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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. Now as usual in the 11 o'clock hour on Fridays, it's our weekly Ask the Mayor call-in, my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio. Our phones are open for your calls to the Mayor at 646-435-7280, 646-435-7280 or a tweet a question, just use the hashtag #AskTheMayor. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Welcome back to WNYC.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Thank you, Brian. Good morning to you. And I'm happy to have another quick breaking news, positive story for you. We have set a new record today for reducing and fighting back COVID in the City of New York. We now have the lowest COVID level since the pandemic began. It is, today, 0.78 percent. It is literally lowest recorded since we started testing in New York City at the beginning of the pandemic and continuing to go down, which is great, great news.

**Lehrer:** And I see there was at least one day this week with zero COVID deaths in New York City. And I didn't look all the way back to March of last year, but I have a feeling that was the first such day since March of last year.

**Mayor:** I'm going to confirm that, but whatever the comparison to the past right now, it says something really, really powerful that New Yorkers have done this. And I really want to emphasize this, you know, as of today, here's the number of vaccine doses. It's astounding. 8,408,000 doses of vaccine given in New York City. And that is New Yorkers making a decision to protect themselves, their family, their city. That's also a lot of great people, health care workers, outreach workers, you know, hospital workers who have been there to vaccinate people when they're ready. And what this means is because people made this decision, we are consistently squeezing COVID out of the city, and we're also seeing tremendous drops in the number of hospitalizations. And thank God that means we are losing fewer and fewer people all the time. And that is what we've been waiting for, that we could get to this moment we can actually see COVID being behind us.

**Lehrer:** I see you're bringing vaccination clinics with the Pfizer vaccine to four schools in the Bronx. And that's great, but let me ask you how much that's scalable citywide. Because if the goal is to vaccinate kids all over the city and the percentage of vaccinated kids are still very low compared to adults, can you do this in every school that has kids at the age of eligibility?

**Mayor:** Well, let's first do the big picture on this question. Young people 12 to 17, you know, is the youth age range that's eligible for the vaccine now. That's obviously only been true for a few weeks with the younger kids in that group. But here's the amazing fact, already as of a few days ago, 118,000 kids in that age group had been vaccinated in New York City. Many of them just in the last few weeks when they became eligible, ahead of the national average. New York City is ahead of the national average vaccinating those younger folks. There's tremendous energy among parents to get their kids vaccinated. Now the school initiative is brand new. It's something we're able to do now focused on middle schools because we finally got that authorization with the Pfizer vaccine to do it. And, look, the school year is coming to an end, but we intend to get into all five boroughs, reach a number of schools, see what kind of uptake we get. And then that's going to determine the next steps. We have the Summer Rising initiative. We expect several hundred thousand kids in various forms of summer school and summer programs sponsored by the City. That's going to be another place where we can vaccinate a lot of kids. And then we'll look to the fall to see how we want to use this as part of the strategy, but really what I think is going to happen, Brian, is with the levels of vaccination we're seeing now, I think between now and the second week in September, we will reach a very high percentage of young people because of all the grassroots outreach we're going to be doing throughout the months ahead., well before a child steps into the new school year.

**Lehrer:** Let's take a phone call. Sarah in Sunset Park – and it looks like this is actually going to follow up on our previous segment. Sarah you're on WNYC with the Mayor.

**Question:** Hi, Mr. Mayor, thanks for taking my call. I was curious to know what you would suggest to voters to look in their City Council member just depending on how you build relationships with them and what kind of qualities you think voters should look out for?

**Lehrer:** That's – let me just tell you, Mr. Mayor, that just before you came on, we were doing a segment with a reporter who covers City Council races for City & State on this exact question. With so many people on the ballot, and so many City Council seats turning over this year, 35 out of the 51 because of term limits and, you know, people don't know how to choose a City Council person very frequently. How would you advise them?

**Mayor:** That's a great question, Sarah. Thank you. Because – and I feel very sort of fond about this question because I ran for City Council as, you know, a community resident in Brooklyn –

**Lehrer:** You were in City Council.

**Mayor:** I was there for eight good years. But what's important is I remember, you know, obviously it was pre-COVID, I knocked on a huge number of doors. I had a lot of personal connection with a lot of voters. That's starting to happen more and more now. So, the first thing I'd say to Sarah, even though it's only a few weeks left if there's candidates that interest you, go out of your way to either, you know, meet them when they're doing public events, or if they're doing a forum or whatever it is, you know, see them live in action. I really – it sounds basic, but I think with the City Council, it is a very intimate reality. These are folks who represent a few neighborhoods. You should take every opportunity to sort of see them, hear them, get a sense of them. But the other I value in City Council members is, you know, their connection to the

community. I would look at, have folks played out their values on the ground in communities? Have they contributed to the communities? Have they been connected? Have they been listening to communities? Look, everyone who is interested in public office goes about it a different way, but I find that the folks who actually took the time to ground themselves in a community and contribute to it and sort of take on some real issues are the folks who tend to be the most consistent in following through and the folks you can feel best about voting on, voting for.

**Lehrer:** Let's take another call. We'll go right to Kiesha in the East Village. You're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Kiesha.

**Question:** Hello, and thanks for taking my call. Hey, Mr. Mayor, this is for East Village residents around Tompkins Square Park. The outdoor dining's been great, but what is the City doing to ensure that there's no noise after 10:00 PM? Because we live in low-rise [inaudible] near street level. And it's so loud with more alcohol being consumed outdoors, there's more shouting and screaming [inaudible]. And, you know, those rooftop parties have led to a death a few weeks ago. And when affordable housing tenants are forced to leave landlords are too happy to jack up rents for more short-term rentals. And also, this is a point about commercial encroachment into our green spaces. Tompkins Square Park, this park was an oasis for stay at home workers during the pandemic. We have red-tailed hawks nesting in the park. But now there's loud amplified music events, random DJ rave parties at all hours, and residents are calling 3-1-1, and community boards to no effect. The NYPD seems to close our service requests without investigating them. Why? And just to make the general point, since we talked about budget earlier, City policies seem to prioritize commercial enterprises. And being an underserved community, especially, we need to have our right to nature protected. The West Side gets a \$250 million [inaudible] we have the East River Park closure and Tompkins Square Park doesn't even have money to water its lawn. Why –

**Lehrer:** And let me get your response from the Mayor. You put a lot on the table, but starting with the noise from outdoor dining after 10:00 PM, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Really, thank you for the question and it's an important one. So, I'm going to have a few folks follow up in this case. One, we have our Nightlife Office that specifically was created to mediate and resolve conflicts where there's a restaurant, a bar, a club, whatever it may be. That is important. It employs people. It's part of our life as part of what attracts people in New York City, but also has to be a good neighbor. And so, this Office of Nightlife has really done a great job figuring out how to balance those realities and often mediate disputes productively. And so, I'll have the director of that office call you up and talk that through about your specific situation. Tompkins Square Park, of course, the resources are there for basic park maintenance. And I think we're going to be able to do some additional things to help parks in the budget now that we have a little more resources. But on the question of if there are the kinds of realities in the park that we need to address proactively, I'm also going to have, from the NYPD, folks reach out to you. I think in this case, the borough commander is the right person to reach out and talk to you about what you're seeing there and how we can proactively address it in a positive way. I think that what we're finding more and more is listening to community residents and coming up with a proactive plan is what works. So, you can expect a follow-up from our Nightlife Office and a follow-up from the NYPD. And please give your contact information WNYC so we can do that.

**Lehrer:** Kesha, hang on, we'll take your contact off the air. I see there's a curfew in effect at another park near there. Tompkins Square Park is in the East Village. There's a curfew in effect at Washington Square Park. Why is that? And what would allow you to lift it?

**Mayor:** This is based on some patterns we've seen in the last weeks trying, again, to be proactive not reactive. A lot of community residents have expressed concerns. And so, the idea is, you know, parks historically have had a closing time. This is an effort to make sure that there's real respect for community concerns about noise and activity. Set a clear bar that everyone understands in advance. It's the best way to do things in a way that, you know, ultimately gets something done for the community. And this is something we keep experimenting with and learning with. We're going to have our community affairs officers who have done really, really good work hearing communities and talking to folks, you know, including young people who might want to be in a park and explaining why things are being done the way they are. And I think that's the best approach here.

**Lehrer:** Kelly in Midtown West you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Kelly.

**Question:** Hello. I want to ask the Mayor what he is going to do about the mentally ill homeless and former prisoners who are living among us in the Midtown West area at all of these former five-star hotels. The second question, have these men received COVID inoculations as a condition of them receiving free housing? I just want to say, in closing, our neighborhood has now reverted to a reality which feels like we're imprisoned. We see the drug deals, we see the overdoses, we see the defecation and urination out in the public. There's a lot more I see, but your screener advised me to not disclose this on the air and I'm going to be respectful. Mayor, my life and my neighbor's lives are ruined from this. You haven't given a definitive answer and we deserve it. We're still paying rent. Thank you.

**Mayor:** Kelly, thank you for raising this. And I would like you to please give your information to WNYC so our team can follow up and get those specifics from you. That would help us a lot. There are some real issues. They have to be resolved. What you're experiencing is not acceptable, and a couple of things. You're going to be seeing a lot more various outreach efforts from the Department of Health to address some of the drug use and from the Department of Health + Hospitals. You're going to be seeing more NYPD presence. You're going to be seeing a variety of things to address these issues. I've heard from several other people and several elected officials. You're going to see a concentrated effort to address this. Second, the hotels that were necessary at the height of COVID to get homeless folks out of shelters, those hotels are becoming less and less necessary. I've said we're very soon going to start the process of moving people back to the shelters where we can provide the most support for them. It was never meant to be a long-term thing. It will not be a long-term thing. You will start to see those changes soon. As for vaccination, it's not a condition of shelter. The right to shelter is long established in the city. We are vaccinating large numbers of folks who are homeless, but like the general population, not everyone is ready yet. It's not a condition. It's something we constantly make available and more and more homeless folks are taking us up on it. And that's good, but I'm hearing you loud and clear about the problem, and I truly believe you're going to see changes quickly.

**Lehrer:** What about the interests of those people who are experiencing homelessness themselves? The caller did not mention that. Do you see their interest as aligned or necessarily in conflict?

**Mayor:** I don't think it's in conflict at all. I mean, Brian, something that I hope will get some attention is over 150,000 people – and this is a very, very big number – over 150,000 people who went into our shelters in my administration, we were able to get to permanent affordable housing, and we're going to continue that work. So, what we do consistently is get folks off the street. The level of street homelessness, the recent federal HOPE Count confirmed, has gone down, thank God. We're going to get people off the streets into shelter, from shelter to permanent affordable housing. But you have to be in a shelter setting where there are support services, people working with you. If there happens to be a mental health or substance abuse issue, people helping you align to the right kind of housing, including supportive housing with folks who have particular needs. That effort works when we get people into shelter and then start the process of getting them to a new life. And so, there's absolutely consistency here. Folks were never meant to be in temporary hotels. It was an emergency measure at the height of COVID. We are putting COVID behind us now, we can go back to the work of getting people onto a better life.

**Lehrer:** And there was the court ruling yesterday that was in the news that will allow the city to move those folks from the Lucerne on the Upper West Side that had become so controversial a location, to another location. Do you have a specific plan for them?

**Mayor:** Yes, and it's been publicized before. There's a plan to move to a shelter facility where there'll be much more extensive services available, health care options available. That was always the point –

**Lehrer:** It's another hotel, right? The Radisson?

**Mayor:** But it's being converted into an ongoing shelter. And the point is, and this is what I announced four years ago, and I really think it was the right direction, it's been working. Get out of hotels altogether, not just because of COVID, historically the city used hotels, paid a lot of money, disrupted communities, didn't give the services to homeless people they needed. We said back in 2017, we're going to a simpler approach, a set of purpose-built shelters, a focus, of course, on affordable housing and getting people to affordable housing, no more hotels, no more scatter site units. We're almost out of the scattered site units altogether. Those are those individual apartments that were not quality housing, that was for decades the norm in the city. We're getting away from that once and for all, we'll be out of that soon in the next couple of years, entirely out of hotels. And this is the way forward and – what's amazing is the shelter population right now is below 48,000. It's well below the number when I came into office and continue to go down, and that's in large measure because we have found better ways to get people to quality affordable housing and to prevent homelessness before it happens with things like legal assistance to stop evictions. Even before the anti-eviction efforts with COVID, you know, this city, to its great credit, that's something I really believe in, started providing free lawyers to folks threatening – you know, threatened with eviction, and helped them to stay in

their apartments so they didn't become homeless. These kinds of structural, progressive changes are really starting to have an impact.

**Lehrer:** Just one more thing on the hotels then, I think back in the 80's or so the single room occupancy hotels for otherwise homeless people had a bad reputation for various conditions there, and other things, I think SROs are making a comeback in the eyes of advocates as, yeah, if you can have a little room for an individual who's a single homeless person, that's actually a good thing. So, is it not?

**Mayor:** Done the right way? It could be, but I want to caution is a point I'm making about, the things we need to get out of. We need to get out of the kinds of facilities that were, you know, obviously private owners, often without the most altruistic focus and if the city didn't have any other choice, that was a scattered site housing, those were those SROs, those were the hotels too often. I want a world where if someone needs shelter and we do absolutely guarantee the right to shelter in this city, it's something very powerful. This is why we're not like San Francisco or Los Angeles or places that you see just for rampant street homelessness, we provide right to shelter, but we're going to do it with actual shelters, it's the much better way to do it. If you have an SRO model and it's run by a nonprofit, a community-based nonprofit, it's done compassionately with real careful checks and balances to make sure people are being served, that could work. The historic model did not work at all.

**Lehrer:** Jason in Gramercy Park, you're on WNYC With The Mayor. Hello, Jason.

**Question:** Good morning guys. Thanks for taking my call mayor. There's a there's a public school in my neighborhood and there is a – I think it's a park that's run by New York City Parks Department attached to it, and there are six swings there, but all six of the swings are like the like the cubes with the – I know you know what I mean? Like the cubes with the little holes cut out for the feet and it's really intended for like the very young children, but the school has kids up to the fifth grade, which means that most of the kids in the school actually can't get into these swings because they're really built for the youngest kids. So, I'm wondering, I recognize this is probably not a huge priority for you, but I'm just wondering if you can get someone in the Parks Department to maybe replace three of those six wings with like the flat plastic kind of style that the kids just sit right in and they bend and they can start swinging?

**Mayor:** I love the question, Jason, because you're bringing me back to a youthful time when I used to take my kids to Prospect Park and the swings were a very big part of our life and actually having the right swing for the right age level was a big deal. And you know, making sure they were available for kids at different levels is right. So, I appreciate the question a lot as a parent, I'm going to have the Borough Commissioner for the Parks Department reach out to you, please give your information WNYC. Let's figure out what – why they are the way they are to begin with and what the goal is there, and if we have to put in some mix of swings or whatever the solution is, but I think it's a very pertinent neighborhood question. And for parents, you need good options for your kids so I'm really glad you called.

**Lehrer:** A question about property taxes, Mr. Mayor, I see there are hearings taking place on proposals that would include bringing small co-ops and condos into the same tax category as one



to three family homes because there are perceived disparities and unfairnesses, and also taxing New York City properties based on their actual market value, the homes, not on their assessed value, which is much, much lower. Would you sign a bill that made those changes?

**Mayor:** I'm going to say it this way. We put out a major reform vision, a private tax commission, working with the City Council, extraordinary people on this commission with, you know, really amazing experience dealing with these issues. Put out a vision, it's publicly available, and now they're doing the hearings to come back with a very specific plan for more equity and property tax for more consistency across neighborhoods because our property tax system, unfortunately really penalizes some struggling neighborhoods and in some ways favors some privileged neighborhood, and that has to change. In the next few months, those very formal, specific proposals ready to be passed as legislation will be put forward, and then we're going to appeal to the legislature to act on them. So, I don't want to preempt those final recommendations are coming soon, but the goal, consistent with your question, is to create more equity.

**Lehrer:** One homeowner who characterize themselves as of ordinary means reached out to me and said, they're worried that their tax bills will go up by five or ten times if assessments are changed to reflect actual market values, many, many thousands of dollars, which they can't afford, they might lose the home, they're concerned. So, if the assessment formula suddenly changes, what about those homeowners?

**Mayor:** One of the things that commissions point out very consistent with your question is that we've got a lot of people who are house-rich and cash-poor, a lot of people in this city, a lot of folks have been here a long time, working class folks, don't have a lot of money to pay property tax. We don't want them to be in a situation where they have to leave their home and leave their neighborhood they love. And so, the idea is to create equity, including options to have people get reduced rates or types of support if they're low income, if they're seniors, you know, disabled, there's a variety of ways to reduce the burden. So, even if you say, well, we're going to have more equity across neighborhoods because some neighborhoods, again, just are paying disproportionately high, some are paying disproportionately low, we're going to try and balance that, by – for folks of limited means, providing them with very specific support to defray the impact of those changes.

**Lehrer:** Rachel in Brooklyn, you're on WNYC With The Mayor. Hello, Rachel.

**Question:** Hi, Mayor, how you doing? I have a question. I have a friend of mine that he was his mother's caregiver and she ended up in a nursing home and now housing wants to evict after he got, you know, gave up his apartment, you know, everything there, you know, he gave up to be with his mother and by now they gave him – they want him out of the apartment, you know, because he not on the lease. And this man, he's elderly, you know? And he don't have no place to go. And on they are telling him – [inaudible] – go ahead –

**Mayor:** Yeah. Rachel, no, I'm really concerned. I don't want to see anyone lose their housing. Will you please give your information to NYC because we have an Office of Tenant Protection that can work specifically to get someone legal help if they can't afford it and to protect their

rights and make sure that if they do have a right to stay in that apartment that they can continue to do so.

**Question:** Yeah, and one thing I want to thank you for helping my special needs nephew for the ID card. I appreciate it. Thank you.

**Mayor:** I remember you called, yes, I'm glad that worked out and, Rachel, please give your information to WNYC because we want to help make sure again, really, especially in this moment where people have struggled so much, we don't want anyone to lose their apartment and I think there's a lot of things we can do to help.

**Lehrer:** Rachel, thank you, hang on. Mr. Mayor, let's talk some electoral politics in the climate debate –

**Mayor:** There's an election going on? I didn't hear about this.

**Lehrer:** I know, I know you don't have to pay attention to it this year which is probably a luxury, but in the debate Wednesday night on Channel Seven there was only one candidate who raised his hand when asked if they would want your endorsement, it was Andrew Yang, but he then went out the next day and held a rally at the side of the gym where you go in Park Slope to criticize you. Is it fair to say he is not actively seeking your endorsement?

**Mayor:** It's fair to say he's incoherent to put those two things together in less than 24 hours, but look what candidates do – I'm always, every single time you see candidates doing something they think will get them short-term gain. This is just unfortunate of the nature of too many candidates, but I think where there may be some missing of the forest for the trees. Vast majority of New Yorkers, especially vast majority of Democrats, believe in things like Pre-K for All, and now we're going to be doing 3-K for All, every three-year-old is going to have early childhood education for free. They believe in affordable housing initiatives, free legal counsel to stop evictions. They believe in what we've been doing to bring the city back and the recovery and opening schools. Yeah, I think everyone wants to be the bright, shiny new brand, but if they're actually listening to what people want, they would recognize that a lot of the reforms we made, a lot of the progressive policies we put in actually represent very much the majority of New Yorkers, and I believe these are the policies that are going to remain and move us forward.

**Lehrer:** People can already vote with their absentee ballots and early voting in-person starts a week from tomorrow. Would you even consider endorsing someone who says they don't want your endorsement?

**Mayor:** A couple of things, I want to say, first of all, really going to keep plugging, we have not only early voting, we have ranked choice voting, please everyone, choose five candidates. You may love some more or love some less, but choose five, rank, make sure your whole ballot is filled out because you never know in a very close election that your lower rank candidates that that vote may still matter, it may still really have an impact as the vote continues. So, please do that. Look, Brian, my attitude is I'm going to say to the people in New York City what I think makes sense to talk about. If I decide I want to weigh in on the race, it really bluntly doesn't have



anything to do with what the candidates are saying or posturing. What matters is if I think it's important to tell the New York people in New York City where I see an important direction for them, I'll talk about it. And if I don't, I won't, but really my job is to offer an observation if I think it's going to be helpful to the future of the city.

**Lehrer:** So, you're not announcing yet whether you're going to endorse, right?

**Mayor:** I've been way consistent. I said I'm watching, and like most New Yorkers, you know, I think most New Yorkers have not made a final, firm decision on their number one vote, let alone how they're going to rank five votes. When I get to the point that I feel somethings were saying, I'll say it, I think this is an extraordinarily close race and people are going to make their decisions in the very last days.

**Lehrer:** One other thing, one undecided voter I know said to me after the debate that, you know, I asked this voter who's undecided, did anybody when you over? And he said everyone promised everything. That was the citizen's line. Everyone promised everything. So, I'm curious if you heard it anything like that and how, as a candidate, you don't over promise when you're trying to win people's votes, so, you have incentives to promise a lot, but the city's finances or other limitations won't allow everything you would like to promise people?

**Mayor:** I am with your voter. I was not overly impressed by that debate. When I ran, I said we were going to end the broken and unconstitutional policy to stop and frisk, we were going to have Pre-K for All our kids for free and tax the wealthy to pay for it, we were going to bring paid sick days in and change that law to get paid sick days that people needed them, and that's what we did. They were all doable things, and I can guarantee it because we did it and we proved it. I do feel there's a diffuse reality in these debates of - it just feels like people are talking a range of very broad ideas. There's no really well-crystallized ideas that grab you and are specific and are viable, and I think the public can tell, and that's part of why there's a bit of an enthusiasm gap and, you know what, the candidates have two weeks to fix it, and in my view, to get their acts together and be sharper.

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

**Mayor:** Take care, Brian.

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