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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON MSNBC'S MORNING JOE**

**Willie Geist:** Joining us now, the Mayor of New York City, Democrat Bill de Blasio. Mr. Mayor, always good to have you with us.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Thank you, Willie.

**Geist:** I do note, as we sit here, that there are one, two, three – on remote and Mike Barnicle over there – four Red Sox fans at a New York City set. And that's just wrong, just wrong.

**Mayor:** Go Sox. Thank you, Joe, Mike. You're great Americans.

[Laughter]

**Geist:** And he's got John –

**Mayor:** And Lemire. Yep, stand strong, everyone.

**Jonathan Lemire:** [Inaudible] forum –

**Geist:** And you guys have a little competitive history on the softball field?

**Lemire:** Yes, you just reminded me of the ill-fated City Hall Press Corp versus Mayor's Office Softball game a few years back.

**Mayor:** Yes. Lemire plays hard. I want to give him credit for that.

**Geist:** Spikes up [inaudible] –

**Lemire:** All grit.

**Geist:** So, we've got a bunch of New York City questions for you obviously but want to ask you about some national news as well. The NFL's new policy yesterday on kneeling – players not

allowed to kneel during the anthem. They can remain in the locker room if they wish but they can't kneel for the anthem. What's your reaction?

**Mayor:** Un-American. Just plain un-American. It doesn't make sense. You know we would not tolerate it if any other employer said that their employees cannot express their beliefs. You know, right away you say violation of the First Amendment. I don't understand why the owners think they can get away with this in any way, shape, or form. But what they're doing ultimately is simply bringing more attention to the cause of players who are saying there's an injustice that has to be addressed.

By the way, I am thrilled to see athletes actually care enough about something beyond themselves to say, "We want to see our nation heal. We want to see a different relationship between police and community." We're doing that here in New York City. We have a neighborhood policing approach that's made us the safest big city in America. We're bringing down tensions between police and community. That's something we would want to see everywhere. These players are helping to draw attention to it.

How do the owners have a right to tell them not to be civically engaged and try and do something they care about? I think it's going to backfire.

**Eddie Glaude Jr.:** This particular discussion happens against the backdrop of what happened to Sterling Brown in Wisconsin – in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Talk a little bit about what the National Anthem protests actually refers to. I mean it is about a particular nature of policing, a particular kind of policing. You've had to struggle with this in this city. Talk a little bit about what those protests are actually all about and how you've addressed them.

**Mayor:** They're an expression of pain. I think we have to understand the notion that the protests are saying we have something happening that does not conform to our American values and has to end and can end. And this is why I don't find it a hopeless situation. I think it's a hopeful situation. Here in New York City, we had a long history of tensions and problems between police and community. We've come a long way to resolve that and heal that.

Again, we're the safest big city in America because we have gotten police and community more on the same page, because we did things like teach police officers to de-escalate. That's something the entire police force in New York City has been retrained to de-escalate intense situations.

We are using implicit bias training to help all officers of all backgrounds understand we're humans. We have biases. We need to consciously think about those to not let them affect our work.

These efforts are working. So crime keeps going down. Here's the other amazing thing that connects to this point. Arrests keep going down in New York City, too. We have 100,000 fewer arrests today than we did four years ago and yet crime has gone down for four years in a row. Why? Because police and community are communicating. There's more sense of being on the same side. We have neighborhood policing which means our officers are trying to build human

relationships locally, get people thinking about each other on a first name basis, talking to each other on a first name basis.

So, I think the NFL protests are about, unfortunately, the opposite. Too many times we've seen the cell phone video of overt injustice of someone killed who should not have been killed. And the players are saying this is not the America we signed up for, how do we fix this?

And they're not being unconstructive. They're not being negative. They're saying we need something different in this country. How many cell phone videos are we going to have to watch before people recognize that that status quo is unacceptable?

**Lemire:** Police conduct is obviously a matter of great importance every day in a major city, so is, of course, public transportation. The subways here in New York, they're certainly run – I'll spare you the talking point – run by the State, is something that is really – the condition of which has really deteriorated here in the last few years.

Service in New York City has really suffered. It has become a flash point in this year's gubernatorial election between Andrew Cuomo, who is seeking re-election, and his competitors including Cynthia Nixon. Can you weigh in what you think – what you see on that race, what you like about Ms. Nixon's candidacy, what you like about the Governor's candidacy, and how should the subways be a part of this?

**Mayor:** Well, I think what is happening in this state is happening everywhere in the United States right now and I'm saying this as a Democrat and a progressive. A big change is underway. It's been coming for a few years. We certainly saw elements of this in the 2016 election but you can go back well before that. I mean I got elected in 2013 as an outsider talking about change, not expected – and we've seen a lot of other people elected around the country whose election was not expected.

The party is changing so I think the primary here in this state simply represents another example of that where a growing progressive core in the Democratic Party is speaking up and not accepting the status quo that has existed for a long time. You're seeing it all over and you're going to see a lot more of it.

I guarantee you this is where the Democratic Party is going because, look, we became, unfortunately in the minds of too many Americans, the elitist party. That's what happened in 2016. We were – to too many of those folks in Wisconsin and Michigan and Pennsylvania, we were a party that didn't actually care about them anymore. And by the way, those folks are white and they are black and they are young and they are old. They're people of different demographics.

I don't buy into this, you know, you're either – are talking about young people and people of color and women or you're talking about white, working-class men. I think it's a continuum of folks who felt let down by the Democratic Party and disconnected from the Democratic Party.

So, that's a lot of what's playing out here in New York.

**Lemire:** So who are you supporting in this?

**Mayor:** I am not in this primary yet. At some point I will weigh in. But I want to say there's a question of what's happening, why it's happening. It's very consistent with what we see around the whole country.

**Lemire:** But you will make an endorsement?

**Mayor:** At some point I'm going to decide what to do about this race in New York State. I'm also very focused on winning back the State Senate in New York State which I think is going to happen. It's been Republican for many years. I think it's about to flip Democratic. That has huge ramifications for the people of New York City and for this state and for the country because of Congressional [inaudible] –

**Peggy Noonan:** Can I ask you –

**Geist:** It's pretty clear, though, is it not Mr. Mayor, that your world view, your ideology, your policy positions line up much better with Cynthia Nixon's than they do with Governor Cuomo's?

**Mayor:** Look, I'm not going to do a sort of analysis of how we connect point by point –

**Geist:** But just the way you see the world.

**Mayor:** In terms of history, I have a great and respectful and positive history with Cynthia Nixon. We've worked very closely together. She's been an education activist. She's been someone who's fought for, I think, a lot of the right things. But the fact is electoral decisions are something I'll make when I feel it's the appropriate time.

But the overall reality, and Democrats should get used to it, is progressives in the party and the grassroots are not going to accept the Democratic Party the way it was. It is in the process of change, it's not just going to happen in 2018, it's going to be a long term trend.

**Noonan:** Can she win? Can Cynthia Nixon win, do you think? And does the part of the party she represents, and you align with, do they have the wind at their back this year?

**Mayor:** Yes. Absolutely yes, progressives and the change-agents in the party and the people who did not accept the previous status quo have the wind at their back. There's a lot of great examples, I think Stacey Abrams is a great example in Georgia this week, but we've been seeing it all over the country, so there's no question in my mind.

Where is the energy? How did Virginia happen? How did the Virginia House of Delegates race happen? A bunch of grassroots Democrats, progressives, activists, running, organizing things way beyond the traditional party structure almost under the radar shocked us all. We've seen that repeated in state after state.

Alabama happened because of a lot of grassroots organizing. I think this is the shape of things to come, less traditional candidates, progressives, activists, folks who can legitimately say I don't represent the status quo. I think that's the future of the Democratic Party.

**Lemire:** You think she can win?

**Mayor:** I – unquestionably in a race with two prominent candidates, in a time that people are very distressed by the status quo, anything can happen.

**Geist:** So Mr. Mayor, the President was joined by Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein and Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen speaking yesterday out on Long Island at an event that focused on immigration, violence tied to the MS-13 gang, and this morning the President weighed in on the renewed effort on Capitol Hill for immigration reform, saying he wants a comprehensive package. Let's listen to what he said this morning.

***Brian Kilmeade:** There's some legislation moving through the so-called 'moderates' in the House to get DACA back out there, to get immigration going, it's not coming from leadership. Have you, Mr. President, been watching this take shape, where do you stand?*

***President Donald Trump:** I have. I have. I've actually have four different bills. Unless it includes a wall – and I mean wall, a real wall – and unless it includes a very strong border security, there will be no approvals from me ... Chain migration is terrible, lottery is terrible, we certainly would like to have in, we have to get rid 'catch and release'.*

***Kilmeade:** If a deal doesn't include those two things, but has the wall and DACA, does Donald Trump do that deal?*

***President Trump:** I think it's time to get the whole package. It's not such a big deal, Brian, it's time to get the whole package.*

**Geist:** So Mr. Mayor what does DACA mean to New York City, specifically when you look it?

**Mayor:** It means tens of thousands of young people who are part of our community and contribute to our community and should be allowed to stay in their own country, this is their country effectively. And what we're seeing all over this country is the American people have spoken, they think the DREAMers should stay. They get it.

You're brought here as a kid, it wasn't your choice, you become part of our society. I've talked to a lot of these DREAMers, so many of them are tremendous go-getters and, you know, they want to make an impact and the fact that they lived their life, kind of on the edge, not knowing if they could stay or not has, I think, brought out a lot of drive and purpose in them. These are the exactly the kind of folks who want to help make America something better.

So there's no question in my mind that the American people are ready to receive the DREAMers as a permanent part of our society. Let's get there. But let's look at that speech on Long Island yesterday. That was painful. I mean I went over the transcript again because I literally couldn't

believe it at one point. It's not about MS-13. It's an attempt to paint Latinos as a danger to our country.

And I got to say, in New York City, we reject that. Our police department rejects that. We became the safest big city in America because we reached out and worked with immigrant communities. They helped the police to make this city the safest big city in America. The last time we had this few murders in New York City, the Dodgers were playing at Ebbets Field. That happened in the ultimate city of immigrants with immigrant and police cooperation.

Here's the other irony, Willie, Donald Trump has told me repeatedly in conversations, he'll often say, you know, "Just things are great in New York City, they're great, crime is down, things are great." He'll acknowledge openly that New York City has gotten safer. And then he'll turn around and attack immigrants and try and paint a very few disgusting gang members – don't get me wrong I want to get all those guys in jail to and deported – but he'll paint them as the exemplar of all Latinos. That's what's really going on here and we shouldn't accept it because the facts speak exactly against it and he knows it, he said to my face, he knows this is a safe city and it's obviously a city of immigrants too.

**Geist:** We know you have to run Mr. Mayor, but before we let you go, Steve wanted me to ask you based on an announcement you made the other day, can he now openly smoke blunts when he walks around the Upper East Side?

[Laughter]

**Mayor:** Willie, Steve Rattner has been misunderstood. Steve Rattner is a hippy –

**Steve Rattner:** Willie doesn't want to take the hit for his questions –

**Geist:** No, you told me to ask, so I –

**Mayor:** He is a hippy who just is waiting to come out. So he just wants to walk down the street –

**Geist:** What is the law, just for clarification?

**Mayor:** The law in New York State is that it is not legal to smoke marijuana in public.

**Geist:** Okay.

**Mayor:** And that will continue to be the case, I believe – I think eventually you will see in New York State, possibly as early as next year, legalization. But that does mean it will include the right to smoke in public.

**Geist:** You won't be arrested for it?

**Mayor:** What I want to see happen, and we're working with the NYPD right now in New York City is, instead of arrest, go to summonses. This is what we've done with low level marijuana

possession. We don't want to saddle a lot of people, particularly young people, with a criminal record that then haunts them the rest of their life. We want to address the issue. We can do that with a summonses, and by the way we brought down crime, again with a 100,000 few arrests than four years, arrest is not always the best way to get something done and our police leaders know that.

**Geist:** And that summonses is pocket change for Rattner. So you are all set, Steve.

**Rattner:** How about on the set of Morning Joe, is that okay?

**Mayor:** Absolutely, there is a legal carve out for the set of Morning Joe. You are accurate there.

**Geist:** Mayor Bill de Blasio, always good to talk you, thanks for being here.

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