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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW

Brian Lehrer: It's the Brian Lehrer Show on WNYC. Good morning again, everyone, and now it's time for our weekly "Ask the Mayor" segment – my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio, Fridays at 11:05, okay, it's 11:06 – 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0, 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0. Or tweet a question, use the hashtag #AskTheMayor. Good morning, Mr. Mayor, welcome back to WNYC.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, Brian. How you doing?

Lehrer: I'm doing all right, thank you. So the streets of Borough Park were restless on Wednesday night, including violence against at least one reporter, an Orthodox Jewish man himself from the Jewish Insider, Jacob Kornbluh, who had reported on resistance to social distancing. How were things last night?

Mayor: Definitely a different situation last night, so I want to speak about that, but let me speak about Jacob. First. I spoke to Jacob yesterday morning and Jacob Kornbluh is a very respected reporter who really tries to let his community and all New Yorkers know what's going on. What happened to him was absolutely unacceptable. It was disgusting to watch. It was troubling to watch. It was painful, and I checked in with Commissioner Shea earlier and an arrest is expected in that case shortly, and obviously that just can't happen. You cannot have someone assaulted for trying to actually report the news to everyone that situation and other situations led to the need. I spoke about in my press conference yesterday to clarify the rules, this is a different situation than we've ever encountered. We went through the initial crisis. We things got better. This is the first time we've had to reimpose restrictions. So we worked with our Law Department to get very clear and guidance was sent out to all police officers yesterday afternoon, it's been made public, making very clear what is allowable and what is not allowable during this state of heightened restrictions as part of the larger state of emergency we're dealing with, and last night was much quieter. We did not have any major problem in any of the areas affected.

Lehrer: As with any such incidents. I don't want to paint any largely peaceful protest with the actions of a few fringe individuals. If that's all it is, how much is that all it is as far as you can tell, and as far as what you would anticipate?

Mayor: Well, look, we're talking about a very big swath of Brooklyn and Queens, overwhelmingly, Brian, people have respected the need to address this problem. There's been a lot of communication over the weeks, leading up to the imposition of these restrictions. There were a lot of warnings that things were going in the wrong direction and a lot of urging of people

to buckle down with social distancing and wearing mass more and more people have been doing that. Community leaders, overwhelmingly you know, well respected community leaders, faith leaders, civic leaders in those communities have spoken up. Elected officials have said, we all need to work together. We all need to address this very few people have been speaking against this. They tend to be, as you said, I think fringe is the right word, a small group of folks you know – right on up to people denying there even is the coronavirus, which is particularly troubling and unhelpful to everyone. But the vast majority of community leaders and institutions have been very much engaged in trying to get everyone to accept these rules, and hopefully it only for a few weeks, and there've been in the scheme of things, very few people protesting.

Lehrer: Gothamist reporter Jake Offenhartz has video that he describes as police joking around Wednesday night with the same men who just beat up a reporter. There's also a still photo making the rounds of NYPD officers in masks, posing for a shot during the protest with a smiling and maskless populist protests leader Heshy Tischler. What the heck were they doing there, Mr. Mayor?

Mayor: I want to see those and I'll make sure that anything that's public domain. I want to see today and I want to discuss with the Commissioner. That's just not acceptable, obviously. Anybody who is inciting negativity, division, violence, who's openly disobeying the laws of the City and the State, obviously that's not someone to fraternize with. So I have not seen those images, but we will address that situation based on, you know, the specific information for sure.

Lehrer: We have a caller related to that, as it turns out, David, on the Upper West Side, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello David.

Question: Oh, hello. Hi, Brian, it's such an honor. You are so great. Mr. Mayor, I have to tell you how intensely disappointed I am in you. I thought we were electing a progressive mayor and this Commissioner of Police who goes out and endorses Trump in this big way, and he's still sitting there as your Commissioner and his policemen are running riot, not following the orders you say they're supposed to follow, not at all, acting like they are in some Republican state. It's really intolerant – a huge disappointment to progressives, I must tell you.

Mayor: Well, David, if your facts were right respectfully, David, you did elect a progressive, and I have been acting on my values and the things I stated back in 2013 throughout, and your facts are just dead wrong, and so, you know, I, anyone can raise anything on this show, but you can't raise facts that are just plain false and it gets okay. The Commissioner has not endorsed anyone. That's just false. The Police Benevolent Association that the police patrol union, which I have tangled with for decades, they endorsed Trump. That is not the same thing as the Police Department of New York City. That is not the same thing as the Police Commissioner of New York City. You have to be discerning enough to understand that difference. I've been fighting with that union, which – the leadership of the PBA is arch-conservative has been for decades. I fought against them when I was in City Hall, working for Mayor Dinkins. I've been fighting against them the whole time. They've protested me nonstop. They endorsed Donald Trump, not the Commissioner. The Commissioner did not take political stances, and this Commissioner has been engaged with us throughout in making the fundamental changes and reforms, the great reduction in arrests, a great reduction in mass incarceration, all of the efforts to change the

relationship between police and communities from neighborhood policing. He's the one who has moved a lot of the discipline initiatives we needed to ensure greater accountability and discipline, and it's just not fair to ascribe to him something that a union that he and I often have to tangle with that they did. It's just apples and oranges here.

Lehrer: You know, I actually want to follow up on the question of Commissioner Shea and I didn't, I don't know that I didn't know he was going to call and clearly the Commissioner has not endorsed Donald Trump, but last week we had on the show – I mean, last week, you and I discussed the Human Rights Watch report on the incident of, in the Bronx, which led Human Rights Watch to call for you to fire Shea, and last hour, one of our guests was Maya Wiley, who used to be a top official under you, of course, and the New York City Law Department, and she came—

Mayor: [Inaudible] – I'm sorry to correct you Brian. She was in the Mayor's Office, she was my counsel, not the Corporation Counsel, which is the Law Department. Those are two separate concepts.

Lehrer: Thank you. So, even closer, and she called on you to fire Police Commissioner Shea as well, and here's a little bit of why she says he is not serious enough about misconduct in the NYPD. Here's Maya Wiley:

Maya Wiley: As we saw police officers ripping face mask off of demonstrators, facing them with their arms in the air and pepper spraying, them directly in the face. After we saw images of police vehicles driving into demonstrators. After we saw instances in which we saw police taking batons randomly to residents in the street. That this Police Commissioner defending that conduct, having to be pressed to say anything that suggested that there was a need for reform, and then after all that, for us to watch for almost six hours, over two dozen riot geared police, helicopters overhead lay siege to the apartment building of a Black Lives Matter organizer, with absolutely no arrest warrant, for using a bull horn at a peaceful demonstration tells us that we do not have a Police Commissioner who will protect the public from bad policing.

Lehrer: Mr. Mayor, your response.

Mayor: I have a lot of respect for Maya Wiley. You know, we served side by side for years. I often sought her counsel on, you know, absolutely crucial matters, but I think some of her facts are just wrong there with all due respect to her. On that last situation, which was absolutely preposterous, I couldn't agree with her more, that following up on that warrant for the protestor in Hell's Kitchen, that was an operation was done exactly the wrong way. It was Commissioner Shea who called it off. I've had this conversation with him. I talked about it publicly. That was the warrant squad acting on a legitimate warrant to be fair, but doing it in a way was absolutely inappropriate. The Commissioner called it off when he heard what was happening.

On the instances that Ms. Wiley raised in terms of the protests back in May, June, a number of those cases are where the Commissioner specifically delineated discipline for the individuals involved and quicker than any previous Commissioner had done. Look I'm not perfect. He's perfect. There's lots of work that still needs to be done, and there will be a lot more work to be

done to fix the issues that we must address in the NYPD. There's a lot more reform needed in the NYPD, there's a lot more change that has to happen in the culture of policing, but I don't want to misrepresent the facts of what happened. He's been very clear about the fact that it's absolutely unacceptable to have a police officer treat someone protesting the way that we saw in several instances during the protests a month ago, and there was discipline meted out, people were suspended and that's what we need from our police leadership.

So, no he has been – here's the thing that people have to remember for seven years, we've been moving a fundamental change agenda in the NYPD and if you ask people at the community level, the change that neighborhood policing brought, it's quite evident to them. He's been front and center in that effort, and that needs to be remembered. I expect more of him and the NYPD, I expect more change and more reform, and we're going to drive it from City Hall over the next 15 months. But if you look at the facts he has moved on the discipline needed in so many of these cases.

Lehrer: Santos in Park Slope, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Santos.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor. I'm also, I know where you live, so I guess we're homeboys here, but I'm calling for a very serious matter. My wife has dementia and she would be going to a senior – it's not only seniors, but it's a day program for people with dementia, et cetera, as it's called the New York Memory Center, it's on 11th and 4th – no 14th and 4th. Anyway they've been closed down since the I guess since the beginning of the pandemic, when we had the whole close-down and they're basically hanging on by their fingernails. This is the only chance for my wife to have any kind of socialization and like her, there are many, so I'm wondering this is not a medical unit. This is a socialization unit, and I was wondering when these programs will be opened up?

Mayor: Santos, what street do you live on in Park Slope? I'm in St. Mark's – St. Mark's Avenue between 5th and 6th. Okay. So let me, would you please give your information to WNYC? I hear you loud and clear, and I really want to make sure that we can provide some help for you and your wife, and obviously those kinds of day programs, everything involving, for example, senior centers, a lot of things have been kept close out of tremendous sensitivity. What happens with seniors in this disease, but that's starting to be changed now, as we have in general in the city done better, fighting back to disease, notwithstanding our current challenge. So I want to help you find some kind of support for your wife that works in this moment and give us your information. I'll have my team follow up with you directly.

Lehrer: And I guess the larger question is kinds of facilities can open and what kinds of facilities need to close with respect to COVID safety, right?

Mayor: Yeah, and look, we learned very painfully Brian that – we saw horrible things in nursing homes, obviously in particular. We closed down the traditional senior centers where seniors often went for lunch and different activities. Those still have not reopened in that form. There's tremendous sensitivity about folks who are older and folks with preexisting major conditions because of the nature of COVID, and we want to be really careful about that. But again, before, you know, the last few weeks we had made really steady progress fighting back this disease, we're going to resume that progress. I don't have a doubt in my mind, and we've got to start

opening up as much as we can safely, and with whatever restrictions, like for example, we had cooling centers over the summer that a lot of seniors went to and – but they were very careful about the six-foot distancing and the mask and all that went very well, very safely. So we've got to figure out how we can start to restore some of these carefully over the coming months.

Lehrer: Joseph, on Staten Island, you're on WNYC with the Mayor.

Question: Hi, how are you? First of all, I got to say that I'm a big fan of your show and I love it very much, and it's a lifeline to New Yorkers, and I want to tell the Mayor I'm a big supporter of him, and I had been for a while. I have a question because I'm a retired teacher. My wife is currently a teacher and she's teaching remotely, okay, and we had some struggles with that. But we went out, we bought a new computer, we bought a desk, we set up a whole office for her, and now we find out with five days to go that the lump sum back payment for teachers that we were supposed to get in about a week is not going to come and we spent that money on preparing the office. So I was wondering what the Mayor's position, I know the city is under a fiscal strain, you know, fiscal stress, but it seems like the teachers are always the ones that bail out the city and, you know, we need the money and, you know.

Mayor: Hey, man, Joseph –

Lehrer: Hey man, let me clarify, and tell me if this is an accurate classification for our listeners. As part of the contract with the teacher's union, there were supposed to be retroactive payments for work done in the past and so they came to very much expect that that money was going to be paid. And because of the fiscal strain on the city, you're canceling some of that money that had already been negotiated. Is that a fair telling?

Mayor: Well, it's postponed. It's not something we can do now. And look, I want to first say to Joseph, thank you for what you and your wife had both done for New York City and for our kids, and I'm hearing your story very humanly and personally, and it's painful. I'm very sorry you're going through that, and I'm very sorry for everyone because teachers are working so hard, educators, school staff, everyone's working so hard, they've done something truly heroic bringing back our schools for our kids. The problem is, I just need to put this in context, you know, when I came into office, the teachers had not been given a contract for years and years. The back pay issues had been ignored by the previous administration. We in 2014, one of the first things we did was came to – we come to a contract with the teachers, which included that back pay, and we've been paying it ever since.

The problem now is three things have not yielded a solution that we needed after the coronavirus hit, we lost \$9 billion in revenue, the city situation has gotten more and more precarious. So I said, look, the federal stimulus is what will save us here. We'll all work for the federal stimulus. That House did its job, the Senate didn't. Then we went to Albany, and we asked for long-term borrowing. We thought we were going to get honestly, never gotten anything, no – no light at the end of that tunnel. So then we went to the unions and said, we need some kind of savings. We need something that's going to get us out of this jam so we can avoid layoffs because if we don't get something, federal, State, or from labor, we have to move to layoffs, which would be the single worst thing for Joseph and his wife for educators all over the city, for kids, for families,

the worst thing in the world would be layoffs. We did not get those savings from the unions. Here was something we could do to stave off a crisis and stave off layoffs to withhold that payment. Obviously people should get that money eventually, but we can't afford it right now given that nothing else has come to support us. So we've said we're not in a position to make that payment right now. The union invoked immediately it's right to go to arbitration. They do have that legal right. That arbitration is happening immediately. The arbitrator will decide what happens with those payments. That is the legally binding right of the arbitrator.

Lehrer: I guess they're arguing that this is different than any expenses going forward. This was money that was already negotiated so that people were depending on.

Mayor: And I do fully understand the frustration and the pain that it causes. The problem is if I don't find some way to get relief for the people of this city and for our city budget, the next step is layoffs. And that – look we announced in June, the potential is as many as 22,000 layoffs. That would devastate our city agencies, that would devastate a lot of families, that would set back our city's recovery. So this is a case of a very unfortunate choice I have to make, but literally we have run out of options. We did not get a stimulus. We did not get long-term borrowing from Albany. We did not get the savings from the unions. This is something we have to do. We're, you know, a bad, bad - if when you think about it, it's a bad situation for everyone. This is not something I want to do, but what would be even worse is if I had to authorize layoffs.

Lehrer: Question from a listener via Twitter. A listener asks, I live in Forest Hills. We demand data that proves COVID is spreading in schools, otherwise open our schools. What do you say to that listener in Forest Hills?

Mayor: I appreciate the concern, obviously, I was a public school parent and I've been putting everything I had into getting our schools open. I want to tell that listener, first of all, if we all do this right, we're talking about a pause of two weeks, you know, I hope no more – worst case in three or four weeks. Then, you know, school is back and we go through the whole rest of the school year. But I am following the lead of our health leadership, our Commissioner of Health and my Senior Health Advisor, the Head of Health + Hospitals, they all came to the same conclusion that we saw a very troubling uptick in a number of communities, that it was starting to spread to the surrounding communities, that we needed to reduce the amount of activities and that meant schools, that meant businesses, everything needed to be brought down quickly mimicking what worked in the spring when we had these widespread restrictions, just reduce activity, reduce travel, reduce people being outdoors rapidly, and if we did that fast enough and intensely enough, we could stop the spread from effecting the whole city and then reopen in these areas quickly. So I feel total empathy with a parent who's frustrated, but again, my hope is this is a very brief measure to get us through this problem and then get us back on track and most of the city, thank God, continues to this day – I'll tell you the indicators for today on overall testing, Brian, right now the overall testing in New York City last 24 hours, 1.16 percent positivity and our seven-day rolling average overall test in New York City, 1.66 percent. Those two measures, if that became the norm in New York City, we could certainly live with that. So the overall situation is very good, but in these specific areas we have a real danger we have to address. That's why we're taking this action.

Lehrer: Jonathan in Brooklyn, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Jonathan.

Question: Hi, thank you so much for taking my call, Brian and Mr. Mayor. I really appreciate everything that you both do for the city. I'm a public school teacher at a high school here just off Union Square and I've been teaching both remote and working with students in-person. And I'm concerned with our approach to high school in specific, public elementary and middle school students stay in the neighborhood for the most part, while high school students often travel all over the city, and I have kids coming from all five boroughs to our school. I'm wondering why are we allowing high school students to continue going to school in-person while they could be traveling from higher to relatively lower transmission neighborhoods, and do you think there could be a better approach for high school students that continues to support their needs while minimizing the likelihood of spread?

Mayor: It's a very fair question, Jonathan, and we're watching this very, very carefully. I talked to our health leadership constantly about the experience with students all over the world. Generally, what we've seen is, obviously with this disease much better reality with young people than with older people, but still there is a concern particularly about the high school aged kids. So what we've been doing is watching every school, 1,600 schools daily and doing a lot of testing around schools in the affected areas, and I'll give you a really amazing statistic, because this says something about what is, thank God, not happening our schools. We don't want it to happen. In 44 schools in the effected ZIP codes having the biggest problems right now in Brooklyn, Queens, 44 schools had testing in school. This is of staff and educators, 2,155 test results, we had only three positives. That's a staggeringly good results.

So we're not seeing spread in schools. We're not seeing any unusual number of students or staff anywhere in the city testing positive. What I think is fair is the school environment has been made extremely safe, and I thank you and all educators and everyone in the schools, because with the social distancing, the face mask wearing by everyone, the cleaning, everything has been working in the schools. So we need to bring down the level activity in the areas most effective, that's why we're closing schools, both public and non-public there. But for the rest of the school system, we are not seeing anything that suggests a bigger problem, and we're trying to go by the science and the data here, and the data is telling us that so far, even at the high school level, we're doing okay and we obviously want those kids to have, you know, the positive influence of you and other educators to help them in this really tough moment in history. So, so far the overall system is doing very well.

Lehrer: And some parents emphasize that you're closing some schools where there have been no COVID cases at all. So what do you say to them about why that makes any sense?

Mayor: Same point, Brian – it's again, I think I can attest to after having been the person who stood up for the opening of schools against much opposition, and I said we had to open up our schools for our kids, especially the most needy kids, the great disparity we see is kids who needed the most help were suffering the most with remote learning and needed in-person education, and we did it. But in these particular neighborhoods where you're seeing positivity levels that have gone up, I think the average among them, according to what the Governor just said was 6.6 in the red zones today - 6.6 positivity versus what I just told you from New York City as a whole, a 1.16 today. We've had neighborhoods in those red zones go up as high as, you

know, eight percent, nine percent. We've got to address that. That means shutting down activity across the board, and that's why we had to do it. But again for – I believe hopefully as little as two weeks, could be three or four, but a very limited period of time, bring down those schools, get the situation under control, reopen then immediately.

Lehrer: You and the Governor are both getting a lot of criticism now for the conflict between you and the chaotic and ever changing response by each of you individually, as people see it, rather than better planning. For example, an article in The Times today, after reporting on Borough Park, says other Brooklyn neighborhoods like Bensonhurst and Windsor Terrace, parents railed – or rallied against the sudden closure of schools. And it says even as officials and religious leaders acknowledged the need to take action before the virus outbreak explodes into a full scale second wave, they bristled at the haphazard way the new restrictions were announced, giving some schools less than a data shutdown after months of working diligently to open. And then it gives two examples, referring to Justin Brannan, Councilman whose district encompasses Southwest Brooklyn. It says many of Mr. Brandon's constituents send their children to Bensonhurst's Academy of Talented Scholars, a school Mr. de Blasio closed on Tuesday that will remain shuttered, even though it falls outside of Mr. Cuomo's school closure zones. And it says, conversely, in Windsor Terrace, students that were to start their third day of in-person learning at public school 130 on Thursday woke up to the discovery that their school was closed though Mr. de Blasio was prepared to let the school open, Mr. Cuomo's office put the school in an orange zone, which required the restriction. So –

Mayor: Brian, I don't know how long you want to keep making the point, but you've asked the question before about why some schools have been included and I answered –

Lehrer: No – well, the question this time is really about the chaotic nature of the rollout of this –

Mayor: No I disagree. Brian, it's just look, again, let's remember the last few weeks and you can editorialize, which is you're right, but I just think you have to differentiate fact from editorial. What did we say two weeks ago? This very day – this very day, the Health Commissioner said publicly for everyone that if there was not improvement in those communities quickly, amongst the things that might have to happen is the closing of public and non-public schools and non-essential businesses. People had a lot of warning. There were a lot of conference calls. There were a lot of meetings. There were a lot of explanations from our health leadership publicly and privately to community leaders, and we said these numbers, the data and science, what differentiates New York from the rest of the country in many cases, adhering to the data and science, acknowledging it publicly, constantly telling people what might have to result, and acting on it.

I agree if you say, well, the State and the City, did they have the same exact vision? No, you're absolutely right about that. On Sunday, I said, we're at a breaking point. We have to act. I don't have the unilateral power to act or I would have. I thought ZIP codes were a cleaner option. The State decided on a different model, that is there, right. I would have liked it if it could have been one model instead of two different versions, but ultimately they were very similar. The State took our model and modified it pretty modestly, and then we had to act immediately. We didn't have the luxury of saying take your time, because there's a crisis. This is about saving lives and

stopping the spread of this disease to the rest of the city. So I wish it was clean and easy, but this is very difficult stuff to manage. When you say ever changing, respectfully, the crisis is ever changing, Brian, it's not static. So when we got new information, we warned people. We tried to take all the steps for weeks. We were in Borough Park trying to get people tested, trying to encourage mask wearing, it didn't work the way it worked in other communities. I've said publicly, Sunset Park, we did the same approach, it worked. Soundview in the Bronx, Southeast Queens, every time it worked, turned around a problem, it didn't work in Borough Park and surrounding communities. So we gave people a warning and we acted on the morning. So I just would say the City and State, we have some differences, but we ultimately get pretty much to the same place and that's why overall, New York City was able to come back and we've been able to move forward, and this is going to be I think, a very brief, let's pray, a very brief setback.

Lehrer: We will all pray together for that one. We'll talk to you next week, Mr. Mayor. Thanks as always.

Mayor: Thank you, Brian. Take care.

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