



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 21, 2018
CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. Before the break we talked about how our city is preparing for marijuana legalization with the NYPD taking steps to stop the practice of arresting people for smoking marijuana in public, all in an effort to reduce racial disparities and arrests. I'm now joined by Mayor de Blasio to talk about that and much more. Good evening, Mr. Mayor, good to see you.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good evening, and I want to actually just quickly parse those two, because they're both important. We have to reduce racial disparity unquestionably, we have to end racial disparity, but we also want to drive down the number of arrests overall. Remember, in 2017, all crime combined, we had 100,000 fewer arrests than in 2013 overall, and we drove down crime. So, the NYPD is very devoted to finding any unnecessary arrests and weeding them out because we think we can continue to drive down crime without those unnecessary arrests.

Louis: Something that I think you and I have talked about actually is that we don't necessarily want to just displace the same issue, right? If you issue a whole bunch of summonses, a certain percentage of people will fail to answer those summonses, it then converts into an arrest warrant and we're sort of right back where we started, right?

Mayor: Well, I think the history is that people take summonses seriously in many cases, especially if we make it easy for people to deal with them. But you're right, if they don't deal with the summons, after a point in time, they could end up being arrested. The difference here is, you know, first of all, until the law is different, you shouldn't smoke marijuana in public. By the way, in a lot of the states that legalized marijuana, they still have left a prohibition on smoking in public.

Louis: All of them – you can't smoke weed in public anywhere in the country legally. You cannot do it.

Mayor: So, people should understand that about all of these states, and if there are changes coming in New York, that's a likelihood here too. But the bottom line is, if you get a summons, you have an opportunity to just pay that, not end up with an arrest record – that's one of the central concerns people have, I have too. I don't want to see people saddled with an arrest record. I don't want to see people, especially young people's future undermined. Too many young people, particularly men of color are suffering from that reality. Here's a way to avoid that all

together – of course, best idea, don't smoke marijuana in public, but if you get a summons, pay the summons – no arrest record. But you right, if someone consistently ignores the summons, there is that chance then that they will get arrested.

Louis: It sounds like you've changed your mind in recent weeks about whether or not this is inevitable – is New York going to simply bless the idea of legalization and then do it first, and I guess put the regulations in later?

Mayor: Well, I want to, again, parse two different ideas. One – you know, we, early on in the administration, ended arrests for low-level possession of marijuana. I'm very proud of that. That was a step in the right direction. But what we've seen based on a lot of the statistics now is that we still had more arrests overall from marijuana than we wanted and we still had a disparity we didn't want. That's why we have to keep making steps, regardless of whatever the State does. The NYPD will come back in the next month with a whole new set of rules, and obviously I've said I want to see those rules include an end to arrest for smoking in public.

The second piece of the equation is the State. The State of New York – look, I think we see a lot of signals from the Governor in particular and from the Democratic Party that this is the likely direction. It's also a true statement – and the Governor said this – that several of the surrounding states have acted or will act, most likely, soon. So, for New York, I think it is inevitable. I can't say that for the whole country at this point, by any stretch. But, for New York, I think it is inevitable. We have to get ahead of that. I don't think it can be acted on this calendar year, particularly with the current State Senate. I think you're talking about, give or take, a year ahead before anything happens. We've got to get the rules in place and the approaches in place to address this well before it happens.

Louis: Okay, we'll be watching to see how that all develops. Let me switch topics to the question of opioid abuse. We're going to have our town hall tomorrow and talk about this in great depth, but, in advance of that, I know we sent a delegation to Toronto to look at safe injection sites, that's one of the approaches that's going to be pioneered here in New York over the course of a year. I was surprised to read that apparently what goes on at this model site in Toronto, or what goes on in the surrounding streets, ain't pretty. You know, syringes in the streets, defecation, prostitution, people shooting up because the place doesn't open 24/7 – they're injecting themselves, you know, in the doorway and, in some cases, overdosing right there on the street – lot of complaints from the neighborhoods around. It's not necessarily the model it's been sold is on some level, or it comes with some collateral costs that we need to know about.

Mayor: Yeah, I want to really disagree with that first characterization. Overdose prevention centers perform a crucial role – they stop people from dying. The number-one goal we have in public service is to prevent people from dying – that's why we have Vision Zero, that's why we have neighborhood policing – go down the list. We have an opioid crisis, we have to address it with every conceivable tool. We found the research showed, in the places that have these overdose prevention centers – Canada, Australia, parts of Europe – no one has died in the one of those centers from an overdose – an extraordinary statistic. A lot of people have been helped to get treatments and to get to a safer, better life because they engaged those centers and they weren't just out shooting up in public somewhere in a bathroom at McDonalds or, you know, somewhere alone, and a lot of lives have been saved. So, that's why we're doing it. Now, that doesn't mean we're going to do it the same way other places have done it. I've spoken to the

Mayor of Toronto, I've spoken to the Mayor of Vancouver – and I want to give the Mayor of Toronto credit, he raised some of the concerns. He said, here are some things we're still grappling with. Well, obviously, the NYPD is a different police force, New York City is a different place, we're very focused on quality of life policing. I've said, in the four locations that we've indicated – one in the South Bronx, one in Upper Manhattan, one in the West Side of Manhattan, and one in Park Slope, Brooklyn – that we're going to have a very focused police effort outside those centers. There are now – all four of them are syringe exchange locations – needle exchange locations. We will not tolerate quality of life abuses, we will not tolerate drug dealing anywhere near those centers, we're not going to tolerate anything that makes the neighborhood unacceptable for the surrounding citizens. So, that's about policing and it's about thinking in advance with the community of what's going to work. That's why we have a public process for each of these centers – six to 12 month process to get it right. Remember, we're still waiting to hear from the State Health Department, we can't start without that – DA has to approve it, local Council Member has to approve it. But my argument is, we will place is very differently, and we will have a zero tolerance approach outside on some of those quality of life issues.

Louis: Okay, that's good to know. That'll ease the fears that some folks may have. New topics – Betsy DeVos, the Secretary of Education was in town – did apparently not set foot inside of a public school, visited a couple of Yeshivas, even as reporters were shouting at her. Did you know she was coming? Have you invited her to visit our schools?

Mayor: We long-since invited her. She got an invitation right at the beginning of her time as Secretary from the New York City public schools. Chancellor Carranza reiterated an invitation recently. It just boggles the imagination. I don't understand how the Secretary of Education comes to the place with the largest schools system in America and doesn't step foot in one of our buildings. Now, I'm not going to put her down, I'm not going to create a whole scene over it, I just think it doesn't make sense.

Louis: I mean, I was thinking, even just at the level of safeguarding her investment – we get a lot of money from the Federal Department of Education.

Mayor: Sure, and we're the flagship school system in the country. And because of Equity and Excellence, we've got Pre-K for all our kids now, we have 3-K coming, we have advanced placement courses in all of our high schools coming. These are things – Computer Science for All – by far, the biggest school system to have that. These are things you'd think she'd want to see in action and decide what to do with them on a national level, but really just as a matter of respecting public education – if you're in the biggest school system in the country, step in the door, take a look. So, I hope she thinks about it and comes back and looks at it.

Louis: Yeah, I mean, I was thinking, even if she just came and said, I don't like any of this. At least take a look –

Mayor: But it doesn't send a good message to our teachers. The only thing I want to say, Errol, is – I met with a lot of teachers on Saturday, and I said, you know, it just doesn't send a message of respect for them. And these are folks who are educating our kid and framing the future of this city. I think the Secretary would have done well to have just shown some respect for their hard work.

Louis: Agreed. Let's take a quick break here. I'll be right back with more from Mayor de Blasio.

[...]

Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall where I am speaking with Mayor Bill de Blasio. Time to talk politics – will you be at the State Democratic Convention this week?

Mayor: Don't have a plan to at this point.

Louis: Really?

Mayor: Yes.

Louis: No speaking role? No –

Mayor: You know, I appreciate the state party, haven't had that kind of relationship with them so not worried about it.

Louis: Okay. The Working Families Party had their convention over the weekend and did you hear about what they did? And what did you make of their trying to sort of manage their process?

Mayor: I heard a little so which piece do you mean?

Louis: Well I meant the non-endorsement of either Tish James or Zephyr Teachout, sort of a place holder in kind of putting off that strategy.

Mayor: Yes, I understand that given that it's two people they are close to. It makes sense. But look, I think the important point here is Working Families Party plays a really important role in this state. I think it will and should for many years to come. I don't get too caught up in any given office or any given moment in time. I get to the core, last 20 years, if you take the WFP out of the equation we are a much less progressive state. That's the bottom line. They have a vision of helping to push the Democratic Party in a more progressive direction. They achieved a lot of that and obviously now the party is moving organically in a more progressive direction. So I think that's the most fundamental point here.

Louis: Speaking of moving organically, you were at the funeral for Mary Sansone –

Mayor: Yes.

Louis: A very, very legendary I would say, political force and organizer seems like too small of a title.

Mayor: Too small of a word.

Louis: Yes, tell us who she was.

Mayor: An amazing human being. So her dad was in the International Workers of the World – an Italian immigrant and I’m a very proud Italian American, I’ve studied Italian immigrant history a lot. There was a very strong left wing impulse in the percentage of the Italian population that came here. Her dad was a part of that – taught her literally, she apparently at the age of eight she was giving speeches in Union Square, urging people to join the Wobblies.

And she took that spirit and that energy and did something remarkable in Brooklyn over the years. She worked with people of all colors, all backgrounds for real change for neighborhoods in Brooklyn. And this was in a time when bluntly, there was very little collaboration and organizing across the racial lines. She famously had Bayard Rustin over to her house in Brooklyn to talk about how to bring Italian Americans and African Americans together at a time when it was almost inconceivable politically.

So she was way, way a head of the curve, brought up a whole generation of people too. This is why you could say organizer, she sure was that. But she was also a teacher, a mentor – hundreds of people – I’ve met a lot of them, who learned how to get engaged politically, civically because of her, got hope – but also were taught from the beginning, you need to work with people from different backgrounds. And one other thing that you know people would say, you go to her house – it was almost a riot, you would go over there each time and there would be you know, a student from Africa and there would be a Latino kid from you know Queens and there would be people from all over and a lot of Italian Americans, she was very proud of her heritage and a beautiful thing that she did that will have lasting impact because a whole generation came up positively influenced by her. I certainly am proud to have been one of the people influenced by her.

Louis: Indeed one of a kind. In the same spirit, young people designated today as part of a big national effort to register to vote. And I think you were at one of the events today as well.

Mayor: It’s so exciting Errol. We have a goal through our new DemocracyNYC initiative to register 50,000 young people each year going forward as they are reaching voting age. Because previously it was sporadic whether schools had any effort to get 17-year-olds, seniors typically in high school and register them to vote in the upcoming next election. So we are making a systematic effort under DemocracyNYC. And today – first time in New York City history, in every high school there was a voter registration effort. I saw, I was at the Martin Luther King campus in Manhattan – I saw incredible energy, a good long line of kids waiting to register. I talked to a lot of them. They are so aware of the consequences. This is what was so powerful – they understand that if they get involved things will happen to them instead of on their behalf.

Louis: How do we at some point change the basic logic? Right? Because you know, your side job was as a political – your night game was as a political consultant. And we both know that for many, many, I’d even say most elected officials – the game is about figuring out who is with you. And getting those people to the polls and making sure everybody else – not that they stay home but if they don’t show up or they don’t register, that’s fine with most officials and that really sort of contributes to the lowered turnout.

Mayor: There’s no question. And the cynical reality in New York State – both parties bluntly over the years conspired to make it hard to register and hard to vote. We are talking about millions of people eligible to register in New York State, over a million of them right here in New York City who are not registered because we don’t have same day registration, because the

voting process is hard and cumbersome because you can't do early voting which so many other states have. So it discourages people from getting involved. The real dirty secret in New York State is that the system is rigged against maximum participation. So your point is well taken.

Then what does the political class do? Well they say okay since we expect low turnout lets go for our slice of that instead of how do we maximize turnout, maximize involvement? We've seen some promising signs lately. Obviously the Obama campaign of 2008 showed how you could bring an entirely new group into the electorate. I'd say some other examples too. Clearly Bernie Sanders's campaign in many ways too. It is possible now with the kind of organizing that is being done in the digital age. We saw it with the Women's March, we've seen it in lots of other examples – the high school students from Florida and all over the country, a kind of organizing now that I think could start to turn us back towards more and more participation, more and more registration.

But we have got to fix the laws or else we are saying we want more participation but we are actually blocking where it matters most. And our Board of Elections too, I'm going to be working with the Charter Vision Commission to have on the ballot this November two important things – one a rule that City can be involved in the outreach to encourage people of all backgrounds, all different viewpoints to vote because the Board has not done a good job of that and two, greater public financing of elections which will help people run – you ran for office you know what it's like – make it easier for people of all different views, all different backgrounds to run an participate and get big money out of politics.

Louis: Okay final question – we are coming up on Memorial Day weekend when you are going to maybe jump into a pool or something but open the beaches, open the pools. Out in the Rockaways, the busiest stretch, about 11 blocks out by Rockaway Beach is going to be closed because five years after Sandy there's been erosion and this is erosion of you know basically public sand that we tax payers paid for and it's been dumped there. And they are supposed to be working on this. What happened and is there a way to sort of fast track it so that we will have access to the beach?

Mayor: Well what happened is the erosion process has been really punishing and a lot of it has to do with global warming and changing weather patterns and that part of the beach really was hit hard. I went down to Washington a few months ago to meet with the head of Army Corp of Engineers and to let him know on behalf of the people of the Rockaways that we needed the Army Corp to come in and restore that part of the beach, only really can be practically done with the Army Corp. They have agreed to expedite their process. We are going to get a final timeline in the next few months. So despite this painful reality that an 11 block stretch will be closed, the Army Corp will be soon committing to a specific plan with real resources to come in and fix that erosion for the long term.

Louis: Is there any temporary things that can be done?

Mayor: We've tried to find it and look the Parks Department worked very hard on this to look for a solution that we thought was safe. And that's the central issue here. This is, for Commissioner Silver, who I think he and his colleagues in the Parks Department, obviously our life guards have done a great job keeping people safe. That's the number one imperative. They felt strongly that they could not secure safety the way that they needed to if you had this

particularly narrow stretch. It was going to be really narrow, particularly at high tide. We have to put safety first, so it's a painful reality – now the rest of the beach, four and a half miles will still be open. People can obviously still use the boardwalk.

Louis: I mean real quick on a related note, west of 120-odd Street out there, the streets are set up where there is like there's no parking, there's no parking for anybody. If I didn't know better I would almost say that they didn't want people like me driving out there – or at least not to stay. What's up with that?

Mayor: Well, I don't know the situation with parking there – honestly I'll look into it. I can say from the point of view of the City – we believe that that beach is for everyone and everything we are doing, including the ferry service, which is for the residents, and the shuttle bus is for the residents but it's also for the visitors who have taken huge advantage of it. You know, that beach is for everyone and if there's problem with the parking we will see what we can do about it.

Louis: Okay very good, thanks very much.

Mayor: Thank you.

Louis: Enjoy the opening, that's going to be happening I think before the next time I see you.

Mayor: A happy day.

###