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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. As we talked about before the break, Mayor de Blasio has had strong words for Governor Cuomo all day, saying that his statement in response to multiple sexual harassment accusations is not sufficient. Meanwhile, New York is marking a sober milestone. The anniversary of the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in New York State. Mayor de Blasio joins me now from the Blue Room inside City Hall to talk about all of that and more. Good evening, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good evening, Errol. I know we got a lot to talk about, but I just want to offer my personal condolences to you and your family on the loss of your dad, Edward. And also, just thank you. Thank your family, on behalf of the people in New York City. He served this city at the NYPD for a long time and rose to the rank of precinct commander. And did a lot of good for this city. So, I just wanted to honor him and thank your family for all he did. And we, I know we will all miss him.

Louis: Thank you. Thank you very much for that. He will indeed be missed. Onto the news of the evening. Mr. Mayor, you've been very vocal about the allegations against the Governor. Today, in fact, you said words to the effect that he may not be able to continue to govern. I'm wondering what makes you draw that conclusion?

Mayor: Errol look, first we heard extraordinary information about the nursing home scandal coming from his own staff. That they withheld information that has real ramifications for what happened to thousands of people, thousands of our elders we lost, and we don't even know why. We don't know the truth of why they withheld information, why they took the actions they took. Did it connect to their political needs, their media needs? Did it connect to their campaign contributions? We don't know. But we know those families are missing their loved ones. That was bad enough. Then you know, two women have come forward with very detailed accounts of sexual harassment. This is the kind of thing that should never happen in today's society anywhere, but particularly where someone is entrusted with leadership and who's supposed to look out for the rights of women. To see that someone may have literally used their power over a young woman, the fact that she was an employee, to try to insinuate, you know, she should have a sexual relationship with him. That's certainly how Charlotte Bennett heard it. And I don't blame her given the details that we've heard. That sounds exactly like what was being said. And this is unacceptable behavior. So, if these allegations are proven true, how does the Governor look the people in New York State in the eye and say, I'm an honest broker, I'm trustworthy after these kinds of things? So, you know, of course we need a full investigation, but I'm saying if that's what we find out to be true – just think about it. You ask tough questions of every elected official

who comes before you rightfully. But you require in those answers, a certain level of truths. Some kind of continuity has to be kept that a leader is leveling with people, is working from some standard of integrity. If someone could use their power to try to get someone to do sexual favors for them because they are in their employment? I mean, come on. That's just not acceptable behavior in today's society.

Louis: So, how do we – I mean, look in New York, we don't have the kind of recall provisions they have in a place like California. We have laws on the books around impeachment, which, you know, the New York Post and others have been calling for, but that's really it. We've only done it once in like, 300 years. It really doesn't work here either. The other forums that come to mind are frankly, an election next year. Is that the right place to settle this and have voters express what they think about the Governor's behavior?

Mayor: Look, that's a long way away. I would say this, there has to be some decency here. If these allegations prove to be true, and if it's true as I believe, that then the Governor becomes invalidated. You know, this is a choice he has to make. I don't speculate on these other possibilities, all the procedures. I'm just talking about the ramification here. If you don't have the trust of the people anymore, if you can't look people in the eye, what do you do? And again, think about the human reality. Here we are on the one-year anniversary of the first COVID case in this city. And the worst of this, the worst of this crisis is what happened to the nursing homes. That was the State's responsibility. And thousands of people died. We still don't know why, we still don't know what was done. We still don't know why it wasn't handled differently. We don't know what it means for the future, Errol. We don't know if our seniors are safe now, still under State regulation. We don't know because there hasn't been a full accounting. What we do know is information was withheld. Why do we know that? Because the Governor's top aide told us. So, this is a trust crisis if ever I've seen one, a crisis of confidence. And continues to be proven, I mean, the Governor has to come to grips with this.

Louis: Is this going to affect the people of New York? I mean, I would ask, is this going to affect your relationship in your ability to get things done? But that relationship was far from perfect in the first place.

Mayor: In large measure, because I had experienced many different realities that showed not the decent sort of what I would call, normal way that people are supposed to relate to each other in government. Where you can disagree. People can be tough on each other, but the classic reality that we've seen here, this threatening of people, an attempt to undermine people in ways that just don't conform with how things are normally done. I've worked with lots of political leaders. I talk to Chuck Schumer all the time. I talked to Nancy Pelosi. I go down a whole list. I've worked with U.S. presidents, no one acts like this. So, I think this has been going on for a long time, but now it has come out in the open in a way that it never had before.

Louis: Worth noting the names that you called off. None of them are shrinking violets, right? I mean, nobody ever accused Chuck Schumer of not being hard driving, same for Nancy Pelosi, Hillary Clinton and others. Well, let me ask you this? If I can switch topics, you announced today that by the end of March, over 1,700 projects are going to be given a green light to restart, including construction of new schools and park upgrades and libraries, and all kinds of great

stuff. What the CDC has expressed concern of – and this is not just for New York, that relaxing restrictions too soon in various states could actually contribute to a fourth wave of infection. Are you taking that into account and have you run these ideas past your Health Commissioner?

Mayor: Yeah. Everything we're doing, we're working with our health team all along. I mean, I believe in really listening to the health professionals. Obviously, this is another area where I've had frustrations with the Governor. He obviously doesn't listen to his health professionals. I talked to the doctors on my team all the time. And we don't make a move unless we've all talked it through. Construction, obviously an outdoor activity. I mean, if you ask my health care leaders, one of the biggest things we've learned in this COVID crisis is the difference between outdoor and indoor. So, an outdoor activity, a lot of industries, including construction have been really smart about the protocols and safety measures they need to take. So, we can do this in a healthy, safe way. But we have got to bring the city back. We've got to bring people's livelihoods back. And we had held up these projects originally, as you remember, we had a horrible cash flow crisis when this crisis, when COVID first hit. The impact on our revenue was so severe, so quick that we literally had a cash flow crisis. And we held up on capital spending until we knew we could support it again. Well, now we are convinced we can. And it's essential to the future and the recovery of New York City. And a lot of these things Errol, I talk about recovery for all of us. We're talking about this is what's going to allow us to build schools, to continue the Vision Zero work, to keep people safe on the streets, obviously to fight climate change. These are things we need.

Louis: Will you be tracking COVID numbers in and around these sites to determine if we are indeed seeing a surge?

Mayor: That's what we do all the time with our Test and Trace Corps. Absolutely. We have not had – I mean, you've heard our Test and Trace team answering what they've seen before. We have not seen a particular problem with construction. We will keep an eye on it for sure. And if there's even a single site where there's a problem, we close things down and, you know, make sure everything is addressed. But so far that has not been the case with construction in any real way.

Louis: Okay. Stand by Mr. Mayor. We're going to take a short break. I'll have more with Mayor de Blasio in just a minute. Stay with us.

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Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. I'm once again, joined by Mayor de Blasio. And Mr. Mayor, since the last time we talked your Schools Chancellor announced that he'll be departing. I'm wondering what you think his legacy is, Richard Carranza, in our school system.

Mayor: Look, he led the way, bringing back the biggest school system in America when most cities didn't even dare to try. I mean, that's going to be the number one thing. This city, we were back on our heels. We had to make a decision about our kids and our families and how to support them. I believed 100 percent we should bring our schools back. You know, the Chancellor believed, really from a very human level, that this was crucial for our kids and, you know, got it

done. And before that, of course, going from, you know, a normal school system to suddenly having to go all remote within the course of weeks and getting hundreds of thousands of devices in the hands of kids. I mean, that's going to be remembered and appreciated for a long time.

Louis: I'm struck by the fact that your new Schools Chancellor is the first, in almost a generation really, to have come directly out of the system that she was, you know, sort of actively working her way up through the ranks. And –

Mayor: I'm challenging you. What about Carmen Farina, brother?

Louis: You brought her out of retirement. I mean you –

Mayor: But she came up from teacher all the way up.

Louis: No, understood. Okay. I mean, my point though, do you think there is something about the management of the schools more about the leadership development track that needs to perhaps be changed so that it's maybe the rule and not the exception?

Mayor: Yeah, no, that's a very – look let's go back one mayoralty. I mean, obviously Mike Bloomberg, for reasons I still don't understand, chose four non-educators in a row. That was a mistake across the board. It always should be an educator. But the fact is – or three, I guess one before him. Three in a row and one before him was a non-educator. So, four chancellors in a row. The fact is it should always be an educator and ideally it should be someone who comes out of the New York City public schools. Absolutely. Now, Carmen Farina was an unbelievably great and respected educator. Meisha Ross Porter, people are going to be blown away by how extraordinary her history is, and her vision is. I'm really looking forward to New Yorkers getting to know her. I mean, she's someone who chose to go to the toughest areas of the Bronx and devote herself to helping the kids in the greatest need and proved those schools could work as the executive superintendent of the Bronx. The Bronx alone would be one of the biggest school systems in America if it stood alone. She increased the graduation rate. She reached kids, closed the digital divide. This is an extraordinary educator, but I agree with you, Errol. That should be the norm going forward. So, one of the things I talked about in the State of the City was a new approach to nurturing the talent that can become the superintendents and the executive superintendents, and obviously the future chancellors as well. So, we really want to do more of that leadership development in the New York City public school system.

Louis: To the extent that you're going to hand all of this off to your successor in less than a year, what would you, I guess in a preliminary sense, say you want to preserve about what it is Chancellor Carranza did, that you hope the next mayor will continue?

Mayor: Oh, look, it's – you know, a lot of this was continuity from Carmen Farina to Richard Carranza now absolutely to Meisha Ross Porter, who by the way, was named superintendent – from principal to superintendent by Carmen, from superintendent to executive superintendent by Richard. So, you're going to see a lot of continuity with this vision. Equity and Excellence, I mean, I really just use the phrase because it says so much. The Equity and Excellence vision is Pre-K for All, 3-K for All, Computer Science for All, Advanced Placement courses for all,

taking that, building that out further. We need to do that, bringing the schools back strong, and that's going to be its own massive effort in September. And I fully intend to see schools back full strength in September. But I think it is deepening to the next level, ending the reality that you and I both know from years and years in this city of parents thinking, you know, that school in my neighborhood is a good school, but that school in my neighborhood is a bad school. Like we have to literally blow away that bad history and create a situation where every neighborhood school feels good and positive and acceptable to all parents. And Meisha has proven that even in the places that have the most disadvantages, you can continue to create great schools. She built a school from scratch, and she proved that if you have the right approach, it can work anywhere. And by the way, she was also a key figure in implementing our Bronx Plan. The Bronx Plan was a way of finally getting the most talented teachers to go to where the need was greatest, a plan we came up with working with the UFT. Meisha Ross Porter has been putting it into action. This proves we can take equity and excellence to a much higher level.

Louis: Well, I mean, the ugly truth, of course, of a lot of this question about what's a good school and what's a bad school in the minds of many parents, simply tracks with, frankly, the racial composition of the families that attend that school. Which is how you end up with some of the skews that we see and in your old district, District 15, and in a number of other places around the city. This was something that the chancellor, Chancellor Carranza, talked about often and wanted to make a kind of a frontal attack on. How did that go and what should the next mayor do about it?

Mayor: I think we just keep going. I think, you know, the two points I'd say, in fact, I agree with your statement in the eyes of some, and those folks are misguided. Sometimes I look at it solely through the prism of race, but I will also say to you, having spent a lot of time in communities of color all over this city, within a community you can have a very clear distinction of what people think is a good school or bad school within their own community even if they're made up of the same exact kinds of kids. I think there's something much bigger to do here. Lay a strong foundation. Obviously, we've done that with pre-K, but now I want to see 3-K become 100 percent universal. You get that kind of foundation, that affects everything. It's much greater investments, continuing to pour money and redistribute funds, bluntly, into communities of color, which we've been doing, but that needs to be supercharged going forward particularly if we get stimulus funding, but I think it's also the equity actions. Look, we tried to get rid of the admissions process for specialized high schools and change it and make them representational. That didn't happen. It will one day. I'm absolutely convinced the status quo is broken. We have started to change the screened schools admission, and you could expect more change in the course of this year, on that front. Gifted and Talented, another system that despite some merits, in many ways, just left out way too many kids and the selections were too arbitrary, a new system coming for Gifted and Talented in September. There's a host of things I think will contribute to greater equity and we intend to do them now. My belief is the next mayor will see that these are the right steps and then build upon them.

Louis: Well, the first flight of kids in the de Blasio pre-K system should be hitting middle school right about now. Do you have hard metrics on how they're doing and how they're fairing compared to if the pre-K system had not been in place?

Mayor: Yeah, you know, we were able to show with – the standardized tests obviously are only one measure and you probably know well that I am very queasy about high stakes testing. I think we always need to look at multiple measures, but they do tell us something. Back before the disruption of the pandemic, we had a chance to see State test scores that actually reflected what kids had learned in pre-K and got to see what it meant that a whole generation of kids was getting Universal Pre-K. And we saw that through third grade tests at that point. And it was striking how much it was helping us start to close that historic achievement gap. There's just not a question in my mind, based on all the evidence we've seen nationally, but even our own evidence from New York City, that this will be a growing phenomenon. As the universality of early child education affects more and more kids in our schools, our entire school system is going to get better. But again, I don't consider that mission completed until 3-K is universal. We're only about halfway there now. What three-year-olds are able to do in our public schools is unbelievable. I mean, it's a time of incredible intellectual openness and absorption and possibility. We got to reach all of them if we really want the public school education of our kids to be as good as they can be. I'm very, very excited about that next step. But yeah, the evidence is pretty damn clear.

Louis: The New York Times had a front-page story announcing the departure of the chancellor, saying that among other things, you and he did not see eye to eye. And that he was pushing harder for desegregation of the schools and that it had caused a rift between you that, his personal tragedies aside, which I think were the immediate cause of his resignation, that was a point of tension between the two of you.

Mayor: Look, you saw very – it was very poignant. I was sitting right there. It was very touching for all of us. Chancellor Carranza, tearing up, talking about the 11 family members, childhood friends he's lost. I mean, I've been talking to them throughout this experience and it's been almost impossible to comprehend, Errol. I remember when he first lost family members, we would talk about it. You know, I would tell him, you know, take the time you need, if you need to be in – if you need time off. And it just got worse and worse, and he's been through so much. We were continuing to do, I think, very good work together but this situation just became insupportable given – for what he was going through personally. And he said, look, I need time to grieve. He just needed a different reality. We've had lots of conversations about how to move this system forward academically and in so many other ways. And we agreed. We agreed we needed to get rid of the Gifted and Talented programs as they're currently structured, get rid of that test. We agreed on the need to act on screened schools. We obviously agreed on specialized high schools. He and I went out there and tried to fight that battle in Albany. You know, that didn't work out, but we tried. So, we had a high level of agreement on the things we have to do, and you know I'm going to just remember how hard he fought for the kids of this city, but I feel sad for him. What he's been through, it's just overwhelming.

Louis: We certainly wish him the best as he tries to, I guess, wrap up his tenure and go deal with those very pressing family problems. Thanks so much for joining us, Mr. Mayor, we'll see you again next week.

Mayor: Thank you.

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