



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

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CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

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

Brian Lehrer: Welcome back to WNYC.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good to be here, Brian.

Lehrer: You want to weigh in on the gun policy issue we were just talking about with the editor of the Daily News, to start out?

Mayor: Well, yeah, first of all, I think the Daily News did an extraordinary thing today, and I commend them, because – it is a very blunt front page, but it made the point that, right now, there are people on the terrorist watch list all over this country who can walk into a Walmart, or anywhere else, and get a gun. There's the NRA aiding and abetting the ability of anyone to get a gun, including people on the terrorist watch list. There's the U.S. Senate that refused to, yesterday, vote on a bill that would deny firearms and explosives to terrorists. I mean, this is – this is unbelievable stuff. And I think this is a moment in history where something's really breaking. I really believe this. I understand why there's such a concern that the NRA has a stranglehold on the political process, but I think it's now reaching a breaking point. After all the college campus massacres, after the examples of terrorists having easy access to guns – I actually think something is going to break.

Lehrer: You know, I – you know, I keep thinking that too after each incident, and the outcry, and the public disgust. But look what happened just in the last day. The Sheriff of Ulster County, upstate near Kingston – did you hear this – has encouraged more of their legally licensed gun owners in the county to carry their guns on a more regular basis – to be a kind of citizen militia in the event of an active-shooter incident. And the Ohio House has passed a bill just yesterday in response, enabling – making it easier to carry guns in schools and daycare centers. So, I'm just saying, it looks like, as much as there's a response on the one side, there's a response on the equal-and-opposite side.

Mayor: That doesn't surprise me, Brian. But I think it's time for the many people in this country, and the many leaders who believe in sensible gun legislation, and certainly want to deny terrorists and folks with profound mental health issues the access to weapons that they have right now in this country – I think there is a moment for action. And one of the things I'm going to be working on is pushing public pension funds to divest from companies that create – that build assault weapons and put them into the hands of the public. Two of our New York City pension funds – the NYCERS Fund and the Teachers Fund – have divested from guns – gun manufacturing companies that literally create the assault rifles that are available on the open market and are part of these campus massacres and these terrorist attacks. It is time for the remaining three New York City pension funds to divest from those companies. It is time for pension funds all over the countries to divest. It's time for private equity funds to get out of the business of supporting gun manufacturers. This is where we could make a real difference. I understand the NRA's power. I understand we have a long way to go on the legislative front, so let's fight back with a different tool. I commend the Daily News for what they're doing. Let's fight back with a whole host of tools. Let's raise the temperature and let's, for one thing, get public money out of the hands of gun manufacturers.

Lehrer: If guns are legal and even Constitutionally protected, why try to divest from the gun manufacturers, as if to say your whole product is somehow immoral?

Mayor: Because if they're making assault weapons and if they're putting those assault weapons on the market so anyone can get them, no matter how unstable that person is, no matter how negative their intent, no matter if they're on the terrorist watch list – those companies are aiding and abetting the problem. That is a very different matter than manufacturing a gun that someone uses for personal protection, or manufacturing a rifle for hunting. I'm talking about the fact that time and time again, the weapon of choice of the evil doers is an assault weapon. That assault weapon is made by a small number of – you know, the ones we've seen most recently – made by a certain number of firms in this country that benefit from public pension fund investments; that benefit from investments from private equity firms. My line in the sand is, if you manufacture assault weapons, you should not have any public money going into your firm. And that will – let's face it, sometimes you hit people hardest if you hit them in their wallet. That sends a message to gun manufacturers. They have to stop being a part of the problem. And that's one way to make a change.

Lehrer: Mayor de Blasio with us on WNYC – and listeners, we can take some phone calls for him. And I'm going to ask that we move on from the gun issue, because we've been talking about it so much on the show and all around the country, and we're going to talk about some city-particular issues with the mayor for the rest of our time. And you can call him on – how about anything other than guns, folks, if that's okay? For Mayor de Blasio, there's enough other stuff that concerns us as New Yorkers that's under the mayor's jurisdiction. 2-1-2-4-3-3-W-N-Y-C. 4-3-3-9-6-9-2. And I'm going to break with journalistic convention, in a way, and mention some good news, because it's real, and I think we could all use it after a week like this, Mr. Mayor. And that is that after years without a comprehensive transportation bill, Congress finally passed one yesterday. And I don't want this to go unnoticed, and I know you've been working on this. And it looks like the New York City area avoided some bad stuff that Republicans in Congress had been pushing. What's the headline on the transportation bill for our area, as you see it?

Mayor: Well, it's – I agree with you 100 percent. We don't see good news that often, that gets the reporting it deserves. This one should be shouted from the rooftops. For years and years, there has been paralysis in Washington on the transportation bill. For the first time, we have actual progress, in terms of the federal government getting back into the business of investing in transportation infrastructure. So it's a five year bill, which is a substantial amount of time – after many bills in recent years that were a year or less – this is actually a five year bill. It adds substantial new money to roads, bridges, highways, mass transit. New York City, by the way, previously had been threatened with an \$80 million dollar cut to those exact same type of areas. Now, this bill will give us at least \$100 million dollars more. And more important than the immediate investment – which I think is going to be hugely important for our ability to move people around and improve our transportation system – is it's the first time in many years we've seen progress. I think it's been a decade or more that we have seen only stasis with the transportation bill. Now, we actually see some forward motion. This could be the beginning of something much bigger, where the federal government actually starts to take responsibility for infrastructure again.

Lehrer: Some not so good news in that bill – the Zadroga bill was going to be attached to that transportation measure, with longer term funding for first responders and others still getting sick from 9/11 exposures, but it failed. And of course, just about all New Yorkers – Democrat and Republican alike – are on the same side on this one. But I've been realizing it's not even clear who the obstacle is in the Senate. Do you know who is blocking the Zadroga bill, and why?

Mayor: I don't know the specific obstacle. I do know it is caught up in the right-wing dynamic around budgets, and it should not be. On this one, the good news, again, is, there has been substantial bipartisanship. And I've been working with mayors and county executives and local officials around the country – and by the way, also on the transportation bill, we had tremendous – really a great response from colleagues all around the country

on both sides of the aisle, who believed we needed a better transportation bill, who also believe in the Zadroga bill, because, you know, the rescue and recovery effort on 9/11 ultimately involved people from all over the country. And local officials all over the country see it as an “all for one, one for all” kind of thing – that it is the right thing to do, to help our first responders who are now suffering. And in – even within the House and Senate, there’s been substantial bipartisanship. So I can’t identify the specific block. I think the general congressional dynamic is the problem. But on this one, even though it was not attached to the transportation bill, I still believe that there’s a really hard push in these final days that we can get it done.

Lehrer: We talked about guns. Let me go on to crime in the city. It’s December, so the crime stats for the year are pretty much in. Your office sent me the Brennan Center report on urban crime nationally and for New York, and it looks like the total number of serious crimes was at a record low in New York City this year. But the one that’s always on most people’s lips – murder has gone up by about seven percent, or about 20 murders more than last year – a projected 353 compared to 333 in last year’s record low. How do you feel about this mixed bag?

Mayor: I think that every murder is, not only troubling, it’s unacceptable. We work every single day to stop murders from happening, and that’s part of why we have 1,300 new police officers coming on the force next year, and that’s why we’ve done civilianization and other efforts that will add hundreds and hundreds of more officers on top of that. It’s why we have a new neighborhood policing strategy. It’s why we’re using new technology. We don’t accept the status quo, even though the status quo is much, much better than it was even as recently as 2010, when we – we had 536 murders in this city in 2010. We had 43 percent less murders this year than we had back then, based on the projection. But it’s not the end of the process. We have to keep working every day to do even better. The good news is, shootings down; 2,400 fewer crimes this year than last year, in terms of the major crimes. There’s been clear progress. There’s been great progress in public housing developments. We focused on what would have been particular violence problems in a set of developments – crime there has been down by about 11 percent in those targeted developments. So, a lot of things are working, but it’s – as you can imagine, Brian, it’s endless, and this is – meaning that – and I share this view with Commissioner Bratton – we constantly are trying to figure out the next initiative, the next innovation that will take those numbers down even further.

Lehrer: So what’s the next initiative on guns? Because since we’re being – you know, talking about being tough around guns and federal law – at the local level, a lot of what comes to people’s mind is still stop and frisk, because for whatever its constitutional flaws and other flaws, it was [inaudible] an illegal gun discovery program and confiscation program. So, not to defend the old stop and frisk program, but have you and Commissioner Bratton instituted a replacement gun specific program, designed to get as many illegal guns off the street.

Mayor: Last I checked, a few weeks back, gun arrests were up about 7 percent this year compared to last. You may remember, a few weeks back we did a press conference, Commissioner Bratton and DA Vance and I were – NYPD took 74 guns off the street in one sting operation, and there are many such operations going constantly. I think – I appreciate the question, but I want to caution. Not only was stop and frisk unconstitutional, it wasn’t working. It was alienating the community from the police, and as we know per police statistics, 90 percent or so of those stops resulted in no outcome whatsoever. The difference now is where there are stops, and [inaudible] I think we’re on a path this year to be about 20,000 to 30,000 stops. There of much more high-quality in the sense of actually identifying where there’s a problem and doing something about it – gun arrests up – more police coming, so we’ll be able to focus on areas where we have to take some concern. ShotSpotter, which we didn’t have before this administration, which allows us, literally, to respond instantly when a shot goes off. That technology, where we’ve deployed it, is quicker than people calling 9-1-1 or any other tool. It allows the police to go immediately when a shot goes off. So, there’s a lot of things – and that allows much better prosecution of gun offenses. And then finally, we’re working very closely with the district attorneys, and working with them to improve the amount and the quality of gun prosecutions because we know – Commissioner Bratton said this, Brian we’re talking about 5,000, 10,000 people in this entire city of 8.5 million who account for the vast

majority of violent crime. We've got to do a better job of getting those individuals through the criminal justice system and off the streets. A lot of times what we've seen revolving door justice along the way. That small number of people causing the violence still are not prosecuted as effectively as they could be, and we have to all work together to solve that problem.

Lehrer: And on the other side of that, and then we'll go to some calls. There were protests here yesterday, as you know, because it was the year anniversary of the Staten Island grand jury not indicting police officers in the death of Eric Garner. The protests now are named at you and Commissioner Bratton for not taking departmental action yet against officer Daniel Pantaleo while you wait for the federal Justice Department to decide on federal charges or not. He's still on the force and still getting paid. What do you say to those protesters?

Mayor: I'd say that we should respect the federal Justice Department. I spoke to Attorney General Loretta Lynch numerous times on this question, but as recently as this week. And she has made abundantly clear that the justice department needs to continue its process and see its process through to whatever outcome they get to. And they have asked explicitly that the city refrain while the Justice Department acts. Now, I have said many times, the Justice Department over decades has proven to be a crucial force in terms of Civil Rights, and accountability. And we have to respect that. So the bottom line is as is well established the NYPD has done its own investigation, but it will not follow through until the Justice Department signals that it's the appropriate time.

Lehrer: Cassius, in Bed-Stuy, you're on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio. Hi, Cassius.

Question: Hello, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Good morning.

Question: Good morning. I don't want to talk about crime, but I'm going to move it to this debacle of hyper-luxuriating, you know, happening to our city. And really frankly, it's a very strange stance that you have – that gentrification is going to happen no matter what we do or what we wish, when, in fact, the city – it's just like you're taking such a passive stance. The city is in control of all sorts of permits, and will decide what neighborhoods will be rezoned or which ones won't be, and it's just very disturbing to see neighborhoods being destroyed by rampant condo high-density building going on. They're like bringing – it's like bringing gated-communities into this city. It's essentially de-urbanizing, you know, the capital city of our nation.

Lehrer: Mr. Mayor, talk to Cassius.

Mayor: Well, Cassius, I couldn't disagree with you more. And I respect the question because I can tell it's from the heart, but I think you're reading most where I stand wrong, and the overall situation wrong. You're in Bed-Stuy. Bed-Stuy – there was no governmental policy related to Bed-Stuy. There was no rezoning. There was no effort to preserve affordable housing. There was no legal services program to keep people from being harassed and evicted. And what happened? Bed-Stuy has gone through a huge amount of gentrification, and many, many people have been displaced. It's not because of luxury towers that were created through a rezoning process. It's because of the actions of the private market within the rules that exist before any of us came along. So, what we've said is – and the same happened in Bushwick, and the same happened in Park Slope, and what we've said is, no, we're not going to just let the market forces determine the faith of this city. So, instead – a very muscular approach by the city government that says we are going to manage the development process. We're going to intervene in the market. The only way there is rezoning and building based on that rezoning is if there is a very substantial amount of affordable housing created in the process. And affordable housing that is consistent with the needs of that community, and the income levels of that community. On top of that – a very substantial preservation process to fund existing affordable housing in the community to keep people in their homes, and provide long term guarantees so that they can stay in their homes because of the subsidies we provide. And then finally – the biggest commitment ever to legal services to protect people against illegal harassment and eviction.

It's night and day from the previous set of policies. The previous policies were entirely laissez-faire. Our policies are interventionist. But I refuse to say – if we took our hands off the situation, if we just took the position, well, we're not just going to do anything, that that's going to end up with a better outcome.

Lehrer: But let me follow up and ask, those of course are not the only options – laissez-faire or your current proposal as it's out there. Because, as you know, you now have four of the five borough boards, all except Staten Island, on record against the zoning and affordability proposal as it stands, which is basically taller buildings with more affordable housing requirements in many neighborhoods. I want to play a clip of Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer on this program last week, where some of the ways that she and speaking for others who are dissatisfied with what the administration has put out, and want to work with you.

Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer: I know that the borough president of the Bronx and others are concerned about the parking – less so in Manhattan, but it's an issue. We need to make sure that there are really a strong anti-harassment requirements for the adjacent buildings and community. We want it to be in our case like the Clinton special district, which is really, really strong. We want to make sure that there is – we don't have poor doors; we don't want poor buildings; we don't want one building that's high-income next to a building that is affordable. And we don't want one floor to be affordable and the other one not. We want it intermingled. AMI – we just talked about, the Area Median Income – has to be much lower in some cases. And the list goes on.

Lehrer: Is there anything, Mr. Mayor that you can promise to Gale Brewer and others on those issues? She says she wants to work with you, but there's this list of issues on which the zoning proposal needs to get better. How specific can you get?

Mayor: Look, I'm not going to be overly specific because it's an ongoing process and the most important players in that process are going to engage it going forward – the City Council and the City Planning Commission. And – but the bottom line is – let's just do a moment on process and a moment on substance. On process, the whole idea is community boards, borough boards put in their input. They're not the ultimate decision-makers, but they have valuable input. We try to learn from it. We try to make adjustments as we see fit, but it's also a back-and-forth with our other partners in the process, most notably the City Council. Now, a lot of what I've heard from this public discussion is the desire for – to maximize the number of affordable units and to have them at the lowest possible income levels, and those are goals we share, trying to figure out how we construct is the work we do together. Now, on the broader [inaudible] point, as you went into Gale's statement you said something simple. You said taller buildings with more affordability. I think – it's not a surprise a New York City that there is a resistance to taller buildings. I think that's as old as time itself in this city, but I believe fundamentally that the taller buildings are what get us that greater affordability – it's a net gain. And this is where I think we have to have a honest discussion. What people saw in previous administrations was taller buildings without the affordability. I don't blame people for being cynical based on some of those experiences. But again, if we were to say okay well we're just going to therefore step away from the situation that doesn't make any sense to me. We have to be muscular about it. So, legal services are muscular. Affordable housing in place being subsidized and preserved for the long term is muscular. Creating and mandating and requiring developers to create new affordable housing that is the price of admission if they want to develop. I want to be clear, Brian – the way we structured all this – what we have proposed, both in terms of mandatory inclusionary zoning, and the rezoning process is if a developer refuses to create affordable housing, they don't get to build, period. That's a very, very reality, and it means there will be a substantial net gain of affordable housing in communities that have been hemorrhaging it before. So, that's where we're coming from. To my view, this is the straightforward, progressive, practical solution to something that previously has just been market dominated.

Lehrer: Betsy, you're on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio. Hello.

Question: Hello. Good morning, Mayor de Blasio.

Mayor: Good morning.

Question: As you know, we've got the world's eyes on Paris right now with the UN Climate Change Summit, and, as you know, there was a march and a rally at City Hall in New York on Sunday. I'd like you to please address – and specifically along the lines of the divestment movement, because I think what you said about using divestment as a tool in this battle with guns is also very pertinent to how we can use divestment of city funds as a tool to get some traction with climate change. New York, again, as you know, is in a leadership position to be a city, globally, that takes some quick and profound action.

Lehrer: Betsy, I'm going to leave it there. Okay – divestment of the city pension funds from fossil fuel companies, Mr. Mayor?

Mayor: Yes, absolutely. And, Betsy, thank you for the question, and I think you're exactly on the right track. First of all, we're calling for divestment in coal by our city pension funds. It's something I've talked about a few weeks back. And then I think from there, we have to figure out how to address all fossil fuels. It gets a little complicated because some companies that are in fossil fuels are also in renewable, so we have to sort that out. But there's no question we just have to steadily move away from fossil fuels. This week we announced that we're making a very substantial investment in electric vehicles for our city fleet. We'll have the largest electric vehicle fleet, based on this decision, of any city in the country. We are going – we've doubled the amount of solar in the last two years in this city. We have to move very, very aggressively, and the goal we've taken on, which is the international, if you will, gold standard to reduce emission 80 percent by 2050. We are going to use every tool we have to get there, but it has to include constantly increasing the amount of renewables, and constantly getting away from fossil fuel. And that's also going to be part of how we go about the city's use of electricity writ large. We're working now on a plan to maximize how we get away from fossil fuels in the electricity that we use, and what we might be able to do with solar wind and hydro, going forward. So, I think localities have been actually the most dynamic part of this whole process internationally, and we have to just incessantly raise the bar to force our national governments to act.

Lehrer: Denise, in Manhattan – you're on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio. Hi, Denise.

Question: Yes, hi – hi, Mayor de Blasio. I'd like very much to ask you to please put into effect the Housing First program. I know you've done it in part – the city's only done it partially, but it's been shown in studies throughout the nation that it's successful to the degree that it is implemented. And, as you know [inaudible] involves providing supportive housing unconditionally to the homeless, with counseling [inaudible] and it saves millions of dollars. It saved the state of Utah millions, and everywhere it saves tremendous amounts of money where it's been implemented successfully and fully. It saves on jail time, police time [inaudible] hospital time, repeated detox – there's a really, extremely high [inaudible] I think it's about 85 percent of non-return to the street of the homeless who receive this counseling with housing, and it saves the city millions of dollars. So, I can't see why you wouldn't put it through whole-hog –

Lehrer: So, what would be whole-hog? Because the mayor announced a few weeks ago – I think on this show – 15,000 units of supportive housing for homeless people. Are you just asking for a larger number?

Question: Yes, and also that it be scattered, not just focused – that he really pay attention to the studies that have been done. Also, in Canada, there were some revisions, there's been some change that's done that's showed that its effectiveness is incredible. But it really shouldn't be done [inaudible]. It should be carried through completely and it should be done for all the homeless.

Lehrer: Denise, thank you. Mr. Mayor?

Mayor: Well, I think I'd say a couple of things. Denise, I think we very much agree on the power of supportive housing, and that's why we've made the largest commitment in the city's history – 15,000 units – and that will start next year, because some of that is taking existing units and providing the series that folks with mental health, and-or substance abuse challenges need. So, that is a right-now, major, new initiative. In terms of the overall picture, I would remind everyone that more and more of the homelessness challenge is folks who are economically made homeless. And so, there's something we have to discuss more in this city, which is the different feelings and the different experiences people are having around homelessness. I think a lot of the emotion, a lot of the concern that people have around the city when they see folks on the street comes from when they do see folks with very evident substance abuse and mental health issues. And those are the folks – the few thousands folks who are in this very tragic situation of not coming into shelter and, you know, being on the street 24 hours. The vast, vast majority of folks who are homeless obviously are in our shelter system where they do get services and they do get support. But I think what we've got to do is separate the two realities. In our shelter system, overwhelmingly now, more and more families, more and more folks who are for economic reasons homeless – wages and benefits haven't moved, cost of housing shot upward – a lot of the folks coming into shelter nowadays can work – are working. So, that's a different reality that's not about supportive housing – that's about affordable housing – that's about increasing wages and benefits. And nothing would make a bigger impact than raising the minimum wage. For folks who have substance abuse and-or mental health problems, that's where supportive housing is a crucial part of the solution, and that's why we've made such a big commitment to it.

Lehrer: Let me catch a couple of things real quick before you go – one is a follow-up to that. The governor's recent remark that you can't manage the homelessness crisis, and so the state plans to step in with both management expertise and resources to be announced in the State of the State address next month. I can't tell whether that's an insult or he's offering help because you asked for help. What's your most specific understanding?

Mayor: I don't get caught up in the verbiage and the personalities. I think it's straightforward – we've committed to the largest supportive housing program in the history of the city – 15,000 units. We very much believe the state of New York needs to be a partner in that effort, as it has been in the past, and we look forward to hearing on what the state can do, particularly on the supportive housing front. I think on the bigger reality – look, we have a homelessness challenge that is, in many ways, bigger than ever. I've said very publicly I don't think I explained it well enough to people. I don't think I made clear the things that we were doing, because we've been working nonstop since we came into office to address the challenge. Because it's more and more of an economic challenge, it's taken a whole set of new tools that we've put in place – that's why we're putting in literally a billion dollars over the next four years on things like anti-eviction legal services, rental subsidies, to keep people from losing their apartments or to get people from shelter out to permanent housing. And these tools are working, and it takes time. There's no question, this is a tough problem that we'll be dealing with for quite a while, but a lot of these tools are working. We've got to keep showing how the additional moves we're making are starting to turn the situation and make life better in this city.

Lehrer: When I Googled your name this morning to see what the buzz is about you today to help get ready for this interview, do you know the first six items on Google news were all about you and Governor Cuomo having had dinner at an East Side restaurant, ordering the same branzino dish the other night, and trying to make –

Mayor: That's a very well publicized branzino.

Lehrer: It really is. So, what can you tell us about your conversation at that dinner?

Mayor: Just what you've already seen. We met – it was constructive. There's really nothing more to say about it.

Lehrer: There could be a movie deal in this. You know, they could call it *My Dinner with Andrew*.

Mayor: That's very witty. You know your film history.

Lehrer: It could be a hit. Seriously though, I actually think you and the governor share about 90 percent of the same values and interest, and since you've both come on the show separately, I have this fantasy of having you both on the show together to talk mostly about what you agree on regarding local and state policy, and how to move forward on those shared interests. Would you be willing, if he's willing?

Mayor: I think that there are very constructive way to talk about public policy and to get the heart of the matter. I'm not sure if that's the best way to do it, but I think the important thing is to keep figuring out the things that we can do on behalf of the people of this city. And, you know, I think there's plenty of examples where we've gotten things done. I think there's other areas where we need the state to come forward and do more to help.

Lehrer: Alright. Well, we're available if the two of you want it. I can't cook as good a branzino as [inaudible] but we'll put out coffee and bagels. It would be nice.

Mayor: [Laughter] I appreciate the offer.

Lehrer: As always, Mr. Mayor, thank you very much. I appreciate your time.

Mayor: Take care, Brian.

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