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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON THE BRIAN LEHRER
SHOW**

Brian Lehrer: But we 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 2-1-2-4-3-3-W-N-Y-C, 4-3-3-9-6-9-2, 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.

Lehrer: So this has been a year, as you well know, when the media and general public have been paying more attention to the infrastructure problems plaguing many of the 400,000 New Yorkers who live in public housing. The lead, the heat, the water, technically public housing is a federal program, which a lot of listeners probably don’t know, and I see that yesterday you spent about an hour with President Trump’s Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Dr. Ben Carson. What did you ask for? And how did that go?

Mayor: Look, let me start, Brian, with how you opened, it’s time to focus on the needs of 400,000 New Yorkers who live in public housing. In fact for too many years I would even say decades they were not focused on and I have to be very straight forward, the previous two administrations did not make public housing a priority. I made it a priority from the first month on the job and we have actually put a huge amount of resources now, it could be as much as \$5 billion when everything is totaled up, to try and address the fundamental challenges in public housing, which really comes from decades of disinvestment particularly at the federal and State level.

The conversation yesterday was productive. I’m not going go into detail about it, but it was productive because it really focused on the question that fundamental changes will be needed to improve public housing and all the stakeholders have to be a part of it. You know, to date we’ve seen over now over 30 years declining real federal investment and we’ve seen the State of New York step away entirely in terms of resources and we need to get all the different players contributing to the solution. So that was what the conversation was about, again, not going to go into detail, but I think it’s important that the conversation is happening because one of the only ways, of course, to move forward is to get people to recognize the shared responsibility.

Lehrer: Well as I understand it, the federal judge might remove management of NYCHA from the City of New York and give it to the federal government, or even under the – put it under direct supervision of the court, so would it be accurate that you and Secretary Carson were both figuring out ways to avoid that?

Mayor: Again I'm not going to get into a private meeting. I want to say that the judge offered – I think – in a very, very long detailed opinion a range of potential solutions and I think it's quite clear that there was not a definitive – not only not a definitive answer from the judge but not even a definitive menu that he offered a range of possibilities. The one connective tissue was saying the federal government had to do more to help the residents of public housing in New York City and he clearly wants specificity in terms of what that kind of commitment will be. So we don't know, you know I can't speak for the judge, I can only say he pointed that that was what was missing in this equation. We're going to all work together to see if we can come up with a long term vision that will fundamentally improve the Housing Authority and respond to the concerns of the judge.

Now I want to remind you, we announced just a couple weeks ago a plan to bring federal resources in and private financing in to entirely rehab buildings that account for 62,000 apartments, well over 100,000 people live in them, using a model that has worked before. It's based on the Section 8 – the Project Section 8 program – and the RAD program federally. We've done this in the Rockaways at the Ocean Bay development, it worked, we've done this on the Lower East Side at Campos, it's worked. There's a lot of enthusiasm for the residents who had experienced it and seen the total changes of improvements in their lives. We announced separate from the judge, separate from HUD, a vision to fix entirely 62,000 apartments as one piece of our bigger turn around program.

Lehrer: Right and we've talked about that here before. Let me stay on that federal piece since you had this meeting with Dr. Carson yesterday, if the judge ruled as you say, and this is what I've seen everybody's version say, that the federal government is falling down on its responsibility to sufficiently take care of HUD, do you take that as a direction to Congress to allocate more money? Should we be pressing Congress on that and saying the court forced you to do it?

Mayor: I want – I'm not a lawyer and I would say that I'm not sure judges order Congress to do things but I do think in this instance the judge was pointing to the federal government's legal requirement, legal responsibility to own up to its responsibility. Remember as you said in the beginning, public housing was chartered by the federal government and created under a federal program and funded primarily by the federal government. That model pervaded for decades until, starting with the election of Ronald Reagan, the federal government stopped – start backing away from its responsibility.

So, all the federal oversight power was there but the resources started to be taken away which really warped the model. That was the crucial point in the 80s where things could have been turned –

Lehrer: Right so –

Mayor: To your question – to your question, I think what the judge is making clear is there has to be additional resources from the federal side. That doesn't mean ordering Congress, it does mean, in my opinion, HUD looking at its budget and finding ways to provide more resources and not just budget but also things like the waivers and the regulatory relief that will allow NYCHA to solve some of its problems more quickly.

Lehrer: So why, in that context, might you not even want the kind of federal receivership that is one of the options on the judges menu since it's the federal government most of all that has failed in its duty to adequately fund NYCHA buildings. Why not force them to be accountable in that way?

Mayor: I understand that theory, Brian, but let me speak in terms of my long standing relationship with the people who live in public housing – and I've spent a lot of time with public housing over the last 20 or more years. If you're talking about the federal government taking over our public housing and running it well, unfortunately, if you look at that history around the country it's a very mixed bag but second, you know, how are people who live here going to have accountability if they can't turn to local leaders for solutions.

There's been a lot of real important issues that were raised in the last couple of years and you've seen me along with the Chair and the General Manager of NYCHA responding to those concerns. There's a heat problem – we went out, we got more mobile boilers and more mechanics. There's a problem with need for more renovations. We announced this new vision around Section-8 and RAD, and I can go down the list one after another of how we've [inaudible] and roofs. We just did all the roofs over to stop mold and leaks at the biggest houses development –

Lehrer: And you just don't trust that the federal government would do that as much?

Mayor: Look at the record. Look at the record. If there's not local control, there's not accountability. I think it's too much of the record unfortunately.

Lehrer: I also read in the Washington Post – and staying on NYCHA for another minute or two because this is so important – that Carson's deputy for this region Lynne Patton, in the same job Regional Director for New York and New Jersey that you once held in the Clinton administration, plans to move from her home in Trump Plaza into a NYCHA building in Harlem for the month of January to get a first-hand experience of what people there are living with. Can you confirm that report?

Mayor: You'll have to ask her. I have not gotten any confirmation of that.

Lehrer: If this happens, and will be more than just a stunt, what would you hope that Director Patton would learn?

Mayor: Again, I don't want to speak to her – I know that job very well as you said and everyone has to make a decision about how they gather information and how they do that job. So, I don't want to comment on whatever decision she makes. I want to say that the challenge here is – the federal government can do a lot to help the people who live in NYCHA. They can provide us with the freedom to get things done. Right now there's a huge amount of regulatory challenges that hold us back from doing the work that they say they want us to do. They can provide the kind of financing we need. We're putting a huge amount of resources in.

The federal government is the – obviously the part of government that has the most capacity to add. If you look at the – now, we've committed and – actually spent and/or committed \$5 billion in five year. If you look at the previous two administrations over 20 years – nothing like that. So, the federal – meaning at the city level – the federal government would now come in and say you know what you guys have skin in the game, we're going to put serious money in, we're going to give you regulatory relief, we know the control has to be local because that's the only way there will be accountability and real change.

But we want for example a monitor which we have with a number of agencies. We can make that work instantly. But we have to know that we can control our own destiny and I think the people of this – ask people who live in public housing if they're comfortable looking to Washington for the day to day management for their buildings.

Lehrer: And finally on this before we move onto other things and take some phone calls, the Daily News reports today that NYCHA is considering breaking up into five borough housing authorities to make running it more manageable. Is that something you might support?

Mayor: That's not something I've heard. My understanding is that that's an idea that was out there in the past. I'll just make a broad statement. We're going to look at any number of ways to get things done but what people really want to understand, the vision I have and the Chair and General Manager of NYCHA have, just look at the announcements we've been making in recent weeks and we've said there's more coming.

This month, we'll be announcing a major new overhaul plan for additional pieces of NYCHA. That's where we're focused. We'll continue the conversation with the other people in the equation and see what other ideas they have.

Lehrer: It's our Ask the Mayor segment as most Friday mornings with Mayor Bill de Blasio – 2-1-2-4-3-3-W-N-Y-C, 4-3-3-9-6-9-2, or tweet a question. Use the hashtag #AsktheMayor. And Allen in Brooklyn, you're on WNYC. Hello.

Question: Good morning and thanks very much to both of you. Mayor, I admire your policies on bringing a progressive agenda in a time when national politics is [inaudible]. One area where we really could do better is in educating the public on transit finance options. We all know there's more money needed to reach the \$40 billion estimated by the head of the MTA for long term capital improvements much less expansion, and yet the two main sources of revenue seems to be straphangers and [inaudible]. No one is talking about value capture or tax increment financing in areas around existing stations in the downtown area whose buildings would be useless statues

without the ability to get people onto those floors to pay rent at high rates, even people who don't use transit in those neighborhoods could not access those buildings unless transit was being used by most people to keep the streets clear for the limousines.

And yet every hearing, every Christmas after every governor's election there's a hearing on raising fares when people are least able to focus. And the media gets advertising money that intimidates them from talking about it. Politicians get campaign contributions that intimidate them from talking about –

Lehrer: Let me get an answer for you, Allen, on value capture financing primarily. Mr. Mayor –

Mayor: Yeah, I'm going to speak to value capture but I want to start with the positive. So, Allen, your point is really well taken which is – we should be talking right now about all the options for fixing the subways, fixing the buses. And I keep telling people – and I'm going to say it, Brian, a hundred times between now and April 1st – April 1st is the day of the decision. April 1st, 2019 is the day that the future of the MTA will be decided one way or another. That is when the State budget will be passed, that is the opportunity to lock in the big decisions that can only come from the State on the future of the MTA.

Now, Allen, there's a bunch of ideas on the table and I think value capture is the worst idea. There's the millionaire's tax which I have promoted, which I think is the single fairest, most progressive – by definition progressive taxation – taxes on millionaires and billionaires in New York City so that the rest of us can get around. It's sustainable. The money is there. That's the number one option in my view.

A lot of people believe in congestion pricing, and I see the virtues and I also have real concerns I'd like to see addressed that I have not seen addressed in any of the plans so far. But congestion pricing is obviously a real potential part of the solution. Then there are ideas like you just saw the other day. I think it was Melissa Mark-Viverito who talked about all the proceeds that could come from the legalization of marijuana.

That's a whole new revenue source – and where is that revenue source going to be devoted? Perfectly fair option to discuss. All of that will come together April 1st. Everyone who cares about the MTA, the subways, the buses should be focusing their attention on Albany over these next four months to force a solution.

But value capture is the worst idea. I'll tell you why. It takes away revenue that New York City uses right now to pay for schools, police, fire, parks, sanitation. That money is already locked in to our budget and to our future budget potentially to do the things that people demand of me.

Every time I have a town hall meeting literally dozens and dozens of new things people want us to spend money on – we need the revenue that comes from the existing mass transit and any new mass transit to allow us to pay for those things.

So, value capture takes money out of the New York City budget and away from the services we provide our people. I think that's the worst of all ideas.

Lehrer: Two quick follow ups. One – if New York State does legalize recreational marijuana, would you like to see the tax revenue dedicated to the MTA or might not be the best use of it in your opinion?

Mayor: I'm going to come forward soon with my sense of some of the things that we have to address before legalization can occur. I think there are a number of different ideas on the table about what could be done with the revenue, so I'm not going to say today it should be one or the other, but there will be meaningful revenue. But I want to be clearer on marijuana. I think this has been under discussed. We need to get the regulatory framework right from the beginning.

There are real safety issues, real health issues, there's huge issues of how we stop corporate America from taking over the marijuana industry in this state and doing exactly what the tobacco industry did, doing exactly what the pharmaceutical manufacturers did with opioids, and pushing a product and doing it in a very corporate manner with no regard to communities and no economic empowerment of communities. We – before we jump we have a chance to get this right and I'm going to be speaking to that in the coming weeks.

Lehrer: And the other follow up, the head of New York City Transit, Andy Byford, seems to be at odds with the Manhattan DA and NYPD on fare evasion. Byford says loosening the penalty is resulting in much more turnstile jumping at an unacceptable price tag which could contribute to fare hikes and service cuts. Do you have a side on this?

Mayor: Yeah I do. The criminal justice reform element here I believe, the NYPD believes, that we can achieve the goal of stopping fare evasion or discouraging fare evasion with an approach that involves much less arrest. We've been reducing the number of arrests, we have been using much more of deterrent approach, it's a fairly new policy so I think it's kind of early to judge it entirely, but the bottom line is every time an officer does not arrest someone for fare evasion, gives them a summons instead, the officer stays on their post as a preventative measure to stop other fare evasion.

So we think this is a much more enlightened approach to policing, it's also good to criminal justice reform. There are times when arrest is appropriate, and there are some differences that the NYPD and the DA have on that, and I agree with the NYPD's concerns, but I don't agree with Mr. Byford. I have a lot of respect for him. I don't agree with his core assessment. There are other reasons why the revenue of the MTA may be going down including the problems of the MTA and I think it's important. We know this is an agency that has not been well run, we know that increasingly that trains have not been running on time effectively and people are more and more discouraged by that. I mean that's the first thing to look at is to why revenue might be going down or ridership might be going down, but in terms of fare evasion, we believe this approach will ultimately be more preventative but also aligned to the values that we have about criminal justice reform.

Lehrer: Question from a listener via Twitter, it says please ask the Mayor what his response is to Monday's New York City Council hearing featuring testimony by kids who have been deprived of equal access to school sports. Why does New York City follow State mandates on deeply

flawed tests and not on physical education? And I will add to the listeners question that I've seen this described as, disproportionately depriving kids of color to school sports.

Mayor: Okay, I did not see what came out of that hearing. I want to be straightforward. I care deeply about this issue in terms of first, physical education, and I want to separate the two concepts because I'm not 100 percent clear what came out of the hearing. In terms of physical education, it is a very true statement that for decades the City of New York and the Department of Education did not live up to the State mandate, and we in fact in the last two years have put in place the plan and the funding to provide physical education truly in every school in New York City in the coming years where every school would either have its own standalone gym that is a functional, usable gym for the size of the school, or we would build a new one in or around the school, or we would lease space in a building nearby to provide it because it's crazy.

Look, as a public school parent for many, many years I could tell you that if your kids don't get exercise not only is not good for their development, it's not good for their learning. So, we're adamantly going to fix that problem. We have the plans and the money in place.

On sports teams, I don't know what the critique is but I'd be happy to come back for next week's show and have more to say.

Lehrer: Okay, let's do that. I'm sure it was hard for you this week to read the New York Times story called "New York's Vanishing Mayor," which said you had been spending less and less time at City Hall – only nine or ten days a month the last two years compared to 19 days a month in your first year in office, and that you rarely meet with many of your commissioners making it hard for many of them to advance new ideas or inform you about problems they are dealing with, the article said. Where have you been?

Mayor: I think it's a horribly inaccurate and unfair article. Unfortunately, I think the thesis was written before the facts were gathered. If you talk to the people who work in my administration, they would say it doesn't matter whether I'm at Gracie Mansion or City Hall or the City Hall in Your Borough program, which is one of the things that's kind of amazing, was left out of the article. You know, in 2017 and 2018 we took City Hall out to each of the boroughs to work with the grassroots more. We literally – five, full working days went to one borough, relocated all the senior staff of City Hall, all of my activities to a different borough. We did that in 2017 and 2018.

Guess what? That reduces the number of days in City Hall because you're out in communities. There was an election year in the middle of that. Obviously in an election, you go out to communities. I've done 58 town hall meetings. But the New York Times, with all due respect to them, which I have often felt pays more attention to elite concerns than neighborhood concerns, does not look at this from the perspective of all the time I spend out in communities and all the time I spend making decisions on a host of issues. But I do it through deputy mayors. That's the organizational structure we've come up with.

I have 380,000 employees and a \$90 billion annual operating budget, CEO of a very large complex entity. My decision from the beginning was to run things through deputy mayors. I talk

to commissioners all the time on a host of issues. But it's not a free market where commissioners come in regularly and pitch their ideas. That's not how we do it. They bring their ideas to deputy mayors, the deputy mayors and other senior City Hall staff present me with a range of options and we make decisions.

It's a different organizational model but here's what I also don't understand. Where is this focus on outcomes? The city has more jobs than it's ever had. It's the safest it's ever been. The social fabric is stronger than it's been in a long time. The schools are getting better. Graduation rate is up. That's what the Times or any journalist should be starting with – are we achieving the outcomes, not do I have my meeting in Brooklyn or do I have my meeting in City Hall or Gracie Mansion?

Lehrer: I hear what you say about the deputy mayor model, but before this week's, what you admitted was, bad handling of the firing of Emergency Management Commissioner Joseph Esposito by the deputy mayor who supervises him – the Times reports you hadn't had a one-on-one meeting with him in two-and-a-half years. So, does that indicate that the deputy mayor model is not working that well?

Mayor: No, I don't think that at all. The deputy mayor model is exactly what brought us the pathway to decreased crime, more jobs, better schools, etcetera. And I intensely focus on the areas that need the most hands-on focus. So, I put a whole lot of time into police, into schools, into obviously when we created pre-K and as we've been creating the 3-K initiative, NYCHA, public housing – a lot of hands-on time – homelessness.

There's a range of issues but there are too many issues to do the super intense approach to everything. There has to be a lot of delegation. If you're not delegating in this kind of role. You're really going to paralyze things. And the deputy mayor model has worked overwhelmingly. We've had, in fact, Brian extraordinarily smooth personnel dynamics. If you look at the line-up of our administration compared to day one, it's amazing how many people are at the exact same jobs they had at the beginning and how much continuity we've had and how that has worked.

Look at the many successes we've had. I agree with you in the case of Commissioner Esposito. There was a fundamental mistake and it was simply that in the rush of events even though it was absolutely appropriate for the person he reported to daily and weekly to have that conversation with him – given his seniority, given his achievements it would have been better for me to have it. That does not indicate any big structural reality. It indicates one decision where I should have seen that that personally deserved a different approach.

Lehrer: Name, in Manhattan, you're on WNYC with the Mayor, hello Name.

Question: Hello?

Lehrer: Hi.

Question: Hi, Brian. Yes I would like to ask the Mayor that he – he just said it right now that he has a very close relationship with people who live in NYCHA, and if he does how come, under his watch, NYCHA has gone to such a bad state and to the point sometimes we don't even have water to take a shower in these buildings and I would love another agency, or the federal government to take over because I've been living there for 40 years and instead of it get better, it's get worse and worse and worse, so nothing is going to change. For all those billion dollars, in 20 years, everything is going to be the same again if it's going to go in the same administration. Thank you.

Mayor: Well, Name, look if you say that there's been a host of problems at NYCHA, of course you're right, but I would say respectfully look at what happened that caused those problems. If the federal government had kept its funding commitments at the level needed to keep NYCHA going, you would not be having this conversation with me. That decision started to be made in 1980 and it's only gotten worse, since then. And, you know, everyone has a right to their opinion but again I would caution, look at the history of what happens when the federal government is directly in control. Look, I don't want to see NYCHA privatized, I don't want to see NYCHA buildings torn down, I don't want to see residents of NYCHA displaced. Under my administration, for five years, none of that has happened, we've protected the public reality of NYCHA, we've protected the residents – residents have all the rights they had five years ago, they pay 30 percent of their income in rent, they have the right to make sure they can have their apartment long term, we've maintained control locally. If you say, oh let's try something new, I guarantee you there a lot people out there, including people in Washington, who think something new means privatization or tearing down buildings, or displacing residents – look at New Orleans, look at a lot of places around the country – be careful what you wish for.

Lehrer: Name, can I just ask which project to you live in?

Question: Two Bridges, 286 South Street, and also, I will say you know the co-ops in [inaudible] street. They were privatized and the people live there well, the people sell the apartment and move to other places for a lot of money. Why can't we never have that – that opportunity too? You know, we are just submitted like in a [inaudible] system in NYCHA.

Mayor: So again, I don't know who is providing you the information, I want to be one if you're not hearing it. Any resident in NYCHA can apply, of course, for any of our other affordable housing options, and there are a lot now. We're in the middle of creating and preserving 300,000 affordable apartments beyond everything we're doing to protect NYCHA. Any resident of NYCHA who wants to apply for one of those can, a lot have, and have left NYCHA buildings and have gone to other types of affordable housing.

Lehrer: Susie in the Bronx, you're on WNYC with the Mayor, hello Susie. Susie are you there? We'll try to get back to Susie. How about Tracy in Woodhaven, Tracy you're on WNYC with the Mayor.

Question: Hi, good morning, how is everyone this morning?

Lehrer: Good, thank you.

Mayor: Good morning.

Question: I just had a suggestion for the Mayor. As somebody who doesn't use public transportation because of my job, something that seems to happen a lot now is with Uber, Lyft, Via, all of these other services, there is less parking. Is there any way we can, maybe, can I suggest that there's some type of rule where these cars cannot park essentially overnight on residential streets just like commercial vehicles can't?

Mayor: Well, that's a real interesting question, and please give your information to WNYC so we can follow up. That's an interesting idea. Look, it's different obviously with those vehicles because they're owned by individuals versus companies. So we are very careful about companies, you know, particularly, you know, big trucks and delivery trucks parking where residential folks want to park. I'm not sure – you know, because it's not the same as a company, it's a privately-owned vehicle, I'm not sure it works the same way, so it's an interesting idea but strikes me as a challenging one. But I will tell you, we obviously, and I want to thank the City Council for this, we did what I wish we had done three years ago when I first presented it the City Council, we finally put some limits on the growth of the for-hire vehicle industry which was getting out of control, and was creating a situation where not only were the streets congested but the wages of the workers were being driven down and it was unfair situation for everyone involved.

Soon, we're going to have the results of a more careful study of what we need to do going forward and we're going to have the opportunity through the Taxi and Limousine Commission to decide really what the number should be for the city in the future and that's something that's long overdue – to create some rules and some limits that work so New York City can keep moving. But I will look at your idea around parking because I know people are frustrated by the lack of parking. I think there's probably other, better things we could do, but I'm going to look at that because I think it's a fair and interesting idea.

Lehrer: Another question from a listener via Twitter, this listener asked "Please ask Bill de Blasio about the Bloomberg News report on the New York City Marshal 'Program,'" the word program in quotes, and as I understand it that article revealed the existence of one New York City Marshal in a position appointed by you who makes over a million dollars year basically by doing the collection work sometimes for predatory lenders. Have you looked into this?

Mayor: We'll we're going to. You know, this is an area that for me, and I think for most New Yorkers, we haven't known a whole lot about, it's just not been an area that gets a lot of attention, but I think it needs another look and we have a new – in fact, the Department of Investigation provides direct oversight of the marshals and I believe the state court system does as well. We have a new investigations commissioner – I'm certainly going to urge her to look at this issue, to see if there are bigger challenges. I think there may be, you know, I think there's some individual issues where individual marshals are being looked at, but we also have to look at this broader system to ensure it's being done in a fair and appropriate manner.

Lehrer: Do you know the guy? The article I believe says he's a mayoral appointee.

Mayor: So the marshals are officially appointed – they have historically been people in the role for a long period of time and they’re kept in the role unless of course there’s anything inappropriate that happens but I think the bigger point here is the entire model needs a new look. It’s an approach that goes back many decades to when New York City was in a very, very different time and I think the City government had less capacity to do things and turned to the marshals who again are effectively independent contractors. I think that’s a model that’s – you know, I’m not saying they don’t do some good work – I don’t know enough about the day to day. I do think it’s time to give this another look and see if this approach makes sense at this point.

Lehrer: Last question for this week, Bronx City Councilmember Ritchie Torres was here yesterday proposing a law that stores and restaurants take cash, because more are going cashless, so that poorer New Yorkers without debit or credit cards all have access. Would you sign such a bill?

Mayor: Well, I have to see the bill because I haven’t seen it yet. I think the goal has merit, I think that it worries me – I think there’s all sorts of folks for whom cash is still, you know, the go-to option and as a lot of folks who for whatever reason are not going to have a card or not be comfortable using one, and it worries me if they’re shut out of the economy and shut out of opportunities. So I think the goal has a lot of merit – I want to see the specific bill before I comment any further.

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

Mayor: Take care now.

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