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

**Errol Louis:** Welcome back to Inside City Hall. As we mentioned earlier, the city is seeing a rise in coronavirus cases with the citywide positivity rate reaching a seven-day average of 2.26 percent. Joining me now to talk about that as well as Joe Biden's election win, we've got Mayor de Blasio coming to us from the Blue Room inside City Hall. Good to see you, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good to see you. How are you doing Errol?

**Louis:** Just fine, thanks. I'm curious, I don't want to sugar coat this. Aren't we in effect in the second wave? I mean the statewide numbers are at the highest level since June, meaning we've kind of gone backwards. I imagine the city numbers are showing comparable retrogression, isn't the second wave here?

**Mayor:** There's still a chance to beat it back Errol. I mean, we have entered a new phase because unlike, you know, the whole summer into the beginning of the fall where we were doing really, really well, now we have a threat. But this threat is not a foregone conclusion. We have an opportunity to fight this back. I've talked to our health care leadership in great detail on this. If New Yorkers right now, buckle down, mask wearing, social distancing, avoiding indoor gatherings in particular, avoiding you know, big family gatherings, don't travel for the holidays. If we do these things the right way, there is still a chance to push this back. We're not seeing so far, thank God, a major increase in hospitalizations. There's still a chance to push this back. But we're counting in terms of, you know, weeks and days now, the timeline, the sort of really brief window we have to stop the second wave from really hitting here.

**Louis:** The sequence is first an increase in positivity than an increase in hospitalization, and then an increase in severe outcomes including death, right? I mean, we'd have to wait a couple of weeks to see if this increase is going to lead to more hospitalization?

**Mayor:** I don't think it's quite as simple as that. You're broadly right, but I'll differ with you on this level. We've been seeing upticks since the beginning of September. We obviously had a real challenge in Brooklyn and Queens, although that really has been beaten back now. And that's very good news. The State today downgraded some of those areas, opened them up some more. But you know, that now has been going on for quite a while. All of September, all of October, we were dealing with different challenges. We have not seen a major change in hospitalizations. So it's not as simple as this most recent increase in cases being inevitably the lead into a lot more hospitalizations and God forbid more deaths. There's still a chance to fight this thing back. We're at a level right now, if you froze New York City in place, right the way we are now, we could

keep going. So we have a chance to stop it. But we're – everyone's going to have to take it really seriously really quickly if we're going to turn this around.

**Louis:** What is the theory of the Health leadership? Are they saying that people have not been obeying the distancing and masking rules?

**Mayor:** No, I think it's more of the pressures around us first and foremost. The fact that around the country, around other parts of the world, we're seeing more of a problem. That is manifesting obviously, and some of the impacts from travel. That's an X factor we didn't have in the beginning of September. I do think fatigue is a part of it, yes. I do think that people, some people are not quite as diligent as they were before about masks and distancing. I think cold weather, obviously the Health leaders talk about this a lot, more and more people starting to spend more time indoors, but you can compensate for that with social distancing, with mask wearing. So it's a variety of factors, but they're moveable. I think this is the central point. There's still a time to do something about it and a chance. The biggest concern of course, is holiday travel. And we're urging people, I just, I say it with a heavy heart because I'm going to miss seeing my family this holiday, my extended family. I know a lot of the people will as well, but we just got to urge people to not travel the holidays, not go to big family gatherings, even locally. Just, we really have to be tough if we're – if we don't pull this off, the problem is you're going to see us having to start putting real restrictions in place citywide. And no one wants to see that happen Errol.

**Louis:** The run-up to Thanksgiving is by tradition, the heaviest travel day of the year. Do you have information from either AAA or from I don't know MetroNorth about ticket sales? Do you have any reason to believe that people are planning to travel?

**Mayor:** I don't have specific information that tells me the final direction. My hope is I think a lot of people were not going to travel who did in the past. I think a lot of people made that decision already for a variety of reasons. My hope is the folks who were on the fence and were hoping to travel, you know thinking about it, planning a little bit will now realize it's not the time to travel. But look, it's horrible Errol. We're going to have to go through the whole holiday season without some of the things we love. But there will be a vaccine in the next few months. There's going to be a much better situation in terms of national leadership of the fight against the coronavirus with Joe Biden coming in. People have to hang on and hang tough to get through this immediate period. And I think we'll get to see some real relief come.

**Louis:** You have put out additional information by ZIP code. What neighborhoods are you most concerned about in the city at this point?

**Mayor:** So if you had asked me a few weeks ago, it would have been really easy. I would have said a lot of Southern Brooklyn and I would say certain parts of Queens, Central Queens in particular. Queens got a lot better. Now Southern Brooklyn has gotten markedly better, still a little bit of work to do. Bigger problem now is a big chunk of Staten Island. That's our focus right now. That's the place where we've seen the numbers start to go up. We need to address that. Some ZIP codes in the Bronx, but much more limited than what we're seeing in Staten Island. So we're going to be sending out a lot of testing, a lot of outreach, a lot of mask distribution. Again, we know these approaches worked. Even Brooklyn and Queens Errol, those were really high

numbers for several weeks, but they've come right back down because of all that grassroots effort and a lot of cooperation from community members, community leaders. We're going to do the same thing in Staten Island and those parts of the Bronx as well.

**Louis:** Are you planning to reconsider the regulations around indoor dining, either in a targeted way or broadly across the city?

**Mayor:** Clearly we could get to the point and the State makes the ultimate decision. There might be some targeted changes depending on what we're seeing neighborhood by neighborhood, for sure. That's why they have these yellow, orange, and red zones. But I think for the bigger picture, look, the State needs to really reconsider at this point. We're above two percent. If we stay above two percent, I certainly think indoor dining needs to be carefully reconsidered. We all want to see restaurants survive and people have their jobs, their livelihoods. We love our restaurants, but we've got to be really careful. Because Errol I keep saying to folks, that job one is to avoid the bigger restrictions, to avoid a bigger shutdown. That's the thing we need to be absolutely adamant about. So if we have to in the meantime, make some sacrifices to protect this whole city. Errol something you'll be very interested in. I talked to our folks at Office of Management and Budget, talked about their analysis this weekend on jobs. You know, we've had jobs start to come back. Over 300,000 jobs that we lost have now come back. We're around four million jobs now in New York City and rising. That recovery is happening. Schools are open, you know, things are moving, we've got to protect it.

**Louis:** I was in front of a camera most of the weekend, starting at 11:28 when the results of the presidential election were announced. But one thing I did notice was there were tons of people who surged into the streets on my block and just about everywhere else. Can we afford to look the other way when for understandable reasons people want to go out and celebrate the way they did? I mean in the end, somebody's got to be a reality check on that kind of behavior. And that somebody is probably the mayor right?

**Mayor:** Look, I certainly understand the point Errol but I'm going to say something a little different. The problem and we've had a lot of experience now across the political spectrum with people being out for political reasons, faith reasons, all sorts of things. People being outside and wearing masks we have to still try and have social distancing, but that's not our central problem. Let's be honest. Our central problem now is people indoors and people not wearing masks. And when you put that combination together, it's a huge problem. The big problems we've seen, the big surges we've seen are not from outdoor activity. They're from indoor activity. And that's where I'm trying to caution people now. People are going to be going indoors more and more as the weather gets colder. We've got to get those masks on constantly. We've got to avoid indoor gatherings. That's our central fear right now.

**Louis:** I think we hit a record high 75 degrees today. I mean the reasons people are going in at this point are mostly not weather so much as some of the institutions that you mentioned, the schools, the restaurants, and some workplaces that are allowing people to come back.

**Mayor:** But again, I wouldn't take this incredibly beautiful weekend on every level and today these are not the kinds of temperatures we're going to see soon. We had some colder weather

before this, just in the last few weeks. People are starting to move indoors more and more with their activities. So the schools have been fantastic. I mean we just gave out the latest data this morning, amazing results in terms of very, very few kids and staff testing positive. Schools are looking great. Most workplaces are looking very good. My fear going forward is family gatherings. It's people in multigenerational households, unfortunately ending up spreading the disease from one person to another. It's folks spending more and more time indoors. It is that fatigue we talked about. People not wearing the mask as much. If we can address those issues now, we can get people really tightened up and to understand. We got to make another push now, just like we did – people of this city did heroically in May and June. Again, we can still fight off this second wave, but it's going to take everything that we've got.

**Louis:** I know this is something that the public health people have figured out by now, but as a broadcaster I can tell you it might help to show some of what's laying at the other end of an outbreak. Meaning, you know, we had a lot of footage of people on ventilators, hospitals that were filled to overflowing. The consequences, I think have been muted in recent months. Would you agree with that?

**Mayor:** Of course, because if you were having this conversation with me in March or April or May people would have been immediately reacting out of the personal pain that the people in their lives – I lost people that I knew. Everyone lost someone, every family lost someone or had someone go through this disease. It is different when you get, you know, three, four months down the line and things have been a lot better. But I think the other thing to think about, yes, people do need to remember the pain that comes with this disease, particularly for seniors, particularly for folks with pre-existing conditions. But I think also people need to think about their everyday lives. You know your jobs depend on this economy being open. Your livelihood, your kid's ability to go to school, everything is riding on our ability to fight back this disease. So I think you're right. We need to remind people of how tough it was. And we have to pray and work hard that never gets there again. But I'm also worried about really straightforward everyday things like people being able to pay the bills. Which would be undermined if there were a bunch of restrictions we have to apply.

**Louis:** Okay. All right. Stand by Mr. Mayor. We're going to take a quick break here. I'll have more with Mayor de Blasio in just a minute when we come back, 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've got a couple of viewer questions here. Somebody wrote in "there's a city-wide hiring freeze on New York City Department of Education school counselors. When will this be lifted?"

**Mayor:** So, Errol, look, our kids have been through a lot. Our kids need a lot of support given everything that's happened, and our counselors do a really amazing job. There's over 3,000 guidance counselors now, over 3,000 on the job. Any school that needs to fill a position we're going to find a way if there's an immediate need. We have a hiring freeze of course, across the whole administration, but in that particular area, if there's a particular need, we're going to work with the school to fill it.

**Louis:** I'm assuming that more counselors, not fewer are needed at this point for the very reasons you just described.

**Mayor:** Exactly, and that doesn't mean we can do a limitless number, but where there's a specific school with a vacancy that needs to be filled, we're going to work with them to find a way.

**Louis:** Got it. Another question, "an officer found a 27-year-old man named Christopher Cruz unresponsive in his cell on Rikers Island a month ago and he died. Are there any updates on why Mr. Cruz died in city custody?"

**Mayor:** No, I need to get the latest on that. It's a tragedy obviously, and my heart goes out to his family. We never, ever want to see that happen to anyone in custody, but I'm going to have to get more details on what the latest in our investigation shows.

**Louis:** Okay. Another viewer had this question, "when the Biden administration confirms an attorney general, would you support Justice Department intervention into the NYPD and a consent decree if necessary?"

**Mayor:** Again, I think the work we're doing right now to continue reforming the NYPD has been going on for seven years, there's a lot more to come. We're going to be working with the City Council on a variety of new reforms. The best way to reform a police agency is to do it locally. Elected leaders acting on the needs right in front of us. I want a constant reform. I want an NYPD is more transparent, more connected to the community. There's a lot to do, and we're ready to do it.

**Louis:** Speaking of the incoming Biden administration. You mentioned earlier today that you were planning to have a call with the transition team or some other equivalent body or individual. Did that happen and have you talked about stimulus and COVID relief?

**Mayor:** So I have calls out to the president elect the vice president elect, and I'll be speaking with some of his transition aides later on this evening and throughout the week, and certainly job one is going to be the stimulus and getting that done – it might even be possible now before President Biden takes office. So that's what will help New York City get back on our feet? I think the chances were greatly improved 11:28 on Saturday when we got that news. Now the stimulus is actually in sight.

**Louis:** Are members of the COVID task force – we were looking through them and trying to see if there were any New York connections. I would imagine they could learn a lot from our tragic experience earlier this year. Do you know if there are New Yorkers or members of your administration who have been approached about serving on that task force?

**Mayor:** I haven't seen what was put out today. I do know Dr. Vivek Murthy is someone that I think is a fantastic choice to be one of the leaders of the administration. The First Lady Chirlane McCray has worked very closely with him on mental health issues. I know our Health

Commissioner, Dr. Dave Chokshi has worked closely with him. So we'll be absolutely organically connected to that that group that's working so hard now to overcome COVID.

**Louis:** Okay. Let's now talk politics for our last few minutes. The Democratic Party, there was an anticipation of a possible blue wave and so forth. It didn't quite work out that way nationwide, but even just sticking within the five boroughs, there was considerable support for Republican candidates in Staten Island and in Southern Brooklyn. What do you attribute that to? What do you think the Democratic Party might be missing as far as the mood of the voters out there?

**Mayor:** Errol, look, I don't know if you're seeing different results that I'm seeing, but let me just tell you, I think the difference between expectations versus reality. The reality is an overwhelmingly democratic city in an overwhelmingly democratic state, even compared to where we were, you know, 10, 20 years ago, markedly different. So I'm not shocked that a congressional seat in Staten Island that's been Republican primarily for decades – I'm not shocked that went Republican. I'm not shocked that there are some places in Southern Brooklyn that voted Republican. That's just not news. I think we should never, ever stop fighting for every inch. That's a different matter. I think it's – I'm a believer. We should contest every seat throughout the city, throughout the state, never from moment, consider a place to be “red” in the sense that we're not going to try and go win back people, because we always can win back people. Errol, you and I had come from the time when Governors of New York State used to win with the five boroughs, Erie County and Albany County and nothing else, and now it's a state where there are many, many parts of the state that vote Democratic. So I think we got to keep it in perspective. I have no doubt that would Donald Trump gone or at least not in the White House, we're going to have a chance to go into lot of neighborhoods and talk about the issues that people care about. Healthcare jobs, the direct things that matter in people's lives, the quality of their schools, and that's where Democrats always win back people who are on the fence.

**Louis:** Are you a little at least a little concerned that your name and image and what might be arguably caricatures of some of your policies or used by Republicans all around the state?

**Mayor:** I'm a Democrat. I'm a proud Democrat. If Republicans think that holding me up to Republicans helps them win Republican votes – not shocking. That's fine. I think what we saw all over the state, again, overwhelming vote for Joe Biden, overwhelmingly Democratic State Senate, overwhelmingly Democratic Assembly. So you might find a few seats where that wasn't true, but again, the big picture here, Democratic Party is dominating New York State dominating New York city even more, and that hardly has changed at all, but I'll tell you, we should go back next year and the year after and reclaim a lot of that, those few places, just go and get them right back. We've done it before we can do it again.

**Louis:** When you do that, of course, whether you're talking about Senate seats on Long Island or that 11th congressional district, then by definition, you're inviting sort of a more moderate point of view into the Democratic Party, right? I mean, it, it, it can't stand for you, you've got to protect those marginal or swing districts, and then that sort of tempers the progressive thrust of the Democratic Party, right?

**Mayor:** I don't think it's as simple as that, and I think the example of best example in recent American politics, Bernie Sanders, who had tremendous ability to reach a working class white voters, let's talk about the folks that were the base of Donald Trump. There are plenty of Democrats who can reach them. Joe Biden in another way, has been able to reach a lot of those voters. No, I don't think it's as simple as that. I think there's a lot of people who moved to the Republican party at different points because they thought the Democratic Party was not addressing the most basic issues in their lives. When Democrats talk about healthcare, Democrats win. That was the case of 2018, obviously when Democrats talk about labor unions, supporting working people, Democrats win. Look, I'm far from perfect, but I want to overwhelmingly citywide twice talking about working people, fighting income inequality, giving people Pre-K for all. I mean, given that to families and kids. These are actually the kitchen table issues that win for Democrats, and we got to keep that in mind.

**Louis:** Okay. We're going to leave it there for now. We will see you next week. Thanks so much for stopping and spending some time with us. Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Thank you, Errol.

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