

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
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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 usual at this time on Fridays, it's time for our weekly Ask the Mayor call in, my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio at 646-435-7280, 646-435-7280 or tweet your question, just use the hashtag, #AskTheMayor. You know, listeners, if our lines get full, we only have 10 lines, they do get full, our Twitter feed never gets full. So, tweet a question, use the hashtag, #AskTheMayor and good morning, Mr. Mayor. Welcome back to WNYC.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you very much, Brian. And Brian, I have some quick, good news, breaking news here. We just got a Department of Labor report that makes clear something I think we're seeing already on the streets in New York City, we're seeing our comeback well in terms of jobs, it's now confirmed that jobs are coming back in New York City substantially faster than the national rate, and that is really good to see. We see so many small businesses reopening. We see so much more activity, but now we have hard facts that show that job growth in New York City is outpacing the national rate and that's good news for all of us.

Lehrer: That's good news, indeed. But since you started with that, I think I also saw in that report that we're still at higher unemployment than the national average. If that's your understanding, why is that? And how do you fight it?

Mayor: We took a huge hit because of the kinds of industries we have here and why we fight it by exactly by what we're doing. You know, very intensive comeback. The vaccination efforts been a huge success. We're going to keep building that, schools coming back fully in September, obviously everything is now formally reopened. I think the summer is going to attract a lot of activity, including a lot more tourism than we expected. It's just persistence, but I'm quite convinced that we are going to be turning the corner more in 2021 than what was expected.

Lehrer: Does the arts and cultural space need more city help to get fully back or just does, you know, the demand and the fact that they're reopening do it sufficiently in your opinion, or are there any sectors of the economy that you feel the city as a government needs to pay attention to, to help them come back?

Mayor: I think it's a little bit of all of the above in the sense of, we need to watch sector by sector. We've done specific things to help the arts community, specific things to help the hospitality industry, obviously Open Restaurants and other support we provide for hotels, a lot for small business, and we'll be talking about that a lot more in the city budget, the kinds of

direct support for small business to come back. I think the fact is the city government has a role to play, but I also truly believe that the organic reality of New Yorkers now, a lot of people unleashing their spending power here in this city, rather than going someplace else. I think that's going to be a big – a big reality. Folks not traveling the world as much as they might've, but staying here and appreciating this place more, spending here, investing here. So, we're going to be doing all of the above. One of the great things that we're doing, the City Artists Corp, we're literally going to be employing artists directly in the style of the WPA of Franklin Roosevelt in the course of the summer to be out in communities and create, you know, workshops, performances, murals. So, we're going to do a lot to directly support arts and culture, for example, but I also see, and you can see it with Broadway coming back, you know, the shows are starting now with Springsteen this month. Tickets being snapped up. Some of this, thank God, is going to happen because people just need to and want to be a part of what's happening in New York City.

Lehrer: An article by WNYC and Gothamist Health Editor, Nsikan Akpan, some of his colleagues today shows increasing COVID segregation in the city – used that term – and new cases in hospitalizations and deaths the way down overall, concentrating in largely black and brown communities. And my question is, is reopening so broadly based on overall averages, rather than the more vulnerable areas, a kind of marginalization of the very New Yorkers who are already the most disadvantaged as they remain more vulnerable?

Mayor: I would say it's the opposite. The reopening is going to provide the relief, the economic opportunity, you know, the jobs, the opportunity for small businesses to come back and communities of color. I go all over the city. I talk to leaders and people represent many communities. There's been a deep desire in communities of color for this reopening, but I think if you asked the question, how do we focus particularly on getting people vaccinated? Which obviously is the answer, it's been proven now, deeply what we announced this last week, bringing community-based organizations, houses of worship, NYCHA Resident Councils into this work, more squarely and literally rewarding them, putting money into the community for every single person they bring in to get vaccinated. These are new approaches that we're trying, but we're very hopeful about. Hesitancy is still a real issue, but it is reducing slowly but surely. And, you know, the sites are in communities of color. The outreach efforts are there. We believe it's going to take persistence, but we will continually reach more and more people.

Lehrer: Question from Hee Jin, via Twitter asks, “Can the Mayor provide an update on his 2017 promise to provide air conditioners for all public schools. Our school in Williamsburg still has broken ACs with children wearing masks indoors in stifling heat” writes this listener, “will he fulfill this promise before his term ends?”

Mayor: So, we're definitely as a city of New York on a fulfilled the promise. We got obviously profoundly dislocated by COVID including on this effort, but it will be done. I'd like that if your team could share that information with our folks here at city hall, so we can follow up with your caller on that particular school and see what we can do to help immediately. But the bigger promise, and it actually, Brian, you'll appreciate this because you have a kind of town hall meeting every day with New Yorkers. I was at a town hall meeting, I believe it was in Queens, and you know, an everyday New Yorker said, hey, this is a persistent problem. Can you make a

commitment to do something about it? I went back to my team, I said, what's it going to take the air condition every classroom in New York City? And we came up with a plan and at that point it was going to take four or five years, but we put the money in place. It's been moving fast. It's gotten a little disrupted by COVID, but it will be completed.

Lehrer: Another school related question from Mirka in Brooklyn. I believe Mirka you're on WNYC.

Question: Yes, hello. Good morning. Good morning, thanks for taking my call. Mr. Mayor, I spoke with you before about my son that is being held hostage in Nassau County. Met you at the Municipal Building in downtown Brooklyn, and up until now, nothing hasn't been done. I went to see my son on Monday, Nassau County, about eight of them surround me. [Inaudible] got killed down there. I can't even get to see my son, even though I go there. I want to know why the courts is taking six years to take a child and have him held hostage behind an old building at [inaudible] Long Island –

Lehrer: I will say that she told her screener she had a budget question about the schools, but Mr. Mayor, can you help her?

Mayor: I do remember meeting Mirka, and our team followed up, attempted to see what we could do. We're happy to do it again. If you'll get - Mirka, if you'll give your information to WNYC, our team will follow up. This is a complex, to state the obvious, and I'll be very simple. It's a complex situation. It did involve actions by a court. We do not control the court system, but we in any way we can help foster some dialogue and see if there's a way to resolve this, we're going to try our best and we'll follow up. Our team will follow up with Mirka.

Lehrer: Mirka, we will take your contact information. Ryan in Manhattan you're on WNYC With the Mayor. Hello, Ryan.

Question: Hello. Hi, Mr. Mayor. Happy Friday –

Mayor: Happy Friday, Ryan.

Question: Thank you. I wanted to ask what your plan is to do about this continued crime in the city and on the subway. I and many New Yorkers have found your comments over the last few weeks, real New Yorkers aren't afraid to take the subway very offensive. My question is most of these assaults from crimes that are happening are the culprits they're arrested [inaudible] bail reform, which is supported. So, we need bail reform, of course responsible ones, but will you commit to working with Albany relook at these bail reforms, and how – what do you say to these people in New York and also the victims of these attacks that these ruthless, violent people are still out on the street being able to walk of this bail reform?

Mayor: Well, Ryan, appreciate the question. I want to say a couple of things quickly. First of all, I've said, and I believe New Yorkers are coming back to the subways and the numbers show it. And I've been out in the subways and seen how they're becoming really, really active again. So, I think you're taking my comment differently than I said it, honestly, I did not say anything about a

person's individual choice. What I said is, people are coming back to the subways. It's a fact. Second there's many reasons that we're dealing with the challenges that we're dealing with. It's not just one law in Albany. It's the impact of COVID, it's mental health challenges that went untreated for years, its many things, but what we're doing about it, the highest number of police officers in the subway in 25 years, even though in fact, subway crime is quite low at this point. It is the largest number of police officers in the subway. In 25 years, we want to really encourage people back, protect everyone. Second, outreach teams that have gotten homeless folks in off the subways who don't have a home, like permanent street homeless folks have been brought in, in a way, a higher number than ever before, literally ever before, and the outreach workers had done really extraordinary work. We're going to do more of that. Mental Health Emergency Response Teams, we're funding more of them than ever before. All of these pieces are going to add up. And in the end look, we made some progress in Albany, we got the assembly to vote on a really important parole reform which would finally provide support to people coming out of State prison and get them help with jobs, housing, et cetera, so they don't end up going back into crime and violence. We need the State Senate to support that we are in dialogue with Albany. On the bail reform question, the discovery reform, ways to keep improving those bills, they are good bills, but they do need some improvements and that's an ongoing conversation for when the legislature comes back, probably in the fall.

Lehrer: This – related to that, this is our last Ask the Mayor segment before Primary Day and I know you're not going to endorse, but we see how Eric Adams is running, we see how Maya Wiley is running to take two of the top contenders who are running differently on the issues of crime and policing. Do you think, knowing both of them as you do, they would actually be very different when it comes to their approaches to the current crime increase in the city and police reform in the short term or the long term, if one or the other was elected?

Mayor: Look, it's a good question. I would only say it this way. I know both very well. I think they both, they both bring a lot to the table. The everyone's going to have their differences of approach or philosophy, but I always appreciate when we're talking about people have actually lived these issues and worked on these issues and dealt with them in real ways, in tangible ways, both have done a lot of work on reforming policing and making policing more respectful. So, I think there are – I think your question's really interesting. Are there commonalities? I think there are some commonalities. There are obviously some stated policy differences, but I'm only going to stay very broad to the human in this sort of historical, certainly two people who bring a lot of good history to the table in terms of addressing issues of how to create a different and better relationship between police and community. And I do think we're getting there. We went through a horrible dislocation last year in so many ways, but what's really interesting, Brian, is I see the community police relationship re-bonding. There's a lot of tremendous work being done right now by community members to stop violence before it starts, particularly Cure Violence, Movement, Crisis Management System, which I truly believe in, we've invested a lot in, but also a range of other community organizations which are explicitly creating a dialogue with the NYPD to have a different understanding on the ground, and you see in the 73 Precinct in Brooklyn, NYPD – one great example – NYPD responded by changing its tactics in response to community concerns and trying out new approaches. So, I think a lot of this is actually happening on the ground well in advance of the decision of the people.

Lehrer: Rhonda in Brooklyn, you're on WNYC With the Mayor.

Question: Hi, is this –

Lehrer: Yeah, it's you. Yes, it's you, Rhonda –

Question: I didn't hear the beginning of that. Okay, sounds great. This is -hi, this Rhonda Keyser. I have been constituent of yours for a long time, Mayor de Blasio, you were my City Council Member. I am a board member of Sure We Can, it's the only nonprofit organization in New York City that works with and advocates for the estimated 10,000 canners that redeem cans and bottles for 5 cents to earn their livelihoods. Our fellow New Yorkers clean up our city streets, and waste stream, and contribute robustly to the 70 percent return rate on bottles who can at no cost to the city or to taxpayers. They're overwhelmingly [inaudible] low-income neighbors. Like many nonprofits, Sure We Can's existence is threatened by gentrification. City Council and the borough president has allocated as the funds to purchase our lot, however, the EDC and or OMB is standing in the way because of red tape even though we have one contract for census outreach and test and trace program, Mr. Mayor, will you please help Sure We Can cut through this bureaucratic red tape? We need your help to ask for an exception to the capital funding requirements to have had \$50,000 a year for three years in city grants. There is no city funding for the work we do at Sure We Can share. Sure We Can has acquired and managed large grants as a sub-organization for several other city grants, census outreach, COVID outreach, et cetera, as well as private organizations, like We Act, \$50,000 from We Act, \$45,000 from Catholic Campaign for Human Development, and our basic operations are self-sustaining. We employ sorters, counters, and managers in addition to supporting 900 low-income entrepreneurs who are cleaning our city streets and wasting at no cost.

Mayor: Well, first of all, Rhonda, very compelling presentation. I really appreciate when people have this opportunity to say something to me and the public and they use the time well. I did not know of your work. I love the name of your organization. I appreciate what you did on the census and COVID. I'm going to have folks call you today. See if we can cut through that red tape. Sometimes there's legal requirements that have to obviously be very carefully adhered to, but sometimes there are areas where we can be appropriately flexible and I really appreciate that you're representing people, who I see every day, as Brooklynite, who are out there trying to make a living in a really respectful, peaceful way that actually, you know, is – it's sad in one way that folks have to make that choice, but they do it in a way that is I find, you know, compelling. We need to be supportive of them. So, let me follow up and see what we can do.

Lehrer: So, take – I mean, hang on, Rhonda, we will take your contact information off the air. And when you talk to the Mayor's people you could say, he said, I gave a great presentation on the radio today. Listener on Twitter says, please ask the mayor why I, a New York City Parks employee, don't have a holiday today. And let me give our listeners a little background, because I think I understand the context of that question. Federal government employees are getting today off for Juneteenth, but not New York City employees, even though you did say last year that they would. So, what do you say to that lesson or in our city employees?

Mayor: So, what we said at the time was we were going to go to the labor movement of this city as we have with previous holidays and have to negotiate a way to actually pay for it. The impact of the holiday is a combined between direct and indirect costs of giving the entire city of workforce a day off is about \$150 million. So, I made the announcement. I said we want to do this, but we have to negotiate the specifics. It will be a school holiday, unquestionably. It is Saturday this year so, it doesn't play out as a school holiday, but going forward on weekdays, it will be a school holiday, that's done. We've got more work to do to bring the other pieces together. I think we'll get there. But what we also wanted to do, Brian, was take city resources and directly address the structural changes that were needed to go right at structural racism, and so yesterday I announced the baby bonds program that starting in September, every kindergarten student in New York City will get a college savings account opened with New York City leading the way and providing the support, and then bringing in more and more partners to add money into it and nonprofits and community and business sector to build up each child account. So, that particularly disadvantaged kids throughout their schooling know that the money will be there later for them if they choose to go to college. This is the kind of generational wealth creation that people who care about Juneteenth have talked about. How do we do something structural to change the fact that African Americans have been deprived of generational wealth. This is one of the solutions that more and more is being seen as promising, and New York City is going to lead the way in honor of Juneteenth.

Lehrer: An article in the times today, talks about not having been able to complete the process by now of a Juneteenth holiday, and it ties it to another promise you made in the aftermath of the racial justice protest that has yet to bear fruit. That other one was that it says the Citizens Budget Commission reported on this week that contrary to your claim that you cut a billion dollars from the Police Department budget last year, they actually only cut about \$300 million. So, did that happen? It is budget season again right now.

Mayor: Yeah, that's just, that's just not an accurate way of looking at what we did. We'd moved substantial elements of work out of the Police Department, and then on top of that took specific resources from the Police Department and moved them to things like youth services and recreation centers, community centers, and on top of that did capital spending to do the physical work to create more spaces for young people. So, it's just, I don't know where they're getting their numbers, but if you look at each and every action, it's quite explicit how we did the different pieces to achieve that goal. So again, I'm very, very clear something profoundly different happened. Whether people agree with it or not, there was a reduction in the NYPD and the number of officers that was part of the decision to move some of those resources over to other initiatives, particularly for young people, and we've continued to make new investments in communities. I've mentioned Cure Violence Movement, Crisis Management System. We've doubled that workforce for this summer. We're tripling it for next summer. But most importantly, these structural changes, things like the Baby Bonds that go at the fundamental question of generational wealth. This is the kind of thing I want to see. New York City do more and more of.

Lehrer: Well, it is budget season again right now. For people that don't know how that works the new fiscal year for city government begins July 1st, are you cutting the NYPD budget again, or having other unresolved issues at this late date with City Council that you would want to make a case about?

Mayor: There's ongoing conversations with the Council. I do not anticipate, and I've said it before, this is not breaking any news for you here. I've been asked before the level of the NYPD is at now, I think it is the correct level. We're obviously dealing with profound problems in terms of gun violence all over the country, but we have it here and we have to fight it back. I think the NYPD's at the right level now to do that. But I also know we're going to be making a number of other investments in communities of color, particularly in young people, as a part of this budget, a lot of new and powerful investments will be made, and that's what we're talking through with the Council right now.

Lehrer: So that sounds like you and City Council Speaker Corey Johnson, who is running from comptroller, think the police budget has been cut enough, if I'm hearing you right?

Mayor: [Inaudible] explicit. Brian, please be careful, respectfully. I didn't say anything about what Corey Johnson thinks. I respect him greatly. I respect the City Council. That process is not concluded. I said what I think from my point of view, the NYPD is at the right level now. Especially considering what we're doing with gun violence and the fact that we're re-establishing neighborhood policing and the bond between police and community and we're investing heavily in community-based solutions to violence. By the way, our investments here in Cure Violence and the Crisis Management System have become the model for the Biden administration's plan to put billions into community-based solutions to violence. We're going to be doing all of that. The City Council has not weighed in yet. We have not completed the process. I'm only speaking for myself.

Lehrer: Right. I want to ask you about the issue of Revel. How do you say that company, the scooter company, Revel, or Revel?

Mayor: Revel.

Lehrer: Known as the scooter share company to most people who see those scooters around, but they want to introduce a fleet of all electric cars to compete in the rideshare space against Uber and Lyft, et cetera. There's a cap on the number of for-hire cars on city streets, but Revel's advocates say you're trying to revoke an existing rule that would make an exception for electric cars. The exception is supposed to promote green technology, I gather and Revel also argues they would be much better corporate citizens than Uber, for example, because their drivers would be treated as actual employees with guaranteed wages and benefits and paid time off and sick leave, not the usual gig economy exploitation, they argue. So, are you against Revel on this, and if so, why?

Mayor: Excellent question. Revel has a profound point when they say the others have not been good corporate citizens, especially Uber. We fought Uber many, many times, and one of the ways we overcame Uber was to put a minimum wage in place for for-hire vehicle drivers. It has now become a national and actually international model of how to address income inequality. If you leave it to the Uber's of the world, they were creating a race to the bottom that was hurting working people deeply. We went right at them and created our own minimum wage for those drivers to protect their interests. Now that said, I really want to see more electric cars on the

street and fewer fossil fuel-based vehicles. At the same time, we put caps for a good reason on for-hire vehicles, because we were seeing a huge problem with that race to the bottom, with too many cars competing for too few passengers, with congestion, et cetera. This is a classic issue. We have to balance the two. So, we are looking at Revel's suggestion. We are looking at how to maximize the number of electric vehicles in our for-hire fleet, but we also want to be really careful to not start back up the ladder of too many for-hire vehicles in New York City, with the problems that that brought us before.

Lehrer: Michelle in Manhattan. You're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Michelle.

Question: Thank you for taking my call and hello Mayor de Blasio. Nice to speak with you.

Mayor: Hey, Michelle.

Question: My question. Hi, my question has to do with something like that's coming right off of that topic, which is parking. I have to go into the city and occasionally I'll be taking one of my friends who's going in for her doctor's appointments and who does not drive, and it has become more and more and more impossible to find street parking in the city. I'm hundred percent for the kiosks for Citi Bike, because biking is fantastic. You know, the restaurants that have taken over street space, a hundred percent yes on that because they need to survive, and it's also, you know, kind of pleasant for people, but because of the increase in purchased automobiles during the pandemic, there is now even less parking with even more cars and the existing parking regulations in the city have not been modified or balanced to kind of a compensate for that discrepancy, and that there is like such a fight over parking places now, that I just heard on the news of 19 or 20-year-old was stabbed to death by a 48-year-old man over a parking space, and there was another very violent altercation between two people over a parking space—

Lehrer: And Michelle, forgive me. But because we're running out of time in this segment, let me ask you to get to your question for the Mayor.

Question: It might just continue.

Lehrer: Well, she framed the problem at very least, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Yeah, and it's, I really appreciate the question and these, these conflicts are very, very painful. It's unacceptable for people to become violent over a parking space. We still are trying to understand the full truth of what happened in the Rockaways, which was not a street parking space. It was a driveway allegedly being the cause of the shooting that led to the death of 10-year-old Justin Wallace. I think to Michelle's point, there is never, ever, ever an excuse for becoming violent over a parking space. It's not an entirely new thing in New York City. It's absolutely unacceptable, and anyone who does will be prosecuted, but that does not mean that we need to solve the problem with people being violent by just opening up everything for parking, to avoid people expressing their rage. You know, people are just not allowed to do that to other people, whether it's parking or any other matter. Open streets have been a success. Open Restaurants have been success. Open Restaurants saved a hundred thousand jobs and will save more going forward. Using our streets differently, makes so much sense, and there's still a lot of

street parking available. Maybe it's not the ideal amount, but it still is a lot. I think what we need more and more is as much as humanly possible people to move to mass transit, and that's the city we're trying to build. It's going to be a much healthier city. If we want to get ahead climate change, we have to focus more and more on mass transit. That's why we did NYC Ferry, created that from scratch, more bike lanes than ever, more select bus routes and busways than ever. This is what I've been doing these last eight years, trying to build up our mass transit options. That's the way forward for this city.

Lehrer: Another streets related question since that came up, listener asked me this week, I'm looking at the Washington Square Park noise crack down, and the Manhattan South police chief was there at a public hearing this week and says he wants to crack down even more on the noise after 10:00 PM, he'd say even earlier. If you're willing to crack down so hard on noise in a public park, I was asked, why have you been so reluctant or at least it seems to some people on the souped-up cars that are noise polluting so many city neighborhoods these days, and I don't mean the all-terrain vehicles, which I know there's an effort to remove and they're illegal, but the legal cars that the owners modify or drive so that they are super loud, and I get questions from various listeners who ask why this is allowed to keep going on month after month after it started at a new historic level in the pandemic?

Mayor: Okay, Brian, you know, I respect you a lot, but I think your question was really shaded unfairly and inaccurately with all due respect. We're not cracking down. You know, what we're trying to do in Washington Square Park is there's a legitimate community concerns. We're trying to find a balance. There was a big community meeting, hearing those concerns, working on positive solutions. We've been talking to a lot of the younger folks in the park who want to have gatherings, but figuring out ways to make them work better for everyone, community organizations, community board, NYPD, Parks Department – everyone's in dialogue, trying to find a solution. So, I just, I know there's been some tendency with all due respect to try and paint a more lurid picture. No, in fact, there's a real dialogue going on to try and solve a problem and to be proactive about it and not let it turn into something where there's ongoing conflict.

As to the vehicles, you're right. There's a new problem. There, there's a serious problem there. The way to address that problem is – I wish we could find ways and we're trying to get to the root causes of the places that do the work to make the vehicles that way, the shops that do that work. But the idea of doing the enforcement on the street comes with real challenges. We're always going to try, and NYPD is going to be out there trying, but it is not easy to find and stop the vehicles. It's not the best way to always go about something, to try and pursue a vehicle during crowded streets, and we also have some more profound issues the NYPD needs to work on right now, but I think it's a real issue and what I want to do, just like the off-road vehicles and the motorbikes and all is get them at the source, impound them wherever we can find them and impound them where people are doing the work to modify them, to make them so loud illegally.

Lehrer: Is there a decibel limit under the law or an illegal disconnection of mufflers law or something like that?

Mayor: I believe all of those kinds of things exist. I'm not an expert on it, but I believe there are definitely tools to work with. But again, the only effective enforcement is at the point of origin, not out on the streets, that's where it becomes very difficult to achieve enforcement, ideally.

Lehrer: All right, and you want to take an extra minute, extend by one extra minute and just tell people about some of the things the city is doing to mark the Juneteenth holiday today for the public.

Mayor: Yeah, absolutely. Tonight at 6:00 pm in Harlem, St. Nicholas Park on the James Baldwin Lawn, we're having a really fantastic celebration for the whole larger community of New York City, and it will be a lot of music and a lot of celebration and a lot of thinking about the meaning of this holiday, which to me needs to be a holiday with purpose, which is why things like our announcement on the baby bonds fit the holiday so much, and then over the weekend, activities all over the city that, you know, community-based activities, I really urge everyone participated. Hasn't been as prominent a holiday historically in New York City. Let's make it a prominent holiday and everyone go out and participate between tonight and the weekend in Juneteenth events.

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

Mayor: Thank you, Brian.

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