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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: We are back Inside City hall. I'm joined now by Mayor de Blasio for our weekly interview. Welcome, Mr. Mayor. Always good to see you.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you, Errol.

Louis: I want to pick up on something that we reported on and the Chancellor talked about. We showed some footage of it – an argument going on in the Upper West Side about how to desegregate their middle schools. Parents are understandably upset that rules may change. The idea being, basically, that some of the lower scoring students from, for a lack of a better word, the black side of the district would get a chance to go into some of these high-performing schools if you want them to. If you want to do it just by test scores, they'll continue to be excluded. What do you think is the best way to attack that kind of a situation?

Mayor: Look, first of all, it's important that the solutions be as local as possible and I think something very powerful happened last year with Community Education Council 3 on the West Side and that does go up into Harlem. And that leadership came together with the community and talked about how to create more diverse schools.

And what was achieved last year was a plan to simultaneously improve some schools and make them more diverse. I thought it was a really good example of how to do things. Not everyone agreed, of course, but I think a lot of people came to understand it as a smart solution.

We gotta keep trying to achieve that. I understand any parent who says, "I had my heart set on a certain school for my kid or a lot of my kid's classmates are going there, I want maximum opportunity to go there." That's very human. That's very natural.

At the same time a lot of people are rightfully saying we need to find ways to diversify our schools. We have to strike a balance and then at the same time create more good options, right. That's part of the dynamic here, is a fear that there might not be enough good options for a child. We have to keep adding more. I think we have in recent years. We have to keep doing that.

So, it's always going to be a challenge but I do think a robust local discussion about the best way to achieve it is part of how we achieve.

Louis: What does your gut tell you both as the Mayor who is in charge of the school system also as a parent, as a former board member under the old system on the community school board – about whether it harms high-performing kids who are doing really, really well and can score high on standardized tests if some of their classmates can't score quite as high?

Does it – is it a problem educationally as far as you can see?

Mayor: No, I actually think having higher – the highest performing kids, mixed with other kids with other abilities lifts all boats. I've always believed this. You know I went to public school my whole educational life up to – through high school as did my wife, as did my kids.

And what I saw consistently in my own experience and certainly through the eyes of my kids is different ability levels is very healthy, different backgrounds is very healthy. Certainly, kids who bring talent to the classroom, it helps everyone.

I think there is an understandable fear but it's one I think may be misplaced that there has to be, sort of, a zero-sum game. I don't believe that to be true. We're providing a lot more support to teachers. It's one of the things we've done, a lot of professional development, to help them work with kids with different abilities.

But I think kids learn from each other. They learn academically, they learn socially that's one of the number one reasons I tell everyone send your kid to public school because they are going to get a tremendous social experience and an understanding of how to navigate the world you might not get in some other settings.

So I think that fear is overstated. I think we can have a situation where everyone benefits from being together.

Louis: Okay, very interesting. Growing up, I was one of those nerdy kids and they had me actual tutor some other kids at certain points. I resented it very much at the time. In retrospect I realize it was a great learning experience. I mean, you don't really know something until you have to teach somebody else.

Mayor: And more and more there is, I think, an educational approach that wants students teaching each other, it wants them leading classes, you know, their own portfolios, their own projects but also teaching each other, tutoring each other. I think that peer support is very powerful, very effective.

So, that's becoming more of an orthodox – a good orthodox in education. It also fits having different ability levels together in the same classroom.

Louis: Let me switch topics. There is a discussion about Paid Parental Leave. You had a hearing today, the –

Mayor: Well, I didn't have it. The Council had it.

Louis: The City, right, right. There's a batch of bills that are making their way to your desk. And one of the things that came up today – the teacher's union had been very forceful in saying that

we need to do legislatively, what they say the administration is asking them to do at the bargaining table. I wanted to play just a little bit of what Michael Mulgrew, the UFT President, had to say and get your reaction. Let's take a look –

United Federation of Teachers President Michael Mulgrew: *The medical condition known as a pregnancy – if the Mayor, the Commissioner, and some other City officials were to experience it, you really wouldn't have much of an issue at the bargaining table anymore. I believe this is clearly gender bias on behalf of the City of New York... And the current conditions that we have to deal with are disgusting.*

Louis: What do you think?

Mayor: I couldn't disagree more. We applied this policy to, I think it was, 20,000 or so is the number, the exact number of City employees – that we could because they weren't in bargaining units. I would love to apply this policy. I said it from the very beginning but we have to do it through collective bargaining and that's the way things are structured.

And we can and I'm very confident we'll get there with the UFT and a lot of other unions. But let's face it, everything is, right now – a lot of the contracts are coming due. It's the appropriate time to resolve this and a number of other issues. I'm quite confident we'll get there.

Louis: But how is this different from Paid Sick Leave or some of the other kind of new sort of fundamental rights or rules of the road that this administration had put in place?

Mayor: Because it's about the municipal workforce. And when we provide additional support to the municipal workforce it is through the collective bargaining process. It's a different reality for municipal workers, unionized workers than if you're talking about the general population.

We're certainly not saying, as much as I would love to say we would mandate this type of thing for the entire population of New York City, we couldn't under City law. When it comes to our workforce, we have to do it through the collective bargaining process.

But I think we can – and we've said it from the beginning, there is a cost here. Let's be very clear and the taxpayers care about this too. We want fairness but we have to come up with a legitimate way to address the cost.

Louis: But there is a dispute about it. Your Labor Commissioner I think says about \$250 million, I guess, per year. The other side or some of the labor folks say that that's overestimated – some of the union people. But given the budget that you released on Thursday, that's not an impossible sum, is it?

Mayor: Whatever the amount is, and I think our figure are accurate, it's a very substantial amount in the context of any budget and what we have done in all similar situations when we provide an additional benefit is we find a way to offset that cost. That's fair. That's proven. That's [inaudible] –

Louis: Well, I mean that's the crux of it, right. I mean, then does it become a sort of a right that makes better conditions for the unions? Each union will then have to then sort of buy that benefit by giving something back.

Mayor: Right, but we've said from the beginning there's a fair way to do that. And that's – you can go right back to the very first day we announced it for the managerial employees. We made very clear – and we have to pay for that by giving something back, as you remember. And some agreed and some didn't agree. We've said that was the model we were going to use. Nothing's changed.

It is a very substantial cost but it's also something that I think is good policy. We just have to get to the table and finish the agreement and we can move forward with it.

Louis: Okay. Let's take a short break. We're going to be back in just a minute. I'll continue with the Mayor.

[...]

Louis: Welcome Back to Inside City Hall where I am speaking with Mayor de Blasio. I want to return for just a minute to that package of bills that's making its way to your desk about working conditions. The City Council has bills that would mandate training, reporting, extend the statute of limitations in city agencies for workers who have complaints about sexual harassment and related kind of issues. Is the City Council leading on this? I mean, is this sort of the – their project? Where are you in all of this?

Mayor: No, we're very much on the same page. I think this package of legislation is very good. This is something that we've been talking about with them from the beginning. We believe there should be more consistent rules, more rigorous and consistent rules across all city government agencies. There should be retraining, I think it's great to extend some of those training standards to the private sectors as well. It's great to extend the statute of limitations – I think all of that is right on the money. Look, the goal for – I think we share with the City Council is we are now going to retrain the entire city workforce. And that's you know 370,000-plus workers. Every single one of them is going to get retrained to ensure they in no way shape or form engage in sexual harassment. We will not tolerate sexual harassment. Every report will be followed up on, fully investigated. There will be serious consequences for anyone who is found to have engaged in sexual harassment, which depending on the details could be retraining or demotion or loss of pay or loss of vacation days, straight on of course over to termination. And what we need is to get all of these agencies on one footing with one training standard and then we're going to report annually what is happening as a result. I think this is going to fundamentally improve work place conditions.

Louis: Okay. And I guess because more numbers came out on Friday afternoon, Friday evening. Is there something about the Department of Education that makes it fundamentally different from others agencies when it comes to recording, reporting, and otherwise gathering this kind of information?

Mayor: So, the thing we have to say about all agencies is they need to be on this common rigorous standard. And some of the agencies, the quote on quote, non-mayoral agencies were not

on the same standard as the mayoral agencies. That's the first thing that we do get. Everyone has a single standard, get everyone retrained, set one clear bar, one clear standard, and then enforce it very rigorously. We've given the Department of Education more personnel. One of the things they needed was more investigators to follow up on complaints. We take every complaint seriously; we've got to follow up on it promptly. They needed more personnel; we put that in the budget. So I think when you get a common standard, common training, more investigators, I think it will make the DOE a lot more effective.

Louis: Okay. Let me switch topics. There is a question about safe injection sites, a place where people under medical supervision hosted by the city could consume drugs. The report on this that the City Council asked for back in 2016 – some people seemed to think that there is an April 30th deadline. That you know, whatever you promised was going to happen by the end – say today. You've got a few hours left. But, are we going to see something by tomorrow?

Mayor: So, let me first say this is about overdose prevention. This whole topic, the whole reason we're having this discussion is to try and stop overdoses, because we have a horrible epidemic dynamic with opioid overdoses. The evidence we've received from around the world suggests this is something that absolutely needs to be discussed [inaudible] here in this city. The report goes into a whole host of issues, and we want to make sure it was very thorough on all of them. It's not just the health issues; it's the law – literally the legal issues, the law enforcement issues, the quality of life issues. I said the other day, this is very complex. People who look at this issue and think it's really easy, are missing the issue of complexity here. I'm the one who said we had to by the end of April, and I am going to say it's going to be very soon, it's not tonight, it's going to be very soon. Some last work is being done, but I also want to emphasize this will not just be the Department of Health report. We will also be taking a position, I will as Mayor be taking a position on how we should act as a result of that report, so both will happen in concert.

Louis: Your good friend, mentor, and former boss David Dinkins came out just a few days ago saying that he's in favor it. Is that a sort of an early indication of where you might end up on this issue?

Mayor: I don't project where I am going. I respect Mayor Dinkins deeply and he's certainly one of the few people alive who understand all the factors that have to go into my decision. What I am signaling is people need to look at all of the pieces. Number one, we're trying to stop overdoses, prevent overdoses. But as you think about this kind of approach it brings up a host of issues and we've got to navigate all of them out in the open, very transparently, very openly.

That's what has caused us to do a lot of thinking, a lot of research. Certainly looking at other cities around the country which are only exploring it. In Canada we have cities that have been doing it. In Europe we have cities that have been doing it. We've been doing a lot of research on that. So, very, very soon we will be coming out with a whole package.

Louis: Okay. The – new topic. We, you and I, have talked about the various corruption cases around Mr. Reznitz and so forth. The New York Times just published sort of a timeline, and let's put you and City Hall aside, the level of activity within the NYPD that some of these bad operators were engaged in, taking them on trips and doing all – exchanging all kinds of favors and you know people with these unofficial position of community liaison which sounds fine until you realize that people are doing all kinds of other stuff with that access. What happens with

that? I can't think of any other City agency where that kind of stuff would go on and there wouldn't be just heads rolling everywhere. I mean is this – are you relying on the NYPD to discipline its own? Because some folks seem to have gotten a slap on the wrist and other people have gotten a trip to the grand jury. What's the –

Mayor: Well I wouldn't characterize it that way, but I'm glad you raised the piece. Let me just speak from the beginning. It was a very well written, well researched piece. I do want to say I thought the title was misleading. I think Allen Feuer did a very thoughtful piece but maybe he didn't write the title. But the title suggested that the Tammany Hall culture is still alive in this city. I think that's an absolute mistake on what's happening and misrepresentation of what's happening.

There are problems in some agencies. Of course there are going to be human beings who try and take advantage, and that's unacceptable. And, by the way, a whole lot of them have been caught and arrested and prosecuted. You remember some of the battle days –

Louis: Yes.

Mayor: – in this city. Corruption was commonplace, it is not anymore. As for Tammany Hall, well I'm sitting here having not received the support of a single Democratic Party organization in the primary in 2013, nor the business community, nor most of labor and I'm the Mayor. So I think we're in a really different dynamic. I think it does a disservice to link it to the past. What we do have are individuals who did something absolutely wrong and we have to make sure that there are no systemic ramifications.

I would argue with your point. I think a lot of heads have rolled. I think that was – there was some culprit, as you said this liaison role, there was some informality there that's really not acceptable. And I see a lot less of that in the NYPD. I think a number of people paid for their mistakes in this horrible incident. I have not seen anything like it since. And this is important, I want to remind you and this is something Preet Bharara said at the time, that the situation began in the previous administration under the previous, you know the Police Commissioner up to 2013. I have not seen anything like that begin under the last two Police Commissioners. I think the culture has changed in the police department. I think we always have more to do, but if you're talking systemic culture, if you're talking about discipline, if you're talking about consequences I think first Commissioner Bratton now Commissioner O'Neill have changed that culture substantially.

Louis: Okay. Before I let you go, the restaurant – a league of restaurants sent a big letter to you at City Hall. They're wondering what your reaction is? They're asking for permission to put a surcharge on their menus to account for what they say are some of the extra costs that they have. As a diner – as a frequent diner frankly –

Mayor: A frequent diner, yes.

Louis: – I don't really care what they're charging me for or why. If it's because of their rent or it's because of the minimum wage or if it's because the price of shrimp went up or anything else like that, just you know, give me the bill and I'll pay it or I won't come next time.

Mayor: Right.

Louis: Why stand in the way of letting them sort of work their menu and their pricing how they want to?

Mayor: Look first, I only heard about this a few days ago so we'd have to access it. Second, I'm not sure of the point since, as you say, it all comes out the same either way. So I'm not sure why this is a necessary or helpful thing.

But the other thing is when I received that I turned to my folks and I said hey this begs an interesting question, they say the restaurant industry is having trouble, what are the facts? So they went and looked at restaurant permits, it means the permits to run a restaurant, it means you're either open or you're about to be open. And they've gone up in the last year, the number of restaurants that have permits in this city have gone up. So I'm not sure if this industry is struggling. We'll look it. We'll always look in good faith, but I'm not sure I understand the reasoning.

Louis: Is that the fee they want to pass onto the rest of us?

Mayor: Well the claim is that the industry is starting to collapse and I'm not sure I'm seeing that. Nor I'm – I'm sure you are seeing that from your fine dining experience.

Louis: Yeah well exactly, you know, like I said I just – I get the bill, I pay the bill. That's as much as I know about the restaurant business. I eat the food, I pay the bill. Thanks a lot for coming by –

Mayor: Thank you.

Louis: – very good to see you.

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