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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. We just finished another violent weekend all over the city with at least five people shot and killed in more than 40 separate shootings. In response to the increase in gun violence, the NYPD says it will change schedules so that more officers will be working over the weekends. Joining me now to discuss that and more, from the Blue Room inside City Hall is Mayor de Blasio. Good evening Mr. Mayor, good to see you.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good evening, Errol. How are you doing?

Louis: Okay, pretty good. The change in the shifts to have more folks out on the weekend, was this – it's not news that there are problems on the weekends in the summers in New York, right? Why did it take until the end of August to get to this solution do you think?

Mayor: Well a bunch of changes have been made Errol, in the course of the last weeks really. I mean a lot of officers that were doing other types of duties are now out in key communities where we have been having real problems. That's been done on a much greater level than in the past. Clearly, because we missed both the April and July classes, for the NYPD recruits, that's a challenge. Obviously changes in the budget, changes in overtime, there's a lot of reasons why things are being done differently. But most importantly, it is moving officers where they are needed most, when they are needed most.

Louis: And Commissioner Shea believes that this will prevent gun violence?

Mayor: Unquestionably. We've learned this now, over not just my seven years, but really a quarter century since CompStat began. You know putting officers where there is a particular problem, precision policing, pinpoint policing works. The places that have really been hit hardest by the gun violence correlate in some ways to some of the worst challenges we've had with the coronavirus as well but there are really specific places where the biggest problems have been. Not whole neighborhoods in many cases, pieces of neighborhoods. So the NYPD, can with additional presence really inhibit some of this violence.

Louis: Okay, we'll be of course watching the numbers and the reports and so forth. And hopefully we will see something better come out of all of this. I got a question on Twitter for you Mr. Mayor about whether – or the extent to which the City has begun working on compliance with the Governor's executive order 203, which asks every police department in the state – or I should say every jurisdiction in the state, to come up with a plan on how to make community and police relations innovative and functional. That's due sometime in April, but there has to be a public process to create that. I was wondering if there is any progress on that?

Mayor: Look we will follow certainly any process delineated in that executive order. But the work has been going on for seven years. I can't speak for other jurisdictions in the state and the Governor created one model for the entire state. But I can speak for us. We've been doing fundamental reforms over seven years, great reduction in arrests, stops, body cameras obviously now on every patrol officer. A whole host of things, retraining the entire police force de-escalation, implicit bias training. I assume what the Governor is pointing to is the need for a lot of places to do things like that. We've been doing all of them already. We've got more coming in the way of reform. We'll be talking about that more and more in the next few weeks. But what we are going to do is of course, show the State everything that we are doing, everything more that is coming and if there is a public process around it, we will certainly make sure that happens as well.

Louis: Okay. Let's talk about some reopening issues. We'll save the schools for later because I have a bunch of questions. We will get to that after the break. But when it comes to gymnasiums, health clubs and the like, there's been a lot of discussion about it. It went one way, it seems they've gone in a different direction. What can people expect? My understanding is that sometime right around Labor Day or right before Labor Day there's going to be sort of a broad opening across the city?

Mayor: That's right September 2nd is the day. Now the State maintains a lot of restrictions, and this is true of many, many industries. There are restrictions on how many people can be in any gym. There are restrictions on the type of activities. Some of that has been left up to localities. We are certainly going to take a pretty strict stance in the name of preserving our low level of infection we have now in New York City. But yeah, gyms will start to open on September 2nd and for people who are members there will be more and more activity happening. But you know, we got to remember the balance we are all trying to strike. We want to see jobs come back, we want to see amenities for people. We also have to make sure it's done safely.

Louis: And what would be the metric that would convince you that it's not being done safely?

Mayor: Look, I think the bigger metric in the city we've talked about, you know, five percent now infection rate is our overall threshold for the city. God forbid, we went back to that. If we go back to that, we're talking about shutting down a lot of things. So that's the real break point. Obviously with schools, it's down to three percent. But we want to watch the trend lines. That's why we've modified our daily indicators so people can see a little bit more clearly the trend lines we're going through. The goal is to keep things where they are now and even go a lot farther to reduce the disease. But if we start to see a steady uptick, that's going to tell us a lot about what the impact has been from these new activities opening up.

Louis: So, there've been questions about indoor dining and when that will be allowed again. The specific question is if it's allowed in the adjacent suburbs in Westchester and in Long Island, that New Yorkers can easily get to and they don't seem to have had any outbreaks? Why not allow it here in the city?

Mayor: It is a fair question Errol. But I think a couple of things have to be kept in mind. We are nothing like the surrounding communities in terms of the level of density we have here. And the way life is in New York City. We were the epicenter in a way that other parts of the state were not. We have a much more sensitive situation. The comparison that I make based on what my

health leadership has told me is really to major European countries and major urban areas in European countries. And also the example we see now in Hong Kong is an important one. Where dining, indoor dining was allowed pretty loosely over the last few months. And now all of these places are seeing a resurgence. And literally indoor restaurants, bars, nightclubs are one of the single biggest factors in the resurgence. This is the consistent information that the New York City Health leadership keeps bringing back to me from the studies they are seeing from around the world. So we have to understand, we all want it back. I want it back as soon as possible, but I'm not going to risk the overall health dynamic of New York City to bring back indoor dining. We're going to try and support the restaurant industry in lots of ways, including obviously the outdoor dining this year and next year. But if it's such a specific nexus to a resurgence of the disease, we have to take it very, very seriously.

Louis: I spoke the other day – a new topic, Mr. Mayor, with the Vice President of the Emergency Medical Technicians union. And they say that the cutbacks that they've heard from OMB, that they should be prepared for, it could be as many as 400 emergency medical personnel. They said response time on ambulances could go up by seven minutes or even 10 minutes. And that loss of life would result. Could these 400 people get some kind of exemption in this current health emergency from the budget cutbacks?

Mayor: Yeah, first of all, with all due respect to the union, nothing has been decided. So they can project, and I know it's their job to be worried. But all we have asked of the City agencies is to give us a proposal. That final decision of course, will be made by Office of Management Budget, working with me and my team here at City Hall. So until we get to the point of announcing the layoffs nothing is final. We clearly Errol, have to be constantly aware of protecting health and safety, whatever choices we have to make. That said there is going to be a ton of tough choices, because we're talking about a level of layoff that will affect every single agency. But no, you cannot assume it's going to be one type of work or another. That is all being resolved right now. And finally, we obviously Errol, we hope we hope we never get to it. We hope for a stimulus in Washington or long term borrowing in Albany or help from the labor unions, anything that would avert those layoffs.

Louis: Okay. Standby, Mr. Mayor, we're going to take a short break. We'll be back in just a minute with more conversations.

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Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. I'm once joined by Mayor de Blasio, joining us from the Blue Room. Mr. Mayor, I wanted to talk about the plan to open to the schools, and the idea of outdoor classes and outdoor facilities being used is not a new one. I'm sure you must have seen there have been photos in articles from 100 years ago, when we had the last serious pandemic of its kind, where kids were learning outside. Why did it take so long? Why are we so close to opening day when this proposal is finally getting deal with?

Mayor: Yeah, you know Errol, first of all, I appreciate the question but I'll tell you there have been so many pieces to address, not just with schools but with everything else. The healthcare situation, jobs, the Phases coming in. This is something that has been among the topics being discussed but a lot of other things had to be resolved earlier. But what we know as we heard from principals all over the school system a lot of them said "hey, I really I could do more with

outdoor.” A lot of them have used outdoor in the past in different ways, so they said we need a clear process – we put it out this morning, we said any principal just send in whatever proposal you were thinking of this week. We’ll get you an approval back by next week or whatever modifications, and we’ll get right to it. So I think the good news here is a lot of principals already have clear plans, how to use a school yard, a courtyard, some are going to want streets closed off. If it makes sense, if we can do it, we’ll be able to do that and turn that around really quickly. So it’s a good moment to resolve all this and move forward.

Louis: Now what’s the deal with parents who want to chip in or supplement how all of this gets done. That is one of the issues that has run throughout public schooling for a long, long time. That groups of parents who are fortunate and well-off can pour a ton of money into extra art teachers and extra enrichment and extra other kind of stuff. Is that going to happen here?

Mayor: Look I think it’s a – you’re right. This has been discussed for a long time and there are some people who say, no, that shouldn’t be allowed and others who say yes, it should be allowed. I have a different opinion than both of those. I think it should be allowed, but I think there should be a spirit of generosity and inclusion.

So if you happen to be in a school that has a very strong PTA and a lot of parents who are doing well and you can raise a lot of money. My strong belief is that you should share some of that with another school nearby that doesn’t have those blessings, that way everyone benefits in a meaningful way. So we’re going to work on a plan like that, the Chancellor talked about it this morning, to encourage that kind of teaming up between schools that are doing better economically and school communities that have less.

Louis: Have any principals indicated to you that getting this done successfully, meaning some outdoor classes and other outdoor – use of outdoor facilities, could make the difference between having a lot of students and being able to teach them, and not necessarily being able to take in quite so many students.

Mayor: No, that’s not what we’re hearing Errol. I mean, we have now a good sense obviously of what our complimented teachers will be and what the number of students in school will be, and clearly we have now the space because we’ve created a blended learning system to accommodate kids any way you slice it. It’ll be different for each school, depending on how big their student body is. But the space is there and a lot of hard work has been done including by, you know, principals, teachers, custodial staff, to get that space ready. So no. Now if, again, if a school community wants to augment and do even more, that’s great, but there’s no question we have the basics we need.

Louis: There are a number of schools – some of the transportation advocates to have begun publishing photos of schools where existing playgrounds have already been taken over and to be used as parking lots by the teachers, when they leave their personal cars there during the day. Will there be some kind of directive from [inaudible] to change or end that practice?

Mayor: It really depends on the school. I mean, obviously we want the maximum for our kids. That’s what this is all about, and we’re going to work with every school community to figure out the best way to do it. There are some places where, you know, teachers do come from long

distances and don't have many options where to park – that has to be considered too. But the goal here is to maximize the space the kids need. That's how we'll approach it.

Louis: And so there are a number of, you know, the, between the Regents, the SATs, and other kind of big markers outside of school, that students are expected to meet. Are you confident that people will be able to take AP tests, take other standardized tests, be prepared for the Regents and so forth?

Mayor: I think it will be very different potentially. I mean, we saw that the end of the last school year, which obviously, you know, we went through – over three months of the school year were during this crisis, and a lot of modifications had to be made. This school year we're starting in crisis and may go on for part of the school year or all of it. So I think there will be major modifications. Look, I'm someone who has a critique and has had critique for a long time of standardized testing. The most important thing is the classroom instruction, and then to the extent that the historic standardized tests can happen, good, but most importantly, kids are going to be taught anyway, you slice it.

Louis: Well, I mean, there, there are a number of high stakes tests as you know, that are internal to the system. So, you know, leave aside the College Board, middle-schoolers want to get ready for the test for the competitive high schools. What happens to them?

Mayor: Again, everything's being reassessed in light of this crisis. I mean, I think you're seeing around the country the, the norm is changing in light of this crisis, that a lot of schools that really focused on standardized tests are now stopping that this year and they're going to alternative approaches. So I think we should see this school year as a thing unto itself. I think a lot will look different. I strongly believe there'll be a vaccine in the course of this school year, and then we'll go into next September, 2021, in a whole different reality, but I'm sure we can make modifications if we can't do the same kinds of things around tests, we're going to find a way, and most importantly, again, tests aren't how you educate kids. They may be a measure, but there's other measures we can use as well.

Louis: And I know running the biggest school system in the country is quite enough, but we've also got this thing called CUNY. What is the plan for them?

Mayor: As you know, CUNY is run by the State of New York. Even though I have some representatives on the board the power resides with the State of New York. My – last I heard each individual campus is being offered some flexibility and how to approach things. I think, you know, higher education in general is grappling with this issue in a different way than public schools, because you're talking about every student is basically an adult and has a lot more flexibility. So, that's a different context where more remote is being used. But, you know, again, there that's one reality. The reality that I have responsibility for is our public schools, 3-K through 12.

Louis: Okay, well, we are going to I guess talk again, as we get closer and closer to that date where we've got our fingers crossed and we'll continue to ask as many questions as possible so that people know exactly what they're in for when September rolls around.

Mayor: As it should be Errol, thank you.

Louis: Okay. Alright, thanks. We'll see you next week.

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