

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January 17, 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, my first guest this evening is usually here on Monday's but yesterday was a holiday. And he started the work week with a big housing announcement this morning. And so Mayor de Blasio joins us now live here in our studio to talk about that and much more. Welcome, very good to see you.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you.

Louis: Let's start with the good news. A record, you beat Ed Koch. I think in his final year he sort of came up with almost as many units as you did in the last year.

Mayor: Yeah, look, Ed Koch did something amazing when it came to affordable housing. And it's taken all this time since 1989 to break that record. But we did in 2017 – almost 25,000 affordable housing units that were financed and are soon going to be in the hands of New Yorkers.

Look, Errol, this is a big deal. And it fits with a series of things we're doing to try and transform this city. I've said my goal in the second term is to make us the safest big city in America. And that means making it a place that everyday people can live in. If you look at what's happening already, 88,000 apartments have been financed since day one of this administration. If you look at the number people already in the affordable housing that we have either created or preserved, it's over 163,000 New Yorkers in the last four years who have affordable housing. This is a big change in how we approach affordable housing. We're taking it to this new scale and we're going to keep it that way for years to come.

And when you add together with some other very big initiatives; Pre-K for All, 3-K. Obviously the efforts to make this the safest big city in America, Vision Zero. These big stretch goals are working. And I think part of the lesson here is, New York City aimed too low in some ways in the past. We are supposed to be the place that does big bold things. When we actually organize around the principle of these kind of really grand but crucially important goals, it gets the government and the whole city to come along and join in and help us go farther.

Louis: Forgive the oversimplification, but the fact that we're following the path that prior mayors have set us on. Where you used the capital budget in order to finance some of these things. In effect, we're putting some of the subsidy on the city's permanent tab. Again, sort of simplifying this but, do you have any worries that there is a limit to how much of that we can do?

Mayor: Well, I am not sure I agree with your characterization entirely. But I would say of course, there is a limit to capital spending. And we are very cognizant of the lessons of the physical crisis in the 70's and we keep a limit on how far we will expand. But I also think it's fair to say there are opportunities for more capital spending in recent years that were under reached. There was more that we could have done. I think it's good we're doing it now. Because, look, it's the number one issue in the city is affordability. And we found by aggressively spending on the capital side but always recognizing those limits we were able to create the biggest affordable housing plan in the history of the city and people kept saying you know, these numbers are unrealistically high, except now we're meeting them. There is 25,000 units a year, this is going to be our standard from now on. That's really good for the people of the city who want to live here and stay here. Who for so many thousands of New Yorkers, millions of New Yorkers have worried about displacement. Now we found a model that means – I mean think about it, every year if you can reliably produce 25,000 affordable apartments you're reaching 75,000 or more people every year securing their future for decades ahead. That's a sea change in this –

Louis: I think of it as 500 units a week, that's very impressive. I know people are tweeting even as we're speaking. Saying that, well they are not really affordable. And so I just want to put up the numbers. This is from your release, 48 percent of these, 25,000 odd units are serving people earning under \$33,000 a year for an individual or \$43,000 for a family of four.

Mayor: Yep.

Louis: So, nearly half are at a level that is working poor? Is that a fair characterization?

Mayor: Look, it's always hard to use the phrases. I think of middle class people, working class people, lower income people, however you want to cut it. We need all of the people in those categories to have an opportunity for affordable housing. Think of it this way, I want to make sure low income New Yorkers have a chance to stay here. There is a lot of working class people struggling to make ends meet who are the backbone of this city. But there is also people who we might call today the middle class. For example, if you have a couple and one is a teacher, and one is a bus driver, or a firefighter. Today we would say those are solid professions. But even with those two salaries people are having trouble staying in this city. I want the economically diverse neighborhoods that have been a part of this city's history. I want to make sure that police and teachers, and firefighters, and nurses, and janitors and bus drivers could still live in New York City. I want to make sure that lower income folks have an opportunity to be a part of the city they helped to build. What I don't want is for us to turn into a gated community or an exclusive place which we've seen bluntly in places like San Francisco.

Louis: Well, you mentioned diversity and housing. One of the issues that I've written about and talked about before is that your administration is being sued by a civil rights organization over

the conduct of the housing lottery. It's not particularly your administration, it's been the practice in past years. But they pointed out that if you get preference in the housing lottery, if you happen to live in the community board, maybe you moved in 90 days before the unit was announced, before the lottery was announced. You get preference, compared to somebody on the other side of town, who might be just as poor or in the same economic streets.

Mayor: Look, that's a pretty rarefied example. The vast majority of people who are applying have been in their neighborhood a long time. And it's a 50-50 split, 50 percent go to anyone and everyone in the whole city, reflecting the total diversity of the city and that certainly has integrative impact. But we're also a city of neighborhoods, and if people have helped to build up their neighborhood, they've been a part of it for so long, and they want to stay in it and they're being priced out. I don't think it's a great solution to say we have no way to give you a chance to stay in your own neighborhood. I mean you know, your love of Crown Heights is quite evident and your history there.

Louis: I can't afford to leave.

Mayor: Well, that's, that's, God bless you, you that opportunity to stay. But I think the point is that folks who come from a neighborhood and want to stay in it have some rights in the equation too because they help to make these neighborhoods for what they are today. I think we can do both at once. And I really – look, I think you have to talk to the folks involved at the neighborhood level. The consent is that the government really matters here. When I talk to everyday New Yorkers they are so worried about being displaced entirely out of the city. And they certainly feel a particular passion for the neighborhood, which in many cases is generations long. And if I say to them, look, your neighborhood is no longer for you anymore, you've been priced out, sorry that's the way the world is, that makes no sense. It's my job to help give them an opportunity to stay in the place that they have been a part of. At the same time, of course we want a more intergraded society in every way. I think that 50-50 split speaks to both parts of the reality.

Louis: Okay, let's take a short break here. We're got more to talk about, including the governor's budget address today which has a lot of implications for the city. We'll be right back to talk about that and much more with Mayor de Blasio.

Louis: We are back Inside City Hall and I'm speaking with Mayor Bill de Blasio. Mr. Mayor, any initial reaction to Governor Cuomo's budget address today?

Mayor: Look, there's a lot that we have to go through. It's a classic the devil is in the details. But as I said at the time of the Governor's State of the State Address, I think the broad thrust of some of what he is saying – particularly on addressing the problems of the federal tax bill, I agreed with in terms of some of what he put into the budget address, I want to see exactly what he means.

I disagree on its face with some of the assumptions in his budget address when it comes to the MTA. The State of New York took \$456 million out of the MTA's budget. They need to put that money back. I still think the millionaires' tax is the best way to solve the long term problem of

the MTA and the most just way to do it. So there is some evident disagreements up front. But we'll have more to say as we analyze it.

Louis: Those two things though, if you lay them side by side – millionaires are going to have a harder time because of what is coming out of Washington right?

Mayor: Well a mixed bag, unquestionably some may because of the absence of state and local deductibility but when you look at all the actions taken in the federal tax bill – the action on the estate tax, the cut for the highest bracket, income bracket in terms of taxes on the wealthy. You know, there's certainly going to be well off people including in states like New York who do better because of the Trump tax bill. Others may do less well.

But let's say for a moment that it composites out that a millionaires and billionaires do about the same or a little worse even. I still think they are paying so much less than they should in terms of their fair share of taxes. So much less than they did pre Ronald Reagan. Remember when was the high water mark of taxing millionaires and billionaires in this country during the Dwight Eisenhower Administration – by the way that was one of the times when the economy was most inclusive and functional. So any way you slice it the millionaires and billionaires of this state can afford to pay more. It's the best and most reliable way to fund the MTA going forward.

Louis: Okay. One of the other ways and it's discussed as a funding mechanism but as we know it is also a means of improving quality of life and managing the streets which is your responsibility – which is a pricing plan. The Governor referred to it today, creating pricing zones. Frankly it sounds a lot like your proposal where you said you create some pricing zones and using any one of half a dozen different mechanisms try to for an example discourage trucks from coming in the middle of the day or discourage commuters from coming at, all at the same time in a way that clogs up the streets.

Mayor: And you said my proposal, do you mean our anti-congestion proposal?

Louis: Yes, exactly, so I'm wondering if you have some common ground there.

Mayor: Well I want to see the details. This one, if there ever were devils in the details it's in this case because you know for months and months there has been discussion of a congestion plan from Albany and we have not seen a single detail and now we are beginning to see something so I want to analyze the whole thing.

What I've said is look, I'll look at any plan and certainly want to reduce congestion in the city. But I want to make sure it's fair. Some of the proposals we've seen in the past I think were not fair were not honest in terms of the economic impact they'd have on different people, in particular on people from Brooklyn and Queens.

I'll look at anything. But you know what, I don't think it takes away from the validity of the discussion on the millionaires' tax because we are going to need a substantial amount of reliable resources to fix the MTA. I think that conversation needs to continue. I think the ways we address congestion take many forms including some of the things that we are talking about. For

example, banning truck deliveries and certain routes during rush hour so you don't have a ton of double parked trucks right where people are trying to go at the most sensitive time of the day. So we are going to look at different pieces of what the Governor has put forward but we are going to keep working to reduce with our own tools as well.

Louis: Do you expect to endorse Governor Cuomo for reelection again?

Mayor: I've been asked this in some many different ways, at some point I will talk about the 2014 races in this state, I'm not ready to do that now. The only thing I've said and I'll say it again here, I believe fundamentally we should have a democratic lead state senate in Albany for the good of the State, for the good of the City. I believe fundamentally that the members of the IDC need to come back to the Democratic Party right now – not someday, right now. That's the most central issue at hand. But at some point I'll talk about all the races.

Louis: In fact that raises your former colleague Jumaane Williams who is now floating the idea of running for Lieutenant Governor, sort of independently. That's an, it's an odd kind of thing we have in New York, at least at the primary level, you don't necessarily run as running mates –

Mayor: Right, right.

Louis: How do you assess his chances?

Mayor: It's too early to say. I've worked with Jumaane for a long time. I respect him. Again I'm not going to be a pundit and I'm not going to talk about my beliefs in this situation yet. But look, it's as, you know about the political dynamics, it's an open market place, anyone can participate. And we've certainly seen a lot of independence from Jumaane so it doesn't surprise me.

Louis: And Kathy Hochul was at your inauguration, I spotted her there –

Mayor: She was yes.

Louis: shivering with the rest of us.

Mayor: With the rest us.

Louis: She didn't have a speaking role, I was wondering why?

Mayor: Well we striped down that program quite a bit. A number of notable people were there and we decided to do a less is more approach.

Louis: Yes, not complaining mind you. We didn't need –

Mayor: You don't want a redo, you were perfectly happy the way it was.

[Laughter]

Louis: Speaking of Councilman Williams, he and Councilman Rodriguez were both arrested outside ICE headquarters and some critics say that the police overreacted. I was wondering if you have spoken with them, if you've kind of looked at that situation and if you any take on that?

Mayor: I have looked at the video extensively. I've talked to Commissioner O'Neill. There is an investigation of the whole incident under way. Look, I think we can only say a few things definitively at this point – one is this was a provocative action by ICE.

As I understand it, the individual in question was a well-known activist, was told he was coming in for a routine interview and then they suddenly turned it into a deportation. As cynical a move as you can imagine, not shocking from the Trump Administration. But that set off a series of events that none of which was expected. I think there is a lot of confusion all around – everyone trying to make sense of a very complex situation.

We are going to look at all the actions, including of our officers and determine what needs to happen as a result. Look, I didn't love what I saw but I also understood it was happening in an atmosphere of very chaotic and unpredictable moment. But we have to look at this, you know, very carefully and clinically before passing judgement.

Louis: What did you make of the Speaker was out there, Corey Johnson, was out there as well. You know, with his security detail who travels with him everywhere. I know you have gotten arrested, even after you became an elected official. It struck me as sort of jarring that this is like kind of like government demonstrating against itself on some level right, when elected officials are challenging the police department of the city that they also lead?

Mayor: I think this is part of why this has to be looked at more carefully. It was not a challenge to our police department or our fire department which had the ambulance in question. Again, this was the action of the federal government that set all of this off. The City of New York – I have to be very [inaudible] the City of New York will not participate. The fire department, the police department will not participate in deportations.

The only exception to that – well known – is a, based on a bill passed four years ago that delineates 177 serious and violent offenses where if someone is convicted of those offenses and is undocumented those are the circumstances in which we cooperate. We do not cooperate with the deportation of someone who has done no offense at all or only minor offenses.

In this circumstance there was no grounds to assume that our police or our fire personal would in any way, shape or form cooperate with ICE and that's part of what confused the whole matter. I thought we had made that very, very clear.

Louis: No, see I'm confused about this. I started to look into it. I mean Ravi Ragbir was convicted and spent a couple of years in prison and that was around financial fraud, when he worked at a finance company.

Mayor: Yes but the conditions as I understand the conditions of his particular situation did not meet the criteria of our law specifically.

And, but I want to get back to the central point, somehow a misunderstanding occurred – believing that somehow the ambulance would be involved in deportation. That is never going to happen. We are not going to take an ambulance which is there to protect human life and use it in a deportation. NYPD is not going to participate in a deportation under those circumstances that did not conform with our law.

So I think in the heat of the moment, which was sparked by a very precipitous and provocative federal actions – everyone at the city level got put in a very confusing situation.

I think you're point about if elected officials were protesting their own government – well, that's not on heard of. I, as a city councilmember got arrested to try and stop the Bloomberg Administration from closing one of our local firehouses. I don't think that is discordant per say. I think the difference in this case was the federal government – instead of being respectful, or collegial or honest about their intention, or working with us to somehow figure out how to deal with this complex situation, they did it abruptly and I think bluntly on purpose to provoke a crisis.

Louis: Okay, interesting. We shall see. Many more things to talk about, we are going to have to save a lot of this for next week. Thank you so much for coming by, always good to see you. We are going to take a short break here. When we come back we will get instant analysis of this interview and much more from our NY1 Wise Guys.

###