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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** January 25, 2018  
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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON THE BERNIE SHOW WITH  
SENATOR BERNIE SANDERS**

**Senator Bernie Sanders:** Hello, everybody. Today, we have a great show, and I am very excited to welcome to the show the mayor of the largest city in the United States of America, Bill de Blasio of New York City. Bill, thank you so much for being with us.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Bernie, what a joy to be with you. It's a much warmer environment than when we were together last time at my inauguration day outdoors. So, thank you so much for having me.

**Senator Sanders:** Bill was very, very kind to invite me to give him the Oath of Office, and it was freezing, but we managed to survive the day.

**Mayor:** We're still here.

[Laughter]

**Senator Sanders:** And we're excited about your second term. Alright, Bill, there's a whole lot to discuss. Let me begin it off by asking you – what does it mean in the year 2018 – and you're beginning your second term now – to be a progressive mayor in an era of Donald Trump. What does that mean?

**Mayor:** Ironically, it means there's a world of possibilities, and I think the election of Donald Trump was not the essence of what happened in 2015 and 2016. I think what was happening already since the Occupy Wall Street movement and manifesting all over the country locally, including in places like New York City, and culminated in your campaign, was an obvious movement for progressive change. I fundamentally believe we're entering a new progressive era. I can certainly say that about New York City. Something very big is happening in New York City in terms of fast, big progressive changes that I think are going to be the norm, going forward – and real, different politics. So, I would just say – look, despite Donald Trump, the energy levels, the organization levels, the number of people getting involved – a lot of it started with your campaign – has deepened, like we saw in the Women's March last weekend. I believe

Trump is not somebody that we should see as, you know, sort of, a door-closer. I think he inadvertently is opening a new door.

**Senator Sanders:** Okay, let's just jump in. I've got about a million questions here – we have a limited amount of time. I worry, and I know you worry, that democracy itself – the ability of people to bring about change, to participate in the political process is now undergoing a real threat.

**Mayor:** Correct.

**Senator Sanders:** Alright, you're the mayor of the largest city in the country – what are you doing in New York City to revitalize democracy, to bring people together, to have a campaign finance system so that billionaires – and I guess in New York City you have a little bit of experience about billionaires buying elections.

**Mayor:** Yes.

**Senator Sanders:** What are you doing to lead the country to make sure we have a vibrant democracy?

**Mayor:** Here's something good I can say about New York City – my predecessor was the richest man in the city. I'm someone that doesn't have a lot of money. The only way I got elected is because we have a progressive campaign finance system, and one that survived the reality of Citizen's United because local laws still matter. And we have strict campaign spending limits, strict donation limits, and matching funds that allow even candidates like me to get to an office like this.

**Senator Sanders:** What does that mean exactly? You know, Mary Smith wants to run for mayor. How can she run if she doesn't have a lot of money?

**Mayor:** Mary Smith can raise a lot of grassroots contributions and they get matched six to one, which is a powerful magnifier. So, I'll give you an example – our system allows you to raise up to \$175 from a New York City resident and get it matched six to one. That relatively modest donor suddenly just gave \$1,000, right? If you give \$10, it gets matched six to one. And that encourages every-day people to get involved. To your point, that encourages democracy, that encourages involvement. And I could never have gotten elected because the establishment forces in New York City were never going to support me, but I got those smaller donations. And it also comes with a reason that people get invested and involved, just like we saw so amazingly on your campaign – people giving a little bit of money also gets them involved.

**Senator Sanders:** Alright, and that withstood legal challenges from the Citizen's United decision?

**Mayor:** Absolutely, it has.

**Senator Sanders:** So your message is that other cities around America could do the same thing?

**Mayor:** Do it yourself. Take matters into your own hands and create the local change. And I'll say one other thing, because we're talking about how to reinvigorate democracy – every victory reinvigorates democracy. So, for example, when I came into office we had a big fight in the city to get rid of the broken policy of stop and frisk that was harming the relationship between police and community. We got rid of it. We got safer. We had a big fight to achieve paid sick leave for another half-million New Yorkers. That fight – that grassroots fight won the day. That gets people involved.

**Senator Sanders:** Right. Okay, let me jump into some of the big issues. You have been active in early-childhood education, in general. You know, I know that people are not going to have decent paying jobs unless they have a quality education, often a higher education. Talk about New York City and education.

**Mayor:** Number one – it's literally the number-one item on my agenda when I ran. I said we're going to have pre-K for all of our kids – full-day, high-quality pre-K for free. And that meant that tens of thousands of families would also have a huge economic burden lifted – working class people, middle class people. In New York City, you could pay over \$1,000 a month for pre-K easily. We literally took that burden off. I walked in the door – about 20,000 kids in New York City were getting full-day pre-K. Now, it's almost 70,000. It is a universal right. We added a whole other grade to our school system. We saw what was possible. And, Bernie, this is part of what I feel deeply – big changes are happening in New York City. Something very different is happening, which energizes me to tell other people we did it, you can do it, aim high. So, now we're going for the three-year-old level. Our stated policy is, by the end of this term, every three-year-old gets early childhood education for free.

**Senator Sanders:** For free?

**Mayor:** For free.

**Senator Sanders:** Okay, congratulations. This is a crisis that we don't talk about here in Washington very much. You know, I know that kids who do not have quality early-childhood education are not going to do well in school. They're going to drop out. They're not going to get the jobs we need. So, congratulations for being a leader on that. Let me talk about an issue – certainly applicable to New York City – it's applicable to almost every major city in America, and that is the issue of affordable housing.

**Mayor:** Yes.

**Senator Sanders:** Somebody – what are the rents in New York City?

**Mayor:** Oh God – it's crazy now. I mean, you know, a working family can be facing \$2,000 or more a month in rent easily in many, many parts of New York City.

**Senator Sanders:** Wow.

**Mayor:** It could be much more too. I mean, it's – and you know this is the double-edged sword of gentrification. As the City got safer – and it's true in other cities – now, suddenly everyone wants to live there and the prices get out of reach for working people, and if government doesn't intervene – I think you and I both share a very stringent view of the problems of the free enterprise system. This is one where the free enterprise system marginalizes people and forces them out of their own neighborhood. The only way to stop that is through serious government intervention.

**Senator Sanders:** Alright, talk about it. I know this is a problem in San Francisco, it's a problem in Birmingham, Alabama, it's a problem all over this country. What can you do? What are you doing in New York City to address it?

**Mayor:** And look, I feel for San Francisco because – you know, I remember the old San Francisco, and, today, San Francisco is not a place for working people and that's not acceptable to me. We said New York City must remain a place for working people. If we're not economically diverse, we're no longer New York City. Our entire spirit – you know it well, having grown up in Brooklyn.

**Senator Sanders:** I grew up in a rents-controlled apartment in Brooklyn, yes.

**Mayor:** And what a difference it meant for your family.

**Senator Sanders:** Yes, that's right.

**Mayor:** So, today in New York City, we still have rent controls of different types and they reach over 2 million people.

**Senator Sanders:** 2 million people are living in rent controlled –

**Mayor:** Rent stabilization and rent control – and that's a huge difference maker. And we, in my government, we said we're going to make sure that if the time of year comes to assess whether there should be a rent increase, we're going to have a fair estimation that respects tenants as well as land lords. Guess what we ended up with? Two years of a rent freeze. Two years whereby government decision, we said the landlords actually did not have a reason for a rent increase and the people deserved a rent freeze. We did that – never been done before. This is an example of something that would have been probably – conventional wisdom would have said five, 10 years ago that's impossible. We did it and we proved it was possible.

**Senator Sanders:** What is – this gentrification stuff is very difficult – very difficult. What do you see the long-term solution to making cities livable for working people, not forcing people out of communities that they grew up in that they love – where they want to live. How do you address that issue?

**Mayor:** Look, wherever possible to put these same kind of standards in place that New York and a few other places have. There should be some form of rent regulation everywhere in urban

America given with what we're dealing with today. There should be another thing we do – free lawyers to stop illegal evictions.

**Senator Sanders:** You – say your word on that one.

**Mayor:** With the City of New York now, and our City Council – great leadership on this – will provide a lawyer for free to any New Yorker who makes \$50,000 or less – they get the full legal service for free. If they make more than \$50,000, they still have access to legal advice. But the idea is to stop illegal evictions, stop harassment by landlords, which is being exacerbated by the ever-growing costs. The greed of some landlords – and I want to be fair, not all. There are plenty of decent landlords too. But the greed of some is such that they will stoop to the most illegal and unscrupulous things to get tenants out and jack up the rent for someone new. We're not fighting back by giving publicly funded legal help to stop that. That's the difference. You can do that anywhere – with Legal Aid lawyers around the country –

**Senator Sanders:** [Inaudible] City attorneys?

**Mayor:** No, it's Legal Aid, Legal Services and we fund it, and it makes a huge difference. That's one thing – one other thing I mentioned is we passed a law – we're very proud of it – that requires the creation of affordable housing in major new developments. So, for example, if a developer comes along – and you remember this from your days as Mayor of Burlington – developers come a long with all sorts of schemes but they realize they can't get anything done if the City doesn't approve. We now have a law that says, if you want the approval, you have to provide affordable housing. And we've got stipulated amounts. It's at minimum 20, but in most cases 25 or 30 percent of the apartments have to be affordable or else you cannot get a permit to build. That's a game-changer too, and in a lot of cities you could be doing that now because the values and the desire of people to be in the city is growing all of the time. Why not use the power of the public sector to fight back and bargain hard – strike a harder bargain because developers for too long in too many cities just got what they want.

**Senator Sanders:** Alright, let me changes gears. An issue that you campaigned on – it's an issue that's reverberating all over this country. Two-fold – number one, we want to keep out citizens safe. We want to do it in a way that we go forward preventing crime. We want reform in our broken criminal justice system. What are you doing in New York City?

**Mayor:** Bernie, there's another area where something very big and something very different is happening in New York City, because I always say we didn't start the mass incarceration crisis but we will end it in New York City. We have consistently reduced our jail population. Our jail system now has under 9,000 inmates. It used to be over 20,000 just two decades ago, and we're driving it down steadily.

**Senator Sanders:** Is that true of the State as well? Or just of the City?

**Mayor:** I don't know about the whole rest of the State, but I can tell you one thing the NYPD is doing that's crucial to this – we realized that arrests were being overused in the previous approach before I came into office with my police commissioners. We've reduced arrests – this

is an amazing figure – the last four years, 2017 compared to 2013, 100,000 fewer arrests – 100,000 fewer arrests – at the same time, consistently safer. We’re the safest big city in America. The level of crime in New York City right now – major crime – is consistent with the 1950s. The number of homicides – you’d have to go back to when the Brooklyn Dodgers were playing at Ebbets Field in 1951.

**Senator Sanders:** That’s a sensitive issue, we don’t want to go there.

**Mayor:** I know, I know, I got controversial there. But literally, we’ve had the lowest number of homicides since 1951.

**Senator Sanders:** Alright, explain that – fewer arrests, lower crime. Now, there are a lot of factors –

**Mayor:** Of course.

**Senator Sanders:** – because this is not just happening in New York City, it’s happening around the country as well. What’s your understanding? What’s your analysis?

**Mayor:** My analysis is that the policies that created a rift between police and community were not only counter-productive in terms of respecting people and trying to create communication, which then made possible things like the overuse of stop and frisk, overuse of arrests – were creating a wedge between police and community. They were very disrespectful in particular to young men of color, and were denigrating to young men of color. By ending those policies, we opened up communication, mutual respect, actual desire to have a constant dialog between police and community.

**Senator Sanders:** Alright, this is – we did that when I was mayor as well. We introduced community policing. This is a difficult issue – easier to talk about than to see take place out on the streets in reality. What does it mean out on the streets? Now, I know because I’ve been traveling – you know, I’ve traveled all over the country – it amazes me to the degree – especially among people of color – the degree to which they saw police not as somebody who could help them but as somebody to be feared – what a terrible thing – what a terrible thing. And obviously, that’s exactly what you want to prevent. You want to see police departments and communities working together. How are you doing that out in reality?

**Mayor:** What you said is so powerful, Bernie, because one day an officer said to me just spontaneously – he said that more and more people are now coming up to him. And I said, why do you think? And he literally said spontaneously – people will talk to you if they’re not afraid of you. And I think it is about a neighborhood policing philosophy that encourages dialog. Literally, our officers are giving community residents their personal cell phone number and email address so they can get to them directly. And what I’m hearing from our officers who are part of the neighborhood policing initiative is that folks are reaching out to them with the kind of information they always wished as officers they’d had.

**Senator Sanders:** They know where the drug deals are taking place.

**Mayor:** Of course. Every community of every background all over the world – you know, there are community residents who can tell you the real deal, right? This is as old as time itself. There are village elders in rural communities all over the world and in neighborhoods all over the cities of America. There are people looking out the window seeing what's really going on, or who can tell an officer who's involved with drugs, where there's an illegal weapon, where there's a gang problem brewing. Our officers are getting that flow of information now, and it's making a huge difference. And here's what I hear from the officers – they're getting a lot more than you's from community members because the community members now feel that's their officer. That officer is there for them. It's making a big difference.

**Senator Sanders:** Is there really – are you seeing a change in mentality among the officers themselves?

**Mayor:** Yes, and we –

**Senator Sanders:** And let's be clear, let's back this up – you know, I know, being a cop is not an easy job.

**Mayor:** It's very tough, and by the way all of society's ills including the mental health challenges that never got address were put on our officers to somehow address. That was very unfair to begin with. We've got to go to the root causes of those problems. But here's what I do hear from the officers consistently – they're not being told 'go make quotas, go arrest a bunch of people, go stop and frisk a bunch of people.' They're being told 'build relationships, get to know people.' It's much more gratifying for our officers. They're getting the gratitude they deserve. But I'll also tell you some of this was retraining. We retrained the entire police force in how to deescalate conflict. We are now going to retrain the entire force in implicit bias and how to weed out the biases that every single one of us as humans beings have.

**Senator Sanders:** Now you mentioned something to me, and see if my memory is right on this when I was in New York City, you said something interesting. All across this country with Black Lives Matter and other organizations are about is the use of lethal force when it should not be used, and we've seen – God knows – too many examples of this. You mentioned to me that the number of times a weapon is discharged in New York City now is significantly less than it used to be.

**Mayor:** Correct.

**Senator Sanders:** In other words, there is now – I presume – an effort to use lethal force, which is [inaudible] sometimes has to be used but as little as possible. Say a word about that.

**Mayor:** So here's a – here's a context for you. 8.5 million people now live in New York City. We have 36,000 police officers, and there are 365 days in a year. Under 100 times in 2016 any of our officers discharged their weapon, and a number of those times were either something that was accidental or dealing with a threatening pit bull or something like that. Only a few dozen times was in actually in the line of duty in a conflict situation. Look at the sheer enormity of the

situation we're talking about in a city of that size, all those officers, so many days. The restraint levels that our officers are showing are absolutely extraordinary. Their training is telling them to show that restraint, and they're doing a great job with it.

So this is another part of how we end these tragedies is helping our officers – you know, our officers didn't use to get this kind of training. Thank about this. Airline pilots, lawyers, doctors got retrained all the time. Police officers in New York City only got to go to the firing range and work on their marksmanship until under first Commissioner Bratton and now Commissioner O'Neill they get retrained regularly in how to work on these tactics to reduce the escalation of conflict.

**Senator Sanders:** And to use lethal force only when absolutely necessary.

**Mayor:** Only when necessary.

**Senator Sanders:** Alright, let me touch on a few other issues. Climate change, environmental degradation – it's not a New York City issue. It's a global issue.

**Mayor:** Correct.

**Senator Sanders:** You're the largest city in the States. You've got a lot of resources. What are you doing about climate change and protecting the environment? I remember I was in the South Bronx a couple of years ago, and I was told – just I think it was one out of four children was dealing with asthma. Does that sound right?

**Mayor:** It's a very high number.

**Senator Sanders:** What are you guys doing – what role can you play in taking on the fossil fuel industry?

**Mayor:** I'll say this for New York City. We just acted, and I want to urge every city, every county, every state to do the same – divest. Divest from the fossil fuel industry. Let's help bring the death knell to this industry that's done so much harm. Like the tobacco companies that were successfully sued decades ago. We're also suing five of the biggest including Exxon Mobil for example who systematically poisoned the Earth, knew about it, covered it up, explained it away, tried to hook people more and more on their product. We think that what every city can do and every locality – use your litigation power to go at these bad actors and get the resources back. We're looking for billions to make up for what they've done to us. The cost of Sandy – Hurricane Sandy – alone in New York City was over \$19 billion and we're having to pay billions and billions more each year for resiliency. But the other thing is by divesting, let's prove that this is an economically unviable industry. This is an industry that its assets should stay in the ground, and it's not the industry of the future.

**Senator Sanders:** So by divesting – what does that mean? New York City funds are no longer being invested in fossil fuel industries?



**Mayor:** In the next five years, because it will take a wind down, \$5 billion in New York City pension funds will be removed from fossil fuels companies, and we have set a specific deadline. We have a dollar goal, and we have said we're doing this. We will find other good investments. We want to protect our retirees for sure, but not at the cost of investing in something that's poisoning the Earth. And let's use our economic power. I think this is one of the most important points. At the grassroots, there's a lot of economic power.

**Senator Sanders:** Are the league of cities in town with the Conference of Mayors addressing this issue as well?

**Mayor:** There's a tremendous focus. I think getting each locality to do the more radical things they can do like divestment, like litigation against the oil companies, that's going to take a grassroots movement. There's been incredible movement in New York City. I want to give them credit because I have to tell you – when I first raised it to experts in my administration they raised all sorts of problems, roadblocks, challenges, but that movement kept pushing us and saying divestment would make a huge difference. And we need that grassroots movement to get other places to do it as well.

**Senator Sanders:** Is New York City becoming more sustainable? Are you investing in sustainable energy in non-fossil fuel transportation?

**Mayor:** Absolutely. For example we right now in our city we've set a goal of 80 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. But then when Trump pulled out of the Paris agreement, we said we have to go even farther. We have a very vigorous mandate on the buildings in our city, which is actually where most of the pollution comes from in New York City, that they have to reduce their emissions. They have to put in conservation, or we will fine them. Real fine – fines that can be as high as \$1 million per building.

**Senator Sanders:** Conservation means weatherization?

**Mayor:** Weatherization and changing and updating equipment and all sorts of things – putting in the right monitors so they use less energy. We're going an all-electric City car fleet. We're putting up electric charging stations for electric vehicles all over the five boroughs. These are things that help move the whole situation because they also tell people – for example, if you want an electric car, it's not so easy to have one in a place like New York City right now. We want to show people this is going to be a much better option going forward because those stations will be around for you.

**Sanders:** You're an advocate of single payer.

**Mayor:** Yes.

**Sanders:** What role can the largest city in the country play in the fight for health care for all?

**Mayor:** Well first by supporting what you have done with Medicare for all and I really want to thank you for that because you know, everything you did in your campaign changed the politics

of America. And I've said this to you, you know, from the bottom of my heart – the American political process will never be the same because of what you created. And that means not only that people at the grassroots now understand their power and that you can approach a political campaign for elective office differently, it also means you can approach each and every issue along the way differently, same organizing approach.

So, for us in New York City, we want to use our political power, our consumer power ect. to fight for a single payer system. Look, we are trying to get this done at the state level. It's hard to do locally but you can do it at the state level. We will play a big, we have a big presence in the state of New York so we are going to fight for that change. We need to make some political change, as you know unfortunately New York still has a republican State Senate, we need to change that this year. And that would open the door to single payer legislation having a real shot in our state capital.

But I think it the same basic principle, organizing at the grassroots for change – I think what Medicare for all now means to people is also very different since the fight to save the Affordable Care Act. You see the attitudes of the American people changing rapidly now on healthcare. And what you put forward is making more and more sense to more and more people.

**Sanders:** Okay, let me go to a more political question, a really interesting question. You have a city which has people, I suspect from every country on earth.

**Mayor:** Literally.

**Sanders:** You got zillions of languages and everything else – amazing diversity. You are the Mayor of this city – unlike the President of the United States you want to bring people together and not divide them up. How do you do that in a city of such complexity and diversity?

**Mayor:** By telling people they matter. You know one of the most powerful things in the last few years has been the Black Lives Matter movement – the phrase I think opened minds rightfully. If the society and the government communicate to people they matter, a lot of other things can be possible. If you denigrate people, if you devalue them, which has been too much of the history of our country, then it is understandable that there will be not only division there will be hopelessness.

So our message constantly is that all the communities of the city matter. By making things universal, very consistent with everything that you fought through. For an example, giving people Pre-K for all says you matter – we are investing in you, regardless of your background, regardless of what language you speak. We protect immigrants of all backgrounds. We –

**Sanders:** Alright, say a word on that because obviously right –

**Mayor:** Yes.

**Sanders:** We are in a terrible, terrible struggle right here in Washington – immigration reform, on protecting 800,000 young Dreamers. What are doing in New York on that?

**Mayor:** The message we give in New York City is we are going to respect everyone regardless of documentation status. And in New York City that means half a million people Bernie. I mean it's amazing, think about it – in the country, almost 12 million undocumented folks who I always remind people, are essential to the American economy. You could debate how they got here and what happened before but right now there is 12 million people who are a part of making this economy work and are in each and every community in America including a lot of rural communities, essential to the rural economy.

**Sanders:** Agriculture, big time.

**Mayor:** Right, why don't we push back on the divisive forces by talking about what's really happening on the ground. So, in New York City, half a million New Yorkers – they are New Yorkers, I don't care in the first instances about their documentation status, they are my fellow New Yorkers. We tell them that we are not going to ask them their documentation status. Our police will not ask and have not for decades and the schools and the public hospitals – no one is ever going to ask you a documentation status. We want to give you as much opportunity to live a good life as anyone else.

God forbid there's an effort to deport someone, we now – working with our City Council, have legal services available to assist families in fighting deportation because you know what happens a lot of time, the bread winner in the family gets deported and the kids get left behind which is the most unfair and also, you know, stupid for the society, stupid possibility in the world that you would break up a family and leave the kids behind and have to fend for themselves. So we help in that way.

And one thing I'm also very proud of – we have an ID card which has become a very positive thing, ID NYC and it says, you know a lot of folks undocumented they can't get a lease, they can't get a bank account, they can't visit a hospital, someone, a loved one in the hospital. They can't visit their kid's school without an ID.

We created a New York City only ID, IDNYC – you're not asked your documentation status, you get the ID card, it opens up a world of possibilities but for a lot of immigrants, documented and undocumented, they've said they feel they belong, that they are being respected and valued because they have the same ID card that everyone else has.

**Sanders:** Alright Bill we want to wind this down, what didn't I ask you?

**Mayor:** Well one thing I want to mention is what we did just in the last few days. We are taking on the opioid manufactures because Bernie, look, I want to just commend you – I've said to you, your town hall meeting in West Virginia was one of the most powerful things I've seen in a long time about actually reaching working people and changing the dialogue. And that's where there is so much hope for progressives when we talk about working people's needs everything could be different. West Virginia has been ravaged by the opioid crisis as has the Bronx, as has Staten Island and other parts –

**Bernie:** And as Vermont, and as Kentucky, as has communities throughout this country. 60,000 people died last year of overdoses.

**Mayor:** So it is an unacceptable status quo so we are suing the big opioid makers and distributors. And we're saying again, very much like the tobacco law suit from the past – they purposely created this crisis for profit, they need to pay so we can start to reclaim people's lives.

**Sanders:** Alright, excellent. That is an issue that you know here in Congress what we are talking about is providing money for states and cities and that's important but at the end of the day you have people who likely knew exactly the addictive capabilities of these opioids and allowed them to go out –

**Mayor:** In fact encouraged.

**Sanders:** And that is outrageous. They have got to be held accountable so I'm glad that you're working on that. Alright, I think what we heard from Mayor Bill de Blasio is that in the era of Trump we don't sit and moan and groan. We use the resources that we have to fight back to create the kind of vibrant democracy this country needs to address the significant problems that we have and we can do it. We can do it when we stand together. So Bill I want to thank you for being here, I want to thank you for the great work you are doing. My regards to the family, we will see you soon.

**Mayor:** Thank you so much Bernie. See you soon.

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