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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 again everyone, and as we do every Friday, it's time for Ask the Mayor, my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio. Our phones are open at 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0, 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0 or you can tweet a question, just use the hashtag, #AskTheMayor. I see some people are holding on from our last segment where you want you to talk about other things. We respectfully ask that you please clear the lines so people can call in with their questions for the Mayor at 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0, for our next guest who has to spend his birthday holding coronavirus briefings and doing interviews like this.

Happy birthday, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Brian, you are very kind and thank you for the well wishes. Well you know what, it's a little-known fact but I, I was born across the street from Gracie Mansion in what was then called Doctors Hospital. Now it's in a classic New York story, it's now condos, but back then it was called Doctors Hospital. Can see it outside the outside the window of Gracie Mansion. And after this whole long life, I've only gone a block away. So, I am celebrating today that I have the privilege of serving the people of New York City and helping us all through this tough time and, interesting way to spend a birthday. But I'm in good company of 8.6 million friends.

Lehrer: There you go. An interesting journey around the world, that lands you back for maybe, your ultimate accomplishment in your life, being Mayor of New York, one block away from where you were born.

So we heard in the news and I know you addressed this earlier today at your briefing, the stat that NYPD, I'm sorry, from Brooklyn prosecutors that 35 of the 40 people arrested for social distancing violations in the borough are black, and of course there were those videos that emerged earlier in the week showing apparently violent NYPD arrests of people of color. And I know you already said this morning that all of this is not who we are as our city, in terms of New York values, and you're going to see that it changes. I want to ask who specifically in city government is responsible for these disparities, getting as far as they have on this and how will you hold them accountable?

Mayor: Well, look, I want to put it in perspective for a quick moment. I don't accept disparity, you know, the whole reason I came here to be Mayor was to address inequality and I think in the context of NYPD and I give a lot of credit to the NYPD leadership up and down the line that

there has been a real devotion these last years to addressing disparity in so many ways. That's why we got rid of the unconstitutional use of Stop and Frisk, and retrained the entire police force in de-escalation and have moved to a neighborhood policing strategy, body cameras – I mean, so many fundamental changes. So I want to put it in perspective. I think the NYPD has been constantly improving and addressing disparity in a variety of ways and needs to keep doing more. And I want to also put in perspective that that the set of arrests in Brooklyn over a period of time during this crisis, 40 arrests in the borough of, you know, 2.6 million people. I don't want to overrate what happened, but the disparity is still unacceptable. So we're, look, I'm responsible, the Police Commissioner's responsible, we all have to figure out the strategies that we'll get up and down the line and NYPD the clear understanding that we have to ensure that policing is fair and just an equal that sometimes takes retraining that sometimes takes more work from supervisors at the precinct level. But again, you're talking in this case about very few specific instances and the importance of enforcement in the context of the pandemic. And that's where I will part company with some people honestly on both left and right, who are saying, Oh, pull back the NYPD in from enforcement – no, no, no, we have to have them NYPD enforcing these rules to ensure that we save lives and we get out of this pandemic.

But I think the answer to your question is it's the same exact way we've made as much progress. There's no question. There's been serious de-escalation efforts you see at these videos we've seen lately, one of which was particularly heinous and I was very critical of what happened there. And the officer has been placed on modified duty and is facing discipline. But you see relatively few videos compared to the millions of interactions in the course of a year between NYPD and citizens, the vast majority of which are done in the appropriate respectful manner. So we're going to work on this and we have ways of addressing this [inaudible], but I want it to kept in that bigger context.

Lehrer: You mentioned what people from the left and right are saying about the role of the NYPD. We have the Chair of the City Council Public Safety Committee, Donovan Richards of Southeast Queens on the show this week. And he argued something that to your point, ironically the police union had Pat Lynch, politically very different from Donovan Richards is also for, and that is not using the police for getting New Yorkers to socially distance. Here's Donovan Richards:

***Council Member Donovan Richards:** I agree with them and you know we should utilize different tools that we have in a toolbox right here in the City of New York. Now first off, we have the Department of Health and they have staff, I think we could utilize them a lot more to do PSAs, to drum up PSAs, to be out in local communities, this is something I've mentioned to the Mayor a few weeks ago, we need to see more of a city agency, city worker presence in a lot of communities. And then we should also be looking at community-based solutions. You know, we as a Council have funded crisis management organizations to the tune of I think close to \$30 million, right? Why aren't we utilizing the validators, the people from our very communities to actually be part of the solutions on the ground?*

Lehrer: So Mr. Mayor, why use the police at all as opposed to Health Department people as the Councilman refers to there for others who are not law enforcers?

Mayor: Look, this is the broadly, I think we're actually in agreement that we want to see more and more types of efforts beyond just police and that's why I announced over a thousand other city employees – enforcement folks from different agencies would be out. That was a week ago plus, I announced that. And then on top of that, we are going to move to bring into this more and more city employees who aren't enforcement folks and community-based organizations as well. So, actually, moving in the very direction that the Councilman is talking about. But you know, I want to differentiate that from folks who have suggested that you take away the single best enforcement tool we have, which is NYPD. NYPD is in every neighborhood, you know, deeply connected and knowledgeable about neighborhoods, deep relationships all around in a way that there's no parallel in other agencies have that kind of reach and that ability to be present and effective. Again, the vast majority of what the NYPD does is both effective in terms of protecting safety and more and more community focused and engaged with communities. So we should do all the above, you know, the right kind NYPD presence mixed with other agencies mixed with community-based leaders and organizations too. And that's certainly the direction we're going in.

Lehrer: But one more question about this relative deployment of what kinds of city workers and this time with respect to the subways, I know that overnight closures are by the Governor, not you, but I see a thousand NYPD officers are involved to deal with the homeless people being evicted each night. And our reporters from WNYC and Gothamist were out at some stations this week and said the number of police on the scene dwarf the number of social services people there to do outreach, and I asked the head of the transit agency, Sarah Feinberg on the show yesterday, shouldn't it be the opposite? Shouldn't social service workers from the HRA, Human Resources Administration –

Mayor: Not the NRA, definitely not the NRA.

Lehrer: Definitely not the NRA, we'll both agree about that. Shouldn't the HRA dwarf the number of police? And she said, I would love that. So why is the ratio what it is?

Mayor: So let's understand. I think, I think there's a little bit of mixing of realities here. The – we're three nights into an unprecedented shutdown of the subway in the late night hours for cleaning, which was exactly the right thing to do, Governor and I agreed on this, to better cleaning, protect the essential workers, but also I believed fundamentally it would help us address homelessness in a more effective way. The MTA was very, very concerned to make sure that'd be enough police presence because you're talking about, I think it's almost 500 stations that were going to be closed for that period of time. And there were concerns about what happens when you close them and what kind of support would be needed for the NYPD in terms of preserving safety. And so there was a very extensive NYPD presence made available for the first days to help a deal with, you know, something we've never dealt with before. That was actually something that MTA wanted, and we agreed to it.

But on the outreach workers, we're going to keep sending as many are needed. I want you to hear this number, Brian, this is literally historic: the last three days – the last three nights when the trains were closed, outreach workers engaged hundreds of homeless folks and over three nights, 520 homeless individuals agreed to come in to shelter or to get to a medical facility because they

needed medical help. 520 people in three days. We've never seen anything like that in the history of New York City where so many people agreed to come in simultaneously. And that's because the outreach workers were there to engage them on a huge scale. And we'll send more if we need more for sure, but it's – the numbers speak for themselves. The outreach workers are doing their job in an amazing fashion. Now, there were people last night, for example, they engaged 269 homeless people and 163 accepted help more than 50 percent. That's amazing. That's unprecedented to have that kind of success rate. But there's still others who didn't – the outreach workers will stick with them. They're going to stay in touch with those people and keep trying to persuade them to come in. So, we have the biggest outreach effort and the history of New York City and we'll keep building it as needed. But I don't want to get confused on why we also had an important police presence in the first days of something unprecedented.

Lehrer: Let's go to the phones. David in the Bronx, you're on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio. Hi, David.

Question: Yes. Hello. Thank you very much. I'm calling because this is very relevant to a lot of other people I believe. I have had COVID-19. I am recovered. I have a letter verifying that I was tested for a COVID-19. I realized that donating plasma saves lives, which I'm very anxious to do as soon as possible. And the problem is that I keep on getting phone numbers, who gave me websites and with a great expert on computers and websites, I've repeatedly tried to get on the website and cannot get through. So, I am willing to drop what I'm doing now to go donate plasma, but for over a week now I can't and I don't know how to do it. There are problems with the website.

Lehrer: Mr. Mayor, can you help David? Good Samaritan and wants to donate blood now that he's recovered from COVID-19, can you help him and if he's having a problem other people might be too?

Mayor: Of course. And David, first of all, I'm so glad you recovered. And second of all, what a good person you are to immediately say, how can I help other people? So, I commend you. Please give your information to WNYC, our team will follow up and get you connected to blood donation. And Brian, to your point, yeah, I want to understand how we make this simpler. I know the New York Blood Center has been the go-to and I know people can go to their website and get information on how to give blood. But what I'll do is get a clearer answer about the specifically folks who are coming to offer the plasma donations, which is part of what is a very promising type of treatment so far for folks who are have been affected with and are experiencing really, really tough symptoms. The plasma treatment seems to be, you know, part of really helping them. So I'll get an announcement out on where people can turn to want to particularly come in because they've had COVID and want to give blood. We'll clarify that for the public. But I know, again, the New York Blood Center will be part of that. And I know in David's case we will connect him via WNYC. So, thanks David very much.

Lehrer: David, hang on. We will take your contact information and you said it, you're ready to drop everything and donate blood. Now we're going to make you do it. So, hang on. Seriously. Thank you for being such a good citizen. Edward in Corona, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello Edward.

Question: Hello. Wish you a very happy birthday. And I also want to say that you've got a very important historical birthday because today is 75th anniversary of VE Day in Europe, when the war ended in Europe and the allies were victorious, allowing democracy to flourish and to experience the freedoms that we are now experiencing today. So, the question that I have is are you and the Chancellor going to give the teachers back their spring Passover-Easter break that were taken away earlier? And how's that going to work?

Mayor: Thank you. Edward. First of all, Edward, thank you for your kind birthday wishes, but you also, you know your history and yes, Victory in Europe Day, and I will just take a moment to reflect on that very quickly because you know, my parents were both 44 years old when they had me, and so my parents were part of that World War II generation and felt that moment deeply, Chirlane's parents as well. All four of our parents were in the war efforts. Chirlane's dad was serving in Europe in the war in the army and her mom worked at the Springfield, Massachusetts armory. And my mom was very conscious of victory in Europe day because she was working at the Office of War Information on a broadcast to Italy at the time. And my dad was serving in the Pacific and the U.S. Army Seventh Division, and for him, Victory in Europe day was a very special day, but unfortunately for him there was still a lot of battle ahead in the Pacific. So for our family, you know, this anniversary means a lot. It's something that's very present for us. So it is a special honor to share a birthday with such an important historical anniversary.

But to your question, Edward, the teachers – look, we asked so much of our educators in the last weeks and, you know, I think the fact is we had to ask people to do some unusual things because it was about keeping the kids engaged, especially as kids were just going stir crazy and we're trying to keep kids in and we're trying to give them something positive to do, keep them focused on their education. And we asked educators to have to make some accommodation for that and the unions agreed to their credit. But we also created mechanisms for some flexibility to try and make sure that it would be recognized that teachers were, you know, being really helpful to the kids in that way and making sure that that time could be reflected in another way. So I don't have the exact mechanics with me. Obviously, we respected any teacher who for purely religious reasons needed to observe, but we did create some kind of accommodation beyond that. I'll make sure, if you give your information to WNYC, Edward, we will get that information to you on how that was handled. But definitely, you know, we're very, very respectful of what teachers have done. And that just last point that you know, I really again appreciate your referencing the history because on a birthday is a day where you remember, you know, who brought you here and who taught you and gave you the strength. So as I'm fighting this crisis, I am really, really thinking about my parents and the everything they taught me because they went through, you know, a really, really tough time in history and maybe somehow those lessons are what is helping me to get through this and help people through this now. So really appreciate you raising that point, Edward.

Lehrer: Edward, thanks. And if you want, we'll take your contact off the air. Terry in Brooklyn, you're on WNYC with the mayor. Hi Terry.

Question: Good day, good day, good day, Mr. Mayor. I'd like to commend you on all your leadership and all your good ideas and I know things are moving and change it. But I'd like to say I need some help. I'd like to get in contact with your office if at the end of this conversation and also I used to work at an agency, the Department of Corrections, but I work now at a homeless shelter and I think the homeless shelters who are still having clients there still need some assistance and guidance. Do you have any new plans to help people who work in those environments?

Lehrer: Are you talking about, Terry, in particular that it's too crowded and the virus can spread or, or something else in particular that you want to shout out?

Question: Yes, the virus can spread and also the facility may not be prepared to deal with individuals who might need quarantine and sometimes that information is kept secret away from counselors or case managers, caseworkers, who might be in the facility.

Mayor: Terry, I really appreciate you raising the concern. I'd like you to give your information to WNYC and the people who lead our homeless efforts, our efforts to make sure that people are not homeless in the city and support those who are homeless. Commissioner Steve Banks and the Administrator for Homeless Services, Joslyn Carter, I would like one of them to speak to you today and hear your perspective directly to see if there are things that we need to do better. Look, the bottom line is that there are clear protocols that are being enforced with every shelter in terms of things like cleaning and personal protective equipment, but when it comes to the people you serve, making sure that anyone who needs isolation can get to a hotel very quickly with proper medical support. We're sending in more medical backup to shelters to keep evaluating the situation. Any place there is need for more social distancing, we'll take more of the clients out and put them in hotels. So that's being, very energetically pursued. But if there is any gap, if there is anything that is not being communicated to the staff or that we need to better, we will, so please give your information, because I think your frontline knowledge would be really helpful to understand what we need to do better.

Lehrer: Alright, we're putting you on hold, we will take that contact information Terry, you bet. Katie in Ocean Hill, you're on WNYC with the Mayor, hi Katie.

Question: Hi Mr. Mayor and hi Brian, thank you for having me on. I was hit by a car in a hit and run while biking on the first day of your new Open Streets initiative. I waited for half an hour for the police to come to file a report and they did not, so the EMT's advised me to go on ahead to bike over to the precinct. I live in Ocean Hill which is a predominately black and working class neighborhood and I'm calling to say that you need to – you need to open up streets for the people. I do not think that limiting space in parks is the answer and I do not think that you understand or trust your citizens to police themselves as it may be open streets. Mr. Mayor, I don't live near a neighborhood near a park. I need – I was, I feel very failed by you, Mr. Mayor, and by the way you have wavered on this. I'm sorry – I'm not sorry, because I'm horribly afraid to leave my house and I think you need to do better and I want to ask you how you are going to do better to protect all of your citizens?

Mayor: Katie, look, thank you. Thank you for the question Katie. I only want people to tell me what they feel and New Yorkers usually do tell me exactly what they feel and I'm perfectly used to it. So, I want to make sure we're constantly offering people more and more options, but I also have a bottom line about what I think is safe and it's my responsibility to keep people safe. And I, with all due respect, I do not know your history or your sense of this city. You know, I've spent my life serving this city. I understand and trust the people of this city deeply, I also understand the challenges in this city and I don't agree with the approaches that we're taking in some other places being applicable here. I just don't. I've been over with this with our Police Commissioner, our Transportation Commissioner, and lots of other people in our team who work closely with communities and we just don't believe that the approaches that don't involve enforcement are ultimately what's going to create a safe environment for people, but the good news is that we're finding more and more ways to open up streets with enforcement. Not just around parks, but far further, with the plan we agreed to with the City Council will ultimately be 100 miles of streets in the course of this crisis, and we're finding more and more community partners who are going to be part of creating the structure to make sure the people are safe while also having the advantages of the open streets.

So, we are going to move in that direction, we were not able, and I stand by this, we were not able to do it at first because we were hemorrhaging people all over the place that were getting sick. We were losing public servants incessantly toward the end of March and beginning of April. We couldn't put together the right enforcement mechanism. We were in the middle of a deep crisis where the focus was on saving lives and protecting the hospitals from being overwhelmed and when we got to a situation where we had more enforcement personnel, we could set up structure that actually work, we could find local partners to work with, that's when started to open up more and more streets, and again I would get to a 100 miles. I'm sorry we disagree, but I think safety in this city, in this context, especially, bluntly, with too many people speeding lately, requires some real, visible enforcement.

Lehrer: But it does come back to the issue that we talked about at the top of the show which is what is the proper role of the police and when don't the police need to be involved if the streets are open as I think Katie is referring to pedestrians, and not to cars in those cases, you had said originally that it was because you did not have enough available police officers, that you couldn't open more streets and now we see the disparate treatment, so there is even more of a backlash against having police involved and enforcing something that is not a violent crime, social distancing – failure to social distance, even though we want everyone to do that. And so people say that New Yorkers have continued to see these kinds of racial disparities persist even in your supposedly progressive NYPD. So what will you do differently this time if you're going to use the police to ensure that this doesn't keep happening?

Mayor: Brian, you're putting together the pieces in a way that I understand why you are but I just have to push back and say I don't agree with the way you're seeing the equation. First of all, you know, I don't – I'm really going to remind people, there are literally millions of interactions between New Yorkers and police officers in the course of a year. And in terms of the course of this crisis, which has been, you know, over two months now, whatever the number is, hundreds of thousands, millions of interactions just within this month. And we have seen a few very troubling videos, I don't take them lightly, and we're dealing with anybody who is does anything

wrong on the police force, and we've seen some situations, you know, where people thought the enforcement was uneven and there are some obvious facts to back that up and we can't let that happen and we'll address it. But the overwhelming, majority of cases, we have seen effective enforcement. How do we know this? We know this because the vast majority of New Yorkers are honoring social distancing, are avoiding large gatherings, are wearing their face coverings, and then the numbers we print every single day on what's happening with the disease that have shown constant decline directly related to the success of those strategies. And human beings do need some enforcement and consequences in our life as a general rule, and the NYPD has done it but with a very light touch. The actual number of summonses, since this crisis began, we went over this this morning at the press conference, it was fewer than ten a day for a city of 8.6 million people. And so we will do better on ensuring there is evenness but we got to put this in context.

As for the Open Streets, I stand by the fact that the model for example in Oakland, which was no police, streets were designated as open, there was no enforcement, anyone in theory, if they wanted their car to go on those streets could have, there were not the kind of barriers in place that would have made it impossible. And I know New Yorkers enough to say that if you leave streets available that some people could choose, if they wanted to decide to drive on that street for whatever reason, and there is no one around to protect people, and there's been too much speeding lately, you could end up losing lives for a new reason, and I just wasn't going to let that happen. I was not going to allow us to create a new problem when trying to fight a pandemic. But now, we have a lot more officers back, we have a lot more community partners to work with, we will intensify the open streets, but we're not going to stop enforcing. The number one issue facing the city right now is the coronavirus. The number one threat to health and safety is the coronavirus. We're not going to stop enforcing on the thing that threatens the most lives, period. But we will keep working to make it as fair and as – with as light a touch as possible that's still effective.

Lehrer: Last question, we're almost out of time, we're going to take this one from a listener writing in via Twitter. It says, I'm an artist, I applied for unemployment starting March 26th, and still have not received anything, can't get through via calling, what can I do? And Mr. Mayor, I know that's a State function, that's not a city function, but we get these calls and tweets every single day, it's such a dysfunctional unemployment system, and you saw the stats this morning, the national unemployment rate hit an unbelievable 15 percent at the end of April. So, can you help get that State unemployment system going?

Mayor: Well, Brian, I'm always going to tell people the truth. You know, I don't pretend to be able to solve what's going on with the State unemployment approach. I do understand and appreciate that the State's been overwhelmed by, you know, something we've literally haven't seen since the Great Depression. So, I'm not here to, in any way criticize when people are trying to deal with something beyond any scale they've ever had to deal with before. But I do want to see it fixed for the good of all New Yorkers and we're going to try to help in any way can. We do try to help people understand how to navigate it, folks having a problem can call 3-1-1, and at least we can make sure that they're going about the application process properly and help them with some troubleshooting. But my hope and prayer is that the State will be in a position to, you know, add the capacity to allow people to catch up because it's been just terrifying to see so

many people go through this, lose their jobs, lose their livelihood, and then not be able to get unemployment. It's, you know, an untenable situation. It has to be fixed quickly.

Lehrer: And I'll just throw in that my producer just wrote that people are apparently having some luck or some people are having some luck calling their State Senators or Assembly Members to get their attention and have them intervene on their cases since it's a State government function. So, we're out of time, Mr. Mayor. Once again, happy birthday. I hope in the midst of all this crisis, you get to eat a piece of cake sometime today and have a little bit of fun. So, thank you very much for coming on and answering everybody's questions as always and I'll talk to you next week.

Mayor: Thank you, Brian. Much appreciate it and good luck to everyone, all your listeners this week. Stay safe, everybody. Thank you.

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