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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, everyone. And we begin as we usually do on Friday mornings with our weekly Ask the Mayor segment. My questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio and our lines our open at 2-1-2-4-3-3-W-N-YC, 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: I'd like to ask you first today to give us an update on the investigation into the street violence last weekend between the far-right group, some call it a white nationalist or western chauvinist group, the Proud Boys and the left-wing ANIFA – anti racist counter protesters. There were questions as you know that whether the NYPD were only arresting the leftists who they suspected of violence. What's the latest on your investigation?

Mayor: Well, there was an arrest made in the last 24 hours of one of the presumed members of the Proud Boys – the right wing group. But I think overall the NYPD has spoken to this incident. We obviously would prefer that nothing like this – there would never be these kind of provocateurs in our city. But if we have to be ready of course for future incidents there is going to be a different approach. There was a lot of police presence around the event itself. But the NYPD has been clear they should have done more follow up around the surrounding area where people dispersed to. To make sure there was no violence and that will be the protocol going forward. There is still a lot of images have been put up publically and still looking for anyone else who should be followed up on. But I think this is an instance where this situation is causing the NYPD to realize they're going to have to do something different going forward if there ever is ever another situation like this.

Lehrer: Do you think any NYPD members had any political stake in that incident, because that's the implication when some people raise the issue of selective arrests.

Mayor: I have no evidence at all of that and I and I have no experience that tells me that. I've been as someone involved in progressive causes over many decades in this city and I've been to

numerous protests with civil disobedience etc. I really have never seen that in any meaningful way. I found the NYPD to do an extraordinary job of being neutral in the way they approach these things. And I think this is a situation where the real lesson here was the presence around the site, where initial conflict was. That actually appeared to have been handled reasonably well. I think the mistake was not recognizing both sides were going to go to try to engage elsewhere and to stay on them the whole time. But that's what I see; I don't see anything else implying any question of any kind of bias.

Lehrer: I hear your voice, by the way. I am sure the listeners are noticing. Are you under the weather?

Mayor: Yeah, I've been for the last week. So my apology if you're not hearing my normal dulcet tone there Brian.

Lehrer: You want to encourage people to get their flu shots. I hear it's supposed to be – and I know I am going to get some anti-vaccine backlash for just even saying that. But I hear it's supposed to be especially a bad flu season in New York this year.

Mayor: Well, we've certainly seen that the last few seasons. So I got my flu shot last week, as did Chirlane. I would strongly urge all New Yorkers to get their flu shots now. This is the time before the season really kicks up. I am your spokes model today that got to take care of yourself.

Lehrer: Is it the flu per say or do you know?

Mayor: No, I think it's other, I think its respiratory issues and some other stuff but no question it's a good time to get a head of the flu.

Lehrer: Steven in Brooklyn, you're on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio. Hello, Steven.

Question: Hello, and thank you for taking my call. And Mayor I hope you feel better.

Mayor: Thank you, Steven.

Question: My question actually relates to the repair of the BQE that you spoke about last week.

Mayor: Yes.

Question: And I completely agree disruption needs to be fixed, however it is going to be complicated and expensive. You're probably aware that Councilmember Levin has opposed using the land west of [inaudible] for the temporary roadway. This option was not presented when Polly Trottenberg and the DOT made the town hall on September 27th. But the next day after there was a lot of push from the community, she said she would look into that option. I think the option has a lot of positive in that it it's much simpler from an engineering perspective, it's likely going to be safer, faster to complete, and much cheaper than building a six lane roadway 100 feet up in the air.

Lehrer: Steven, thank you. And for listeners who don't know the issue. There is going to be some kind of repair over the BQE around the promenade in Brooklyn Heights. It's going to be a lot of disruption for people who live around there and there are different options with different pros and cons that the city is considering. And Mayor you did take a position on which one you would like to see go forward and obviously there caller would like to see a different one.

Mayor: Sure, well I think Steven is raising a different alternative which I appreciate. The initial understanding and the core point that Steven is talking with. This is a huge, huge undertaking. And it's one that if we don't grapple with soon, we will really regret it later on because the BQE was out of commission because it could not function. It would have a paralyzing effect on a lot of what we do in the city. So we have to get ahead of it. There's been a couple of alternatives presented and I try to be straight forward with people about what I thought was the better of the alternatives even both of them involve a lot of sacrifice, and lot of challenges. What Steven is talking about a different idea that's come up in recent days and of course it needs to be fully evaluated. I am the first to say a lot of times a government has good ideas, and there is a lot of other times when someone at the community level or other experts come forward with another alternative that may work. So we will definitely look at that.

Lehrer: Moving on, Election Day is coming up and yesterday you had to admit the city blew it when trying to inform people that they might not be properly registered to vote. And I know the goal was to make sure people had the chance to re-register if they had to after WNYC's Brigid Bergin's reporting found lots of people bumped from the rolls in 2016 improperly. So the intention was good it looks like but what happened?

Mayor: Well not only the intention was good. I think in most cases we actually were able to reach people who needed the information. There is no question let me say it upfront that this was a good idea whether there was a problem in the execution. The information I have today is about eight percent of the names that should not have been on that list. But if that proves to be true at the ended that means 92 percent of the names were people we needed to reach out to. And this would be exactly right on your history Brian. This stems from the fact that almost 200,000 people were purged inappropriately by the Board of Elections before the 2015 presidential primary. It was a seismic moment for the city in terms of undermining faith in the Board of Elections and our election process. And we have been working ever since then to come up with alternatives. That's why we came with the Democracy NYC approach. That's why we have on the ballot now for November both a ballot proposal to allow the city to do a lot more direct outreach to people around when elections are and where their polling site so they get accurate information. We're going to also – clearly, major priority for the fall ballot is our proposal to reduce donation limits and increase the amount of public funding of elections so you have money out of politics, but on this one – this is an idea that came up in response to that crisis in 2016. It came up later than I would have liked. People recognized that there was a tool we could use to alert these voters that they me be on the verge of having their names taken off the rolls. I think it would have been a lot better if the good folks who were working on it – they had found the approach a month or two earlier, it would have gone better. If the list hadn't had eight percent names inaccurate, it would have gone better. But I not only think the intentions were good, I think a lot of people got reached with a warning in time to double-check to make sure your registration is active and in time that they could update a registration if it needed it and so hopefully that means that some people were spared once again from being purged from the rolls.

Lehrer: Is there anything that anyone should or can do at this point before this November's election?

Mayor: As far as I know, you know, we've passed all the registration deadlines. But of course, you know, as broken as New York State election law is, and I will note I'm sure we'll have many conversations going into the spring legislation session in Albany that we need same-day registration, we need early-voting and or vote-by-mail, we need to allow people to change party registration on a much more reasonable timeline. One thing that is true of the state is you can go in – if you believe you are duly registered somewhere and you get there and you're not on the rolls, you still have the right to ask for an affidavit ballot and put a ballot it and then there's a follow-up process to confirm it. So, you know, God-forbid anyone goes to their poll site and believe they were registered and find they weren't. They still should demand that affidavit ballot.

Lehrer: Kate in Brooklyn, you're on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio, hello Kate.

Question: Hello and hi, Mr. Mayor, it's me again. Yesterday, I was among many Success Academy parents, including Assemblyman Crespo who also happens to be a Success Academy dad, and we rallied at City Hall to implore you to stop being so dismissive of charter school parents and at the moment there are 53,000 families stuck on waiting lists for charter schools. And the city's own data shows that there are 100,000 seats across 200 school buildings that are not being used. Now I believe that fundamentally you are a good person who believes in equity. So why are you discriminating against public, not-for-profit charter schools, and only giving us a fraction of the space that we need to grow and to thrive?

Mayor: Well Kate, you're a good and involved parent and citizen, I want to thank you for that. I've seen you, I've heard you on this show and I think a town hall meeting as well if I remember correctly, and I believe you're motivated by what you believe is right but I just want to be clear I think I've spoken to this many, many dozens of times over the years. I believe we are trying to work across the board with parents, in charter schools, in traditional public schools, in all schools – I remind people always that our signature initiatives, like Pre-K for all, 3K for all, after school for all our middle school kids, all have been done with charter schools as well as religious schools and of course our traditional public schools. So I think we have a long history with working everyone. I think the charter movement is very diverse. There are some schools that are very open about the fact – I think reflect the values bring up, including everyone, reaching special ed kids, kids who don't test so well, kids with special needs, English language learners, kids of all backgrounds. Some charter schools do an exceptional job and others I think less so.

But the bottom line question is where are we putting our energy and our focus? My focus is on the 90 percent or so of our kids who go to traditional public schools and try to make those schools better all the time. I've been very clear about the fact that we constantly make space available for charter schools, that's why you've seen the charter school sector have natural growth in the last few years. But I do not believe in going farther than that. I believe what we have now is the right approach.

Lehrer: Let me follow up just very briefly because our time is short on – on that. When she asked about specific number, I think it was in the hundreds of thousands, of seats that are unfilled right now and asks why you can't use those seats for more charter schools – what's the specific answer on the ones that are unfilled?

Mayor: So there's a – there's a process that functions every day, every year, where charters get established and they fill out the space and they can allocate, and a lot of those charters are now in that process of building out within the school buildings they're in and then some new ones come along and get authorized and we make space available when we can, and when we don't feel we can meet their particular need, I'll give you an easy example: sometimes charters have asked, for example, elementary schools in a high school building or high school kids in an elementary school building. We don't believe in that mixture as a policy matter. So sometimes we accommodate the need, sometimes we can't. But there's a state law that then provides the charters with subsidies to find their own space in those situations. That's what we believe is the right approach – I do not believe the idea is to just constantly try and site more charters. I think it's not where our resources, energy needs to go. First it needs to go in fixing existing schools we have, but we've seen, one more point, we've seen our graduation rate go up 50, five-zero, 50 percent in the last 14 years. We've seen our college readiness go up across our traditional public schools. When we apply energy and resources to our traditional public schools they keep getting better and that's 90 percent of our kids where they're served, that's where our focus needs to be.

Lehrer: Let me ask you about a story that the Brooklyn site, kingscountypolitics.com, brought to life. The headline is: "City Takes Black-Owned Property, Tells Residents They Have To Move" and it says here – the lead line is, "if the city's justification for taking fully paid off, Black owned properties is to keep the apartments affordable and the buildings better kept, they're off to a rocky start with the long time tenants of 25 McDonough Street in Bedford-Stuyvesant" and it goes on to tell that story and broaden it out. Can you explain that program and apparently its side-effects?

Mayor: Well, I want to be careful because I don't know about 25 McDonough Street specifically. Is this the third party transfer program or is this something else?

Lehrer: I believe it is.

Mayor: The – every case and individual in that program, I think there's fewer than 100 properties in the entire city that are going through that program right now. It typically is related to where there's been real health and safety issues that have gone unaddressed for years and that is a concern for a community regardless of the demographics of who owns or what community we're in. So I appreciate the way you're phrasing it honestly and the way the article may have phrased it but I want to be real with you that I don't care what demographics you ascribe to – ownership, if you've got a property that comes with real health and safety problems. That said, when we're talking about at any given point less than 100 properties, if there's some specific thing that's been missed, that needs to be addressed, we will do that and we'll certainly have our team follow up on that Brooklyn Politics article, but my understanding the broad concept is a distressed building or problematic building that has been given at least three years to address these problems and hasn't and then that becomes a bigger issue for the surrounding community.

Lehrer: Mr. Mayor we're out of time and I think mercifully, because now you can go and get some more tea.

Mayor: It's time for tea for sure. Thank you very much Brian, have a good weekend.

Lehrer: Thank you as always, talk to you next week.

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