



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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 27, 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. The national conversation on guns continues to unfold this week around the country, in the White House, in Congress, and here in New York City. Mayor de Blasio joins me now to talk about that and much more. Welcome Mr. Mayor, very good to see you.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you.

Louis: I wanted to start with, you announced stepped up security measures and increased drills and other checks on schools. Is there a specific threat or vulnerability that the NYPD or Department of Education had identified?

Mayor: No. And I want to talk about what's happening on this issue more broadly, but to the immediate question. No, there's no there's no real, tangible, specific, credible threat towards New York City public schools. And I want to emphasize to all new Yorkers that the NYPD has tremendous intelligence gathering capacity, and we use that in our anti-terror efforts but we also use that to protect schools. In fact over the years specific plots were identified or threats that were made were investigated and you see in many instances that the follow-through is what has ensured our children's safety.

So we're going to continue those very vigorous efforts and the whole notion of 'if you see something, say something' really matters here. I really want to emphasize this, it's not an abstraction if you think something's wrong. If you think a young person has gone on a wrong path, someone's talking about a violent act, they have a gun, they're talking about getting a gun, report it to a police officer, a teacher, call 3-1-1, or if it seems like an immediate threat call 9-1-1. That's absolutely crucial.

But the other thing I wanted to say is this, we are in a – I think an unprecedented national moment. I think for the first time in decades there's a chance of real change on gun safety issues. And let's face it, our young people are leading the way. They're breaking through all of the barriers that have stopped change on the gun safety issue before. I think we have to support our young people in that and we have to listen to them.

I'm going to have a town hall meeting as early as next week where I invite New York City high school students to come in and talk about what they're feeling about this moment in history, what they want to do about it, the leadership they're going to provide to make sure we're all safe going forward. And this is something I think we have to do all over the country now. There's a call for nationwide action next month. I can't remember anything like that certainly you'd have to go back to the 60s or the 70s to remember anything where high school students all over the country were talking about a coordinated effort on an issue. This is powerful and exciting and I think we have to support it.

Louis: The – on the specifics of violence in the schools, I tend to think, like I think a lot of my viewers do, that it probably plays out differently here than what we've seen in cases like, you know, all the way from Columbine to this recent case in Florida right. And I guess the question is, are we tuned the right way? Are we looking for the right kinds of violence? Because violence is a problem, it's just not somebody walking in, you know, coming in with an AR-15.

Mayor: Look we have to look at every possibility. We have to guard against them all. You're right, we don't – thankfully here in New York City and New York State we have strong gun laws. That's helped. We have the biggest and strongest police force in the country. That helps. There's a lot of deterrent. And people have been very good about telling the NYPD what they're hearing. There's a lot of habit in this city of doing that. I think all of that helps.

But, every day we have to be on guard against any threat like something as horrible as what we saw in Florida or other schools around the country. And we have to be on guard against any other type of violence. There's really a seamless approach which is that intelligence gathering, that staying connected to students, teachers, parents, anyone who may have information. Our school safety officers spend a lot of time listening to get that kind of information. Our intelligence operation does a lot of follow-up. No, it's not just to prevent a horrible massacre, it's to prevent any kind of violence.

Louis: At one point you mentioned – and we've all been impressed by these young people –

Mayor: Yes.

Louis: – some of them are really extraordinary. They have a bright future. They have, in fact, moved the national debate. You mentioned at one point, you said look, as far as this planned walk out – one of the ones in March or April, that if you were a kid that you'd want to do it. And it struck me, you don't want a million kids to walk out right?

Mayor: Look, I think we have to acknowledge what's happening at this moment in history. This is young people taking responsibility for their society. They have watched as adults in power in Washington have failed them. This massacre in Florida could have been stopped. And I said very clearly last week responding to some of the comments of Wayne LaPierre of the NRA, the leadership of the NRA bears a lot of responsibility for why this massacre and other massacres happened. These young people are saying we're not going to be stymied or bullied by the NRA leadership, we don't care what the conventional political wisdom is, we're going to demand change now. And watch, it's actually happening because of their efforts. What I said was if I

were a high school student today of course I would join that walkout because it's about the lives of young people and their futures and their survival.

Now look, I think what we're going to see on that day is some students will want to participate and others won't. I've said very clearly we want parents to indicate how they feel about it. In the case of high school students we want to ensure there's lesson plans leading up to it. That whatever walkout occurs it's supposed to be for only 17 minutes. That's it's –

Louis: Well yes, I mean, there's your problem right? I mean people are going to go to lunch or, you know, vanish for the rest of the day.

Mayor: Well, look, our job is to send the message and to follow-up that if you really are serious about this and you want to go out for 17 minutes to show respect for 17 people who were gunned down in cold blood, go for 17 minutes then come back to the classroom. I think in the younger grades we're looking at the possibility of whether we can just keep kids in the building if they want to participate but still acknowledge.

Young people taking responsibility for their society is a very powerful, important thing. We haven't seen enough of that. I want to support it and encourage it. Again, I'm going to have a town hall meeting because I want to amplify those voices of young people.

And I said to some of my colleagues the other day, I said I can't remember anything like this. I said, the 60s or the 70s is the last time I can remember high school student energy and activism like this. That, you know, it augurs well for the future. I – in my State of the City you know I talked about civics education, I talked about how to get people voting and participating again. I wish it didn't take a tragedy but you know what these young people are giving us all an example of what actually engaged citizens look like.

Louis: Yes, there's your education right there. On the subject of guns, there's supposed to be an NRA fundraiser. One is planned in Brooklyn for April. And as you know there are a lot of legal gun owners here in the city, I'm thinking mostly of civil servants, you know, peace officers and so forth. What would be your message for gun owners here in the city?

Mayor: My message, not only to gun owners but to NRA members, is don't accept what your current leadership is doing. Look at the surveys. First of all we know that the vast majority of Americans believe in background checks. They don't want to see anyone on the terror watch list get a gun. They don't want to see someone with a mental health challenge get a gun. They don't want to see someone who committed an act of domestic violence get a gun. There's a lot of common ground. The NRA leadership obstructs that. You look at NRA members, they're more open to gun safety legislation than their leadership is. Their leadership is in league in the gun industry. It's a – it's a vicious circle of how they support each other, the industry and the NRA leadership.

So my message to gun owners is join us. I respect the Second Amendment and I respect those who have guns for legitimate purposes and are law abiding citizens, but join us in putting common sense safety laws in place to protect everyone else.

Louis: Politically how do you – how do you deal with something like Wayne LaPierre, the head of the NRA, name checks you and a bunch of other liberal democrats to get a rise out of everybody, sort of take the focus off of the young people and turn it into kind of political dogfight. He fundraises off your name, you can fundraise off of his name. It's – how do you avoid sort of getting into that loop? Which again, sort of distracts from the actual leadership coming from the young people.

Mayor: By focusing on the young people. And that's why I want to hear their voices. I want to give them a platform here in New York City. Young people from all over the city to speak about their own vision for the future and what they want to see changed and how they're going to be part of it.

I wish I could say that adults in positions of power in Washington had broken through on this issue but it's been decades since we've seen any real progress. If our young people are the ones who can finally make a change then why don't we get out of the way and support them? And not make it about political back and forth but actually focus on them. I find that a powerful concept. And I have a lot of faith.

You know I've heard some critique of younger generations and I think it's unfair. When you look at the political experience they've had, the – you know, folks – kids in high school, kids in college and those a little older than them, they have seen the crisis of climate change, they've seen a recession, they've seen the student debt crisis, and now they've seen this series of massacres. They're pretty worldly wise, they're pretty serious because of the times they've been living in. And I see in these young people – I mean it's amazing Errol, it took them a day or two to come out of their grief and start fighting for change. And their voices are so powerful, it's absolutely effecting this whole country.

Louis: Yes, no, you can use Snapchat for more than just, you know, sort of silly messages as it turns out. They were – amazing how they did that. Let's take a short break we'll be right back.

[...]

Louis: We are back inside City Hall and I'm joined once again by Mayor de Blasio. Mr. Mayor, the Comptroller, Scott Stringer, has re-emphasized a plan that's he floated more than once before which is to take money from the Battery Park City Authority – surplus money – and put it towards, in this case he says it should be used for NYCHA infrastructure, for the public housing authority. He estimates it could be \$40 million a year for ten years. What do you think of that idea?

Mayor: I think it's well intended but I disagree for a very specific reason. That money is focused now on affordable housing initiatives and we have a crisis that we have to address in affordable housing while we address the challenges in public housing. Look, the current estimate for the cost it would take to actually fix all the NYCHA buildings, it used to be \$18 billion.

That number is going up. That's money we should have gotten a long time ago from the federal government or we would have loved to see some from the State government as well. More and more, that burden is falling on New York City.

And so what we are trying to do with the Next Generation NYCHA plan is combine the smart use of City resources with the right kind of efforts to bring in private dollars while protecting the public interest at the same time. I absolutely oppose privatization. There will never be privatization at NYCHA but that we can bring in private dollars still that help us fix some of the problems.

And we've reorganized NYCHA to try and make it more efficient. There's much more work to be done. But you know, let's be clear about the magnitude – billions upon billions of dollars needed and we need to fight for it. There's a – obviously right now we need from Albany – Albany owes us about \$250 million, almost a quarter-billion from the 2015 and 2017 budgets.

Money was passed, allocated, but never got here in New York City. Tenants should be – residents should be fighting for that. We should be fighting in Washington. It's probably going to take another election or two until the doors open up. We should fight for a federal affordable housing program, again support for public housing.

But no, if we're going to fix the problem, it's going to take a lot more.

Louis: I understand there are going to be folks on the steps of City Hall talking about this very issue. As you may know, the IDC issued a statement today calling the lead issues in NYCHA because of the deteriorating housing stock worst that Flint, that there's high levels of –

Mayor: Look, I'm sick of the IDC, period. That's a highly irresponsible statement on their part. Flint is a national disgrace and horrible damage was done there. In the case of NYCHA, the problem was identified. There have been numerous inspections undertaken, numerous remediation efforts. I wish that had been done in the previous administration.

It is a fact that those inspections stopped in the last administration. They should not have. I wish we had seen it and understood it earlier. But once it was identified, we swung into action. The inspections have been happening the last two years. The remediation has been happening. Thank God our children have been protected and the incidents of lead poisoning have been going down consistently in New York City.

We have the strongest public health department in the whole country. It is night and day from what happened in Flint and it's irresponsible of the IDC. And the IDC is simply trying to cover up their own sins.

The IDC really bears a lot of responsibility here having aided and abetted Republicans for all these years. If we had a Democratic State Senate, there would be a lot more support for public housing. There would be a lot more support for affordable housing. There would be support for stronger rent laws.

So, I'm just sick of the IDC. If they don't come home to the Democratic Party right away, they will suffer the consequences.

Louis: Let me ask you about homelessness. You announced progress on reducing the number of cluster sites. On the other hand you have only opened ten so far of the new facilities that were supposed to replace some of the cluster sites. Are you on your schedule or are you behind your schedule?

Mayor: We're a little behind. I believe it's 11 and there's I think seven more coming soon. The cluster sites have been closing. In fact, we announced today more cluster sites are closing and that's a really important thing. That's housing that people really shouldn't be in that the City paid for, for years out of desperation. And we said that's just not something we're willing to do anymore.

We've been consistently getting out of those. The new shelter facilities are coming online. We're making sure that people from that area, from that borough, from that area more and more move to shelter in their own community which certainly is a lot better for families and kids in particular.

So, we're a little behind schedule but not much. We believe we will keep to the pace to achieve the overall goal. It will be 90 facilities over time and as we achieve that we'll get out of clusters, we'll get out of hotels, and we'll have a much better system.

Louis: I got to ask you about the Bedford Atlantic Armory. I go past it literally every day. It is – has been for generation now the worst run shelter in the entire system. A young man was killed – stabbed to death right in front of it just the other day.

Is somebody going to be held responsible for that, I mean at some point? There was a big piece in the Daily News showing people – I could go there with a camera and it would turn you stomach, the things that you see. The public urination, people having sex in the bushes, people camped out on the Citi Bikes turning it into a like sleeping encampment. Staff seems to have absolutely no clue about what's going on. There doesn't seem to be any programming going on there –

Mayor: Look, that's not acceptable. Obviously a lot of issues have been raised about that site. First of all a big change is that the NYPD in the last couple of years has taken over the supervision of shelter facilities. Remember for decades, the NYPD did not get involved directly into facilities and in their security inside.

That has changed now. The NYPD supervises and trains all security personnel in shelter – major change there. As part of neighborhood policing, we want our officers to regularly engage shelters on the outside too.

So, if it's not happening enough at that site, then we have to make adjustments, we have to fix that. That's unacceptable.

This horrible tragedy, the murder that occurred, the investigation is underway. We do not know if it has any relationship to the shelter itself or if it just happened to occur near it. But I've heard those complaints. I don't accept it. I'm going to direct the NYPD to have a more vigorous presence outside and the shelter staff have to take responsibility as well.

Look, part of why we're changing the shelter system and putting in these new purpose-built shelters is we have to change the physical reality, we have to change the security reality, the whole dynamic of shelter.

What we're seeing more and more is that folks who are on the street are getting the message in the vast majority of locations that the security situation is improving. That's going to help people come in off the street. The fact that P-D is in those shelters is very helpful but we've got more work to do for sure.

Louis: In our last minute, I always ask viewers to send questions. This is a gentleman, Andrew Jackson in Far Rockaway. We were not only sent a letter but called to follow-up and we had a nice little chat.

Mayor: Very good.

Louis: He's got a suggestion on how to fund the MTA, how to fund NYCHA. And he basically says – his recollection, I don't remember it this way – was that when Dinkins was in office that he had a special lottery to help raise money. I don't quite remember it that way. But here's the suggestion, "I suggest that we in New York City have some kind of lottery to raise money. People play the state lottery every day and invest and spend money on the big lotto bigs and scratch-offs raising from one dollar to \$30 to get or win thousands or millions of dollars." He thinks that's a way to raise money to help the city. I'm not a big fan of gambling but I wanted to find out if you thought there might be something there.

Mayor: This is an initial response because I really haven't thought – I never heard that idea of doing a city-specific one. I'm not a big fan of lotteries. They tend to end up taking a lot of money from lower income folks and obviously very, very few benefit. It's kind of regressive taxation in a sense. So, not something I'd immediately be thinking about.

Louis: Yeah, I'm with you on that although people do tend to spend it anyway. I think that's the logic of it. Anyhow, thanks so much for coming by.

Mayor: Thank you.

Louis: Never a gamble to come here for Mondays with the Mayor.

Mayor: There you go.

Louis: We're going to take –

Mayor: I like the way you did that.

Louis: You see what I did there?

Mayor: Nice segue.

###