

TRANSCRIPT: BILL DE BLASIO
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Interview by Rafael Pi Roman | MetroFocus

Rafael PI ROMAN:

And with us now is Bill de Blasio. Mr. de Blasio, welcome.

Bill DE BLASIO:

Thank you Rafael.

PI ROMAN:

Now, Mr. de Blasio, you are now the city's public advocate but you want to be its mayor. Why?

DE BLASIO:

Because we need serious changes in New York City. I am not satisfied with the status quo. I, I say wherever I go, we are living a tale of two cities, we have the greatest income disparity since the Great Depression, we have educational disparities, healthcare disparities, hospitals closing all over as you know. We can't have a city where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer and the disparities sharpen and expect to succeed and expect it to be a place really open to everyone. Simple point: the history of New York City, New York City's success has been about being open to all, available to everyone. And that's becoming less and less true. We have to change the policies of the Bloomberg years or the exclusivity, the elitism will simply grow.

PI ROMAN:

Now Mr. de Blasio, education is one of your key issues, if not your key issue, And it has been. Can you give us an example of one education reform that you're proposing?

DE BLASIO:

I am a public school parent, have been for the last fourteen years. If I were elected, I would be the first mayor of New York City to serve while having a child in public school. A central reform I want to make, I want us to dedicate ourselves to early childhood education and after-school; two areas where we're really lacking. I proposed, back in October, a tax on the wealthiest New Yorkers, those who make half a million or more. That would allow us to guarantee full-day pre-K for every child at that age in this city and an after-school seat guaranteed for every middle school student who needs it. That, to me, would be a fundamental investment in education and a great equalizing investment that would really lift up kids all over the city.

PI ROMAN:

That income tax hike on wealthier New Yorkers, some of your critics are concerned that that's the kind of thing that makes some of these New Yorkers say, "That's it, I am out of here. I'll work here but I'll commute." You're not that concerned?

DE BLASIO:

I'll tell you why I'm not. First, there's no empirical evidence that that's true, that people would leave because of a small tax surcharge. Second, even wealthy people understand if we don't fix our school system the future of the city is going to be in question. This is not a punitive tax, this is saying some people are doing very, very well in this city. By the way, Wall Street is doing better than ever, literally. A lot of people are doing fine. We need their help. It is only right for us to ask for it so that a lot of kids who are left behind get a chance to get a good education.

PI ROMAN:

Now, just last week, you were arrested in the middle of your campaign. Why?

DE BLASIO:

Because now we are facing a different kind of healthcare crisis, a different kind of epidemic. It's an epidemic of hospitals closures. Most dramatically, we lost St. Vincent's on the West Side of Manhattan three years ago. But we have lost a number of others in recent years. Now, in Brooklyn, literally this summer, we could lose Long Island College Hospital and Interfaith, meaning downtown Brooklyn and brownstone Brooklyn would have much less service. Bed-Stuy and surrounding neighborhoods would have much less service. Healthcare would be available to fewer people. Thousands of jobs would be lost. Right now, the mayor is not lifting a finger to stop it and I thought it was important to call on the mayor, the governor, all levels of government to intervene before we lost more healthcare capacity in this town.

PI ROMAN:

You know, in 1990, during the Dinkins administration, which you served, murder, the murder rate in New York City peaked at 2,245. Last year was 419. The mayor argues that that dramatic drop is due, in part, because of stop and frisk, which you want to end. Why do you want to end it?

DE BLASIO:

Stop and frisk when done constitutionally can be a very valid police tactic. You follow a suspect description and you go after people who fit that description. That's part of policing. That's not what we have now. We have a form of stop and frisk where almost 90% of those stopped are innocent in every way, shape or form. It is not based on a suspect description, it's a broad- brush approach that has alienated communities from police and has violated the civil liberties of a lot of everyday New Yorkers. I don't think this is a sustainable path. I don't think this makes us safer. I do know, it is extraordinarily frustrating, particularly to parents and grandparents in communities of color, that their young men, and that's who the target is usually, young black and Latino men, are treated like suspects even though they are abiding by the law. That cannot continue, so we need a fundamental reduction of stop and frisk. We

need an inspector general, a racial profiling bill, a new police commissioner, the things that would fundamentally allow us to reset.

PI ROMAN:

Now, some of your supporters, and many of your detractors, both agree and say that you are the most progressive candidate in this race—

DE BLASIO:

Proud to be.

PI ROMAN:

--but in fact, most of the democrats, if not all democrats, are tacking to the left, during this, this primary—

DE BLASIO:

Oh, I don't agree with that.

PI ROMAN:

Well, okay, whether that's the case or not, those of you who are, isn't it going to come back and bite you in the general election?

DE BLASIO:

First, I just have to say, from my point of view, you've got candidates like Chris Quinn and Bill Thompson who oppose a tax on the wealthy. You've got them plus Anthony Weiner opposing the racial profiling bill. Chris Quinn wants to keep Kelley as police commissioner despite the mistakes he has made on stop and frisks. I think there's plenty of Democrats who think, somehow, that they should be tacking to the right side or the middle side of the equation. I am very proud to be the progressive in this race. I think people want progressive change in this town. I think they are very frustrated with the status quo and don't want to see New York City lose its value. So look, when you ask about the general. I think it extends to the general election as well, the folks I talk to across party lines, across boroughs, feel that this place has become less fair and they want some answer. And I think they're actually looking for a progressive answer, regardless of party affiliation.

PI ROMAN:

But forget about progressive, this city hasn't elected a Democratic mayor in twenty years.

DE BLASIO:

Correct.

PI ROMAN:

Why is it going to be different this time?

DE BLASIO:

I think those elections really were because of very particular things going on in those moments in history and because some of the strengths of the Republicans, obviously Bloomberg's wealth, for example, and some of the weaknesses of the Democrats. I don't think it was ever a change in fundamental values in this town. I think this is going to be a course-correction election. I think this is going to be a Democratic year, unquestionably. Especially given what people have been through economically the last few years.

PI ROMAN:

You know, as I mentioned earlier, Anthony Weiner is running for mayor, as most of our viewers, if not all of them, know, and Eliot Spitzer wants to run for comptroller. What do you think about that? Should New York City be the city of second chances, or do public officials only get one shot at getting the basics right?

DE BLASIO:

I don't, I don't like that construct honestly, respectfully because we all believe in second chances and a sense of openness to people. That's not what this is about. These are two people who broke the public trust in very different ways, but still broke the public trust. I think the question always is, "Have you, have you atoned for that in a meaningful way? Have you resolved the issues or are you just going to go and do it again?" And also, "What do you stand for?" And, you know one of the things that I disagree with Anthony, for example, on is Anthony has been very, very close to the real estate industry. You know, Anthony voted for some things in City Council that were very favorable to that industry. That's more pertinent to me than some of the other questions coming up about him. But I have to ask the question, always, if someone was willing to openly dissemble or violate the law, previously, the public has every right to say, "You broke our trust and we are going to hold that against you." So I think humanly, we believe in second chances, but in public life we're held to a higher standard.

PI ROMAN:

Okay, Mr. de Blasio, thank you so much.

DE BLASIO:

Thank you, Rafael. Great pleasure.