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

**Brian Lehrer:** We begin as we usually do on Fridays with our Ask the Mayor segment, with New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio. Our phones are open for your questions for Mayor de Blasio at 212-433-WNYC, 433-9692, or you can tweet a question, just use the hashtag #AskTheMayor and we'll see it. Mr. Mayor, welcome back to WNYC.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, Brian, I like your power of positive thinking because someday there will be a Gateway Tunnel – Donald Trump or no Donald Trump.

**Lehrer:** Let's hope, I like your power of positive thinking. Have you seen though the big federal spending bill that Congress did just pass this morning? Anything in there, infrastructure, there is some infrastructure spending in there, so maybe the Gateway Tunnel is, but I don't think so, or anything else in particular interest to New York City?

**Mayor:** Oh, a lot of interest in New York City. So, first of all, on infrastructure although there is more that has to play out in the Congress on the specific appropriations it is a good sign to see actual federal dollars going into infrastructure.

We haven't seen the formal Trump infrastructure plan, we know already though that it will be heavy, heavy on privatization and private dollars in I think an unworkable way. What we really need, what has always worked for this country, is heavy infusions of federal money to fix infrastructure for the good of our people and our economy.

So, it's good to see that in the bill. It's great to see the payments to keep our hospitals going, hospitals particularly that server a lot of uninsured folks, that's been extended for several years. The Children's Health Insurance program, that extension is crucial. The aid for Puerto Rico, the disaster relief for Puerto Rico, as well as the Virgin Islands, Texas, Florida, that's fantastic. The anti-opioid funding that is so important for New York City and the whole country. There is a lot here that goes against the grain of what Trump talked about in his first budget which was classic republican cutting of domestic programs. What we see here is a lot of that domestic spending is back and that's very good news for New York City.

**Lehrer:** Are you shocked by that – kind of stunned by the amount of spending in this bill, we'll be talking about this later with another guest in national politics segment, but after all these years of the Republicans digging in against Obama budgets and trying to be the deficit hawks and worrying that our, you know, children and our children's children aren't going to be able to have the Social Security and Medicare, the current generation. That, boom, there is huge deficit going to be incurred by this new spending agreed to across the aisle.

**Mayor:** I think – I think that's a great question but I think the deficit hawks gave away their validity by voting for the Trump tax bill. You know, when you talk about adding \$1.5 trillion to the deficit by giving huge tax giveaways to the wealthy and corporations, it just made them irrelevant in the discussion going forward. You know, even conservatives can see through that a-mile-away.

What is sad to think about is that \$1.5 trillion in federal spending is that now lost revenue because of the tax bill, that could have gone straight into infrastructure – that would have transformed this nation. We've got to work for the day where that actually happens. But I'll tell you what I think is interesting here, don't underestimate the impact of the elections of 2017 around the country, the fact that it's 51-49 senate, the fact that the trend all over the country was democratic, I think the members of the house and senate can see that.

I think that the members of the House and Senate can see that. I think they understand that if they had not addressed things like opioids, if they had not provided money for hospitals, hospitals start failing because they didn't provide the support if that Children's Health Insurance program failed. I think this is actually the people speaking and being felt in Washington whether Republicans like it or not, they can count, they can see what people are saying, I actually think the people had a lot to do with this.

**Lehrer:** Let's take a phone call. Eve, in Manhattan, you are on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello.

**Question:** Hi, let me just get you off the speaker. Mayor, I've been following cases of members of our community facing deportation and ICE [inaudible] for example taking Rabi Ragbir, is this or is this not a sanctuary city? We've been watching NYPD assist ICE. We've watched them in our court rooms yesterday. What can you do to make this an actual sanctuary city, like Oakland?

**Mayor:** Eve, I appreciate the question, but I've got to be honest, because a lot of good, progressive people have asked me this question, I ask all of you, look at the facts that have been presented now since the day Donald Trump was elected and nothing has changed.

We have a law governing our actions that say, we do not cooperate with ICE unless someone has committed and been convicted of one of 170 crimes that are serious and violent, and that's all online, all available, that's a bill that was passed by the City Council which I signed four years ago. That's what governs us in this city. It is the right way to do things.

The NYPD does not participate in deportations in any other instance. And the situation of Mr. Ragbir, and I strongly support him being allowed to stay in this country, he has done a lot to help

his fellow immigrants, he should be allowed to stay. Under our law, he should be allowed to stay, we do not cooperate with ICE in the situation like he has.

Well what happened the other day, it was a single incident that was exceedingly aberrant, that was sparked by provocative actions by ICE agents and it nothing like anything we have seen before, and I've said consistently, and look at all the time since Trump was elected, NYPD does not participate in deportations. FDNY does not participate in deportations. So I ask people, look at the facts, recognize that we are very consistent in our policies, we provide legal assistance to those who are threatened with deportation, one of the few places that do that on a substantial level. We are exactly what we've been, nothing has change.

**Lehrer:** And Eve, thank you for your call. I think, if I remember correctly, but correct me if I'm wrong, that we've talked in the past about fair-beating not being one of the protected categories when it comes to sanctuary city, and I saw that you were in public disagreement with Manhattan DA Vance who is backing off most of the current prosecutions for turnstile jumping. What's your latest thinking on that?

**Mayor:** Okay, Brian I want to differentiate strongly, and it's very important that people get the facts on this, and I ask you and your team to help people get the facts. The 170 offenses, which I've talked about incessantly, it is a City law, it's visible for everyone, there is a list online, etcetera. Fare beating is not one of them.

That's an absolute misunderstanding of the situation. It has to be a serious or violent crime to be on that list and it means that someone is undocumented has gone through due process in a court of law then found guilty and convicted of one of those crimes. That's when we participate with ICE.

Otherwise something like fare beating, we would never participate with ICE, there is – here is where I think the confusion is. When someone is arrested for fare beating and finger printed, yes there is a federal information network that ICE can key into, but I think what we've seen is that ICE doesn't need that to do what is done, unfortunately we've seen very consistent, random acts by ICE all over the country. They don't need that information to be able to do what they are doing, they are doing it anyway, as much I disagree with what they are doing.

We believe that on fare evasion, that people shouldn't do it, and there has to be a sanction, but what is increasingly been the sanction is a summons, not an arrest. We've steadily reducing the amount of arrest. Where I differ with the DA is if someone is a constant recidivist and or has done serious crimes, we have to have the opportunity arrest. We cannot send the signal that anyone can evade fares on a regular basis. That is just not acceptable.

**Lehrer:** I guess you don't buy some of the reformers position that fare evasion is largely a crime of poverty?

**Mayor:** There is no evidence to my mind. We see, and it's not perfect research I think from any point of view, but we see people who evade fare and have money, and we see people who evade affairs who don't have money. We see people who evade fares who unfortunately have done

other criminal acts and obviously if someone has been involved in criminal acts they probably don't care much about evading fares as an additional act.

But it's a mix for sure. I'm not saying poverty doesn't play into this. I'm saying we can't use that as a reason to create an incoherent system. People have to pay their fare to go into the subway. We're trying to address poverty in so many ways, raising wages and benefits, getting people more affordable housing, paid sick leave, a whole host of things we're trying to do alleviate poverty but we cannot say because we're trying to fight poverty and income inequality, we're going to have an incoherent system for how people get on the subway.

Now, I believe in the Fair Fare, for example. I want the Millionaires' Tax passed in Albany to fund the MTA and that would include the Fair Fare, which is half priced metro cards for low income New Yorkers. That's an actual policy solution for poverty, but a free-for-all where anyone can go evade the fare whenever they want, that doesn't work.

**Lehrer:** Just to be specific about what's changed under the Vance plan and what your actual disagreement is, you mentioned recidivists, so as the Times puts it, if the person lacks a valid identification or has a history of similar arrests, there's the recidivists, they are booked currently on a theft of services charge, a misdemeanor carrying a maximum penalty of a year in jail. And it says under Vance's plan, instead of being brought from the police station to court, those defendants generally will be diverted into community service or social programs and if they comply, the fare beating charge will be dropped.

And it says an exception will be made only when the police have strong reason to believe that the defendant that poses a risk to public safety like a sex offender. So does that reduce basically to your sole gripe with the Vance plan is what happens with repeat fare evaders?

**Mayor:** Let me try to break it down quickly. First of all, Commissioner O'Neill and I are going to meet with District Attorney Vance because we really want to talk this through. I understand if you have got a singular offense, I don't want to see people arrested for that, I think summons and obviously alternative versions of sentencing make a lot of sense if it's something that someone has only done once or even very occasionally.

What I'm concerned about is, if you've got people able to consistently evade fares with no meaningful sanction, if there is not arrest somewhere in the equation, if there is consistent fare beating, then we don't have clear enough consequences and people will do it more and more. That's not fair to everyone else in this City who pays their fare. There is a lot of struggling working people who still pay their fare to get on the subway. They should not be in a situation where other people think they can get away with it on a regular basis.

So we have to strike a balance. We have been, the City of New York, the NYPD, consistently reducing arrests for fare evasion and that has worked, but there is a point where you need arrest in certain circumstances. I remind you overall, arrests in New York City in 2017 were down a 100,000 compared to 2013. So in four years we managed to yearly arrest rate down by 100,000 instances and still reduce crime.

We want to keep lowering arrests. The Commissioner said the other day, Commissioner O'Neill said, we think we can continue to lower arrests for fare evasion but we cannot take arrest entirely out of the equation or it is an invitation to some to consistently evade fares.

**Lehrer:** Our next Ask the Mayor question comes from a listener via Twitter, and this says, ask the Mayor any intention of re-examining laws about police officers sexually assaulting those in their custody? And let me to explain this to people who don't know what that refers to yet. There is a case of two Brooklyn police officers accused of raping a woman they had detained and their defense is that the sex was consensual and this has brought to the public's attention that it is legal in New York, as in most other states, for cops to have sex with people currently in their custody. Talk about a power imbalance. Raising questions about the legitimacy of consent, so do you think that should change?

**Mayor:** Oh absolutely. This is – this is unacceptable that someone who has the power over another person in that circumstance would not be held accountable for their actions is unacceptable for me. So I fully back state legislation, City legislation, both to insure that sex in that situation would be treated as rape.

You're right, there is a horrible power imbalance, it's unacceptable. And by the way, an officer on duty should not be engaging in something like that even beyond the criminality question as a matter of their professional responsibility should never be engaging in any sexual conduct like that. So no, we need the law to be crystal clear. There have to be very severe consequences for that.

**Lehrer:** Can you change that by mayoral decree as New York Police Department policy while you wait for, I guess the State legislature to do something legally?

**Mayor:** The – I am not an expert on the current administrative rules related to this but I am pretty certain that the NYPD has clear ways of addressing this right now. I think the piece that was missing was the criminal status. I can certainly get back to you on how it's handled specifically but it's obviously inappropriate behavior from the perspective of the professional standards of the NYPD. Again, as you said, what the officer claimed was it was not illegal. We now need to make sure it's additionally illegal.

**Lehrer:** And somewhat related, I see the City has a new anti-domestic violence campaign that you launched this week. Tell us about it.

**Mayor:** Well, my wife, Chirlane, our First Lady, took the lead on this, and the idea is to make it much easier for those have survived domestic violence to access the help they need. So, there's an online portal which provides a lot more information in a lot clearer fashion than in the past, really to empower women – and it's not always women, but it is often women, obviously, who have gone through this to know where they can turn for help, that a lot of help is available. The website is NYC-HELP. And it is one of the ways that we make sure that whether it is knowing where the centers are that you can turn to for help, knowing how you can get help with housing, knowing what your rights are, how you can get legal assistance, the whole set of needs is laid out there.

**Lehrer:** Next question, also from Twitter, a listener asks, can you ask the Mayor what is he planning to do with TLC – Taxi and Limousine Commission – to stop the abuses of their summons and if he will try to limit the amount of cars from Uber and Lyft. People are committing suicide because they are desperate, says this writer. And again, for people who don't know this story we did a segment on it earlier in the week, but there was a suicide this week, as you know Mr. Mayor, of a livery car driver in front of City Hall and he left a note saying basically his suicide was a political act because of various grievances with the regulation of taxis, but mostly that the City is allowing Uber to flood the streets with competition making it impossible for fulltime drivers like him to make a living anymore. What's your reaction, both to his suicide and to his issue?

**Mayor:** Yeah, I want to speak to that, I just want to do one correction. In my haste, I said NYC – on the previous question about domestic violence, I said NYC-HELP, but I meant to say NYC-HOPE. My apology. NYC-HOPE, H-O-P-E, is that website for help that could be provided to survivors of domestic violence. I also want to let everyone about the City's domestic violence hotline available 24/7, which helps any survivor to know all the help they can get right away and there is that hotline. You can call 1-8-0-0-6-2-1-HOPE. 1-8-0-0-6-2-1-HOPE.

On your question, Brian, I think we have to separate this into a couple quick pieces. First of all, my heart goes out to the man who took his own life and to his family. I've said, we've got realize when that happens, there may be other societal factors, but it also begins with someone unfortunately dealing with their own struggle and with some kind of mental health challenge and folks who have that challenge or know someone in their life who are considering suicide should turn to our mental health hotline, 8-8-8-NYC-WELL.

We cannot look at a situation like this and just go immediately to a societal analysis. We also have to say, something else was going on in that individual's life, and if we see situations like that there is a chance to help immediately by calling that number and getting guidance from a professional.

On the larger points, I think there is two things to say. One is larger technological change is what undergirds everything we're talking about here. Before the sharing economy developed so intensely the dynamics around for-hire vehicles were simpler, maybe more predictable for people who were working in that field.

Technological change has upended a lot of those assumptions and it's clearly consistent with a lot of the things we're dealing with all over the country that bluntly there is very little policy for and we better start grappling with this as a city and a country. We've got to get ahead of some of this technological change on a policy level to help protect peoples' livelihoods and avoid so much dislocation.

The specific issue, yes, I think we have to find better ways to regulate the for-hire vehicle sector in general. I think we need a consistent approach across the sector. A couple things that are very immediate, we've taken some substantial actions the last few months to ensure that disability access to vehicles is consistent across the sector more than it's been.

I've talked in Albany about some of the things we need to do to make sure that if we move to, for example, a surcharge on for-hire vehicles for the MTA. That it is consistent across all sectors of for-hire vehicles whether it is an Uber, a Lyft, or whether it is a livery cab, or whether it is a Yellow Cab or green cab. But we did make an effort a few years ago to try and put some kind of limits on the way that the sector was evolving to create some order. That did not work. Obviously the City Council was not ready to move on that.

We have to come back and look at what is a single comprehensive vision for the future of our for-hire vehicle sector that can make sense to everyone involved. That's something we're going to be working on in the coming months to see if we can put together.

**Lehrer:** Do you have any reason to believe that the new City Council is going to be any more receptive than the old City Council? Particularly when it comes to what the deceased driver's main issue was, the number of taxis of any kind on the street in the defense – in defense of the ability to make a full-time living at the wheel?

**Mayor:** I do believe this City Council will be more receptive because what I think what happened last time was, you know, in the rush of events instead of figuring out how to slow down and resolve outstanding issues, you know, at a certain point there was a decision to just pull away. I think we have a chance now to do this in a more orderly fashion and make more sense of it.

I also think that you'll remember back then, we feared that the growth of the for-hire vehicle sector was affecting congestion. A lot of people doubted that. There was an initial report that actually we commissioned that in many ways added to people's doubts, it said maybe it's not as bad as we thought. But now I think we are getting more and more evidence that unfortunately it's true. You know, in the last two or three years a lot has changed with congestion. I think we are seeing more and more impact from the for-hire vehicles. So we need to now put that all into an orderly process with the City Council and see if we can come up with a better set of rules across, again, the whole industry. A set of standards that apply equally on many important issues. As I've said, examples like disability access and how we fund the MTA wrapped into that discussion

**Lehrer:** HP in Manhattan, you're on WNCY. Hello HP.

**Question:** Good morning Mr. Mayor. I'm a first time caller. My name HP [inaudible] and I live in Manhattan. During last year's Veterans Day celebration I was moved when you talked about your dad. Like your father I'm a veteran of World War II. I thank you for what you've been doing for veterans, however there are 300,000 veterans in New York City who everyday pay full fare on the subways and buses. I get a discount because I'm an old man but what about the younger veterans? They made sacrifices as well. I don't know if you're aware of it, but there is an incentive before the MTA which asks them to extend to veterans younger than 65 the same discount as given to seniors. The beauty part of it is you have the power to change it now because there's no legislation required and systems are in place to implement it.

**Lehrer:** And let me get a response for you HP from the Mayor, and thank you for your service. Mr. Mayor?

**Mayor:** Yes, HP thank you so much for all you've done for this country. Thank you for also – I appreciate that you recognize the passion I feel about what my dad went through in World War II and [inaudible] issues and for every family particularly who's seen a vet wounded. My dad lost half his leg on Okinawa and it affected his entire life, every minute thereafter. You know, I don't think – I don't think a lot of folks, unless you've gone through something like that or have been in the family, you know, it's hard to recognize the level of sacrifice and the impact over generations after.

So, first of all, we now have something very good in New York City, Department of Veterans Services. We've done a lot more than ever before in this city to help vets get employment, get mental health services, get access to housing. We're adding more affordable housing for vets. We've done a lot to get vets who are homeless off the streets. There's much, much more to do.

I think it's a real interesting proposal. I have not heard that one before HP. It is the MTA, and I like to remind everyone we don't control the MTA, the State does. But it's something we can certainly talk to the MTA about. And I think it's a very worthy proposal. I can't pass judgement on it until I get more details but I'm glad you put it on my plate here because it's something that I want to take a look at.

**Lehrer:** Our next caller is Lauren from Manhattan. You're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello Lauren.

**Question:** Hi, hi Brian. Mr. Mayor, my son attends a private school for special needs students and he's been there since 2013. Every year we sue the DOE for tuition reimbursement while we pay the school upfront. Every year the DOE settles with us because they agree that he needs these services that they can't provide. And while I'm really grateful that there is this option, I'm calling about the length of the wait and the enormous financial burden that it puts on families like ours. In 2014, I read in an article how you were planning on streamlining the process because of the burden, and it's really bad this year. And it's really tough for families to come up with this money and I would like you to address that please.

**Mayor:** Lauren, thank you, and first of all, I really appreciate you raising the issue. And I often say that, you know, parents in general in this city it's – I've been a parent for a long time, it's tough to be a parent in New York City. I love my city, but it's a tough place to be a parent, and it's especially tough for parents with kids with special needs and our job is to make it easier, not harder.

Here's what we've done, and here's what we have to do. We have given an order, and I want to thank folks in the State Senate, State Assembly worked hard on this, pushed us on this, but it's also something I already wanted to do. The order was, stop making this a litigious, difficult process. Stop trying to tie up families, in effect, to save the government money. That's what was happening for a long time. My order was, get to a resolution as quickly as we can. If there's a true, huge disagreement sometimes, unfortunately, there's no option but to go to court. But, in a



huge number – a very big percentage of these proceedings we can get to an outcome much quicker, much better in a collaborative process. That’s what’s been happening much more. I’ve heard that from a lot of families. And it’s costing the City of New York a lot of money but I think it’s a worthy investment.

On the question of – the situation such as you laid out, if the – the IEP hasn’t changed, the plan for the child hasn’t changed, if the placement hasn’t changed, we’re now trying to get in place the idea that you can have a kind of three year window where if we see the things are not changing we just keep continuity in the placement and provide the funding. And try and, again, reduce the amount of process and speed it along.

I would like you to share your information please with WNYC so we can follow up individually to see how we can speed up your process. I think you make an important point. I don’t want to see parents – there’s so many parents in this city that just don’t have the money to shell out upfront, or it’s a huge burden. I don’t want to see that happen if we can avoid it. We have more cash flow than parents have when you’re talking about the City of New York. So, I want to continue to fix that process. I’ve seen real progress, I’ve seen it can – you know, even the DOE bureaucracy, which is legendary, can move, can improve. We’ve got more to do and I want it to be a lot faster. So, I want to see if we can help you but I also want to make bigger structural changes.

**Lehrer:** And Lauren we will take your information off the air for the Mayor’s Office to contact you so hang on for a sec. Also on education, Mr. Mayor, you announced this week that high school graduation rates are up for the fifth year in a row, now more than 74 percent, congratulations. But, the education website Chalkbeat cautions that number may be less than 100 percent meaningful because the State has made it easier to earn a diploma, and they note that CUNY reports college readiness rates are 10 points lower than the graduation figure based on those who come to CUNY and still need high-school level remedial classes. In the fullest telling possible, what is the rising graduation rate mean as you see it?

**Mayor:** There’s no question it means we as a city are making progress. It’s across all demographics and all boroughs. So it is clearly meaningful. The tests and requirements over the years keep changing but when you see consistent patterns like this, of course it means something. The graduation rate is plummeting. The graduation rate used to be 20 percent or more not long ago in New York City I believe it’s 7.8 percent now in this latest update. You know having a graduation rate over 74 percent, highest in the history of this city. It means a lot.

But the point underneath it Brian, you’re absolutely right. One, I want to move that graduation rate a lot farther a lot quicker. I want the college readiness levels to catch up much more with the graduation rate. Now we see enrollment in college going up. We’re at the highest ever enrollment of our kids in college ever. And so, meaning kids who go through four years of New York City public high school then enrolling in a two-year or four-year college, we’re at the highest percentage. I want to say 56 percent from the class that graduated last year enrolled in a college. That is a knowable fact. That is an objective fact because you’re talking about all the colleges out there with their standards accepting our kids at a higher level than ever before. And our kids having the requirements ready.

But, it's absolutely right to say our college readiness levels are not as good as our graduation rates. We've got to align those two. And we've got to close the achievement gap which is what the Equity and Excellence vision is all about. It really starts at the beginning which is why not just Pre-K For All but 3-K For All is absolutely vital and we're expanding 3-K rapidly. It also is about getting our kids reading on grade level by third grade. This is one of the biggest issues facing New York City that is getting the least attention. We have to rapidly improve our ability to get kids reading on grade level by third grade. That opens the door for them to succeed through the rest of their education, and that's what the Equity and Excellence plan calls for. So –

**Lehrer:** Now that you –

**Mayor:** – definitely good news.

**Lehrer:** Now that you've had universal pre-K for a number of years, have you seen that? Because that was one of the things that it was supposed to change, right, was the equality of kids from different income families at that third grade reading level. Can –

**Mayor:** Well we're –

**Lehrer:** – you measure it yet?

**Mayor:** Go ahead, I'm sorry.

**Lehrer:** I'm just asking can you measure it yet?

**Mayor:** We're just about to be seeing those results. Remember that the 3-K – excuse me, the pre-K expansion began in earnest for the school year beginning September of 2014 going into 15 then got the full strength September 15 going into 16. Those kids are now aging up to the point that we're going to see them going into third grade soon and we're going to see what results they get. So we have not yet felt the full affect.

But I want to say this, pre-K was step one, 3-K is step two, getting kids reading on grade level by third grade is step three. They all synergize. But, this is going to be a huge focus of the next four years, that third grade reading progress. There's no question, and every educator I've ever spoken absolutely is certain, we're going to see pre-K and ultimately 3-K effect that equation. It stands to reason – I was in a 3-K classroom, three-year-olds in Brownsville, Brooklyn just a few days ago and seeing these kids already dealing with the kinds of concepts, the counting and the letters and the things that are going to be essential to their education future. At the age of three in Brownsville that has often been underinvested in and kids who have not had as much opportunity, to see the turnaround that happens when you give that opportunity to kids at the age of three, it was breathtaking. So there's no doubt in mind we're going to see that have a big impact on reading levels in the next few years.

**Lehrer:** Alright last thing, we'll stay in the education sector. I see the Department of Education is putting a halt to a father-daughter dance that had been held at P.S. 65 in the Stapleton section

of Staten Island, putting an end under a gender inclusivity policy. The Assemblywoman from there, who of course was also the Republican candidate for mayor last year Nicole Malliotakis, disagrees with the decision. Do you defend this as necessary in the fight for gender equity?

**Mayor:** I think there's a way of bringing all these pieces together positively, Brian. I am not familiar with all the details but my understanding is that dance will go on, it got rescheduled to make sure it was inclusive. Look, there's all kind of care-givers in the world, there's all sorts of families, we want to respect them all. If a father wants to bring his daughter to a dance, that's a great thing but we want to make sure other folks can also participate according to how their family looks. So, I think the idea was they are rescheduling – this is my understanding, rescheduling it soon and making it more open, more inclusive. I think everyone wins in that equation.

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

**Mayor:** Take care, Brian.

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