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

**Errol Louis:** Welcome back to Inside City Hall. It's Monday, and that means my first guest tonight is Mayor Bill de Blasio. He joins us from inside City Hall in the Blue Room. Welcome, Mr. Mayor, good to see you.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Literally, inside City Hall, Errol.

**Louis:** Let me start by – when you were with us last week, the news about Attorney General Schneiderman broke while you were sitting in the studio. At the end of the week – a second conviction for Sheldon Silver. I guess it's bad for business when these things happen. What is your sense though of what it takes – not reforms and moving around this law, or that regulation, or this piece of scrutiny – but what does it take to get people to understand that there's an affirmative need to act in an ethical manner every day of the year?

**Mayor:** I think about this a lot, because it's painful to see people who a lot of us held in good regard suddenly no longer be here. Look, first and foremost, their victims, whether it is the taxpayers in one case, or these women who suffered such indignities in the other case – that's who we think of first. But, you're right, it's also corrosive of the public trust and we need to do so much more to rebuild the public trust.

I think there's a variety of answers. I think it's constant training and ethics, something we do here on a regular basis to remind people of all the limits and make sure they're living within them. The disclosure laws are very helpful – things like financial disclosure are a good part of that. I think – you know, I was thinking about it in terms of the City reality, I could argue strongly that a positive in this city has been term limits – something I believe in, has been very helpful in the context of New York City because it does not give anyone a sense of, they hold an office for life.

And let's face it, in some of these instances, these were folks who were in office a long, long time, had gotten maybe a sense of entitlement. I think in the case of my office, for example – two terms, and then you know you're off to do something else is actually a good balancing factor in keeping people focused and not creating that sense of entitlement. So, there's a lot we've got to do. I think obviously, any sign of any impropriety, you know, having a culture that calls it out immediately – that creates discipline. I think that's a healthy thing as well.

So, we've got a lot we can do, but the really important thing is we need more civic participation, and if people looking to be involved see things like this, it's often discouraging. I truly believe that the real connected point here is to fix our voting system, reform our electoral laws so it's easier to register, easier to vote, do the kind of public financing that we'll be proposing in the fall here in New York City to take money out of politics – I think that's going to be an important step in creating a cleaner dynamic –

**Louis:** Do you think there should be term limits for State offices?

**Mayor:** I don't have a specific position on that yet. I only want to say what I know from here. I think term limits has helped here.

**Louis:** Okay.

**Mayor:** And I think when no one feels that they own an office, if you will –

**Louis:** Right.

**Mayor:** – And we know some people have been many, many terms in the executive branch or in the legislative branch. There's something good and humbling about knowing you have it for a brief period of time, do all you can with it, but it ain't yours.

**Louis:** Yeah, absolutely. I understand, I guess on a related note, that you have some news to announce about steps that will be taken to deal with sexual harassment complaints that the City is going to be forming a new strategy to deal with it in the private sector.

**Mayor:** Well, that's right, Errol. I mean, look, we have a lot of work to do in the public sector and we will do that for sure. We are going to be re-training all of our employees, we're going to be doing annual reporting on what we're doing in the way of follow-up and consequences, we're creating a single, uniform standard, a more rigorous standard for all City agencies. But let's face it, the public sector has been, in a very aggressive way – certainly the case in New York City – recognizing these issues and acting on it.

The private sector in many cases has lagged far behind, and we need to be more aggressive. So, I signed legislation last week. I want to thank the City Council for their leadership as well. We increased the statute of limitations. We made clear that all private sector companies have to provide training of what it means to not engage in sexual harassment of any kind. But we also need teeth in this equation, so what we're starting is a new unit at the Human Rights Commission here in the City. It may very well be the first in the nation of its kind. We're actually looking around the see if there's anything that parallels it elsewhere. But it's a unit specifically focused on sexual harassment in the private sector, with a clear message that those in the private sector – and we've seen it so horribly in the entertainment industry, for example – those who are victims of sexual harassment, that they can come forward to our City Human Rights Commission, that there's a dedicated staff that will take their complaint, follow up, that there are real consequences for a company that tolerates sexual harassment – major penalties up to a quarter-million dollars that can be fined either to the company or to the individual who did the harassment – and also the ability to mandate retraining in a company, and other moves.

We need this kind of teeth in our relationship to the private sector, and I hope what it'll do is send a message far and wide in the private sector of this city, millions and millions of employees, that sexual harassment is not tolerated in New York City, and if anyone engages in it, there will be consequences, and if a company doesn't deal with the fact that it's happening on their watch, there will be consequences for that company.

**Louis:** Okay, that sounds very interesting. We'll look to see what happens with the Commission on Human Rights with regard to that. Let me switch topics. At some point, we have talked over the years about the marijuana arrests. Advocates have said and they have shown numbers now that come, in fact, directly from the NYPD, showing that there's really a disconnect between the number of complaints about marijuana use and who ends up getting arrested for that use. The City Council has come up with numbers, the New York Times did an analysis, Politico did an analysis, and it shows pretty consistently that, in areas that are overwhelmingly white, an overwhelming and certainly a disproportionate number of the arrests in those same communities for pot smoking tend to be Black and Latino and mostly young men.

At what point do we sort of acknowledge that as a fact and start working on some solutions?

**Mayor:** Well, Errol, we have to do better, there's no question about it. And I would say, if you're looking at the big picture, we have driven down the number of arrests overall. Literally, in 2017, there were about 100,000 fewer arrests overall than just three years earlier while we've been driving down crime. We've reduced marijuana arrests specifically by about 37,000-38,000 since four years ago. Obviously, we stopped arrests for low-level possession.

Those are real elements of progress, but I take to heart that we just have to do better. That's my message to all New Yorkers. We have got to continue to drive down the arrests. We've got to look at other policy changes that will help us do that. I don't accept disparity. I really don't.

I do think a number of the arrests are fueled by complaints in communities. I do think that's an honest truth, but that doesn't answer the whole question. If the disparity continues, it's not acceptable. And I've talked to Commissioner O'Neill about this. I think he feels strongly as well. He said some of this today at the hearing at the City Council – that he does not want to see the status quo continue either. Look, we proved you can radically reduce arrests while bringing down crime.

We proved that you could identify areas where you can no longer arrest and still have a safe, orderly environment. We've got to go farther and we'll certainly have a lot more to say on that in coming weeks because people should not have the fear of this disparity. This is not what I signed up for in terms of making sure we have a city that gets fairer and fairer all the time. It's going to be the fairest big city in America. That's my goal. People have to feel and have to see that policing is being applied consistently across all different types of communities.

**Louis:** The way you're talking about it sounds similar to how I think about it, that this is not a marijuana question, it's a fairness question, because even if you change the law so that having almost any amount of marijuana for use was not a crime, if the stops are pre-textual in the first place then the cops are going to find some other reason. It'll be open-container, it'll be suspicious movement, it will be bulge in your pants, or some other kind of thing. That's really the heart of the problem, isn't it?

**Mayor:** Fairness has to be the standard. Now to be fair, since you raise stops, look at the good news that speaks to this on stop-and-frisk. That number is down about 93 percent since four years ago. That had been – the stop-and-frisk policy had been a huge driver of negative interaction between police and community and clearly discriminatory interaction because it overwhelmingly was about young people and particularly young men of color. Now, that's changed profoundly.

So, again, there's a lot of indicators of how quickly we can change while being effective at keeping the city safe but you're right. The question across the board – I don't care if it's about marijuana or any other category – is there has to be an atmosphere of fairness.

And you know we've talked about safety in these terms. People need to both be safe and feel safe. It's something that both Bill Bratton and Jimmy O'Neill have been really clear about. Both of those matter.

Some times we've created the reality and shown the statistics that prove that people are safe but they still don't feel it yet. Well, the same thing in terms of fairness. The numbers, the facts have to prove there's consistency and fairness, and people have to feel it is the governing philosophy and it's felt all the way down to the individual officer.

I think the retraining of the entire police force on things like de-escalation has helped. Implicit bias training which is starting now in a big way, I think will help a lot in this vein too but we've got to look at the whole realm of policy options because we have to achieve a kind of policing in this city that everyone can see as fair and consistent.

**Louis:** Okay, that is a message directly from the Mayor to all law enforcement who are listening.

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**Louis:** Welcome back to Inside City Hall. I'm speaking with Mayor Bill de Blasio. Mr. Mayor, I want to go back to another law enforcement question. There was recently some reporting about the Sex Crimes Unit and how there's a backlog of 1,400 cases and the backlog seems to be getting bigger. The case load are far-outstripping the personnel that are assigned according the deputy chief who is in charge of that unit. I'm wondering what action is going to be taken in the Police Department to deal with that.

**Mayor:** Well, we're absolutely going to deal with it, Errol. So, a couple of things are happening. We see a lot more reporting and it's a sad reality but it is in the end something in its own way positive that more people are coming forward, obviously, overwhelmingly women. More people are coming forward and saying they've been victimized and they're standing up and they're providing the information.

That is so important as a matter of justice but it's also important in terms of stopping the perpetrators who will only victimize others if we don't get to them. So the reporting is a good thing but it indicates some really painful realities we as a society have to deal with.

Well, yeah, so that means more work to be done. The mandate the Commissioner O'Neill has given to Chief Dermot Shea, who is now the Chief of Detectives and has Special Victims under his purview, is to look top to bottom at that unit, decide what it needs in terms of policy, in terms of personnel, resources. Whatever that unit needs it's going to get.

I believe that Special Victims is a crucial, crucial element of the NYPD. There's more work to be done than ever. We need to get these perpetrators. We need to show the survivors that there are real consequences. Whatever Chief Shea and Commissioner O'Neill come back to me with and say is the need, we're going to make sure they have the resources.

**Louis:** Nobody is in favor of cheap symbolism but because these are crimes that are largely perpetrated against women and children, should there be a woman in the command staff who is intimately involved in making these decisions?

**Mayor:** Well, first of all, there have been women and men chiefs of Special Victims over time, as best I understand. And there's obviously women and men in the hierarchy of the NYPD. So, there's a lot of voices at the table making sure that the right policies are in place. Most central is the fact that I'm 100 percent committed to making sure the resources are there. And that review will be done quickly and whatever is needed will be provided to that unit.

**Louis:** Okay, new topic. There's been a scramble to fill the vacancy created by last week's resignation by Eric Schneiderman for attorney general. Have you spoken with Letitia James, your successor as public advocate, who seems to be – whose name was mentioned almost immediately? And do you plan to take a position on who ought to fill that position?

**Mayor:** Well, at some point for sure I will certainly sit down with Tish James. She is obviously one of the most, or the most prominent candidate so far in this process. The legislature is going to make its own choice but much more important is the regular electoral process because the timing of this horrible situation that occurred last week still puts us in the normal electoral calendar for the primary and the general election.

So, clearly, that's where the ultimate decision will be made. I will take a position before the primary and I'll be taking a position on other matters in New York State politics before the primary. Not ready to do that today but of course I will certainly sit down with Tish James and hear her out.

**Louis:** The other big name that comes up frequently and generates a lot of excitement is Preet Bharara, who has never run for office before. Do you think this is something that might be a good fit for him?

**Mayor:** I don't conjecture on that type of thing. He'd have to say obviously if he wanted to be a candidate and then we could all get to know what his vision is. I don't know if it's something he wants to do or not.

**Louis:** In addition to being a Democrat, you're a Working Families Party candidate. Do you plan to be at the convention this weekend and have you talked with them about how they're going to get involved in all of this?

**Mayor:** Well, look, I am a proud Democrat and I also have a proud, long history with the Working Families Party. I believe that the Working Families Party has contributed a lot of good to the state, a lot of progressive change has come from the Working Families Party and I'll continue to support them as an important part of the equation. I haven't been doing much with party conventions in the state but I can tell you that I'm going to be active in the Democratic Party but I'm also going to support the notion that the Working Families Party has been a really positive contributor over the last 20 years and should be for a long time to come.

**Louis:** Okay, I understand you are heading to Washington, D.C. tomorrow to speak at the Center for American Progress' Big Ideas Conference. What's your big idea?

**Mayor:** Well, I'm not going to steal the thunder, Errol. But I am going to talk about the changes that have been made at the local level here and how big a part of that is now in social change in America that the world has really flipped. When you and I were coming up, in many ways the federal government was the driver of the big changes in our society and was the innovator of progressive policies. Now, more and more, the last place you'd look is the federal government for change.

The first place you look is the most local level and what's happening here in New York City, whether it is, you know, the way we ended stop-and-frisk and created neighborhood policing, or whether it's Pre-K and 3-K for All, or the biggest affordable housing program in the history of the country, or ThriveNYC – mental health access for all – I mean, these are big changes that effect millions of people and they're happening at the local level and nowhere else, and other cities are doing their own versions of these big changes, and this is going to add up to something very important in the coming years. So, I'm going to give a bit of a sense of how this is all developing and where it's taking us.

**Louis:** Okay, and because no good deed goes unpunished, you know that people on the other side of the building from you – over on the City Council side – who have published a letter and who have said more than once, including the Speaker, that they think your current executive budget is too rich – that it's spending too much, it's increasing the headcount too quickly, it's imposing costs that the City can't or shouldn't shoulder at this moment. Are you prepared to negotiate with the progressive City Council over downsizing government?

**Mayor:** Look, I was a City Council member for eight years. I inherently respect the Council, I respect Speaker Johnson, but I also have a job to do, and my job is to make sure we provide the services that New Yorkers need every day. So, I always challenge people who are critical of the budget. I say, okay, do you want to take back the 2,000 new police officers on patrol? I don't think so. I don't think hardly any New Yorkers would want to take that back because it's helped us become the safest big city in America.

Do you want to take back 1,000 pre-K teachers, and more to come as we build out 3-K? Do you want to take away early childhood education for four-year-olds and three-year-olds? I don't think most New Yorkers want to do that. I don't think most Council Members want to do that.

When you go down the list, we provided more special education teachers so more and more families that have a kid with special needs could get the services they deserve and not have to fight in court for them. Go down the list. It's things that I think people really believe are

important, and we've tried to address a lot of long-standing problems that often went ignored in this city. So, I'm going to argue that we've actually created a budget that fits the times we're living in – happens to have been also helpful in creating the biggest, strongest economy we've had in a long time. We're close to 4.5 million jobs, and that – if you think about it, one of the biggest goals of local government is the make sure the economy is strong. We have a strong tax base, a lot of jobs for people – well, that comes from safety – public safety is crucial – good school system, good municipal services. Talk to people in the business community – I think they would say they're seeing a lot of that now. There's always more to be done, but they're seeing it.

So, I don't see that easy thing to cut. I think we are on the right track. And, by the way, we have over \$5 billion in reserves, the most the City has ever had in our history. So, we're being fiscally responsible at the same time.

**Louis:** Okay, very good. We'll see what they have in the way of specific recommendations for cuts. In our last minute, earlier today, you may have heard the Supreme Court struck down a law that widely prohibited many states from legalizing sports betting. That now opens the door for you to possibly legally bet against the Yankees, or whatever it is you might want to do. Do you think there are some benefits for the City in such an idea?

**Mayor:** I'm not sure yet. Gambling always makes me queasy, because I think for a lot of people it's an addiction, and for a lot of people, including folks of very limited means, it can be economically ruinous to them and their families. So, it's hard to get entirely excited about it. We have to look at it clinically. If the new legal reality is, this is going to be allowed everywhere; we obviously have to think about what it means for New York City and how to play the appropriate role. But, you know, it's one of those realities that should be looked at with a certain amount of caution in my book.

**Louis:** Okay, we will leave it there. Enjoy your trip. We will see you next Monday. Thank you for spending some time with us.

**Mayor:** Thank you, Errol.

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