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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 30, 2018 CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

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 usual on Fridays with our weekly Ask the Mayor call in, my questions and your questions for Mayor Bill de Blasio. Our lines are open at 2-1-2-4-3-3-WNYC, 2-1-2-4-3-3-9-6-9-2 or tweet a question with the hashtag #AskTheMayor. Mr. Mayor welcome back to WNYC.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you, Brian.

Lehrer: And let's begin on the big package of State budget bills gradually emerging this morning to meet tomorrow night's deadline. With a lot at stake for the city I'm sure you know more than I do so what's the headline so far according to you?

Mayor: Well there's still a lot playing out. I wish I could give you a final headline but we don't have it yet. I can tell you what to focus on. The focus is, for us, is of course restoring as much as possible of the proposed cuts. The Governor's budget cut New York City between \$700 and \$800 million. Our goal is to get as much of that back as possible. The Assembly has been outstanding in fighting for money to be restored for things like special education, youth services, juvenile justice, a whole host of areas that we are concerned about deeply.

We're obviously very focused on design-build, and that's the area where I think we could get some real progress for the city. That concept which isn't well known but is really, really important is – it's a way of saving a lot of money and a lot of time when we are building things. The State gives itself that right. We want the city to have the right so we can save our taxpayers potentially billions of dollars over the next few years and save a lot of time on major projects. Some of the things we're talking about are NYCHA, obviously, all of the things that need to be fixed at the Housing Authority. We could do it a lot quicker if we had that design-build authority. It allows us to cut through a lot of the steps that usually take substantial time. We'd like that for the BQE which needs major new work. We would like that for building the new jail facilities to replace Rikers.

And then obviously on the MTA the central thing we're fighting for is a revenue plan going forward and a lockbox to ensure that any money raised in New York City stays in New York

City and is used for our subways and buses. So, those are – those are some of the big things but nothing is finally resolved at this hour.

Lehrer: One reported sticking point this morning, besides those big things, is that State Senator Simcha Felder, mostly on behalf of Orthodox Jewish private schools in Brooklyn, is trying to get those Yeshivas exempted from statewide curriculum standards. And Politico New York reports Felder is gaining leverage, or at least seeking leverage, for the lack of standards that he wants for Yeshivas by holding up things that you want for the city including, ironically, more red light safety cameras around schools. Can you confirm that Felder is doing that or that you're aware of negotiations that include any of that?

Mayor: Brian, I do not know the details. That situation has kind of been unclear over the last few days. I don't know specifically what he is proposing at this point. Look, obviously I think these issues should be separated in general. The speed cameras around schools are to save lives, and that's something after the horrible tragedy we saw in Park Slope, I think there's more and more support all over the city for the idea of speed cameras around schools. I don't know if that's going to be actually entertained in this budget but if it isn't, it should be fought for intensely in the legislative session up until the end of June.

But look, I think the bottom line here is all kids deserve a good education. We've got to make sure that happens for all kids. That's our mandate, that's what we'll continue to focus to do. But I don't understand the latest iteration of, you know, what's being talked about inside Albany on this.

Lehrer: In theory, deal or no deal as far as you're concerned if it's more red light cameras that you want for less oversight of Yeshiva's curriculum standards which he wants?

Mayor: Again, I have not heard that idea being put on the table. I'd like to suggest in general what we need to do more of is separating all these issues and treating them on their merits. This is a real frustration I have with the process in Albany. And something like speed cameras, that's about saving lives, is totally different than an education curriculum issue.

So, the bottom line again is, I do not know the exact state of play on that this morning, I'll be briefed on it soon. But what we want to see happen here is we want this budget to address a whole set of core issues that are effecting New York City and you know, it ain't over until it's over so we're still going to fight for those changes.

Lehrer: Some of the things effecting New York City has been on a list of sticking points that the media, including this show, has tended to focus on and I'm curious if you think either if there's anything to report or that we've even been focusing on the right or wrong things. Like eliminating bail for low level crimes, an anti-harassment law, congestion pricing, extending the statute of limitations on child sex abuse crimes, and what is a budget measure, emergency funding for NYCHA and the MTA. Either anything to report on any of those, or are they a distraction from bigger things – even bigger things that you think we should be talking about budget wise?

Mayor: No those – those are all important issues. I think what's hard for everyday people to make sense of is unlike – I mean it's hard to have a favorable comparison to Washington but even unlike Washington I think the strange thing here is that a lot of these issues get pulled together into a budget package or you know, ultimately some get left out regardless of how important they are. So you listed that whole set of really crucial issues that need to be addressed.

They're – in my four years now of watching the Albany process I can't find a rhyme or reason of which ones get included and which ones get dropped out in the back and forth. Look, I think that has to change. I think it will change over time in Albany. I think this is probably we're at the end of a period where this type of thing was normal because I don't think it makes sense for addressing people's needs. But you know it's still not clear what's going to end up in this package.

Now I can tell you from a New York City perspective, here are things that we are going to fight for whether they make it into the budget or whether they are going to go into the legislative session up to June. We're going to fight for speed cameras. We want to double the number of speed cameras so we can protect kids around schools. We're going to fight for electoral reform. I mean that seems to not be on the docket right now. That has to be a big fight going to June. We need things like same day registration. We need vote – early voting to allow people to have much more participation. We're going to fight for 50-a reform, that's transparency about police discipline. There's a whole host of things that we need to fight for.

I'm very interested, for example Brian, in fighting for a vacancy fee or vacancy tax which would penalize landlords who leave their storefronts vacant for long periods of time in neighborhoods because they're looking for some top dollar rent but they blight neighborhoods by doing it. I think there should be a penalty if a landlord does that. That's something we could get done through Albany. So we have a host of things that we're going to fight for even if they don't make it into this budget.

Lehrer: Comptroller Scott Stinger is adding pressure on the breakaway Democrats in the State Senate who help the Republicans in power up there by endorsing Democratic primary challengers against two of the IDC members. He wants the defeat of State Senator Marisol Alcantara in Upper Manhattan and Senator Jose Peralta of Queens for being Democrats who empower the Republicans. And that's relevant to what's going on today in Albany. Are you ready to endorse their primary challengers too?

Mayor: I've said very clearly a couple of things. One, there'll be a point where I talk about the 2018 elections in the State of New York, and I'll be very clear about what I believe at that point, but that's not today.

The second thing is I've said very clearly the IDC needs to come back to the Democratic Party immediately, and if not of course there'll be these challenges. It's a moment where Democrats are demanding that people actually live up to the values of this party. And this is – you're right, this is part of the roadblock in Albany. This is part of why Albany is the way it is. And it has been very damaging, I think to the whole state, but certainly to New York City.

But again, I'll get into the specifics at an appropriate time.

Lehrer: And another reason you might be annoyed with the Governor today is his proposal for a State, kind of business development district around Penn Station. Is he trying to take City property tax money for the State by doing that? I understand you have an issue with his idea.

Mayor: I do have an issue and I think it sets an extraordinarily dangerous precedent not just for the Penn Station area, for all of New York City and I would argue for any city or any town in the state. If the State of New York can reach in and starting telling us what we get to decide about our own land, our own land use decisions, our own future, it's very, very dangerous Brian.

Look, you're talking about, in the case of the Penn Station area what the Governor originally proposed, would end environmental reviews. So something that's been sacred, it is protecting our environment by ensuring there are careful reviews before any major building is done, that would be ended. There would be no community input whatsoever. So people who live on the West Side of Manhattan would not have any opportunity to speak to what would happen. And there's been a proposal for really huge buildings to be built there. It would just be done because the State says it's okay. That's a horrible, dangerous precedent.

And then separately there's been several instances lately of the State talking about reaching in and taking our local revenue, talking our property tax money, diverting it to other things. I remind every New Yorker that's money that pays for police, fire, sanitation, schools. That's something that should worry everyone when the State might reach into our local budget – and if they do it here they can do it any place else – and take people's tax dollars and divert them to something else.

So, these are real big problems. Now, I will say there's been a lot of push back in Albany, a lot in the Assembly, and even in the Senate as well because I think the danger related to these proposals is clear to a lot of members of the legislature.

Lehrer: I've heard a critique that you want the City to use the increase in property tax money that would come along the route of you proposed BQX in a similar way to what the State wants to do with value capture, as they call it, of property money around places where you know housing is being built around subway stations and things like that, that you want to use money from property tax revenues along the BQX line in the same way that is dedicated to development of that Brooklyn-Queens waterfront streetcar. A contradiction?

Mayor: No, I think it's apples and oranges and I'll tell you why for several reasons. First of all, there's such a fundamental principle here that if the State government can invade local finances, you know, then get ready for a lot of bad things to happen. I really want to emphasize that. We see it all over the country.

The local level is where policing is provided, fire, education, sanitation, parks, you name it. The local government is responsible for the vast majority of things that actually affect people's daily lives. What's happened in recent years is that more and more responsibility and mandate has been pushed down to the local level without funding.

That's bad enough, Brian. But now the State of New York finds a clever backdoor way to start taking local revenue away. You're going to see tremendous stress on the things that we have to cover for the people and the things we have to provide for the people of this city. That's dangerous unto itself.

The second piece of the equation is obviously in the case of the BQX, the light rail in Brooklyn and Queens, that's something the City is doing on its own. In the case of the West Side, the 7-train extension, that's something the City determined and worked with the MTA on.

But the difference here is the suggestion that something could be mandated from above. That's an entirely different reality and very dangerous, and again the plan that was put forward would take a huge amount of revenue out of the City's coffers. And it's also the slippery slope. Once they get away with it the first time, what else will they find that they want to take?

Remember, this administration in Albany under this Governor tried to take money from the City for – make the City pay more for CUNY, make the City pay more for Medicaid. We've seen foray after foray trying to get at the City's money.

But what I keep telling people is here what's all New Yorkers should realize, I mean it wasn't that long ago we went through the fiscal crisis of the 70s. This city worked so hard to get back on its feet financially. We finally are in a stable position in a very unstable world given everything in Washington and Albany, the international economy, etcetera.

We finally have a stable fiscal situation that can protect this city for the long haul but if anything ever went wrong, Brian, there is no cavalry coming. No one is coming to help New York City and I always say this to people. We are on our own at that point. The federal government is not going to help us, the State government is not going to help us.

So we have to protect our fiscal stability. And when I see the State of New York reaching into our finances, constantly trying to divert our money -I want to warn all New Yorkers - that's going to end up hurting us deeply if that is allowed to happen.

And so we're fighting it intensely and again so far a lot of members of the legislature have joined us in that fight.

Lehrer: So, here's one more along those lines and then we'll go to calls. Cynthia Nixon is running her campaign in the Democratic primary against Governor Cuomo in part on saying that the schools and certainly in particular schools where there are mostly minority kids in New York City are, she says, underfunded and over policed.

And I put that question to the Governor when he was on here the other day about giving more money to education for the city schools and I'm going to play you 40 seconds of his response.

Governor Andrew Cuomo: How much do the poor schools in the Bronx get? How much do the high-performing schools in this borough get? How much does a student in the chronically failing

school get? We've never had that conversation and you can't even find the information. And I said in this budget in January, that's the relevant conversation. It's not how much money do you spend. We spend more than anybody else. How much more do you want to spend? We spend more than anybody else in the United States of America. It's who gets the funds.

Lehrer: He wants more transparency from the city schools at a granular level. Are you in conversation with the Governor about this?

Mayor: We - look, we've been in a conversation with the State for years about how to make sure there's equity for our schools and there is a way to do it. It's called the Campaign for Fiscal Equity decision by the Court of Appeals a decade ago. Of course it's about the money. Brian.

Look, the Governor often likes to put out these ideas without having the facts behind them. There's a huge amount of information that is publicly available on how much we spend on each school. We've had a huge commitment to moving resources – it's visible, it's knowable, these are facts, they're public domain – moving resources to schools that were historically underfunded.

It's all out there right now and again the problem here is he doesn't know these facts because he hasn't looked into it. The fact is we've constantly upped the floor on what each school gets to address the inequities of the past and we've shifted because of our major initiatives a huge amount of resources to schools that were historically underfunded.

So the entire Renewal School program that started with 94 schools, the Community Schools program which is about 215 schools, everything we did with pre-K, now 3-K, the Advanced Placement for All initiative – all of these things disproportionately helped schools that were underfunded in the past.

And we've said very clearly if the State would just fulfill the mandate that the highest court – the highest court in the state, the Court of Appeals, gave a mandate to the state which the State of New York has effectively ignored for a decade, we would then have the resources to bring every school up to the level of funding that it deserves.

But we can't do that alone. So, that information has been out there. It continues to be out there. Anyone who says it's not about money doesn't understand how much it takes to provide a quality education particularly in this context. We have one of the most costly environments in the entire country.

We have a huge number of kids in special education, a huge number of kids who are Englishlanguage learners, a huge number of kids who are low-income and are dealing with a lot of other struggles, a huge number of kids who very sadly are homeless. Our costs are very high but we can continue to make immense progress toward equity and improving our education – it actually does take funding to achieve that.

Lehrer: Sheila in Manhattan, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Sheila.

Question: Hi. Hello Brian and Mayor de Blasio. Thank you for taking my call. I'm calling – I want to know what the City is going to do about the tragic situation that has been imposed upon very hard-working cab drivers, medallion owners who invested with the City, and whose contract for exclusive rights for the market has been totally set aside and is leading to suicides for people who can feel that they can no longer make a living or retire or [inaudible] their investment but that they still have to pay for. And I want to know what the City is going to do about that. We know that an e-hail and street-hail is essentially the same thing that this descending of all of these black cars on the city that is what is causing the congestion. And I want to know what the City is going to do to reverse and correct this terrible, terrible blight that has been imposed upon a hard-working profession. It's been – it changed to a gig economy with part-time people taking over full-time jobs. And there were other solutions if the City wanted to provide –

Lehrer: Let's get a response from the Mayor. Obviously this is an ongoing problem.

Mayor: It's a huge problem and Sheila, thank you for the call and my heart goes out to these drivers and their families because I know the world changed in a horrible way for them and it's incredibly tough. I have to say I can't be dishonest with you about this core point.

People talk about the situation leading to suicides. I feel horrible for these families but look if anyone because of their finances whether they're a cab driver or anyone else, if someone because of a financial situation is considering suicide, there are other challenges they must be dealing with because that alone should – nothing should ever lead anyone to suicide but because of a financial crisis people need to get help.

So I just got to emphasize we can't just sit back and say, "Oh we have a financial crisis and therefore people are turning to suicide." We need to get those people help. If anybody knows of someone who is considering taking their own life because of a financial challenge, we have the ability to connect them to mental health support. We can help them through that crisis and help them get back on their feet.

And I remind everyone, anybody in your lives whatever background they come from, whatever profession they're in - if you hear someone talking about suicide call 888-NYC-WELL and talk to a trained counselor and get them help.

On the question of the policies that we've been trying to use to address this. This came out of nowhere. The technology changes, the economic changes swamped us all certainly the industry never anticipated anything like this. We tried a few years ago to do something that I thought made sense which was to put a cap on the growth of some of the for-hire vehicle sector like Uber. As you will remember that objective was not pursued by the City Council and that was a big fight.

I think the caps are the kind of thing we need to talk about again because the situation has gotten worse since then both in terms of the pressure that's been put on the medallion owners, everyday taxi drivers, but also because of congestion. We've seen a huge growth in this for-hire vehicle sector including a lot of cars that are driving around without anyone in them. So, I think we should revisit that question about the caps. But on top of that we're trying to create parity across all of this industry. In other words, everything that yellow cabs have to do, the others should have to do too.

So we have applied disability access rules to the for-hire vehicles. I want to see stronger safety and labor rules for them as well. You know, there's talk in Albany right now about surcharges to help the MTA which I think is a good idea but those would be applied the same way to the Ubers of the world as they are to the yellow taxis.

I think that's an important point for parity. So, those are some of things that we can do. And obviously we're not selling anymore medallions so we're trying to protect the value they have now by the approach but this has a lot to do with something that changed literally in the course of a few years in the way consumers approached this market. And we're going to try and find ways to address it. But one of the things we have to look at again is this idea of caps.

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

Question: Hi, how're you doing?

Lehrer: Good, thank you.

Question: Good. So I'm a concerned parent. Thank you again for taking my call. I'm a concerned parent up in the West Harlem area and I wanted to ask a question about the classroom sizes and not allowing, I guess, Success Academy kids to be – opportunity to have more space there at the school. Could you talk a little bit about and why I guess [inaudible] –

Lehrer: This is the Wadleigh – the Wadleigh school building Harlem?

Question: Correct.

Lehrer: This is – Mr. Mayor, I'm sure you know the case. For our listeners, the Success Academy charter network is asking for more space there and saying you're kind of politically discriminating against it when that school is growing and the regular public school in the same building is shrinking. What do you say about that situation?

Mayor: It's just – I appreciate the concern but I want to give you the full facts. The proposal we put forward is actually to substantially the expand the high school in that building which we want to be a bigger, stronger high school focusing on the arts and working very closely with cultural organizations all over Harlem. We think there's a real need for that and we have other needs as well that would be addressed in that building.

So, you know, look what we try and do in the case of each building is determine what we think is the highest best use in terms of the education of kids in the community. I understand that there's going to be certain charter organizations that have their own interpretation of what they think is best. We have to look at the overall picture. You know, this is a school system that about 90 percent of our kids go to traditional public schools. That's in the end what we have to focus on. It's how to do best by the whole system. And certainly in the case of Harlem, having an expanded stronger high-quality arts education high school is something that we think would be a great benefit for the community.

Lehrer: Richard on Staten Island, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Richard.

Question: How're you doing? Two weeks ago I called in and asked whether the Police Department could assemble a database of the source of all guns recovered. What the updated status of that request?

Mayor: Well, Richard, you did call in and I have to admit I don't have that one in front of me. I owe that to you. Can you please give your information to WNYC because I owe you an answer on that. I thought it was a smart idea but I don't have a formal answer yet. I will talk to Commissioner O'Neill about it about it and we will certainly get you an answer in the course of the next week or so.

Lehrer: Very briefly, Richard. What are you looking to learn on behalf of the public?

Question: Well, basically let's look at the murder of Police Officers Ramos and Liu. There was a lot of media coverage of that but where did that gun come from? I think there has to be a connection between the crime committed with the gun and where the guns come from if we're going to make policy changes –

Mayor: And Richard's point last time was to really focus on the fact that so many of the guns come from places that have lax rules and then those guns get flooded into New York State.

Lehrer: Here's an NYPD question from a listener via Twitter. It says, "Mr. Mayor in light of the killing in California, can we conversely acknowledge good work by our officer's precincts like at our 28th?' So this listener, Gregory, is obviously a fan or who knows maybe he works at the 28th Precinct. And do you have a comment on the killing of Stephon Clark?

Mayor: Yeah, these tragedies have to end. I mean it's – look I haven't seen the video tape from Sacramento. What I've seen described makes no sense to me how that could possibly have happened.

The – what we're emphasizing here is you know rigorous training of our officers and deescalation and the neighborhood policing strategy. And you know the numbers came out for 2017 and the number of times our officers used their weapons in an adversarial situation in this entire city, 365 days in the year of 2017, I believe it was under 40 times.

We are really emphasizing restraint and our officers are doing a great job. They really are. I've seen – we've seen some of the body camera footage from our department and it's stunning to see how much restraint our officers exercise. And that's got to be the way forward. And having body

cameras is a crucial piece of this as well which will be on all of our patrol officers by the end of this year.

So, no, I'm just – I'm sick to my stomach over what happened in Sacramento. I don't understand how it possibly could happen but I want to believe based on real evidence that better training, a focus on de-escalation, focus on neighborhood policing, and developing a closer working relationship between neighborhood and policing, more officers who live and work in New York City, more officers who stay in their same precinct for long periods of time and get to know their neighborhood – that that is all having an important impact.

Lehrer: There was a report since the last time you were on that police officers still routinely lie in court under oath – testilying is the word that was identified by that word way back as I'm sure you know in the Judge Mollen Commission under Mayor Dinkins and here we are still. Is it something you have any new policy response to?

Mayor: Oh there is a very strong policy response and look, this is a horrible part of the past of the NYPD, I'm not going to mince words about that. I believe that we have been beating it back. I know there are still some cases because we are talking about 36,000 officers so there is always going to be some bad apples but our job is to find them and address it and make sure people who shouldn't be on the force aren't on the force, or if they do something wrong move them off the force which Commissioner O'Neill has done aggressively.

I believe we are putting that past behind us. But the examples that you know our Internal Integrity Unit, Internal Affairs Bureau – the size of that unit has doubled in the last five years. The training emphasis, heavy training emphasis on integrity and make clarity about consequences when there is a lack of integrity. There has been more audits of arrest records to look for any instances where there might be any inconsistency. Obviously body cam footage is crucial to all of this going forward, it's going to be the ultimate proof point and it will be on every patrol officer by the end of this year.

You know, I think another great step, which again we are going to fight for intensely in the spring in Albany is the 50-a reform – the reform of the law that would allow us to put disciplinary actions out publically, you know, obviously with appropriate confidentiality respected but to show to everyone that there are consequences for any wrong doing. So I think the atmosphere is changing intensely but we are not going to take any of that lightly.

Lehrer: One more, Alexander in Brooklyn, you are on WNYC with the Mayor, hi. Alexander are you there? Alexander once, Alexander twice –

Mayor: Try another one.

Lehrer: Emily in Greenpoint you are on WNYC hello Emily.

Question: Hi. Thank you for taking my call.

Lehrer: Sure.

Question: I'm calling about the DOI investigation that came out this week regarding sexual assault being –

Lehrer: Whoops and Emily's phone is breaking up, Emily are you still there?

Question: Oh yeah, I'm here can you hear me?

Lehrer: Yes, keep going.

Question: Okay. I was pacing, sorry – because I'm so upset about this issue. The DOI recently came out with a study that said that the police had been underfunding the SVU which has resulted in an actual systemic under investigation of a acquaintance rape and sexual assault, preferencing stranger rape even though many rape cases, many more rape cases have been reported. So I'm wondering what the Mayor is intending to do about this?

Lehrer: Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Yes Emily, thank you very much for the call. Look the clearest thing, the first thing I want to tell you is there is absolute commitment – I'm 100 percent committed to giving special victims Unit whatever they need. I just want that to be crystal clear. There's been a lot more investment over the years in investigators for special victims, that number of investigators has gone up steadily. We have been adding detectives – this report suggests more detectives, I'm going to talk to the Commissioner about that, if that's something they need they will certainly get it.

There are a lot of things in the report the Police Department disagrees with and believes are not factually accurate. So I just want to be really clear that -I want to spate the question of are we ready to do anything and everything to do support the special victims unit? Yes of course and we have seen an uptick in either, you know we don't know all of what is going on here but we believe it is an uptick in reporting of rapes and other assaults that used to be not reported. We want people to report, we want people to come forward, we want them to be treated with respect and support, we want people to see who are victims that there is real action taken, and that the perpetrators are found and punished is really important to stopping this evil crime.

So I'm very, very committed to making sure the resources are there. It is going to be an area of greater focus but I also want to say with respect for the Police Department that has consistently been driving down crime. And has been engaging in I think a much more community focused approach and communicative approach to neighborhood policing – that there are parts of this report that the Police Department strongly believes are not accurate.

Lehrer: The language that I have seen and then we will be out of time after this answer is that the Department of Investigation report says they don't investigate domestic or acquaintance rapes after an arrest. Do you understand that and are you accepting the NYPD's denial of that?

Mayor: I just, again, I'm going to go over it in detail with Commissioner O'Neill but everything I've seen consistently from the NYPD and I think people have watched this over these last years. The city has gotten safer – they have addressed crimes across the board. And with a very, very different approach then was there in the past because of neighborhood policing. I don't accept the notion that there is any lack of focus or energy. Either some area where more resources are needed, we are going to provide it. It's as simple as that. But I want to go back and look carefully at this. You know one of the concerns is who was interviewed for this and who wasn't. And it looks like a lot of the key people who do this work were not interviewed for this.

So again I emphasize when NYPD – which has made this the safest city in America and has consistently shown a more, an approach that's more community focused, that's more communication focused with communities of all kind and is deeply concerned about crimes against woman in particular. When you see a report like this and a lot of the key people where not interviewed who do this work, that raises a real concern about how accurate it is.

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

Mayor: Thank you, take care Brian.

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