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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: We're back Inside City Hall. It's Monday, that means Mayor de Blasio is here for our weekly discussion. Welcome Mr. Mayor, always good to see you.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you, Errol.

Louis: We have reached a deadline, I understand for the NYPD's marijuana working group that was supposed to look at changes in policing and or policy based on discrepancies between where complaints for marijuana use were coming in and a higher arrest rate that was not to the liking of the department or City Hall. Is there anything to report about that?

Mayor: Yeah, so tomorrow we'll lay out the whole proposal that came out of the task force Commissioner O'Neill created with the NYPD and working with other agencies. Look, let me say two things. One, the goals, the goals are to reduce unnecessary arrests which is something we've been doing overall. A hundred thousand fewer arrests overall in 2017, then 2013 crime going down consistently in that time frame. We want to build on that. So there is more unnecessary arrests to do away with. Certainly when it comes to marijuana enforcement, second the disparity. It's going to take time for sure, but we must reduce it and ultimately get to the day where there is no disparity in how we address different parts of our city. One thing I will tell you, I won't go into all the details of tomorrow. I am going to do that with Commissioner O'Neill but I want to say this, we're going to start very quickly. The things we announce tomorrow will be implemented this summer. So the change in the everyday lives of New Yorkers will be felt as early as this summer, will build out over the course of the year. Meaning, I believe we will start to drive down some of the unnecessary arrests, and some of those disparities literally in the course of 2018.

Louis: Okay, we'll look forward to that tomorrow.

Mayor: And I just want other thing to note. We have another mission ahead, it's something we're just starting on, but we want to talk a lot more about in the next few weeks which is – there is a generation that was affected by the policies of the past. A lot of whom ended up with a record for very minor offenses. It's time for us to turn our attention to that question too. Folks, including a lot of folks are still quite young and have their whole lives ahead and their careers

ahead who are being affected by a record. We need to figure there's some ways that we can address that, that's going to be another thing we act on in the coming weeks.

Louis: Okay, I mean that involves what? Ceiling or expungement?

Mayor: There are different options, but the one thing I would say broadly is I think now having looked at new ways to address the here and now, it does not negate that the policies of even the recent past have had a real impact on a lot of New Yorkers. We've got to look at whatever option can best address that.

Louis: Okay, that is an encouraging piece of news for those of us who have been talking about rap sheet mistakes in places, where somebody's rap sheet follows them forever and ever, and once a mistake is in there you can't even get it out whether intentional or not. You wrote an op-ed that went up on [CNN.com](https://www.cnn.com) today and it was about this crisis on the border where families are being separated. I did not realize that this was even possible, but a nine-year-old boy, a Honduran boy you wrote about was separated at the southern border and was shipped to a contracted facility here in New York City. How does that happen? How often does that happen? How do you get word of it? What is going on?

Mayor: I am shocked too. It's an inhumane system, and these kids and these families are not treated like human beings. And it's not surprising that this has really caused a revulsion all over the country. By the way, faith leaders of not only different background faith wise. But of different ideologies, including a lot of conservative faith leaders have really expressed their dismay at the notion that the fundamental unit of our society, the family being disrupted this way. It's even worse if you take the mother and the child, or the parent and the child and you separate them by hundreds of thousands of miles. It makes no sense. I was shocked – New York City is going to do all we can do with legal support and every other kind of support to work for unification of these families or at least to make sure the kids get to another family member in the meantime but not be held in isolation, I think it's traumatic for these kids. I think it goes against all our values. And there is a dehumanization that's happening here by these policies. And we know that the Trump administration could reverse them instantly if they wanted to. And I think what you're going to see very quickly in this country is a clear, clear majority of Americans say "wait a minute we didn't sign up for this" you may agree or disagree with any particular immigration policy. But breaking families apart in this fashion is unacceptable.

Louis: Yeah, the morality of it aside. If one thing that strikes me as atrocious policy making is that the notion is to serve as a deterrent to take this really strong and arguably immoral action to try and get the word to people – don't show up and request asylum at the border. How is that supposed to find its way into some little village in Honduras or a crime torn neighborhood in Guatemala?

Mayor: It's not, and the notion of deterrents when people are seeking refuge from the kind of things that we have given asylum for in the past – I mean it really gets to the core concepts in who we are as a people, who we are as a country. Even the founding fathers thought about these issues. This was a nation built of people who escaped persecution. It's been an American value from the very beginning, that there are people who deserve asylum. If you're a family in a

neighborhood or a city in Central America where you think your child is going to die because of the violence all around you, anyone of us would try and get out of there. If you're a political prisoner or someone who has been put through political subjugation, anyone would try and escape. People have come to the United States for generations escaping that kind of subjugation. There's a process to determine if someone's claim is appropriate or not, but the notion that all of that is suddenly being thrown out in a very misguided quest to blame immigrants for whatever challenges we face. I mean the simple Trumpian equation is blame immigrants for you own economic woes thinking about people who have struggled all over this country to make ends meet who have been left out too often in our economy. Those folks need to understand the forces of the status quo, the forces that have created the economy as we know it have nothing to do with a struggling immigrant escaping violence.

Louis: So this nine-year-old boy ends up here separated from his mother in New York City. What department will New York City assign to help him and what kind of help could you give him?

Mayor: Well, look we have a strong Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, and we have a strong legal assistance program runs with the Human Resources Administration. We are going to do everything we can; if someone's here in our city we want them to get that legal assistance. To make sure they get a fair outcome. If we can help with a reunification with another family member here, we'll obviously want to do that, and any assistance to help that child and that family. But in the end I think we've got to get to the root cause of this. It's what you said. Folks fleeing oppression are not going to hear the message don't try, because the alternative is to stay back in a place where literally they think their lives may be in danger.

Louis: Sure, sure.

Mayor: Why not deal with this humanely, and with a simple principal. If you're processing a case, do not take a child away from their parents. Simple principal we should all be able to agree on across the spectrum.

Louis: Logistically and in terms of the health problems and liabilities they're about to incur, I'm sure they're going to rethink this or at least I hope they will. Let me ask you, today a front page story in the Daily News about the law firm that represented you in to which you owe money, and that's personally is involved in the zoning dispute on the East Side. The implication of the story is that they're getting favorable rulings because directly or indirectly the assumption somewhere in your government is that hey this is the same firm that represents the Mayor; let's take it easy on them.

Mayor: That's just wrong, that's wrong in every way. The decisions are made on the merits, period. And you know, the only reason I owe debt to that firm, is there is still not a mechanism for which I can raise the money to pay it. When there is, I'll start doing that. So, I think this is absolutely a bad piece of analysis. I think it's inaccurate and I for one had no idea that that firm was involved until I saw the story today.

Louis: The mechanism available that other officials before you have used is they you know they mortgaged their house or something.

Mayor: Look, I disagree with that respectfully. I think what people have done historically, literally for decades is had a legal defense fund. And that's what I assumed too. Look you have the right to defense in this country, but unfortunately its costs a lot money. Folks in public life don't typically have a lot money. And the way you address that is to raise money under a clear set of rules. It turned out the city didn't have those rules, hopefully we will have them soon, and then we'll raise the money. I think that's the appropriate way to handle it.

Louis: Okay, let's take a break. We've got more to talk about with Mayor de Blasio; we'll be back in a minute with that. Stay with us.

[...]

Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. I'm once again joined by Mayor Bill de Blasio. And Mr. Mayor, another yellow cab driver committed suicide making it the sixth such incident since November. The Taxi Workers Alliance blamed it on the intense pressures in part spurred by this gigantic growth of the app-hailing services.

Is it time to revisit the idea of a hard legislative cap or some other sort of directed immediate solution?

Mayor: Yes, it's absolutely time. Look, this has been a really painful, tragic time. My heart goes out to these families and it's painful for all of us to watch. I say – and I'm going to say it every single time – if anybody in the taxi industry or any other industry feels because of economic pressure, they're considering taking their life, people have to help them, get them help. There's obviously a mental health pressure there that has to be addressed and 1-888-NYC-WELL is the go-to number for an kind of mental health assistance.

And we're reaching out to folks in the industry and I ask anyone who knows of anyone in distress like that, we got to help them not take their life. We got to help them toward a solution in terms of both mental health and economically.

But i absolutely think it's time for bigger action. We tried it a few years ago. You know the pushback from Uber was furious and there was concern in the Council but I think a lot has changed since then. I think people in the Council are ready for action –

Louis: You know, speaking of Uber, I talked to their CEO, Dara Khosrowshahi, the other day and he said he was open to the idea of starting or contributing to a fund to provide relief in certain instances – not for somebody who owns 20 medallions, a company, but for individuals like this poor man who recently took his life who was not a medallion owner but who was leasing a car for \$300 a shift and making \$200 on that shift and losing money every day falling further and further behind.

Is that something the City would consider starting or contributing to?

Mayor: I think we can look at a range of options. That's certainly something we should look at but the bottom line I think is structurally fixing the situation as best we can. Clearly there are so many for-hire vehicles out there now to the point that a lot of times they're driving empty which is not really good for anyone. It's not good for the drivers who aren't making enough money. It's not good for the environment. It's not good for congestion. I think a few years ago there were a lot of questions, I think there are fewer questions, now. I think there's more consensus that we need some bold changes to address this problem and I think it's very important that the folks out there doing this hard work, all these drivers see that change is coming.

So, I think the Council – I can't speak for them – but I think they're very receptive. I'm certainly ready to go and I think now that the City budget is passed, this would be something we all focus on quickly.

Louis: Okay, another demonstration at City Hall today involved the case of Saheed Vassell, who was shot and killed by police officers a couple of months ago. Even at this date, two months later, people have been asking just to know the names of the officers who killed him, who shot him, and unedited footage of the incident. As of now that still hasn't been provided.

Mayor: Well, I believe last I checked, it was, I will say admittedly weeks ago, that all the pertinent footage had been provided. Everyone can have their own definition but certainly the footage I saw which I know was released publicly gave a broad cross-section of what happened.

There's a process going on now obviously with the State Attorney General and then thereafter with the NYPD disciplinary process. I think that's the right way to go. I spoke to Mr. Vassell in the days after this horrible tragedy and he said something very simple. He wanted to make sure that justice was served in the final analysis. I do too.

But I think the way things are progressing in terms of investigation including an independent investigation by the Attorney General is the right way. I think at the appropriate time, identities, depending on how the process plays out, come out but this is not that time in my view.

Louis: Isn't it just a basic threshold question? Like how could a community have faith in a process if they don't even know who's involved because the City won't tell us?

Mayor: Because you have to have faith that when – and I do have this faith – when there's a combination of an independent entity looking at it and a disciplinary process inside the NYPD that has proven consistently certainly in our four years-plus to be objective and to lead to real outcomes depending on the situation, that that's appropriate.

But you know what just like the voices of the 9-1-1 callers were not put out for their protection, I think not putting out the names of the officers in the aftermath is perfectly appropriate. In the end there is due process and in the end everything is revealed that needs to be revealed. It's a tough balance to strike.

But what we are absolutely committed to is justice for everyone involved and getting to the truth of what happened.

Louis: Okay, let me switch to a different topic. Stephanie Miner, the former mayor of Syracuse, New York, has jumped in to the race for Mayor. She said she's going to run as an independent, not as a Republican, not as a Democrat. Have you talked with her about this?

Mayor: I haven't. I've known her a long time. I have tremendous respect for her. I think she did a great job a mayor in Syracuse but I have not talked to her and certainly I don't think I've talked to her even in 2018 [inaudible] that I can remember.

Louis: Sorry, I may have said something different. She's running for Governor.

Mayor: Yes. Yes. But again it's news to me.

Louis: Is it a good idea for something like this to happen – not that I'm projecting that this could even happen, I have no idea what her chances are or what polling might reveal – but when you have in effect two Democrats running in the same race, which is essentially what this would be, and then you add the possibility of a Cynthia Nixon running as a Working Families Party line, in effect you've got three Democrats running against a Republican candidate in November.

Mayor: Look, the simplest way for me to say it is, when the smoke clears there should be a Democrat as Governor of New York State, period. And it's just a real bottom line. Today's news is a surprise, I think to all of us. And we'll have to process it and see where goes. Obviously, you know, she has to get on the ballot which has its own process.

But I'm someone who's said I'm very comfortable with a strong debate in our own party. I'm someone who believes the Democratic Party has to get back to its roots, get back to its identity as a progressive party. I think that's important morally, substantively, and for political win-ability in the future.

But when the smoke clears, we need to have a Democratic governor in New York State.

Louis: Cynthia Nixon who is running for the Democratic nomination, unveiled an education plan that looked oddly familiar after talking with you every week. She's calling for increased funding for schools based on taxation of better off New Yorkers. Sounds like a millionaire's tax. But when she showed her chart, it showed it would dip down to households making something like \$300,000 and you and I may disagree on this but I think if somebody making \$300,000 a year and somebody making a million dollars is in fundamentally different categories.

Isn't that always the wrap millionaire's tax, like you start up here but next thing you know it becomes like the alternative minimum tax – starts creeping down, starts creeping down? Next thing you know it's a tax on the middle class.

Mayor: Well, look, I understand that concern but I think I'm a little more literal. For example, the tax that we've been talking about now for the MTA and its future is literally a millionaire's tax. I think every leader has an opportunity to declare what they think is a fair balance point.

Something like education reaches very, very deeply into our society. So, it's perfectly legitimate to offer whatever number she makes sense.

I have not seen the plan until it came out publicly obviously. But I think the bottom line is what I think is healthy is saying where are we going on education? You know the big thing that would change the future of this city and a lot of the rest of the state would be for the Campaign for Fiscal Equity case decided a decade ago by our highest court in the state to be honored by the State of New York.

It really never has been on a consistent basis. That would provide funding that would be transcendent for New York City, for upstate cities, for rural areas as well. It would really try and address where the gaps are in education in the State of New York. I'm glad that discussion is being had because let's face it, as a city, as a state, we're still way far from where we need to go educationally in a world where education determines economic destiny.

Louis: Okay.

Mayor: It's a good debate to have.

Louis: Alright. We're just about out of time. The heat today has been oppressive. Are the cooling centers on tap? Are those going to be opening up any time soon?

Mayor: We've used them any time the heat gets difficult for people and they've been very effective. So, anyone who needs relief can call 3-1-1. But hopefully, this is not going to go on too long this week.

Louis: Yeah, I'm doing the informal thing. Kind of looking at movies that I may want to go see or something like that.

Mayor: Get to a movie theater, Errol. It'll be good for you.

Louis: Thanks a lot, Mr. Mayor. Very good to see you. We'll see you next week.

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