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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON MSNBC'S MORNING JOE

***Bill Ritter:** How many of you would like to have Mayor de Blasio's endorsement for you as mayor of New York City, please raise your hands. Mr. Yang, one.*

Joe Scarborough: [Inaudible] children's school of good government [inaudible] –

Mika Brzezinski: Wednesday night's Democratic primary debate for mayor of New York City and joining us now, the Mayor of New York City, Bill de Blasio.

Scarborough: Mr. Mayor –

Mayor: We're back –

Scarborough: Mr. Mayor, it's a tough crowd.

Mayor: Let me tell you –

Brzezinski: This is a very tough crowd.

Mayor: That's just another day in New York City. Can we just celebrate that you guys are back in New York City, everyone together around the table. This is beautiful.

Brzezinski: It's so nice –

Mayor: This really feels great. This is another symbol, another sign of the comeback in New York City. It really is. And I predict, summer of New York City, it's going to be the most amazing summer.

Scarborough: Summer of love.

Mayor: Summer of love. It's going to be – people are going to come from all over the country to this city because this is where it's going to be happening. And I predict a Brooklyn Nets victory.

Brzezinski: Oh, wow.

Mayor: Brooklyn Nets, ladies and gentlemen, national champion – NBA champions. First time a team with the name Brooklyn will win a national championship in over 60 years. There's your prediction for the day.

Brzezinski: Okay, wow he's –

Scarborough: [Inaudible] 1955 Brooklyn Dodgers [inaudible] –

Willie Geist: [Inaudible] well could be right. They've got a tough series right now against the Bucks. But if they clear that hurdle, they're the odds-on favorite [inaudible] –

Mayor: Brooklyn all the way.

Scarborough: So, you're telling me the Atlanta Hawks beat the Knicks, and now they're going to beat the Nets?

Mayor: No, I'm – no one's beating the Nets. That's what I'm telling you.

[Laughter]

Let me go over this slowly. No one's beating the Nets.

Scarborough: You don't think so?

Mayor: No.

Scarborough: Do you agree with that, Willie?

Geist: They got the best talent in the league. I think if they beat the Bucks, they win it all. But this series is tough.

Jonathan Lemire: I think we can all just be – agree and be happy that the Lakers are out and can't win again. But yeah, the Nets are terrific, but the Bucks are really good too. I agree with that. Whoever wins this series will probably be the favorite to win the whole thing.

Scarborough: Yankees, Red Sox.

Mayor: Yes, this weekend.

Scarborough: Big series this weekend. Are you going to Yankee Stadium?

Mayor: Yeah, Joe, I'm busy this week on official duties.

[Laughter]

Scarborough: [Inaudible] staying away from Yankee Stadium –

Mayor: I happen to have a very booked schedule.

Brzezinski: Boston –

Mayor: I'll go to Citi Field anytime. There is no conflict there. God bless.

Brzezinski: Okay. Let's get serious.

Scarborough: Okay, so, Scott Stringer was here.

Brzezinski: Yeah, he wasn't –

Scarborough: He's not asking for your endorsement –

Brzezinski: Not a huge fan –

Scarborough: But he said –

Mayor: I'm crushed.

Scarborough: He said you should clear subways right now of the homeless. Why don't you do that today?

Mayor: Okay. Look, first of all, let's put things in perspective. This city, after what we went through, has just made a remarkable comeback already. We have beat back COVID in this city. COVID level is 95 percent lower than they were on January 1st.

Brzezinski: This was ground zero –

Mayor: Yes, it was ground zero. It's now one of the safest places in the country. Most New Yorkers, I can now say a majority of New Yorkers have gotten at least one dose of the vaccine. That effort's growing. So, to bring back the city, get the health care part right, get the vaccine part right, that's happening. Now, on top of that, we've got to address some of the long-term problems that this city and every city faces. The way to do that is with what has worked historically, bringing police and community together. That's neighborhood policing. That worked for years, drove down crime, created a deeper bond between police and community, and homeless outreach. We've gotten literally thousands of people off the streets in the last seven years into shelter, kept them [inaudible] –

Scarborough: So, help me out with this because we've talked. And I – when I had you on, we always talked about the declining crime numbers. Before the pandemic lowest number since the 1950s. They didn't even have records going back to how safe New York City was before the pandemic. But I have heard, again from New York residents time and again, well crime rates were extraordinarily low, homelessness has remained a problem that's plagued your

administration from day one. Why is that? What do you think the problem has been with homelessness and what could you have done better? What does the next mayor need to do?

Mayor: Look, I – this is very bluntly, an area where along the way, I've recognized things we could have done better. I've said it very publicly –

Scarborough: So, what should the next mayor – we're not doing this [inaudible] –

Mayor: But here's what I –

Scarborough: [Inaudible] got you. What does the next mayor, whoever it is, need to do? What have you learned?

Mayor: And this is what I've learned – exactly. Homeless outreach. People have a journey as individuals, you know, there but for the grace of God go any of us. People – if you talk to homeless folks, they were living a “normal life.” Something went wrong. They descended down to life on the street. Our job is to bring them right back up. It can be done, but it takes very patient intense outreach. It takes understanding of what each person needs to come in off the streets. Maybe they need mental health services. Maybe they need to have an alcohol or addiction problem addressed. Maybe they need to be reconnected to family. But that patient work by these extraordinary outreach workers, who are really angels, who go out every night. They'll talk to someone a hundred times if that's what it takes, actually works. And even during the pandemic we found we could get homeless people off the streets into shelter, and they've stayed, but it's repeat, repeat, repeat. It's patient-intense human work with real heart. And that's what works.

Geist: So, Mr. Mayor, we've had two candidates in the last two days, Scott Stringer and Kathryn Garcia yesterday, talk about putting mental health professionals to work alongside New York Police Department officers. Ms. Garcia suggested having a ride along, a social worker go along with cops in their car to address whatever the situation would be. I think a police officer would tell you they get a 9-1-1 call, there's a domestic dispute, somebody waving a gun, they don't have time for a social worker to talk them down. So, how does social work, how does mental health fit into the New York Police Department?

Mayor: Very important question. There's a separation between a situation that could be violent, which is not a place to put a social worker in the middle of for everyone's safety or a situation where we can handle it with civilians, with health care personnel, with social workers. We've now made a major change in New York City already, and the candidates should pay attention to current events a little bit more to what's already happened, where we now send, on emergency calls more and more, civilians if we don't think there's going to be a violent situation.

Geist: What is that kind of a call? How do you make that distinction?

Mayor: If the call comes in and if someone's with a mental health challenge or crisis, and there's no evidence of violence on the scene or a weapon, then increasingly we'll be sending civilians out to do [inaudible] –

Scarborough: So, listen, so last month we had – the numbers were low, blockbuster numbers this month. U. S. economy added 559,000 jobs. The latest sign of strengthening recovery as vaccinations rise and COVID restrictions ease nationwide. I'm reading this from the Washington Post. Unemployment rate dropped from 6.1 to 5.8 percent. Let's go to Brian Sullivan. And, Brian, really bad numbers last month, people were wringing their hands, wondering what changes needed to be made, much stronger number this month.

Brain Sullivan: Yeah, it is, Joe. And I think it goes to what you're talking about with the Mayor. I mean, it's about leisure and hospitality. That was the biggest jump in jobs. I mean, just walk around New York City, New York City does feel back. A month and a half, two months ago, restaurants were empty except maybe a little bit outside. The hotels were mostly empty. That is all coming back. And that is happening nationwide, Joe. And that's one of the reasons 559,000 jobs – okay, a little bit below what Wall Street expected, but forget about the expectation because the numbers were all over the map. Literally throw a dart, hit a number, that's the way. Look at the averages. Over the past three months – yeah, last month was weak, 1.65 million jobs created over the past three months. Look at the longer term trend, the unemployment rate coming down. And, Joe, the best news of all is that average hourly earnings rose 0.5 percent. That doesn't sound like a lot I know, but it is. People that are working are getting paid more to do it, more money in people's pockets.

Scarborough: Brian, thank you so much. Really appreciate that update. And that really is – it's two great things happening right now. People are going back to work, but also not only are we getting more people going into the job market, but salaries are going up and you see some of these national chains who are on \$15, \$16 an hour. I mean this – COVID is going to be transformational in a lot of ways, but it seems like wages going up is one way [inaudible] –

Geist: Yeah, and that national number, you see it in plain sight here in New York City. You see it in the restaurants, you see it in the stores opening up. And I think a lot of it, to your point, goes back to getting people vaccinated, letting them feel safe, where they go shop and where they eat. The mask guidance from the CDC about a month ago where they said you don't need the mask inside anymore if you've been vaccinated, etcetera, has played into that. So, where do you see New York right now economically in terms of this comeback you're talking about, and what work still needs to be done?

Mayor: So, I think it's really important to start philosophically with the point that we have to put COVID behind us in our minds. You know, it's almost over, it's time to go to the future. That's why we're opening schools full strength in September. No questions asked, no more remote learning. It's time to go back to normal.

Scarborough: And by the way, that's going to be hard. You're talking about people's journey. I'm still seeing some people in New York – I mean, I've been in Florida, you know, so, you know –

Mayor: A little different –

Scarborough: A little laissez faire down there but there are still people that are still on that journey. I had a guy on Twitter who said that watching us all together gave him hives. I didn't tell him that I hug everybody that comes on set. I tried to [inaudible] he said not so fast. No, but it is – this is all a journey, isn't it?

Mayor: It is. And I think sometimes what we – we fight yesterday's war a little bit too much because today in New York City, I mean, 0.81 percent COVID positivity, lowest since the beginning of the pandemic and going lower all the time. So, let's get our minds –

Scarborough: Can you guys believe that?

Mayor: The fact that we're turning the page.

Scarborough: [Inaudible] Jonathan, Rev, all New Yorkers here. Can you guys think back to March and April of last year and –

Brzezinski: [Inaudible] been through a lot –

Scarborough: What you guys have been through and where the city is now?

Geist: Well, the day that there were no COVID deaths, I was talking to somebody and we're thinking about the refrigerated trucks outside the hospitals and the field hospital in Central Park, the graves that were being dug –

Lemire: The constant ambulance sirens. There's the soundtrack to the city, and now that sounds –

Mayor: But New Yorkers get this victory because we said to New Yorkers, we're going to ask you to sacrifice, we're going to ask you to do something tough. You know, socially distance, shelter in place, wear a mask, change your life. They did it. And then we'd say, go out and get vaccinated. And now it's 8.4 million vaccinations given in this city.

Scarborough: It's amazing.

Mayor: So, now let's put this in perspective. People did this. Every vaccination is a human being making that decision to show up and a health care hero there to give them that vaccination, that human equation's happen 8.4 million times. So, in the end, the victory goes to the people of this city. It didn't happen by magic. And this is what gives me faith in the future in New York City, the strength and resiliency of our people. They fought through everything. They created, even in the midst of crisis. And that's who New Yorkers are.

Lemire: But a defining issue of the campaign now, though, is crime and shootings. We've certainly seen a real rise in that in recent months. And, in fact, there was a suggestion by Comptroller Stringer and others that the police were not doing enough to solve these crimes. The clearance rates are not high enough. So, I want to get your response to, A, what's fueling the uptake in the violence, but, B, to that, what [inaudible] police department –

Mayor: Jonathan, the word for that, that is called ignorance. That is a lack of understanding of what the NYPD does every day. First of all, the NYPD in the midst of this crisis kept doing everything to fight back crime, but we had the highest level of gun arrests a few months ago since 1996. I mean, we've seen extraordinary efforts and the NYPD has gone through so much, but they keep coming back.

Scarborough: So, Scott Stringer, when he blames the cops, is he being ignorant?

Mayor: Indeed. It's – first of all, we went through a global pandemic. This problem of social dislocation happened all over the country. No jobs, no schools, no houses of worship. 2020, we still don't even fully understand the extent of what happened here, if you will. But now we see the NYPD is re-bonding with communities. Major gang takedowns have happened and will happen. Court system – this is only the second week in New York City that the courts have been up and running fully since the beginning of the pandemic. Now we're finally having consequences again for crime. So, all of these pieces are coming together, but for Scott Stringer to say, the NYPD is not doing their job, clearly he does not understand what's happening [inaudible] –

Geist: He actually said, Mr. Mayor, that if he's elected, he's going to get rid of Commissioner Shea on the first day, doesn't think he's doing a good job. What's your reaction to that?

Mayor: Look, I think Commissioner Dermot Shea helped us get through the worst crisis in the history of New York City. And so, you can agree or disagree on any decision, but give him and the 35,000 men and women of the NYPD credit for taking on the hardest mission that's ever been asked of them in the history of the city. And often with many officers home sick with COVID and their families fighting COVID, and we had to fight to get them vaccinated. You'll remember the State of New York did not want to allow us to vaccinate first responders. We had to fight to get that done. It's been a very tough journey, but the NYPD and the whole city is clearly coming back.

Reverend Al Sharpton: Let me ask you this. Let me go back to the beginning of the segment with you. What happened? When you have all of the candidates running to succeed you saying they didn't want your endorsement, but Andrew Yang, who everybody argues is not a New Yorker. Now, I remember in '13, when you ran and you were against stop-and-frisk, you were pre-K, and even against the guy I knew all my life. I supported you, many supported you, the progressive agenda. And we did get pre-K and stop-and-frisk did go down and crime went down. You ran for re-election, almost unopposed. So, why are we looking at candidates coming behind you? Is it political opportunism? When I get guys sitting there saying they would do part Bloomberg, but no part of de Blasio, I mean, what are we looking at here?

Scarborough: Come on, man –

Reverend Sharpton: In a Democratic primary –

Scarborough: In a Democratic primary –

Mayor: Rev, you remember that song from the 60s? Games People Play? Everyone's trying to be the change candidate. Here's what we should not change. We have the greatest recovery going on in the history of New York City. We have pre-K for every child. We're about to have 3-K for every child, three-year-olds early child education for free, universal. That's coming in now, too. We pushed down crime before a global pandemic, six years in a row, while bonding police and community together, and making major reforms. We continue to make major reforms, but reforming policing and public safety need to walk hand in hand. So, I think what these candidates are doing is trying to act like they're the brand new shiny, you know, other leading brand, if you will. But what the people of this city want is to continue the progress that we've made and build on it. This is what I hear all the time from folks. People are proud of the recovery of New York City. They don't want folks saying New York City didn't do something right here. They're proud that New York City came back so strong. They're proud of our vaccination efforts. They agree that it was right to open schools. This city opened schools when most cities didn't dare.

Reverend Sharpton: No. And I think that there have been some things there, there were things that we wanted to see more done with the Garner case and other things, but I'm talking about the general flow of the city to compare it to where Giuliani and Bloomberg was. That's why I don't get Democratic candidates having that position. There was another song called, Backstabbers. It was a little after [inaudible] –

Mayor: This point –

Scarborough: Could I – you know, I'm sorry. If you're going to talk about the Spinners, I just have to ask that we get the decade right. It's the Spinners and Dionne Warwick from 1975. O'Jays' Backstabbers like '72, '73. But go ahead.

Mayor: Encyclopedic. I mean, that's the only word for him, an encyclopedic knowledge.

Scarborough: If you talk about the Spinners, yes. Go ahead.

Mayor: Rev makes an important point. Invoking Michael Bloomberg in a Democratic primary, watch your step because in the end people in this city did not like the fact that elections were bought by Michael Bloomberg, and they responded very strongly after Michael Bloomberg to that fact. They did not like stop-and-frisk and they responded very strongly. They did not like a city dominated by landlords and developers. So, that concept is long gone. I won't comment on any individual candidate, I'll say a Democrat who's invoking Michael Bloomberg does not understand the Democratic electorate.

Scarborough: Were you surprised yesterday when Andrew Yang invoked Michael Bloomberg?

Reverend Sharpton: I was, in a Democratic primary –

Scarborough: A Democratic primary, yeah.

Reverend Sharpton: I worked with Bloomberg on some things. I'm not just totally anti-Bloomberg, but I'm saying in a political race, Democratic primary, to think your scoring points going Bloomberg and attacking de Blasio – and when I've disagreed with the Mayor, I've said – I've called the Mayor and said I think we should do more on trying to get rid of the guy with Garner or something like that. But the general flow of where he went, certainly more in line with Democratic voters than Bloomberg who I had worked with on some things and Giuliani. And that's what I'm saying, are we looking at just rank opportunism here when you're looking at a debate and you got eight candidates and seven of them saying you would not want the endorsement of the sitting Democratic mayor. What's going on here?

Scarborough: By the way. I was corrected. You correct somebody, they correct you. Backstabbers – actually I said '73, '74. It was '72.

Mayor: I think that was close, Joe.

Brzezinski: You usually know stuff that's totally unnecessary.

Reverend Sharpton: You're tired, Joe.

Scarborough: A little before my time.

Mayor: We believe in redemption, Joe.

Brzezinski: Yeah, we do.

Mayor: Give him another chance –

Scarborough: When we get to a break, can we play Mighty Love by the Spinners, going to break?

Brzezinski: Before we go to break though, we should ask him about his next act because he's so positive. Everybody has a next act. There's always a way to reinvent yourself, you know. We talk about that a lot. You could run for president.

Mayor: I'm going to – I need to know my value.

Brzezinski: All right. Well, you know, here's an example. One of the graduates of being mayor of New York City, a spokesmodel, let's go –

Rudy Giuliani: *I've been sleeping on My Pillows for some time. I love them. Yeah. Simply the very best pills ever made. But I just found out that they also have a wide assortment of other incredible products, like their mattress topper, sheets, towels, and slippers – and more.*

Scarborough: Let me ask you, will you do Mr. Pillow ads?

Mayor: I have to say that's not my role model. I watched that –

Scarborough: No Mr. Pillow ads?

Mayor: I felt a cringey feeling up and down my body. No, no, no.

Brzezinski: We've been feeling that way for a while.

Mayor: We've been feeling that way for quite a while with Rudy Giuliani. No pillow ads.

Brzezinski: Well, it's really good to see you, Mayor Bill de Blasio –

Mayor: And I want to congratulate you guys –

Scarborough: And you are predicting an NBA championship –

Mayor: NBC championship –

Scarborough: For Brooklyn.

Mayor: Brooklyn, New York. First time since the 1950s. Brooklyn will lead the way. And, look, as you see today, New York City is coming back. This is really – this was really important that you guys are here. I'm not blowing smoke. It's so important for people to see that we're back together and it works and we're safe. So, thank you. I'm really glad –

Scarborough: I'm going to hug you after this segment.

Mayor: I'm okay with that.

Brzezinski: It wouldn't be the first time.

Mayor: I'm okay with that.

Scarborough: [Inaudible] again –

Geist: Don't provoke Trae Young again next time. Please don't do that [inaudible] –

Mayor: One time only. But the Knicks won the next day. Put that in the record books.

Geist: You know, when I was trashing the Red Sox to the mayor, he made an excellent point, which is that we have common cause now, because the real enemy is the Tampa Bay Rays. They're the best team –

Mayor: [Inaudible] mighty –

Scarborough: [Inaudible] talking about the Rays every day, but for the fact that they're not on the East Coast [inaudible] –

Brzezinski: Mayor Bill de Blasio, thank you very much for being on this morning.

Scarborough: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I appreciate you coming in.

Mayor: Welcome back.

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