



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

Brian Lehrer: We begin as usual on Fridays with our weekly Ask The Mayor segment with Mayor Bill de Blasio. Our phones are open for the Mayor at our other number 212-433-WNYC, 212-433-9692. Of course, that's not our membership line. Our Ask The Mayor line is totally separate, and Mr. Mayor welcome back to WNYC.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you, Brian.

Lehrer: Well it looks like you, and we were all, blindsided by the Miami schools chief Alberto Carvalho who you had thought had accepted the job to be the schools chancellor here, but then there was this big outpouring of love for him in Miami and asking him to reconsider, and then sure enough he backed out. So what the heck happened?

Mayor: Well Brian, I've never seen anything like it. I've been in public service for decades. I've never seen anyone do something like this before. I mean the people who were blindsided are 1.1 million school children in this city who deserved better. And look, he had accepted the job numerous times in conversations with me and with our First Deputy Mayor Dean Fuleihan and had authorized the formal release of that news. And I am as confused as everyone else why anyone would do such a thing.

But here we are – my focus is on the 1.1 million kids. I want to remind all New Yorkers we have great educators in our schools, and they're going to do great work while we find a new chancellor, and there's lots of extraordinary professionals around this country who want to be the chancellor. This is the biggest school system in the country. It is the premiere education job in America. People from coast to coast have been asking to be considered, and the search process resumed yesterday, and we will have a really great new chancellor quite soon.

Lehrer: Just one follow up question on Carvalho. Politico New York says past scandals involving him, including decade old accusations of an affair with a former Miami Herald reporter, were being resurrected by reporters here in New York, and so maybe Carvalho got cold feet because by staying in Miami he'll dodge the media feeding frenzy. How much do you think that had to do with it?

Mayor: I can't read his mind. I can only tell you that topic was discussed in great detail with him well in advance. I made very clear to him, I know First Deputy Mayor Fuleihan did as well, what the media environment was. He was quite familiar with the reality of New York. We vetted him very, very extensively. I went over every element in the vetting with him personally and reminded him that all these issues would be rehashed. So this was – and I'm talking about many days before the announcement because I offered the job to him almost two weeks ago, and he accepted over a week ago. So I can't make heads or tails of that. It was quite explicit there would be scrutiny. It was quite explicit that this is the number one city in the country, the number one education job in the country, and if you're going to come here this is the big leagues and expect to get ready for it. So I can't tell you what happened after that.

Lehrer: Well, if there's a silver lining maybe it's that it speaks well of your search process that you wound up with a top candidate who was so beloved that there was a popular uprising to get him to stay in Miami. People don't react that way to government officials that often.

Mayor: I think that's a fair statement, and I do give him credit for what he's achieved down there. But if had wanted to stay there, he should never have traveled here twice to interview at length and have dinner with the First Lady and I and all the things he did. But here we are – look, it's in the past now. Carmen Farina is going to continue on the job for the next month. She's done an outstanding job. Our focus now is to build on her legacy. The graduation rate has gone up consistently. We've seen consistent progress with big initiatives – Pre-K For All; 3-K is coming on now; AP advance placement courses in all our high schools; Computer Science For All – all these initiatives are going to keep growing. The next chancellor will build on them, and again I'm quite sure we're going to have a great chancellor quite soon.

Lehrer: It's our Ask The Mayor segment here on the Brian Lehrer show as every Friday at 10 o'clock, and Jennifer in Little Italy, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Jennifer.

Question: Hi, thanks for taking my call. As I think –

Lehrer: You there, Jennifer? Did we lose you?

Mayor: Can't hear her.

Lehrer: Her line seems to have dropped out. We'll try to get back to her if we can. Marion calling from Princeton, you're on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio. Hi, Marion.

Question: Hi, good morning and thanks for taking my call. Mr. Mayor I'm not sure if you're even aware of this being an issue. I'm a wheelchair user. I love coming into the city as frequently as I can and especially to go to Broadway shows. Here's the problem – the curb cuts in and around Times Square are terrible to non-existent. It's dangerous. I will not come in by myself, although I would be willing to to see a show I would like to see, and I don't know if you're aware of the problem. In other parts of the city there are no curb cuts. On the Upper West Side, they're terrific. I don't know if you even know that this is an issue, and I wonder what you have to say about it.

Mayor: Yes, I do. I appreciate it, Marion. I do know it's an issue, and it's something we're very focused on. There's a lot to do. It's a huge city, and obviously many, many areas did not have as many curb cuts as we want, and it's our job to act on that. It will take time for sure. I had not heard specifically about the problem in Times Square. I'm going to have my team get on that immediately and see if there's particular sites we need to focus on. But there's going to be a lot more work done on curb cuts all over the city. We want this to be first of all from an equity lens it should not be that some neighborhoods have lots and others don't. We want to make sure we address all neighborhoods, and it's something we're going to have to work on steadily for years because it's just a vast amount of work. But we will be doing that.

Lehrer: Rebecca in Blissville, Queens, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Rebecca.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Good morning.

Question: Blissville, if you don't know, it's a tiny outpost in Long Island City bordered by Calvary Cemetery, the Newtown Creek, and the LIE, and it's made up of, you know, houses – people have lived there for 150 years or families who have. But it's also industrial with small businesses, auto-garages, carpentry houses, statue of liberty factory, and Silver Cup Studio plus two hotels. And within the past couple of months in the City View DHS has moved in 100 single men, which opens partly on Greenpoint Avenue and the other side on a small, leafy residential block.

Lehrer: A homeless shelter you're talking about?

Question: A homeless shelter. It was a hotel converted to a homeless shelter for 100 single men. And secondly the Fairfield Inn, which is on Van Dam, and it's a more industrial area, but it's a block away from the residential blocks and is adjacent to another residential block will have 156 families, so if we do a plus-one on that and add the 100 men that's about 400 people in a community –

Lehrer: Forgive me, what's your question for the Mayor?

Question: – in a community of about 400 people. So my question for the Mayor is are there guidelines for density because at this point it will be one-to-one, and it's not what to you seems like a reasonable amount of density of residents to homeless persons, and would those guidelines apply equally to communities like Riverhead – Riverdale, Williamsburg, and Park Slope?

Mayor: Rebecca, thank you for the question. I've got to back up for a moment just to describe the overall strategy. We will be converting from what was done for many, many years as the homeless shelter population grew and grew, which has been happening for decades. The City at various points relied on what's called cluster sites, which are often substandard housing and obviously relied a lot at different points on hotels paid for by the day. The policy of the city is to leave the cluster sites all together. That has been happening more and more. We announced a

number of closures of this last week and to ultimately leave the pay-by-the-day hotels, and we're going to move to a system of purpose built shelters and facilities that are specifically for shelter that will be in every part of the city, every neighborhood in terms of looking at where homeless folks come from and representing the fact that every part of the city has homeless folks in our shelter – shelter system I should say.

So that's the overall policy. Right now we are sitting when we have the opportunity to find an appropriate site. Remember we have a legal obligation if people qualify, we have a legal obligation to make sure that they have appropriate housing. The last thing we want is a lot more people on our streets. We're working very hard to get people off the streets through the HOME-STAT initiative which is beginning to really bear fruit. But the law in this city is that we have to provide shelter, and one of the good things about that is we do not have the extraordinary street homeless populations that you see, for example, in some of the west coast cities.

Lehrer: True. If I could follow-up on one of her very specific points. She says the ratio in that part of Queens, if this is built in this way, would be one-to-one permanent residents in that neighborhood and homeless people who are being moved in to the shelter. Is that –

Mayor: I'd have to look –

Lehrer: – if you acknowledge that's true, is that acceptable?

Mayor: Again, I have to look at the specifics and I'm going to be careful not to speak hypothetically. We care, obviously, to make sure that wherever there is a shelter facility that we take into account the needs of the surrounding community and we try and balance things. But we also have a shortage of available sites and we have to balance – you know we have to make decisions taking into account we need the sites to make sure that people are sheltered, and we want them to be as fairly distributed as possible, and we want to think about things, obviously, like the impact on the immediate community.

What I will do, Rebecca, if you'll give your information to WNYC, I will have a senior person from our administration talk to you later on today to hear the specifics. We'll follow-up and we'll look to see if there's anything different we want to do with that situation.

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

Question: How you doing? Could the Mayor have established a database of where each of the guns recovered by the NPD –

Lehrer: NYPD. By the NYPD?

Question: Yes. In other words they report an aggregate, they'll say basically that so many guns were recovered, they came from Georgia or Pennsylvania or from Virginia. But we don't know the gun for a specific crime, such as the shooting of Officers Ramos and Liu. Where did that gun from? What's the story behind that gun?

Lehrer: How about a database of guns and where came – especially if they’re illegal weapons in the City of New York, where they came from. Does that NYPD already do something like that? Do you know?

Mayor: Richard raises a very important point, Richard thank you for that. Look the NYPD has been explicit, Commissioner O’Neill has spoken about this, and Commissioner Bratton before him, that one of the central problems in this city, one of the fundamental reasons we have any violence in this city is guns coming in from out of state. It’s been documented many times. I think Richard makes a good point. We can make sure we’re showing it consistently to help everyone understand the sheer magnitude of it. And in a lot of the most notorious killings that have happened in this city the gun was found to come from out of state.

So, I’ll double back with the Police Commissioner about what information we’re putting out and I want us to, obviously, put as much out as we can, you know, whenever it’s not related to an ongoing investigation, to show people that the problem is lax gun laws and that – law enforcement is very clear about this. I want to be really crystal clear in this moment where everyone’s talking about guns. Ask the Police Commissioner of the biggest city in the country, the gold standard police force in this country, the NYPD, ask Jimmy O’Neill what he thinks about lax gun laws and he will tell you, lax gun laws put his officers in danger.

It is clearly time for common sense gun safety legislation. It’s a majority view in this country. I believe this might be the moment where something happens because of these extraordinary young people in Florida. And by the way we’re having a town hall meeting with New York City students next week who I think are going to pay an important leadership role as well.

But, I think Richard makes a good point and we’ll endeavor to get as much information out about that as possible.

Lehrer: Another NYPD question. You probably know by now that 14 news organizations including WNYC are suing the NYPD to keep body camera footage generally available to the public after the police union filed its suit to keep body camera footage private. What’s your position?

Mayor: Well I don’t quite understand why there’s a lawsuit when we already have the position you described. The Commissioner has spoken to this, I’ve spoken to this. We intend to make appropriate footage public.

Now there’s a couple of important provisos. One, if there is an immediate investigation, we have to talk to each District Attorney involved to see what they feel. We cannot put out footage without that conversation when charges are pending.

And there are really important exceptions. In the case of domestic violence, for example, we will not put out footage of the victim. We will not show the victim’s identity. There are other situations like that where there are really strong confidentiality considerations.

But you've seen recently, there were instances of police involved shooting, after the DA was consulted the footage was put out so all New Yorkers could see exactly what happened from the police officer's perspective. And I think people really value that. So that's what we're going to be doing. I think the PBA lawsuit has no grounds. I don't understand the media lawsuit because, again, that's – we already have the policy of disclosure.

Lehrer: And I want to ask you one NYCHA question. When you were here recently you said you couldn't just commit \$2 billion to faster paced repairs, partly because the State and federal governments weren't doing their share. Yesterday Governor Cuomo was on the show and I asked him about that and he said this after saying NYCHA's problem is not a money problem.

NYCHA's problem is a management problem. When they tell you it takes us three to four years to spend money that we get today, that is a problem.

And the Governor also said this.

NYCHA is wholly controlled by New York City. It is a federally funded agency. The State historically provides no funding to Housing Authorities because it has no role. It's a federal program administered by the City. We may took an extraordinary step by actually providing funding to NYCHA, which had never happened in history before.

The Governor on this program yesterday. Your reaction to any of that?

Mayor: There's a lot the Governor's leaving out. I saw some of the transcript and he alleged that he was very familiar with the inner workings of NYCHA, that's just not the whole truth. I've talked to him a lot of times about NYCHA he does not evince a detailed understanding of what's happening there.

The fact is the State committed \$250 million to NYCHA, voted on by the State legislature, signed by the Governor. That money has never arrived. Of course money is part of the solution. I mean it's ridiculous for the Governor to suggest that an agency that now has somewhere over \$20 billion – is that latest estimate – over \$20 billion in physical needs that money is not part of the problem.

We have had resources that we've put in as a City at an unprecedented level: \$2.1 billion in capital money, \$1.6 billion in expense money that had never been put in by the City of New York on that level before. That money has been spent consistently and effectively to make major changes at NYCHA. You look at what's happened the last four years, I can give you any number of indicators: reduced crime, we've had much faster repairs, roofs being fixed. All sorts of things that show physical progress at NYCHA. The Governor's not talking about any of that.

Why doesn't he stop talking and give up the \$250 million that he already signed off on. Some of it's from 2015, some of it's from 2017. But that idea that it is not about money is specious.

We will continue to improve everything that's being done at NYCHA. We have only just begun, we're going to do a lot more. But I've heard the Governor say this before on education, 'oh it's

not about money'. Of course it's about money. You can't make our schools as good as they could be without money, you can't make public housing what it should be if \$20 billion is missing.

Lehrer: And we've got like 30 seconds left. I see you're going to Atlanta later today if the airports aren't closed from the weather, I guess, to address a union not from your political funds but on the taxpayer's as Mayor. Are you going to be able to go, and why is this a City and not a political function.

Mayor: Well the nor'easter we're experiencing, it looks like it could be somewhere between one and three inches of snow at this point, doesn't look worse than that. There might be some flooding in some areas in southern Brooklyn and Queens that people should be very careful about. And by the way, everyone should really be careful on the roads today.

But look, this is a union, the United Food and Commercial Workers, and the retail workers that have a huge presence in New York City. Tens of thousands of members. We work with them on a whole host of issues that affect the quality of life of all New Yorkers as well. This union has been in the lead on things like paid sick leave and living wage legislation. They've asked me to come down and speak to their national gathering about ways we can all work together for the bigger changes we need including the changes in Washington that would benefit New York City. So, it's an absolutely consistent thing to do. I'll be away only a short time. But this is an organization that has a very big impact on New York City,

Lehrer: Mr. Mayor, safe travel if you go. Talk to you next week.

Mayor: Thank you, Brian.

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