



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10007

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**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

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

**Errol Louis:** Good evening, welcome to Inside City Hall for Monday, November 12th, 2018. I'm Errol Louis. New York elected officials including Mayor de Blasio are back in town after attending an annual gathering in Puerto Rico known as SOMOS el Futuro. That's where State lawmakers discuss and set part of the legislative agenda for the upcoming session. This year, of course, the buzz was all about Democrats winning control of the State Senate for the first time in nearly a decade. Joining me now for the first time since Election Day is Mayor de Blasio. Good evening, Mr. Mayor, very good to see you.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** It's great to see you and I am thrilled at what happened on Election Day including the Democrats winning the State Senate. And I want to do a thank you. I want to thank the people of New York City for voting for all three of the ballot questions. Each one got on average almost a million votes – two-thirds of the votes for each one – and now we're going to be able to strengthen our democracy and get big money out of politics, reward small dollar donations. So, a real good day for New York City,

**Louis:** Yes, indeed. In fact, we will certainly get to all of – actually, you know what, before we do anything else, I understand yesterday is the actual Veterans Day. Today is the day we observe it but I guess I wanted to ask you at a minimum, you know, veterans tend to be undercovered by the media. This is just a given. It's one of the biggest federal agencies there is. After the military, it might be the second or third biggest department in the whole U.S. government.

We don't have dedicated reporters who follow it. I know there are a lot of veterans here in New York. The local job is to try and sort of fill the gaps that the federal government doesn't and get people better connected to services and so forth. What's the most important thing that we could, as a city, be focused on for veterans that we're maybe currently not giving enough attention to?

**Mayor:** Well, I totally agree with your thesis that there's parades and there's commemorations and yet in the 364 days between Veterans Day, where's the action? There's not enough coverage, there's not enough follow through on the federal level. It's very strange. It should be one of the issues that unites us the most and where there's the most focused attention and energy. It isn't. So our veterans get left out in the cold too often. The city, for that very reason, started our own Department of Veteran Services. It's the first in the country – this kind of model – to really fill

those gaps aggressively, to get veterans housing, to fight homelessness, to get them mental health and physical health support, to help them get jobs.

And we're doing a lot more of that. Look, when I look across the range of needs, I do think the physical health and the mental needs are particularly crucial because we know sadly the V.A. is not sufficient. The more I've talked to members of the military and former members, the more I hear about mental health as a concern coming out more and more. Obviously, the First Lady has focused on destigmatizing mental health. She's talked to a lot of people in the military about the fact that both in service and after their service, members of the military need that access and they don't have it often enough. And there's a lot of stigma that has to be overcome.

So, you know, our Commissioner for Veteran Services, former Brigadier General Loree Sutton of the Army is a mental health professional by background. She's really focused on that as one of the number one things we have to do differently and that has to be done on the ground.

**Louis:** Okay, give her my regards. I will try and catch up with General Sutton. We need to talk, like you said –

**Mayor:** And she is an energetic guest. You want her on your show.

**Louis:** Yeah, no, I've met – she's very good. Okay, the political victory for Democrats. Was it all you hoped for, more or less? I meant there's this odd debate about whether or not this was a true blue wave. As far as I can tell, I don't know how much Democrats could have asked for beyond winning a bunch of governorships in the midwest including Kansas, flipping 300-odd legislative seats including control of the chamber like the New York State Senate. I understand there was euphoria in Puerto Rico –

**Mayor:** Look, I –

**Louis:** And it wasn't just the drinks –

[Laughter]

**Mayor:** There you go. I think people should be very pleased with the results of Election Day on many levels. You know seven governors flipped and seven state legislative chambers. The House was won not just by a little but by a lot. The State Senate won not just by a little, by a lot.

To me, it was a very, very solid night. No one thought it would be easy to take back the Senate and even that there's – we're still waiting on Arizona and Florida, and Arizona particularly looks good for Democrats.

Look, I think we had some exciting candidates who were helping us to try a different approach to campaigns. Certainly Stacey Abrams, Andrew Gillum. Beto O'Rourke – two of those we don't still know where that election is going but what we know about three of them is they ran superlative races that took states that used to be considered out of reach and put them very much on the edge of victory either now or in the near future.

So, I think it's a very satisfying night. Now, the question is – what do we learn from it? We learned that we've got to run candidates that can go to the grassroots and energize people to vote who weren't voting otherwise. That's those candidates I mentioned for sure.

We learned that you got to talk to people and when you do talk to people in the industrial midwest, suddenly we're winning those states because our candidates went out and talked about health care first and foremost for which the Republicans had no answer. So, I think there's a lot of good to learn from this.

I also think if you thought this was high turnout, look out for 2020 which I think is going to be astounding turn out. I mean Democrats won over six million more votes in – if you composite the Congressional election – over six million more votes nationally. In the presidential last time, it was a three million vote gap in favor of Democrats. They've doubled that in two years. I think when you look to 2020, you're going to see an astounding level of turnout and an even higher Democratic advantage.

**Louis:** One thing that comes with a party that's kind of on the rise, that seems to be attracting a lot more voters as the Democrats demonstrably did this last time, is that you get different kinds of Democrats.

Right, so here in the city if you're looking at the Congressional races, you get a Max Rose who actually kind of used you as a negative foil saying, you know, 'Bill de Blasio doesn't care about us and the Republicans don't care about us and Dan Donovan doesn't care about us.' And I understand there's a certain team flavor of, hey, do whatever it takes to win but he's a very different kind of a person than Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. They're both Democratic freshman. There are seats upstate that flipped where there will also be sort of a different kind of a Democrat. What kind of big-tent philosophy do you think is going to emerge out of all of those?

**Mayor:** Look, I think you see even with the campaigns just past to some extent. The Democratic Party has to get a more unified national message and particularly focusing on pocketbook issues, kitchen table issues. Health care was that. It was pretty [inaudible] across all campaigns but there was a lot more to talk about including the fact that people's real incomes have been stagnant for a long time which is really one of the reasons why I think Trump had the strength he had in a few of those midwestern states in 2016.

Democrats did not speak to that clearly enough but this year you saw the beginning with the unified or fairly unified message on health care. My view is this is a party that has to be very clear to working class people, low-income people, middle-class people, you name it, that people are not getting ahead in this country except for a privileged few and that privileged few needs that great tax break that they got from the Republicans taken right back, repealed, brought back. Use those resources to help middle class and working class people.

I think that's going to be a unifying message around 2020. I think the President is very vulnerable on this point. You'll notice that Republicans talked, at the time of the tax legislation, they were predicting this would be a huge positive – remember the days right after? Companies

were making announcements. People were talking, ‘Oh, I got \$200 back in my paycheck,’ whatever.

It suddenly went silent because the more people understood and the more Democrats educated them about the fact that it was a giveaway to the wealthy and corporations, they angrier average Americans got and not just Democrats, people of all backgrounds politically.

I think that sets the equation for 2020. Talk about that. Talk about health care. Talk about the things – I think kitchen table issues including how to support families. I mean look, in this city with what we’ve done with things like Paid Sick Leave, Pre-K, 3-K – those are things that help families to make ends meet. I think people want to hear about a lot more of that going forward and that will make the divisiveness of Trump even starker in contrast because you have an opportunity to talk to people about what you’re actually going to do for their lives and how you’re going to change their lives. And Trump can’t make that argument at this point.

**Louis:** Right, right. Well, we’ve got more to talk about – how all of this is going to play out in New York. I know that there’s an almost decade-old backlog of Democratic wishes and priorities that are going to all be carried to Albany in January including the city’s wishlist. We’re going to talk about that in just a minute. But first a short break. Don’t go anywhere, we’re going to have much more with Mayor de Blasio.

[...]

**Louis:** We are back Inside City Hall. I’m once again joined by Mayor de Blasio. After a decade in the wilderness, Democrats are taking control of the State Senate. There’s now a Democratic Governor, all three people in the room, not three men in a room, one’s a woman –

**Mayor:** Yes, the world has changed.

**Louis:** Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Carl Heastie, Governor Cuomo, they are going to start moving on this Democratic agenda that many of these senators ran on, promising you know, a lot of different issues. You were with them in Puerto Rico, I’m sure the city’s wish list may have come up.

**Mayor:** Oh, I’ve talked about it a lot before Election Day, after Election Day and I certainly had great meetings with Leader Stewart-Cousins and Speaker Heastie and I couldn’t be more excited about each of their leadership and how they are going to work together. I think that is going to be really exciting for this state and this city. Look I want to segue from what we saw on Tuesday. Here we saw a clear mandate for campaign finance reform in this city. I think one of the biggest agenda items in Albany will be fixing the Board of Elections here in the city, acting on election reform writ large for this state – one of the only states that doesn’t have things like early voting and same day registration. And looking at campaign finance options for the state as well which has pretty lax campaign finance rules. One of the things we hoped for when I put forward the campaign finance proposals back in my state of the city was that when you know, the biggest city in the county, 43 percent of New York State’s population, when we acted decisively it would encourage Albany to act too. So I think the moment is ripe for election reform and campaign

finance reform in Albany and when you look at these recounts and all going on in other states, it's a reminder that we are way behind them in terms of our election laws and we are actually making it hard for people to vote.

**Louis:** Yes, our machinery is badly in need of a tune up, if not a root and branch replacement but as you know, you've offered \$20 million, I think your predecessor Mayor Bloomberg offered a comparable amount to the board saying like, look please modernize and we will pay for it. And what they said was keep your money, we would rather have control.

**Mayor:** And that control has been disastrous for the people in New York City. Election Day was really bad, really bad. You know 2016 was marked by disenfranchising 200,000 people, arbitrarily purging them before the Democratic presidential primary. This year was marked by an extraordinary number of problems with the voting machines and excuses given were things like it was raining. Well, you know that's not a new development in human life, we've had rain before so Board of Elections is broken. Albany can act, even within the current partisan structure to professionalize the Board of Elections, empower the executive director to make the managerial decisions and not need to go to the board for everything. I think it is one of the most immediate reforms we need. They need to be told by all of the different party leaders, take that \$20 million, institute the reforms that we've offered. But also things like early voting, would take a lot of pressure off. In the country this last Tuesday, by Tuesday morning, 38 million people had already voted and didn't need to go to the polls on Tuesday. I think New Yorkers would embrace it but they have to be given that right.

**Louis:** Are you expecting to see that on the early agenda, when the Democrats take full control in Albany?

**Mayor:** Yes, I believe there is tremendous energy for early voting in particular, but we also have to push reform for the New York City Board of Elections. And this is going to be a major, major priority for me and I would like to ask everyone to get involved because April 1<sup>st</sup> is the crucial day in Albany when the budget is passed. From now to April 1<sup>st</sup> we have to really focus on fixing our Board of Elections. And again, I'm very hopeful that our example of aggressive campaign finance reform and public financing will have a positive impact on the Albany debate.

**Louis:** You said something Friday on WNYC, you told Brian Lehrer, I intend to continue in elected office if there is an opportunity to do so but my focus is on being Mayor of the city for the next three years and two months. So in the three years and two months, we will be talking with you every week, but when you say something like if there's an opportunity to do so, what goes through my mind is there are really only three offices that are higher than Mayor. There's governor, there's senator, there's president of the United States. Which do you think might be available first for you?

**Mayor:** I don't conjecture, you know. The way I'm trying to be clear about this is I'm focused intensely on the race to the finish, December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021, we got a huge amount to do. I mean things that you know are passions for me like instituted 3K For All across our school system and going a lot further in terms of making this the fairest big city in the country. We'll see if other

opportunities exist at the end of that time, if they are, I am going to be very interested in continuing this kind of work because I think I've been able to get something done for people.

**Louis:** But you – do you ever, you know, wake up and look in the mirror and say like, I can do a better job than that guy, you know. I mean half the country says that about Donald Trump but even among the Democratic –

**Mayor:** Yeah, that's a low bar –

**Louis:** But even among the Democratic contenders, though, right? I mean –

**Mayor:** I don't – I don't think about it that way, I think about the fact that if you believe in public service, and if you build up some ability to do it and you think you want to keep doing it, keep doing it. But you also have to be realistic. I have to be realistic about which opportunities exist. Right now we've got a huge amount to do here and I think what we do here has a very big impact on the rest of the country. People pay a lot of attention to New York City as a model of a place that is doing some of the things that the rest of country needs to do. We're pretty harmonious at this point. We're the safest big city in America. We have an economy that keeps building. There is a lot to show here I want to keep building on that but I do want to stay in public service after that.

**Louis:** As early as this Wednesday a bill could be introduced in the City Council that would eliminate the office of Public Advocate.

**Mayor:** I think that's a huge mistake.

**Louis:** Yeah the Councilmembers who have put it up think it's a good idea. What would you say to them –

**Mayor:** Well I had that job and I think it was an important opportunity to have checks and balances. And public advocates have done that with whoever is Mayor, whether it is the same or a different party. So I think with the City Government this strong, this big, and a strong Mayor system, those checks and balances bring real value. So I think it's proven itself.

**Louis:** The Amazon deal. You have said a lot of nice things about it. Have you used Amazon? Are you a customer?

**Mayor:** I am not.

**Louis:** You are not customer?

**Mayor:** No.

**Louis:** Never?

**Mayor:** I'm real - I'm real old school. I just go to the store.

**Louis:** You just go to the store. I don't know what –

[Laughter]

**Mayor:** But I'll tell you this. I think what has been underestimated here is the sheer magnitude of this vision. We're talking about the single biggest economic development deal in the history of New York City. What we're talking about is a number of jobs that would make this company the single largest private employer in the City when it fully plays out. We're talking about what I think is the absolute consolidation of our technology sector once and for all as, you know, global capital for technology.

You don't – you know, people hold press conferences when they pick up a few hundred jobs. We're talking about a number somewhere between 25,000 and 50,000. And yeah, it will take work to implement it properly and we need the company to work well with the neighborhood and with the City. We think they will. But I want to say to everyone who is looking at this, we have never seen this magnitude of economic progress in terms of huge number of jobs and high quality jobs. I gave the State of the City a couple years ago and talked about, you know, a vision of creating high quality jobs for New York City. This is the epitome of that.

**Louis:** And they're going to be if not right next to very close to the Queens Bridge Houses?

**Mayor:** If they – again – they have not made a final decision on this city or the final location but obviously they've looked very hard at Long Island City and you're right. I think that's an incredible opportunity for the people in Queens Bridge Houses. I mean the folks I talk to who want to see our technology sector expand and want technology jobs, folks in public housing, CUNY students. We've invested a lot to help CUNY students get STEM degrees, two year STEM degrees, they're going to be able to take something like and go right into a company like Amazon. So there's a whole generation coming up and even folks who are well into their career who want to get into the tech sector this instantly builds our tech sector to a whole new level overnight.

**Louis:** Are you in conversations with the Governor about whatever final packages is going to be available to Amazon to help them make their final decision?

**Mayor:** I've talked to the Governor, and our teams have been constantly communicating. We've done a lot of negotiation at the City level because a lot of it has to do with very local matters but there's unity that this is something that would affect our economy foundationally and we're going to do the things that we can to make sure that ultimately New York City is the winner here.

**Louis:** Okay, so you and Governor Amazon Cuomo, perhaps we'll get something good for the City. Okay, thanks – thanks very much. Enjoy the rest of your Veterans Day holiday. Thank you for coming by. Let's take a short break here.

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