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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS ON INSIDE CITY HALL**

**Errol Louis:** Good evening. Welcome to Inside City Hall for Monday, June 8th, 2020. I'm Errol Louis. The five boroughs have officially entered phase one of the so-called reopening process, easing some restrictions. This comes exactly 100 days after the first confirmed case of coronavirus in our city. The reopening process comes amid days of unrest and protests across the city seeking police reform. The City's handling of the protest has itself sparked criticism as calls grow for action. Some of which has already begun to happen at the State Capitol with promises of reform here in the city as well. Joining me now to discuss that and much more from inside City Hall, we've got Mayor de Blasio. Good evening, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good evening, Errol. How are you doing?

**Louis:** Just fine, thanks. And I see that there were protests taking place again today. What is your sense of why people are still in the streets protesting?

**Mayor:** I think it's a powerful moment in history, Errol. People are feeling so much about the history that has plagued this country and the need to change things, the need to go right as structural racism. So, I understand after seeing, you know, just the most overt injustice possible with a murder of George Floyd, this is a demand that I understand is deeply, deeply felt. And on top of that, all the frustration that came out of the coronavirus crisis, the disparities, people cooped up inside, people who can't turn to, you know, work, school, all the normal things they would be doing. There's a lot of reasons, but a lot of important issues. And I think you said it well in the beginning, I have no doubt there's going to be action in the State Capitol in the next 48 hours, including the repeal of the 50-a law. And here in the city, we're going to move money out of the police budget into youth services. We're going to change some of the fundamental approaches to policing. We're going to speed up police discipline. These things I think are going to be really seen and felt by the people in this city as being the right direction.

**Louis:** What do you say Mr. Mayor to the people who say that the system while it appears to be broken is actually functioning as it was structured and intended, that the criminal justice system is down to its core, it's got discrimination just kind of hard wired into it, and that it's necessary to take really radical action, not change a law or a policy here or there?

**Mayor:** I think it's right to say there is structural racism throughout the court system, the policing structures, the prison system, you name it. That is this bad history of this country. I think that's a different matter than saying, how do you solve it? I think there's a series of things that you can do very sharply, clearly that really do fundamentally, you know, just not improve, but transform

the system. I think neighborhood policing was a very big beginning in that direction, for example, or just greatly reducing incarceration, which we were able to do in this city and remain safe. There are many fewer arrests, for example. There's a lot of things you can do to change the way you go about it profoundly. But at the same time, I think we have to understand these are human structures and to figure out what it's going to take to do things differently rather than say, there's no hope in a structure – that's like saying to me, there's no hope in democracy. There is hope in the criminal justice system, because there are elements of it that were actually built for justice. And there certainly are things that we can do to live up to our ideals better. So, I think people have to understand the human challenge, but also put ourselves into the tangible solutions rather than sort of say, there's nothing here. I don't think that's fair. There is something here to work with.

**Louis:** When the call to defund – so-called defund the NYPD comes up, some people want to defund it down to zero. Some people want to take a billion dollars out of the budget. There's kind of a meaningful difference obviously, but the Budget Justice Campaign says this, and I want to read this to you. It says, “the NYPD’s current \$6 billion budget is larger than what we spend on health, homeless services, youth development, and workforce development combined.” And they're talking about numbers that predate the current deficit in the coronavirus situation. How did we get to that point?

**Mayor:** I think we got to that point, Errol, because of tremendous challenges that had to be addressed. I mean, look, I think some people might be tempted to make the parallel that many of us have felt over the years about the military budget. The military budget is way bigger than it should be, and money should be moved out of the military into education, into the kinds of things that will build jobs for people in communities that are disadvantaged. There's so many things we could do with that money. The difference with policing is the police reality on the ground in New York City largely occurred organically. For example, we put major investments into neighborhood policing because we wanted to build a different relationship between police and community. It actually took more personnel to do it. We had a lot of communities including in recent years that felt there was not enough police presence to keep them safe. Some of the communities that have experienced the most crime. and still are, wanted respectful, positive community, engaged police presence, not a retreat, but actually wanted the presence the right way. We've had the threat of terrorism, which seems a little farther away now, but Errol, you know, over the last 20 years, that's been an issue we've had to address with, you know, very, very substantial resources because it kept happening to us.

So, I think there is something very different when you compare a police budget with a military budget, a lot of times a military budget, military industrial complex, a lot of money wasted, a lot of money put into wars we shouldn't be in. With policing, a lot of it has come actually out of the realities we're facing day-to-day – domestic violence, we're putting a huge amount of money into addressing domestic violence for example. That's a sin and an ill in our society that no one would want us to walk away from. But can we do some of these things without police? Absolutely. We talked about a very good example yesterday. Our Racial Inclusion and Equity Task Force said, get police out of enforcement of street vending. We're going to change that immediately because you can do that with civilian authorities. I think there's other areas like that. Why not use civilians, where you can use civilians?

Obviously with social distancing, we were wrong. I want to take full responsibility, Errol. I was so concerned about the coronavirus, I tried to apply the abilities of the NYPD to make sure there was social distancing. That was a mistake. And I quickly changed it, Commissioner Shea, we quickly changed it. We sent civilians and instead we sent the Cure Violence Movement in instead. That's a very good example of something that actually could be done better by civilians. So, we have to look at those kinds of solutions.

**Louis:** Okay. I wanted to ask you, you were on a conference call with staff members over the weekend, is my understanding, and according to Politico's report on it, one of the things you said was that you imposed the curfew last week in part to sort of head off the possibility of then National Guard being deployed in the five boroughs. I wanted to follow up on that. What gave you the sense that that was imminent? Were you told that by the Governor or anybody else?

**Mayor:** Oh yeah, and look, I won't talk about private conversations, Errol, but it was quite clear that it was something that was being considered, you know, by various leaders around this state, by the national – you know, by the White House. I mean, there's lots of different specific voices that we were hearing talking about the need to bring the National Guard into New York City. There were people right here in New York City calling for the national guard. I thought that would be the single worst outcome not because I disrespect the National Guard – because you bring a military force into the biggest, most complex city in the country, the chance of accidental violence to me would have been very high. You know, we didn't lose any lives, thank God, this last 10 days. And it took a lot of work to make sure we didn't lose any lives.

I think if we had brought in the National Guard, the chance of us accidentally seeing a life lost would have gone up quite a bit. And a curfew was a different strategy to address real problems. You know, we talked about, Errol, what happened Sunday and Monday in Manhattan, in the Bronx, absolutely unacceptable and real and painful for those community residents in the Bronx. I met with – those store owners I met with. Absolutely had to be stopped, but I felt the NYPD plus the curfew would get us there and would also be another way to make sure there was no effort to bring in the National Guard.

**Louis:** Okay. And then, of course, later on, or I should say around the same time, there was an open letter that circulated followed today by a protest by current and former staff members. What's your sense of why those people marched over the Brooklyn Bridge today?

**Mayor:** I think people are feeling so much, Errol. I think there's some moment both of profound pain and anger, not just because of the murder of George Floyd, but because it has brought out so many of the other inequities and there've been so many other murders like that in recent months, but also the sense that this has to be a moment for transformation. I understand that, and this is what we've tried to do in so many ways over the last six-and-a-half months and – excuse me, six-and-a-half years. And what I said to the members of my administration, when I spoke to them yesterday, I said, we have a year-and-a-half, it has to be a relentless, intense year-and-a-half of making change in this city and leaving the city a very different future. And I think we have the ability to do it.

I think it is a transformative moment in the whole country not only because of the protest, the coronavirus, the economic crisis, all of this, you know, the history, the New Deal came out of one of the most horrifying economic crises of the country. There's a moment, you can feel it, when things are about to change and we're in it now. Our generation has to make the impact and I've got a year-and-a-half to do it, and I intend to do it with really great intensity.

**Louis:** Okay. Stand by, Mr. Mayor, I want to talk further with what you have planned for the next year-and-a-half, but that's going to happen after a short break. I'll have much more with Mayor de Blasio in just a minute. Stay with us.

[...]

Welcome back to Inside City Hall, where I am speaking with Mayor Bill de Blasio. He joins us from inside City Hall and Mr. Mayor, the current and former staff members who issued this letter, they had three – they have four demands. One of them is the budget, defunding NYPD. We've talked about that. There's going to be a lot of discussion about that. We got that. I wanted to ask you about the other three things. I mean, they basically call for, they say immediately fire all NYPD officers found to have used excessive force or to have covered their badges at protests. And they also say release the names and official disciplinary records of all personnel who've been accused of using excessive force, covering their badge numbers or other misconduct. And then I guess the third is appoint an independent commission along the lines of the Knapp or the Mollen commissions to examine the conduct of the NYPD during this last week. Have you responded to any of those? Do you have any thoughts or anything you can tell them about those demands?

**Mayor:** Yeah. Look Errol, there are many, many voices in the city right now raising real concerns. Elected officials, activists, community leaders look, I'm not here to answer one specific group or another specific group. I'm here to speak about the overall situation. We are going to move money from the NYPD to youth services. That's something I believe in. I know a lot of people in the City Council believe in it. We're going to make that happen. We're going to change the nature of the disciplinary process. I've been very clear about that. It has to be sped up. Now that is not just words because you're seeing it starting to happen right now, even before most of these protests going back to Friday a week ago, a week ago Friday. You heard the news that the case in the Lower East Side, about a month ago, that the disciplinary charges were being brought and that the trials were about to begin for those officers. We now saw two officers suspended. They're going to trial. We saw a supervisor transferred, he's going to trial. This is starting to happen in a much faster, clearer way. We need to do a lot more of that. We have now the State Attorney General looking into these protests and the larger issues. I have our Department of Investigation Commissioner and our Corporation Counsel looking into. The own review that the course, Internal Affairs Bureau is doing. There's a lot going on here to assess all the things that happened these weeks and what we need to do differently.

But I can tell you one thing, we will change policing in New York City, further. Errol, I am convinced that the things we did to date – the great reduction in arrests, the end of the marijuana arrests, the end of stop-and-frisk, the body cameras, neighborhood policing, the great reduction in incarceration. 11,000 in jail when I came in, 4,000 in jail now. I mean, these are profound

changes. They've been working. We have shown we can make big change with NYPD and we're going to make more in the next year and a half. I'm absolutely focused on it. I'm absolutely certain we can get it done.

**Louis:** But Mr. Mayor you're – with all due respect, you're convinced, but a lot of other people are not convinced, which is why they're marching in the streets. And some of that has got to do with transparency and disclosure, right? I mean we have body cameras on lots and lots of cops. Nobody can see it unless the NYPD decides to release it. You mentioned disciplinary action against officers. We don't know the names of those officers. And when asked, we never seem to be able to get an answer.

**Mayor:** And you know, as I do Errol, something I've been calling for for a long time, we talked about it just days ago – the repeal of the 50-a law looks almost certain to happen in the next 48 hours.

**Louis:** But Mr. Mayor without invoking the law, if cops do something good, they rush into a burning building. They get a cat out of a tree or something, everything about it is put forward, their whole jacket, everything they've ever done, where they grew up, what high school they went to, their picture, them and their family and everything else. If something else – if something goes wrong, like they cover up their badges in violation of explicit policy, including from you as the mayor, everything is secret. This is the kind of imbalance I think that some of the protesters have been talking about.

**Mayor:** Yeah, it's not an acceptable reality Errol. I'm saying, I think aggressively the same thing you're saying aggressively. When the 50-a law is repealed, I think a whole world of transparency opens up. I want it to be clear if anyone's done the wrong thing and what the consequences will be. And now we're going to be able to do that. I need the discipline system to go faster than it ever went before. We've been working on a series of changes over six and a half years. And you know something about the reality of government. You don't do every single change at once, but the ones we went to do got done, it worked. And that convinces me we can do these changes too. It's not rocket science. It can be done. We have now a law that's going to change that's going to allow for the kind of transparency that say here's who is going to a trial, here's what's going on in the trial. Here's the outcome of the trial. This is exactly what we've been needing all along. I think it's going to say to a lot of people who are now very upset that they're going to see with their own eyes, the kind of things they've been waiting for.

**Louis:** Will we ever get to see body camera footage that's unedited from the NYPD? And not just when they feel like releasing?

**Mayor:** Errol, I want to make sure we do that better too. Now there's a vast amount of footage. This is part of the problem, but we need to figure out a way to do that that's also better and more transparent.

**Louis:** Well, they said right from the beginning, your former commissioner, Bill Bratton basically said he was never going to release it. That he was going to treat it like 9-1-1 calls.

There are some jurisdictions that release it, New York doesn't. We never get to hear the 9-1-1 calls.

**Mayor:** Again Errol, we have an absolutely vast, vast amount – this is, let's be honest about this. We have a scale that makes it different here. If there's things we need to figure out how to pinpoint to be more transparent about I'm certain we can do it. Are we going to be able to release all the body camera footage from all officers? Of course not. It's an overwhelming amount of material. But where there's cases where we need to do more, I'm certain we can find a way to do it.

**Louis:** There were rumors that were flying all over a city government. I'm sure you heard about a lot of it. That the top staff I heard at different times, the Commissioner, the First Deputy Commissioner, the Chief of Department, were all threatening to resign or were about to resign or were possibly being fired. What's the truth about all of that?

**Mayor:** It's just incredibly stupid. That's what the truth is. I don't know why a rumor that came out yesterday, that I made very clear through my press secretary was false. That wasn't acted on in any way, shape or form. And now I've denied a bunch of times and in a bunch of ways throughout the day, and you're still asking about it. God, bless you. It's all false. No one said anything like it. We've all been working together for years and years, all of us. And we're working to get things done for the city. And we still are. Nothing happened, zero. I don't know what more I need to tell you, but I'll keep saying it a bunch of different ways if you like. Nothing happened.

**Louis:** Now look, we've heard that about other commissioners. And then it turned out to be – you know, the truth ends up being a very different story.

**Mayor:** But Errol, I don't know what to tell you, if you are going to say that my friend, then what do you want me to say back to help you understand that if nothing happened, nothing happened. It just – nothing happened. We were working together all day long, everyone period.

**Louis:** Okay. Before I let you go there, the reopening happened today. What are your plans for when you'll plan to open up say City Hall or 253 Broadway? The buildings where lots and lots of municipal workers tend to come. Do you see that happening anytime soon?

**Mayor:** I think we got to do that, you know, piece by piece. I mean, right now folks who can work remotely still should work remotely. I mean, phase one is as you know, Errol is really about the kinds of industries that really require an in person presence. And now they're able to go back, but with still real social dismissing measures and others. Phase two is where you get into things like office buildings and all, but still with the expectation of social distancing and maximizing remote work for the immediate future. Errol I'm concerned that we hold the line on the coronavirus situation. And I liked – you know, you heard the numbers today. They were really promising on the health care front. But we've got to keep doing that now for weeks and weeks before we even think about going deeper into building out our government workforce in those office buildings again. So this is going to be like constant watching of the facts. And then if

we really think we're in a strong situation, then we'll start to bring more people back into offices as needed.

**Louis:** Okay. Will do. I'm staying here at home until the coast is clear. Thanks very much.

**Mayor:** We'll let you know Errol.

**Louis:** We'll talk again real soon. Okay. Yeah. Please let me know.

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