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

**Errol Louis:** Welcome back to Inside City Hall. My first guest tonight was sworn in for his second term earlier today on the frosty steps of City Hall. He joins me now for his weekly Mondays with the Mayor interview. Welcome and congratulations. Very good to see you.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** My hands are finally starting to work again Errol.

**Louis:** You know I really – I only found my butt like a half an hour ago. I froze it off. I couldn't find it. Let me ask you about this. One person who we – I know we both have a lot of affection for, David Dinkins was there, the former Mayor. And, you know, 106 was there to talk about 109 and everything was, you know, kind of [inaudible] but I started to ask myself, is he really going to sit through this? And there he was in the front row –

**Mayor:** All of it.

**Louis:** – through all of the frost and he seemed to be handling it better than people a third of his age who work with us.

**Mayor:** Well, first of all, he's a Marine. He's a tough guy.

**Louis:** Yes.

**Mayor:** And a strong man. But, you know, I think he really has a sense of how important a moment like this is. And it means a lot to me to have had him there, and for Chirlane because he really gave us our start. And so it was very touching. But I am just totally impressed by his fortitude. Whatever he's having for breakfast, I want to have it too.

**Louis:** Truly. I mean, again, some thirty-something journalist, we're all back there moaning and weeping and stamping our feet. And he's just kind of sitting there and enjoying himself. Well, did you enjoy yourself?

**Mayor:** Yes.

**Louis:** What for you was this about? I mean, because look, technically you were sworn in last night. You paid your nine dollars at Gracie Mansion. This was entirely ceremonial.

**Mayor:** Sure.

**Louis:** What was the ceremony about?

**Mayor:** Well first, I loved it. I had a great time. It was, despite the cold, it was a truly warm, positive, engaging atmosphere. Most importantly I was there with my family. You know, the crowd just represented, to me, something very positive about this city. You know, people of all walks of life together. Having Bernie and Jane Sanders there was just wonderful and very inspiring. So there was so many things about it that left me feeling great.

And look, the message was clear. First, we have to be proud and recognize what we've achieved as the safest big city in America. And it should inspire us to go farther, to get safer, to bond police and community together even more. And it really is a great example to other parts of the country still struggling with some of these issues that it can be done. Because it wasn't easy for New York City, it took a long, long time. But we're in an amazing place right now.

And I used that point to say I now have another goal for us which is to become the fairest big city in America. To constantly work to make sure that people are treated fairly, that there's opportunity, people are not priced out of their neighborhoods, that they can get a great education for their kids, that they can get things they need like mental health care that used to be impossible to find. We have a chance here to create something that really hasn't been real and possible in New York City before. A city where a people of all walks of life, all incomes can live in a good and decent way. That's what I seek to achieve.

**Louis:** When you talk about fairness, because there – it doesn't have precise sort of legal parameters –

**Mayor:** Of course.

**Louis:** – on any given issue. Are you talking about sort of fairness of opportunity? Because you can have a fair shot at – say in a housing lottery at some affordable housing and it's still fair even if you lose what was for a lot of people an important chance to stabilize their economic lives, right?

**Mayor:** Look, of course you're right in that fairness means that anything that you encounter should be by the rules, by the book. But I'm talking about I think a deeper meaning which is we want to see the maximum number of people afford their own city. We want to lighten the burden and lift the burden from them.

So, for example, for two and a half million people we had two rent freezes, folks in rent stabilized housing. And we know going forward that anything that's decided each year about the rent will be based on a fairness towards tenants, not just a preference for landlords as used to

exist in the past. We need to constantly create more affordable housing, both new and preserved affordable housing so that more and more people are winning those lotteries.

We need to make sure that schools come up across the board. So, I've always said this, and you and I can both relate to this, this notion that parents have felt for generations in this city, 'oh that school over there is a good school', that school over there 'bad school'. We got to get past that and create a school system where people can sense real opportunity in every school. And that's why things like Pre-K for All and now 3-K to come are so important because they create a level playing field.

It's a big project to create fairness and equity across the board. But New York City is actually showing that we can make major, major strides. I got four years. I want to do this with tremendous urgency. And some of it, as you know, has to happen in Albany. Great example, it should be easy to vote. It should be easy to be a part of the democratic process. It's not in this city because of broken laws in Albany. This is the year I want to go and fix that.

**Louis:** On that very point, is it possible to isolate that, the voting procedures themselves, separate it from ethics, separate it from the budget, separate it from everybody's pet project in some county in upstate New York, and just get that done. Is that going to be something you – is that going to be a fight that you can wage in Albany?

**Mayor:** I think it's a fight a lot of people can wage all over this state. I think there's tremendous frustration and we've seen in now in election after election. And talk about Bernie Sanders being there today. Certainly there a huge number of his supporters all over the state that felt in 2016 that people didn't get the right to vote that they deserved, or people got thrown off the voter rolls who shouldn't have. That's a powerful constituency. There's all the good government groups, there's lots of progressive organizations that are sick of seeing people marginalized. And overwhelmingly we know the lower you go down the income scale the more likelihood that you're not getting that opportunity to vote.

So, I think the fairness issues around voting are becoming sharper all the time and I think some of this is national. Look what happened in Alabama where people rightfully rebelled against efforts to restrict their right to vote and came out in record numbers.

I think there's a tremendous energy about fixing our democratic process. I think that pressure's going to be felt in Albany this year.

These are easy things – early voting, same day registration. These are not hard things to do –

**Louis:** That's right.

**Mayor:** Tons of states of have done it –

**Louis:** And yet they've never gotten done. I mean it's not like it hasn't been introduced. It gets introduced all the time but it somehow dies in committee, it never comes to the floor, it gets

blended in with a thousand other projects, and somehow the deal gets too complicated to get it closed.

**Mayor:** There are status quo forces in the Republican party and the Democratic party, let's be blunt, that don't want to see people have that right to vote. We've got to fix that. It has to be a grassroots movement. It has to be an insurgent movement.

It's no longer acceptable to have New York State literally be one of the hardest places in the entire nation to exercise your democratic rights.

And I think the people are more and more angry, more and more focused on this. And that's how you jolt things in Albany.

**Louis:** Well, what will you say when folks in Albany say, "Oh, it's fine for de Blasio to say that, he's not going to face another election as far as we know."

**Mayor:** First of all, I've said it all along, and I believe as someone who from the beginning was an underdog and went out to endeavor in every way possible to get people to participate including people who were being counted out of the process. I mean, I think that's one of the reasons I was blessed to prevail in 2013 – is we went out there and worked hard at the grassroots level to get people to turn out and vote.

I've lived through it. I can say to people, I guarantee you if you create a more vibrant democracy not only are you going to have more accountability in government, you're also going to have more people feel bought-in to their society.

One of the points I tried to make today is – I borrowed the incredibly powerful line from Lincoln, "a house divided against itself cannot stand."

If we let rampant inequality grow, we destabilize this city and we destabilize the country. If people feel they cannot exercise their right to vote, if they feel they're being stymied and inhibited, you're not going to have a sense of belonging and people feeling like they're stakeholders. That anger, that frustration is very unhealthy for society.

So, my argument to the different folks in power in Albany is, you have the ability to make this happen. You have to have the will to recognize that if you don't fix this problem it will undermine the good of this city and this state.

**Louis:** Well, I mean we'll talk at another time, I guess, about the fight that has been going on in Albany. But bring it closer to home. You've often talked about how people who are doing very well in this city are a relatively small group depending on how you define it – 20,000 people, 30,000 people paying a very large share of the taxes –

**Mayor:** Sure.

**Louis:** – that make the city go. How do you convince them that a house divided against itself is unstable and that they need to do more and help you make this a fairer city?

**Mayor:** I don't pretend to have persuasive powers over everyone in that group of people. Some have – there's a wonderful organization called Patriotic Millionaires that talks about these very same issues and literally says the wealthy should pay more in taxes, that, you know, the stratification is dangerous to the future of the country.

By the way, it's unprecedented. You'd have to go back almost 100 years to have this kind of income inequality and to see it growing the way it is, is a very troubling sign. And the Republican tax bill, you know, it was just passed in Washington, will exacerbate the problem.

People who care about stability, who care about social fabric should be looking at this moment in history and say we've got to adjust right now, we've got to fix this.

So, I think there are some of the one percent who understand it, who believe it's in everyone's interest to get this right, and are willing to make some sacrifices. I think there's others who are not.

But my job is not to convince them. My job is to convince, in every way I can, both the larger majority of people and obviously policy makers in Albany and Washington that we're on a dangerous path if we don't address these issues.

**Louis:** Okay, we've got some more issues to talk about including some of the stuff that was said today. I want to get your reaction to some of the other speeches that were coming from the podium today. We're going to do that after a short break and then we'll have more with the Mayor.

And then later tonight, we'll bring you an exclusive interview with the man who's expected to become the next City Council Speaker, Corey Johnson.

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We're back Inside City Hall, and I'm speaking with Mayor de Blasio about the day of his inauguration. Now, after we've, sort of, put everything together and we kind of went through and said who said what, who said what – there was something from the Public Advocate, Letitia James, that I really wanted to, sort of, ask you about.

She said this, not today but she kind of underscored it, but in an interview last week with the New York Times she said, "I suspect that the Mayor of the City of New York is going to focus mostly on national politics. I, myself," meaning Tish James, "will be focusing on the needs and concerns of New Yorkers. There's no shortage of issues here in the City of New York."

That sounds to me – and you sort of combine that with what she said from the podium today as if she feels like she needs to step up because you're stepping out.

**Mayor:** Look, I don't understand that because every single day I'm working, or my team is working, on the most fundamental issues. You know I did 50 town hall meetings in the last couple of years and people talk about the most local, the most personal issues, you know, streets that need to be repaved, sidewalks that are broken that need to be fixed, trees that need to be pruned, I mean all sorts of the most personal and neighborhood kind of issues as well as the bigger issues – how do we make New York City affordable, how do we keep improving schools, how do we keep lowering crime?

You know, I work on all of this every day. I also think some of the things that New York City needs comes from Washington D.C. right. I think it's a mistake to think that we can solve some of our bigger problems like infrastructure for example or our public housing situation, can be fully addressed with our own resources.

Of course we need change in Washington to address some of the most fundamental challenges in New York. So, my message has been all along, I got to be able to do all that day-to-day getting things done in New York City, the small things and the big things in this city, while also trying to contribute to change on the national level that ultimately New York City needs desperately.

**Louis:** There are in fact two infrastructure projects we're you're going to need some cooperation either from Albany and or from Washington. I wanted to ask you about both of them. When it comes to the Gateway Tunnel, the big project which is really central to the entire region, there was a recent headline saying the federal government, as far as they're concerned – it's not on their agenda. Is that going to be something you have to go down to Washington and fight about?

**Mayor:** Well, first of all it's a huge issue for all New Yorkers. We should all care about getting the Gateway Tunnel done. It's first and foremost the responsibility of the two governors', New York, and New Jersey to act on. I think for both of them it's a major priority. I want to support that in every way I can. I think the Trump administration; the one thing we can say about them is expect the unexpected. They veer in and out on different things. I think when they understand a little more what it means to the economy of this Metropolitan region and when they hear a little bit more from people who are going to have more influence than ever like Chuck Schumer. Now with 49 Senators in his caucus, I am hopeful we can get things back on track and move it forward.

**Louis:** Okay, closer to home. You're pet project, the BQX, the Brooklyn-Queens connector headlines again in some of the real estate, in some of the other trades pointing out that it's behind schedule. It perhaps is going to run into sort of a conflict with some other infrastructure needs that are being dealt with especially on the BQE in Brooklyn Heights. And that the Governor has the power to either sort of help it or even kill the project. Where does that leave the BQX?

**Mayor:** Well, look, let me put aside the state issue for a moment. I have not talked to the Governor about his views on the BQX. I hope he would understand that providing a new mass transit option for hundreds of thousands of people. Including – I think it's over 40,000 people who live in public housing along the route is part of what is necessary for the future of New York City. You've talked about the Gateway Tunnel. That's necessary for the future of New York City. But more and more mass transit is necessary as well. Because we're going to be nine

million people before too long. Our roads can't handle the number of people, the number of cars. Our subways are already overcrowded in so many cases. We need ferry service, we need select bus service and we need light-rail. He is the first opportunity to create light-rail, a major new development for New York City. The City is going to do it itself. We are not asking the MTA to do it. We are going to do it ourselves. Of course it's complex, of course there are infrastructure challenges. We've never suggested otherwise. But it's a great route; it will have a huge ridership. It will be the beginning of something much bigger for the city in my hopes in terms of creating light-rail in a lot of other places. And we're going to forge ahead with it. And so if there are challenges, we'll overcome those challenges.

**Louis:** Okay, you – I owe you, you literally chewed gum and walked at the same time to demonstrate that you could.

**Mayor:** I did on video.

**Louis:** So –

**Mayor:** It's very impressive, don't you think?

**Louis:** Having done a little bit, I don't know which is chewing and which is walking. But having now talked about the BQX – when it comes to national politics, Bernie Sanders administering the oath for you today. Do you want him to run for president? Do you expect him to run for president?

**Mayor:** Look, I think 2020 questions just make no sense at this point. I don't mean – you guys will ask them, I understand it. But I am going to tell you my personal view. No one knows what the world is going to look like when we get closer to 2020. The focus now should be on taking back the House, maybe even taking back the Senate. That's what democrats and progressives should work on. And look, we are a couple of seats away from Chuck Schumer being the majority leader which would be amazing for New York City and New York State. We have a chance to stop the Trump agenda dead in its tracks by picking up two senators and obviously a real chance to take back the house. That's where the focus should be. So I was so honored to have Bernie and Jane Sanders be a part of this because they are literally to me the exemplars of the fight against inequality, and they have changed the American political process. And when I say for example, I want to create the fairest big city in America. That's going to take a lot of grassroots energy. That's going to take a lot of participation. What Bernie and Jane Sanders have done is really change the rules of the game in a very powerful fashion. Let's focus on the work we need to do right here, and let's focus on taking back the House and Senate.

**Louis:** Well, whether it's the House or the Senate. Where do you think there are opportunities that a Bill de Blasio could really help make the difference in?

**Mayor:** So my view is that the focus who are out there running all over the country will make their own decisions on who can help them and I want to be responsive to that. I am for example; I went to Iowa for the Organization of Progress of Iowa, which there's some parallel to the working family's party here in New York, a different structure but some of the same ideas. That

organization I think has the ability to really change the politics of that state. There are right there two House seats that widely understood to be flip able from Republican to Democrat, including one that covers Des Moines where I was. Look, so I am going to go where people say, “we’d like your help” whether it’s a candidate, or whether it’s an organization. And my ground rule is going to be, is it going to help take back the House or Senate and is it going to help build lasting progressive change? Because we’re not you know thinking just about one election, we have a lot more we need to think about for the future of this city and this country. So you go where people say we’d like your help. You know, I’ve spoken at Democratic Party dinners around the country; I’ve been invited to different states to do that where they feel I can help, that’s where I want to be.

**Louis:** Okay, well we’ll see there, we’ll see you here; we’ll see you next Monday as a matter of fact.

**Mayor:** Absolutely.

**Louis:** You’ve had a world wind a couple of days, you dropped the ball, you had the swearing in last night.

**Mayor:** I did not drop the ball. The ball dropped upon my signal, very big difference.

**Louis:** Ah, yes, yes.

**Mayor:** You know, I am probably having a groundhog moment here.

**Louis:** Gravity, gravity, very good. Thanks a lot, congratulations.

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