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

**Errol Louis:** Welcome back to Inside City Hall. We just learned a short time ago that Joyce Dinkins, the former First Lady of New York City, has died. The Harlem native broke barriers as the first Black first lady of our city during David Dinkins' time in office. She was actively involved in improving literacy skills of city students. Mayor de Blasio, who got his start in politics under then Mayor Dinkins joins me now with reaction to that and more from the Blue Room inside City Hall. Good evening, Mr. Mayor, very sad to hear about Joyce Dinkins.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Yeah, Errol. This is very sad. Chirlane and I heard a few hours ago and, you know, we have the honor of serving under David and Joyce Dinkins, and such a strong and good woman, so dignified in everything she did. You know that she played a huge role in Mayor Dinkins' – his whole path, his whole path to the mayoralty and in the work he did as mayor, she was in so many ways, you know, one of the great strong forces of the administration. And not because she was out front and, you know, someone who played a particularly public role, but we all could see, you know, she was a lot of what held things together. And it's just – it's to me, thinking back at what they went through, and both she and Mayor Dinkins were put through so much, but she kept that sort of quiet, strong dignity, no matter what. I never saw her, you know, at any moment, anything but sort of focused and composed and thinking ahead, and someone just to admire. If you spent time with her, you admired her.

**Louis:** Yeah. She was a wonderful person. And, you know, folks don't know – the story hasn't been told, I think, enough that her father was a Harlem assemblyman. So, by marrying her, basically Dinkins married into Harlem politics through her, and she knew the political game very, very well having grown up around it. So, you kind of couldn't put anything over on her. She certainly understood how the political game works.

**Mayor:** Yeah. And I think she was at that point in history where there were still very unfair assumptions about what the role of a first lady should be. And she stayed a little farther back in terms of the public eye, but exactly what you said – behind the scenes, everyone knew she was a powerhouse and she contributed greatly to the mayor reaching the mayoralty. And you just knew she was one of the people who, you know, saw the world as it was. She very much wanted a better world. She was filled with compassion, but she was also a realist. And we're going to miss her a lot. She did a lot for this city.

**Louis:** Indeed. Let's get onto the business of the day, Mr. Mayor. We just went through some of the state's numbers about where COVID cases lie with special reference to these new zones that were created. Are you seeing any signs of progress?

**Mayor:** Yeah, Errol, first of all, I have to say this is going to be a pivotal week we're entering into now because we now have the right restrictions in place and a lot of enforcement going on and a lot of effort at the community level to get people to buy into these restrictions. And this is going to be a crucial week. I am encouraged. We've seen some leveling off in the different indicators and that's very good news, but we got a long way to go to make sure that solidifies. With luck, Errol, this week will be decisive in all of our favor. And remember, as soon as the following week, by the end of the following week, we might be able to get things back to where we were when we started September. And that's what we want to do. We really were on a good path then. If we buckle down, if people really listen to the guidance about the face masks, the social distancing, and we'll be out there in force over these next days to make sure everyone's gotten that message, this could be a crucial week in turning us back on the right course.

**Louis:** Will protest – we've seen a lot of protests and folks, of course, have the right to go out and complain if they don't like the policy or the way that it's being enforced, are those going to be treated as mass gatherings to be broken up, or are they going to have the kind of leeway that say the protesters around Black Lives Matter were afforded earlier this year?

**Mayor:** It's a different situation. We've been through different realities in this crisis, but this is the first time we've had a resurgence. And one of the things I feel strongly is we cannot let this resurgence grow into a full blown second wave in New York City. There does not need to be a second wave for all of New York City. If we stop it now in the parts of Brooklyn and Queens, where we're having issues, we can keep the city on a good track. Because overall, the city is doing very well as your numbers indicate. So, in terms of protests – instructions have been given to members of the NYPD, Sheriff's Office, etcetera. The clear legal guidance that we didn't have a few days ago, but went out at the end of the week, making very clear they do need to be broken up. Of course, there'll be ample warnings. The goal is just to get people to disperse. If that doesn't work turning to summons or other methods. But, yeah, we've got to be clear that any large gathering creates a problem when we're trying to stop a resurgence of this nature.

**Louis:** Are you getting help from local elected officials who represent parts of that area? I'm hearing from a number of reporters that the phrase they keep using is a vacuum of leadership or an absence of leadership, which either means the folks don't exist or they're playing a very quiet role at a time when maybe more public actions are required. What's your sense of that?

**Mayor:** I think it's very individual. What I think over the whole sweep of the challenges we've had is certainly seeing different people take different stances. I will remind you a few weeks ago as the problem started to emerge in certain communities, and we really got the word out strongly that if there wasn't progress, if there wasn't more adherence to social distancing and using masks, etcetera, that these kinds of restrictions were looming. I mean, we put that warning out well in advance of implementing the restrictions. At that time, you saw a lot of community leaders, a lot of elected officials come forward and say, hey, everyone, we've got to take this seriously, we've got to do this, you know, for all of our own good. So, I have seen moments where the elected officials really did show unity and get that message out, and overwhelmingly community leaders, rabbis across the community had been very, very helpful at telling people how important it is to take this seriously.

**Louis:** The City's Twitter account said that something like 62 summonses had been given out totaling over \$150,000 in fines over the weekend. I'm trying to think, has there ever been a sort of a comparable level of crackdown during this coronavirus crisis?

**Mayor:** Not that I can identify, Errol. This has been a particular dynamic because remember first we suddenly had a crisis back in the spring we never had experienced before. That got very bad, very fast. We shut down things across the whole city. And then, thank God, we had those three or four months where things had gotten a lot better. This is the first time we've had to deal with the danger of a full blown resurgence. And the fact that it is in some very specific areas and areas that are, you know, addressable, we can contain this problem, it really calls for a different set of measures than we've ever used previously. And so those summonses are going – you know, it's very clear. Our enforcement agencies are giving out the summonses, no one wants to, but we will. And some of them are very sizable in terms of the penalty involved, the financial penalty. And our goal here is just to get people to comply so we can really end this. We have the opportunity – again, this week is crucial. This is something I said in the beginning that, you know, these restrictions might only have to be in place for a few weeks. If everyone participates, we can actually get rid of this in a few weeks and go back where we were. And hopefully these penalties are showing to those who are thinking twice, that there really is a consequence if they don't participate the way we need them to.

**Louis:** Before we go to break, we're hearing that New York City is going to – is scheduled to close two City jails in November, the famous Tombs in Lower Manhattan and a facility on Rikers Island. So much of this close-down scenario was predicated on a crime rate that would fall and stay low. Yet we're hearing about shootings and other crimes going up. Are we in for a collision course with what we're doing with detention facilities and the possible need for more of them?

**Mayor:** It's a fair question, Errol, but that's certainly not what I'm seeing, and my team is seeing. Remember we had jail facilities – you know your history in New York City. You go back 20 years or more, our jail system was over 20,000 people. You know, we got to a point during the coronavirus crisis, we had the fewest people incarcerated since the 1940s. So, we've driven down mass incarceration intensely and purposefully. There may be a situation where there's something that has to be addressed in the near term, but the overall pattern is clear. You know, we're leaving the era of mass incarceration behind. We got to get out of Rikers. We've got to have a new community-based, modern approach to correction. And it's got to actually be about correction and rehabilitation. That was not possible with the 85-year-old facility on Rikers. So, I feel good that we will have the space we need when we need it.

**Louis:** Okay. Stand by, Mr. Mayor. We're going to take a short break here. I'll bring you the rest of my conversation in just a minute with Mayor de Blasio, stay with us.

[...]

Welcome back to Inside City Hall. I'm once again joined by Mayor de Blasio. He joins us from the Blue Room. Mr. Mayor, I want to talk about the race for mayor, about the upcoming race for

mayor and sort of take you back to 2013, when you were running. We're about six months out from the primary, or at least from petitions hitting the street, and for things really sort of heating up. My sense of this, you tell me if this is misguided, but my sense is that this is the time that people should really be trying to talk to all of these candidates and introduce them to some ideas and some policies that the typical person, again, going back to 2013, who's running for mayor, they might have two or three sort of big ideas, but they're either a blank slate or they're open to being persuaded or educated about a whole raft of other issues. What's your sense of that?

**Mayor:** Well, Errol, I think that's a really good point. Look, I had been in New York City public life quite a while before I ran for mayor and I thought I had a good grounding on a lot of issues. I got to tell you, the minute you get into this building, it is a humbling enterprise. You got to learn about many, many more things than you ever imagined. So, you're absolutely right when you're talking about six months or more before a primary. It's actually a really good time to try and get your concerns, your ideas, your proposals on the table, in the candidate's mind. There's plenty of space, usually still, in the candidate's platform. Very few candidates by this point have a perfectly delineated platform. I will also say, because it brought a smile to my face when you think about this time in 2013, I think – I like to say, Errol, I was in fifth place in the polls, but it was the strongest fifth place you've ever seen in your life.

**Louis:** [Laughter]

**Mayor:** And so, it's another reminder that this is like a, you know, a century in political life between now and when people do the voting next June.

**Louis:** Well, I mean the flip side of it, and this was something that concerns me is that candidates and I went through a whole bunch of forums with you and the other [inaudible] –

**Mayor:** I remember.

[Laughter]

**Louis:** There's such – there's a dynamic that comes out where in order to please the crowd that's in front of you, right, maybe they're politically important, maybe they're just interesting and boisterous. People will say whatever will get a rise out of the people who are in front of them, and now they're locked into a policy position that they may or may not have given a whole lot of thought to and may or may not really fit with the rest of where they want to take the city. I don't know if there's a better way for people to, sort of, develop their programs, but that dynamic concerns me greatly. And, frankly, one thing I remember from 2013 was you had the biggest number. Everybody said they needed affordable housing. You put the biggest number on the table. I think John Liu was close to what you were saying, but you said 200,000 units built or preserved and that's fine. You know, it's a good number, but is that the way we should be doing it? Should we be bidding that way for important public policies?

**Mayor:** At the time when I said 200,000 apartments, some very knowledgeable people – I remember one conversation in particular where a very friendly, knowledgeable person said, Bill, that's this close to insane. I'm proud to say our plan is now 300,000 apartments. It proved to be

actually quite doable and we're continuing to build on it. So, I actually think that the forums and the campaign is an opportunity to talk about bold visions. But you're absolutely right, Errol, they have to be grounded in something. They can't just be crowd pleasers. I mean, I called for Pre-K for All, and you'll remember at the time many observers scoffed at that. And they said it was an impossibility logistically, financially, educationally. I'm very proud of the fact that when you aim high and you stick to something, you can actually do things that people thought were impossible. And now, of course, we do have pre-K for every New York City child and 3-K for tens of thousands as well.

So, I think the process is healthy if it causes candidates to delineate a very tangible vision, not just platitudes, but give us some numbers, give us some priorities, tell us what you're going to do and what you, maybe, won't be able to do because of your priorities. But you're right about the impulse to play the crowd. It's very hard to resist. And I've found a few times I knew I was going to say something that was not going to get a warm reception at that particular forum, and you brace yourself for it. But by the way, if you want to practice being mayor get used to not just being adored but get used to opposition as well. And so, it's actually really healthy in those forums to say what maybe not everyone wants to hear. I actually think most New Yorkers see that as integrity. So, it is – this is a crucial time. And I – you know, I think I did something like 60 or 70 of those forums, and I'm very glad I did, Errol, because you'll learn a hell of a lot. And it makes you have to own up to your beliefs.

**Louis:** What do you think New Yorkers are going to be looking for as far as the de Blasio legacy and whether it should be continued, altered, countermanded? You know, there are some candidates out here whose language sounds a whole lot like de Blasio plus, or de Blasio but I'll do it differently, or de Blasio but I'll do it better. Do you have a vested interest one way and the other?

**Mayor:** Sounds like – you know, in advertising, it sounds like new and improved [inaudible], right?

**Louis:** [Laughter]

**Mayor:** The – look, I think this direction is necessary for the city, take on that tale of two cities, you know, go at the fundamental inequalities, whether economic or racial or in education, whatever it may be. That's what I came here to do. And I think, Errol, I truly believe we've made some very, very substantial progress. And what I hope and believe will happen is that the people who will want it, take it to the next level. And there's a certain amount you can do in eight years and then there's things that need more time or need a better context. I think it's an extraordinary moment historically in terms of social transformation, and my hope and prayer is the next mayor will take the foundation that we laid and go farther and build upon it. But I do think that represents the vast majority of New Yorkers today. I think the vast majority of New Yorkers want to see us go in a more progressive direction and not at all go back where we were in the 20 years before I came in. I think luckily that, sort of, government by the elite and government for and by the wealthy has been rejected by the people. And I think that's really good for New York City.

**Louis:** Would be disappointed if people – if voters turned out to be, for lack of a better word, indifferent, if they just said, you know, we don't want to fight the crusade of curing inequality, we just want the garbage picked up on time.

**Mayor:** I think the public has every right to having the garbage picked up on time. But, what, I truly believe, Errol, we proved in the last seven years, is that a progressive administration that's about social change can also get the garbage picked up, can make the schools better, can make the streets safer. Look, we've had a tough, tough time during the pandemic, obviously, but previous to that, I truly believe that with my team, I've been able to show that a progressive administration can get the basics done, that people want, the bread and butter things done. And by the way, what's more bread and butter than Paid Sick Leave or guaranteeing health care for every New Yorker, which we've done, or providing Pre-K for All, or 3-K? I mean, these are – you talk about picking up the garbage or keeping the city safe, dealing with people's health care needs, improving education, giving them more educational opportunities for their kids for free, that's bread and butter too. And I do believe the public wants that direction continued.

**Louis:** Before I let you go, maybe you can help me with a little prep. We're going to be doing a debate later this week between candidates who want to represent Staten Island in the U. S. Congress. When you think about Southern Brooklyn and Staten Island, what are some areas that you, as mayor, want to see the next member of Congress deal with?

**Mayor:** Look, I think we've got a couple of things that immediately come to mind. The next member of Congress is going to be right in the middle of the fight to not just preserve health care but expand it. And what I know of Southern Brooklyn and Staten Island is there's still a lot of people who deserve better health care. So, I think that's going to be a pivotal issue and one where you're going to see sharp division between these candidates. Who wants to not only preserve Obamacare, but go much farther versus who wants to tear it down? I think that piece is crucial. I think the other thing is you talk about two parts of the world that are sensitive to climate change. I mean, look what Southern Brooklyn and Staten Island went through because of Sandy alone, and look at the threats that are posed to these parts of our city in the future. So, I am someone who believes in the Green New Deal. We've implemented the Green New Deal here in New York City. I think this race in Staten Island, that should be front and center on the table too. And I think Staten Islanders and Southern Brooklynites need a candidate who's going to support Green New Deal type of ideas to preserve those coastal communities that'll be in tremendous danger if we don't turn the course of global warming once and for all.

**Louis:** Okay. I should have asked you up front, did you make an endorsement in that race?

**Mayor:** I have not. You know, I support Democrats though.

**Louis:** Okay. Fair enough. Thanks so much for joining us. We'll talk again next week, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Thank you, Errol.

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