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

**Errol Louis:** Good evening. Welcome to Inside City Hall for Monday, June 22nd, 2020. I'm Errol Louis. The city today entered phase two of the reopening process, which includes outdoor dining, in-store shopping, and the reopening of city playgrounds. This comes a day before primary day, as concerns are raised as well about a sharp increase in shootings, and a big rise in complaints all around the city over fireworks. Joining me now from the Blue Room Inside City Hall to talk about all of this is Mayor Bill de Blasio. Welcome, Mr. Mayor, good to see you.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Thank you very much, Errol. How you doing?

**Louis:** Very well, thanks. Let's talk about the big reopening. A number of things were supposed to be happening. What's your sense of how things are going as of today?

**Mayor:** Yeah, Errol, pretty damn well, actually. So far, so good. I mean, we're obviously going to see how it plays out over the next few days. But my sense is, a lot of people were ready to come back to work. There's particularly enthusiasm, obviously, about the restaurants reopening with the outdoor seating. There's a lot of enthusiasm. I'm one of the people who feel this about the barbershops and the beauty salons. A lot of us have been waiting. And, you know, my sense is people were getting ready and they're finally able to get going. So, it's a good feeling right now.

**Louis:** When will the playgrounds be reopening? I guess specifically, when will the hoops be back that were taken down?

**Mayor:** So, there's a difference between the sporting activities and the playground equipment for kids. So, what we said is only the playgrounds with the playground equipment, the swings and jungle gyms and whatever else, that's what we're focused on right now, particularly focused on, you know, younger kids, parents with kids who've been cooped up. We're going to treat all of the sports activities the same in the coming days. So, whether it's basketball, soccer, tennis, handball, you name it – we're looking at all of that. That's going to be a little more complex because you're talking about older kids, you're talking about adults, you're talking about often a lot more direct contact and contact sports. So, we're working that through right now and hope to say more on that in the next few days.

**Louis:** What is the plan if you start to see infection rates or hospitalization rates start ticking up? What does that mean for – it clearly means we can't advance to another phase, but is there a possibility that we could re-impose some of the restrictions?

**Mayor:** It's always possible. Right now, thank God, Errol, we have not seen the kind of evidence that would make us even consider that. Look, what I think you'll see with the indicators, I go over every day with the people of this city that we're going to see a trend line. If something starts to go in the wrong direction, it's not going to be, you know, overnight, it's not going to be the flicking of a switch. It's something that will develop over a week or two. So, if we start to see a few days of the wrong indicators, I'm going to talk about it, I'm going to warn people, ask people to tighten up. If we saw a sustained period and we blew through those thresholds in our key indicators, that's when we certainly would not be moving on to further phases. And there is even a scenario where you might roll back. But right now, I don't see that. Right now, I've been very impressed. We now have a good look at what two weeks of phase one went like. It went very well, actually. Folks stuck to the face coverings, the social distancing. I think New Yorkers are pretty devoted to it and they know that's the way to get out of this crisis. So, I'm still pretty hopeful.

**Louis:** Okay. Let me switch topics. We saw that the U. S. Attorney for the Southern District was fired. It was a Friday night firing. Some controversy. He resisted at first and the president got involved, but the president says he's not involved. Well, the latest wrinkle in that saga involves you, where it turns out that apparently Jeffrey Berman, the U. S. Attorney who was fired, was under pressure, which he resisted to co-sign a letter criticizing you over your handling – disparate handling, I guess, is what the letter was supposed to say – of protestors compared with how some religious organizations were treated when it came to congregating and gathering. I guess, first of all, did you have any inkling that this letter was being drafted or that this kind of criticism was coming from the White House?

**Mayor:** No, came totally out of the blue, Errol. And I want to say, what they did was absolutely inappropriate. I mean, Jeff Berman was a very good U. S. Attorney, someone I worked very closely with on a number of issues and a guy of real integrity. I mean, he was willing to go at anyone regardless of party and let the facts take him where they did. And he obviously was not afraid to take on members of the Trump inner circle. And so, let's be clear, that's why they fired him. I didn't know about this issue with the Department of Justice and the letter and all until, you know, after DOJ sent us a letter. We didn't think it had anything to do with Jeff Berman, but it was absolutely an inappropriate action to fire him and the very effort to politicize how we're handling, for example, religious observance, where the City and State have been unified with major religious leaders from the Cardinal through leaders of many congregations that we have to take this slow and in smart stages to protect the health of their congregants. So, the whole thing was outrageous.

**Louis:** Okay. Well, I mean politics aside, what about the substance of it? When it came to – I remember there was the funeral up in Williamsburg and you witnessed part of it in person and were very strongly opposed to those kinds of gatherings, and warnings were issued and fines were threatened and so forth. And then we had 25 straight days of protests. And there was not, sort of, a similar kind of cry on public health grounds about people congregating night after night.

**Mayor:** I think it was a very different reality. I think when you're talking about folks dealing with mourning, folks dealing with religious services, things that are a part of life, especially religious services every single week, and not just thousands of people, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, even millions of people, when you add up everyone who goes to all the

religious services in a week in New York City – very, very different than protests that have been in the scheme of things, except for a few days that were truly large, most days it's a few thousand people. That's nothing, that's not anything to scoff at, but it's not anywhere near the scale, anywhere near the impact. And the protests came at a particular moment in history that it was just not going to be realistic to ask people not to do it. But the bottom line going forward is we're working with the religious leaders and they have wanted to be cautious and careful. It's never been contrary. It's always been in coalition with the religious leadership. They shut down the services even more quickly than governments asked them to. So, I really think they're two very different things.

**Louis:** Okay. Before we take a break, I want to ask you your theory about the fireworks. I think we now know this is a citywide phenomenon. It's not just a couple of noisy kids here and there. It sounds like World War II just about every night and it goes shockingly late into the night and we're well past the point of thinking, this is the run up to July 4th. What's going on out there?

**Mayor:** I do think it is a much earlier, much bigger run up to July 4th. I do think July 4th is the nexus still, but it's unlike anything we've ever seen before. It seems to be every part of the city. You're right. Late into the night, really big fireworks too. I'm very worried about it. I'm worried that someone's going to get hurt. Besides the fact it's a nuisance and quality of life problem, I'm really worried that some kid's going to get hurt or someone's going to set something on fire accidentally. I've asked City agencies, a number of agencies to put their heads together and figure out a way to address this. And we're going to have something to say on this very soon. We're going to get into action on this soon because you know what days ago, I thought maybe it was some isolated thing, but no, this is a much bigger phenomenon and we have to address it to keep people safe.

**Louis:** Standby Mr. Mayor, we are going to take a short break now. I'll have more with Mayor de Blasio straight ahead. Stay with us.

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**Louis:** Welcome back to Inside City Hall. I'm once again joined by Mayor de Blasio. Mr. Mayor, I wanted to ask you about a story that's been kind of creeping along – alongside all of the other activity that's going on in the city, which is that, as of this point, we're just about halfway through the year, we've seen a 25 percent rise in homicides. And we know that that's off a very historically low base, on the other hand, that that number is of great concern. Shootings are up as well, a number of other crime categories. I wanted to get your sense of how that fits into all of this. There's talk about defunding the police, reorganizing the police at the same time as we're seeing more bloodshed in the streets.

**Mayor:** Errol, it's such an important question for the city, because, right now, there's something wrong out there. I mean, we're seeing not only a serious uptick in murders, we're seeing an even bigger uptick in shootings, and I'm very worried about it. I have not seen something like this in the entire time I've been mayor. This is a much more pronounced increase. There are definitely reasons for it related to the coronavirus, that we had a substantial period of time when a lot of our officers were out sick. The criminal justice system is absolutely struggling to get back into gear – the court system, the DA's have not been prosecuting, and I think in some cases not been prosecuting things we need them to focus on, like gun violence. There's a lot of things going on

here, but it's adding up in a very troubling fashion, and we've got to address it. So, today, I talked about we're going to be shifting police officers to some of the areas where there's particular problems – Brooklyn North, parts of the Bronx. We're going to continue to move officers out into the field through Summer All Out – you know, away from desk jobs, out to frontline posts. We are going to put more and more resources into Cure Violence, Crisis Management System to hopefully stop shootings before they happen with those grassroots efforts. But, Errol, something's wrong, and as we are trying to address the real issues of justice, I totally honor the fact that we have to do a lot more in the way of reform in the police – more transparency, more accountability, better discipline. There's definitely reforms we have to make and deepen, but I'm worried that they might come at the expense of neighborhood policing. And that's where we have to strike the balance. Neighborhood policing has worked, has been part of the de-escalation strategies, bringing police and community closer together. We need to keep going with that and not reduce the presence of police officers in the places where they're needed to fight violence, while simultaneously in making big changes and reforms. And figuring out how you balance those two, I think, it's the crucial discussion this city has to have right now.

**Louis:** There are a number of agencies. I mean, what you just described are – you know, the number-one agency under your control, of course, is the NYPD, but there are other that can impact this, right? There are other agencies, not just the district attorneys, who are independently elected, but also the parole department, the probation department, there are lots of different players or institutions that can impact this. It's not necessarily a matter of, as they say in criminology, cops on dots, right? I mean, your first response has to be to kind of react and say, okay, what's going on in this neighborhood? But what might be going on in that neighborhood could actually be fairly complex, right?

**Mayor:** There's no question, Errol. You're right. So, first of all, let's face it, there's a certain amount of violence that is people coming out of prison, sometimes trying to settle old scores. That's one reality. The fact that we have no real planning that happens – when prisoners come out of State prison, there's only cursory efforts made to make sure that they end up being brought back into society positively, they have a job, or a housing – that's just not a reality right now. That needs to be addressed. It's actually a big issue, planning to help make sure they don't end up back at violence. So, there's an interconnection there with what Cure Violence tries to do. That movement tries to make sure when people come back, they don't instantly re-engage and retaliate. That's a whole piece of it. The parole process needs to be looked at, unquestionably. This is something Dermot Shea has talked about for years, that the parole process needs to be modernized to help the NYPD protect communities. There's a whole host of elements of that. Those are State pieces. The DA's, as you said, I think we need a clearer discussion in this town about how DA's need to participate, fighting gun violence, because it's very uneven around the five boroughs. And then, obviously, continuing to improve the strategies of policing. And CompStat, we know the value of sort of precision policing – CompStat-driven policing. It has to get better all the time, but then there's the community piece, and here's where I do think trust – I think neighborhood policing really does help the police to fight crime tangibly. It helps information to flow to cops on where there's going to be a problem and helps them get ahead of it. And when that trust is torn up, I think it's a real problem. So, there's so many pieces, Errol. And I'm glad we're looking at all of them here as you and I talk, but I think that the fear I have right now is this upsurge lately is not like what we've seen before. It's deeper. And it is fueled by all the dislocation that's happened with the coronavirus, and to undo it – I mean, we can't see the shootings continue to go up like this for the rest of the year. That's going to endanger a lot every-

day New Yorkers. We've got to figure out how to disrupt it quickly and figuring out what it's going to take for the NYPD to do that and where they need to keep their officers in substantial enough numbers to do that is a crucial, crucial question.

**Louis:** Well, you know, it's interesting, I just assumed because so much of criminal activity is, by definition, parasitic, that they were going to be under a lot of pressure, because the economy was closed down. Like you can't – you know, you can't sell dope out of the back of a bar or a nightclub if that place is closed down. And these are people who, by definition, settle their business disputes with violence. So, I was just kind of assuming there might be some element of that, but I want to focus on something you said – and I want to make sure I don't put words in your mouth or misunderstand you. I thought when it came to prosecuting different crimes, yes, there were five different independently elected district attorneys, they have sort of different nuances in how they handle certain kinds of misdemeanor complaints, how they handle, say, marijuana cases, but I thought that when it came to firearms, when it came to weapons, all of them were pretty tough. And I believe we have some State laws that are supposed to mandate pretty tough treatment for anybody found with a gun. Are you saying that that's not the case?

**Mayor:** From everything I've experienced, no. I think it's very uneven. I think the difference between someone found with a gun – that's a crucial phrase – someone who has a gun, has a loaded gun, whether they use it, whether they don't use it, whether someone's hit or not hit, I think there's a lot of nuance. And the question of how many times someone is arrested with a gun without much consequence is a big issue. There's – I think, Errol, we need a deeper conversation in this city, because it's actually not that many people who cause most of the violence – that is also something we have to keep in mind. This is, I think, sort of, a misunderstanding as people look at the environment in the city – vast, vast majority of people, obviously, are law abiding. Even amongst those who are not law abiding, most don't do serious violence. But those who do, those have a propensity to carry a gun, use a gun, there's not enough follow through. And too many of them don't do, you know, a lot of serious time and are still out circulating. And so, I'm worried, because I see an uptick in shootings at this level. It's – you know, it's not okay if it's a gang member shooting a gang member – it's still a human being shooting a human being. It's especially not okay if someone innocent, you know, walking by gets caught in that crossfire. And we've seen that over time and we used to see that a lot in the city, I don't want to see that come back. So, I think there's a lot of pieces to it. But as we try and figure out the State pieces, like getting the court system to function again, getting the parole system to work better, better process for how prisoners are returned to our community – you know, in the meantime, the central question is, what can the NYPD do in the here and now, and what can the DA's do in the here and now when you get a case. And that – I think that piece needs to be tightened up and the NYPD is going to have to hold the line in the meantime.

**Louis:** Okay. We'll have more to talk about and more to say about it in the near future. Thanks so much for joining us. We'll see you next week. Good to see you, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Alright. Take care.

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