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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 now it's time for our Weekly Ask the Mayor call-in – my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio at 646-435-7280 or you can tweet a question, just use the hashtag #AskTheMayor. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Welcome back to WNYC.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, Brian. And Brian, I am feeling your neighborhood today. I know you're Inwood, right –

**Lehrer:** Correct –

**Mayor:** So, you're right next to Washington Heights. But I went to 'In The Heights' last night and I went there in the Heights at that extraordinary, beautiful theater up there on Broadway in Washington Heights. And what an amazing movie. I want to say to you and all New Yorkers, go see this movie. It captures who we are as New Yorkers in a way almost no movie I've ever seen does. And it's joyous and it's a total sign of our rebirth. It's amazing. The timing is perfect to show the rebirth and the energy of New York City.

**Lehrer:** I would expect nothing less from Lin Manuel Miranda, and I can't wait to see it myself. But we can say five stars from Bill de Blasio, right?

**Mayor:** Five stars.

**Lehrer:** Well, early voting in the primary election begins tomorrow. May I ask if you plan to vote in person or by mail.

**Mayor:** I am going to vote in person on Election Day, and I also have to make a reference here to a very pressing, surging election situation because we, yesterday, did a demonstration for the people of New York City of how ranked choice voting works, and did a pizza topping ballot. And I swear, Brian, sometimes you got to do something that people can relate to. So, now 13,000 voters have already voted. I want to encourage people to vote because it is a way to actually start practicing your ranked choice voting skills. I'm not going to give away early results because I don't want to bias the election, but people have to get used to ranked choice voting. Here's a fun way to do it. Go to [nyc.gov/pizzavote](https://nyc.gov/pizzavote), vote for your favorite toppings, vote for five choices, one through five, get used to this new approach.

**Lehrer:** And here's the very short version of a ranked choice strategy tip that I've heard going around. I'll adapt it to what you did yesterday, Mr. Mayor. I would rank spinach first, mushroom second. And I really don't like olives. I know, who doesn't like olives? But if you really don't like olives, don't rank olives fifth. Don't rank them at all. So, if there's a candidate you really don't want in office, don't rank them at all rather than put them last on your ballot. So, we'll get more into ranked choice voting strategies on a Monday –

**Mayor:** Friendly amendment, friendly amendment. You have obviously – you know, eight candidates were on the stage for the Campaign Finance Board debates and there are more than that. So, I want to urge people to think about the – Brian's point is well taken. If you abhor someone, if you think they absolutely cannot be mayor, of course don't rank them, but I'm going to push people to say, look at everyone, really study, choose the five in order of your preference, because literally, you know, your first four in the process could go by the wayside as each round of recount happens. Your fifth vote may still be alive in this process. And it could be a very close election. So, I would urge people don't leave anything blank. Literally do the work, do the thinking to get one to five, leave off the people you absolutely can't stand, of course, but push hard to see if you can find five choices in order, because that's how you actually maximize the impact of your ballot.

**Lehrer:** I'd be happy enough if anchovies wins, but not olives. Now you've been holding off on saying who or whether you would endorse at all in the race, but here we are with the polls about to open tomorrow. So, have you decided on either?

**Mayor:** Not yet, I'm watching carefully, obviously, there was another debate last night. There's one more CFB debate coming up. I'm watching very, very carefully. I'm going to make a decision, my own personal decision, obviously, but also if I want to say something publicly, but I'm going to take this one close to the end, unquestionably. And I actually think, Brian – I'm talking to a lot of New Yorkers, the vast majority of people are making a decision late this year, much later than usual. They're still seeking information, they're finally beginning to focus. This has been unlike any election I've ever seen. I think this will be volatile right up to the end. I think people are going to be deciding, you know, many people, day before, day of, or even as they're walking into the booth.

**Lehrer:** Tillis in Queens you're on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio. Hello, Tillis.

**Question:** Hello?

**Lehrer:** Hi, there, you're on the air.

**Question:** We would not think to ask children with special needs to enter a lottery to decide which children's needs should be met. However, for the upcoming school year exceptional students that require an accelerated education to meet their needs had to enter into a lottery to determine enrollment in the city's Gifted and Talented programs. As mayor, what will you do to meet the needs of all incoming children in need of accelerated education?

**Lehrer:** Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Great question. Very, very important question. And I'm going to say two things. One, the system we put in place just for this year's admissions will allow us to reach a lot more kids. Next year, we're going to reach more kids who have those abilities, who have, whether it's in one subject or multiple subjects, have the ability to do more advanced learning. We're going to be able to accommodate a lot more than the previous very narrow, Gifted and Talented program, which is now gone forever. In September, we will announce a new model, which will be the permanent model. And I intend it to be something that reaches many thousands more kids each year. Remember the Gifted and Talented model that we inherited and struggled to find an alternative to, honestly, that at least only a few thousand kids a year. We've come to the conclusion it was so broken, we needed to go in an entirely different direction that could reach thousands, even tens of thousands of kids. Because many, many kids have a particular talent and ability. And so, after a lot of consultation with stakeholders in the next few months, in September we're going to announce an entirely different approach that will absolutely reach many, many more kids than ever before.

**Lehrer:** Andrew in Jackson Heights. You're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Andrew.

**Question:** Hi. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Thank you, Brian. We spoke two months ago. I'm the co-president of the 89th Street Tenants Association, the devastating eight-alarm fire that destroyed our two buildings in Jackson Heights, Queens in April. We represent over 500 residents, Mr. Mayor, essential workers, a 99-year-old woman who's reaching her centennial, kids starting at pre-K in the fall, and newborn kids, including my own son. Thanks to you, last time we were given a brief hotel extension, but now we're facing an eviction to shelters on June 20th, Father's Day, which will be first. Mr. Mayor, we need the following – we need a humane hotel extension until September 2021 so we can find housing as close as possible to home before the new school year starts. And two, we just need HPD to expand housing options for us. Any voucher programs for our 200-plus families. I'm just going to conclude, but there's zero HPD shelters in Queens. We need a displacement prevention program to keep us in our community so we return home. We surely are not the last fire or emergency. And Mr. Mayor –

**Lehrer:** Whoops, did Andrew's line drop – Andrew's line just disappeared. He got disconnected somehow. Do you remember –

**Mayor:** Sure, of course –

**Lehrer:** I don't expect you to one for every call that comes in –

**Mayor:** No. No. Of course. This was a horrible fire and displaced so many families. I do remember speaking with Andrew here on this show and I remember what we did after, and he's right. We provided additional time in hotels, but more than that, I spoke to the Housing Commissioner, Louise Carroll, this morning. And, in fact, all the families have been asked to fill out permanent affordable housing forms and a number of families have been offered – I want you to hear this, Brian, because it's really an amazing example of the compassion of the city. A number of families have been offered permanent affordable housing in Queens. Now some folks will say, immediately, well, is it in the exact same neighborhood they were in? No, the honest

truth is no, but it is in Queens. It is permanent affordable housing, affordable for the incomes of these families.

So, I think considering the folks went through this tragedy and the City of New York's response is not just here's a hotel room for a little while, but actually here's long-term affordable housing for your family – this is an important indicator of the way we try to really support people. So, the messages to all the families, we need everyone to fill out forms for permanent affordable housing. We're going to get you options, as many as we can. We want to accommodate everybody. And we're certainly going to look at the hotel situation to be as flexible as we can in the meantime. But the goal is every one of those families will get one kind or another of permanent affordable housing option provided to them.

**Lehrer:** And that is good news if it really works out that way. Andrew certainly sounded like they're on the brink. And it doesn't seem apparent that they're going to be taken care of as of this moment.

**Mayor:** Well, respectfully – and I appreciate, every journalist should always be questioning, but I'm giving you, actually, news here, Brian, directly from the Housing Commissioner that these offers are already being made. Again, remember in many places, someone might go through a tragedy and maybe they would get help and maybe they wouldn't, or they get very temporary help. To think that people, you know, went through this tragedy, and the City's response is, we're going to give you a long-term affordable option that we create for you, that's a whole different level and it's a very good thing. And yes, real, live apartments. In some cases, brand new apartments in brand new affordable housing developments. So, we'll happily get you the details so you can become a believer, but I'd like us as New Yorkers to recognize the level of compassion in the city. It doesn't happen in most places in this country. This is quite exceptional.

**Lehrer:** Thank you. I want to ask you about something that has come up in both the mayoral campaign and the comptroller's campaign. It came up in the comptroller's debate last night and maybe in the mayoral debate last night, which I didn't watch because they shouldn't have scheduled it at the same time as the comptroller's debate. But it's that the City budget has gone from about \$70 billion to \$90 billion a year on your watch. And if those numbers are accurate, that's a big jump in just eight years. And, of course, it costs the taxpayers. Can you justify it?

**Mayor:** Sure. The only reason the budget was able to grow was because there was revenue. In some cases, it was federal revenue. Originally, it was a lot of FEMA money after Sandy, more recently, of course, stimulus. In some cases, recently, thank God, State Revenue, the amazing work of the legislature and finally bringing us justice on education funding, the CFE case, and giving us our fair share of education funding. In other cases, it's been prosperity. In the last years leading up to the pandemic, we added almost a half million jobs in this city since the beginning of my administration and we had the most jobs in the history of New York City and therefore a whole lot more revenue. So, what've we done with that money? Pre-K for every child for free, now 3-K will be universal as well. Affordable housing is going to be for 700,000 people when our initiatives over, costs a lot of money, but it's absolutely worth it. The mental health services we created, afterschool services for immigrants and working people. I mean, this is exactly what

we should be investing in. I believe in a redistributive approach. I believe that if you're going to fight inequality, you need to take resources, especially from those who have done very well, and redistribute them to working people, and that's what we've been doing, and pre-pandemic had led to the honestly the greatest prosperity we'd ever seen in the city and the most shared prosperity.

**Lehrer:** Dominic in Brooklyn, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Dominic.

**Question:** Hello, Mayor. Since January 2020, I've been involved in a holdover eviction with a veteran who was diagnosed with PTSD and because of his erratic behavior, I had to do this, but the problem is well - now I'm being held hostage and we have an apartment with a person that won't get vaccinated, he runs his air conditioner and electric heaters 24/7, my electric bill this month is \$369, I'm not kidding, \$369. And if- I won't drop the case, he wants an extortion of \$25,000 and then he'll leave. And I had shingles last year, I was diagnosed with shingles, I actually slept in Prospect Park in a tent, then police came -

**Lehrer:** Dominic, let me jump in and get clarification on why this is a question for the Mayor. Is there something about city policy that's preventing you from getting rid of this roommate you don't that you feel is a threat?

**Question:** Yes, so I went to social services, but everything's closed. My court case was March 23rd, 2020, and the court closed three days before. So, I've been stuck with this person and now I'm in Massachusetts, actually right now, I stay at my girlfriend's house and she's moving to Canada, and I can't go there. So, they -

**Lehrer:** So, I get it. Dominic, I'm going to jump in again, Mr. Mayor, what can you do for somebody in a situation like that?

**Mayor:** It's a very obviously complex and painful situation. Dominic, please give your information to WNYC. I'm going to have someone follow up from our Veterans Affairs Office and also our Social Services Department. Look, what I'd say here is, I feel for everyone involved. If we have a veteran who served our country and has PTSD and are dealing with mental health challenges, we got to support that individual. Everything Dominic is saying about his situation also sounds like he needs help and support, and we've got to find a way to mediate this. So, we will get our city agencies to work with Dominic individually to try and fix this, the bigger point, Brian, thank God the courts are coming back across the board. This has been something I've been calling for and pushing for, for months. It took way too long for the court system to come back, but at least it's back now and working off backlogs pretty quickly it seems. So, I do think a lot of issues beyond the one Dominic raises are going to start to get some resolution in the court system, but we'll reach out and see if we can help resolve this case directly.

**Lehrer:** Christine in Cobble Hill - and Dominic, hang on and give your contact information to us off the air if you would like to. Christine in cobble hill, you're on WNYC with the Mayor, hello?

**Question:** Hello. Thank you. Thank you, Brian, and thank you, Mayor de Blasio for taking my question today. I'm calling in relation to extended use permit fees that are charged to outside

organizations to provide after school programs in New York City Public School. This past year those fees went up exorbitantly, which we understand was due to increased cleaning costs due to COVID, and we certainly understand that actually schools need to be safe. However, we're trying to - our school just yesterday in Brooklyn, we're trying to set up an afterschool program for next year, and we're not able to get a lot of information about exactly the fees will be. We understand that it's still going to be exorbitantly high, there's one school in Brooklyn that received a bill just yesterday for the permit for an afterschool program and it was \$259,000, and that is on top of the charges that the program has to charge on families. It's simply untenable that families can bear the cost of this exorbitantly – exorbitant permits. So, I wanted to ask when will we receive clarification, the fee structure for these permits in the coming school year? And we'd also ask that you direct the DOE to waive old fees for extended use permits for afterschool programs, whether they're run by external organizations or internal, I mean the internal programs that are funded by the DOE and the DYCB do not have to pay these challenges, but all families need either free or affordable after-school care. We – you know, we simply can't have parents being able to go back to work full-time in office buildings and getting to the city back to normal if we, you know, don't have childcare after school for our families.

**Mayor:** Well, thank you, Christine. That's a really thoughtful and important question. You – I think your addition of the history of what we all had to do this last year is good and important and there was a lot more requirements for cleaning, et cetera. Thank God that is going to be different going forward because we've found out a lot more about COVID and the issue of surfaces is much less of a concern than it was thought to be. So, we can approach that differently. There still has to be a substantial amount of cleaning, but not the same as before. So, to your point, I will have the Chief of Staff to the Chancellor, Gabrielle Ramos, call you and talk this through to see how we can help address your situation. So, please give your information to WNYC. On the larger question of waiving all fees, I'm going to look at that. I could see an argument for that. I could also see some problems from that. Let me take a look at that and see what we can do. So, I hear you loud and clear, and we will certainly consider that.

**Lehrer:** Christine, hang on, we'll take your contact information off the air. Mr. Mayor, I want to ask you about the latest developments in the police killing of Kawasaki Trawick which we've brought up several times with you on their show. This week, as I'm sure you know, the Civilian Complaint Review Board called for the firing of the officer who shot and killed Trawick in his own home, even as the New York Post describes what happen. Thompson was charged by the board with using his taser and gun improperly, entering the property and improperly, and failing to get medical attention, according to sources. They say the other officer who is more experienced and repeatedly – did repeatedly tell his partner not to use for us, and yet he did. But my understanding is Commissioner Shea has already cleared Officer Brendan Thompson in this case, and so I'm confused. Isn't a Police Commissioner supposed to wait until the CCRB makes its determination, and then he makes a final ruling?

**Mayor:** Yeah, there's more than one level of accountability. Brian, I don't blame you for being confused and something that was very unclear of the world and we're working real hard to make clear. So, if you go online, you can see the disciplinary matrix that the NYPD agreed to with the CCRB, actually helped to create with the CCRB. This was a two-year process to come up with very clear standards that if an officer violated one of the rules of the department or the law in any

way, and was after due process found guilty, you can see the exact penalties that that officer would receive. The – I've said, the Police Commissioner said we are going to honor that matrix 100 percent, and what it means therefore is even when the police department has had their own internal review, and if they look at the situation and I've seen the video, it's a complex situation, the police department says we think in this situation the officer did what they could do or should do. The CCRB is another oversight. That's why we have an independent Civilian Complaint Review Board, it's something we've strengthened in recent years. Now, the CCRB has said we've looked at it, separately, and we think these charges should be pursued. So, now that we'll proceed to due process. And then the ultimate decision, would be based on the outcome of the due process and we'll align to the discipline matrix.

**Lehrer:** CCRB is independent to a point, it's still in the hands of Commissioner Shea to make that final call, and you supported it remaining in the hands of Commissioner Shea. Now that you are seeing the CCRB finding, will you call on the Commissioner to fire that officer?

**Mayor:** Again, I'm being real clear about a massive reform that was done. And we believe in due process, there has to be due process. So, I'm not going to ever say something should happen until we've actually gone through the evidence and had due process. I, as a progressive, I'd say to all fellow progressives, don't believe in due process for some and not for others. We have to have due process here. So, the CCRB, this is actually to me, checks and balances working. CCRB independent of the police department says we think there is something here. We think there needs to be a trial. They are proceeding to trial. If the verdict is guilty, then the penalties have to be within the range prescribed by the discipline matrix. And the Commissioner's going to follow that. I'm going to follow that. Whatever the range of penalties is, it will not be anything but what is prescribed by the discipline matrix. It is a massive reform. It has never been done before in this city. It doesn't exist hardly anywhere else in this country. And it's absolutely transparent.

**Lehrer:** Roberta in Harlem. You are on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Roberta.

**Question:** Good morning. Morning, Mr. Mayor. I am a retiree of the City of New York. And we have only recently found out that you together with the Municipal Labor Committee are participating in the sale of our Medicare benefits. Benefits that are federal, that we have paid into all our working lives, to a private organization called Medicare Advantage. Why are you not instead working on a project so that everybody in the City of New York can have single payer health care? Why are you privatizing our benefits? This is unacceptable.

**Mayor:** Well, Roberta, thank you for the question. I think that's just not what's happening with all due respect. First of all, I do believe in single payer and I fought for it here and around the country. Second of all, we have guaranteed health care for all in New York City. It's the most advanced health care system anywhere in the country. Any New Yorker who can't afford health care will either be provided an affordable plan via New York City or will be provided a NYC Care card, which means even if you're an undocumented person, even if you can't pay anything, you'll be given a primary care physician at one of our public hospitals and clinics. Nowhere in the country has gone as far in guaranteeing health care as New York City, but for our retirees, we want to make sure that the benefits people have continue. We also want to make sure the retiree health care system is solvent. And we've been working with municipal labor, this has not been



done in isolation. It's been an ongoing cooperative effort with the Municipal Labor Council to determine a way to keep the system funded long term, to protect you and all retirees, but keep the level of benefit the same. That's what we're doing.

**Lehrer:** David in Harlem, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, David.

**Question:** Hi there. Good to be on your call here. Mr. Mayor, I'm concerned with – and I hear from the screener that this has been addressed before, so I apologize, I hadn't heard it discussed before. But the number of unlicensed motorcyclists that tend to take over the neighborhoods mostly on the weekends, but it could be any evening. I have a young child, my wife and I are very active in the city, we're runners, and pedestrians walk everywhere. Number of occasions, we've had some close encounters with these unlicensed vehicles. And, you know, we're – frankly we've been quite threatened over the health of our child and ourselves, including one time on Central Park circle, those motorcyclists going the wrong way against traffic. I'm just wondering how high is the priority here to do something about this?

**Mayor:** I appreciate the question a lot. And, David, I'd like you to give your contact information to WNYC because I'd like the local precinct that covers Central Park to talk to you about your experience so they can hone their enforcement approach. This is a real issue. It requires very focused enforcement. It is a priority. Of course, number one priority right now is getting the city back 100 percent and addressing the gun violence that emerged here and everywhere in the country, in the wake of COVID. And we will turn that around. And as we do that, we'll focus more and more on a variety of COVID – excuse me, a variety of quality-of-life issues too. But this one's a real issue. The fact is that in many cases, these unlicensed motorcycles and other vehicles can be confiscated instantly because they're illegal on their face. We are asking New Yorkers who know where these vehicles are to report them. If you call in a location where they're being stored, and we've gotten a lot of calls from communities, and we've confiscated hundreds and hundreds of these vehicles, we literally can take them from their owners and they will not cause harm to the people of the city. Because they are literally not legal, not allowed in New York City. So, there's an effort to go at the root cause, but we're also working on enforcement. So, please let's make sure you connect with that precinct commander so we can do better at the enforcement there.

**Lehrer:** The other thing that comes up with those groups and some related co-drivers is the noise from that. That came up in the Manhattan Borough President's televised debate the other day, for example.

**Mayor:** A lot of debates. Dueling debates, Brian.

**Lehrer:** A lot of debates. But with respect to how noise is enforced, there was the incident in Washington Square Park last Saturday night, where I gather maybe you're going to say it was about something else, but originally to keep loud music from playing on a Saturday night at just 10:00 pm, with a 10:00 pm curfew. Cops in riot gear from the strategic response group, which as I understand it is supposed to be like an anti-terrorism group, came to clear out Washington Square Park at curfew. Do you personally think this is a good use of that organization, which I believe that you accepted a recommendation to deemphasize?



**Mayor:** Sure. And Brian respectfully, that's just not what happened. And so, let me please give you a chance to hear what happened. There were a lot of concerns from the community. And you're right, that music and very large gatherings and amplified music, loud amplified music was part of the problem. The work as always, the first work is being done by our community affairs officers. That's one of the reforms we've made. That's a good reform, that works. But after a lot of attempts to mediate and all there were folks in the park who were not willing to abide by the rules. When you say riot gear and the media likes to do this – the only difference between what the officers are wearing in that kind of situation, where unfortunately people are throwing things at officers, so they put a helmet on. The fact is we don't want to use SRG in that situation. But if we say here's a curfew. This is for the good of keeping peace and quiet in the park, based on lots of concerns from the community. And we set a deadline and that's what we're doing for a limited period of time. And people try to resist that deadline. And in fact, commit acts of violence. Of course, the officers have to respond. And if things are being thrown like bottles at officers, they are going to put on a helmet. But I think this is a very temporary thing. We're trying to be proactive, not reactive. Stop a problem before it grows. And I think we'll be able to establish a much better balance going forward in Washington Square Park in the weeks ahead.

**Lehrer:** And last thing on this, because we've gotten a number of calls this week about this. There've been reports of similar early park closures in Crotona Park in the Bronx and Coffey Park in Red Hook. We haven't seen those same crackdowns against Prospect Park or Central Park where a different crowd can be found partying and drinking wine late into the night. And people are saying, this looks like it's about race and class to them? What's your response?

**Mayor:** Well, obviously Washington Square Park is in one of the most privileged communities in New York City and primarily Caucasian community. Each of those communities is different that you just named. So, I think that immediately shows this is a very selective, specific effort when there's a particular problem. It is not something we're going to do on an ongoing basis. It's something that would be used sparsely when there's a particular problem to address. But one thing I think we've learned is, address a problem proactively, not reactively. And with the – absolutely we're trying to find the most peaceful resolution and we're going to do the same thing in all communities of all backgrounds.

**Lehrer:** But at the Crotona Park and the other case indicate that it's not being done equally across the board? And you know, that they, that the park goers in Washington Square were less white than the neighborhood?

**Mayor:** I don't know that honestly. I've seen, but again –

**Lehrer:** Well, that's what's been reported.

**Mayor:** Again, respectfully, I've seen the crowds in Washington Square Park, and I think they represent that neighborhood quite a bit. I'm sure there's a mix of other people as well. But the bottom line is this is a very rarely used approach. I want to confirm exactly what happened in those two other parks, because many times I've gotten media questions about things like that, that turned out not to be the whole story. So, what I'll say to you is once in a while if we think there's

a need to proactively stop a conflict and address an issue, we'll do that. But it's a rarity. It's a rarity and it's something that we are going to do when we think there's a problem solved. But then the goal is to get things back to the normal approach as quickly as possible.

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

**Mayor:** Thank you, Brian, take care.

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