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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. After months of journalists asking for it, the City finally released data on Friday about the number of sexual harassment complaints in City government. Since 2014 it turns out there have 1,312 sexual harassment complaints filed within the City's workforce of which 221 were substantiated. During that same period the City paid out \$4.7 million in legal settlements related to 32 different complaints. I'm joined now by Mayor de Blasio to talk about that and much more. Good evening Mr. Mayor and very good to see you.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good evening Errol.

Louis: This whole issue of these complaints and how long it took to sort of just derive the numbers – is the City behind the private sector for instance when it comes to just tracking and really trying to get your hands around this particular issue.

Mayor: Well the City has to do better. There's no question. I don't know if I would say the whole private sector. I think there are elements of the private sector that have done very well and others not so much at all. The City was, before this movement, before the #MeToo movement really I think woke people up in general and focused everyone, I think the City was not where it needed to be and I will tell you why. There were different systems in different places. The mayoral agencies, the historic mayoral agencies had a fair amount of constancy in the approach but we saw a real variations with the "non-mayoral agencies" – historically that's NYCHA, that Health + Hospitals, and Department of Education still governed by state law in that sense. Very different approaches, NYCHA for an example based its approach on federal guidelines that are less strict than city guidelines. '

So what we are going to do now is put all agencies on a single standard, a city standard which is more rigorous. We are going to hold everyone accountable, we are going to annually publish data on complaints and how they were handled. I think this is going to make us a lot better at addressing the issue. And I think this is an example of this movement having really focused attention very positively.

Louis: Shortly before you came in one newspaper published numbers about City Hall itself, meaning the 500 or so people who more or less report directly to you and your senior team and said that there were five complaints there. Does that strike you –

Mayor: Five or fewer. We created a category system where we said you know for the confidentiality involved including the person who filed the complaint that we wanted to be very careful not to create a situation where we disclosed information, thus bringing out the name of the complainant when many, many complainants do not want their name to be made public. So we have a category of five or fewer without defining the specific number.

Louis: The response, I understand there is going to be some efforts at retraining and so forth. Honestly having worked at a number of companies it always strikes me as sort of a CYA kind of an after the fact effort to sort of say well we had a training and so we have documented that we told this person not to harass their coworkers, vendors or other people that they come in contact with. That seems like a very low standard, I'm hoping you have something more robust in mind.

Mayor: Yes the training is one of a number of options that the “low end of the scale” is retraining efforts, there's a whole host of things you can do after that. People can be disciplined in a variety of manners. Obviously they can be suspended, they can have vacation days taken away, they can be demoted all the way on up to termination. So in those five or fewer cases, they were all substantiated, again we are not going to get into the specifics of each case. What we will do is put out clearer information about the cumulative dynamics.

Look we have a vast workforce, you know pushing up when you conclude all the “non-mayoral agencies” – well over 370,000 people, were are talking about the last four years so it is a substantial period of time, no instance of sexual harassment is acceptable and we are going to be very clear in all we do about that. Everyone, the entire city workforce is going to be retrained. We are making the consequences very, very clear.

But what I would say is at least a positive sign is the number of cases for such a vast operation, they are very few organizations in this entire country that have as many employees as the City of New York, you know in the scheme of things, a very small number that ended up in any kind of settlement, I think that is at least a hopeful sign.

Louis: It is certainly worth noting you want to have some perspective on it. When it comes to demoting or disciplining or even retraining, some of this sort of involves union rules. Right? I mean I'm thinking you know, you can't just fire a teacher, you can't just fire a cop. There are different kinds of arbitration and other kind of requirements that stand between an accusation and a final resolution?

Mayor: I'm not a lawyer and I am not an expert on those labor relations matters, I would say remember you've got city human rights law, you've got you know different legal constructs governing the fact that someone cannot be harassed and there are penalties obviously in terms of employment as well. So there is a couple of different things happening here, even if there are, if there is a union contract, still someone has committed harassment we have tools obviously to address that.

Louis: Okay, I want to shift to transit. The bus plan is being, is under discussion. One of the things that came out today that at least two board members, not your board members, but a couple of MTA board members said that basically the NYPD has not been helpful or has shunned the responsibility or the responsibility for helping to deal with the issue of parking in bus stops and otherwise cluttering and clogging and jamming up traffic when it comes to the bus stops. Do you have a response to that?

Mayor: We take that issue seriously and I want to be very clear, we want you know, this administration has focused a lot on buses. We had a big plan we announced a few months ago for 21 new select bus service routes. These are major endeavors, big capital expenditures a lot of work goes into creating them and a lot of work at the local level to get community buy in and work out routes. So we are very focused on speeding bus times and we believe in the MTA. We believe in the bus lane cameras are a crucial piece in the agenda, that's something that Albany can do more on. But yes I want to see the NYPD do everything that we can appropriately. Every precinct has got to deal with a whole lot of things but we certainly want to help resolve this issue.

Louis: The idea of the MTA police taking on some of the enforcement and I guess it's technically it's their buses, it's your roads, it's their buses. If they offer to do some enforcement would that work for you?

Mayor: I would let the two police forces talk that through. I mean generally if you are talking about precincts and roads that are being patrolled you know, we have a particular ability in the NYPD to do that but look, this is a good idea. The bus plan that Mr. Byford put out is definitely a step in the right direction. It reflects a lot of priorities that we've talked about in this administration, focusing more on buses, more on the outer boroughs. So, I like what I see, and we want to be supportive. But certainly we could let the experts talk about the best way to implement. And again, we want to see the NYPD be helpful.

Louis: Okay, we've got some more MTA stuff to talk about; we're going to take a break though. We just had the Inner Circle dinner.

Mayor: Yes.

Louis: And for our viewers who don't know. We talked about –

Mayor: And it was quite a show.

Louis: They missed quite a show.

Mayor: Quite a show.

Louis: The political reporters come and make fun of City Hall, City Hall gets a rebuttal. We're going to play a little bit before we go into commercial and then we'll be right back with Mayor de Blasio. Take a look.

[...]

Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall, we're speaking with Mayor Bill de Blasio. That guy is very, very funny.

Mayor: He's amazing.

Louis: Yes, and The President Show which he started I guess about a year ago. I am a fan; he is one of the better Trump imitators.

Mayor: I think he's the best, a lot of fun.

Louis: Let's talk about something that's not so much fun. The East Side Access – there's effort to bring the LIRR into Grand Central. I actually toured the place a couple of years ago. It's like 200 feet underneath Grand Central. Fascinating, expensive, there has been some great investigative reporting about cost overruns and so forth. And I've tended to think of it as an MTA problem. But I understand, it's actually sort of a City problem.

Mayor: It's all of our problem. I mean, remember New York City residents pay into the MTA in so many different ways. And we just have to pay in again because of what the state did in the budget. So we pay and pay and pay, but our money goes elsewhere a lot of the time. This is why I've talked about a lock box so much – needed to make sure any money we ever give stays in New York City for our subways and buses. Well, here is what we've heard about the East Side Access now. It's another billion dollars over budget. It's been over budget, over budget again. Now another billion dollars, it's years behind schedule. And look, let's be very blunt about this – the MTA wants our money, but meanwhile they're blowing a whole lot of money on East Side Access. They're not doing a good job with it, they're not getting the job done. You know, the Governor loves to talk about management, and competence. I would say this is a case where people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. Let's be real about it, but what it meant here, which is particularly troubling is – notice how this report on the billion dollars more in overrun was held until after the state legislature decided to require the City to pay into the subway action plan. Do you think if New Yorkers knew that another billion dollars got wasted they would feel good about our tax dollars going to the MTA? If that money was used properly, we wouldn't have to pay into the subway action plan.

Louis: Do you think they knew about the billion dollar overrun before the selling of the budget?

Mayor: Look, I don't have all the details, but I find the timing rather convenient. You know that just a few weeks later now the truth comes out about a billion dollar cost overrun. You know, look, I find it deeply troubling. We're doing a lot of things here in the city that are complicated like our affordable housing plan, and keeping the streets safe. And we are finding a way to stay on budget. This should have been on the table for that discussion in Albany. Again, I think a lot of the legislators from New York City if they had known that the MTA just blew another billion dollar on the East Side Access. They may have not been so quick to require the City of New York to have to pay to the subway action plan. And we need the whole truth to come out in the future.

Louis: Food for thought and I'm sure we will hear some more of this. This won't be the last overrun actually. If history is any guide on the project –

Mayor: But then what does it say about the MTA? And again the state runs the MTA, the Governor runs the MTA. Where is there going to be accountability? And it's something – I can tell you my board members and some of the other independent board members are saying, how are we keep pouring money into the MTA and they can't get things done on time. The costs are much greater. You've seen the reports, the Times did a great series on this about London, Paris, all sorts of cities in the world can build more subway lines with much lower cost than what happens here. There is something fundamentally wrong and I can certainly say my MTA board members are standing up and saying we've got to deal with this. We can't just keep throwing money at something and it get burned up because, another billion? That should be a front page story.

Louis: Literally vanishing down a hole. Speaking of billions and budgets, your Executive Budget is due soon I hear? Is it going to be this week?

Mayor: Thursday.

Louis: Thursday. Ah-ha. Okay. That's –

Mayor: That's soon.

Louis: That-that is pretty soon. Any surprises in, I mean that both ways, because of course it's often been a pattern - I've noticed over the years, even before you became Mayor, that somewhere between the Preliminary Budget and the Executive Budget, the Mayor finds a whole lot of extra money.

Mayor: Look, the difference this year is we took a big hit in Albany. I mean this is a fact. Well over half a billion dollars. And honestly we did not expect that. I said very clearly I did not think it was appropriate for the City to pay for the subway action plan, I thought there were better ways for that money to be pulled together, I wish I known about the East Side Access, I would have spoken about that at the time, but, I mean this additional billion dollar overrun.

But we did expect what the legislature do what we have seen in the past which was a major increase in education funding, and bluntly that seemed to happen particularly in election years, we saw a lot less money going to education than we thought. We have to make up that cost, obviously, we did not get money to pay for the Raise the Age Initiative, which is something I believe in and support, but was hoping it would not become a unfunded mandate, now it is an unfunded mandate. We lost money for Close to Home, which is the juvenile justice work, we took a lot of hits here, well over half a billion, that's going to show up in the budget.

So I won't go into a whole lot more detail, we'll show the different shifts that have happened since the preliminary budget, but I would say that, you know, in certainly my five years, this being the fifth budget, this is the worst hit we have taken in Albany and we want to guard against that in the future.

Louis: Okay, we will be watching for that on Thursday. Well, a little bit of politics, special elections tomorrow. A lot of people have been rallying, I know how you feel about this, we've talked about this week after week, have you now been campaigning for any of the candidates in these special elections?

Mayor: Well I strongly support Luis Sepúlveda and did an event with him I think was last week. Look, it's the same thing I always say, I want to go where any candidate thinks I can be helpful, and if they don't, that's fine. That's part of life. And by the way, that's every political person is going to be desired in some places and maybe not as much as other, or it depends on how a candidate wants to handle the race. Some candidates do not want to focus on, you know, outside surrogates or endorsers as much. So I stand ready to help my fellow Democrats but it's up to them, how and when.

Louis: Okay, fair enough, the tax day came since the last time you and I spoke. And you revealed some portions of your taxes. I think the thing that stood out for a lot of people was, \$350 to charity, which seems very, very low. I mean I was thinking, I think that's low and I'm pretty cheap –

Mayor: I mean its low compared to previous years, and I think we are now paying the piper in terms of Dante's college education. It's really taken a big bite out and it's another year in change and that will be over. But after – we've tried to be very charitable for many years, but we got to a point that we really have to focus on a lot that we owe and trying to catch up a little bit on that.

Louis: I mean the other thing that showed a loss on the rental homes that you have. I mean you left your house to go live in Gracie Mansion for now, how do you lose money on real estate in Park Slope?

Mayor: Because they are old houses. These are old frame houses, it's two houses, they are since we got them, you know, they were not in perfect shape when we got them, we've tried to make some repairs, but they just constantly need more. We've tried to keep the rents reasonable, but what we are taking in simply doesn't cover all the costs.

Louis: Wow, I was looking at it, and I was like, the rent is too damn low.

Mayor: Well, that's a new slogan.

[Laughter]

Louis: Okay, don't campaign on that one.

Mayor: Yeah.

Louis: I guess finally, the congressional race in Staten Island, New York 11, the Democrats just put out a poll suggesting that Michael Grimm actually might be ahead of Dan Donovan, now I think of that is a little bit of mostly politics, right? I mean it's not really none of their business

who Republicans want to pick. What do you think of that race? Would you – do you think the Democrats have a better chance with Grimm as the nominee or Donovan?

Mayor: I'm not going to conjecture, I'm going to say this, what's happening all over the country is happening here too, where a lot of people are rethinking the whole situation and we appear to have a strong Democratic wave here emerging.

I was talking to someone the other day, I said I remember 1974 was probably the first, you know, election really, really deeply after the Watergate crisis, and this feels amazingly like that in terms of just how intense the feelings are and the Democratic enthusiasm. That's the one thing I know and I think it's going to be felt all over the state. So, I won't get into any of the other nuances, that's all I'll say.

Louis: Okay, you know, I think you got the bug a little earlier than I did, I really started noticing politics in '76 when Jimmy Carter won, and I thought that was pretty early, but '74?

Mayor: '74 brother, '74.

Louis: Woah, okay. Great to see you, thanks for coming, we'll see you next week.

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