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NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 14, 2021, 7:00 PM
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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: Back to Inside City Hall. With COVID-19 rates at an all-time low since the pandemic began, and the five boroughs starting to recover, Mayor de Blasio announced today that our city will be holding a ticker-tape parade next month in Lower Manhattan to celebrate the frontline folks who saved us from the pandemic. Mayor de Blasio joins us now from the Blue Room inside City Hall to talk about that and much more. Welcome, Mr. Mayor, good to see you.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you very much, Errol. How are you doing?

Louis: Good. Very well, thank you. I want to start with the 70 percent vaccination rate that we either are about to pass or are going to pass any day now. Governor Cuomo has announced that it will mean that the State is about to lift nearly all restrictions on gatherings and masking. What's that going to mean for New York City?

Mayor: I think we're ready. Errol, I mean, look today, record low positivity since the pandemic began – 0.59 percent today in New York City. That's incredibly good news. I think [inaudible] my original sense was July 1st. We're damn close. I think it's a time – given the facts, given the data, given the science because so many people have gotten vaccinated and so many continue to get vaccinated. We're ready to reopen. Now we got to keep an eye on the situation. Keep vaccinating folks who haven't been vaccinated yet. Always watch the data, in case we have to make any adjustments. But when you look at the overall trend, it's absolutely fantastic.

Louis: From a regulatory standpoint, will this mean that private businesses can no longer impose mask requirements?

Mayor: Private businesses? Look, I'm not an expert in all the state laws, but I'd say they still have the right to regulate their own spaces for what they believe is important for their needs. I still think that makes sense. We've obviously seen universities, for example, private universities make certain decisions. Every institution has some latitude. It makes sense, but the overall reality is that we can finally do away with so many restrictions and move forward. And again, this is because New Yorkers earned it by going out there and getting vaccinated. This came with a lot of effort and it's something we can't let up. We talked earlier today in the press conference about some of the challenges we're seeing out there in the world, some of the variants, for example, but the answer is always the same, get more people vaccinated and that's what we intend to do.

Louis: Okay. So now let's talk about the portion of the workforce and of the world that you have some direct influence over. Should City employees assume that they will be back at work with no distancing or masking requirements?

Mayor: Well, we're working on that right now. I think this is another example, Errol, of where we've worked out of the abundance of caution in terms of very public workplaces, where you have vaccinated and unvaccinated people together. We know that also according to State rules and CDC rules, there are exceptions for example, in school spaces. So, there still will be spaces where extra precautions are taken and we're still going to have our Test and Trace Corps out there, keeping an eye on the situation. But as they continue to progress, we'll keep making adjustments.

Louis: Let me ask you about this parade for the COVID heroes. You announced the parade today. What are we likely to see on Wednesday, July 7th? I'm wondering, for example, who will be marching? There were lots of public and private entities and institutions and individuals who helped save the city?

Mayor: Well, we're going to have a delegations of health care heroes, first responders, essential workers, working with obviously the hospitals, we're working with unions representing a lot of the workers who saved this city. So, we'll have different delegations marching. We'll have floats. We're certainly going to have some special guests joining us. Something I can tell you Errol, this is new information as part of what we plan. There will be a ceremony at City Hall on the steps of City Hall. This will literally be the first major gathering on the City Hall steps in over a year and another sign of the fact that we're turning the corner. So, everyone, mark your calendars on July 7th. This is going to be a day to remember, Canyon of Heroes thanking the folks who were the heroes who saw us through COVID.

Louis: Is this a government sponsored event? Or are you –

Mayor: Yes.

Louis: Oh, okay, so –

Mayor: Yeah, the City of New York's sponsoring it. We're working with a lot of organizations to make it happen. But this is something we are doing to salute the hometown heroes, the folks who, you know, in many cases, of course the public didn't get to know all the names of the people save so many lives and helped us through COVID. But we're talking about tens of thousands of New Yorkers who did heroic things, starting with our health care heroes. And I said, last year, we're not going to have all the other big parades until we first salute the people who are the true heroes of this crisis.

Louis: Okay, so well, I guess we'll get details as we get closer, as far as distancing of the spectators or anything like that along Broadway?

Mayor: Well, look again, as restrictions are being lifted, I think we can have a decent crowd there. I mean, there'll be obviously as per usual, some smart precautions taken, but what I'm

really looking forward to is thousands and thousands of first responders, health care workers, essential workers, marching on Broadway, the confetti falling on them from all the office buildings around them and a big crowd to greet them. That's what we can now do because we fought our way to this point. I mean, it's, it's actually a little bit case in point here, Errol – the very fact that we can hold the parade to honor these folks is a symbol of the fact that we've traveled this distance and that these heroes made it possible. So, this is the thank you they deserve. A really warm New York City celebration.

Louis: Alright. We're looking forward to that. Let me switch topics and ask you about what's going on at Washington Square Park. Perhaps even as a metaphor, a lot of people, young people in particular have had to spend a year indoors. They seem to have a lot of energy and it's playing out in Washington Square Park and other public places. Are you concerned that this might become the norm in parks all around the city this summer, what we've seen at Washington Square Park?

Mayor: Well, Errol you're right that young people have been through so much in this crisis, and I think everyone's adjusting to a new reality. And thank God it's coming with more freedom, and we see jobs coming back, the economy coming back. So, I do think over time, you're going to see some normalization as well. I think people are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel very clearly now. But look in the parks where we're taking some proactive moves to keep things calm, to address some issues [inaudible] parks. It's not something we're doing in most places, obviously. It's not something we've been doing for very long. It's not something I expect we'll have to do for that long. I think it's about just getting ahead of certain challenges and problems before they become bigger problems.

Louis: Okay. We're going to take a short break here. Standby, Mr. Mayor, we'll be back with the Mayor in just a minute.

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Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall, where I am once again joined by Mayor de Blasio and Mr. Mayor, I hate to bring this up every Monday it seems, but we've had yet another weekend where multiple people were shot around the city. Is there a plan that goes beyond anything that we've heard so far?

Mayor: We keep building the plan all the time, Errol. I've told you, we've had a record number of gun arrest by the NYPD. The courts are now finally back. This is the third week we've had the courts back. We're actually seeing a lot of movement in the court system. A lot of very fast catching up, which is tremendously helpful. We're seeing consequences for some of the violent criminals who hadn't been addressed previously. Some of them are going to be serving time now, that wasn't possible previously. So, those pieces are moving, the community-based solutions, Cure Violence Movement, Crisis Management System, those investments are having more impacts, a lot of pieces coming together. But here's how here's a breaking news piece that we finally saw on Friday, Errol, that you and I talked last week about parole and changing the approach to parole at the State level, protect the people in New York City, but also to create more of a humane approach to folks leaving prison, coming back to communities. Well, look that

bill passed the New York State Assembly. That's a bill that has a lot of strong elements to it, requiring the State to provide housing, health care, opportunities, job opportunities for folks coming back. This is unprecedented. It passed the assembly strongly. Now, as you know, the Senate went out of session, but as expected back in the next few months, we're going to be working intensely to win that vote in the Senate as well and that could be a big step forward for the city.

Louis: Ideally from your point of view, which would be the agency in the city that would help with the re-entry process to make sure that people under these reforms who are coming back get the services that they need?

Mayor: Well, two agencies immediately come to mind, our Department of Social Services does a lot of this work, HRA within DSS does a lot of this work right now helping people particularly in these transitional situations and obviously our Department of Corrections because this is the model we've been using. We provide transitional jobs for folks coming out of Rikers. We provide discharge planning to get people ready to return to their community the right way. So, we're ready to work with the state in a very collaborative fashion, but you know, the State of New York, this has to come with a requirement, it has to come with an obligation, and the fact that the Assembly supported this and now is on record, you know, one down, one to go, we can make this the law and really change the reality for thousands and thousands of returning citizens each year.

Louis: Well, you know, let me bridge into a conversation about the race for mayor. We've got primary candidates who are, to take for example Eric Adams and Maya Wiley, who are kind of going at it over the right mix of traditional enforcement, anti-gun interception units, different kinds of patrol philosophies and so forth, and then we've got sort of a civil rights approach, and we keep hearing about the trauma that communities that have been through and the need to sort of address that if you want to really get at the roots of criminal activity. What's your sense of how this conversation is going and where it's going to settle out when we have a new mayor next year?

Mayor: Look, I think it's an important conversation, Errol. I think the whole truth about this mayor's race is that the whole debate, the whole conversation never jelled the way we might have wanted in large measure because of COVID, and it being an earlier primary people aren't used to it. A lot of factors here. I've also said after the last year debates, I wish the candidates gave a little bit clearer vision for people to latch on to, but, that said, I do think it's going to sort out. First of all, neighborhood policing, you know, a very different approach than was taken in the previous administration. That's proven to be effective. I think a number of the candidates, whoever wins, are going to want to take that approach and build upon it. So, that is where there's proactive policing and precision policing, but with a real focus on building relationships at the neighborhood level, I think that's the way of the future, but I think the root cause issue and the question of trauma has come to the fore like never seen any time before, and that's important too, because that's going to inspire this city to focus on things. I – look, I focused on early child education and affordable housing. A lot of the things that really are at the root of how we change things for the long term but thank God mental health issues are getting a lot more respect. You know, my wife, Chirlane focused on de-stigmatizing mental health and putting a lot more

support into those initiatives. Now we're going to do the crisis calls, sending civilians out to address mental health crisis instead of armed officers where appropriate, a lot is evolving quickly and I'm actually quite hopeful that these strands can be pulled together into a better approach in the future.

Louis: If we can go back to 2013, early 2014, you came in with a clear mandate to do something about changing or breaking or reversing the culture of stop and frisk, when it came to the public safety issues, what else did you think you had to do or needed to do or had a mandate to do back then?

Mayor: At that point, when it came to policing, I certainly thought there were more reforms to be made besides just ending the broken policy of stop and frisk. I did want to strengthen the CCRB, we've been able to do that, I did want to see a closer working relationship between police and community that became neighborhood policing. Clearly, you know, I ran on Pre-K for All, thank God that's done. 3-K's going to be universal. I also felt I had to produce a very substantial amount of affordable housing, and we put a big number up there, 200,000 apartments. That was a risk to put up there. I'm thrilled to say that plan is ahead of schedule, actually, and doing great. But I think it was to me, Errol, very clear, strong platform planks that were, you know, live, or die. I said, this is what I came into, if I didn't do it people would have had every right to judge me very harshly. I'm proud to say we were able to make those changes and they worked.

Louis: You know, following the current race as closely as I have, I find it difficult too for each of the candidates come up with the kind of list that you just ticked off. It wouldn't have been quite as difficult in 2013, really kind of tricky right now, we see pretty low turnout so far for early voting where we're right at the start of it, of course, but what's your sense of how ready people are to sort of make their choices in this race?

Mayor: I'm worried about that. I'm worried that because even though I think we have some good candidates, for sure, the whole idea of those sharp clear goals hasn't been there as much as I would've liked to see. And you're right, you know, again, for me, it was on stop and frisk. Pre-K, affordable housing, obviously paid sick leave was [inaudible] then, and real differences among the candidates on a lot of these issues. So, I think it animated the election and made people want to get involved and take a stand. This has been a somewhat more amorphous race, but again, for reasons in some ways beyond the candidates' control, including the focus on COVID, obviously. I think there's still a week and it's a long time, it's a century for God's sakes in politics a week before the election. There's still time for the candidates to really sharpen and clarify to the people what they want to get done. This is the point where the people are listening, but I do think there's a direct connection between how inspired people are by a specific vision of change and how willing they are to come out and vote.

Louis: Are you an undecided voter at this point? And are you planning to vote early?

Mayor: I'm going to vote on Election Day. I want to see literally every piece of information I can until the end. I have not decided how to rank candidates. I'm going to rank five candidates, but I have not decided who and in which order yet.

Louis: Okay.

Mayor: So, this is going to be one I'm going to look at really right up to the end, and I think there's a hell of a lot of New Yorkers in the same situation I'm in.

Louis: Oh, what about the race for controller, you've dealt with controllers quite a bit over the last eight years –

Mayor: True statement, Errol.

Louis: Have you got a choice in that race?

Mayor: I do not, same situation, looking at everything closely, and no final decisions on how to rank, but again, what – the one thing I want to say to all New Yorkers, and I hope everyone has participated in the vote on pizza toppings, really the biggest thing that happened last week, that the choose five people. There's five choices available. Do the research and choose five. If there's more than five, pick out the five you think would be best, because your vote literally stays alive through each recount, recut, and it's important to not leave a space blank where you could actually put your imprint on the election.

Louis: And as far as you're concerned, does that apply all the way down to City Council where there's an open race for your old seat in District 39?

Mayor: Yeah, and there's a lot of talented people running in my Council District. I think I'll be able to find five people to rank and feel good about it. Absolutely. Look, if, if anyone looks at a particular race and says, there's no – there's a person here I can't stand, or I just can't find five. I can live with that, it's something I understand. But what I'm saying to all New Yorkers is do the research, do the hard work of getting to know these candidates because really to make your vote have maximum impact you want to rank five different people, one through five, and you don't know if that last one might not be the vote that actually has an impact.

Louis: I mean, and this is just to take your case. This is amazing. So, like, you know, you've got mayor's race, controllers' race, borough president, City Council, you're talking about, you know, like 20 people. You're voting for 20 people, you know, a fairly complicated order.

Mayor: Yeah, but what's good about it – I have to tell you, I see the pros and cons and the challenges, but what's good about it is, and this is why, you know, the folks on my team who came up with a pizza topping idea, I give them a lot of credit. When you start thinking about all the other choices we make in life, pizza toppings, or airlines, or whatever it may be, countries who want to visit it, you name it, people naturally rank, everyone loves lists and ranking. And so, adopting that to our sense of politics, it does require a little extra work, a little extra thinking, you know, watching the debates, which tells you so much, but the virtue of the system is it makes you think a little more deeply and you don't waste your vote. A lot of times we've all had the feeling you voted for somebody who thought they were going to be a real viable candidate. Didn't work out that way. Well, that votes out the window. In this case, your vote stays alive as

people are disqualified, it bumps up to your next choices and your next choice, I find that kind of exciting. It actually empowers people more.

Louis: Okay. We'll see how it all works out. We'll talk again next week. Thanks, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Thank you, Errol.

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