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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. We will begin as usual on Fridays with our weekly Ask the Mayor segment, my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio. Our phones are open at 212-433-WNYC, 433-9692, or you can tweet a question, just use the hashtag, #AskTheMayor. Hi, Mr. Mayor, welcome back to WNYC.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Well thank you Brian, it's good to be here.

**Lehrer:** And you're definitely making news today with your latest budget proposals for the fiscal year that begins July 1<sup>st</sup>. One thing is that you reject the City Council's proposal to spend \$200 million on half-fare MetroCards for New Yorkers living below the federal poverty line. They see it as a really good investment to make sure low-income New Yorkers can afford to commute to work, helping with economic mobility through physical mobility, why don't you?

**Mayor:** Brian, this is a matter of really clear record, going back several years. I think it is a very good idea and my concern is, what does it mean if the City pays for another MTA expense that should be covered by the MTA? And this has happened over and over again, including most recently with the "Subway Action Plan" which cost us over \$400 million.

My view is really clear, we first of all, when we give money to the MTA as we just did, we need full accounting of what is being done with the money. We just saw this ludicrous story about the 'East Side Access Project' by the MTA having a billion dollar cost overrun. This is yet another cost overrun, yet another delay in a project that seems to just take up money all the time, but yet the state is asking the City to give money to an agency that clearly does not how to use its money properly and on the right things.

So we're calling for full accountability when it comes to the contribution we made to the 'Subway Action Plan', and I have yet to see that accountability from the MTA. So the problem here is, is New York City going to have to keep having to incur additional costs when they should be MTA costs. And by the way, the best way to fund the Fare Fair idea, which I said many, many times in support of the idea, is with the Millionaires Tax which is now a stronger

than ever possibility because of the likelihood of a Democratic Senate being elected later this year in Albany.

So that's the difference here, it's not on the idea, I agree fully with the idea, I've said that for years. I'm going to work cooperatively with the Council on it but I think there is a better way to handle it which is the millionaire's tax and I think we have to be very cautious about continuing to pay for expenses that should be paid for by the MTA.

**Lehrer:** You do propose, and if I have my numbers right, to spend over \$600 million more than last year on homeless services and that's \$300 million more than even your original version of this budget, just recently released. What should we read from this in human terms about the city's homelessness crisis?

**Mayor:** Yeah I want to check – I do not have the final numbers on that category or the budget in front of me, I'm not sure if that is accurate. There is certainly a major increase but I'm not sure if that's the actual number.

What we should make of it is that addressing this challenge of homelessness takes a lot of work and it will take a certain amount of expenditure to be able to once and for all turn the tide on this problem. So the plan we announced a year ago, which was, Lord knows not the typical kind of plan, tried to deal with some blunt truths.

We have put a lot of money into putting people into substandard housing called cluster apartments, we're getting out of that. We put way too much money into hotels we pay for by the day, we're getting out of that. We're building and opening shelters all over the city, 90 in total, so that we have shelters that are meant to be sheltered, that will eventually be converted permanent affordable housing, but it will allow us to get out of the clusters, get out of the hotels, there is a cost associated with making that transition so I think what we've seen here is clear.

We are incurring more hotel costs on the way to transitioning out of hotels because we've closed lots and lots of cluster apartments, hotels are more in part expensive. We are incurring a lot of cost to open new shelters but that is the gateway to reducing costs over time.

We've seen very – actually Brian – very important, the number of folks in shelter has actually been steady and flat for the last year, that's the first time in about a decade that's been the case, or most of a decade. So that's a good sign and we think we're going to be able actually reduce the number of people in shelter soon and that's going to reduce costs too. So I think – we believe based on the projections that we have that this is the last big expenditure on the way to restructuring the system and then starting to reduce costs.

**Lehrer:** The total proposed budget – this is not a stat that most New Yorkers could not recite fast – the total proposed budget for the next fiscal year is \$89 billion, and that's almost \$4 billion than the present fiscal year. Can the tax payers afford an inflation rate of more than four percent in the cost City government?

**Mayor:** Yeah, if you look at recent budgets, you know in the last decade or so, that kind of rate of increase, three percent, four percent, or a little more, is pretty consistent. And that is because of, you know, real costs that we have to pay, for example, one of the number one driver, or I think the number one driver of the increase of this budget is labor costs that are actually being paid out to make up for the years when our municipal employees did not have a contract and they were owed a lot back pay once the contract was finally settle because it was applied retroactively.

You know, when I took office, none of our over 370,000 City employees were under contract. We've now gotten effectively almost everyone under contract. But we had to pay for those past mistakes and that is stretching into next year and finally the year after. So that's the number one category.

Also for example, debt service is not a sexy topic, but we are paying a lot more debt service because we're doing a lot more capital construction. New Yorkers want that, they want new school seats, they want more affordable housing, they want roads repaved, we're doing all that but with it comes a cost in our expense budget as well. I think that's a good choice to invest in the infrastructure of the city and make sure it is livable, make sure it can be successful.

So, you know, the core argument here that I laid out yesterday is, yeah there is an increase in this budget, we have the revenue to pay for it, we're living within our means, but it's really a question of do you we think we're moving in the right direction strategically in the City. We have the most jobs we've ever had, 4.49 million jobs, the most in our history. We are – schools are clearly making some real improvements, we're the safest we've ever been, this all took money and a real investment to achieve and sustain and that's good for our economy and quality of life. I argue that that is smart use money. If things tighten, we have unprecedented reserves to guard against any downturns or any other challenges.

**Lehrer:** A Crain's story today points out that your budget criticizes the Trump tax changes while benefiting from them through increased tax revenue to the City of about a billion dollars, how do you square that?

**Mayor:** Oh, it's very straightforward, the billion dollars, we said very clearly yesterday, about \$600 million is a one-time revenue, and I'm not scoffing \$600 million it's going to help us do good work, but then it is not coming back. And the much bigger hit is that the Trump tax legislation effectively ended any possibility of an infrastructure plan. Remember then-candidate Trump talked about a trillion dollar investment in American infrastructure in which New York City would have gotten a very substantial amount of money to address one of the oldest infrastructures in the country. What's happened?

The tax legislation soaked up every available dollar. It was a huge giveaway to the wealthy and corporation and now a deficit blown up further, suddenly there is no discussion in Washington anymore of an infrastructure plan. It is delayed at least for another year, maybe for the entire Trump term. So basically the train left the station once they gave away all that money. That's going to hurt New York City many times over, year after year after year, much more than any short term infusion we got because of that tax legislation.

**Lehrer:** Here's another federal government question, President Trump's Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson, I'm sure you've seen this, is proposing the tenant share of the rent in subsidized housing be increased from 30 percent to 35 percent and that work requirements could be imposed for able-bodied people under 65 ...

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**Mayor:** ... because I don't have evidence of that. I will however, with a whole heart, go to the Chancellor who is going to bring the fresh perspective, of course, and say, you know, what are we thinking today about this generation's state tests and do we have any concerns at this point about anything discriminatory. That would be a major concern for me, it's true, but that is not my understanding at this moment. I will give it a serious look, though.

**Lehrer:** Columbia –

**Question:** [Inaudible]

**Lehrer:** Wait, wait, let me ask you a follow up question because you made a very serious charge that parents at a school on the Upper West Side are invoking test scores in order to keep schools segregated. Why do you make that claim?

**Question:** Well, because [inaudible] the proposal in that district to have a certain percentage of low test scores attend the school in that district and that the affluent white families that are currently at that school, 199 in particular, they are saying that they don't want those lower performers at their school.

**Lehrer:** Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Well, I would separate the two points here. The question of how we use a test for assessment, again I'm not – I believe Columbia is speaking from her perspective honestly but I cannot accept as a ground rule the discussion that these tests are inherently discriminatory because I have no evidence of that.

The tests in the view – my view and DOE's view are one of multiple measures. I'm going to say this constantly whenever this conversation comes up. We don't believe in an over reliance on high-stakes testing. We believe in multiple measures. Tests are one of many measures we use to assess how a child is doing and what they need to keep progressing.

It is somewhat universal compared to other measures like grades, for example, portfolios, all sorts of other things. So, I want to say first there is a place for testing done right and the state has profoundly changed the approach of testing – the time limits and the content, etcetera – and that came from a lot of parent and teacher concerns. Teachers were deeply involved in creating this test under the State Education Chancellor MaryEllen Elia, who I think did a very good job of trying to listen to teachers and parents and alter the test appropriately.

But on the question of if a school district is trying to foster diversity by ensuring kids of different academic achievement levels learn together, I think there's a lot to be said for that approach. It has to be done effectively and in a way that will benefit everyone ultimately.

But I want to separate that notion because you might say you don't like the test or you challenge the validity of the test's content but I don't want to confuse that with the desire of that school district's leadership to create more diversity in the school and trying to figure out a fair way to do that.

**Lehrer:** One other related thing – we were looking at the Twitter feed of Chancellor Carranza and it looks like he retweeted a RawStory.com video which was described this way in the retweet, “Watch. Wealthy, white Manhattan parents angrily rant against plan to diversify schools.” And it says, “A new effort to diversify schools in the Upper West Side of Manhattan, one of the richest neighborhoods in the city, has drawn angry reaction.” Are you familiar with the Chancellor's position on the Upper West Side issue? He retweeted this video.

**Mayor:** Yeah, I'm not – first of all, we've not had an extensive conversation. I have seen his tweet. I want to say a couple of things. First of all, I think he's a man of extraordinary integrity who's devoted his life to achieving social justice and fairness through public education. So, it certainly is consistent with his values that he would say that.

Now, I think what has to be looked at in a really sort of focused important way here is if we're going to achieve diversity in schools – there's been a lot of desire for that all over the city for good reason – we have to do it in a way that balances the desire for diversity with trying to address the legitimate concerns of all parents. I think the challenge and the history of this topic which goes way before the last few years all over the country – how do you achieve diversification of schools and at the same time improve schools for all and make those a common strategy, a united strategy?

I think in the same area of the city, in CEC3 there's a really good plan put together with a lot of community process that came out last year to achieve more diversity in district schools while improving the school simultaneously. This particular discussion that's occurred in the last few days, I think gets to the fact that a lot of parents are concerned and I understand why. I went through the middle school application process, the high school application process.

They want to make sure their children have access to a school they really value. That is normal. That's appropriate. At the same time we have to address the diversification issue and a lot of those same parents would say, oh, I want to see greater diversity in schools. We got to square those two concerns.

I think part of how you do it is continuing to provide parents with more and better options that also are the context for greater diversification. And what I've seen in the last – not only in our time but before to be fair to the previous administration – a lot more middle school and high school options of high quality, giving people a lot more sense of choice and less sense of, oh my God, I've only got one option, if my kid can't get in they will not have the kind of education that we need.

We need to break out of that paradigm because that helps us also address how we diversify our schools more broadly.

**Lehrer:** Was the Chancellor vilifying that group of white, Manhattan parents by retweeting that with that headline? And do you have a problem with his retweeting it with that headline?

**Mayor:** I – look, I don't think he at all intends to vilify anyone. He's not that type of person. This was his own personal voice. We didn't talk about the specific wording in advanced. I might phrase it differently but the most important point here is he's speaking, I think, from a place of integrity about the fact that if we're serious about diversification we're all going to have to work creatively and we're all going to have to address the quality of the schools and diversity of schools simultaneously in a way that people can really buy into.

And CEC3, Community Education Council 3, did a great job in the last few years of achieving a lot of that, not without some opposition of course but they ultimately I think made real progress. So, I think the Chancellor is speaking bluntly as someone who understands from personal experience that there's a lot we have to overcome in this society to create fairness for people of color.

And I think he's speaking from that perspective. But I'm certain he does not mean to vilify anyone.

**Lehrer:** By the way, on maybe a lighter note pertaining to kids, yesterday was Take Your Children to Work Day and WNYC employees who are parents took part. And since our workplace is a radio station we invited the kids to record questions for you –

**Mayor:** I like it.

**Lehrer:** And we're going to play two of those now as we did see a pattern with the kids. They seem to think the city is dirty. Listen –

***Question:** Hi, my name is Franklin. I live in [inaudible] New Jersey. And my question is – should there be a fine for leaving your dog poop in public places where people walk their feet?*

***Question:** Hi, my name is Carolina. I live in Park Slope. And should there be a fine for littering, and if there is, should it be bigger?*

**Lehrer:** Mr. Mayor, can you answer either of those questions?

**Mayor:** Sure, these are very intelligent and important questions. And I want to thank the young people for asking them. There are fines for both. Now, the challenge is applying the fines. There are substantial fines. There's a really good argument they should even be higher but the biggest question is the enforcement. In any instance, you have to have an enforcement agent see the thing happen to be able to apply the penalty. You can't show up an hour later and there's some litter and just, you know, assign it to someone. There has to be evidence that it happened.

But I think – I'm hearing this a lot. You know, I've had 53 town hall meetings around the city. I'm hearing this concern more and more. So, I think we've got to start thinking about – do we shift some enforcement issues in this direction. That's not a minor matter because what we're doing on other types of enforcement is taking up a lot of time and energy and people want that too. They want to make sure a lot of other rules are followed but this is a growing concern. So, we're going to have to investigate are the fines at the right level right now, and how can we create more consistent enforcement and what's that going to cost and what would it mean in terms of other things that might not get as much attention. All big questions, but I do want to address those questions.

**Lehrer:** Lorna in Queens, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Lorna.

**Question:** Yes, I have a question for the Mayor. When the City do the construction on the streets and it damage their homes. I am on the corner of 115th Avenue and 200th Street in St. Albans Queens. And the vibration – it break up all my China, everything come crashing down from my cabinet. I went outside and I asked the guys what can be done. They said they don't know. My house is cracked up, the ceiling, the plaster breaking up, and the ceiling is falling out, the steps of vibration, everything break up the house. The vibration, that made drop the house so bad. I called 3-1-1 – the investigator came from the City building. He said, he told me – he told me the vibration crack up the house, and he is going to write up a paper for me. The supervisor told me that he cannot write that the vibration crack up my house because he does not live here to see. You know, and that's not fair to us. We are elderly people. When I bought my house it was not destroyed, it was not damaged. I have pictures before my China when it was full with China's and crystals and lots of crystals [inaudible].

**Lehrer:** Lorna, was this a city construction crew doing street work? Or was this a private construction crew on private property?

**Question:** They said they work with the city.

**Lehrer:** They did, Mr. Mayor what can you do for Lorna here?

**Mayor:** Well, Lorna has got a good point, and I don't know the details, I don't know the specifics. But the idea that she is raising is an important one. So, Lorna first of all, why don't you give your information to WNYC so my team can follow up with you? Look, first of all we want to confirm all of the facts, including that the crew was actually working under a city contract. If they are and the damage is confirmed, we've got to figure out some way to address that. I don't know the standard. I am sure this is sadly not the first time something like this has happened. But we have to make people whole. So without commenting on the specifics I would say I believe you, I want to make sure our team gets the facts, and if there is something that needs to be compensated for, they'll work to achieve that. So please give your information to WNYC.

**Lehrer:** Lorna we're going to take your contact information on hold right now, and hopefully this will work out better than it's been working out. We're almost out of time as you know. We'll be talking in our next segment about the Bill Cosby verdict. And I see the City last Friday

released sexual harassment data from city agencies for your years in office. The Lead Line and Politico New York story on this says there have been roughly 220 substantiated claims of sexual harassment in city government under Mayor de Blasio's tenure. But the City cannot say if there was any disciplinary action taken in the majority of those cases. If you accept the premise, can you explain why that's the case?

**Mayor:** Well, I want to say just quick framing on this. I think it's very important. I think we've had a seat change moment in our society and thank God for the #MeToo moment. It has totally redefined what we need to do to address sexual harassment and what we should not accept anymore, and what we should not allow happen to people who have been victimized. So here is what we're going to do totally differently going forward. We are going to have one single standard for all city agencies of every type, all 370,000-plus employees. That is a rigorous standard that does not leave any room for harassment. We don't accept it in any way, shape or form. We're going to retrain the entire city work force in how to appropriately work together and how to make clear how unacceptable all harassment is. We're going to annually put out updates on what we're doing in terms of the number of cases and the outcomes. We have to be very careful about avoiding the level of detail that exposes the victims. In many, many cases they do not want their identities out and we have to be very careful to not create a dynamic where that happens. But we're going to be aggressive, we want people to believe they've been victims or [inaudible] to come forward. Every complaint will be fully investigated, we believe anyone who says they've a victim of harassment, we believe them and we're going to fully investigate. And what we will provide is a clear sense in accumulative way of what kind of discipline occurred. But I would say to you, when things are substantiated typically there is discipline ranging from n the lower end, if you will. People are getting retrained, re-educated, up through suspensions, pay reductions, demotions, vacation pay, vacation days being taken away, etcetera up to of course termination.

**Lehrer:** And the total number of harassment complaints in the last four years was about 1,300 with 17 percent of them considered substantiated claims. What do you make, what do you think the public should make of that 17 percent rate? Like is it, 83 percent false claims? Or a troubling rate of failure to believe women and some men or something else in your view?

**Mayor:** I think it's a couple of things. I think it's a lack of a single standard. A number of agencies were not working with it as rigorous an agent standard as typically the mayoral agencies were. So we have some of the big – you know, NYCHA is a great example; officially federally regulated, state regulated, not a city agency. They were working on some federal standard that was much less rigorous than the city standard. So we're going to know have a reality of one single rigorous standard. We're going to make very clear to all agencies there has to be prompt follow up and will provide additional personnel if needed to do that for more investigations for example. And we're going to hold a high bar that if there is a substantiated claim, we expect a rigorous consequence appropriate to what has been found. Again, in some cases it may be really appropriate to retrain someone; in other cases it may be appropriate to terminate someone. And that we want to see that followed through in real time. So I think the fact is this is now on everyone's front burner where it belongs. And it's going to be a rigorous approach with annual disclosure going forward.



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

**Mayor:** Thank you, Brian.

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