



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

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**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON INSIDE CITY HALL**

**Errol Louis:** Good evening, welcome to Inside City Hall for Monday, September 24th, 2018. I'm Errol Louis. Washington DC is starting the week focused on Supreme Court drama, but here in New York we're paying close attention, also keeping an eye though on public housing, school segregation, policing, and of course city politics and power. Joining me now to talk about that and much more, as he does every Monday, is Mayor Bill de Blasio. Welcome, very good to see you.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Happy U.N. Week Errol.

**Louis:** Yes, and in fact we had on your international affairs person and we got quite an eye into what goes on other than jamming up the traffic.

**Mayor:** There's a lot.

**Louis:** Are you going to be going by the General Assembly?

**Mayor:** I actually spoke this morning at the World Economic Forum on our climate change initiatives, our commitment we've made to invest two percent of all our pension fund money in renewable energy and climate solutions, which is an initiative we're undertaking with Comptroller Scott Stringer and the boards of our pension fund. It's going to mean – it's extraordinary, it's going to mean \$4 billion invested in renewable energy and I went there with leaders from all around the world and business leaders as well as public sector leaders and I said everyone should make this commitment. Two percent of all your investments, all your assets, put it into renewables – that's how we address climate change. Obviously we're also divesting our resources from fossil fuel companies, that's about five billion we're taking out of the fossil fuel industry, which is a dying and dangerous industry we need to get away from. London just joined us in that effort and we're going to be organizing cities all around the world to do the same.

**Louis:** I always forget where our city ranks but our economic output is the equivalent, if you translate it into GDP, we'd be like the – we're bigger than 100+ countries.

**Mayor:** We're way up the scale and we have a lot of economic power and we have to use it to protect the planet.

**Louis:** Okay. Let's get closer to home. Last Friday this was a big story – it was on the front page of one of the newspapers, a suggestion that, or an allegation reporting suggesting that your administration kept a file on your DOI Commissioner Mark Peters. That there were – there was some friction that led people to think you know what in case we need perhaps fire this commissioner let's start keeping a file. What happened?

**Mayor:** I'm going to speak very broadly because we're talking about a matter that's currently under investigation. There were some specific concerns that come up some of them very publicly around the situation with the Inspector General – the Special Commissioner at the Department of Education – that's lead to an investigation and while that investigation is ongoing we'll wait for those results, but that's the bottom line, that's what's going here, that's what's behind all this.

**Louis:** Did you ever see or keep a file on Mark Peters?

**Mayor:** Again, I have not but I want to be very clear that I can't go into any details because this is a matter that's under investigation—

**Louis:** Well is the underlying logic of the story true? That – that his investigations, which did touch on a lot of different agencies, including Corrections, and it wasn't always good news for the administration. Did that put distance between you and your commissioner?

**Mayor:** I just want to emphasize – I believe it's important in any government to have careful scrutiny of what's going on in our agencies and I've supported those efforts and we've put a lot of resources into those efforts. We actually added money to the budget for DOI so they could do more of that. I think that's important, that's productive. That's a different question than whether any one of my commissioners might have done something that wasn't appropriate and again that matter is under investigation.

**Louis:** Is – should we – do we have any reason to think that Mark Peters' future in the administration is not secure?

**Mayor:** I'm obviously not going to comment on that because we have, once again, a matter under investigation.

**Louis:** Okay and when you say under investigation, by who?

**Mayor:** There's an outside law firm that was brought in to look into this – independent investigation of the allegations that were made and we're going to wait for them to come forward with their results—

**Louis:** Okay, on the subject of legal matters. A lawsuit's been filed by Councilman Lancman and some others, some civil rights and civil liberties groups, alleging noncompliance with a law

that was passed that you didn't sign – there's a way for bills to pass if you neither sign nor veto them. This, I guess, falls in that category. What they are looking for is data on stop and frisk.

**Mayor:** Yeah, this was handled in a way that I don't think was particularly straightforward by the Councilman. We'd been working with the City Council on the legislation, obviously ultimately, agreed with that legislation or I would have vetoed it if I didn't believe in it. We have been working very incessantly to create the groundwork. With any legislation you have to figure out how to actually implement it. We want this transparency. We believe legislation is right to call for it, but at the same time the Police Department has very real and honest concerns about not providing in a public manner, strategically important information, in an age in which we're the number terror target in the country and obviously we deal with every day crime as well, that's a legitimate balance point. By the way the Council leadership and the Council staff has understood that and they've been in good faith negotiations. I expect, literally in a matter of days, this issue will be resolved and honestly I think the Councilman knew that, I don't know why he went ahead and took this action but the more important thing for the people of this city is this matter is about to be resolved positively with the City Council.

**Louis:** Well, I mean what they were looking for was, I said stop and frisk, but it's really turnstile jumping—

**Mayor:** Fare evasion.

**Louis:**—in particular, fare evasion, arrests, or detentions and they wanted to know the background because there was this allegation based on past data that 90 percent of the people getting stopped for this were Black or Latino. You're saying this is going to be resolved meaning we'll know whether that percentage has gone down?

**Mayor:** I'm saying that there's definitely going to be a release of information – we've committed to that from the beginning, it's going to happen in a matter of days. It will be because of a collaborative process between the Police Department, my office, and the City Council leadership, the City Council staff, to come up with a format that provides the information exactly that you described that people want to get at. Are there disparities, and what does it tell us about where we need to go in policing. That's 100 percent fair. The Police Department has said there are certain types of information that could create some strategic problems we have to have some limits on. That's not about the disparity questions – it's about more geographical questions.

**Louis:** I got to say, I mean, in a way I can't quite understand that. I mean we could crowdsource where are the stations where you are more likely to get away with turnstile jumping, I mean it's not, it's not like it's a secret in the first place?

**Mayor:** Well, I don't know about that. I think the bottom line is with any kind of public disclosure when it's a security issue – we're talking about a security issue, we're talking about the public safety agency for this city, you do need to ask the question, are there considerations, in terms of fighting crime, in terms of preventing terrorism, it's a perfectly legitimate question, and strike that balance. And the conversation has proceeded with that being the fair ground rules all

around. No one has disagreed those are important considerations on all sides. We simply need to finish the process of agreeing on what that information looks like and that it's coming out.

**Louis:** This bill falls in a category I don't know how many others there are like this, but it strikes me as a little unusual for you to neither sign nor veto a piece of legislation. Have you done that a lot?

**Mayor:** Well not – I wouldn't say a lot – but the bottom line is the more important point, sometimes that's the just a logistical question but the bottom line is whether I'm comfortable with a piece of legislation or not, and if I'm comfortable with it, I either sign it or I simply let it pass into law. Again, sometimes it's simply a matter of logistics and that's another way to achieve the same outcome. In this case, I think this legislation is absolutely fair, we just have to work out the details.

**Louis:** Okay, fair enough. We heard from your transportation commissioner, a six-year closure is being contemplated for the Brooklyn promenade. Are there any less severe alternatives?

**Mayor:** Clearly we've asked that question. I've asked that question. I think everyone has asked that question. Look, the triple cantilever there, where that very sensitive, crucial part of the BQE and I'm saying this as a proud Brooklynite who has spent a lot of my life on the BQE, probably too much of my life on the BQE—

[Laughter]

– if the BQE is not in usable shape that is literally devastating for not just Brooklyn but for the whole city. So we have to come up with a plan that would allow us to fix the foundational issues – we're trying to – we're trying to create something here that will last for many decades and address a crisis before it happens. I mean very soon the BQE is not going to be usable, if we don't do something about it. But the question was do you want an alternative that maybe a little more gentle on that immediate area but will push a huge amount of traffic out in to the whole surrounding area of Brooklyn and take a substantial amount longer, or do you want to pull the band aid off, get it done as quickly as possible, and keep traffic moving and keep out of the streets of Brooklyn. That's why this plan makes sense. Any time you hear it for the first time, you're like isn't there a better way? I've asked that question. I am convinced that this is the best of a series of imperfect options, but the one thing that must happen is action on the BQE and sooner rather than later.

**Louis:** Right, right. Your former rival, Joe Lhota, who lives over there, may be on the warpath on this particular one, and he won't be alone, you know the folks in Brooklyn Heights.

**Mayor:** Look, at least Joe Lhota's been open about the fact that it's personal for him because of where he lives and I understand that anyone who has a concern about their immediate place where they live but I think the basic question people have to ask themselves is: okay, do we want to take the chance of the BQE being shut down because we didn't do this work, I think everyone would say not to that. Okay, so the work has to be done, do we want it to take six years or a lot longer? I think everyone would say, as we saw in the case in the L train too, people actually were

surveyed, they said get it over with, do whatever it takes but get it done in the shortest period of time possible.

**Mayor:** ...possible. And then the question is, do we want all that traffic spilling out over a whole swath of Brooklyn or do we want to keep it in the area that's now the BQE? And there is a way to do that by creating another – basically another roadway above, and that's what allows things to keep moving while the work is done. I don't love it. I don't think anyone is going to love it. But I do think it is the most sensible solution.

**Louis:** Let's take a break, we've got more to talk about, we're going to do that after this short break.

[...]

**Louis:** Welcome back to Inside City Hall. I'm joined once again by Mayor de Blasio. There was something – it looked to me like a sort of public-private partnership where these folks who make the very fancy water bottles say that they are going to give hundreds of thousands of them to City kids, which is a pretty nifty thing. Did you ask them to do that?

**Mayor:** Well, I want to give a shout out to my Office of Sustainability, and the Mayor's Office, and the Director Mark Chambers, who's been working with the S'Well Company, and they're a New York City based company that wanted to do something really special for this City. They wanted to also do something to help get young people away from plastic water bottles and beverage bottles and into something reusable. You're right, they're beautiful bottles, they're really wonderful. Chirlane is personally addicted to the S'Well bottles, she loves them.

So I asked about how the discussions went and apparently they said well we want to do something big. And we said okay, let's talk about different groups and we talked about the high school kids and that's, you know, over 300,000 kids, and they're like okay, which is stunning. So they're going to give every one of them -

**Louis:** That's amazing.

**Mayor:** You know, their own reusable water bottle and when you think about it – so a study recently showed the average American uses like between 100 and 200 water bottles in a year like a classic kind you buy in the store. The plastic gets thrown away, it ends up in landfills, it obviously takes petroleum to make the plastic in so many cases. You're talking about just this one donation to all the high school kids in New York City is going to literally save potentially millions of plastic bottles from being used. And it's also going to teach these young folks a new way to think about things and, you know, it's pretty evident when someone gets one of these bottles they use them and don't go back –

**Louis:** These are high end. This is like \$40 bucks retail. I do not own one, I could never bite the bullet enough to buy a \$40 water bottle but –

**Mayor:** They work.

**Louis:** Maybe one of the high school kids will leave it on the bus or something. I can cop one –

**Mayor:** You're being opportunistic, I'm impressed. You're going to hang out on the busses where the high school kids go.

**Louis:** Just in case. We certainly do appreciate that. I want to ask you about the Staten Island Wheel. I had the investors in - or one of the investors in last week, and to summarize their case, I know there is kind of more to it, but in the end what they are saying is, look the City is investing \$47 million into the shopping mall, and the outlet mall that's going to be on the North Shore, they're asking for something that is relatively less, kind of a bigger number, but they kind of want to borrow – they want to go into the private market using the City's bonding power so that they can get this 630 foot observation up and make it a spectacular attraction, it would be the biggest in the world, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. Why not consider that?

**Mayor:** Well obviously we've considered it for years. I mean this is a plan that was approved by the Bloomberg administration and it was supposed to be all private money and the cost grew and then it grew some more and grew some more, and now we are in a situation where the investors have come to the City – and we've said very clearly, you know those tax free bonds are a very big deal, they're not something we give out lightly, there's a lot of different needs that we could apply them to. But most importantly, this is not something for the public sector to be involved in that way. It was supposed to be a private sector project. It's on public land, they've already had certain advantages provided to them because of that, but until we see a plan that can work, it does not make sense to expose the public sector fuller – in a fuller way – or the people in this City.

I get – and I've said this publically – I understand why there are people on Staten Island say, wait we really hope this can work and we want the jobs and we hope it will help tourists to stay. I think malls are an interesting comparison, you know, the outlet mall is going to – it's going to happen, it's well on its way, that plan has been working. There's clearly a market and an audience for that. There will be a lot of jobs. But the land where the wheel is mean to be, if it's not used for the wheel, we're going to find another very important economic development purpose that will help Staten Island as well. So look, if the investors can find a way, great, with their own resources, if they come to us with a different proposal we'll listen, but we have not been convinced that this is the kind of place to put any kind of public asset.

**Louis:** Okay, that's not going to make them happy but I thank you for answering the question.

**Mayor:** Well if my job were about making people happy, only, it would be a little different.

**Louis:** Yeah, you're in the wrong line of work. Although you're going to have four of these feet that are like 100 million pounds each, like you know, sitting there. I don't know what else you can do with those things, you know?

**Mayor:** One of many challenges in New York City.

**Louis:** Yeah, I mean put a transformer on top of it or something. There's a story about foreclosures and there were a couple of cases but they involved the Third Party Transfer program. And while there were only a couple of cases cited by this community media outlet, Kings County Politics, it sounded very disturbing. And the fact that I know one of the people made it even more disturbing to me. These are folks, the profile is senior citizens, house paid for, no mortgage, taxes up to date, hit with a relatively smallish bill – in one case it was a water bill for like \$3,700 bucks that they were perfectly prepared to pay. Went to pay it only to find that the Third Party Transfer program was already in motion, the house was about to be taken away from them to be used for affordable housing. I don't know that, if this is an epidemic or a trend but as you can imagine it sends a tremor through the homeowner community, that this might be what the City is doing.

**Mayor:** Well okay, first of all you know, I want to make sure, I don't know this specific case but I want to make sure we look at it again and see how things were handled. But my understanding is that at this moment there's about 90 homes in the whole city that are anywhere in this kind of process so that's not nothing but in the scheme in all of New York City, it's a pretty small reality. In my understanding there's a series of checks and balances, and sign offs that are needed before anybody's home is ever taken including involving the City Council. So I do think it is a fairly narrow and rigorous program. But you know I also have a healthy, healthy sense of objectivity when it comes to government and I think, you know, if something here doesn't seem right we should take a look at it. We will.

**Louis:** Okay, I'm doing a town hall tomorrow on the subject of public housing. Your folks know about this. We started asking for input, questions from tenants, and so forth. Much of it is in the extremely worried phase or even disgusted phase where they are asking questions of NYCHA management that are phrased like, how can you sleep at night knowing that these are the conditions that we are living under? We are going to talk with your folks and a bunch of other people tomorrow but I wanted to get, you know, sort of your reaction to that, the extreme frustration –

**Mayor:** Sure I understand it. You have spent, you know decades literally, talking to NYCHA residents. And I've had 57 or 58 town hall meetings and almost always NYCHA residents there, raising their concerns. I feel the frustrations too. But I also have perspective and I've shared it publically with people regularly that this is a problem that really began probably first and for most with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. And that's when the disinvestment in public housing [inaudible] at the federal level. The State also walked away, I think it was 1998 that the State ended some of its investments. So today we have an almost static situation with the federal government where there's almost never any new money coming. Once in a while a little bit but basically not. State government has promised us hundreds of millions – we've never seen it. It's literally you know, since the 2015 budget, the money that was supposed to come, we've never gotten except for a small percentage.

We are out here alone trying to make things work. And the City under my administration has put over \$3 billion in new money into NYCHA, brand new, not required – we obviously are going to doing a lot more. We have the federal consent decree but beyond that – we are committed to a substantial amount of new funding for NYCHA but the problem is that we are \$30 billion. So of

course there are things that are not the way they should be. Now our job is to constantly improve the management of NYCHA and I think Stan Brezenoff and Vito Mustaciuolo are doing that. We have to get a lot more resources in so we are going to have to keep pushing the federal government, keep pushing the State government, keep getting private money in. And we are going to have to use it in a more creative and effective way to address the problems. We have – you've seen a couple of these recent developments under what's called the RAD program. We've been able to do whole refurbishment of an entire development using private sector money while keeping it publically controlled, while keeping the rent levels the same. We are going to have to do a lot more of that.

**Louis:** In the end, you wouldn't blame a family for saying you know what? This isn't working for me. You know public housing is a lovely idea, we wanted it to work, I'm part of a community. I wanted this, you know, it's affordable but there's too much of a gap and there's too many moving parts and possibilities that may or may not come about. I've got to take my family and go somewhere else.

**Mayor:** Well, I'd say it a little bit differently. There's over 400,000 people in our public housing. And I've talk to a lot of them. I give NYCHA residents a lot of credit, a lot of them have fought for years and years to keep their developments as strong as they can be. I was at Queensbridge Houses, the largest in America, we redid all of the roofs to stop leaking, stop mold. And I said there with a bunch of the residents, I told them how much I admired them for going through a lot of tough times and having made their development a lot better, having made it a lot safer too which is another big story in NYCHA. Yes, there's real issues but it's gotten a lot safer in recent years with the help of residents and the Cure Violence movement and of course the NYPD's efforts. So when you add it all together, I think a lot of residents are very proud of their developments. They see problems but if you go into their apartments, they are beautiful, they are immaculate, they've done an amazing job despite the adversity. I think a lot of people want to do all they can to keep fixing things. If someone said I'm just frustrated and I don't know what the future brings. I would understand that but I want to emphasize – this administration, we are 100 percent committed to NYCHA. We've put our money where our mouth is but more importantly I think there is a whole lot residents who have proven their commitment through action.

**Louis:** Okay, that is going to be the last word. Thanks very much. We are going to be in Queensbridge in fact for our town hall tomorrow and we will give them your regards and we will see you next week, thanks very much.

**Mayor:** Alright.

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