



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

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

TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. As we told you before the break, President Trump earlier today, advocated for the use of stop-and-frisk to address crime in Chicago. Joining me now to talk about that and much more is Mayor Bill de Blasio. Good evening, Mr. Mayor. Happy Columbus Day to you.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Happy Columbus Day to you, Errol.

Louis: The first part of the President's comment is something I have heard from you. It's something I think you could subscribe to – that New York is a much safer city than it was in the 1990s, and in fact the safest big city, says the President. So [inaudible] –

Mayor: It's shocking, we agree on something. Yes.

Louis: I assume you agree on that –

Mayor: Yes, we are the safest big city in America. True.

Louis: Now, you do disagree, I think about – to put it mildly – whether stop-and-frisk is an essential tool. Although, if you time shift Chicago to say New York, 1994, maybe it is an interesting strategy to use.

Mayor: Well, I'm not an expert on Chicago but I do think we can say a couple things. First of all, we're the safest big city in America because we adopted neighborhood policing on top of CompStat and precision policing, and we need all of those tools. And I think in Chicago, there has been a history of division. There has been a history, unfortunately, of a real disconnect between police and community.

So, the notion of making it worse with stop-and-frisk, I think, is absolutely backwards. And you know in fact, when I first saw Donald Trump after the election in 2016, one of the number one topics was stop-and-frisk. And I said to him, talk to Jimmy O'Neill, talk to the police commissioner in Los Angeles, and others that believe in a neighborhood policing approach, and learn about how that actually makes us safer and improves the flow of information and the level of cooperation with the police.

But if you go back to the days of stop-and-frisk, in this city it created a tremendous tension between police and community because folks felt that their young people were being treated like criminals even though they had done nothing wrong.

So, no, it's absolutely ridiculous to suggest that stop-and-frisk could move Chicago, or any place else, forward. You can use it in very small doses – what Bill Bratton has always said and I think he's right – there is a very narrow discreet way to use it in particular situations when someone, for example, matches the description of a criminal specifically. But as a broad brush strategy, it was an abject failure in New York City. We have gotten safer five years in a row since we got rid of the use of the stop-and-frisk.

Louis: Okay, there is a caveat to that, that I think came up at one of your last press conferences, where it was noted by your Chief of Crime Strategies that rapes have increased every month for a year. They are up 28 percent since January, up 22 percent in the month of September alone. And many of them are for past assaults but many are not. To be sure, a minority, a very small minority – something like seven percent – are committed by strangers or are alleged to be committed by strangers. Where are we? What is going on?

Mayor: This is a question everyone in the NYPD is asking themselves, trying to better understand what's happening here. But I can tell you something is quite clear. It does not correlate with the trends in all other crime areas. In general, crime continues to go down. It's the fifth year in a row where overall crime has gone down in New York City.

Shootings have continued to go down. We have achieved a lot more with fewer arrests. We had 100,000 fewer arrests in 2017 than we had in 2013, and a much safer city. The basic indicators are all moving in the right direction. This one has been abhorrent and what we think, first and foremost, is it's more and more people coming forward, obviously in particular woman, coming forward. And instead of having received the horrible messages including some of what we've seen in the last couple of weeks emanating from Washington that they should not tell their story and they will not be believed, the message in New York City has been exactly the opposite that they will be believed. They will be supported. They should come forward.

If they come forward we can bring the perpetrator to justice. We can stop the perpetrator from harming others. And I think more and more people understand that. More and more women, in particular, are reporting these crimes. And for a long time the NYPD felt that this was a crime area where we got a much lower, sort of, artificially low indication of what was really going on out there.

And now we're seeing a bigger truth that for many years was held back. So, we do not see a major increase in any other crime area, therefore – as best we understand it at this point, it is people coming forward and reporting it in a way that they did not in the past.

Louis: So, I saw some staffing up of the Special Victims Unit in response to what is going on.

Mayor: Yes.

Louis: Is it possible or have they told you whether or not this is going to become, I guess sort of, the new normal that we'll just sort of staff the units that deal with this kind of crime at a higher level? Because we're going to expect to hear more reporting.

Mayor: Look, we certainly – the PD did decide to staff up that unit more and I think that was smart and my message to Commissioner O'Neill has been – as much staff as he needs there because we have to address this issue profoundly and we have to make sure that anyone who comes forward knows their case is acted and acted on intensely and quickly.

But I do think it's fair to say there's a bit of a new normal here that if reporting is finally being – if reporting is finally correlating to the reality, we're finally seeing the truth coming out. We need to put the resources in to address it.

God forbid we go back to the days when women felt they could not report. We have to sustain this. If this is the reality, we have to sustain the reporting and the honesty. And look, I do believe over time, it will allow us to catch more and more perpetrators and create more and more of a sense of consequence.

Let's face it. A lot has to happen in our society to end these kinds of crimes once and for all, but one of the most painful realities is the notion that so many victims and survivors felt they would not be believed and so many perpetrators thought they could get away with it.

And that's what we're seeing playing out in this discussion all around America now. We've got to break that culture once and for all. Every perpetrator of sexual assault has to know there will be consequences and they will be severe. Every victim and survivor has to know they will be believed and their case will be followed up on with all the resources of the NYPD.

That's the reality that we are consolidating now.

Louis: Let's go from violent crime to economic crime, so to speak. The New York Times did this gigantic –

Mayor: Yes.

Louis: – takeout on the Trump family –

Mayor: Gigantic.

Louis: – allegeding that there's intergenerational, sort of, tax fraud. There's a local angle. You, as well as some of your State counterparts, said this is worth a look just based on what was reported. Do you have any sense of whether or not there's anything further that the city can do?

Mayor: There's a lot we can do. So, economic crime is exactly the right phrase for it. From what we can see from the Times reporting – and I commend the Times, it's an extraordinary amount of time and energy and resources they put into it to bring out a bigger truth that was systematically kept from the people. This appears to be a very elaborate systematic effort to defraud the government and to defraud the people of New York City who didn't get those tax dollars.

And I always say to people – what does that mean? That a lot of seniors didn't get the resources they deserved, or kids, or veterans. When a wealthy person finds a way to defraud the government and not pay their taxes, someone is hurt in that process and all the rest of us who are paying the taxes have to carry the burden more.

We believe there's tens of millions of dollars of potential exposure here. When you look at the property tax ramifications, the real estate transfer tax ramifications, the unincorporated business tax ramifications – and we're talking over years and decades – in fact, Donald Trump and his organization may owe the people of New York City tens of millions of dollars.

That's separate from all of the things that are being looked at now by the State with the City on income tax and other areas. We're cooperating with the State. We're going to pursue everything we can with them when it comes to income tax but the City, in fact, has a direct line of attack on these other areas. And we're not going to let this go. We're going to put a lot of personnel on it. This will be a long investigation but you know, to think that someone who had all that wealth and power already went to so much trouble to defraud the people of New York City, that's unacceptable. And we need to pursue this as far as it will go.

Louis: As the story strongly suggested, this was perhaps an excessive use of a basic set of strategies that wealthy families tend to use to try and minimize and sort of – there's tax avoidance and then there's tax evasion and then there's fraud, and there was a little bit of all of those things but you must have been stuck as I was. It's like this is one family that appears to have sort of denied City, State, and federal tax of half-a-billion dollars. What else might be going on with some wealthy families here in New York?

Mayor: Look, it begs a much bigger question, I agree with you. First of all, the wealthy do not pay their fair share in taxes just by law, by the amount we ask of them legally and theoretically even though we all know we don't get the amount that we even ask.

That's way too low and it's much less than it used to be in the past. And the wealthy and corporations just got a great tax break from the Republican Congress a few months ago. Then you're right there's a whole other layer where every legal loophole was taken advantage of which suggests we need to close more of those loopholes. And then there's something even worse – the tax evasion, the fraud.

This appears to be all of the above, well into the evasion and fraud category. I think this will spark a bigger conversation in this city and this state and certainly in the whole country about the fact that the wealthy are getting away constantly without paying their fair share in taxes for all of those reasons.

And I think it's going to be a big issue in the 2020 election. I think people in this city and this state and this country are now fed up. And by the way, look at the tax legislation in Washington that the Republicans thought was going to be such a winner for them. It turns out to be a millstone around their necks because people realized it was a giveaway to the wealthy.

This will only exacerbate that frustration.

Louis: Okay, let's move to another topic after a quick break. We'll be right back with more from Mayor de Blasio.

[...]

Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. I'm joined once again by Mayor Bill de Blasio for our Monday conversation. You were at the Y, there was somebody there with a cellphone, you were you know stretching or doing what I would call a yoga pose, called sitting duck. This is not the first time this has happened, you've let it be known where you work out. It's a quasi-public place. Well a woman came up to you and said she was homeless and asked you to sort of create 30,000 more units which is a policy proposal some advocates have been putting forward. That's inevitable right? I mean that people are going to do that?

Mayor: No it shouldn't be inevitable. I think, look first of all, the woman involved, I feel for her, I think that anyone who goes through homelessness deserves our sympathy and our support and we've tried to do that in this administration. You know we have 90,000 people who went into shelter in the last five years and we got them to permanent housing. We've had 2,000 people living on the streets permanently who because of the extraordinary work by our outreach workers and by NYPD working with them, those 2,000 folks have come in off the streets, are now in a safe secure place and they haven't gone back to the streets. This is what we have to focus on every single day. So I feel for the individual involved. But I also have to say it is not a public place. It is a place where folks come expecting a certain level of privacy, all the members there, everyone who is participating there and there's an explicit rule you're not allowed to film in the place. So if someone starts filming, I'm not going to engage them. If they want to get a meeting or get my attention that's not the way to do it. Now plenty of other times, people who are not filming will respectfully raise their concern for a moment. And I'll spend a moment, I'll direct them to the right person, I'll make sure there's follow up.

Louis: So that very conversation would have gone differently if it were not for the filming?

Mayor: Absolutely, 100 percent, and it happens all the time. People inside, outside, you know I only ask them to understand I'm on a schedule and try and you know, raise their concern quickly and I'll get them to the right person. And I listen and I respect – it's what I've done ever since I was a Council member in that neighborhood. But if you're filming you're violating the privacy of everyone in there and it's against the rules of the Y to do that.

Louis: So was it only because of the camera that your security guys hustled you away like that?

Mayor: Yes, yes.

Louis: Okay, interesting. So what might the conversation have been like had she not –

Mayor: If she had said hey, I'm homeless. I would say how can we support you, what help can we give you, and I'll get you the right person. If she had said I believe in creating 30,000 apartments for the homeless I would have said I have spoken to this publically many times, I don't agree with that strategy, we have a different strategy which I've said at town hall meetings and on, you know, radio call in shows and other places.

Louis: Okay, alright. Let's move on. At the Horizon Detention Facility for young people – this is pursuant to the law it says that the older teenagers have to be taken off Rikers Island while they are waiting some kind of disposition with their cases and go to this new, less secure facility, or non-secure facility. There's been a lot of violence, the plans calls for –

Mayor: It is a secure – I just want to, I heard your phrase there. It is absolutely a secure facility.

Louis: Okay, absolutely secure – but it's not a jail which was the whole point right? You wanted to get them out of Rikers –

Mayor: Yes, it's not an adult jail, it's not an adult jail.

Louis: But there's been a lot of violence. The critics, including the Corrections officers union says that they haven't been – there hasn't been sufficient training. They shouldn't be doing it. This was all anticipated and yet the City walked down this path that has now led to violence.

Mayor: I disagree with them respectfully. Look I honor the work of our Corrections officers and we've tried to do more and more to support them, to create in our jails, and obviously in these facilities as well, a more secure environment. For one thing we hired a huge number of additional officers over the last few years, a lot more training, a lot more cameras, all sorts of things to create a better environment. I'm very, very happy the Governor recently signed the bill on body scanners which is going to be very important for protecting everyone in our jail system, keeping weapons out, keeping contraband out. So I care about our officers, obviously care about the folks who happened to be incarcerated and we want to see them rehabilitated.

But let's be clear, Raise the Age was the right policy. New York State was one of only two states treating juveniles as adults. The State put New York City on a very aggressive timeline for this transition, faster than the entire rest of the state even though we had more to do. And I want to give a lot credit to our Correction Commissioner and her team, to our ACS Commissioner and his team. They had to do a whole lot very quickly to get these facilities together and I think they did a good job with that. But it was going to be a new reality any way you slice it. And we have to keep making adjustments. So what we will see now is any young people who commit additional crimes, they will be charged, and they will have additional consequences. Any young people who are unruly will find themselves in a much more restrictive environment. We are going to apply a whole host of tools to ensure that this is a safe environment. And I am a big believer in rehabilitation. I believe in education and training and things that are constructive. Particularly with our younger residents there to make sure they get on the right path. But we will not tolerate any violence towards officers or towards other young people and there will be consequences and I think that's going to be felt more and more in the coming days. And that's going to create a lot more balance.

Louis: A grievance that I know Corrections officers have, in a case like this where something like 20 of them were injured, is that they feel that they don't get the same kind of respect and regard that other City workers get when they are injured in the line of duty. Have you for instances, you know like talked with any of them or reached out to any of them?

Mayor: When there's a serious injury and everyone can define that, you know, in different ways but there have been some of our Correction officers in the last year for example who were

seriously injured and I reached out to them the same way I reach out to first responders when they are injured. And I do respect them. You know there's always going to be differences with every union leadership but that's a very different matter than what we think of the men and women who do this work which is really important work, really difficult work. Again we have tried to put a lot more resources into supporting them and when one of them is injured I do understand what that means for them and their families and try to be supportive. Thank God in these situations we've seen very minor injuries and we want to end them all. Obviously this is an environment that is secure, that we put a huge amount personnel into, will keep putting into these two facilities – one in the Bronx, one in Brooklyn – whatever it takes to make them secure. We do believe in this reform. It may have been decided in Albany, it may have been decided on a very tight timeline but we believe it's the right thing to do. We will do whatever it takes to create a secure environment.

Louis: Okay. Let me switch to some stories, some reporting that we did as well as the New York Times, different aspects of the same story which is special education. The New York Times had sort of a shocking piece about a kid who made it all the way to sixth grade and was reading at a first grade reading level and they documented you know, multiple steps along the way where required evaluations where not done. We've done a story on how parents are sort of at sea trying to find therapists and then the payments to the therapists are late, causes problems for them and more importantly the kids don't get the services that they need. Is there going to be a special look at this? This is something like 200,000 kids. This is a fifth of all the students.

Mayor: Absolutely, look a lot of this is very troubling to me and I'm not going to accept it. You know when my kids went to elementary school they went to a school that was structured to be half special ed and half general ed. And I spent a lot of time back then talking to parents of kids with special needs and hearing their stories and hearing what they went through and that lead me to focus on trying to achieve reform versus when I was outside as public advocate and council member but now from the inside – parents have not been treated right over the years. It's been too hard for them to get the services they deserve. The bottom line at the DOE for many years was save money, not help kids when it came to special ed. We have tried to fundamentally change that. There's also been a lot of focus in Albany, I want to give the legislature credit, they've been very focused on it as well. But we've had a meeting of minds that we need to do a lot better.

Now something like not paying therapists makes no sense and I'm meeting with Chancellor Carranza tomorrow, our regular meeting and I'm going to raise this to him that those payments have to be made right away. You know a kid being advanced without getting the proper support and being treated like they are on a certain grade level when they are not is not fair to that kid or that family. We have to correct that. So there's a lot more to do. And I want to say I think Chancellor Carranza has done a really smart restructuring of the DOE that will help us achieve more and more quickly but I'm not satisfied with the situation with special ed at this point.

Louis: Before I let you go, game three, game four in the Red Sox, Yankee series, coming up.

Mayor: Game three, game three tonight.

Louis: Game three tonight.

Mayor: At the edge of our seat.

Louis: Where will you watch the game?

Mayor: At Gracie Mansion.

Louis: At Gracie Mansion.

Mayor: Yes.

Louis: Have you made any bets with any staffers? Any friendly wagers?

Mayor: There are not friendly wagers. There's a lot of trash talking going on. A huge amount of trash talking. Two very good teams, I will say with deep humility this Yankee team is really a special team and they have gotten healthy at just the right time for them, not the time for the team I grew up with. And so you know, I think folks who are looking at this series have to say the Yankees have some really momentum right now but it ain't over until it's over as we learned in 2004.

Louis: Well, yes indeed. If the Yankees win the series would you make the traditional bet with your rival mayor up in Boston?

Mayor: Well I think that's a little complicated.

[Laughter]

What we can say is –

Louis: You can complicate the bet if you want.

Mayor: No if they win this one I will happily make the bet with next one, which I suspect or I believe now is the Houston Astros and if, I've said many times and I say it with a whole heart. If the Yankees go all the way we will throw them the biggest party, the best parade they've ever had.

Louis: And you will be there?

Mayor: I will be there and I will bow before them.

Louis: Okay we will see. A little extra incentive for them.

Mayor: There you go.

Louis: Thanks a lot. We'll see you next week.

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