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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall where we are keeping our focus on today's snowstorm. While the worst of the storm may be behind us, the city remains in a state of emergency. Crews are hard at work and City officials are urging people to stay off the roads so that Sanitation plows can make their way across the five boroughs. Mayor de Blasio joins me now from inside the Blue Room inside City Hall to talk about all of this and more. Good evening Mr. Mayor, good to see you.

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

Louis: Okay, hanging in there. Let me ask you about the latest with the subways. The service – as far as you know, will it be restored tomorrow?

Mayor: Obviously, that's the State and the MTA's call. I have not heard a specific timeline yet. I think the real concern is about you know, any elevated tracks and how we've had a lot of problems in the past with them. So I think there's going to be some caution there. We expect Errol, another easily three or four inches of snow tonight, steady between now and midnight. Probably a similar amount spread out over the course of tomorrow. So this isn't over yet. But I will obviously let the State speak for itself about the MTA.

Louis: Okay. Should, I guess it is a related question. Should parents expect any degree in school learning for the rest of this week?

Mayor: Oh yeah sure, Wednesday. We've said, I said earlier today, we will be back strong on Wednesday. Look, here's the bottom line about tomorrow. We cancelled school because we knew it would be a tough day tomorrow coming off the storm and we wanted to be you know, extra careful about keeping kids safe. We cancelled vaccinations because we were really concerned particularly about seniors going out for vaccinations in a situation that still wouldn't be fully resolved. But Wednesday we expect everything to be back full strength. That's the bottom line.

Louis: And that'll be around the same time that the order to not essential workers to stay home would be lifted?

Mayor: The order, what I put in place, the executive order I signed, a local state of emergency expires at 6:00 am tomorrow morning, Tuesday morning. So let me talk about that. You know, we expect by 6:00 am in the morning that any serious snow would have passed. Let's pray that remains accurate. But still what we're going to have in the morning is very icy conditions. So I really want to urge people to realize that Sanitation still has to do its work all night tonight and

tomorrow. We want to still keep as many people off the streets as possible. The specific travel advisory ends at 6:00 am, but if you don't need to use your car tomorrow, you shouldn't. If you can stay off the streets, that's best. Because Sanitation still has a lot to do. It's not – we want to make sure that it's not just that the snow has been plowed, but we really get back to blacktop so that by the end of Tuesday, we're fully ready to go, you know, full strength on Wednesday. So urging people caution tomorrow, particularly in the morning rush hour. If you don't need to use your car, if you can use mass transit or stay home tomorrow, that's a very good idea.

Louis: Do we have any information on when a trash collection will resume?

Mayor: Yeah. Our hope Errol is if things go well, as early as midnight Tuesday going into Wednesday. That's what Commissioner Grayson is shooting for to start it up on that overnight shift you know, in the early morning hours of Wednesday. But again, we got to see if mother nature has any curve balls here. But based on what we know now, that's still, that's still our goal.

Louis: Okay. Let me ask you about the information you released over the weekend about racial disparities in the vaccination process? And for those who didn't hear it, out of a sample of about 300,000 vaccine recipients, 48 percent were white, 15 percent Latino, 15 percent Asian, 11 percent Black, which is less than half of the population of about 24 percent of New York City is Black. Critics have called this a national embarrassment, a moral and management failure of the highest order. What I think we heard you say on national television this morning was that it was due to supply. But disparity is not about supply it's about how the scarce supply was distributed, right?

Mayor: No, it is first and foremost about supply because we have not been able to create the momentum in the vaccination program anywhere to encourage people to get vaccinated the way we want them to. We want it to be plentiful and easy. We want lots of people in their life to have gotten vaccinated so more and more people are encouraged. Unquestionably, number one factor here is supply. The design of the program we created, 60 percent of the vaccination sites that we have started are in the very same communities of color that were identified as high priority by our task force on racial inclusion and equity. So we did the geographical selection to achieve that prioritization. But there wasn't supply to go with it. The other piece is clearly there's a massive hesitancy problem, a trust problem in communities of color that has to be overcome. That's going to take a lot of dialogue, a lot of education and information being provided by medical professionals. A lot of validation by local leaders, a lot of, you know, people getting a chance to see more and more people around them getting vaccinated so it gives them some more comfort. That is not an overnight problem. That's something we're going to be working at for weeks and weeks. But if we get the supply, at least what I can guarantee is it will be targeted and prioritized to the places where the need is greatest and the danger is greatest. And that's those communities we laid out, 33 neighborhoods across the city that need to be prioritized.

Louis: When you're talk about validation, did you consider getting a shot while the camera's rolled as a one way of conveying to people that this is safe?

Mayor: I considered it but I'll tell you why I didn't do it. Because clearly such important national figures, Joe Biden, Kamala Harris, plenty of, you know, major figures have gotten the shot. I wanted to emphasize that I was going to and the members of my administration were going to go by the rules and wait our turn. My turn is not up. I don't qualify under these current rules. I

thought it was really important for people to see that I truly believe that, you know, folks 65 and older, first responders, health care workers deserve that shot more than me and I'm deferring to them.

Louis: In a case like the one that was on the front page of the New York Post today, where you have a white fitness instructor who goes to Port Richmond High School in Staten Island, basically lies about her eligibility for the shot and gets it. If there are no consequences, that's going to happen over and over again right?

Mayor: Look that shouldn't have happened. I'm upset about that for sure. I was shocked when I heard that was possible because we've set a process in place where you have to qualify. And that just, I don't know. And I actually have asked our Health Commissioner, Dr. Dave Chokshi to identify why that happened and make sure it doesn't happen again. I agree with you, if this becomes a persistent problem, consequences always help with human beings. We're all, you know, we all pay attention to incentives and consequences. I will tell you Errol, I have not seen this as a widespread problem so far. I mean, what we've seen is overwhelmingly folks who are getting the shot are getting it because they are in the actual priority categories. But I certainly agree with you if we see a bigger problem, consequences or one of the things that could help us.

Louis: Yeah. I mean, I'm under the impression, I mean, you know, tell me if I'm wrong about this, but that 100 percent of the vaccines that come to New York are under the direct control of the Mayor and the Governor. So that whatever happens with distribution ultimately is the responsibility in our case, of the Mayor?

Mayor: Well, it's true that the State plays a role and the City plays a role. I take full responsibility for the pieces under my control, absolutely. But we also don't have a single unified universal health care system. We unfortunately end up having to rely upon a whole host of providers. And most of them I think are doing a very, very good job. But in terms of could an individual slip through? Yeah. And that's not something I'm happy about, and we have to try and stop that. But the bigger point here is we are – Errol in many ways, this whole country's having the wrong conversation because we have a ridiculously low supply. And what is happening in this country is two companies, only two companies are making the vaccine while millions and millions of people are waiting and are in danger. And the federal government has to intervene here. They have to say to the pharmaceutical industry and the biotech industry, all of you now have to participate. There's plenty of companies that know how to make vaccine. They should be instructed to use the existing formulas for Moderna and Pfizer and produce on a huge scale, as we would in a wartime mobilization. It should not be about patents. It should not be about profit. It should be about people and saving lives. That is not happening in this country. That's the single biggest problem right now, that that's being left on the table. If we had supply, we would be able to change the situation fundamentally in this city.

Louis: What would – exactly what would change though? I mean, if we're not sure why the disparities happen in the first place, how would you know how to change them?

Mayor: Because if you could provide consistent supply to those 60 percent of sites in the communities of color, in the most affected areas, and you could do as many appointments as you needed at any point, rather than constantly having the problem now where we make appointments, we have to postpone appointments. We have to ration the vaccine because there's

not enough. If you could say for those communities, there's plenty of vaccine. You would create true momentum. People would see people constantly in their lives getting vaccinated. It will give them encouragement. I would do 24/7 so it's easy for people. No one would ever have trouble getting an appointment. That's how you get to that critical mass. But we're not asking the central problem. Why don't we have supply if we have vast industrial capacity in this country and the federal government has the Defense Production Act, why on Earth don't we have more supply? Something is wrong with this picture and we got to go to that root problem.

Louis: Okay. Stand by Mr. Mayor. We are going to take a short break now. I'll be back with more of this conversation 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. He's at City Hall. Mr. Mayor, I wanted to ask you about what happens with schools. The school system has lost tens of thousands of students over the last year due to people leaving or temporarily relocating. The Wall Street Journal has reported that some schools are being asked now to send money back to the Department of Education because of the declining enrollment. They use as an example, P. S. 9, which is near where I live. And I know you're familiar with it, in Prospect Heights. They had the first teacher, it so happens, who died of COVID-19, it is believed. The school is being asked to return about \$300,000 in funding about \$4,000 per student. And, of course, they don't have the money for that. In fact, they're spending a whole bunch of money for substitute teachers to try and deal with the students that they do have. What's the path out of that?

Mayor: The path out, it's two things, two really big, crucial things, Errol. First of all, the federal government sent us money – that last COVID relief package, the federal government sent money focused on Title I, you know, for kids in greatest need. That all went to the State of New York, which I think was a mistake. It should have gone to localities too. We believe that the State of New York owes us \$2.3 billion from that funding. We have about 60 percent of the Title I kids in New York State. By that formula, we should get \$2.3 billion to help us address all the vast costs we've had in keeping schools open in the time of COVID, going to remote learning, everything. That's the kind of money that would allow us to give relief to P. S. 9.

The other thing obviously is the big, real federal stimulus that we're hoping to see which if we get that it's going to help us to do a lot of things in terms of schools better. I mean, I want an intense effort in this new school year to close the COVID achievement gap, to reach kids academically, to reach them emotionally, to address the trauma they've been through. We've said, we're going to bring in more social workers, we're going to bring in, you know, a variety of approaches, both academic and mental health screening. We could do so much more if we had stimulus funding to really allow us to build that out on a much greater level to help our kids. So, I think it really comes down to those two things. Does the State give us our fair share of the money already sent from Washington? And is there a new stimulus? If we get the right combination of funding, of course, I want to see these schools made whole.

Louis: Well, I mean, in the interim while you're waiting for the federal government to come through and while you're tussling with the State, as they put together their own budget, what should educators and parents and families at the local level be expecting?

Mayor: Well, we're going to know a lot more, hopefully, you know, in the next few weeks. So, I hope that wait will not be long to get the clarity we need. Obviously, the State – the part I'm raising about the State will be resolved by the April 1st State budget. So, that's amazingly soon, you know, it's only eight weeks or so away. So, I think we're going to get answers, but I think, look, schools have done an amazing job, principals have done an amazing job navigating this tough situation. If there's fewer kids in the school, obviously, that's unfortunately an objective fact. I don't think that's going to be the reality for long, Errol. I think it's really important to note. I think a lot of families will be coming back when COVID is over. I think New York City, as always, will have a chance to grow again. We were at our highest population in history just in the last few years, and our strongest economy ever. I'm convinced we're going to see that and more going forward. But in terms of helping the schools in the meantime, I think we're going to have a lot of those answers just in the next few weeks.

Louis: Okay. Let me shift topics to the NYPD. The City Council's unveiling, a package of legislation that's designed to reform the NYPD. The general idea of the proposals – there are a lot of different ones – but the general idea is to get the NYPD out of the business of doing certain things. So, for example, investigation of traffic crashes would move from the NYPD to the Department of Transportation under one piece of legislation. There's this long standing question about what should be done with people in emotional distress and which agency should be the lead in those cases. There's talk about changing who would have final say on disciplinary matters, take some of that out of the exclusive purview of the commissioner. What's your general sense of the direction that the Council is taking?

Mayor: Look I've seen only the top lines, so I want to see the whole package before I comment in detail. But I – look, I believe there's been a very productive relationship with the Council over seven years, moving a variety of police reforms. We've agreed constantly and made things happen regularly. So, I think we're going to do that again in the next few weeks. But I can't get into the details until I really get to see all of it. But I'll tell you something we just did – and the Council helped us along the way to do this crucial thing, the discipline matrix to fundamentally change and tighten up and make more transparent discipline of officers to do the wrong thing. We just announced that police precinct councils will have a role in this selection of precinct commanders. There's a host of reforms that have been happening on top of the things we did earlier, training the police force and reducing arrest, reducing incarceration, obviously getting rid of the broken policy of stop-and-frisk.

It – to me, this has just been a continuum and it has to deepen. I expect a number of reforms this year in New York City. And to your point, Errol, about what should police be doing and not doing. I mean, we moved police out of vendor enforcement, for example, street vendor enforcement. We gave that to the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection. Obviously, now the Department of Homeless Services is the first go-to for addressing issues involving homelessness. But that doesn't mean sometimes police don't have a role to play. And I think that's the subtlety here. It doesn't mean it's always one thing or another. It's, which agency sometimes has the lead, and then the police can also have a role to play. Sometimes the police have a lead, and another agency has a role to play. So, those are the things we're going to sort out with the Council in the weeks ahead.

Louis: When it comes to – just as a broad proposition, you've got a lot of experience in government. I mean, you know, it dawned on me as I was preparing the notes. Many times, the NYPD will sort of jump out ahead and try to initiate reform when they see that some kind of regulation or negative consequences or intrusion is coming from the outside. We saw that with body-worn cameras, for example, right? The court order comes down, NYPD sort of jumps out and creates a whole program. I guess the question I have for you is, has there ever been an example – I can't think of one in City government where major reform came from within an agency without outside pressure or guidance or supervision? So, to the extent that the NYPD is trying to reform itself, is that I guess by definition, almost doomed to failure?

Mayor: No, I'll tell you, it's interesting the way you say, it's a great question, but I guess I have a different take. Maybe it's a glass half full or glass half empty. I mean, the things the NYPD has done differently over the years often comes from, you know, what was happening around it in society. And CompStat is probably the greatest example of all time. There was a tremendous crime problem, and something had to be done strategically very, very differently. That's where CompStat came from. But the same with neighborhood policing, it was a response to a broken dynamic between police and community, largely due to stop-and-frisk. You know, the retraining of the entire police force, which I initiated with Bill Bratton, was after the tragic – you know, the death of Eric Garner, which gripped this city. We needed to do something fundamentally differently.

So yes, there are those moments that generate action, but the ideas often do come from within the NYPD. The retraining of the police force, which is fundamental. It doesn't get enough attention. It's one of the most basic ways you change behavior. And we've seen, you know, just the de-escalation training alone has really changed a lot of how the NYPD patrols the streets. That idea came from Bill Bratton and folks in the NYPD. It was not – there was not like a movement calling for retraining. That came from within. So, I think it's important to give agencies credit that there are often reformist elements thinking up the next idea and ready to act. And certainly – I'll give you another one. When we moved to end marijuana arrests, you know, that was something the NYPD was developing all along as an idea, over the years I've been mayor, that they saw that there needed to be something different because the approach wasn't working. So, I'm a little more sanguine and hopeful about the fact that I think not just the NYPD but a lot of other agencies, you can see some of the things they need to do better and innovate the solutions. And there should be a public dialogue on top of that to help propel them forward.

Louis: Okay, well, we will continue that dialogue another time, both with the City Council and with you. We will catch you next week. Thanks so much and best of luck with the remaining snow, Mr. Mayor. We'll see you next week.

Mayor: Amen. Fingers crossed. Thank you. Errol.

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