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RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS ON THE JOHN GAMBLING SHOW

John Gambling: Thrilled to have the mayor of New York joining us today on the John Gambling Show – Mayor Bill de Blasio. Mr. Mayor, hello there, and Happy New Year.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Happy New Year, John.

Gambling: I'm hoping it's going to be, and I'm sure you are as well. It's never an easy job steering the ship here in New York City. And let me get to the – because we have a short amount of time here – let me get right into it. Why do you think that the homeless issue has been so vexing?

Mayor: Well, it's a challenge on this city and state now for over 30 years. And I think it used to be a challenge primarily about people with mental health problems, substance abuse problems, single men. It's now much more about families; it's much more about working people; and it is much more about economics, sadly. People who couldn't afford the rent; people who lost their jobs and their whole families have gone into shelter. And people are still working, and there in shelters. So, it has to do with the incredible cost of living and the increase in the cost of housing in the city. And a lot of the challenges people face with jobs that just aren't enough to pay the rent. So, we're trying to address those fundamental issues, but at the same time, right now, get people out of shelter; get them to better housing. 22,000 people we've gotten out of shelter in the last two years, and we're going to be doing a lot more of that.

Gambling: Is the answer simply more facility; more apartments to move these people into. I'm not talking about the mental health issue part, but just the people that are still working – I find that hard to believe, not hard to believe, but I'm surprised at that.

Mayor: You know, John, I was at the Bellevue Shelter last night and talked to any number of residents there who either are working right now or had been working recently and want to work again. A lot of them are veterans who had served our country, and wanted to get back to work. It's very tough out there if you only have a minimum wage job. And look at the cost of housing in this city. You know, it's just become very, very tough for people to make ends meet, and a lot of people just, literally the bottom falls out in their life economically and they end up in shelter. That's the folks in the shelters [inaudible] absolutely; housing – both housing for folks who just need decent affordable housing and for some of the folks in shelter, of course, there are those with the mental health issues as well, and other issues who need supportive housing. That's why we announced the biggest investment ever this city has made in supportive housing – 15,000 apartments. And do, I think the way to think about this, John, is there's two parts to the homeless problem; there's folks in shelter, that's where the overwhelming number of homeless are. What they need most is help getting to better housing. And then there's 3,000 or 4,000 people on the street. It's been that way for many years. It's not acceptable to me. Those folks need much more help. They're living on the street 24/7. Those are folks who are much more likely to have mental health problems, substance abuse problems, and I'll tell you we've had some real success with our new outreach effort already begun – HOME-STAT, we're going all over the city constantly engaging homeless folks trying to convince them to come off the streets short-term and ultimately permanently. And a lot of the faith

community has been crucial in that – helping provide places that homeless folks would come into that they trust; that they feel are safe, so we can ultimately get them off the street permanently.

Gambling: The governor's order of the removing of those that are living on the streets when it goes below 32 degrees – that is not a new thing. The city's been doing that. Tell me about the logistical issue there, and the problems of actually finding everybody.

Mayor: Well, the city has been doing it for a long time as Commissioner Bratton said the other day. He was doing that with NYPD officers when he was back at the transit police in 1990. P-D plays a crucial role; EMS and our homeless outreach workers. So, often, typically, they know where homeless folks have congregated, and they go right to them and say, look, it's cold, come in. And what we found on Monday night, in particular, is a couple hundred people did come in voluntarily either because our workers came up them and offered shelter or they just went in on their own to shelters or to emergency rooms. So, there is a plan in place. We're going to keep [inaudible] with this whole HOME-STAT approach where we, literally, are going to be able – and, John, this is really important – we're going to be able to know where the 3,000 to 4,000 people who are living on the street – we're going to know exactly who they are, literally every name; what their profile is; where they typically are because that's part of how we're going to know what's it going to take to convince them to come off the streets, and get them the help they need. So, we have a good sense of where they are, and we go out, you know, intensely to get them in and a lot of people do respond to that.

Gambling: Alright, let's switch gears here for just a little bit. The first medical marijuana dispensaries in the state are opening up. There's at least one at the moment in New York. Very interesting, the governor's law here on medical marijuana does not allow buds or leaves or anything like that. They have to be dispensed in a vapor or liquid or pill. I'm not quite sure exactly how it is. Are you in favor, Mr. Mayor, of legalizing marijuana? You know, the stopping and the summonses have decreased significantly. Do you think that that would be the way we should ultimately go here?

Mayor: No, I don't, John. I think it should be looked at once we get a better sense of what's happened in Washington State, and in Colorado. Right now, I think we're in the right place. I think the medical marijuana law was a good law. I think our decision with NYPD to reduce arrests for the lowest level of marijuana possession was a smart move. And I think there's been very productive. But in terms of a full legalization, I'm not ready for that. I know Bill Bratton's not ready for that. I want to see what happens when those two states have a few years of experience under their belt to see what the total impact is.

Gambling: You know, I think, I've been against this idea – not medical marijuana, but legalizing marijuana right from the very beginning. And I think that it's been interesting to watch the city of New York, the state of New York, New Jersey, other places sort of admit that medical marijuana should be available, but I think everybody's scared to death about the legalization.

Mayor: I think there are people who believe it would make their lives better, and would solve some problems. I think there are people who are absolutely scared, and see some real bad unintended consequences. But again, for the first time, we have an opportunity to see it – two big states, I mean, Colorado and Washington. You have big cities there, Denver, Seattle. We're going to get a good experiment in what this does. Does it ultimately benefit society or are there really negative unintended consequences. So, I think we want to watch that carefully before making any further judgements.

Gambling: The Governor has made a lot over the last couple of days about the Javitz Center redo at one billion; Penn Station, \$3 billion; the Post Office. All of these things have been discussed for decades, literally. Do you think that they're going to happen? Are they a reality or is this just more talk again?

Mayor: I'm hopeful. I think the Governor's plans both on the Javitz Center and on Penn Station are absolutely a step in the right direction. And I think, particularly with Penn Station there's a growing realization that, you

know, we are going to be more and more dependent in the future. This region is growing. And look, we have the most population we've ever had in this city – almost eight-and-a-half million. We have the largest number of jobs this city has had in its entire history – 4.2 million jobs. Both of those are going to grow. We're going to hit nine million people in the next couple of decades. We are certainly going to expand the number of jobs in this city. And that means we need better transportation to get people around the city, but also all the folks coming in for those jobs. Penn Station's a key – it's right now about over capacity – ten times over the capacity it should be handling. So, I think what's happening is reality is setting in. And Amtrak stepping up; the Governor stepping up. We need the federal government to step up, obviously. But this is the right moment to push it.

Gambling: Speaking of reality, traffic in the city and around in the five boroughs absolute disaster as you know. [Inaudible] tried to get around yourself. Do you think tolling the East River bridges; congestion pricing; where's Bill de Blasio's head on this?

Mayor: Well, I was very uncomfortable with Michael Bloomberg's particular plan on that. There's been some other plans put forward that I think are more interesting. But it's quite clear, and the Governor said it, and I think it's pretty clear in the state senate as well – that they're not going to entertain those ideas. So, I don't think that's a live option now. I think the bigger question is what other things can we do. Look, we want to get people as much as people out of their cars into mass transit. We certainly made very big new investments in mass transit here through the city budget, and we've made big new investments in bus rapid transit and in the future of the MTA. But I also think there's a congestion problem that I think we need to do more to fix. And, John, part of what's ironic, particularly in Midtown – a lot of the congestion is caused by all the construction we have now. The construction is a blessing. It means jobs and economic growth, but it comes with a negative, which is all that congestion.

Gambling: You're absolutely right. I must admit that I have been just amazed at the number of cranes there are in New York City, especially on the west side, but throughout the entire city. And, as you say, that's a wonderful thing.

Mayor: It's extraordinary. And the city is booming [inaudible]. I'm proud to say, John, since I've come into office – almost 200,000 more jobs here in the city. And, obviously, the construction boom, you can see it with your own eyes. But, again, for all the good it causes, the negative is that, boy, that comes with a lot of congestion.

Gambling: It certainly does. Mr. Mayor – a pleasure. I hope we can do this more often. Thank you.

Mayor: Absolutely, John – look forward to it.

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