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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR ERIC ADAMS HOSTS A FIRESIDE CHAT WITH NEWARK
MAYOR RAS BARAKA AT THE 2022 NYC EQUITY SUMMIT**

Deputy Mayor Sheena Wright, Strategic Initiatives: Thank you so much. Thank you so much, Chair Jones Austin. I know for many of us here, it feels like a family reunion, right? We're all connected in this work. There's a saying, everything's been said, but not everyone has said it. My job is not to say what everybody has already said, but really just to give you a charge and to get us started.

I do want to thank Darren Walker and the Ford Foundation for this wonderful, wonderful reception and the use of this space in underwriting this event. And certainly all the leaders that are here, I can name you all, but we would be here all day. But thank everyone and certainly our Commissioner Sherman, who's really spearheaded all of this work.

We know the data. This is a group, as they would say in church, who would be preaching to the choir. We know the data. We know that 50 percent of the people on Rikers Island are Black men. We know that 65 percent of Black and brown children were not reaching proficiency in reading. We know that there are only 3.5 percent of the businesses in the city of New York are Black owned. We know the data about homeless youth being disproportionately LGBTQ+. We know the data. So, we all know the data and we all know how we got here. This group, this room knows that this system was designed to produce the results that we have. We all know that.

So, the question here today is, now what do we do about it? There's lots of conversation and theorizing and maybe even pontificating and sometimes finger snapping. It's okay, we can snap our fingers. But the question is, what do we do about it?

My charge to you, as you hear from the esteemed panelists, we have mayors that set the vision, right? Without vision, the people perish. We need to set a clear vision. You're going to hear from leaders and stakeholders who will help ground us in not only what the data is and what the data shows, but real concrete examples forward.

But this is a working session today. I want you all to appreciate that. There are breakouts, work groups. You are experts. That's why you're here. We want to hear from you.

There is a guiding thought I want you to have today as you traverse this day's activities. Did it matter that I was here? And not just because, yes, because I took away a lot. I learned a lot. But it's about what you contributed, because we are really going to take this forward. We're asking you to weigh in, roll up your sleeves, lean in, give what you've got.

It's not going to stop here. But in this moment, in this session, it's historic in so many ways, in all the ways that we know and that are so evident to us. So, lean in, contribute and help drive, and I know you're all doing it in your individual way, but collectively, as Commissioner Sherman said, we go far together. Let's really put it all together and push forward certainly for the City of New York and beyond. So, without further ado, I think we do have our two mayors who are here, going to be in conversation, so that they can help us set the vision for the path ahead. Thank you so much.

Commissioner Sideya Sherman, Mayor's Office of Equity: Good morning. We have our two mayors coming down shortly, and we'll start this conversation. But when we were planning today, one of the things that we wanted to do was really start the conversation with big picture framing, and really an opportunity to discuss some of the biggest challenges that our cities face. And who better to discuss it than Mayor Adams and Mayor Baraka? And so we'll talk about some of the challenges that our region is facing and really get an opportunity to hear from these two leaders. So, without further ado, Mayor Adams and Mayor Ras Baraka.

Mayor Eric Adams: Good morning. Thank you.

Commissioner Sherman: Good morning. So, today's discussion is focused on creating a more equitable New York City, and how better to start the day than a conversation with our mayors? We want to start with where we are today. This city was devastated and our region was devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which we know disproportionately impacted communities of color, low income communities, immigrant communities.

As we start to recover as a city and as we ensure we have a just recovery, how do we avoid returning to the status quo? And if you can, just describe what are some of the biggest challenges that we see in our cities right now? I'll start with you, Mayor Adams.

Mayor Adams: A combination of, and really it's the shifting of mindset of... I use technology all the time, that we have to have an upstream approach. Archbishop Desmond Tutu stated, we spend a lifetime pulling people out of the river. No one goes upstream and prevents them from falling in the first place.

We have a downstream mindset. We wait until people come downstream, and then we spend hundreds of billions of dollars on the downstream mindset and people are eating off that system. And as long as that system is profitable, there's no real desire to go upstream and prevent it. What we did around dyslexia screening, we know 30 percent to 40 percent of our prisoners at Rikers Island are dyslexic. So why aren't we screening for dyslexia, upstream? All the money that's made for those who are incarcerated is in contrast to those who want to prevent a downstream mindset. Foster care children, young people whose profiles are the same.

When we did an analysis through our criminal justice system, we noticed those young people who were just as involved, more likely to be in a homeless shelter, more likely to have a learning disability, more likely to come from a community where they were abused. But we were doing nothing upstream to prevent that. We were just responsive.

And so the real challenge that we have, in my opinion, is to shift a mindset from being downstream thinkers to upstream thinkers, and be proactive to prevent what's happening downstream. Now we can't just abandon what's going on downstream. We have to fuel while we're flying. Let's prevent the flow and then deal with those who are downstream also, and those who are midway, to catch them and pull them out before they go all the way downstream.

That mindset is hard to shift, because so much money is made off of downstream reaction. And now we fight — I'm hurting how people make their paper. That's dangerous.

Commissioner Sherman: Well, I definitely hear that. I would add, when you think about some of the underlying challenges within the COVID pandemic, these were all of these compounding inequities and years of particularly investing in our work downstream. I'd love to get your response too, Mayor Baraka, and also some of the unique challenges that you see in Newark.

Mayor Ras Baraka: Well, first I would agree with Mayor Adams, that we refused to invest in the issues up front. So the heaviness of the pandemic hit our community so hard, because of those gaps, particularly around housing. We did not have anywhere to quarantine, which made it more difficult for us to avoid catching COVID. So, one person got it, and the whole family got it as a result of that.

So, our investment in housing and making housing available and affordable to our residents, particularly Black and brown people and people of low income, we need to do that. We began even doing that faster and more in the city of Newark because it's necessary to access the broadband. For example, we've been spreading broadband across the city. We did it before the pandemic. So we allowed some of our kids to go to the rec centers to do the kind of work in school from home. They were able to do virtual learning that they wouldn't have been able to do from their own home.

So now we have to expand that citywide to make sure everybody has access to broadband and all those services as well. I mean, access to healthcare. We have four times more people die at home in the city of Newark during 2020 than they did the year before because they didn't have access to healthcare because the hospitals were overcrowded and people frankly were just afraid to go. There was no one coming to their home. There's no clinic right down the street from their house. So really trying to reorganize and rethink healthcare and the delivery of healthcare service is important for our community and we're going to continue to do that, and talking to our partners about how to make healthcare easily accessible to the residents of our community.

Those are major issues that we have in our community that have existed before. COVID compounded it and now we have to work on it even more. Just the access to income and wealth and money. Once you couldn't go to work and all of those things shut down, you were in trouble, right? There's no way to pay your rent, and all these other things that you need. So guaranteed

income and all these stimulus checks became important. That's why they're still important now and they should be happening now. People should still be getting money, some cash in their household in order to take care of the services that they need to, and it helps the economy at the same time.

Commissioner Sherman: Absolutely. One of the things that we discuss often is equity is not only about how we lead, but also who leads, right?

Mayor Adams: Yes.

Commissioner Sherman: And I have the privilege of sitting between two Black mayors who are leading the biggest cities in our region. As leaders of color, I'd love to hear more about the reflection of your call to public service and how your lived experience is informing the work and the priorities of your administration. And also how you navigate that tension between managing and serving your constituents with systems that weren't always necessarily designed with us in mind, in some ways we're designed to perpetuate inequities at the same time that you're trying to transform those systems. So whoever wants to jump in.

Mayor Adams: Well, I think a couple things. And we have to always be conscious of the hidden sexism and racism and how we communicate. I may be a male mayor, but my administration is led by women. I'm the first mayor in history where you have five women deputy mayors, a woman police commissioner, women in charge of the Department of Sanitation. When you look at my administration and you see all of these women who have been... really, men have been taking the credit for what women have been doing behind the scene. And so when I became mayor, I said, "Listen, I know where the real talent is." And so now, because I'm not taking the traditional people, now is defined, "Well, your administration doesn't have the traditional people so it is not suitable." So those hidden messages that you see men coming up and say, "They're seeking help from us to help them in administration." Like hell, we are. We are asking you.

What we are doing is an institutional shift. And as being a mayor of color, Black mayor, after 30 years from David Dinkins, this has been a 28 year journey. 28 years ago, I said on January 1st, 2022, I would be the mayor of the City of New York. Now, it took a while before people thought I was not on medication, but that plan has been mapped out. And so the city that betrayed me is now is being built into the policies that I'm implementing. I was betrayed to be dyslexic and not learn until I got into college. I was betrayed when I was at the point that my family needed some food to eat, that they were feeding my mother and my five other siblings food that fed our chronic diseases. I was betrayed that mommy didn't have childcare that Sandra, my sister, had to stay home to keep us. And that's why our childcare and the billions were putting into childcare because we know it impacts women.

And so all I did was do an analysis of where the city betrayed me and took notes over these last 28 years and say, "Now that we're mayor and we have an administration, we are going to go after those betrayals and fix those betrayals." And the team is focused on how do we deal with those betrayals that were in place. And that battle is really, it's a moonshot moment, as I tell the team all the time, "We can't use old solutions to fix 21st century problems anymore." And so people say to us all the time, "Well, what you want to do is impossible." No, it's impossible for you. It's

not impossible for us. We know that we can run these cities better and that's what you see Ras doing in Newark, and that's what I'm doing. And 11 of the top cities in America, for the most part, have Black mayors.

Mayor Baraka: That's right.

Mayor Adams: Have mayors of color.

Commissioner Sherman: Wow. That's a lot.

Mayor Baraka: I concur. I think it is not lost on me that we have the ability and responsibility to make sure our administration is more diverse. So more than half of the leaders in our administration are led by women of color. 90 percent of the people or more that are running the city of Newark are people of color, black and brown folks specifically. So most of that is because of where we are, but it's also by design.

I grew up in a household of activists, folks that were attacked because of their beliefs, who sometimes we ostracize because of the things they organized and were a part of and made me understand the importance of community and the power of organizing and activism. And so I bring that kind of lens and framework to city government. And I don't treat the systems like they're broken, I treat them like they're operating the way they're supposed to.

Mayor Adams: That's right.

Mayor Baraka: They've just been designed to operate against me. So that means that I either have to supplement what's going on or create entirely new systems to address the issues that we have so they can include me, right? Because they don't include me, that's why we have to have this inequity conference because I'm not included. And when I see it that way, that's me trying to be more democratic. Folks look at it differently, but our fight against racism and white supremacy is a fight for democracy.

Mayor Adams: That's right.

Mayor Baraka: That's what it is. And so us putting women in these positions, there's a fight for democracy, to expanding democracy. And that's what we're doing in Newark and in New York City. We're helping America see what democracy really looks like.

Mayor Adams: You know what's important? It's so important what Ras just stated, that we have to be so careful. We've just seen the summit over the weekend with a group of people who are involved in the criminal justice system, which is really the feeder of some of the crises that we're facing. We had advocates, legal aids, judges, prosecutors, police, and we were all in the room and we walked out of there saying, "We agree on eight out of the ten items on the list." However, we have a media in this city and country that sensationalism and division sells because our minds are hardwired to be attracted to unfortunately bad news.

When you look at my daily papers and you go through the first eight pages, you would think, my city is out of order. Oh, we got this Black mayor and everything is out of order. Yes, I have six felonies a day that are on my subway system, but I have 3.5 million riders that get to and from that place of employment to school and work with no problems at all. I'm on the subway every day. So when you sensationalize the worst part of your day, you start to define yourself through the worst part of your day.

So that image that goes across America, "Hey, you have this African American mayor and the city is falling apart," that's not true. We're number one in the major market in hotels. We have 56 million tourists coming to our city, 65 million are coming next year. 91 percent of our hotels are back up and operating. We've increased the number of people coming back to work. We are realizing how our economy is turning around. But when others are painting that picture, it dismantles the leadership that we are doing. And it's so important that we can't pit ourselves against each other, the blueprint we must be all a part of and not allow other people to define how we come together. And that's what we saw over the criminal justice summit this weekend.

Commissioner Sherman: It's so important. And this is the point around expanding democracy. One of the things that we've been talking about, and we'll discuss further today, is this idea of the way in which we're addressing our work here and now, but also how we're thinking about it in terms of generation. The New Yorkers that will come after us, and particularly our young people. What are the ways in which your administrations are trying to address generational challenges like the opportunity gap, the racial wealth gap? I'd love to hear some strategies and ideas that your administrations have underway. And we'll start with you, Mayor Baraka.

Mayor Baraka: Well, New Jersey has one of the largest wealth gaps in the nation where a white family's median wealth is about 300 thousand dollars, Black families are about 17 and Latinos about 21. So that wealth gap is enormous. Part of it is centered around home ownership. So just starting from there first, we have a program where we are taking folks that were using Section 8, we're taking them out of housing and we're using that to allow them to have a mortgage. So we're giving them a home, putting them in a home so they use their Section 8 voucher as a mortgage and they can own a home outright in 15 to 20 years paying the same amount of money they paid when they were in public housing. And this does not go up or down, it stays the same. And we're able to do that because we own the property so we're able to manage that.

We want to step further, we're about to expand that program to all residents who are 60 percent or below of the area median income. We'll sell them the house directly for a dollar. They have to fix the house, the mortgage will be based on what it costs for them to fix the house. We're doing it in conjunction with Bank of America and NACA. No money down. You don't have to pay any money, so there's no upfront costs. And obviously your mortgage will be tied to what it costs you to refurbish the house, which in some aspects will be cheaper than what you're paying now for rent.

And so we are trying to be as creative as we can to make sure that that works. We also joined with the mayors guaranteed income, trying to make sure we've identified some people and we're giving them cash every month, some twice a year, some a big check once a year. We're studying how that looks and what it turns out to be to push for earned income tax credit, the expansion of

that child tax credit, and the expansion of that in the state and in federal government. There are over a hundred mayors that are part of that right now that we are pushing and pushing and pushing, because I believe that. I believe the stimulus checks work. I believe we should continue to do that for people who need it in perpetuity. That's what we're focusing on.

We also are dealing with our anchor institutions and making them hire Newark residents at larger salaries and spend more of their procurement dollars in the city of Newark. Newark based businesses are trying to expand their ability to grow and have money at their disposal as well.

Commissioner Sherman: That's awesome. And I know, Mayor Adams, we've had the opportunity to celebrate universal college savings together, and you shared some of the investments in childcare. So it'd be great to speak more to the work of our administration.

Mayor Adams: Yeah, no, and it's so important. First of all, we're the first mayor in this country to have an office of equity, which is so important because sometimes people think equality is equity and it's not. If you give me a jacket and my size is 52, but you give me a 44, that's equal that we all got it, but I need one that fits me. And so we want to cater our programming about equity. Everything from what we're doing, what we call V-CRED, teaching our young people vocational training, good jobs that basically have been skipped over with our young people. As the mayor stated, earned income tax credit, we were able to get increased the first time in over 20 years in Albany. How we lean into moving and transitioning people into home buying. We moved away from the Mitchell-Lama type program, the officer and teachers next door program. That's how I got my home. And that home purchase allowed me to have enough equity to pay my son's college tuition and he left school debt free.

So the holistic approach to lifting people up. Our childcare, many women are unable to go to work because they don't have adequate childcare. What we did in investing in childcare brought the cost of childcare down so it's really incentivizing many families to be able to go back into the work field. And then what we're doing over the summer, building out what Sheena Wright did and David Banks did around our summer learning, what we did, the summer rising program, the SYEP program. Those young people that went to school over the summer were not only becoming academically smart, they were becoming emotionally intelligent. We did meditation, mindfulness, yoga, financial literacy, healthy food, so there must be a holistic approach to dealing with the economic challenges that people are facing and not just a band aid effect. And we just really believe we must develop the full personhood of children and families so they can move out of the economic challenges that we're facing.

Commissioner Sherman: And then for our final question, this is really a question for you, but also a prompt for our audience. Today we brought together a room of diverse leaders from all sectors and we're spending the day together discussing equity, sharing ideas. And the premise of this summit and this discussion is that no city can do it alone, that equity requires something of all of us. So I'd love to hear from you both, as leaders, what do cities need in terms of partnership, collaboration, investment? What do we need from our stakeholders in order to really ensure that we're addressing these issues long term?

Mayor Baraka: Well, first of all, we need commitment and the will to get these things done. The urgency has to be there, not just in a crisis. People came together in a crisis to do specific things, well, most of us did, in a crisis to get these things done. But this should happen even when there's not a crisis in your mind, because we've been in crises for a very, very, very long time. And when you look at it that way, the urgency is there.

And then I think we need investment. I mean, there's been deliberate and intentional disinvestment in our communities for decades, intentional and deliberate. In fact, the U.S. Department of Justice just sued a company in New Jersey, Lakeland Bank, who are still practicing redlining today, today. So it's been intentional. And so we need intentional investment. The same way there was intentional investment, FDR and WPA and the New Deal, we need a new deal now because some of us ain't never had the old deal. So we need that now. We need an Urban Marshall plan. I mean, the mayor is brilliant and smart, and I think I'm brilliant sometimes, he looks better than me. But at the end of the day, I mean these problems are big. We do what we can, but we need partners, we need help and we need commitment and investment in these communities and we need it on all levels.

Mayor Adams: And one of the first things we did when we took office, I believe it was in January, we met with Darren and the Ford Foundation. They have been amazing, Jennifer and others. And we said, "Let's all get in the room together." You have to operate off of blueprint. I think nothing is more of a Shakespearean tragedy than when you put your heart and soul into something and your resources into something and it's not coordinated. We must get in a room and identify a real blueprint and identify who's doing what.

We can't continue to operate like this. One block I have four financial literacy non-profits. On one block I have five domestic violence. We don't all have to have our own non-profit, our own board, our own this, our own that. If we coordinate together we can come up with a real blueprint on what's expected. We missed a major moment during the Black Lives Matter movement. All of these corporations that felt guilty for the moment, they thought that okay, let me just put 100,000 dollars at your dinner dance. Let me just do these token events.

No. Those of us who are in health should have come up with "What's the health blueprint?" Those of us in education, "What's the education blueprint?" Law enforcement, the blueprint. Social services, the blueprint. Housing, the blueprint. Then we go to those corporations. We should have told them all, "Hold onto your money. We going to come to you what we want as a master plan instead of just these little spot checks that we're doing."

So, what I'm hoping that all of us do is what Darren did with us in the beginning of this administration, let's get in the room. Number one, let's draft the blueprint. Number two, many of us have been in this too long and we start from a place of what can't be done instead of what can be done. I told my team the other day, we need outside entities to come in, look at our operations and say, "You need to start thinking of the possibilities."

I'm getting this book for my home team. I encourage everyone to read Moonshot. That book is a powerful book that we are around each other and we are limited by our intellectual boundaries of the possibilities. There's nothing impossible. We have to be aggressive enough to move beyond

that. So when the neanderthal men were around, if someone would've told them when they walked into a room they would be able to flip one switch and every light would come on in that building, they would've thought it was impossible.

There's nothing on the planet right now that was not on the planet when they were there. It was just that no one had the vision and insight to go beyond where they are. There are things we are doing right now, we think are impossible. We just need the visionaries to tell us that we can do it. We're not lacking possibilities. We're lacking vision.

Commissioner Sherman: Well, thank you. I can't think of a better way to end this discussion. A new world is possible. Thank you so much, Mayor Adams and Mayor Baraka. Thank you.

Mayor Adams: Thank you. Thank you.

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