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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON HOT 97

Ebro Darden: ... Mayor de Blasio, who is still, currently, the Mayor of New York City for the next year. How are you doing, sir?

Mayor Bill de Blasio: I'm doing good. How are you doing, everybody?

Darden: We're doing well. Thank you for coming on. I saw – and the reason the team reached out was because we saw you very adamant about investigating this nursing home situation with Cuomo and saying that there was some very serious circumstances that were in front of you and the city, lawsuits and things like that. Can you – we've tried to follow along with the nursing home scandal, to understand, you know, what actually happened and where the scandal is. Can you help us understand what you know today?

Mayor: Yeah. And this is exactly what so many people are trying to understand, Ebro – is what really happened. So, what we know is thousands of people died. We don't know enough of what could have been done to save them. We don't know how decisions were made or why decisions were made. The facts have not been made public. We know a lot of information was held back by the State and, it appears, by the Governor. And we need to know some other things like did a huge amount of campaign contributions from the nursing home industry have anything to do with this. And so, there needs to be a full independent investigation. There's obviously a huge amount of very legitimate concern also about sexual harassment allegations. Both of those realities need to be fully investigated very openly. And we got to figure out what truly happened to these thousands of seniors. And these are – remember, these are people's grandmas, grandpas. These are aunties, uncles. These are people who we need to know, could they have been saved and why were the decisions made? We need to know, and the families need to know, and then we also have to make sure it would never happen again. And the fact that we still don't have the truth, worries me, that – what does it mean for the future? How are we going to protect people in the future? What does it mean for the whole way the State has handled nursing homes and are they safe now? We've got to get these answers.

Darden: So, it is a transparent – transparency, first, is the issue. But then the deeper seeded issue of donors who potentially were donors to Cuomo's campaign being protected from their inadequacies and lack of transparency –

Mayor: I'll go farther. The question is, were the nursing homes doing what they needed to do to save lives, to protect our seniors, our elders? Were they being protected or not? Were the nursing homes telling us the truth? Was the State telling us the truth? Were these lives valued?

Darden: And why is the information being hidden?

Mayor: And why is it being withheld? And so, a full independent investigation is needed. And we've got – again, what does it mean for the future too? What does it mean for the thousands of people who are still in nursing homes or anyone who might go into a nursing home? Are they safe? Right now, looking at how the State handled this, it's hard to, you know, feel assured that our seniors are safe going forward. So, we've got to have a full investigation. And if campaign contributions were part of why the State was so lax, so hands-off towards nursing homes, well that truth has to come out too.

Peter Rosenberg: So, Mayor, you already were on the Governor about this nursing home situation with good reason. Then you hear about the sexual assault allegations. What did you think when you saw that, first of all, what was your original feeling? And do you – if we find out that there's merit to these allegations, do you think he should immediately resign?

Mayor: First of all, it sickened me. It sickened me. The thought of a powerful man trying to take advantage of his power, intimidate a young woman. You know, and just the sense of like, he was treating her like, you know – again, these are allegations, and we need a full investigation, but if that was what truly happened, it was like he was treating her like she was his property. I mean, just disgusting, creepy. And, you know, I've seen so many situations where he was abusive to people in a profound way, not just raising your voice, profoundly abusive. A lot of folks use the word, torture, with him –

Rosenberg: You've seen this personally, Mayor?

Mayor: I've seen him – not in the sense of sexual harassment. I've seen him be abusive in a way that would not be accepted by anyone else in leadership towards people around him, threatening people. I mean, when Ron Kim came out with his story, the second I heard that I knew that language immediately. I had heard it, plenty of other people had heard it. So, it wasn't hard, Rosenberg, to believe, when you've heard that kind of language, that's the same kind of person who could then think he could say anything to a young woman in his employment. So, when I heard it, it sickened me, it disgusted me, but it also sounded like, yeah, I could believe that happening too. And that's why we need a full investigation.

Darden: Wow.

Mayor: And then on top of it, you know, he's saying to them, “Oh, I was joking around and all.” Sexual harassment is not funny. I mean, who the hell tries to explain that by saying, “I was just joking around.” I mean, that even further confirms a mindset from a-whole-nother time that we have left behind that's unacceptable. I mean, Laura, please, did you have the same reaction?

Laura Stylez: No. I mean, it's exactly what you said. It's like, especially when you start saying like, "Oh, I didn't mean it that way. I was just joking." It's like, it just goes to show you that a lot of that old-school thinking, you know what I mean, it's still very much present, you know. And, listen, I just would like to see a full investigation happen and I would like everyone to tell their story.

Mayor: Amen. Amen.

Darden: One question –

Mayor: And maybe more stories like it and everyone should come forward because, you know, we've got to know this truth too, and it's got to be a message to everyone, not just in government, everywhere – media and in the business world – you cannot treat anyone this way. You cannot treat a woman this way. You cannot treat a young woman this way. You cannot treat anyone this way. And it can't be laughed off. It can't be swept under the rug.

Darden: Well, whether it's Cuomo, whether it's Trump, whether it's other elected officials who have allegations, where do these investigations go? Because that's a frustration I know that I have, I can't speak for anyone else. But even in the corporate environment, these big executives, you know, allegations that can't be substantiated even though everyone's like, "look, I know this person, and this is language that they've used before." It never seems like these things end up going anywhere. That's a big frustration for me.

Mayor: I think they more and more – you're absolutely right about the history, Ebro. Too many times they didn't, but I do think that's changing. I think more and more, you're seeing real consequences for folks who are abusive, for folks who commit sexual assault or sexual harassment. I do think more truth is coming out. More people are coming forward. More of these investigations are leading somewhere. But you're right, you can't just assume. We need to see a thorough, but still fast investigation. We need to have an independent investigation. Again, both of the sexual harassment and of the nursing home scandal. All of this needs to be brought out. Because if you don't bring this stuff out, there's no consequences. It just continues. I guarantee, you know, these – where you're saying, what you're saying, I feel a real affinity for. If people don't see consequences, they continue the behavior.

Darden: That's right.

Mayor: And other people out there think they can get away with it too. And we have to create a society where people know you don't even think about it.

Darden: Well, and there's legal precedent. Once you've done an investigation and it's gone nowhere and nothing happened, there's now legal precedent that like, how do we even find closure here?

Mayor: That's right. And I think what is really important – I want to tell you that the two women who've come forward did a great service to everyone. And it's not easy. I feel for them, it's very tough to be in that spotlight. But by coming forward, they're saying we can't accept this, any of

us. And they're also protecting the next woman or the next person that could have happened to them. And so, I do think one of the powers of investigations, it also encourages other people to come forward and tell their story.

Rosenberg: Mayor, can I follow up real quick on what you said about seeing this behavior before, not that specific behavior, but sort abusive behavior. And listen, this is not the first time I've heard ever that Cuomo is very, very tough to be around and tough on people –

Darden: [Inaudible] bully –

Rosenberg: Yeah. That's what I've heard. When have you specifically been in a room where you've heard him talk down to people?

Mayor: Oh, many, many times. And he specifically, for example, the notion of, you know, threatening people, saying you should fire people, saying – you know, treating anything like it's the occasion for very abusive treatment of the people around him. It's not – again, I understand the idea of sometimes, you know, people may have to make tough decisions or do important work are going to be hard charging. That, fully understood. Or raise their voice, okay. This is different. This is a style of threatening, bullying that is persistent, that is – you know, I've seen that many, many times, like literally just threatening people's jobs, telling you, you should fire other people. I mean, it's just, it's strange to me, but what you heard with Ron Kim, this is why I said instantly I believe him. When Ron Kim says that Cuomo was angry [inaudible], he says, “I will destroy you. I will destroy your career.” Who does that? Who does that? It's one thing to say, “I disagree with you and I'm going to air my, you know, I'm going to air it publicly.” He didn't say that. He said, “I'll destroy your career, I'll destroy your family.” I mean, who does that? But that is something thoroughly believable to me coming from Cuomo.

Rosenberg: Let's talk about the mayoral race coming up and this new voting that we're going to experience in New York City called ranked-choice voting. It happens in other places, but it's new here. Do you have any insight to share with the voters about how they should be preparing and understanding what ranked-choice voting is and how does it – and also how does it work in the primaries versus the general? Like what is –

Mayor: Yes. Same approach in both that – well, you're right. In a primary in general, if you have only two candidates in a general, you don't have anything to sort out. But if you have multiple candidates, it's the same concept. Meaning three, four, five, whatever. If you had independent candidates, you still are using that kind of approach to the best of my understanding. But the primary I can speak to. And I have lived in places where they have this system. It means every one of your rankings counts. And this is what New Yorkers need to get used to quick and we have to help educate them, and the Board of Elections, especially, has to help educate. Ebro, if you're voting and you say, well, here's the person I liked best, but I like this other person pretty good and another one, you put number one here's my preference, number two here's my second best, number three here's my third best. They all count in the end because what happens is if no one gets a high enough figure, then they keep counting those second choices, third choices, fourth choices, and no part of your ballot gets wasted, therefore. At any point it could matter. So, I think when I fear deeply, is people are just used to voting for a person, we're done here, who's

my favorite. Just one person out. If you don't put your second and third choice and fourth choice, you actually could lose your vote. You could be disenfranchised because you end up diluting your voting power. It [inaudible] the math of this thing is that they keep counting until they have someone who's a winner.

Darden: And it's like above 50 percent, right?

Mayor: Right. The point is you keep going until you have that number. And therefore, if your favorite candidate, for example, let's say your favorite candidate doesn't do well at all. Well then, your first place choice, didn't get you very far. But your second place choice, your third place choice still may affect the outcome. So, it's hard – sort of people aren't used to it. But what is very easy for people to think about, humanly – we all think about ranking, we all see lists all the time and, you know, all-time greats number one, two, three, we are [inaudible] –

Darden: Rosenberg's the best ranker in the world.

Rosenberg: I'm a big ranker, sure.

Darden: Big ranker.

Mayor: We all do it. We do it more than ever. So, what I'd say is that's the way to think about voting. When you think about it, your number one vote is still the most important thing, of course. But then most people will have a feeling like, you know, I kind of liked this other one too. I'm not – I don't want to vote for them, number one, but I kind of like that one, or I kind of liked that or I could deal with that one. You know, you really want to keep doing that ranking. That's the central point here. Feel – you know, think about it and go as far down. If there's any candidate you like, make sure you put them on that list. Second, third, fourth. If someone there's like no way in hell, you want them to be mayor. Okay, you don't have to put their name anywhere, but you should try your best with the people you think might be good, give them a ranking.

Darden: What is the – you know, I see progressives really excited on social media about ranked-choice voting in New York City because this, I've read, really makes it challenging to the two-party system. Is that a truth?

Mayor: I don't know if that is a truth. I think there's a counter argument that ranked-choice voting, because it is to some extent about name recognition and who's better known, it is not such a challenge to the two-party system necessarily. And also, I've always feared about it, that folks who just had more money or more name recognition walking in the door might be advantaged. But the good side of ranked-choice voting is you avoid the need for a runoff.

Darden: Okay.

Mayor: You get, you know, in principle, more people participating in a primary than a runoff. You get, you don't have to have a whole separate election. And if people get used to it, it really could be more representative because if you think about it, you would know who you want

number one, two, three, four, and your vote would never be wasted. A lot of times people vote for someone we saw this most powerfully, for example, in the year 2000 or even 2016, where in the presidential election folks voted for a third-party candidate, Green Party or whatever it may be, and then that vote had a huge impact on the outcome, but in a negative way, if you will, not because folks' values got represented just because they ended up favoring Republicans in that case. As opposed to if you said, well, I want the Green Party first, but if that candidate is no longer viable, well, then I'd rather have the Democrat next, you know, in a sense it does keep your vote alive until it finds a place where there's actually a potential winner. I don't know if I'm articulating that perfectly, but I do think that's one of the good things in the system.

Darden: Two items before we let you go onto your workday. And because we're talking about the upcoming elections, much will be made of homelessness in New York City and much will be made of things that you proposed that possibly that will – not possibly, that didn't get done due to voters not wanting things and community boards not wanting things and etcetera, etcetera. How do we as voters, what should we be looking for from an upcoming mayor in addressing the homelessness issues?

Mayor: I think that we need to, first of all, understand homelessness has been a challenge since the 1980s because it came from, in large measure, the revulsion people felt at human beings being forcibly institutionalized in places that used to be, you know, off limits, never examined, where folks with mental health issues were sent often against their will, without the right treatment. And that whole thing got exploded in the 70s. The truth came out and then folks were just let out of those places, which was in principle, a good thing, but there was supposed to be a whole different approach to mental health, a whole different – like halfway houses and all sorts of other things to help people. And none of that happened. So, the government said, “Oh, it's disgusting these folks were forced into these mental institutions against a will. We're going to help them,” but then they forgot to help them. And then that led to people with profound mental health issues, just ending up on the street with no place to go. What we're trying to do now is reverse that by putting a very intensive effort out to reach people on the street, just constantly come back to them to try and figure out what will get them back in off the street. We have a thing called Safe Havens that have been very effective, small settings, nurturing settings, mental health services, substance misuse services. A lot of homeless – street homeless folks have agreed to come into those settings and it's helping them stay off the street and then we can get them to permanent affordable housing. So, I actually think, Ebro, we found something that could be the long-term solution.

Darden: Small intimate, you know, localized focus.

Mayor: And very human, very human scale because every – look, here's the simplest way to say it. Everybody who is homeless on the street, once they were functioning in our world in, you know, everyday life, something caused them to spiral down to the point they were living on the street. We got to bring them back up. We got to bring them off the street, back up to a life that's better and connect them with family again, get them the kind of treatment and support they need. Get them permanent affordable housing. We can reverse this trend, but it's very hands-on and very human scale. That's the difference maker. And that's what we call our Journey Home strategy. And I think this is the model for the future.

Darden: Mayor de Blaz. Thank you for your time today.

Mayor: Ebro –

Darden: Yes, sir. Yes.

Mayor: Ebro –

Darden: Yes.

Mayor: So, we made some history on Friday, and I want to suggest that you bring on, as a guest soon, our new New York City public schools Chancellor –

Darden: Oh, that's right –

Mayor: Meisha Ross Porter –

Darden: Yes, we need Meisha. And by the way, I need Carranza on too.

Mayor: Well, he's – you can do that too, but I want to talk about who's coming in.

Darden: Yes.

Mayor: Meisha, first Black woman to lead the nation's largest school system. Twenty-year veteran of New York City public schools, born and raised in Southeast Queens, decided not just to be a teacher, but to be a teacher where the need was greatest in the Bronx, and has devoted her life to the Bronx and kids in greatest need, and has proven despite all the hype, the other way, that kids who have had a lot of disadvantage, if you give them both support and love and a great education, they thrive. And that's what she's been doing. And now she's going to be our Chancellor for the whole school system. And I think you're going to be impressed.

Darden: Yeah. I mean, listen, I liked what Carranza was doing. I'm sure I'm going to like this lady. And I like what you guys have been saying. I know there's some challenges still in the public school system. I also want to say – and you know, I don't like Monahan – I'm glad he stepped down. I wish he would have been fired, but you know, listen, at least he's up out of there. Is there going to be some more upgrades in the NYPD?

Mayor: You know, Ebro, I like your editorial comments there.

[Laughter]

[Inaudible] we have on our new Chief of Department, highest ranking uniformed officer in the NYPD, Rodney Harrison. I believe he's been on your show before –

Darden: Yes, we know Rodney.

Mayor: You should get him on. And we're very, very proud of the work he's doing. And, of course, our Chief of Patrol Juanita Holmes. So, we've got quite a lineup of people, I think, have a lot to say to the people in New York City. And I'm really proud of the changes that we're making, and you know, we're going to keep making them all the way to the finish line.

Darden: There you go. Mayor de Blasio, thank you for your time today.

Rosenberg: Thanks, Mayor.

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