there’s a way to do that, the state has the power, this is – and again, this is an amazing opportunity. We are present at the creation of something entirely different.

**Darden:** Yeah, it’s a big deal.

**Mayor:** But if people – here’s my fear. And Congressman – excuse me, Councilman Ydanis Rodriguez said this yesterday. It’s true that for middle class, upper middle class white people it’s already de-facto legalized.

**Darden:** That’s right.

**Mayor:** They no longer get in trouble for it.

**Darden:** That's right.

**Mayor:** So if the impulse in the state and in the legislatures. Oh let's just, let's just create the equality of everyone can use it, but not address the underlying issues of injustice, and what was broken in our criminal justice system. Not expunge, not create economic opportunity. If all they do is legalize it. People will feel good in the first instance and then they'll realize we're in a whole new problem that we could have avoided.

**Darden:** And with that and the reason I brought that up is important to balance too, right. Because I believe there are more people that can hear our voices right now whose families are unaffected, right? Because they are white, because they are wealthy, because they've been smoking weed anyway and not getting in trouble for it. They don't relate to the whole decriminalization expungement talk. What they do relate to though is the health and wellness talk. So anybody who is on the fence about the benefits to health and wellness and even helping addicts overcome some of their addictions, helping people who suffer from epilepsy, cancer patients, people in pain, arthritis, people with sleep issues, other mental health issues, right. There's a lot of health and wellness benefits. So if you are in opposition and don't understand, you probably also need to understand health and wellness benefits to the great community through this opportunity.

**Mayor:** Ebro, that's right. And I agree with that. That's a very important point that has been obscured by the legal dynamics for many, many years. The flip side is also important to recognize. Like any kind of drug some people have a propensity to get dependent on that can be a challenge. Driving under the influence of marijuana is different than driving under the influence of alcohol, but it still comes with real dangers.

**Darden:** That's right.

**Mayor:** So, part of this is coming to grips with the reality. Because this has been like the biggest don't ask, don't tell in history, right. Everyone has been out there using marijuana and somehow it's not been legal.

**Darden:** De Blasio, de Blasio I saw your college photos man. I know you was rolling up. And now you can be open about it, man. I mean listen [inaudible].

**Mayor:** I cannot tell a lie Ebro. It's true, but it was a brief moment in my life and it just didn't do it for me to be honest and I moved on with my life. But the fact here is just as we should be very open and honest about the medicinal qualities and the positives. We should also be open and honest that there are real health considerations and things to be concerned about and people need to get educated about that. I would like to believe in the legal context. We can have a very different conversation. When it was illegal but widely used, people were really not coming to grips with both the positive elements, and the problems that associated with health and marijuana. This is a chance to actually have an honest societal conversation. We're having that much more for example on mental health. We need to have that with marijuana as well.

**Darden:** So, will there be classes? Will there be training? Will there be something that New York City that you're in control of – because there is obviously a lot with this that you don't actually – that you can voice on but you don't necessarily control it until the law is set by the state. But is there something that you want to do with your team to make sure that the communities and the people who have interests in running actual business and learning the business as well as learning all of the [inaudible], and auxiliary ways to create businesses around this opportunity, right. Because you have people who are in the oil business, people who are growing, people who are in the different types of flower of the marijuana. You have massage oils and different businesses that come with this opportunity. Is the city going to be supporting some sort of workshops, business incubators something?

**Mayor:** Yeah, that's exactly the direction that we want to go in. And if you look at the report that we put out yesterday it's literally a road map for how the City of New York can manage this change productively and it talks about health, safety, economic opportunity, justice, making sure that the sins of the past are addressed. All of that is in there, and we wanted a road map. We didn't just want to talk about it like let's see what happens. We wanted an exact road map and we have laid it out now. But one of the things is absolutely right in what you're saying. If we're going to create economic justice, if we're going to create opportunity for those who were victimized, and those who have been historically left out, we have to actually help support that. That's why I said yes it is providing people the ways to understand how they get in the business, providing the low interest loans. Providing all the support to facilitate it being a small and community based business approach as opposed to a big corporate approach. We have to be actors of that. All we need is a state law that gives New York City and all of the other local areas of the state the ability to do a lot of things and do it the right. The State obviously has the decision here. And the State should set the broad ground rules. But we need a muscular approach here in New York City to create this kind of justice economically and we need the power to do that.

**Darden:** So I guess, you said April. You got the plan rolled out. We're going to deal with the criminal justice stuff which is always going to get pundits. So, I'm going to tell everybody who can hear my voice right now, be patient because the legal aspects of getting people out of jail and expunging records is going to require all of us who actually vote, and those of you who haven't been active voting to stay on the necks of people who represent us at the State level and the City level even giving you, Mayor de Blasio – yanking your chain a lot and rattling your cage to make sure that this issue keeps getting brought up and we get to some solutions, correct?

**Mayor:** Correct, Ebro, that's called democracy. I endorse it. The idea is – yeah, a lot of people who have felt that our political system doesn't serve their interests, doesn't respond to their needs – they have a lot of reason to say that. Well here's a chance to see some action that actually may reflect the will of the people and the needs of the people finally.

And I think you're right, everyone who cares – register to vote, get involved, make your voice heard. If you want to see this go faster, if you want to see those records expunged, if you want to see economic opportunity for communities that have been treated unfairly, if you want to see people let out of prison for these low-level offenses it's going to take political pressure from the grassroots. That's where change always comes from.

So, people should get in the game now because this is a really historic moment and we have a chance to get a lot of things right.

**Darden:** Mayor de Blasio – the weed report as it will be known now, we will get de Blasio on once a month as we approach this moment in history. People’s brains haven’t really wrapped around what’s happening. We live in New York City. Ten years ago stop-and-frisk – you was getting thrown in the bin, bro, for a blunt – a blunt. Now, we’re on the phone with the Mayor trying to figure out how to work our way out of that.

Now, I do – I must say to everybody who can hear my voice, you will not be able to walk down the street and smoke marijuana, the same way you can’t walk down the street and drink alcohol. It will be treated the same. If you’re under – the age will be 21, right de Blasio?

**Mayor:** Correct, 21.

**Darden:** If you’re not 21 you won’t be able to walk into a facility and purchase. You also must have a license to sell. Yes, it is a business. We live in America, ladies and gentlemen. To go out and make money doing anything, you need to have a license. If you are selling weed without a license, they will still be locking your ass up.

If you’re behind the wheel of a car with any substance, just like when you get those prescription pills and it says, do not operate a vehicle. If you’re behind the wheel with alcohol, if you’re behind the wheel with weed, you will still be in trouble. If you and your bonehead friends are blocking the walkway of a building, smoking weed, it will still be a problem. If you’re sitting on my stoop –

[Laughter]

– smoking weed while my kids is trying to come in and out of our building, it will still be a problem. Did I cover everything, de Blasio?

**Mayor:** Ebro, I’ve never heard you so eloquent. No, this is what we call news you can use. This is the truth. There’s not a utopia here, and it’s not going to be a situation where there aren’t rules because everyone needs those rules to have a city and a society that works. So, that’s exactly right what you laid out.

Now, I want to remind you, just like we got rid of the broken policy of stop-and-frisk so young people, particularly young men of color, are not being confronted all the time even though they did nothing; just like we said we would no longer arrest for low-level possession of marijuana, more recently we’re no longer arresting for smoking in public.

It’s still illegal. There’s still a summons. You have to pay your summons. It’s real money and –

**Darden:** If you don’t pay your summons, if you don’t show up and pay your summons, that turns into a warrant.

**Mayor:** Exactly right, and then that can be an arrest. And that's where – what we've tried to do exactly in the spirit of what you said, is move away from a really punitive and unfair system while still keeping some standards. Because as we said in the beginning, there's a lot of people in this city who are not comfortable with public smoking of marijuana particularly when it comes to their families, their kids. And the law is trying to strike a balance between the different interests and the different needs. That's actually what democracy is supposed to do. So, the good news is we're not trying to lock anyone up but if you smoke in public, you will get a summons. You need to pay that summons. If you don't pay that summons, if you were a repeat offender, then a warrant that can lead to an arrest. So, people are being given lots of chances to get it right and just follow the rules the right way –

**Darden:** Now, Mayor, this is what we got to have though – on the day that it becomes illegal, maybe the first month –

**Mayor:** The day it becomes legal?

**Darden:** Yeah, the day or the month after it becomes legal, I'm going to need everybody's patience because people will be running in the streets just smoking weed to just see what happens, alright. It's going to happen.

And then everybody's going to get used to it. It's going to calm down and it will become normal and everybody will chill out. But that first month, is going to be – there's going to be some boneheads, some nutjobs, some rabble rousers, trolls, people who like to cause problems that will be doing things. So, Mayor, I just want to put you on notice to let the team and everybody know that that first – we're going to have a celebration. It's going to be a celebration in the streets.

**Mayor:** Well, Ebro, we are realists here in New York City. The good news is what you said – I think we're going to have a new law, people are going to get used to it. We got to get the new law right.

But I want – there's one other thing we should celebrate related to this as we close out 2018. This is something I want all New Yorkers to really feel because we said this could be a safe city while being a more just and fair city –

**Darden:** That's right.

**Mayor:** That the unfairness was actually not only dividing us and making us less safe, here's a fact from the last year that blows me away still. In 2017, the NYPD has 100,000 fewer arrests from four years earlier. 100,000 fewer people were arrested than four years earlier and crime went down, and they have continued to decrease the number of people arrested. And I want to give a lot of credit to Commissioner O'Neill and the folks at NYPD and there's a belief that neighborhood policing and working with the community is actually the way forward for both safety and justice. They are proving it, arresting fewer and fewer people and continuing to drive down crime. And this is the way of the future.

**Darden:** Yeah, shout out to Jimmy O. Shout out to – what’s the other guy’s name? [Inaudible] Monahan, shout out to Monahan, man.

**Mayor:** Terry Monahan.

**Darden:** Monahan is the homie. Listen, the NYPD is trying to do their best. There’s obviously – we gotta at some point de Blaz when it’s appropriate, the Pantaleo – Eric Garner , you know, officer, and how that’s going to play out over the next year of making sure that has some closure. I’d love to hear your insight on that when the time – I don’t think you can speak on it right now but –

**Mayor:** We will come back on that for sure and that issue will be resolved next year.

**Darden:** Thank you very much. Let’s go – the weed report with de Blasio.

**Mayor:** Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, everybody.

**Darden:** Smoke a tree, you know what I mean.

[Laughter]

**Mayor:** I’m not going to endorse everything Ebro says, but I’m –

[Laughter]

Happy Holidays.

**Darden:** Take care, Happy Holidays, enjoy your family – send my love.

**Mayor:** Take care.

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