

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January 22, 2021, 11:05 AM
CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov (212) 788-2958

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 as usual to start the 11 o'clock hour here on Fridays, it's time for our weekly Ask the Mayor segment, my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio. At 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0. Or you can tweet a question. We'll see it if you use the hashtag #AskTheMayor. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Welcome back to WNYC.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Hey, good morning, Brian. How are you doing?

Lehrer: I'm doing okay. Thank you. And you may have noticed that we've got a new president this week.

Mayor: Oh, really? Brian, tell me about that.

Lehrer: And a new Senate Majority Leader who happens to be Chuck from Brooklyn. What do you expect will change most concretely most quickly for the city?

Mayor: Yeah, I want to say just humanly, I think a lot of us, a lot of people listening would agree. It just feels entirely different to not have a president stoking division and hatred and undermining, you know, every form of progressive progress. And it's amazing. I mean, it was just – I feel I'm breathing easier literally. But on top of that, knowing as we address all these issues, COVID and everything else, we literally are going to get some kind of support from Washington, not constant interference. And on the tangible level, it's really two things. It's vaccine supply and vaccine flexibility is number one and stimulus is number two. I've already been talking to leaders in the Biden administration about both maximizing supply which clearly they want to do in very different ways than the Trump administration, but also giving us a lot more freedom and flexibility, particularly the ability to use our reserves of second doses right now to give people who need the first dose, that first opportunity to get some protection. That's on the front burner. And then stimulus, which Brian, I can't tell is that a month, is that two months, is it more? I don't know the exact timing. But what I do know is with Chuck Schumer as majority leader, the chances for a serious stimulus, like big enough to actually stimulate the economy, big enough to actually make cities and states substantially whole, is finally on the table now. And I've talked to Chuck Schumer about the need for a substantial amount of direct aid to go to New York City so that we can plug the budget gaps and start to recover. And I know he is tremendously devoted. So I'm really hopeful on that front, but until it happens, you know, we have a lot, we got to work through.

Lehrer: The country also has a new Assistant Transportation Secretary nominee. Why do I bring up that position? Because she was your progressive Transportation Commissioner and a guest heard plenty of time, plenty of times on this show, Polly Trottenberg. Never mind she'll report to Pete Buttigieg, and should – it should probably be the other way around. But transit is so key to the city's prosperity. Anything you're hoping Polly Trottenberg will bring to national policy?

Mayor: Oh, absolutely. I mean, she's – Polly Trottenberg was a great Commissioner of Transportation for this city and she was with me the entire run of this administration. And she did an amazing job and many accomplishments, but I keep coming back to Vision Zero. She was one of the key architects of Vision Zero. And I think she's going to help make that a national vision, which we need. I think with her as the number two person at Department of Transportation, we're going to see a lot more aid to mass transit, a lot more directed locally to the things that make an impact, a lot more support for bike lanes, a lot more support for Vision Zero efforts. And that's going to be funding first and foremost, undoubtedly, but I also think the policies are going to change to support these kinds of efforts. And Polly agrees, you know, centrally, we all agree. We got to get away from the automobile more and more. I mean, that's the central thrust here is we got to reorient our society away from cars and more and more towards mass transit and all other forms of transit. I think Polly's going to make a huge impact. I'm very proud of her. And also, on just a honorable mention, absolutely note Deanne Criswell our Emergency Management Commissioner is going to be the head of federal FEMA. You know, the person who's going to respond to disasters all over the country. One of our own is going to be running FEMA. And Deanne has been outstanding during this very challenging, horrible time we've been through. She's been one of the leaders of the City's response. Talk about impact for the city. I know with the FEMA administrator, being someone who just served New York City, that we're going to get the support we deserve and the consideration we deserve as we finally fight back COVID once and for all.

Lehrer: Austa in Manhattan, you are on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello Austa.

Question: Hello.

Mayor: Austa, can you hear us?

Question: Hi. Yes. Can you hear me?

Lehrer: Yes.

Mayor: Yeah. How you doing?

Question: Good. Good. Okay. So, my question is the Armory on 168th Street in Fort Washington is set up as a vaccination site. And it was my understanding that it was set up to provide for -- it's the only site in Northern Manhattan, which has been very hard to hit. And that it was to provide to a community that's been very hard hit. But in fact, it is only providing vaccinations for people who are patients of Columbia Presbyterian or their

system. If you go onto their website and try to get in, and you don't have a Connect account, which is an account that patients have, it says, okay, if you don't have that set up this account. And you try to set up the account and it says, I don't recognize you. It just seems unethical for Columbia Presbyterian to only be treating their patients when this community is in such need.

Lehrer: You know, I think I might have an answer to that because I live kind of around there. And I know somebody who was not in their system, who went through what you just described, but did succeed in signing up, just joining that New York Presbyterian Connect system without a record there. And then they were able to try to sign up for appointments. So, I think you can actually do it without any prior relationship. But Mr. Mayor, do you have any information about that?

Mayor: Yeah, no. I appreciate Austa's question because it gets to a bigger point. So, on the narrow point of this particular site, Austa please leave their information with WNYC. I want to follow up because I am concerned if a site's being run by any individual provider, they're supposed to open the doors wide, not end up excluding people. You're absolutely right. That's an area that was hit real hard. We need more vaccination capacity in Upper Manhattan. We of course have Harlem Hospital. But we are intending to add more sites. And this site is an important one and it needs to serve the maximum people. So, give your information, we're going to work to make sure that problem is fixed. But I think the bigger point is our goal is a very neighborhood-based approach to vaccination. We want vaccination sites in all sorts of facilities, schools, you know, armories, you name it, all over neighborhoods. We want to have vaccination sites in public housing developments. The only way this works and the only way this does not turn into an elitist exclusionary exercise is to bring vaccination to the people, particularly in the neighborhoods, hardest hit by COVID. Now, obviously we are nowhere near the supply we need to do that. But as a question of approach, a neighborhood-based site like this has to be inclusive of a neighborhood. And if it isn't, we have to intervene and fix that. And I'm going to move on that quickly.

Lehrer: To that point, I was reading in the last segment, which was all about vaccines. A Twitter thread from City Council Health Committee Chair Mark Levine, that starts there are alarming signs that covered vaccination in New York City is disproportionately leaving behind people of color. And the first thing he calls for is we need to see data on the racial breakdown of vaccinations. And we need to take action now he says to fix another egregious case of inequity in this pandemic. So, are you collecting data and would you collect data at his request on the racial breakdown of vaccinations?

Mayor: Well, I really respect the Council member and agree with him. But before his request, we already said yesterday, we're organizing that data and are going to put it out through our Health Department. This was a question actually at yesterday morning's press conference. And I said, of course we want to be transparent because we want to drive an equity-based approach. And I want the transparency to keep everyone honest. And Commissioner Chokshi said Health Department is organizing that now. We'll put it out publicly. But the bigger point – I agree with Mark Levine on the bigger point. We have to

understand there's a tremendous amount of hesitancy and mistrust, particularly in communities of color about the vaccine after the horrible history in this country and in the medical community of it, you know, experimentation on people of color and misuse of science. And just general distrust of government, which who can blame anyone for feeling? We need to reach especially deeply into the communities that were hit hardest by the coronavirus and simultaneously have the highest levels of mistrust. The way to do that is getting ever more local. Bringing in community groups that people trust and community leaders that people know. Speaking the language of the community. Sites right there in their immediate neighborhood. If this gets reduced to a small number of sites in places that are only being reached by folks who are already privileged, it's the exact opposite of what we need. So this is why the call from AUSA is so important. The 168th Street site is crucially located for Washington Heights, but it needs to be open to all. And then we need to go even more local from there. So, if you're in Washington Heights and if you're in Inwood, there's places as nearby your exact home as possible. And that's what's going to help us gain trust and willingness to step forward.

Lehrer: Our reporter Fred Mogul has a story on Gothamist. Brownsville Hospital, I think it's Brookdale Hospital in Brownsville offers vaccinations without appointments to improve equitable access, outsiders take advantage. And it's about people coming in from higher income neighborhoods, I guess you'd say, whiter and higher income neighborhoods and maybe taking a lot of the slots that are intended to go to people in Brownsville. Are you aware of that? And would there be any solution to that?

Mayor: I want to get the details on that. And the specific, what they've specifically experienced. But I'm worried about this phenomenon. I really am. Part of why we have started doing vaccinations in public housing developments directly is to really encourage the people who need the help the most to get it. And to make it as accessible as possible, answer people's real questions and concerns. Again, have community leaders right there, clergy right there, you know, folks who are trusted. I think when we do that kind of approach where we're bringing the vaccine to people in every sense. And engaging them and really making sure that folks who are in the greatest danger, where did people die the most? Let's be, it's just such a painful reality, but let's be honest about it. People passed away disproportionately in lower income communities of color and immigrant communities. The dangers still exists in those communities. And that's where we need to vaccinate the most. So, having the sites in the communities and the appointments, actually the virtue of appointments is you can really help make sure it is folks from the surrounding community who are in the greatest need and the greatest danger. That said, of course, Brian, any, you know, the next question anyone might ask, well, what about, you know, folks who happen to be doing better economically, for example? I want them vaccinated too. We have sites all over. And we are – you know, our goal is at least 250 sites in the city, every kind of neighborhood. But my deep concern is if we don't saturate the areas where there's the greatest danger, that we lose lives that could've been saved.

Lehrer: Judith in Park Slope, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi Judith.

Mayor: Hi. Thank you so much for taking my call. The reason I'm calling is today's my birthday. I'm 79. I had my first Moderna on the 19th this week in Bushwick, they were lovely. And they were able to schedule a second appointment for me on February 16th. That day at home, I got an email confirming my appointment –

Lehrer: Whoops. You know, what? Her line completely dropped off. But I see from the notes –

Mayor: I didn't get to say happy birthday to her.

Lehrer: I think her question was going to be concern for getting the second dose on time with the shortage. Is that going to be an issue when we get to that point in the city in a few weeks?

Mayor: No. Very important question. So, first of all, I hope Judith is listening, has the radio on. Judith, happy birthday to you. Yeah, we are protecting those second dose appointments. This is a really important question, Brian. I want to make sure people understand when I say we need flexibility with the second doses, I want to explain how we do that while protecting the appointments. So, let's use her exact example. Her second dose appointment is February 16th. Today, January 22nd, obviously almost a month away. Right now, in New York City, we've got – the last count I had was about 65,000 doses being held for second dose applications that couldn't happen for two or three weeks. So, in effect, from my point of view, an artificial reserve that they're being held in a way that unfortunately keeps them from being used for first doses of folks who need some protection right away. Anyone who is 65 or over should get that first dose in principle, we want as many people as possible to get that first dose. It provides about 50 percent protection just from the first dose. What Dr. Varma explained yesterday, my senior advisor during our press conferences, the medical ideal is you get your second dose exactly on, you know, the three or four-week mark, depending on which vaccine you're using. But if it's a week later, for example, it was a week later beyond the ideal date or two weeks later, it doesn't change the basic equation. You still have had protection from the first dose in the meantime. Once you get the second dose, it is 100 percent, you know, effective just as it would have been a week earlier. When I say – it gives you everything that it would have for the long haul, whether you get it in her case on February 16th, or February 18th, or February 20th. And so what I want to make sure, and I hope you hear the egalitarianism in this point, I can't abide – I've talked to a lot of seniors who are just scared to death right now, honestly, of this disease. And the notion that we could be giving them a first dose right now. And then in the meantime, really I do believe the federal structure is going to come into gear and produce a lot more, we can back sell our supply and be ready to give those second doses. And we do plan to give them on schedule for everyone who's currently scheduled. I just think that's a much more decent and humanitarian approach than withholding doses from people who need them now.

Lehrer: You know, my producer who screened her call has another detail to add from what she originally said before she got on the air and it's fairly alarming. She said she had a second dose appointment for a specific date and just got an email that it was canceled. So, you can imagine how that feels when you're scheduled for that second dose, that should be

delivered in a timely fashion. I heard what you said about there being some wiggle room in that medically, but is that the first you've heard of an actual cancellation of a second dose?

Mayor: Yeah. Overwhelmingly, what I've seen is second dose appointments are made and kept. I think there may be cases where there's some movement where they say, 'Hey, we had you for February 16th. We need to move it a few days.' Again, same impact. You're going to get your second dose. And we are absolutely adamant that anyone who gets the first dose, we're going to make sure they get a second dose on the exact day or close to it. So, I wish we could get her contact information to make sure that we get her that rescheduling immediately. And if you're producer knows how to reach her or anything more about her, we want to get to her and work that out.

Lehrer: We're going to try to find her. I want to ask you about the discipline matrix that you unveiled this week for the NYPD, specific acts of discipline for specific acts of misconduct. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm not seeing where the Commissioner or Chief of Department are subject to any specific discipline even though your Department of Investigation found them to have failed in a number of respects on their leadership during protests last summer. So, if I'm seeing this right, why are they – why are acts of leadership that result in police brutality, exempt from the matrix while the rank and file gets held to account?

Mayor: I just – I respect the question, but I couldn't disagree more with the way you're framing it. Read the DOI report. It does not say people condoned brutality. We never would condone brutality. We are here to stop brutality. That's the whole idea of what we've been doing for seven years. The DOI report – and anyone who cares about this topic needs to read the whole report. It's extremely instructive and it's tough. It's hard hitting, but it's very clear about the structural changes that need to be made. The policy changes that need to be made. But it's also very clear about the extraordinarily complex, ever-changing environment that happened in May and June and the ways that the Police Department had never confronted a situation like that before and why they needed to do things differently for the future. The matrix is about anyone – and you can see exactly every single offense in the discipline matrix. I urge folks who care about this nyc.gov/disciplinematrix. It's all there in black and white. If an officer commits any of the offenses that are listed, there is, of course, due process, as everyone deserves in our society, that if they are found guilty, it says the exact penalties that apply. And that's exactly what is going to happen from this point on. We've never had this in the history of New York City. I don't know of other parts of this country that have things like this. There may be a few, but it's certainly not the norm. This revolutionizes discipline because it's public, Brian. I just want to make sure; I know you care about transparency, the exact charge, the exact penalty, all public, and then everyone who is held accountable to produce within this matrix, and this is what will happen from this point on in New York City.

Lehrer: I have two follow-ups. One, you referenced the Department of Investigation, DOI report, which you accepted last month. One of their recommendations to avoid brutality at protests, as I understand it, was for the NYPD to stop relying on what's known as the Strategic Response Group to police protests. And yet on Monday, we saw close to a hundred

SRG officers breaking up that MLK Day protests that resulted in accusations from multiple protestors, who our news department spoke to, who said they were brutalized by SRG officers, including a woman who was hospitalized and a young man who was given concussion treatment. So, if you accepted the DOI report, why is the NYPD still sending officers from that unit to police small marches?

Mayor: I want to say at the outset I really think what is so powerful about the DOI report is it points out what everyone did, good and bad on, you know, all around, individual actions and systematic problems and everything. I really think we have to look at what happens at each one of these incidents and not paint it as, you know, everyone did something right, or everyone did something wrong because unfortunately we still do have instances where in an otherwise peaceful protest, some individuals choose to do violent acts and that changes things. But to your bigger question, Brian, there were protests last night. SRG, not there. There were protests the night before, in Times Square, SRG not there. Community Affairs, front and center. That's what is going to happen. Monday night had an abhorrent reality. After what happened at the Capitol, which was, I think 12 days before, Monday night – after what happened at Capitol, a group approaching City Hall, there was particular sensitivity. No one anywhere in this country wants to see a repeat of what happened at the Capitol from, you know, anybody of any ideology. So that did cause some special conditions. But I'm affirming again, what you're going to see going forward is Community Affairs upfront, the most limited policing possible at protests. And again, I can prove it to you because you can go look at what happened last night and the night before. That's going to be the model. And that's what the DOI report called for, and I agree with that entirely.

Lehrer: And one more, the news organization, The City, reported this week that the CCRB, Civilian Complaint Review Board, has substantiated 40 instances since Eric Garner's death of officers using prohibited chokeholds, and that none of those cops have been fired. So, will this discipline matrix apply retroactively? And if not, what do you plan to do about those officers?

Mayor: The discipline matrix, from this point on, literally today on, anyone who utilizes a chokehold and is a member of the NYPD – and it's proven because there is due process – it's very clear in the matrix the result is termination, couldn't be clearer. It's right there in writing. And the NYPD has signed an agreement with the CCRB agreeing that that is how things are going to go. The cases before, each one's through their own process. Some substantiated, some not, some resulted in discipline, some are still pending. By all normal American law, you can't do double jeopardy, you can't retry someone for the same offense, but you can, going forward, apply these standards. And that's what we're going to do consistently.

Lehrer: Was this news story, the first you heard of these 40 CCRB substantiated chokehold violations, and what would that say about your police commissioners' – several of them – commitment to police reform that this was taking place in so many cases, seven years after Eric Garner?

Mayor: It says we have to do better. Again, the allegation is not the same. We, I always say, if you believe in due process, whether you're a progressive or a conservative, if you believe in due process, due process yields individual results. So sometimes an allegation, and there's a full investigation, there's due process, and there's a trial and someone's actually found innocent. No, that didn't happen. Or there's some extraordinarily important extenuating circumstance, but I'm going to put it in the here and now, and going forward, I think it should be clear as a bell to all our officers from this point on, they're all quite aware, everyone's aware, this discipline matrix now governs New York City. If you utilize a chokehold – and again, let's put aside true extenuating circumstances. Like it's the only way to save someone else's life or something like that. If you utilize a chokehold inappropriately against law, against department regulations, you're found guilty, you're going to be terminated. It's as simple as that.

Lehrer: Rachel in Queen's you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Rachel.

Question: Hi.

Lehrer: Do we have you, Rachel?

Question: Hi. Hello.

Mayor: There you go.

Lehrer: We have you now.

Mayor: Hey.

Question: Hi. Thank you so much for taking my call. My question is about the changes to admissions in middle schools this year, really all the schools, but I'm wondering why you waited until December 18th to announce that you were canceling all auditions for middle schools for the talent-based program? When there are children who have literally been preparing for years for schools that have 30 spots that are now going to be lottery-based, and how at the same time you could say that you didn't cancel the G&T exams because it would be unfair to four-year-olds who are preparing.

Mayor: The reality of the middle school admissions is that it relies on things that we just don't have available. And that was the governing reality. There were not the same tests given by the State because of COVID. The grading situation has been thrown off. Look, I don't agree with – and I made that clear – I don't agree with the single test approach to anything. And this is the last time it's going to happen with a gifted and talented. It obviously doesn't require State standardized tests or, or grading history and all that. It's a different venue. But I don't agree with it and it's not going to happen anymore. But they are two very, very different things. I think the bottom line is we need to reevaluate all of this, both because COVID has thrown off the things that we used to depend on, but also because there's more and more questioning of whether the approach historically made sense or not, whether it really captured who kids are and their range of abilities and potential. And also,

whether it was inadvertently exclusionary. We got to – this all now needs to be re-evaluated.

Lehrer: Let me give Rachel a possible follow-up because, Rachel, did I hear you correctly? Are you talking about specific schools where there's an audition like with a musical instrument or something?

Question: Exactly for dance or for acting or for musical instruments, when all of these children have been preparing for years to audition for talent programs. I'm not talking about testing.

Lehrer: It's not about the G&T for academic admission to certain middle schools. It's – you understand the different categories, she's trying to raise, Mr. Mayor?

Question: No, I appreciate it. I did not understand that nuance in the original question. I apologize. Rachel, would you please give your information to WNYC. I want to follow up on this. Obviously, the main body of what we were doing in the announcement on the screen schools was responding to the lack of State testing and the lack of grades that reflected anything like a normal reality. And, of course, everyone's trying to work through the bigger issues of how to do schools going forward in an equitable fashion, but the audition point I do take to heart and let me make sure I understand exactly what accommodation we're trying to make there and how we're going to address it going forward, because I do hear there's a difference there, and I want to get you a good answer. So, if you give your information to WNYC we'll get you a direct answer today. And Brian, I'll be happy to give you an update next week.

Lehrer: Thank you very much. One more, Lizzie in Little Italy. You're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Lizzie.

Question: Hello. Good morning, Brian. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. I wanted to mention that Vision Zero has made me a safer driver for sure. And I want to express my appreciation for that. Can you guys hear me?

Mayor: Yeah. Lizzie, thank you. I wanted to hear what you want to say but I first just want to thank you because that was really one of the core ideas, to change the way we think and behave. And I really appreciate you saying that.

Question: I am much more cautious and I'm glad for that. I have other issues with it as my issue will be expressed. And I also understand the getaway from cars thing, but I live in Little Italy and many citizens, residents of that neighborhood really need their cars and cannot begin to think about paying five or six hundred dollars for a garage. So, our wonderful restaurants have taken up a lot of, you know, street space as you know, and that will increase probably during the summer unless we get this thing in hand. And I wanted to – I have a suggestion about parking, at least in my neighborhood, but would probably also apply to some other neighborhoods, but mine is the only one I know well, which is that there are many streets, especially Mott, Elizabeth, Mulberry where [inaudible] no parking

8:00 AM to 6:00 PM rules except on Saturday or Sunday are still in effect. It's no longer an industrial area. Those spaces are not needed as they once were for industrial deliveries. And I wonder if some of those stretches of blocks, there are about eight stretches of blocks, where if they were converted to alternate side parking – and again, your other gesture of making alternate side only two days a week is also awesome. Thank you very much for that. Could they not be converted to alternate side parking instead of 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM because they basically sit absolutely empty all day. And we've already lost a lot to restaurants and to Citi Bike things. So, what do you think?

Mayor: Yes. And, Brian, if I could ask a follow up of Lizzie for just a quick second. Lizzie, give your information please to WNYC. Yes, we're going to review those spots because if there is a better way to use them, I want us to do it. So, I'll make sure we understand exactly what you're talking about. But here's my question back to you. Thank you for recognizing what we're trying to do with Vision Zero, but I do want to reduce the use of cars in the city profoundly, but first and foremost, because of global warming and survival, let alone Vision Zero. Lizzie, for you, what would it make – what would you need to not need a car? What sort of changes would you need to see to not need a car?

Question: I would need to not have young children, elderly parents, and a dog. And there are – I have to visit – I'm tending to an elder out of town who needs regular help, and it would be impossible. It would be like a two-and-a-half hour trip if I had to take a series of public transportation options to get there. Sometimes I need it for shopping. If I do a big shopping I have to, I need a car to hold those groceries in. I can't get onto the subway. I can't afford to shop at Whole Foods. So, in order to get to a grocery store where I can, you know, carry – have like four bags full of groceries, I need to be able to transport them. So, I don't think that the no cars thing really works for everybody. And surely there has been a diminishment in – not during COVID because in COVID nobody wants to get on public transportation anyway. I used to subway all the time, you know, I'm not – but there are times when I have to have a car. I drive a 2003 car. But so, at this point, the public options do not cover people in my situation. It also doesn't cover people coming from out of town who just want to go to restaurants or shop or whatever in Little Italy. So that's my answer.

Mayor: That's a great answer. And I'll only say quickly, Brian, you know, I didn't have a car for a long time. What motivated me to have a car was when Dante was born and we had two kids and, very much like Lizzie is saying, we were dealing with kids, we were dealing with elders in our family, but I'm in a position now where when I leave office, I'm certainly not going to own a car. And I think there's a lot of New Yorkers who don't need a car, can do fine without one, use other options, you know, use Zipcar, use mass transportation, whatever it may be. But Lizzie makes a good point about, for some people, particularly in certain life moments, it's really valuable. So that's the balance we have to strike. Certainly, where there's parking we can make available, we will, but Lizzie, I do want to correct one thing very openly. We're going to keep the Open Restaurants program permanently. It's proven to be an amazing positive impact for the city on so many levels. And we need to bring our city back strongly. So, I do want to be honest with you, that's here to stay and I think it's going to be a great thing, but you're making a fair point. Where there are other

parking options available, we should be trying to figure out that as well. And I appreciate you raising this and please give your information to WNYC.

Lehrer: Lizzie, thank you. And, Mr. Mayor, thank you as always talk to you next week.

Mayor: Thank you, Brian. Take care.

###