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

**Brian Lehrer:** It's Brian Lehrer on WNYC. And time now for our weekly Ask the Mayor call in, 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, just use the hashtag #AskTheMayor. And yes, it'll be kind of truncated today as a – hey, a ceremonial reopening of Coney Island has to happen on its own schedule. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Welcome back to WNYC.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, Brian. I want you to know I'm sitting here at P.S. 90 in Coney Island, just steps away from the Cyclone. And I am honored to have been one of the first riders on the Cyclone. And the rides are open at Coney Island. It's an amazing feeling as part of the rebirth of the city. And I have one other piece of news for you, which is yesterday in New York City, we set a record 104,600 vaccinations in one day in New York City, which is more vaccinations than there are total people in the City of Albany, New York. It's like we vaccinated a whole city in one day.

**Lehrer:** Is that the first day over 100,000?

**Mayor:** It is the first day – we broke 100,000 once before, but now we've broken it by substantially more. So, this is the shape of things to come. I think you're going to see in the weeks ahead, a half million a week, even more, 600,000 a week or more as we get more and more supply. And the demand has been really amazing, especially now that everyone is eligible.

**Lehrer:** Well, I thought maybe you'd be doing Ask The Mayor from the roller coaster. That would have been an experiment.

**Mayor:** I could do that. You'd get very dramatic responses, Brian.

**Lehrer:** Yes. Well, let's say this is just a metaphorical roller coaster ride, not a literal one every Friday. There's a lot of education news today. So, let me get to some of that with you. Today is the last day for the families who've been choosing all remote learning for their kids to opt back in for the rest of the school year. And for our listeners' context, the large majority of students had been previously opting out. How many are opting back in?

**Mayor:** So, today's going to be the decisive day and it's really important for parents to know you have until the end of the day to opt-in. We announced obviously that the two-case rule has

been ended, a new rule in place that will allow schools to stay open much more consistently and still be safe. So, we expect there will be a decent amount of activity today. But right now, we're well over 40,000 opt-ins. But we'll have the final number on Monday when we get a chance to really add up everything that comes in today.

**Lehrer:** I saw though that registration for any kind of kindergarten for the fall in the public schools is down by 12 percent compared to this year. Is that more privileged parents leaving or deciding on private school? Or parents of any means deciding on homeschooling for now because it's all so complicated? What do you make of that 12 percent drop in registering kids for kindergarten?

**Mayor:** I think it's too early to really judge what it means, honestly. I think what you're going to see is the recovery is going to move very quickly. The economy is going to come back and we're seeing amazing facts about the economic comeback already, thanks in large measure to the stimulus. You're obviously seeing the vaccination rate is astoundingly fast now. And I think you're going to see case levels go down. So, I expect Brian, a lot of people who have been away, are coming back. I expect a lot of people who are not sure what they wanted to do in terms of their kids' education will solidify their plans. And of course, families can sign up for kindergarten, you know, all through the spring, all through the summer. And in fact, some cities – excuse me, some families even sign up, you know, September, October. So, I think we will see a lot of folks come back in the course of the coming months. We are ready. New York City public schools, I want to emphasize this, will be fully open in September. We are assuming that every single child can be in school five days a week based on everything we know now.

**Lehrer:** Raquel in Clinton Hill, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Raquel.

**Question:** Hi, good morning. Thanks for taking my call this morning. Yeah, I have a subject where my nephew, he's 18, but he's disability. And he goes to a special school and I've been trying to get his ID, the non-drivers ID card. And we went to the motor vehicle and they said it, there was not sufficient documents that he needed. He needed an ID. But now we don't have an ID with his picture on it. So, they refused us to get an ID card. We have [inaudible] but he didn't have a picture with his ID on it.

**Mayor:** Well, Raquel, we can definitely help you. Will you – Raquel please give your information to WNYC. Department of Motor Vehicles, DMV is the State, but we can still help you work with them. And also we can get him an IDNYC, which is an absolutely formal, official photo ID. And it will help with everything you need. So, we can get that for you right away. Just give your information to WNYC please.

**Lehrer:** Anne in Park Slope. You're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello Anne.

**Question:** Hey Brian. Hey, Mayor de Blasio. How are you gentlemen doing today?

**Lehrer:** Okay, thank you.

**Mayor:** Very well, Anne. My head's spinning a little from the Cyclone but otherwise very well. How are you?

**Question:** Well, glad you and Luna Park are out there and having a great time. I'm calling because I have a situation. I applied for the New York State COVID Rent Relief extension back in December. And after many emails and delivering of paperwork, I qualified and was granted an award at the end of February. It took – I was told to wait two weeks for the funds to get disbursed to my landlord. They were not dispersed. I called, they said that there was a backlog and to keep trying. And back on March 24th, this program shut down. I cannot find anyone to help me get these funds to my landlord. Brad Lander sent me on to Robert Carroll and I'm assuming they're working on this. But I can't get a warm body. And I know I'm not alone in this. I'm hearing that a lot of people who qualified for rent relief in this second program, have not been able to get their funds to their landlord. And I don't know where to go to for help for this?

**Lehrer:** Mr. Mayor, is this the first you've heard of this since Anne says she knows a number of people having the same problem?

**Mayor:** Yeah. And part because if I'm hearing correctly, this is the State funding stream that somehow the State is not getting to people. And I'm always confused by the State of New York, but we're going to help Anne anyway. So, Anne, will you please give your information to WNYC? We'll have our Tenant Protection Office follow up with you. I have to imagine there's a way to get this corrected. If the money was allocated, it still should be available. We'll work with you to find a solution.

**Lehrer:** Good. Anne, you hold on too. We'll take your contact information. Speaking of being confused by the State of New York, the State budget got passed this week, as of course, you know. And we and others have been discussing the details. And one factor was that with the federal COVID relief bill money, Albany no longer had a deficit to close. Is the same now true of the City for its budget year, which begins July 1st?

**Mayor:** Well, we're so much better shape, thank God, because of the stimulus and because of the actions – I really want to give the State legislature credit and Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Carl Heastie really deserve credit here. I mean, they did something incredibly important by raising taxes on the wealthy, finally ensuring that the wealthy would pay more than their fair share of taxes and then devoting that money largely to our kids and families and honoring the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, a court decision from years ago, State had ignored it for years and years, multiple governors that ignored it, and now the State legislature took charge and New York City is going to get its fair share of education funding finally. So, we're in much better shape. In two weeks, I'm going to be presenting the formal city budget to the people of the city, to the City Council, and that will reflect all of the changes, but we're in so much better shape than we were before.

**Lehrer:** Well, how do you convince wealthier New Yorkers who may have left the city for pandemic reasons to come back, especially in light of the new tax rates – if they're really that wealthy, we are talking about people who make a million dollars a year or more under that no impact – but you want them here too paying their city taxes as well as their State taxes. And is it

related to the job you have to convince reluctant families that the schools are safe to send their kids into either to return for this school year or to register for kindergarten?

**Mayor:** Well, I'd say it's a little different. I mean, look, Brian, I think for this year a lot of families – it's a very personal decision – a lot of families have sort of the groove they're in now and remote and they want to keep it that way. Other families really want to get their kids back in-person learning with teachers and experiencing being with friends again and all, it really depends on the family. But September everyone will be welcome back five days a week, and I think that is crucial for the entire recovery of the city and things are moving really well, but New York City public schools have been the safest places in New York City, and that's going to help make everything else work.

But to the wealthy, look, this is a great place to live for everyone. There are so many people, including folks who've done really well, who just – this is the place they want to be because everything that's here, the cultural community, the restaurants, that every industry is here, for those looking to build their careers and their businesses, there's no place better to do it. So yeah, there's higher taxes, and that also means a lot more investment in things like education and culture and things that people want, and I think a lot of wealthy people understand that. But remember also, Brian, they got a massive tax cut from Donald Trump just a few years ago and they've been benefiting from that and many other previous tax cuts. So, I don't think there's anything that's happened here that's going to fundamentally change the decisions of most people who have done well.

**Lehrer:** Nicole in Brooklyn, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Nicole.

**Question:** Hi, thank you for taking my call. Tuesday afternoon, I parked my car with my four-year-old son, he walked in the house and I got out of the car. I was parked about two doors down and I was excited to find a spot on the block. I live on a very difficult spot – block to park on. And I – this man in front of me, in front of the neighbor's house, was sort of calling down the block, these people down the block, all of a sudden, he turned and then shots were fired, and I was right there as it happened. I was happy my four-year-old got in the house, and they found bullet casings right by where I was standing in addition to other places on the block. Two bystanders were injured although I think they were around the corner, so I didn't actually see the people who were shot. And I want to just, you know, I live in right below the Parade Grounds on Prospect Park on 18th and Keaton. And I know gun violence has increased in our area, this is in broad daylight, four in the afternoon, and, you know, I've thought about this and I want to know what's being done? What's being done? There were 40 police officers or more who covered our block for hours. Like, I don't know what that means, what comes of it or whatever else.

**Lehrer:** Or how you feel safe tomorrow, right, Nicole?

**Question:** Right, and so I walk out the door now and I, you know, this was only three days later, but when I opened the door even to put the garbage outside or something like that, I very carefully look from one side to the other, and when I had to take my son down the block, I carried him – I have a one-year-old and a four-year-old – I carried them right in front of me so [inaudible] cover. We could do that –

**Lehrer:** And you're younger one is making their radio debut right now and thank goodness your four-year-old got in the house safely. Mr. Mayor, gun violence is increasing in the city. You don't need me to tell you.

**Mayor:** Yeah, Nicole first of all, as a parent, I'm feeling what you're saying very deeply and it must've been terrifying, and, you know, parents first name thing, obviously, is anything to protect their children. So, I'm very, very sorry you went through that, and I'm sure it was very upsetting. And look, we have seen something after years and years of reducing gun violence steadily, we saw something horrible last year, and we saw a lot of things disrupted in all our lives, but one of the worst parts of it on top of all the pain and all the illness from COVID, we also saw more gun violence. And I think it comes back to this horrible combination of things we saw, you know, people didn't have jobs, almost a million people lost their jobs, schools were closed, houses of worship were closed, things really were falling apart. We – I believe this fundamentally, this year is going to be very, very different because we're going in the reverse direction, thank God. The city is coming back. Jobs are coming back. Kids will all be in school in September. And we are also bringing communities and NYPD closer together. There was a lot of work that had to happen to build up more trust. I think that work is starting to really be felt and we're investing in community-based solutions to gun violence, like the Cure Violence Movement and the Crisis Management System, and the NYPD also is taking more guns off the street now than it has literally in 25 years. And there's way too many guns in our society. We all know this, and we all know they come from outside the State, but the NYPD is getting more of them now, and that will continue. So, it's very upsetting, but I know we will turn the tide and New York City has before, and we will again.

**Lehrer:** Thank you, Nicole. Best of luck to you and your kids. We've just got 30 seconds left, can you give me a quick take on vaccine passports being itself, the Excelsior Pass from the State? I see the Daily News describes you as giving a kind of qualified support to the Excelsior Pass, 30 seconds.

**Mayor:** 30 seconds? I think passports will play an important role and I understand why not everyone wants one and I understand the privacy concerns, but I think they will help. So, magic bullet, no. Part of the solution, yes.

**Lehrer:** Mr. Mayor, thanks as always stay safe out there. I hope your stomach settles down after your ride on the roller coaster and talk to you next week.

**Mayor:** Sooner or later. Thank you, Brian,

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