

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 3, 2021, 7:15 PM

CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. As we mentioned earlier, Governor Cuomo announced that 24-hour subway service will resume on May 17th. And additional restrictions on restaurants and businesses will be lifted soon after. Meanwhile about 80,000 City employees returned to the office this morning, many for the first time since the pandemic shutdown the city. Mayor de Blasio joins me now from the Blue Room inside City Hall to talk about that and much more. Welcome, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Hey, Errol. How are you doing today?

Louis: Just fine thank you. And I wondered how this first day back went for 80,000 of your employees? Not everybody of course, is happy about it. What can you tell us about how it went and how safe things are for City workers?

Mayor: Well, first of all, a lot of energy here at City Hall today. It was such a good feeling, Errol. I mean there was just a buzz to the place. And a lot of smiles, a lot of people happy to be back together. And people who know they are contributing to the recovery of New York City. And it's a good time for folks to be coming back. We've had a very successful day across the whole City government. And it is time. It really is time for folks to be back together so we can supercharge this recovery. And obviously, a lot now is moving. I think the timing turns out to be right on the money.

Louis: Are masks optional for those coming into City buildings, including City Hall?

Mayor: No, we – look, we have masks as a rule. Obviously, CDC says now there are certain circumstances in which people don't need them. But our rule has been to say very simply people should wear masks because we're talking about relatively confined spaces, obviously.

Louis: Will workers who have received the full vaccination treatment, be handled differently or will they just follow the same rules as everybody else?

Mayor: Look for now, again, the simple approach has been, and it's certainly what's worked in our schools so brilliantly is say, you know, if you're inside a City workplace, wear a mask, obviously you're connecting with the public, wear a mask. It's just the simple thing to do right now. Over time, we'll keep assessing. I mean, one of the goals, obviously and I've talked about the power of opening up New York City more and more, bringing us back strong is to reduce the

requirement of some of those restrictions. And we'll be watching the data. We'll be watching the science. We're paying a lot of attention to what the CDC says. But for this initial time, as we're starting out, you know, we've got a lot of smart precautions in place and we want to keep everyone safe, obviously.

Louis: Now, you as a major employer and of course there are other major employers in the private sector, what's the plan for workers who simply don't want to return?

Mayor: Look, we need people to do the work that is so important to bring back this city. Overwhelmingly, of course, folks are saying they understand that, you know, this is a crucial moment for the city. And just like 80 percent of City workers, the vast majority, have been at their posts throughout this entire crisis, including some really tough assignments and dangerous assignments. They stood by us. They got the job done. It's certainly, it's the right time for office workers to come back. People are obligated. It's as simple as that, Errol. If they're told this is when they have to show up at work, that's when they have to show up at work, just like anytime would have been true before the pandemic.

Louis: There was a question we got from a viewer. This came on Twitter and it sounds like a City worker. It says City workers teleworking have been doing so without overtime or compensation, comp time. Since the City has the largest budget ever, will these employees receive retroactive pay or now be eligible for overtime?

Mayor: Look, Errol, as I would say right now, we are going to in-person work. We'll align to the rules we used when people are in-person, they'll be treated the same way as when they were in-person before. But I think the important thing is to work on where we're going from here. From this point on, you know, we are moving to the full reopening of New York City and getting back to the basic approaches we took before the pandemic. That's what I'm focused on, not looking back, but looking forward.

Louis: Well, but if people think that they do have a valid claim for overtime or comp time, is there a procedure for processing those requests?

Mayor: I honestly haven't heard that question before, and it's not something that I've focused on. I'll have my team follow up on it, for sure. But I think the important point now is let's focus on serving the people of New York City. Let's focus on bringing New York City back. That's where I'm going to put all my energy.

Louis: The Governor has announced that the subway system will reopen 24/7. Do you support this? And as far as you know, does that mean that overnight cleaning is going to change or end?

Mayor: Look, I, from the very beginning, I thought the cleaning was the right approach and the closure for a few hours at night was the right approach. And the City and State announced that together. But I said also from the beginning that it would be temporary. And when the right time came, we should go back to 24/7. That time's now. You know, I talked about the July 1st is the time I want to see a full, full reopening of New York City. But I'm certainly comfortable with the subways coming back sooner than that. We'll be ready to make sure – a lot of things that we have

to be really smart about, including how we ensure that homeless folks who are in the subway system, get outreach and get to shelter and stay in shelter. That effort has been incredibly successful during the course of this pandemic. 800 New Yorkers who were living in the subway system now are in shelter, not in the streets, not in the subway. We're going to keep that going with this new approach because it works. So, we're going to be really, really focused on continuing that. But obviously having 24/7 service is a blessing for a lot of New Yorkers. And so, you know, I'm glad it's back, it's part of our recovery.

Louis: After eight years of tangling with the Governor over various issues, when you called for July 1st, did you know he was going to sort of announce an earlier date? I mean, it was absolutely no surprise to us at NY1.

Mayor: I don't tend to be surprised by his particular choices lately. Let's put it that way.

Louis: Okay. Fair enough. The COVID numbers are going down, which is great. There's of course, more and more concern about a lack of herd immunity and whether we will ever get there? What are your health professionals telling you about that?

Mayor: We talked about this even this morning in the morning briefing. I never actually thought herd immunity in the purest form was the goal that was so assured to us. Honestly, I thought of it as more community immunity, more functional immunity. Dave Chokshi, our Health Commissioner spoke about this this morning. That, you know, when you combine the number of people vaccinated, which is outstanding now, over 6.6 million vaccinations to date, with the number of people who've been exposed to the disease and have the antibodies, it simply means there's just not that many places for COVID to go right now in New York City. Thank God. That creates a functional kind of immunity. We want to keep deepening that. Herd immunity in the sort of classic sense that the disease wouldn't mean anything to us anymore? I was not personally anticipating that. I was anticipating a world in which COVID becomes like influenza. Where it's a real issue. You know, the flu we have to take seriously, we lose some people each year to the flu. But for the vast majority of people, it's a quick shot and they're fine. So, COVID is not going to go away permanently, but we can reduce COVID's impact to so little that it becomes just a part of the sort of health backdrop in New York City as we continue to recover.

Louis: Okay. A lot of the parks and streets are increasingly lively. But the commercial districts, especially parts of Midtown, Manhattan feel like a different story. So, the Empire State Building is under 50 percent occupancy. You've got small businesses that are not – they don't have the foot traffic to back up their sales. Landlords can't keep giving discounts, or so they say. Amid the optimism of the reopening do we have a disaster developing? And what would you do if you were a business owner? Would you reopen in Midtown right now?

Mayor: Yeah, listen, I think a lot of business people are looking forward. I think they are playing the long game. New York City is obviously coming back. You just laid it out beautifully. The activity levels in this city now are outstanding. The economy is extraordinarily strong here and around the nation. What's it going to mean? A huge amount of economic activity in New York City. I think the summer's going to be intense. I think you're going to see a lot of tourism. I think you're going to see people coming out to the outdoor dining, the cultural events. I say all

that to say, I think that folks who own businesses in Midtown realize that there's going to be a big comeback and it makes sense to get ahead of it. It makes sense to get ready for it. I was just in the Empire State Building on Saturday for the 90th birthday celebration. And in fact, extraordinary companies have taken a space in the Empire State Building. Some of them are taking even more space. So, I think the rebound is coming. And as we're seeing right now today with City office workers, it's the right time for people to come back. So, I think you're going to see a lot of private sector firms saying to their employees, we need you back. We need the creativity. We need the teamwork. We need the ability to teach skills to new workers, younger workers. We can only do that in-person. I think the pendulum's going to swing back intensely over these next few months.

Louis: Okay. Stand by Mr. Mayor. We are going to take a short break here. We'll have more with Mayor de Blasio in just a minute. Stay with us.

[...]

We are back Inside City Hall on once again, joined by Mayor de Blasio who's with us, coming to us from the Blue Room, and Mr. Mayor, I've got a viewer question. This is from [inaudible], and the question is can anything be done about all the drag racing in Manhattan? So dangerous people, weaving in and out of traffic? No NYPD anywhere?

Mayor: You know, I've heard several concerns raised lately about this. I take it seriously. I spoke to Chief Rodney Harrison, our Chief of Department for the NYPD, and there is a new effort that the NYPD is going to focus resources on this area because it's a real – it is a danger, it's a disturbance to communities. This is a quality-of-life issue we take seriously. So, I think in the next few weeks you're going to see a strong new initiative on that front.

Louis: Okay. If we could talk politics for a minute, you made an endorsement today. It was sort of noteworthy, it came out—

Mayor: Yesterday.

Louis: Yesterday, well, I noticed it today. It was over – it was on Twitter through your Bill de Blasio account, which you haven't used in months where you're saying nice things about Mercedes Narcisse – a registered nurse, a community organizer, an activist. You endorsed her election to the New York City Council. Why her and will there be other endorsements?

Mayor: So, it's May now and obviously elections, I think, seven weeks away. You're keeping close count. I think that's right.

Louis: That's right.

Mayor: It's soon, and now's the time I'm starting to focus, and I think a lot of New Yorkers are starting to focus. Mercedes Narcisse is running in the 46th Council District in Brooklyn, Canarsie, and other neighborhoods in Brooklyn. I've known her for years and years. I think she's an extraordinary community activist, and also as a registered nurse, she was out there helping

people during COVID. She was providing healthcare directly to people in need in her community. She was running a food drive, putting herself out there to help others. So, that's the ultimate form of public service. I'd like to see a lot more elected officials who are people who have really rolled up their sleeves and help people in a crisis the way Mercedes Narcisse has. So, I really felt she was someone I wanted to help get to the City Council, and I'm going to be watching for others that I think are exceptional candidates, and when I think it makes sense to endorse and get involved, I'm certainly going to do that.

Louis: Okay, 50 other council districts and the borough presidents and the comptroller and the mayor. Do you expect to make endorsements, in particular for mayor?

Mayor: I'm looking at it. I'm looking at all different races and I'm going to decide as I go along and not guaranteeing I am going to get in, but if I feel at any point, it's the right thing to do then, I'm not shy, Errol.

Louis: I know you've got a point of view of these things. In fact, on that note – Scott Stringer, who was running for mayor has been accused of sexual misconduct. He's been losing endorsements. I don't imagine you were ever planning to endorse him, and you said some things that made it sound as if you were calling for an investigation, but who would do that? What is the right way do you think to process this situation that he finds himself in?

Mayor: Yeah, I don't know the perfect answer to that question. My understanding is at the time he was in the State Assembly, so I'm assuming it's a state jurisdiction. That's my understanding. I think DOI said it is not – the City DOI said it was not their jurisdiction, but I do think with such an important allegation and, you know, so close to an election, it really would be ideal to have an investigation done and get results quickly because the people need to know.

Louis: I mean, given the amount of time that has passed, I mean, any criminal or civil statute of limitations has long since passed almost certainly, you know, it's – not every wrong is has a remedy at hand, right? So, what I mean, it wouldn't be fair, would it? To ask him to answer for something that happened 20 years ago that was alleged only now?

Mayor: I think it's very important that he answer and help people to understand and tell the truth about what happened. But beyond that, I think something of this magnitude deserves an investigation because whatever a candidate says it should be respected, but it's not obviously the whole story and investigation is the only way to get to the truth, and I, you know, I think people deserve that. I think when the public has a decision to make of this magnitude, who's going to lead this city coming out of this pandemic, hopefully into a very, very bright future. We got to know the truth about folks and at this point, the best way to address that would be for there to be a quick, but very precise investigation.

Louis: Okay. Well, let me move on. The amend named Jordan Burnett has been charged with vandalizing houses of worship up in the Bronx. He was arraigned over the weekend on 42 counts, criminal trespass, aggravated harassment, other charges. The acting Bronx Criminal Court Judge Louis Nock ordered him held on bail. That decision was then overturned because we

have a 2019 law that says you don't require bail for things like this. The judge thought he did the right thing. You said that you agreed with that. Do we need to move to a different standard? I mean, New York is really an outlier among the 50 states and not allowing a judge to use dangerousness as a criteria for ordering somebody to be held on bail.

Mayor: Yeah, Errol, I've spoken to this many times over the years. First let's be very, very clear. The bail reform law was the right thing to do, and the legislature did the right thing in addressing some horrible injustices, and clear institutional racism. That said, I also believe there has to be space for judges to use their discretion when they think there is legitimate threat to the public. That's something we have to keep working on to get the balance right. But, in this instance, you know, you're talking about a hate crime. You're talking about an attack on a synagogue, a violent attack on a synagogue, at time when people are so concerned, and we've seen the horrible attacks on the Asian American community. I think one of the ways we fight hate crimes is by making clear there will be consequences, and I am concerned if someone has consistently committed a hate crime – I don't want to see them out on the street where they might do it again, because communities are living in fear right now, of hate crimes, and we need to show them that we really consistently find the people who commit these crimes. It's not many people. In a city of eight and a half million, the vast majority of people in the city support each other, get along with each other, but a very small number of people committed these crimes. They need to suffer the consequences.

Louis: Yeah. But I mean, in this case, I mean, we're, we're not, we're not arguing whether or not someone should be held accountable, but the question is what should their status be while they're waiting for their day in court so that we can determine if they actually did it, right? I mean, like any other defendant there could be anything you know, anything at all going on with Mr. Burnett. I mean, he could say that he wasn't in his right mind or he was under duress or it's a mistake, or you have the wrong person. There's any number of things that he could say. The idea is that he needed that be jailed until we can sort all of that out.

Mayor: I fully appreciate that point. I think it really comes down again to what the facts say and what the law says, and if a judge looks at the facts and it looks at the law and says, you know, someone poses a threat and within the law, they make a choice. I respect that. But the bottom line here is I'm responding to the human reality, the human reality is, we've gone through a very tough time, the pandemic, horrendous, but then on top of this period where we've experienced these hate crimes, I think people are deeply hurt by them. They do involve violence, and we've got to make sure that people don't get to keep committing them. So, it's a balance we have to strike, but I am very convinced that one of the ways to make sure that these crimes stop is for it to be clear that they're not going to be tolerated and there will be consequences.

Louis: Is this a possible instance in our, in our last minute of a collision between well-meaning, you know, long overdue, progressive reforms and the reality of the way the world works?

Mayor: Well, that's a pretty cosmic question, but what I'd say -- it's a heartfelt question too, but I would say that we keep working at these things. Seriously, Errol, I would say the reform was absolutely needed, and as we practice, as we go through the work of implementing any law, we watch for the intended consequences and sometimes the unintended consequences and make

adjustments. So, I think that's the honest conversation. Let's see, as these things play out, if we got to make other adjustments. There were adjustments made in 2020, if there's other adjustments needed that's what the legislature does regularly. The ultimate goal here is to create a society that is fair, is filled with justice, that's colorblind, but also where people can know they're safe.

Louis: Okay. We'll leave it right there. Thanks very much for joining us, Mr. Mayor, we'll see you next week.

Mayor: Thank you, Errol.

###