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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: Good evening. Welcome to Inside City Hall for Monday, April 27th, 2020. I'm Errol Louis, thanks for joining us. As you know, since the pandemic has struck our city, we've been bringing you political coverage around the clock here at NY1. Tonight, we are pleased to continue that process by returning to a nightly broadcast of Inside City Hall. This week begins with news that hospitalization figures are moving slowly in the right direction, although hundreds of New Yorkers have lost their lives in the last 24 hours alone. We've also heard about new self-testing procedures that City Hall has announced. We've got news as well about the possibility of reopening the economy and we've heard about a new initiative that will open up to 100 miles of car-free traffic so that people can go outside and keep their social distance. To talk about that and much more, as well as, the plans to cancel the planned presidential primary, we've got Mayor de Blasio who joins us now from the Blue Room Inside City Hall. Good evening, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good evening, Errol.

Louis: I want to just start with the street closure plan. Something that you'd resisted up until now. And I guess broadly the question is about mixed messages. Your administration has closed dog runs, you've padlocked playgrounds, you've taken the nets down from a basketball hoops, and the announcement today sounded like you're going to say, well, let's open up a hundred miles of streets so that people can come outside and hang out. That seems like the opposite of what we've been talking about for the last month?

Mayor: Well, I think you are right. If that's what it was, it would be a contradiction, but that's not what it is. The fact is that what we've been concerned about from the beginning has been the fact that we need to figure out how to make social distancing work, make the reality we're living with now safe and healthy for everyone and not create new, unintended consequences. So, in fact, Errol, when the first ideas were floated, we tried them in different ways, but there was a persistent concern about creating new gathering places as you suggested. That was one of the things that made me hesitant. Also, the need for a lot of enforcement, which I'm a believer in that to keep people safe, we need enforcement to do so, to make sure there isn't congregating, to make sure there is social distancing. Or in the case of streets, some other cities opened up streets without enforcement. I thought that model would be dangerous here. But what's changed in the last few days is very productive conversations with the City Council. And they parallel conversations that I've had inside my own administration, including with Commissioner Shea and our Transportation Commissioner Polly Trottenberg, about the way that we could address the growing reality of warmer weather. Where more and more people are going to come out

naturally. Yes, we're telling people, still you need to shelter in place and yes, of course keep your social distancing. But we knew in the warm weather there would be some impulse to get out more. Even if people spent most of the days inside, we knew a lot of that would be around the parks. The notion of opening up more space around the parks, opening up those streets made a lot of sense logistically and in terms of safety. The council and my team, we saw a lot of common ground there. That's one of the things we're going to be doing. So, it's with enforcement Errol, to your original point. It's not open up a space and ignore it. It is open up a space and have enforcement to make sure that people handle it properly, but there is more space for everyone.

Louis: On a related topic, as the weather gets warm, the question of what happens in the pools and the beaches is going to be front and center as well. What is the prospect of that?

Mayor: So, the pools right now we do not have a plan to open. Look at the rate we're going. We are making progress as you said up top, we're making progress in terms of driving back this disease. But it is going to take a substantial amount of time. So, we do not plan on having the pools open for the reason of health and safety. Pool is obviously a place where a lot of people congregate. There's locker rooms, there's lines. There's lots of things we don't want to see now. And the expense reality. We had to make some serious cuts in our budget and there's real great dangers ahead to our budgets. That was a choice we had to make given everything we knew. Beaches are a little more flexible in the sense that right now of course they're open public spaces. There's no swimming. There won't be swimming anytime soon. But if we make a lot of progress, there is a possibility of doing more with the beaches later on in the summer. Nowhere that I can identify. No time I can identify now, for sure. It's too early to say. And nowhere near when we would normally open around Memorial Day. But I'm not ruling that out because we've made some really good progress in the last few weeks. The question is do we consolidate it? And to do that it takes consistent social distancing, consistent shelter in place, and this very aggressive test and trace program that we're putting in place for May. I think that's going to be a crucial piece of the equation. We're going to test a lot more New Yorkers. Trace their contacts, quarantine and isolate people. I think that's going to help us move forward aggressively.

Louis: You know the announcement included a mention that you're going to hire a thousand tracers or trackers. And it just struck me that we've got, you know, you've got 300,000 employees, many of whom have been idled, right? I mean, you've got, even if it's CUNY professors, CUNY students, there's tons of people who are out there already on the payroll, right? Who could maybe do some of this work?

Mayor: Errol, that's a fine question, but I'll tell you what's going on here. First of all, as I said earlier today there will be people in other jobs in City government who will be converted to this work, but we needed people who had health care backgrounds. Now remember, the vast majority of people doing health care right now are still needed in the hospitals and the clinics. More and more, we're going to need people for testing. Remember, we still need medical personnel. We announced some really great news today with the self-swab, the simpler version of the test, but it still requires medical personnel to be present. That's going to take up more and more of our health care workforce. So, all the folks engaged right now we're going to need either in hospitals, clinics, a testing program, et cetera. The tracing, we want people, this thousand people to be folks who come from a health care background but may not be employed right now in the health

care field in New York City. We're also going to use a lot of other City employees. This is going to end up being thousands of people, could easily be between five and 10,000 people by the time we build it out. We don't have the final number yet. But this is just a piece of it. But I'll tell you something. For those folks who have that health care background, it's going to be a great opportunity to do something really important and get employed when so many people need a chance to get back to work.

Louis: Did your health experts tell you that these need to be health people? I mean the tracing itself seems more like, almost like a logistical question more than anything else? You ask somebody, Hey, where have you been? Who else was there? What are their names? How do I reach them? That doesn't strike me as health care work necessarily?

Mayor: Well, I think the fact is having the health care background sure helps because there's going to be lots of questions about what people experienced and what they're, you know, what their symptoms have been, what their experience has been. The health care people in fact, our health care leadership came up with this idea. I'm certainly not someone who's going to tell you what qualifications we need for contact tracing. That's not my field. So, it came from our health care leadership. But the point is we're going to use folks with a health care background for a lot of it. There are some other pieces, I agree with you, that don't require so much of a health care background. Whether it's in the tracing or the whole program to create a system to get people to isolation and quarantine and support them. So, we're going to be using a lot of our current City workforce as this builds out during May. But the roles that require a health care background, that's where our health team will determine what's needed.

Louis: Okay. Standby, Mr. Mayor. We're going to take a short break here and we'll be right back with much more from Mayor de Blasio. Stay with us.

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Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. I'm joined once again by Mayor Bill de Blasio. He's at the Blue Room inside City Hall. And Mr. Mayor, I wanted to ask you about the task forces on reopening the economy that you announced over the weekend. The names are very familiar to a lot of our viewers, people who have been involved in civic life for a long, long time – former Lieutenant Governor Richard Ravitch and Carl Weisbrod and Patrick Gaspard and Jennifer Jones Austin, really top notch people. I'm wondering though why they're serving on a volunteer basis. Are they going to have staff support? This seems like a very big, complicated, and important topic that they're working with.

Mayor: Oh yeah, they absolutely are. Look, Errol, this is an extraordinary group of human beings. Really all – every single one of them have devoted so much of their life to making New York City better. And they bring this extraordinary breadth of experience, including people you mentioned like Carl Weisbrod and Dick Ravitch that literally have been part of bringing the city back from horrible moments in our history. Like the fiscal crisis of the 1970s and 9/11. But each of the people involved bring tremendous perspective and we're going to create a staffing structure for sure. I've asked them to put together a very initial roadmap for a fair recovery. And that means the building blocks, the basic ideas that we should be guided by. I've asked them to

do that by June 1st so we're going to provide them with ample staff support. And then I want them to stick with us over the 18 or 19 months after that to follow through that vision and build out the plan. And my goal, you know – I have 20 months left in this administration – is to really come up with not only a strong restart to the economy and a strong recovery of everything that makes New York City great, but to do some work that starts us on a transformational direction to address some of the disparities that have been so evident in this crisis.

And I think in a moment where we're resetting, that's the right time to focus on these disparities and do something different. And these folks all have been part of really big systemic change in a lot of different ways. So, I want them to help guide that process over all 20 months and then we'll be in a position, not only to make a lot of change now, but to leave the next administration with a pretty strong blueprint for what could be done in the years ahead to keep improving New York City.

Louis: Okay. You know, on a related note, when you talk about expertise – when it comes to Chirlane McCray, your wife who, as First Lady, will be co-chairing one of the panels on reducing racial inequity, I think of that as specialty work. You know, there are civil rights attorneys who have worked on this for decades and people who work in human resources or, you know, school desegregation, that it's something that really requires a lot of specific expertise on that topic. Is there something she's worked on in the past that really reduced racial inequity?

Mayor: Oh, unquestionably. Look, let's be clear what this is. We have several different things we're doing the Fair Recovery Task Force that we talked about a moment ago, a group of councils according to the different sectors and elements of the city – small business, big business arts and culture, there'll be a whole group of different panels working with us on the restart and the recovery. Later on, I'll be naming a charter revision commission as well. But one piece of the puzzle is an internal task force within the City government made up of City government officials, and I made that clear when I announced it, to work on making sure our City agencies right now and for the next 20 months are consistently focusing on addressing disparities much more intensely as we deal with the aftermath of the coronavirus. So, now and for the next 20 months. Look, I love my wife deeply, but I also admire my wife deeply for what she's given her whole life over to, which is the work of equity and what she's built with Thrive, which is an entire reimagining of the mental health system to actually provide access to people across the board. This has been her life's work. The other leader in this effort, Deputy Mayor Phil Thompson, has spent many decades working in transformation and equity in a variety of ways in government, in academia, working with labor unions. These are folks that this is their life's work. Now they're just the beginning. They're going to be bringing together key figures in this administration, all from communities of color and focused on communities of color. So, it's one piece of a much bigger puzzle, but I want the team in this administration to make sure that every agency is very energetically, rigorously focused on the work of equity in response to this crisis. And that's what this panel is here for.

Louis: I heard at your press conference this morning, Mr. Mayor, you had not yet seen the New Yorker article that among other things compared the experience here in New York to what went on in Seattle and in Washington State at the outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic. Have you had a chance to see that article?

Mayor: Yes, I have.

Louis: What did you make of that? I mean, the number I think that was striking for many of us was that we've got over 16,000 fatalities here and Seattle has – well Washington State has fewer than 700, although the outbreak happened pretty much around the same time.

Mayor: Well, they're very, very different situations. Look, I thought the article had some insights and I thought the article had some inaccuracies, too, but the situation in the two places was profoundly different. I've spent a lot of time in Seattle. I know that area pretty well. It is profoundly different. We, as I talked about at length this morning on the broader question, why is New York been hit so hard – because we're one of the great international capitals. We have so much connection to the rest of the world. And that's a great thing usually. But that hurt us. I think the whole story of the coronavirus is that globalization enabled the coronavirus in so many ways and we're one of the cities that's most in the center of that globalization, obviously, one of the most densely populated places anywhere in the United States of America. You know, in so much of this country, including in Seattle and Washington State, people do not live in this kind of concentrated reality we live in. And I love New York and I love everything about New York, but we never could have imagined the pandemic doing this to us.

We haven't seen anything like it in a hundred years. But unfortunately, New York City was a place where it could spread with particular intensity. But I'll tell you something, what has been clear from the beginning is we didn't have the testing, which I think would have been the game changer, but we, in this city, and I think the state as well, mounted a very vigorous approach and New Yorkers really responded. I mean when I talked about shelter in place and I was one of the first leaders in this country to call for their local area to shelter in place, a lot of people wondered if New Yorkers could do it. New Yorkers have done an amazing job, Errol. You know, the last people you would imagine could figure out how to be less social and less close together and find a way to make a work, well, New Yorkers have done it. They've stayed home, they've really practiced social distancing.

We're beating back this disease and what we're going to do with the testing and tracing program is going to be the biggest thing that's ever been done like this in this country, in any city. And I think it will be the crucial part of beating it back further. So, we were, unfortunately, the perfect place for this land but also people fought back –

Louis: But wait, do you think you think density alone accounts for that massive difference in the mortality numbers?

Mayor: I don't think there's any one factor that counts for all that at all, Errol. I think what is true is the fact that we had people coming here from all over the world from different directions, which we now know coronavirus was coming not just originally from Asia but from Europe too into New York City. The fact that we are so densely populated in big buildings in a way other places aren't, these are key factors. There's no one piece to this story. There's many, many pieces, but unquestionably we unfortunately were in many ways the place that this disease could spread most rapidly and that's just a fact of how we live and how many people are here. Now, the

question of course is where do we go from here and how do we fight it back and I think we have the tools even though we still need a lot of help from Washington on the testing, we have the tools more and more such as the announcement today that we can do the self-swab tests, which will speed up the testing a lot and make it a lot easier. That's going to be a big part of how we fight this back.

Louis: Okay. We are out of time. Mr. Mayor, we'll talk again next week. Thanks so much for spending some time with us. We'll see you at the next briefing. Thanks for joining us.

Mayor: Thank you very much, Errol.

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