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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. The deadline to sign up for health insurance in New York is approaching. Mayor de Blasio is urging people to get coverage through the Affordable Care Act and tonight the Mayor is taking part of the People's State of the Union. That's a rally billed as a public alternative to the President's speech tomorrow. Here now to talk about that and much more as part of our weekly Monday's With Mayor segment is New York's Mayor, Bill de Blasio. Good to see you, thanks for coming in.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good to see you, Errol.

Louis: Let's start with the important business, Wednesday is the deadline for those who don't have health insurance, if they need to do it, what must they do?

Mayor: Okay, Wednesday at midnight is the deadline. Anyone who does not have health insurance, any New Yorker, should either call 3-1-1 or go online to the City website, nyc.gov, and right there it's very straightforward how to proceed.

You know, I want people to understand we have really simplified this process to make it easy. Something you can do same day even to sign up. And it's crucial. You know it gives you immense security for you and your family, piece of mind, to know you have that insurance.

Here is the amazing thing Errol, obviously President Trump and the Republican Congress saberrated that they were going to get rid of the Affordable Care Act. They failed. The Affordable Care Act is well – alive and well – and still with us. But here is what is amazing, more and more Americans are signing up now.

Rather than be discouraged that there was a fight over it, there has been a surge in sign-ups. And that's been happening here in New York as well. We are in the middle of a big effort to get tens of thousands more people signed up. Again, if you are listening to this, if any of your viewers are seeing this, get online right now, call 3-1-1, you can sign up right now.

Louis: Yes, even you are healthy. Even if you don't think you're going to get sick. Even if you think you'll put it off until next year. You have to do it by Wednesday to get coverage for the

rest of 2018. Stuff happens, you slip, you fall, it's going to snow tomorrow, make sure you do it please.

Mayor: I'll say one more thing, most people if they, God forbid, had a major health problem, you know we say the famous line people, one paycheck away from economic disaster, well most people – most of us – are one health crisis away from economic disaster. So you can't play around it. Get health insurance. It's affordable. It's available.

Louis: Okay, on to some business. You were at the White House with a bunch of mayors. The U.S. Conference of Mayors –

Mayor: Got an invitation to the White House.

Louis: You were – invitation, right, you could have gone to the White House. At the same time, or on the same day, a letter came. A kind of snarky letter, kind of a nasty letter from the Department of Justice once again browbeating so-called “sanctuary cities” including New York, saying that if more cooperation is not forthcoming, or if you don't document some kind of cooperation, federal funds could be lost, subpoenas could start flying, and so forth.

You took the opportunity, you and several other mayors, and you said, you know what, we are not going to this meeting. And here is what I can't figure out. As an activist I think you can relate to this. If you are going to push back against the federal government, one thing you would do is get together with all the mayors who wanted to push back and then demand a meeting with the President, but you already had the meeting with the President. You could have turned the infrastructure discussion or at least some portion of it into letting him know how you felt about all of this.

Mayor: Well, I understand that but I will tell you why I don't think that would have been possible. First of all, let's talk about what happened with that letter, you know, a bunch of us, even though we disagree with Donald Trump, we got the first invitation that mayors had gotten since he became president.

A bipartisan group of mayors, we meet annually in Washington, U.S. Conference of Mayors. You know, presidents for generations have invited the members to come to the White House and have a discussion. I participated in them with President Obama, for example. So the invitation finally came, and a lot of us, you know, understood we had differences with Donald Trump, but we were willing to go if there was going to be an actual dialogue on infrastructure.

That morning, as you said, out came not only a letter, but a press blitz by the Department of Justice attacking 23 American cities and mayors, even before I had heard this letter had gone out, other mayors pulled out immediately, Los Angeles, Chicago, New Orleans, and a lot of others said, you know an attack on one of us is an attack all of us. It was obviously premeditated. It was obvious what the timing was. It was the only time he ever met with mayors for God's sake.

By the way, Republicans and Democrats both felt it was inappropriate having seen that letter. Yeah of course we could have gone but here's what we found, also, that the actual folks who did

go, were treated to nothing more than a photo-op. Trump came in, spoke, and left. Unlike what Obama had done or Bush had done or Clinton had done where there was an actual dialogue.

I think this is a cautionary tale on several levels. I think it was actually the President and his team who turned this into a political event by attacking the very same cities he had invited to the White House for the first. That's just not acceptable. I would never in a million years, if I was trying to have that kind of dialogue, I wouldn't attack people that same morning. And obviously this is part of a systemic strategy the White House's employed lately to try and demonize not only immigrants across the board, but treat immigrants as if they are all criminal.

Louis: Well did you fall into – if they set a political trap, which is what you seem to be suggesting, did you walk into that trap? Was the idea to say, hey you know what, we'll put this out, we'll restate a frequently stated – a publically stated – position and we will chase all these mayors away and we won't have to talk to them?

Mayor: I would argue that we all came – a bipartisan group of mayors came to have a serious conversation, as it turned out, there wasn't even going to be a serious conversation, and I think we've all learned a lesson now about the Trump administration, that they weren't actually interested in the dialogue.

We also, remember you – remember some weeks back, the same thing happened with Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi, who were going – trying to have a constructive dialogue at the White House. They and the Democrats were attacked that same morning by the President. They said we are not coming to the meeting under these pretenses. If you want to have an honest dialogue, create atmosphere where we can think that there will be some collegiality. So no, we had no reason to believe it was coming. We came in peace hoping for a dialogue.

But I'll tell you, I think the reaction was very collegial that mayors saw cities under attack, including mayors whose cities weren't under attack. They still said I am not going to be a part of this.

Louis: Well, but here is the thing. There was some interesting analysis by Nicole Gelinas in the newspaper today pointing out that unlike the Mayor of New York; the Mayor of Chicago has a Republican Governor. They can sort of get some stuff done through other means, same with Massachusetts. Mitch Landrieu, in a –

Mayor: He's a Democratic governor, but go on.

Louis: I am mean Mitch Landrieu in New Orleans has a got a –

Mayor: Republican Senators.

Louis: Two Republican Senators. And he himself is leaving office this year. I mean they're in fundamentally different positions, compared to New York which in any event is the most important city.

Mayor: Yeah, with all due respect. I don't think that's how things really work. This is a president who is not trying to have a dialogue. Who had a real opportunity to have one, obviously was not interested in it both because of the attack on these cities, but also because we saw what happened with the folks who did go, that they were not given an opportunity for a dialogue. You're right. You can go to the White House and start shouting. But I don't think that's productive either. We've got to realize that Donald Trump does not respond to niceties. He has to understand that [inaudible] treat these cities this way. And he has to understand the people of this country are demanding an actual infrastructure plan.

Louis: Do you ever want to meet with him at any time?

Mayor: I've met with him, you know that. Right after the election I met with him.

Louis: During the transition but not since the inauguration.

Mayor: But I would always meet if there is a real agenda, and a real opportunity for a dialogue. I am not just going to meet for just a photo-op. I mean that's what we learned here as well. They were not planning on a dialogue. That's what we – you know, so the mayors who had the greatest problems didn't go. A lot of Republican mayors were there. You know, relatively friendly audience one could argue. They didn't have a dialogue, they didn't attempt – unlike all of his predecessors, Democrat, and Republican alike. There wasn't a dialogue. We've got to come to grips with what Donald Trump is doing here. He is not attempting anything like a normal functioning government. We can all see that. I am not going to participate under those terms. We need to fight in the Congress, that's where the action is. Let's face it, and we saw it on so many of these issues so far. If you want to get anything done and also if you want to find a place to stop things that might hurt New York, we got to go the Congress. The Affordable Care Act was saved by focusing on Senators, and Congress members. The Tax bill, I don't like what happened in the end, but there was a number of Republicans who ultimately voted against it. That came from a lot of work locally, including by mayors. The Congress, whether we love the Congress's composition or not that is the venue where action is right now. I'll be thoroughly engaged there. I talked to plenty of Democrats and Republicans.

Louis: They can't compel the executive to come up with an infrastructure plan, right. I mean they could appropriate the money, they can't make him –

Mayor: What have we seen on the Affordable Care Act, and the tax bill, a lot of the actual origination of the plan came from the Congress. And I don't know what the president is going to put forward. Well he sounds like now he's putting forward is bluntly a privatization scheme. He talked in the campaign about a one trillion dollar infrastructure plan. We all heard what we've seen for a generations. That would have been government funds to move public works that would really fundamentally help this city and this country.

What we are now seeing is a stripped down plan. No more than \$200 billion in public money. And a whole lot of private financing schemes, and we've seen these privatization efforts before. They fail when it comes to infrastructure. They don't move, they end up with a lot of controversy or public assets being owned by private corporations. Which so typically back fires and profits

only the few. So no, this president is not showing us a real infrastructure plan. We will fight for when the Congress – you know in 2015 I went to Washington with a group of mayors, Democrats and Republicans. We fought for an increase in the highway bill for roads, bridges, subways, everything. We actually got an increase working with a Republican Congress. We got an increase. I am going to go and fight for that again in the Congress.

Louis: Okay, we've got more to talk about. Right now were going to take a short break. We'll be right back with Mayor de Blasio.

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Louis: We're back Inside City Hall and I'm speaking with Mayor de Blasio. This event tonight, that town hall, there are a lot of Hollywood types, there are a lot of recording industry entertainers.

Mayor: They're New York types actually.

Louis: New York types. No, they do count.

And the Mayor of New York will be there. You're going to make a speech. This is in advance of the President's State of the Union speech tomorrow. This almost strikes me as a textbook definition of preaching to the choir, right. I mean there would be no disagreement in the hall tonight. What do you hope to tell these folks?

Mayor: This is about energizing people for the fight ahead in my opinion. And I am not going to give a big long speech. I am only going to talk for a couple minutes. But my message to people is how we have to organize and activate for this year ahead. I think a lot of people spent much of 2017 being down in the dumps, and feeling hopeless. And that was a massive mistake. It always is in the face of adversity. I think those elections in November of 2017 were eye openers for a lot of people. Virginia, especially later Alabama. And it's time for people just to get consistently active whether your goal is to flip the House and the Senate or it's to work at the local level to change state houses or to change behavior from the movements we see for the right to women for example.

It's time for people to get active. So my message is simply one of, let's get serious, let's get into gear now. Because this is game on, right. The State of the Union also in effect marks the beginning of we're going into this electoral year, this extraordinary year of opportunity. And I don't think anyone should rest on their laurels about it. The numbers are pretty powerful right now and in favor Democrats and progressives. But that only gets actualized on the ground. That's the lesson of Alabama and Virginia in my view. It happened on the ground.

Louis: One New York progressive, Cynthia Nixon, the actress is going to be there. We asked her just recently saying, "Hey, you thinking about running against Governor Cuomo?" And she said maybe. What do you think?

Mayor: Look, Cynthia is someone I respect greatly. And you know she is a dear friend. And she was one of my earliest supporters. I don't know what her choices are going to be in terms of her political work. But, I know she has done a lot for this city and this state for sure through her activism. And I admire her for it.

Louis: Well, I know you meet a lot of people who've never run for office before. What would be your advice to her, or anybody else?

Mayor: Oh, you know, I don't give generic advice. My point would be about this year for everyone. I think it's a year where you're going to see tremendous progressive activism and democratic activism. I think there is going to be a huge movement in this state to ensure that the IDC rejoins the Democratic Party. That's being felt at the grassroots. There is going to be a movement for electoral reform. This is one of the hardest states to vote in. It should be one of the easiest.

Louis: With all of that said. Do you see a role for her? Do you see either a path to victory, or a way that a candidacy by her can leverage some of the things –?

Mayor: Again, I am not going to do punditry. I think what she has done an activist is consistent with what we're going to need to see activists do on a whole host of issues in Albany. And again, right now electoral reform is going to be a part of this legislative session. It needs to be. The fight for greater transparency – you know I've talked about the 50-a law. A lot of people want to see greater transparency and greater trust and belief in a relationship between police and community. Let's get that law changed, so we can disclose police disciplinary records. There's a lot of big items in Albany. I'm not here to get into electoral strategy. I can say this is an activist moment, and people need to take that moment to Albany.

Louis: Okay, let's talk about government. The Public Advocate, Letitia James, yesterday talked, once again – she's said this before – about Shola Olatoye, the chair of the New York City Housing Authority saying that she thinks what she's done is very serious and that leadership changes are needed at the authority. I guess the other bad news that came along is the \$57 million verdict to a mother whose child, whose four-year-old – meaning she was born while you were mayor – has lead poisoning. Big verdict. Ritchie Torres the former chair of the public housing committee says if it was up to him she'd be gone by now. At what point do we sort of put all of this stuff together and chart out a new direction for the authority?

Mayor: It's just not how a serious leader should make decisions because some critics have offered criticism. That's not how I make my decisions. I'm very comfortable – when I believe someone is the right person for a job I'm comfortable standing by them. When I think someone needs to move on I'm comfortable being the person who makes that decision and tells them that. There were some people at NYCHA who needed to move on, and they have. I'm very excited we're going to have a new general manager coming in – Vito Mustaciuolo – who has a fantastic record from his time at our Housing Department, really making a change in people's lives, and I think he will do great work. But Shola has for four years improved life for people in public housing. That's what it comes down to is the actual lives of people.

Louis: Are critics being unfair to her?

Mayor: Absolutely. It's very easy to criticize, and it's very easy to jump on an issue. The lead paint issue is very serious. I understand that, and the health of children is paramount – I mean my whole administration has been focused on children. It's been our number one focus – obviously pre-K and so many other things. But the original problem did not happen in this administration. That does not forgive the missteps since. But let's face it – she came into an agency that she did not know, nor did I know, had stopped lead paint inspections. It wasn't doing things right. When it was discovered changes were made. Now there are inspections. Now there is remediation. This issue is a serious issue. Thank God there's extensive efforts to protect the health of our young people from lead in this city across the board, and thank God lead paint problems have been consistently reducing in New York City.

But let's look at the whole picture of public housing. She took over a bankrupt organization and righted its finances. It's now solvent. She took an organization that had too many developments that were not safe and worked with the NYPD to make a number of them much safer. She helped to get rid of all the scaffolding that were a huge security problem in the developments. She sped up the pace of repairs.

Louis: How is it solvent? Whenever we talk about this I keep hearing that you know it's \$18 billion, it's \$20 billion? It's \$23 billion now.

Mayor: To be fair, when she took office the day-to-day operating expenses were near – you know, the operating budget was near bankruptcy literally. And look, she prevailed upon me to end a whole host of things that used to be the norm under previous administration like NYCHA paying for its own police services or NYCHA paying taxes to the City of New York. Under her leadership, we ended those mistaken policies, and that money went back to NYCHA. She took that money and sped up the repair process with it. When you look at the fact the agency was really, extraordinarily troubled – she came and she said we're going to get rid of a number of administrative positions, we're top heavy, we're going to save money and put that money into direct service to our residents and repairs. And that's precisely what's happened, so I am convinced she has made real change and will continue to. And that's what I'm – my obligation is to the people who live there. I think she can do the most to get the job done.

Louis: Okay, before we say goodnight – you were at the Grammys last night. I didn't see you on the red carpet coverage, but where were you? Where were you sitting? How'd you like it?

Mayor: Well, I went to the red carpet part because I wanted to talk to some of the folks who were part of the – I spoke to the host James, and I spoke to a number of the celebrities, and I thanked them for being in New York, and I encouraged them to come back soon, and there was actually a lot of enthusiasm. I talked to a lot of media there, local and national, about why New York is the natural home for the Grammys. We are the music capital of the world. I'm sure you would agree.

Louis: Of course.

Mayor: And a place – and I actually think when you look at the show last night being in New York brought out a different sensibility – a diversity and an energy and a purposefulness that was really refreshing to see. Now that being said, our ethics rules – it turns out – did not allow me to go inside.

Louis: Get out of here.

Mayor: Yes, it's true.

Louis: You've got to be kidding me.

Mayor: So I went to –

Louis: I mean, couldn't you have bought a ticket or something?

Mayor: No, not allowed to. Doesn't work. So I went to the first part, watched at home the rest.

Louis: Oh man.

Mayor: Yeah, well.

Louis: That kind of sucks.

Mayor: Public service, my friend. Public service.

Louis: You might have to work on that, wow.

[Laughter]

Well, thanks for – thanks for I guess showing up. Very good.

Mayor: But the performance of the evening was Childish Gambino. I want to say that.

Louis: Okay, alright.

Mayor: Others can say other great performances.

Louis: That opening was kind of hard to top.

Mayor: The opening was amazing, but I'm saying the pure musical brilliance of Childish Gambino's performance I want to commend.

Louis: Alright, very good.

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