

THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON  
THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW**

**Brian Lehrer:** It's Brian Lehrer on WNYC, and it's time now for our weekly Ask the Mayor call-in, my questions in yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio at 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0. Ask the Mayor anything – well, give him some privacy, but mostly anything – at 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0. Or, you can tweet a question, just use the hashtag #Ask the Mayor. And, good morning, Mr. Mayor. Welcome back to WNYC.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, Brian. Thank you for those – you know, putting a little bit of guardrail on that. Thank you, I appreciate that.

[Laughter]

**Lehrer:** I see you gave your final State of the City speech last night. No guardrails on that. Eight out of eight before your term limited out. It was a prerecorded virtual address for people who didn't see it for these virtual times, and you announced some new and newsworthy things. So, let me take down some of those to begin today, and you can explain them to our listeners. At this time when the virus is so prevalent and new, more contagious strains are breaking out, you nonetheless announced a plan to bring the City workers back to their offices in person in May, which is really pretty soon, and this is something that I know the real estate industry has wanted you to do to model that it's okay to come back to all kinds of private companies, offices. We've talked about this before. So, for the City workers, is that a hope or an order? Or, how would you describe it for May?

**Mayor:** I really appreciate the question, because this is one of the heart-of-the-matter points, how we vaccinate enough people to bring back our economy fully and, obviously, the public sector needs to lead the way. Just a quick note for all of your listeners, the main message of the State of the City was a recovery for all of us, an inclusive recovery, a recovery that does not repeat the status quo of the past, that addresses the disparities that come up in the COVID crisis. And anyone who wants to see both the video, which is really about the people of New York City and how we recover this year and beyond, and the policy papers that go with it, you go to [recoveryforall.nyc.gov](http://recoveryforall.nyc.gov). Again, [recoveryforall.nyc.gov](http://recoveryforall.nyc.gov). But to your question, Brian – so, 5 million New Yorkers will be vaccinated by June under this plan, which creates a pervasive reality. That creates a dynamic of much greater community immunity and changes the whole possibility of comeback. We know we can do that, so long as we have supply, and I'm seeing some good signs about vaccine supply. But we know we can do it, because we've already proven that we have the capacity to get up to a half-million vaccinations per week. The City workers about – you know, a very strong percentage of our workforce right now, between 70 and 80 percent of our workforce is at their work right now, because of the nature of their work. They're

at the front lines, serving the people in New York City. The folks that worked in offices who could do the work virtually, and anyone else doing remote work, they'll be coming back beginning in May, because it's time. We know we can vaccinate. We'll do specific vaccination drives related to public workers in work sites. But we know by then we'll have the capacity to reach people. And, also, it's how you bring back any public or private work site, and the schools are the great object lesson. You put right precautions in place – and we saw more from the CDC about this just this week, further proof at how safe schools have been when the right precautions are taken. We're going to do that in our public workplaces as well.

**Lehrer:** On policing, you propose to give local neighborhoods some input, I see, into who gets hired as their local precinct commanders. Who in each community will get that input? And I say, the Police Commissioner will still have final discretion over the hire. It won't be by committee. So, how meaningful is this community input, as opposed to just letting people talk?

**Mayor:** Look, I have talked to folks in the last few days as this plan was being perfected, who have been working on these issues for decades, and they were thrilled to hear this, because this changes the whole reality. The Commissioner has to provide to the police precinct council, and that's a kind of neighborhood entity has been around for many years – neighborhood folks volunteer to be a part of it – has to provide three to five nominees. And one of the things we believe in is, of course, nominees who reflect the diversity of New York City. So, for the first time in New York city history, the police precinct council will interview everyone who is nominated to be a precinct commander. It's a chance for those police leaders to show their connection to the community, their understanding of the community, their vision, and for the community to put them through their paces, then they provide formal input back to the Commissioner, and the Commissioner makes the final decision. Then, that police commander has to consistently stay connected to the police precinct council and get formally evaluated after the first year and work with the Commissioner on that as well. I guarantee you that this changes the approach, because it makes everyone mindful of the fact that you need leaders who fit the community, who understand the community, are listening to the community, and work with a community. We're making that a much greater priority by putting this in place than just the traditional model, which was, you know, rightfully about crime fighting, but we know that crime fighting and connection with the neighborhood have to go hand in hand.

**Lehrer:** You announced plans last night for a dedicated bike lane to replace one car lane on the Brooklyn bridge and the 59th Street Queensborough Ed Koch Bridge – the only bridge I know with three different names – and also several bicycle boulevards. Can you explain bicycle boulevards and say where there'll be?

**Mayor:** Yeah. If you go on the website, you'll see a schematic of them actually – [recoveryforall.nyc.gov](http://recoveryforall.nyc.gov). You'll see what a Bicycle Boulevard will look like. And there's going to be – we're going to start with one in each borough and then keep growing from there. They are very bike-friendly, bike-focused streets with lots of measures to slow things down and favor bikes. You could still have some traffic on them, but they're constructed in a way that's going to encourage bicycling and make anyone who's driving have to drive in a really slower, more mindful manner, and I think that's good for everyone. We want to put them – we'll have more to say soon on exactly where there'll be, but we want to put them where the need is greatest in terms of places where major bike lanes are not connected and need a connecting route, where we think there'll be a lot of ridership, and where there's particular safety concerns.

**Lehrer:** Will they all be separated bike lanes?

**Mayor:** Well, you'll see the visual. I urge everyone to go look at it. It's literally taking a whole street and changing the orientation of the streets, so the bikes are using the whole of the street. And, again, when you see the visual of how the protections are put in place, how the traffic is calmed, it's not like anything you have seen previously, it's a very different bike-friendly approach.

**Lehrer:** Let me do one more down this list of new initiatives you announced in the State of the City last night, then we'll go to calls. You proposed to establish a Charter Revision Commission to identify sources of structural racism in the city and recommend changes to the City's Charter, which is like City's constitution, that would root it out. Those would require the voters of the city to approve them, I presume, as charter changes do. So, can you get specific about the kinds of changes to the City Charter that you envision potentially being an acted by the voters to fight structural racism that the City Council or the Mayor can't just do already, if you have the political will?

**Mayor:** Yeah. I'll give you some broad examples. And, again, this is going to be an effort to start this year. I think given how important it is, it should continue into 2022. That's how I'm structuring it. Obviously, the next mayor can have their own judgment, but I think if people see this commission doing important structural work there'll be a lot of support to continue it. Brian, it's true to say some things can be done by an executive order, some things can be done by a vote in the Council. Sometimes the best thing to do is go to the people both to ensure it happens and there's a full public debate, but also, because of the impact of a popular vote, really deeply embedding something into how our city is run. What it means to me is looking at the various institutions of our society, City agencies, Department of Education, Fire Department, Police Department, Health Department, you go to go down the whole list, where are there structural issues that must be addressed? Looking at the business community, looking at cultural institutions, looking at nonprofits – where are the changes we have to make? Some of those are the kinds of things that might end up on the ballot. Some of those are examples of naming and formally acknowledging structural racism, and then identifying the changes that private entities will have to do as well. I'll give you an example of something we did previously that at least started us down this road with the cultural sector. We came up with the New York City Cultural Plan to acknowledge that many, many cultural institutions had historically not had strong representation of people of color on their boards or among their staff, particularly their senior staff, or even among their audiences. We said that City funding in the future would be related to how well these institutions did at diversifying on all those fronts. It has led to major changes. Just formally saying that, that is an area that needs to be addressed and linking it to outcomes like funding has led to major changes at New York City culture institutions. I want to apply that same prism to literally the whole of New York City society and then decide in each case do we need a charter change? Do we need a law change? An executive order? Or, is it really about shining a light on a public or private institution and the leaders of that institution agreeing to change their approach?

**Lehrer:** Kate, in Queens. You're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Kate.

**Question:** Hi, I have a question for the Mayor and a comment about [inaudible]. Mr. Mayor, I'm curious whether or not you're open to flexible work schedules for City workers who have proven during COVID that they can successfully work from home responsibly. We didn't have work from home policy prior to COVID. And then, regarding vaccines, I'd like to encourage you to further restrict where vaccines are available for folks. The way it currently works, or at least it seems to me, is that you're making vaccine appointments for folks with community centers for vulnerable populations, but then you're opening those appointments to folks like to the public at large, and then these vulnerable populations are competing with people, like myself, trying to find an appointment for their mother-in-law. And, for me, the ethical choice has already been made by the City as to whether or not I can book that appointment for my mother-in-law, because it's an open – appointment online. So, I'd like to encourage that you limit these appointments like happened at the armory. That's all.

**Mayor:** Thank you, Kate. I really appreciate – and I appreciate the way you phrase that. And, obviously, I can tell that you care very deeply about addressing the disparities that we're out there trying to overcome. It's a really important question, one we're working through as we speak. Look, we want everyone to get vaccinated, let's be clear. We're not trying to create barriers. We're trying to create an open door to vaccination. We're trying to maximize vaccination in the places that suffered the most. And we see in many cases a trust problem, a hesitancy problem in those very same communities that we have to address with local leaders, with voices that people trust, with lots of questions being answered, etcetera, and giving people comfort. So, there's a lot of moving parts here we have to try and make sense of in an equitable way and we'll certainly have a lot more to say on that as we give an update to the people the city on the data that we're finding in the vaccine effort.

On the flexible work schedule, it's a good question. I mean, look, I think my opening position here is we know that when people gather in a workplace there are things that happen better than happen remotely. We've certainly seen that in the course of this year in government. I've had many, many instances where I saw a lot more effectiveness when people could get in the room and meet together, even if that to be distanced, and wearing masks, and be smart about it, it still made a huge difference. So, I still prefer to get the City workforce fully back in person, but there will be a clear evaluation of where flexibility might make sense in the short-term and the long-term, because we have learned a lot in this experience. So, I would just start with saying, I think it's actually going to be everything from a morale boost, to an efficiency boost, to a creativity boost to get people back together. But we will think very carefully about, you know, how we want to deal with flexibility in the future based on what we've learned here.

**Lehrer:** A couple of follow ups on that. Will you require City workers to be vaccinated or disclose whether they've been vaccinated, if they're coming back, if they have to come back in person?

**Mayor:** Well, a couple of things real quick, Brian. Look, this is a policy we've announced and we're going to be flushing out the details between now and May, obviously. I said very clearly, I want to get City workers vaccinated. There'll be lots of ways to do that between now and then. But I also want to be clear, we're working in a context where the very precautions we put in place – and I'm going to use the schools as an example – clearly until recently we didn't have a vaccine. And yet the schools were amongst the safest places in New York City, because of all the other precautions. This is something – Dr. Jay Varma, who's my senior advisor on the COVID

crisis, he's really been clear about this. From the international research, if you require people to wear masks all the time, if you clean all the time and you ventilate all the time and you do social distancing, it really limits the ability of the disease to spread and that's without even having vaccines [inaudible] –

**Lehrer:** Right, but we want [inaudible] –

**Mayor:** [Inaudible]

**Lehrer:** But you can't bring City workers back to the offices as they have existed in the past and the density with which people worked in those offices [inaudible] –

**Mayor:** NO, that's my point –

**Lehrer:** [Inaudible] Yes?

**Mayor:** No, no, wait, wait, wait. That's why I said very clearly with all the precautions appropriate to the moment. At some point, this coronavirus moment is going to pass, and we'll keep adjusting as we get more and more information. But if you said, let's say it was today, of course you're going to have all of those precautions that we're using in the schools and we use right now in City government offices, for the folks who are back, you would use all of the above. What we don't foresee at this moment, Brian, is a mandate that folks must be vaccinated, or somehow, you know, they are not allowed to do their work. That has not been where we've been. I haven't felt that's the right thing to do. I know a lot of the unions representing City workers have not favored that approach. I think when you combine an increasing level of vaccination with stringent precautions, that's what's going to make us able to handle this very smoothly. And then every day we get closer to that kind of critical mass point of community immunity that solves a lot of the bigger problems.

**Lehrer:** And to the caller's concern, and everybody's concerned about disparities, my understanding is the City has data on the disparities by race but has not released it. Is that still the case? And if so, why?

**Mayor:** I've answered this numerous times, including this morning. We're releasing it this week. We still have some more work to do to perfect it. There's a lot of information, including the challenge of folks who chose not to provide their demographic information. So, we're really trying to make sure we get this exactly right and with specific ideas of how we're going to follow up on it. So, that's coming out, as I said this morning, give or take the next 48 hours.

**Lehrer:** One more from our station's health editor, who just slipped me a question based on this new story this morning about the Johnson & Johnson vaccine phase three data, the company's vaccine can't establish herd immunity, is what I'm seeing. Its efficacy appears to be too low for that. You voiced excitement over this vaccine in the past, but seeing what you're seeing this morning, if you've gotten to it yet, is it worth the investment in the long-term?

**Mayor:** I don't have from our health team – I don't have a definitive report suggesting anything but that it will be a major contributor to what we have to do. So, you know, I want to look carefully. I want my health team to evaluate that information, but I don't want to jump the gun on

that. So far, the notion of a single dose vaccine, and this is what two things separate Johnson & Johnson, one, the single dose not double, two a much easier refrigeration methodology, which means much more flexible use. You know, for example, we've had vaccination sites at public housing developments in the last week. They've been really successful. I want to do that all over. If you don't need a stringent refrigeration regime, that makes it a lot easier to be out there longer hours, etcetera. So, I'm very hopeful about Johnson & Johnson. We'll get a full evaluation. I'll be able to speak about that next week.

**Lehrer:** Clinton, Hamilton Heights – you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Clint.

**Question:** Hi, thanks for taking my question, Brian. Mr. Mayor in December, and on January 15th during this segment, you were asked why the NYPD had failed to serve the CCRB charges on Officer Wayne Issacs for the 2016 killing of Delrawn Small, despite the CCRB sending charges to the NYPD in October. And you said that you would talk to the CCRB and have a formal answer, which seemed like a misleading deflection since the NYPD is delaying, not the CCRB. And then on January 19th, last Tuesday, NYPD leaked news to the media and the Police Benevolent Association that they would stop blocking the CCRB prosecution of Isaacs, but they didn't bother to inform Delrawn's family. And at that point they still hadn't served the charges. So, given the terrible way this case has been handled and the disrespect to Delrawn's siblings, will you commit to ensuring that the disciplinary trial is scheduled for the spring so that this can be resolved before the five-year mark since Delrawn Small was killed? And will you support the demand that Isaacs be fired and not be allowed to retire with benefits?

**Mayor:** Look, I'm going to keep this very simple. The concern raised was that this trial wasn't moving and it needed to move. It's now moving. I want to see it happen as quickly as possible. There are many other disciplinary matters that have been waiting because of COVID obviously, many important ones. So, there's going to be due process here. And then we'll judge accordingly based on what comes from that due process as we would with anyone.

**Lehrer:** So, you're not committing to a timeline for that trial to when it would start?

**Mayor:** No, again, we – the bottom line is it's moving. It's important, it's moving. There's also a lot of other important trials that have to happen. So, I just want to say the important point is it's moving forward.

**Lehrer:** And the last time you were on you hadn't seen the video of that incident that appeared to contradict the NYPD's version of events. Have you seen it yet?

**Mayor:** No. And, Brian, again, there's going to be an entire trial here, so it's not for me to – I'm just not going to get involved in opining when there's about to be a formal trial led by the CCRB. That's what that process will achieve.

**Lehrer:** Teresa in the Bronx. You're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Teresa.

**Question:** Hello. Good morning. Thank you, Brian. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. I'm calling because –

**Mayor:** Good morning, Teresa. How you going?

**Question:** Hello, Mr. Mayor. Hello, Brian. Thank you, Mayor, for all you do and all you're trying to do. I'm calling you this morning on behalf of a friend of mine. She lives in NYCHA housing in Brooklyn, and she's been having an ongoing problem with heat and repairs in her apartment. She's not getting any heat at all. And she said the holes in the walls, leaky pipes that leaks water, and it could be a fire hazard. I bought her a heater to try to help her out. And yesterday she called me, she was in such distress, she said the heater had blown out the lights and thank goodness she did get somebody to come over to turn the lights on, but they told her don't use the heater, don't use the stove, but in the meanwhile there's no heat. So, I was just wondering if somehow – because I don't know what to tell her because she calls me every day with the same complaint. She's said she's been asking for help. No one has been helping her. So, I was going to ask you if we could try to help her in some way to get these repairs done in her apartment.

**Mayor:** Teresa, thank you so much for looking out for your friend. And would you please give your information to WNYC right after we finish. I'm going to have the general manager of the housing authority, Vito Mustaciuolo, reach out to you or to your friend directly and make sure the repairs are moving. So, we're going to have the top guy talk to you directly to get this working. It sounds like a really – a situation we do not want to leave the way it is. We got to get help for your friend and let's get it going today.

**Lehrer:** Good. Teresa, hang on, we're going to get that contact information. Sounds like they're going to get serious about helping your friend on this. Mr. Mayor, in our last couple of minutes, since this was your last State of the City address last night, you're obviously thinking about New York after you. And now that you're in your eighth year of one of the most difficult jobs in the world, what kind of advice would you begin to give your successor? Whichever one of the 33 mayoral candidates, it turns out to be –

[Laughter]

Not so much about policy, but about something that you've learned that you never thought about before taking this office, that turns out to be important to not being overwhelmed by it.

**Mayor:** Okay. Well, that's interesting. Your last words change the question a little bit.

**Lehrer:** Oh, you can go wherever you –

**Mayor:** I'll do both real quick. This is not to flatter you or colleagues at WNYC, Brian, but one thing I learned because when we started out, we didn't want to use the same approach as Bloomberg and Giuliani had used to a weekly call-in program, and made the decision, later than we should have honestly, to do the call-in with you and with WNYC, which I think has been a really healthy thing. So, I think this is one of the things I'd say to any candidates. You've got to keep perspective. You've got to constantly hear the voices of people. This is one good way to do it. So, I'll pre-endorse the notion that whoever becomes mayor should stay with this format on WNYC every Friday.

But I think the other thing is the power of town hall meetings, which I learned really, really intensely – again, something we didn't emphasize in the beginning while we were trying to build up the team and get key policies in place, but the town hall meetings are so powerfully

instructive. They're humbling on one level in a good way, they get you outside of the bubble, but they also are very life-affirming. And I think that's the kind of bigger point I would make that – when you're fighting the daily battles against whatever crisis, against the other levels of government, which is inevitable, there's going to be challenges with the federal and state government against those who might not be doing the right thing in the private sector, whatever that may be, or, you know, snowstorm or anything else, the best thing is to go back to the people. The best thing is to hear the voice of the people, even the critical voices, and to just see how much people care to see how much they actually – very, very powerfully. You go to a town hall meeting. I did this – I did 70 of them, typically 200, 300 New Yorkers –

**Lehrer:** Ten seconds.

**Mayor:** Yup. You would get not just emotion and specific problem, you would get solutions and people often offer the best solutions.

**Lehrer:** Thank you for that answer. And we'll do more big picture as this year goes on. And Mr. Mayor, thanks as always. Talk to you next week.

**Mayor:** Thanks, Brian. Take care.

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