



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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 6, 2018

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. In less than 12 hours, polls will open in our City and here on NY-1 we've been reminding voters about the two page ballot that you'll be filling out tomorrow. Joining me to talk about that and much more is Mayor de Blasio. Good evening, Mr. Mayor, good to see you.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good evening, Errol. Flip your ballot.

Louis: I've got it right here.

Mayor: Oh my God, you've got a live ballot. Alright.

Louis: Yeah, you know, in its many contortions here now.

Mayor: Alright.

Louis: You – this is the first time in a while that you haven't been on the ballot. Right?

Mayor: That is – well I was 2017 I was on the ballot. It wasn't in 2016.

Louis: Well it wasn't that long ago. This is true. Who are you voting for tomorrow?

Mayor: I am voting for all Democrats. I like the Working Families Party, so I will certainly be voting on the Working Families line where applicable and urge progressives to do the same. And I will be voting yes on all three ballot measures, starting with Question One so we can get money out of politics.

Louis: We will get to that in just a minute. Let me talk about some of the preparation in the run up to here. I know you were campaigning in Florida for a gubernatorial candidate. Can't be of any help, he's not going to the senate or congress, so that was just helping a guy in Florida, a nice guy apparently –

Mayor: Well I think the guy is going to lead to a lot of bigger changes including in the 2020 elections. So if you want to know the larger meaning I would be happy to.

Louis: So you got right there where I was going which is that this is for 2020 to both you're campaigning there and Chrilane McCray, you're wife's campaigning also –

Mayor: Listen to what I'm saying. Flipping Florida to Democratic leadership has a huge bearing on New York City and New York State because Florida is one of the states that Democrats need to win in a presidential election. So I believe in Andrew Gillum because I think he will be a great governor for Florida. I believe in Andrew Gillum because he is a progressive who is very consistent in his progressive values and that's important for the changes we need in the party. But anyone who thinks that the governor of Florida doesn't have a consequential impact on what happens here is not paying attention to the politics –

Louis: Well it's a little bit of a trick shot, right, that's some years down –

Mayor: That's not a trick shot. That's – that's – two years from now my friend.

Louis: Well you're saying he wins this year, they reapportion, something happens in 2020 –

Mayor: No I'm saying – I'm saying it's not quite as goes Florida, so goes the nation. But Florida is obviously one of the most important pieces of the puzzle. And New York City, and I'm going to speak parochially as New Yorker, New York City needs a Democratic president, a Democratic house, a Democratic senate, to achieve all of the things. Infrastructure plan - great example - repealing the tax cut for the wealthy and corporations so that money can go back to the people. Florida is one of the places that's going to be absolutely crucial.

And this is this whole point, we've talked about it a lot but I really think of this needs to be understood better, to effect life in New York City sometimes you have to go out of New York City to effect the things that ultimately have the most profound impact on us, the congress, the presidency, the changing shape of American politics. Andrew Gillum is an extraordinary example of someone who I think is going to be – he wins, American politics changes.

Louis: Very true, I've seen a lot of analysis along those lines. Closer to home, if the Democrats should win control of the State Senate, there is a long list of legislation that Senate – State Senate Democrats have been saying they are finally going to get to, the Dream Act, some criminal justice reform, and codifying Roe v. Wade, as Mayor of New York what do you want to put on that wish list going into 2019?

Mayor: We need stronger rent laws – the number one thing we can ensure there is affordable housing in New York City, beyond the plan that we have, you know, we're building 300,000 affordable units, but the next thing we must secure is stronger rent laws, not the just the same ones, stronger rent laws to protect the affordable housing we already have, that reaches over two million people, that's one. Two Mayoral control of education, look we've got the highest graduation rate we've ever had, we have Pre-K for All, we're looking forward to 3-K for All, that can only happen with Mayoral control.

I want to see voting made easier in New York City and New York State. I want to see campaign finance reform. I mean these are all fundamental matters that can be acted on. Obviously funding the MTA, talk about everyday lives of New Yorkers, the only way we can fully fund the MTA and get it fixed is with action of the legislature. That never happened with a Republican State Senate. You have a Democratic State Senate, I think we can finally come to a plan that will make a difference.

Louis: Okay, we'll see how that works out. Now back to your ballot initiatives.

Mayor: There we go.

Louis: You mentioned Number One which would change the matching funds from six to one to eight to one –

Mayor: Yes.

Louis: And you mentioned in the way it is often touted which is getting money out of politics. Specifically getting more tax-payer into politics, right? To pay for all of this?

Mayor: It's both. It is getting – okay so right now, if you're running for Mayor you can ask for a contribution over \$5,000, most New Yorkers could never come close to giving \$5,000, but for those who can they have a disproportionate impact. This would knock down that maximum contribution to \$2,000 but it would also say that if you give up to \$250, you're a smaller donor, you give \$10, \$25, \$50, up to \$250, gets matched eight to one. So let's think about, let's say you gave \$250 matched eight to one, is \$2,250, you actually surpassed what a high donor can do.

This is really flipping the system to put the power and the ability to make an influence in the hands of everyday people. It rewards low dollar donations and it really pushes away the notion of money flooding the political system. Yes, we use public funds from action funds, in fact if someone does this right, you can get 75 percent of your entire campaign can be paid for with public matching –

Louis: Yes, this is what concerns me is that the people who will most take advantage are incumbents, and can include longtime incumbents, people who know how to sort of work these kind of systems, people who already have an established fund raising base, so we the tax payers are helping the incumbents stay in power, which to me is not supposed to be the goal of this.

Mayor: I think it's quite the opposite. First of all there is a minimal additional fiscal impact in addition to what we're already putting into our campaign finance system. The New York City campaign finance system - one of the jewels in the crown - is respected all over the country, it's produced much better outcomes I think for this city in terms of good government and opening the doors for better representation. This is taking the next step. Look, you run for office, you know what it feels like, I run for office, a lot of times in terms of real time and energy you say, okay I've got to bite the bullet, I'm going to have to call a certain amount of wealthy people to get the money to be able to fund my campaign.

Under our current system, good though it is, you can only get up about 50 percent of your funds, from matching funds, if you do everything right. A lot of the other time and energy is going into cultivating the wealthy. That's not the way it should be. People who are running for office should focus on their own community. Under this system you could fund your entire campaign in your own neighborhood. Now, sure will incumbents in some cases be able to do that in a smart way? Yeah, but I'm interested in the fact that everyday people, challengers, activists, are now going to have a source of resources to mount a campaign that they never would have had before.

Louis: When you ran for reelection in 2017, you used matching funds, you got – took part – you mowed down two challengers who in some ways were not much of a threat. I mean, a lot of respect for Sal Albanese, a lot of respect for Bob Gangi, they were nowhere near being the kind of challenge that required the public funding your campaign so you can run against them.

Mayor: I – look, I've said all along if we're going to tell people that they should participate in public financing, and they should not go and pursue big money and really focus on low dollar donations, we have to be consistent about it. If there is – there are real challenges, there was enough challenges obviously that we had debates, we had the whole process, the matching funds should be rewarded. But again, this is a small amount of money in the scheme in an overall city budget.

I'm more interested in this scenario, we have lots of good people, community activists, engaged people, PTA members, community board members who right now could be extraordinary leaders, they would never think of running for office because they don't know where they would find the money. And what's daunting now, even though we have a better system than most, is you still have to find some bigger donors to make it work by in large. Here is a system, Question One, and this is why people should vote yes, Question One creates for the first time in New York City the reality that you can run just from with donations from your own community, and you can get them matched, and you never need to talk to a single big donor. We all over this country, by the way, extraordinary bipartisanship, Americans want to get big money out of politics.

Louis: You know it's interesting, and we'll have to take it up another time, but, you know, I recently spoke to a young business leaders – youngish business leaders rising up – and one of the things that's hard to do is to get them to focus on the City. They are all with these big, global nation, multi-national corporations. They want to vacation outside the City, so when you try to get them to focus on the schools, the homelessness, the things we talk about all the time, and they say look I'm really barred from participating, can't give money, I don't have time, I'm a busy executive, they basically feel outside the system. I want those people to care about the City. I want to get them involved.

Mayor: I want to get them involved, but much more I want to get everyday New Yorkers involved because you know there is a million people in this City who are eligible to be registered to vote aren't registered even. There are so many people who are turned off by the political system because they think it's dominated by money.

Here is a chance to show people in New York City, and really at a great example for the country, we're literally pushing away the big money, we're rewarding the little guy, the small donor, and we're saying to everyday people if you want to run, you can actually compete with anybody else. I think it's going to be really exciting, I think it's going to democratize things. By the way for younger folks coming up who want to get involved, this says that you can run just as much as anyone else and I think that's powerful, so vote yes on Question One.

Louis: Okay, let's take a quick break here. We'll have much more with Mayor de Blasio in just a minute.

[...]

Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall, I'm joined once again by Mayor de Blasio. Hey, my producer was telling me in my ear that you were being vague – I didn't feel like it was vague. Who are you voting for for governor tomorrow?

Mayor: Andrew Cuomo, on the Working Families Party line.

Louis: On the Working Families Party line okay, right—

Mayor: Yeah, that wasn't vague. I said I was voting for all the Democrats.

Louis: Yeah, that's right I thought it was pretty clear—

Mayor: Who – which producer was this?

[Laughter]

This is a very cynical, cynical person. I want to be clear I am voting for all the Democratic candidates, wherever they're on the Working Families Party line, I will do that, and I'm voting yes on Question One, yes on Question Two, and yes on Question Three.

Louis: Okay. Those, without getting into the substance of them, it seems that you are following the tradition of other mayors who put together Charter Commissions, not because the ideas are great, although they are or at least debatably okay, but in order just sort of force it on and bump off the ballot a rival charter commission that the City Council is putting together.

Mayor: You know, I would ask people to look at this Charter Commission did. I think they did an outstanding job. Cesar Perales did a great job as chair. I said in my State of the City speech almost a year ago, let's focus on improving our campaign finance system, which is so pertinent. Look, Bernie Sanders and the \$27 donation right? I mean we saw a sea change in American politics—

Louis: But couldn't you just – you could write that up as a bill and send it to the other side of the building and have them pass it?

Mayor: And I said very clearly that I thought if it went to the people it would pass and no disrespect to the Council – maybe they would have, maybe they wouldn't have – but going to the people I knew that there would be a lot of support and that sometimes having that mandate from the people says something about the direction we need to go in both here and in Albany. So, I thought a popular mandate for campaign finance reform had its own value, but that's what I called for, and I also said let's work to overcome some of the gaps of the Board of Elections that's not doing the job telling people what their accurate poll site is, not doing a good job on translation. Let's find a way to do that. The Charter Revision Commission took those ideas, they played out those, but they went in other directions as well. The idea on the term-limits for Community Board members was from the Charter Revision Commission listening to testimony all over the city, it was not part of my original suggestion, they came up with that and they put it together. I think it was a really good process that yielded like serious reform ideas. Meanwhile the council has its own commission which we are participating with and that progress is going on – process is going on as well. So I really feel good about the work of this Charter Revision Commission, and by the way, these are key issues of democracy. Look at what's happened in the last two years in this country. There is a groundswell of participation. We know got to have our institutions meet that and actually work with that, that's why I believe in community participatory budgeting, that's why I believe in opening up community boards some more and different people can participate especially young people.

Louis: Okay, we'll see how all of that works out. Getting past Election Day there are some issues on the table. I haven't talked to you in a while so let me try and do a little catch up here. The Third Party Transfer program you know has gotten a lot of attention. It includes HDFC, some of the co-ops, some of the people who have put in sweat equity over the years. They like some other small homeowners, are losing their homes due to non-payment of relatively small amounts—

Mayor: They're not losing their homes, they're not – let's be clear, they remain—

Louis: Losing ownership of them.

Mayor: Right. They would remain there as long as they live and the idea is it would continue as affordable housing thereafter. Look, we'd never want to do a transfer if there's any way not to and I assure you the city puts years into trying to address these issues, particularly in terms of buildings we've already invested in for years or decades, we're trying to solve them. But if a particular building ownership can't address its underlying financial reality we can't let them fail we have to come up with a different model and we have to preserve it as affordable housing.

Louis: Well but look, let me ask you this. Where does homeownership fit into, I understand it's a small percentage – piece – of the overall 300,000 units. But where does homeownership fit into your thinking about where New York should go.

Mayor: It's an ideal but the fact is with the affordable housing crisis we have, the extent of it today in New York City are overwhelming focuses on rental housing, I've said this many times. Homeownership is great – it's more, of course, cost-intensive. It works for some people – it doesn't work for a lot of other people. We do have it as a component, we do encourage it, and we

do support it. And, you know, in these situations we're talking about what we've invested for years or decades in these buildings – we'd love it to work out, that the ownership structure can continue, that's always the goal. But if that can't be achieved, maintaining that building as affordable rental property, long term, is also something that's good for New York City.

Louis: Okay, you will, I'm sure, continue to hear some of the complaints from those who think they're being pushed out but we'll—

Mayor: They're not being pushed out if they can continue living there and that's where I think there's a disconnect.

Louis: Well, again the ownership is important for—

Mayor: But this is based on years and years and years of consistent public investment so let's be clear. You know, we think about the typical American homeownership model, that's usually people with their own private resources. You're talking about the public – the City of New York has invested in these buildings, not loans—

Louis: That's the thing though I mean there's sweat equity, it's not as if they—

Mayor: – grants – 100 percent. But there's been – they've had a partner for a long, long time, putting a lot of money in. All we're saying is make it solvent, make it effective, and go in peace. If it can't do that, we're not going to let it fail, we're not going to kick them to the curb. They can stay there, but we're going to make sure it is – the buildings are taken care of properly, and they are long-term affordable housing.

Louis: Okay. Let me ask you about the salary pay gap in your early education program. This has been a challenge from the very beginning, where those who are UFT members, who are DOE employees doing the Pre-K, the 3K, are getting on average quite a bit more, something like \$30,000 more than some of the people who are doing the same work, sometimes in the same neighborhood, sometimes on the same block, but working for community based organizations. Is there going to be something in your next budget, for example, to try and bring those more in line?

Mayor: So this issue I care about a lot. I honor all of the people working with our kids, obviously Pre-K was a number one issue of my administration, now 3K will be in place in the next few years for all of our children at the three-year-old level. These folks who do this good work, I've worked with them for many, many years and I want to see them do well. It's two different unions with two different histories, two different pay scales. We have already started the process of creating some real parity between these two unions and the workers in them. It's not going to happen overnight, it does have to happen through community, excuse me, through collective bargaining but I was at a town hall meeting in the Rockaways during our City Hall in Your Borough week in Queens, and I said I believe in moving towards parity in steps. It will take steps because it is labor negotiations. But that's the goal I believe in, and the most important point is to say I honored these folks because I really, really believe in early childhood education.

We've put a huge amount of resources in, we're ready to put more in, and we want to move towards parity—

Louis: I mean, if it's the – I know Bob Linn does this stuff for a living but I mean, if it's essentially the same job title and it's – you've established patterns, you know, in the uniform and some of the other titles, why not just establish it as a pattern and be done.

Mayor: I would say, look, with absolute respect for everyone who does this work, I think there are subtleties here, and the realities of bargaining with a union and different unions, different histories, we have to make sense of that in a fair way. I don't think it minimizes down to everything is exactly the same. I think the key is when people ask the question do we believe in moving regularly towards parity? Yes. Have we already started that? Has there been real movement in terms of resources? Yes, and we're going to continue that.

Louis: Okay, we're going to leave it there for now. I've got more questions; we'll take those up next week. Thanks for coming by, always good to see you.

Mayor: Thank you. Vote, flip your ballot.

Louis: Vote.

Mayor: Flip your ballot. Vote yes on one, two, and three.

Louis: Vote on one, two, and three, yes or no.

Mayor: Flip your ballot.

Louis: Yes, okay, flip your ballot.

###