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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. According to city officials, nearly half of all New York City residents have already received at least one shot of the COVID-19 vaccine. This comes as the daily COVID-19 indicators are slowly moving in the right direction. Here now to talk about that and much more is Mayor de Blasio, he joins us from the Blue Room inside City Hall. Welcome Mr. Mayor. Good to see you.

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

Louis: Just fine thanks. I'm getting my second shot later this week. Looking forward to that.

Mayor: Amen.

Louis: Maybe the first time I've looked forward to getting a needle. So, walk-ins are now available for anybody who's 50 years old and up. Is that eventually going to become the norm for all ages?

Mayor: I'm hopeful about that Errol. I mean, right now we're doing it at a number of city sites. It's not all sites. I want to just confirm it's a set of city sites, city runs sites, H+H, Health Department, et cetera. We've had it now for a few days. We like what we see. We think it's encouraging people to come and get a vaccination. It's convenient. You don't have to do a lot of planning. I think that's going to really help a lot of people to want to engage vaccination. How far we go, we're still working on, but look, in a perfect world you'd love it to be the norm because in addition to other issues we've dealt with, including honest, hesitancy, and questions people have had, some of the problem is just busy lives and questions of convenience and logistics, and if you can take that out of the equation and have a lot of places people can go – all you have to do is walk up whenever it works for you, that's certainly going to increase the number of vaccinations a lot. So, I'm hopeful we can get to that at more and more sites soon.

Louis: So, is there any particular set or subset of New Yorkers that are left to be vaccinated? Is there a particular interest that is the focus of public health experts?

Mayor: Yeah, sure. I mean the first thing our health care team would say is they're still concerned about the oldest New Yorkers. So when they started the walk-ups with no appointment, it was for 75 years old and up. There's still a lot of folks in that 75 and up – 65 and up category that we need to vaccinate. They are still the single most vulnerable group in New York City. We got more to do there and then obviously in communities of color there has been

hesitancy. That hesitancy is reducing for sure. But there's no doubt that having the ability to go and have more localized, grassroots centers is helping. If we can make the process more convenient, more spontaneous. I think that will help a lot in communities of color as well.

Louis: Someone from one of the pharmaceutical companies, I think it was Pfizer said that a third booster shot might be needed and perhaps once a year, they people might have to renew it. What are your health experts telling you about that? And are there plans in place to do that?

Mayor: Look, we're looking at that right now. We talked about this morning that it's something that is not unusual when it comes to vaccinations. I mean, look at flu shot once a year. You know, we're obviously promoting that all the, the time it's something we would have time to gear up and create an apparatus around, but I think it's safe to say Errol after 2021, it's a different reality. We got to beat COVID here, and now with mass vaccination, it's clearly working. You saw this morning's indicators, some of the best and lowest numbers we've had in a long time. Clearly the vaccines and the vaccination effort is beating the variants. We were wondering who was going to win that race. Right now, the vaccine is beating variants really well. I think the crucial thing is break the back of COVID in 2021. After 2021, it becomes just another disease out there, and that's not to belittle its horrible, horrible impact, but like influenza, which, you know, you know, can be fatal in folks, we've learned how to fight it and save a lot of lives. I think that's what the booster shots are going to be in the future, and we'll certainly start planning for that once we get a little farther along with this vaccination effort.

Louis: We see here today, Governor Cuomo is easing restrictions in museums and zoos and movie theaters. That's all going to happen later this month, just as we're starting to see the positive rates go down. Are you still in touch with Albany? Are you in sync with this idea? Do you think this is a smart thing to do?

Mayor: Look they – the State makes its own decisions consistently. The notion of fully coordinating with the City and having a real discourse that hasn't happened very often, but I will say, you know, so long as the decisions are being made based on the data and the science. You know, I can work with it for sure. My whole team, our health team can work with it. We're going to keep watching, we're going to keep being vigilant. If we see a problem, we'll call it out. But these specific choices are certainly things we can work with.

Louis: Okay. Well, let me move to a different topic. I meant to get to this last week, how do you want the NYPD, Mr. Mayor, to handle complaints about marijuana smoking in non-permitted areas, smoking in the park? You know, I mean, we, we don't want to create friction and enforcement situations that are going to take us backwards. What's the thinking behind that?

Mayor: Yeah, it's an important question, Errol. I appreciate it. Look, the template is based on our smoking or anti-smoking laws, which delineate many, many places you can't smoke cigarettes. They'll be the exact same places where you can't smoke marijuana in public. What we want to see here is the NYPD remind people, educate people, warn people, direct people – if they're in those areas, you can't be here, and generally I think that will do the job. This is a civil matter. This is not a criminal matter. So, the goal here is to use all the different tools the NYPD has that do not involve a criminal sanction, and I think in the vast majority of cases that will

work, it'll be, there'll be a learning curve. But look, you know, smoking is a good example. Cigarette smoking, obviously it was much more pervasive than marijuana smoking took time, but we got to a situation just culturally societally where it doesn't happen in lots of places, and I think we can replicate that with marijuana.

Louis: Okay. You came out today Mr. Mayor against proposed upgrades at a power plant in Astoria, Queens. I'm wondering how you reached that conclusion, and what the City will be doing to make up for the energy that that plant might've provided?

Mayor: Yeah, there's one in Astoria, there's another one in Gowanus. Those are so-called – the proposal was for “peaker” facilities, that meant they could provide extra power generation in certain situations of high demand. Look, here's the problem: they're dependent on fossil fuels. They simply deepen our dependency on fracked gas in particular, absolutely unacceptable, you know, ruinous to the environment, horrible in terms of climate change. My message is it's time to break this dependency. There's clearly plenty of resources have been made available at the state level to ensure reliability of our power supplies. So, we don't need these plants to begin with, but more importantly, everything from this point forward should be about renewables. I mean, it's happening all over the world, Errol. I mean, look, what's happening in China. Look, what's happening in Germany, you know, major competitor nations or similar nations in terms of economic strength are constantly shifting resources to renewables and they understand more and more that any new fossil fuel infrastructure is just absolutely counterproductive. It's literally making things worse. And we're going to be – we're going to pass a law that in 2030, there cannot be new fossil fuel connections in New York City at all. So, these plants, they just exacerbate a problem. We do not need them, and we've got to start showing right now, and we'll will use every tool we have as a city, that just say no to fossil fuels, wherever humanly possible.

Louis: And just to be clear, you're including natural gas in that, right? The companies themselves, and there are some advocates say that it's a transition fuel to take us from, you know, oil and coal to renewables, bridging the gap until in the time period before renewables are widely available.

Mayor: You know, I understand that argument. But I'd, first of all, say fracking has to be taken into account because of its horrible environmental impact, and that I think really undermines that argument. That's why I don't believe in it. I believe we have the wherewithal right now to start a radical shift to renewable energy, and we have to. We're on a very tight timeline. You've seen the UN reports that have suggested that 2030 is the break point year. That's very soon we should be using every tool we have to move to renewables now. The City's going to be doing that with hydro power for all city facilities. We're going to be getting the City of New York, the city government to be fueled entirely by renewable power over the next few years. Everyone's got to start making these commitments. You see the automobile companies are increasingly turning to battery powered vehicles. I mean, there's a growing recognition that if, and it's obviously Earth week, we have Earth Day coming up, if we don't change radically quickly, we may blow the window that we have to stop climate change. We just have to be as blunt as that about it.

Louis: Okay. Stand by Mr. Mayor. We're going to take a short break. I'll be back with Mayor de Blasio in just a minute. Stay with us.

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Welcome back to Inside City Hall. It is Monday with the Mayor, and I'm once again joined by Mayor de Blasio. Mr. Mayor, well, shortly before we went on the air, the Delegate Assembly of the United Federation of Teachers made their choice for mayor and it was Scott Stringer. As someone who was endorsed by the UFT in the past, what kind of help can he expect from having the teachers' union in his corner?

Mayor: I got a lot of respect for the UFT. I work with them regularly on so many issues. I will remind you in 2013, they went with another candidate. So, that was not a situation where I was endorsed by them. But look, I mean, it's a major union with a devoted following, obviously that's helpful. But what I would suggest to everyone is we've now seen, you know, the endorsements split up among different candidates, somewhat reminiscent to what we experienced in 2013. What really matters is the people starting to engage this election and they haven't yet, they really haven't. I think because of COVID there's been a lot of distraction, understandably. As it gets closer, I think people are going to be really scrutinizing these candidates, including ones they don't know really well. And that's going to be what starts to shape this race in a way we just haven't seen yet.

Louis: As good as time as any to mention that May 13th will be the first mayoral debate. I will be moderating it. It will be right here on NY1.

Mayor: And you are a just moderator, Errol [inaudible] –

[Laughter]

Louis: I am an experienced one –

Mayor: Yes, you are.

Louis: There's a lot of forums. There are a lot of forums. Well, let me ask you about education. You rolled out a plan today to use the increased education funding provided as part of the budget deal. There's a lot of money that's being distributed. What should parents look for or expect to see that's going to benefit their kid as a result of this money? It's one thing to say that schools are going to have more resources, but what are parents going to see that's going to make a difference?

Mayor: I'm going to speak as a parent, myself. My kids went through New York City public schools. We could not have really imagined this day coming. It's almost 20 years ago that the fight for the Campaign for Fiscal Equity started to fully fund New York City schools the way we should be. And it's finally – the day is here. So, we're going to provide 100 percent Fair Student Funding for every single school in New York City. Literally every school will have parity with that base standard of funding that has eluded us for decades and, you know, Errol, the schools that got cheated the most were in lower-income communities, immigrant communities, people of color communities. We finally can make justice out of injustice. But here's what it means for the

average parent and the average kid. It means that there will be enough teachers. It means that so many schools that have suffered not having enough teachers that they needed, they couldn't offer specialized subjects, they couldn't offer arts and culture and music, they couldn't offer AP classes. There was all sorts of examples where just for lack of resources, kids were deprived. You're talking about much, much richer opportunities now, also will make it easier for educators. They'll have a lot more capacity, strength in numbers, a lot more teacher training. I mean, we want to lean heavily into STEM. We want to lean heavily into Computer Science for All. This is going to give us the resources to do a lot more teacher training. This is going to be much better for kids with special needs because we'll have more personnel to attend to their needs. And literacy – I mean, this is where literacy coaches make a huge difference and the ability to work with kids one-on-one. There'll be the staffing to do that one-on-one work and get kids to grade level in reading. Inestimable impact what this is going to mean for New York City. And again, decades overdue, but justice is finally being served.

Louis: I mean, as a practical matter, is the Chancellor going to go through a budget and funding exercise, or is this just a matter of being able to take an existing wish list off the shelf and say, okay, we can finally get the new art teacher, the new band teacher, or whatever else it is that they might want?

Mayor: There's two tracks here. The Chancellor and I are working on bigger investments, again on things like STEM and Computer Science for All, on teacher training, on the ways we're going to be assessing kids both for academic needs and mental health needs in the new school year. Those are all going to be across the school system and derived as a plan, a universal plan. But what Fair Student Funding means is every school gets an allotment of money to determine how to use best and to answer their historic needs. I guarantee you, every principal in New York City is going to know how to use this money quickly because they've been suffering from the lack of it. Our principals have been trying to get things done often with much less staffing and much less support than they needed. They'll finally be able to fill out a budget worthy of our kids.

Louis: Is the instruction going to be to treat this like a one-time windfall or something analogous to that because, you know, you get a bunch of money that's not going to be recurring, you do one thing with it. If it's a funding stream that you have reason to believe is going to extend into the future, you could do something different with it.

Mayor: The Campaign for Fiscal Equity money that the State Legislature – to their great credit, they never gave up that fight, Carl Heastie, Andrea Stewart-Cousins deserve such credit here because they would not let the idea of justice and the Campaign for Fiscal Equity decision, they wouldn't let die. They stuck to it and they saw their moment and they grabbed it. History is going to smile on them. That's recurring funding because that's based on the new revenue from raising taxes on the wealthy. So, the Legislature did something powerful. They remembered the commitment to CFE from 20 or so years ago and they finally found a way to make it real for everyone, but they linked it to revenue, new revenue, sustainable recurring revenue. We also have the stimulus funding, and that will play out over several years. We're going to be spending that stimulus money over two or three years in reality. That needs to be understood for what it is, but there's so much about bringing schools back and making them strong that is not – does not necessarily require permanent funding but requires smart investment for the next few crucial

years of comeback. The recurring funding, thank God, will be there for each school to have that hundred percent Fair Student Funding.

Louis: Okay, we've got a minute left. I wanted to pull out a number from our NY1 poll. Our exclusive NY1 Ipsos poll on the state of the race for mayor. One question we asked New York City Democrats was how they felt about their party. 22 percent of likely voters say that they consider themselves progressive or left leaning or more left leaning than the Democratic Party itself, 59 percent say that they're generally in line with the party, and another 18 percent say they're centrist or conservative. So, you've long been a voice saying that the party needs to move to the left. What do you make of those numbers?

Mayor: I think we've moved the party to the left. And I think it now is – that 59 percent to me represents a party that is much more progressive than it used to be and now better aligned to the public as a whole, but we've got some more work to do. Obviously, what we saw in Albany just now was the Legislature leading the way on higher taxes for the wealthy. You saw in some recent polling this week, how extraordinarily popular that was not just among Democrats around – across the whole electorate. So, the party's become more progressive. Let's give a lot of credit to Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and so many others who have been fighting for change. and I've been fighting for it too. But we got more work to do because it has to be the party of working people and it cannot be what it was too often in the past, the party of elites and the status quo. I think we're starting to make clear, we're not the party of the status quo, and that's really healthy and that's going to lead to a strong future for the Democratic Party.

Louis: Okay, that brings us to the end of our time. Thanks so much. Good to speak with you. We'll talk again next week.

Mayor: Thank you, Errol.

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