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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 everyone on day three of our spring membership drive, we hope you will join us and be a WNYC member if you're not already.

And we begin, as we usually do on Fridays with our weekly Ask the Mayor segment, my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio, 2-1-2-4-3-3-WNYC, 2-1-2-4-3-3-9-6-9-2, or you can tweet a question, just use the hashtag, #AskTheMayor. Mr. Mayor, welcome back to WNYC.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you very much Brian.

Lehrer: First topic, marijuana. It looks from the news of this week that both you and the Governor are moving closer to full, in his case, or de facto, in your case, legalization or how would you describe your announcement this week?

Mayor: Well my announcement this week was about the NYPD and recognizing that we still have a problem with disparity in arrests and we still – I think – have a real concern about whether they are unnecessary arrests. You know the whole notion here has been to create more fairness and equality in the way policing works in this city and I think we've shown that is actually the way to a safer city and a better relationship between police and communities.

So we got rid of the broken policy of Stop and Frisk, we've retrained the entire police force in de-escalation where using implicit bias training now to help everyone treat everyone properly and recognize the biases in all of us. We are going to have body-cameras on all of our patrol officers by the end of the year. This is all about creating a dynamic of equality and fairness in policing.

But we looked at some of the things going on here and we said we've got to better. You know, overall, last year compared to four years earlier, we had a 100,000 fewer arrests which is a stunning figure. A 100,000 fewer arrests by the police while driving down crime simultaneously. I know that we can continue that trend. So there are still some unnecessary arrests that we can

address and certainly I don't accept – I don't expect in any and accept in any way disparity in policing.

If there is a dynamic where enforcement is different neighborhood by neighborhood because of demographics, we've got to fix that. We got to figure out a way forward. So I had a series of conversation with our Police Commissioner, Jimmy O'Neill, we agreed on a 30-day process for an overhaul of our policies related to marijuana enforcement and reform of those policies and in 30-days the NYPD will come back with a new updated approach.

Lehrer: The Governor said on Monday about recreational legalization, "to say well it won't be in New York I think is to avoid reality at that point". Do you acknowledge an inevitability of that as the Governor apparently does?

Mayor: Well he's got a point about what's happening in surrounding states. Obviously Massachusetts has acted and if New Jersey acts, which I think is likely, there's obviously that dynamic around us. I don't think there's an inevitability nationally yet because both of the profound political differences around the country but also because there's a lot of issues that still haven't been worked through, and this is what concerns me.

I can absolutely see the positive dynamics of legalization but I think some of the challenges have not yet been fully accounted for. For example, you know in the states that legalized, they still do not allow open smoking of marijuana in a public place. That's still an enforced crime. So the dynamics of how you decide to address that, which type of measure you use whether it's arrests, or summonses, or some other measure, and how you make sure that that enforcement is fair and equal, that's still necessary as a discussion in every state, including the ones that have legalized.

You also have the question of what will be the health ramifications, what will be the impact particularly on younger folks. Look, my great fear, I've said it before, is the corporatization of the marijuana industry, that you have giant corporations in the style of the tobacco companies, taking this opportunity and running with it and with the goal of trying to hook as many young people as possible on marijuana for the profit of those companies. And that has real ramifications for health and safety and that has to be addressed. Now if we're – I think as a country – if we're really trying to put things in order, we would say that we need to address those issues upfront and not make the mistakes we made with tobacco for example.

I fear in a free enterprise society that ordering of steps won't happen, but my hesitation still revolves around some of those issues. What I can tell you though is this action by the NYPD is an example of, certainly within the current laws, we need to do better so we're going to start that process. And if other changes are coming, we want to get ahead of them.

Lehrer: One other criminal justice question, policing question before we go to the phones, I see your Law Department asked a court yesterday to throw out a jury award in a civil suit, \$2.2 million, to the family of a mentally disturbed New Yorker named Mohammed Bah, shot to death by the police in 2012 after his mother had called for an ambulance. Now you weren't Mayor yet then but why are you disputing the verdict after it went through the jury process.

Mayor: Brian, whenever I don't know the details of something, I'll tell you. I'm actually not familiar with that case, as you said it did not happen while I was Mayor. I'm not familiar with the case and I'm not familiar with the Law Department's action. Often times the Law Department is working on, you know, a level of trying to defend the larger interests of the City and thinking about precedents and one thing or the other, but I don't know the specifics of this case. I'd be happy to comment later once I'm briefed on it.

Lehrer: Jun in Williamsburg, you are on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio. Hello, Jun.

Question: Hi, hello, thank you so much. Yeah my name is Jun Aizaki. I'm an architect based in Williamsburg, I have a company called Crème and we're – we're proposing a really cool project that is a bridge, a pedestrian and bike bridge that connects the Greenpoint neighborhood of Brooklyn and Long Island City in Queens and it's called a Timber Bridge, and we're actually doing Kickstarter campaign. This is part of the New York City X Design efforts which is amazing and –

Lehrer: And I'll note this is a good question for National Bike To Work Day, but what is your actual question to the Mayor, Jun?

Question: So look, the question would be – so this is one of the efforts that we're proposing because we feel like there's not enough sort of inter-borough transportation –

Lehrer: You want City funding for an East River pedestrian and bicycle bridge? Is that where you're going?

Question: Yes well – yes, we'd love to get – we want it – we'd love to get this idea in front of the Mayor and having this opportunity –

Lehrer: Alright, Mr. Mayor is this the first you're hearing of this?

Mayor: Well it's the first I'm hearing of this particular idea. NYCx is something that I think is an exciting notion of getting great ideas on the table from New Yorkers as to how to improve quality of life in this city and doing innovative things. So this is a really interesting idea from my point of view.

I don't know the specifics so I can't tell you how we would respond to it. But I can say on the notion of do we need more inter-borough transportation, absolutely. Which is why, for example, our NYC Ferry service connects Brooklyn and Queens, for example, along the waterfront. Connects the Rockaways to Manhattan. All sorts of connections that are not there sufficiently previously. We – NYC Ferry is part of that. That's why I think the BQX, the idea of having a line that goes through Brooklyn into Queens is critical. But, you know, bridges are a very interesting option too if they're viable, if we can afford them.

It's certainly worth looking at because the life of the city – it used to be, you know, Manhattan was the hub in many peoples' minds. I'm not sure that was true full reality, but that was the idea at least in how policy was made. What we now know is, you know, seven million of us live

outside of Manhattan and the connection between the boroughs, particularly between Brooklyn and Queens is an obviously example, is deeper and deeper. And a lot of people, that's what they need to do for work, for everything is just go between Brooklyn and Queens and never reference Manhattan. So we need a lot more of those type of options.

Lehrer: Betty in Far Rockaway, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi Betty.

Question: Yes thank you. I'm a resident of, as you said, Far Rockaway and I want to thank the Mayor so much for the ferry and the completion of the boardwalk. I love bicycle riding along there. It's just absolutely beautiful. Just one thing, I live, as I said, in Far Rockaway and there are tractor trailers that are parked there for days on end. People live, I think, in the area and use these tractor trailers and they don't want to park them I guess legally because I think it's illegal to park them overnight. And the local precinct seems to, you know, think it's not illegal. The local Congress people say no they're allowed to park there, but they're parked for Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and it's just such an eyesore for the community. Is that legal?

Mayor: Betty it's a great question. I appreciate – first of all, thank you for what you said about the ferry and the boardwalk. Me and my team, we're very proud of both as both examples of fairness for the Rockaways that wasn't there for a long time. So, permanent ferry service at the same cost as a subway fair, beautiful new 5.5 mile boardwalk, this is the kind of thing the Rockaways deserved a long time ago.

On your question, look, I want to know the specifics but my broad understanding is no, it's not legal in many cases to leave a tractor trailer on a street location. And this is a problem all over the city of trucks parking where they're not supposed to. I don't know the specific location. I don't know if there's some exception. But I want it taken seriously because I agree with you that kind of thing could be a real eyesore for a community. So if you'll give your information to WNYC, I will have my team follow up with the precinct. And let's get you a real clear answer on – it's either legal or it's not and why. If it's not legal, then we of course will direct the precinct to do more enforcement.

Lehrer: Betty hang on, we're going to put you on hold and take your contact information and definitely follow up with that. Mr. Mayor the Supreme Court ruled this week, as you know, that states can legalize sports betting. We were talking about whether New York should legalize marijuana earlier, should sports betting be legalized in New York in your opinion?

Mayor: Look, I haven't seen the details of the Supreme Court decision but I can tell you my gut reaction. I'm worried because, again, we have very addiction focused society. I mean let's be really cold about this, there's such powerful discussion finally going on about the role of addiction in American society. Obviously my wife Chirlane and everyone who has been working on the ThriveNYC initiative is focused on a broad range of mental health challenges and addiction challenges. Most notably now opioids which have become a huge, huge problem for this city and for this country.

That's one piece of the puzzle. I talked before about what would happen if another drug was legalized and how a corporate structure would take over an attempt to, bluntly, addict more people or hook more people, whatever word you want to use.

Well I'm worried about sports gambling. I'm worried about the fact – and gambling addiction is a real problem. A lot of people lose a lot of money. A lot of families see their finances ruined by one member of the family who has a gambling addiction. I could extend it further to the real discussions that are finally happening about the addictive qualities of the internet and how a lot of companies, bluntly, have manipulated that reality in the tech space.

Lehrer: This is another case where it looks like, like with marijuana, that New Jersey wants to go there. Would that influence your decision for New York?

Mayor: Look, I'm giving you the – in my view the bigger public service response. Meaning, before we think about revenue, which is bluntly driving a lot of this, before we think about job creation, which is never an irrelevant issue, it's an important issue. I'm trying to talk about what Pandora's Box are we opening here? So I'm deploy concerned, and I don't like – and the thesis I'm putting forward is I don't like how this connects with all the other addictive dynamics. I think it's dangerous.

Now, on the practical side Brian, of course if we're going to see it – if the Supreme Court is active then the doors are open nationally, and then real issues come up of what does it mean economically, what does it mean in terms of jobs, what does it mean in terms of revenue? And we have to grapple with those issues. But I hope in this state and certainly in our city we as much focus on the human impact as we do on the economic impact.

Lehrer: Norman in Harlem, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Norman.

Question: Hi, and good morning, Mr. Mayor. Thanks for taking this call. I want to bring to your attention a money-grab scam the FDNY has been imposing on buildings involving their five-year mandatory inspections of sprinkler systems. They are over inspecting for no reason. I'm the president of a small ten-unit condominium in Harlem who took over from a corrupt sponsor that left us with major headaches like not paying bills, losing records, and specifically here failing an FDNY flow test five years ago ignoring notices, accumulating violations, etcetera. We ended up paying huge fines and renovation costs to get our sprinkler system in compliance. We paid for a fire suppression contractor that cost us a lot of money to test the system –

Lehrer: And what is the FDNY doing that you call a scam? Norman?

Question: What they're doing is they're – I'm getting to that. We passed the flow test for the sprinkler system two years ago after it's cost us a lot of money. But a few weeks ago we got a notice from the FDNY saying that the test didn't count because it just cleared up the violations and did not – and so they're going back five years to the time that we failed the sprinkler system test –

Lehrer: Just to be clear, Norman, and in our limited time, are you saying this is just over-enforcement or are you alleging that somebody is on the take here, making money from this within the FDNY in some way?

Question: I'm saying that it must be a systemic problem with other buildings where the FDNY is disregarding tests that you could pass and going back to a five-year mandatory period of time instead of looking at when we passed the test two years ago, they're going back five years just because the code says five years.

Lehrer: And are you getting fined? Is that the money part?

Question: Well, that's – yes, exactly.

Lehrer: Alright. Mr. Mayor?

Mayor: I'm not familiar with the details, Norman. I obviously take it seriously if someone thinks they're being unfairly fined and I said this very intensely from the beginning, we do not want to fine people for revenue. That was the approach of the previous administration. That is not the approach I want. We have actually reduced fines in a number of areas. For example, small businesses – are down over 40 percent during this administration because we don't want to take people's money just to take their money. We want to take money only when it is to punish behavior that the person is unwilling to address and resolve and to put some kind of impediment in place against things that might undermine health and safety.

So, I don't know the details here. If you give your information to WNYC my team from the Mayor's Office will follow-up to make sure this was handled properly and if there's a problem, to get it addressed. But I certainly don't have the impression that the FDNY looks to do things like this for the sake of revenue. I think they're sticklers about safety. They're the gold standard in terms of fire safety for the nation. But I don't want even an inadvertent situation where people are being over-fined if there's some way of resolving the underlying issue without it. So, let's have our team take look at that and see if we can address it.

Lehrer: And your position is that the Bloomberg administration was fining for the sake of revenue and you stopped that?

Mayor: I use the parallel of small business – absolutely. I've said this for years and years and years going back to when I was public advocated. The amount of fines projected in the budget in the last Bloomberg term kept increasing each year not because people were more law breaking but because the City was using it for revenue. And it was a tough time for the City economically and fiscally. I get that there was a pressure but it's the wrong way to do things. By undermining small business and taking a lot of money out of the pockets of small businesses, actually was counterproductive in my view for our economic needs and for employment and for everyday people. So –

Lehrer: And your fines revenue has gone down?

Mayor: Yeah, in terms of small business as one indicator – about a 40 percent reduction in revenue from fines because we changed the policies and we said fix the problem. If you fix the problem, we don't want to fine you. If you persistent and refuse to fix the problem then we will absolutely fine you. If the problem is particularly serious and dangerous, we will fine you. But we don't want the small, kind of, arbitrary fines that used to be the norm. Now, I would say that for every agency.

FDNY, I would note, deals with some of the most sensitive safety issues. So, I'm giving them the benefit of the doubt that if they're doing something there's a real safety rationale. But I also want to make sure that there's no one who thinks that the mission is to get revenue first because that is not the mandate.

Lehrer: Okay, we're almost out of time. One politics question before you go. Public Advocate Tish James is getting in to the Democratic primary for New York State Attorney General, as you know, but she made it sound like she won't compete for the endorsement of the party that brought her to City Council, the Working Families Party. Speculation is she wants the support of the Governor and since Working Families has endorsed Cynthia Nixon, they're now toxic to Tish James. Want to weigh in?

Mayor: Well, I think very highly of Tish James. I'm going to sit down with her soon to talk about her candidacy but on the question of WFP, WFP has done a lot of good in this state. The Working Families Party, unquestionably has helped the state move forward on things like better wages and benefits for working people and a whole host of reforms that have only begun – we need a lot more of in terms of cleaning up Albany and making our elections more accessible, helping people to vote, getting money out of politics.

WFP has been in the vanguard of all of this. So, I would say that my impression is she has not made a decision that's final. I would certainly urge her to take the line. I think it's an important line in the general election. And if she is the Democratic nominee, she would want that line.

And you're right, this was the party that gave her a chance to run for the City Council originally and she won just on their line and I think that's an important part of their history, helping good progressives who might not have won otherwise to have a chance to serve in public office. So, I don't know what's really the behind-the-scenes reality. I just hope in the end she will keep an open mind because I think WFP matters a lot in this state.

Lehrer: Mr. Mayor, thanks as always. Talk to you next week.

Mayor: Take care, Brian.

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