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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 and as every week at this time, it's time for our weekly Ask The Mayor segment, my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio at 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0, 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0 or 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, how you doing today?

**Lehrer:** I'm doing all right. I think there is one dominant topic for you this week, and it seems from a lot of reporting that the city has a problem of the protests against too much police violence being met with too much police violence or heavy-handed police tactics. Do you accept the premise?

**Mayor:** No, I accept the premise only in this way, that I think people are deeply hurt. There's an anger, there's a pain over what's wrong in policing in America and in New York City that we have to fix. There's a pain over the killing of George Floyd and there's a sense of injustice not being addressed, and we have to address it. We have to show the deeper change. But in terms of the way that, you know, the many, many thousands of people have been out there protesting have been addressed. Look, there are some specific instances I don't accept, where there needs to be discipline. But the vast majority of what I've seen is peaceful protest that has been respected as always, and folks making sure voices heard for change, and police have shown a lot of restraint. You're always going to see, unfortunately, because we're humans, you're going to see specific things that didn't work and it has to be consequences, and then it has to be changes in approach, but I've been out there so many times in the last week, Brian just literally going right up to where the protests were to watch them, and I have seen overwhelmingly peaceful protest being respected by the NYPD—

**Lehrer:** There are so—

**Mayor:** The protest is in many ways about police, obviously the – it has been done peacefully.

**Lehrer:** There are so many examples though that have been reported of bad police behavior that it starts to look like if not a pattern, if not a policy, way too many bad apples that would reflect a failure of your administration. Here's the description from the New York Times today of something that happened in Mott Haven last night, around curfew at 8:00 pm, officers charged into the crowd and began to arrest people who have been protesting peacefully moments earlier.

With no apparent provocation, officers shoved protesters onto sidewalks. Many people tried to leave shouting that they would willingly go home. But with officers on all sides, they had no way out. Around 8:30 pm, officers charged in again, swinging their batons and striking protestors. Dozens of people were arrested and then forced to sit on the street with their hands cuffed, one person was taken away on a stretcher. So that's from the New York Times, and I'm going to play one piece of tape from that scene that our Gothamist reporter Jake Offenhartz brought back last night. This is 21-year-old student Rolando Sanchez. This was recorded. I gather on the top of the hill at 136th street in Mott Haven, as officers were still processing close to a hundred protestors,

**Recording:** [*Person 1: "We're trying to, we're trying to – we're peacefully protesting, they're trying to keep us in as they're telling us to go home or we're locked in between walls of police, hitting us with batons, hitting us with their bikes and asking us not to resist." Person 2: "Yeah, and I have it on video." Offenhartz: "How, I mean, I know this is a ridiculous question. How does it make you feel? Like describe your emotional state at the time?" Person 1: "I was scared. I was ignited, angry at what I was seeing. We – all we want is for them to take a stand with us, to, to put down their weapons and walk with us and march with us. That's all we want, to show that they're with the people as well, and—" Person 2: "They just keep proving us wrong." Person 1: "Right, right. They're proving us right."*]

**Lehrer:** 21-year-old Rolando Sanchez last night in the Bronx and Mr. Mayor, his charge of the protest, the police hitting people with batons is confirmed in Gothamist reporting and in New York Times reporting. So, my question is this your policy?

**Mayor:** Brian, look, first of all, I'm very moved by what Rolando said, and I think he's saying something bigger, and then I'll speak to your question. I think he's saying the aspiration that we all have to hold and this government has to achieve, which is that we all do walk together and all do find something different, and I know you could say, well, okay, right now with everything that's happening, are we achieving that goal on one very, very profound level? Yes, because thousands and thousands of people all over the city every day are protesting peacefully, and that is being respected. On another level there's a challenge that we're facing that's underlying, and this incident in the Bronx is indicative. This has not been just one thing, and Brian look respectfully, I mean, you could talk about one piece of the equation and leave out everything else. But I don't think that actually is fair to everyday New Yorkers in our neighborhoods.

We saw horrible attacks on people and property on Sunday night, Monday night, that was one thing. We've seen a persistent pattern in some groups, and it's been very small in the scheme of things, but it's been absolutely persistent here in cities, around America of people aimed to do violence to the police, to communities, to property and are doing it systematically, are doing according to plan. There was explicit warning in the case of that gathering in the Bronx. That doesn't mean every single person that was there was part of it, obviously, but groups organizing that event, advertised their desire to do violence and to create conflict, and as Commissioner Shea said, moments ago in the press conference, we just had, the NYPD recovered gasoline canisters on protesters, weapons, and clear plans to do violence in that context is very, very dangerous to not address that.

Now, if any protesters were there peacefully and not associated with that, and they got hemmed in and all, that's something that I don't accept and we have to fix, and I will make sure there's a full review of what happened there. But I think there's a, there's almost a little bit of magical thinking here that the horrible stuff that happened Sunday night, Monday night, didn't happen. That the attacks that we've been seeing, certainly since Friday night, systematic attacks on the officers systematic use of violence by a few, but enough to make a huge, negative impact that that's not happening, and that we don't have to somehow address all these issues at once.

**Lehrer:** I could go over—

**Mayor:** That's what's going on.

**Lehrer:** I hear you, and I could go down a less that we don't have time for, of incidents similar to what I just described in Mott Haven last night on Wednesday night, on Tuesday night. So protestors are asking can't you make the distinction between arresting looters or people injure – out to injure or kill police officers without a curfew on peaceful protestors or that kind of police behavior toward peaceful protestors or the kettling that you just described. You didn't use the word kitting, but protestors are using it, meaning panning people in, and that's COVID risk to if the police are panning people in a way that they have to be really, really closer to each other, then they're going to be before and police officers aren't wearing masks themselves, in many cases police officers are behaving toward people who have only demonstrated peaceful behavior in ways that are inflaming people's attitudes against group.

**Mayor:** Brian. They can – they can have people can be inflamed against me. That's not the issue. The issue is we have to move the city forward and we have to protect people. You respectfully, I'm not hearing objectivity in your question, and if you want to declare that you're not being objective, I respect that, but no, I'm sorry. We cannot just see one piece of this equation. This is a debate we should have in this city. This is just, we have to be clear. I've spent years and years in communities talking to people and they want safety and security and peace, and then there's also a tremendous issue about over-policing or disrespectful policing or anything that's inappropriate in the police. But that balance to begin with – we're going to have a real conversation about New York City. Let's start right there. The irony that came out in the press conference earlier, people saying defund the police, members of City Council saying defund the police who a few years ago, insisted number one budget priority that we had 2000 more police officers on patrol because their communities were saying, we're not safe enough, we need to see more police around, and we wanted to have a different relationship with police, which means we want cops on the beat, not cops going buy in squad cars. We've got to be clear that the vast majority of working class, middle class, New Yorkers, every single day, they want safety first for themselves, for their families, and they associated that safety with NYPD, but they want the NYPD to be different and better, and they're right, and it needs to be different and better. But meanwhile, in just a week's time in this city, we have dealt with not peaceful protest alone. That would have been the clearest thing in the world if we were only dealing with peaceful protest. Brian, if this had only been peaceful protest and any of these incidents had happened, I would've said absolutely inappropriate across the board, and I still say inappropriate anytime there's an investigation has proven that something was excessive or wrong, but here's the rub, and we have to be honest about it. From the beginning of these protests, we saw not only in New York City, but in cities

around the country, a small well-organized group of folks, some call them anarchists, you can use different names, who were aiming to do violence, who were aiming to harm police officers, harm property, create destruction for the purpose of an agenda. They wanted it on video. They wanted to be able to use it for what they were trying to achieve. That was part one. Then when we thought that was being reduced and we could move forward, two nights of property destruction out of nowhere, hadn't seen it in a long time. Those by the way, were overwhelmingly just plain old, well organized criminals who saw opportunity. I was in Burnside Avenue in the South Bronx talking to the people whose stores were destroyed, talking to me residents who said, we cannot let a community has fought for decades to come back, be undermined, and so there is more to this story than meets the eye. We are going to keep the city safe. We are going to reform the NYPD, Brian, you're 100 percent right on one piece of this, where there is a video, it needs to be fully investigated when you see results, and we see need to see them a lot quicker than we've been seeing it. This is a critique I have the NYPD and I'm going to go deal with this, that discipline takes too long. That is unacceptable. That must change.

**Lehrer:** Patrick in Yorkville. You're on WNYC with the mayor. Hello Patrick.

**Question:** Hi, it's Patrick [inaudible] Yorkville. Hi Mayor. I've been organizing the silent nonviolent vigils at Carl Schurz in Gracie Mansion at 7:00 pm every night. We'll be there again tonight. It's been notoriously and internationally reported as akin to a sit in. It's filled with those everyday New Yorkers that you mentioned last night. We marched around the neighborhood after the vigil, more than 500 Eastsiders, I left at 8:00 pm and said, thanks to the commanding Officer Walsh for the 19th for keeping her forces calm. 10 minutes later, I was seeing videos of my neighbors, your neighbors too being pushed around, one beaten up, and seven arrested. Our cry is "no justice, no peace." So nonviolent protest is not going to look like peaceful protest and should not be palatable to you or people in power. It's been a long time since you marched for the people, so it seems you need a reminder. The point of protest is civil disobedience, and that includes your curfew. The city's own website says that people will have every opportunity to go home. It says nowhere that people will, the police will respond with violence, aggression, or arrest. So it appears that the police are enforcing the law they don't understand. All our video and testimonial evidence shows your police turning into werewolves at 8:00 pm every night. You're worried about a few storefronts, help them get boarded up, but don't use robbery as an excuse. There's no excuse for violence against our neighbors.

**Lehrer:** Patrick, I'm going to leave it there. What would you say to Patrick, Mr. Mayor?

**Mayor:** I respect where Patrick began, but I'm going to take issue with where he ended. I, Patrick, I don't know how many protests you've been in. I've been in more than I can count, and I don't forget a single one of them, and I don't for a moment feel distanced from the people protesting. I feel kindred. I was at the memorial yesterday in Brooklyn. A lot of people were upset. I know as like to be in that kind of crowd, feeling the government is not hearing us or acting, and it's my job to show people that there will be action, real action and things that will change the fundamental nature of policing and the relationship between police and community. I have been at Gracie Mansion, hearing all the protests, peaceful, respected by the police, or I wouldn't have been able to hear all them all the time or see all of them all the time. I was out in Brooklyn last night, trailing a protest to watch exactly what was happening, moved all over a part

of Brooklyn, no interference. When there was a point where police thought something had to be different, they talked to the protesters about it, and there was clear instruction. That's what's been happening all over.

Now, there's incidents that don't conform with. We need to deal with them. If any police officer has done anything inappropriate, it needs to be dealt with. We're going to have investigations. If there needs to be charges or discipline, there will be, and we have the Internal Affairs Bureau and we have the Civilian Complaint Review Board and any New Yorker can put forward any complaint and it will and must be acted on, but the notion I've – I think Patrick, it was respectfully really unfair to say, oh, let's do a few store windows get broken. You better go up to Burnside Avenue in the Bronx and talk to immigrant Latino and Latina store owners who fought their whole life to create something for themselves and their community. I talked to people who for 30 years have had a store and saw it destroyed in a matter of minutes. No, what we saw was absolutely horrible and unfair and disrespectful that people in this city that some, and they were criminals, they were not protestors, attacked people's livelihood, attacked what they had built that is unacceptable and will take any measure to make sure that doesn't happen, and we're not going to allow any violence, so—

**Lehrer:** Is the way to prevent—

**Mayor:** Wait, I'm finishing.

**Lehrer:** Yeah, go ahead.

**Mayor:** You could say everyone in the crowd is peaceful. The exact tactics of some of these folks who aim to do violence are to blend into the crowd. This is like a known thing, not just here, but all over the country. They don't set up a way and say, oh, we are the anarchists over here who aim to do violence, that's not what they do. They blend in, their own materials show that they blend in, and that does not allow any violence against innocent people, but it is the point that there's a complexity here that has to be acknowledged.

**Lehrer:** Are you saying then that the policy has to be to arrest everybody who's out after curfew?

**Mayor:** No. And we haven't been doing that period. Brian, I don't know what your reporters are telling you, if I was trailing a group of protesters watching them marching at 10 pm last night in Brooklyn, I've been by Barclay's center night after night. There's people gathered there, police standing back, letting them protest after curfew. No, it's – you can see it with your own eyes. Don't mistake the things that have gone wrong, including some things are absolutely unacceptable and discipline will be meted out with the overwhelming number of things have gone right. I feel like there's an inability to look at things with any subtlety at all, Brian, respectfully. How can I have all these examples that I've seen with my own eyes, a peaceful protest after curfew, and then people are saying, will protest be allowed after curfew? It's peaceful. How has it been happening if it's not allowed?

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

**Question:** Hi. Hi Mr. Mayor, so I just wanted to ask a question about the NYPD not wearing face mask. So I've been out protesting. I've also seen a lot of videos. I just feel like it's representative of the general attitude of the NYPD that we're in a city that is in a crisis. I mean, you've been focusing on safety and these are people that are technically supposed to protect us and they are not wearing face masks. What I've seen is all the protesters are wearing face masks – sorry, I'm very passionate about this, it just really gets to me but I don't understand –

**Lehrer:** And not all to be fair, but go ahead –

**Question:** Even makes any sense. Yes. Yeah. It just, I know you're not completely responsible for that decision because the NYPD and I'm sure that they're probably getting, you know, their temperature checked when to see whether they're sick, whether they're going out there, but still just the symbol of it. How – what does that say to the people about this police force that is supposed to be protecting us?

**Lehrer:** Ashley, I'm going to leave it there. Mr. Mayor, as a matter of policy, why is it not required for every police officer who's out on the streets, in the pandemic, in a crowd to wear a mask?

**Mayor:** Yeah, no, Ashley is exactly right. And Ashley, thank you for the question. I'm frustrated by it too. This is again, Brian, boy are we in a situation where any attempt at pure consistency is being roiled by an ever-changing environment, starting with the pandemic, but no, it's quite clear. The policy is police officers are supposed to wear face coverings in public, period. There are times when it's understandable. If you're trying to give a command and people can't hear you as well, or you know, you're drinking water from a water bottle. I mean, there's obviously exceptions, but overwhelmingly police officers are supposed to wear those face coverings for everyone's safety. It has not been happening consistently. I have had this conversation with Commissioner Shea multiple times. It has to be fixed and that bothers me.

And I really do feel Ashley's point and I share her point, but that's not the thing that bothers me the most, Brian, what bothers me even more is the reports of officers covering their badge number or their name up or not turning on their body camera when they should. And I told a story at the press conference earlier that one of the things that bothered my daughter the most in her experience before she was arrested, and she said the crowd was calling out one officer who didn't have his body camera on, even though he was in contact with the protesters, you're supposed to the minute you're having an encounter with civilians, the body camera's supposed to go on. He didn't do it. The – you know, he apparently either made a move to do it, or did it for a moment, then turned it back off and the crowd saw it and started yelling at him, your body camera's still not on. And that should never have to happen.

I understand in the rush of events, an officer might legitimately forget, but you know, people have to know body cameras on at the appropriate times, name and badge number visible at all times, face covering on at all times except for valid exceptions. This is where that there's a sense, and I hear it loud and clear of double standard, and that's not good. That's not acceptable. If

people feel that the police are not holding themselves to the same standard that they hold everyone else, that is when a breakdown in trust occurs and we cannot allow that to happen.

**Lehrer:** Mike on the Lower East side, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello.

**Question:** Hi, Brian. Thank you so much for your reporting and thanks to reporters like Jake who are out in the streets covering things. I just wanted to ask specifically about the budget. I know people always say budgets shows values. I'm a public servant. I work at HPD, the agency that's responsible for developing affordable housing and maintaining the cities you know, private housing stock, almost all of the private housing stock in the city. HPD gets 19 cents for every dollar that the NYPD gets. So I'm just wondering you know, is is HPD one-fifth as important as the NYPD. It seems like the priorities are really off. I think people are in the streets because they don't have, you know, affordable housing, they don't have health care, they don't have you know, good jobs, stable jobs, and I think there's a reason people are upset right now. And the way – the things we're hearing from the Mayor, I think are upsetting. And I think that people aren't being listened to and yeah –

**Lehrer:** Mike, I'm going to leave it there. Let me focus his budget question, Mr. Mayor. You have a June 30th budget deadline as you know, coming up for the fiscal year. That starts July 1st with the big budget deficit from the effects of the pandemic and from the stats I've read proposing to leave the NYPD's nearly \$6 billion budget in tack, while slashing education and youth programs and cutting other agencies, this has become a rallying cry for many people. And when they say defined the NYPD maybe there are a few "abolitionists" out there, but what people really mean for the most part is put back summer youth programs, put back other things and let the NYPD take its fair share of these cuts.

**Mayor:** Brian, and I appreciate it. Let me just start with my appreciation to Mike. First of all, Mike, thank you for serving the city at HPD and I really appreciate the work you all have done. You've created a record in the amount of affordable housing for people. Brian, I'll try and do this real quick. The there's just a dichotomy here that we need to acknowledge and it gets to Mike's point where he says he's not sure if I'm listening. I want to assure everybody I am listening from my heart and my soul. People are angry, frustrated, deeply, hurt. They were hurt before the pandemic and then the pandemic just upended lives and I've been there in communities talking to people and they care a lot about policing issues, but most profoundly when I talk to people, they care about – they can't pay the bills right now, they don't have a job. They're worried about how they can pay rent, where they can get food, where they can get medicine. This is how basic and horrible the situation is. There's tremendous frustration. So I'm listening deeply to that, and I'm listening to the cries for help and the deep desire for reform and NYPD. And we must do all those things. I've got a year and a half. I'm going to devote every ounce of energy to making deeper change. So any one of the things I'm not listening to, I better do a better job at showing them listening. I can tell you right now, I see it. I feel it.

To the point about the budget priorities. We have put massive amount of money and I'll get the updated version of what Juan Gonzalez assessed years ago when he said, and this administration there's been a massive redistribution of wealth. His number I believe is \$21 billion, that has been moved to working people and low income people because of everything from pre-K to affordable

housing, to paid sick leave, we go through many, many initiatives most recently, guaranteed health care, guaranteeing that every New Yorker who doesn't have insurance still will get health care coverage. Only city in America is doing that. Honestly, Brian, respectfully you and so many others have spent very little time on the fact that New York City guarantees health care for all its people. And I think if we're really talking about where our money is going, you know, with the amount of affordable housing we've created, the money we pay to stop evictions would free lawyers, you know, the things we are doing for people adding two full new grades of free public education. This is what redistribution looks like and by now, and Juan Gonzalez did that assessment, it was 21 billion, it's going to be a lot more now, that was years ago. That is exactly hearing the deep cries of the people for justice and for redistribution and for a whole different approach to our life and our economy.

But on the NYPD and this budget, there's a misnomer here. When things got cut in April, it was because they could not exist in the coronavirus. We couldn't do summer youth employment in person, at that point, we still can't. The things we used to do with summer youth, they'd go to a non-profit organization, work in the office, the non-profit organization is not open for them to work there. It doesn't work that way. So that was what was undergirding that decision. We're definitely going to be putting a lot of resources into youth initiatives. We're going to work with the City Council on that. There's no question about all the money we need to put into affordable housing, education, youth programming, but that is a different question than whether we will be safe enough if we change our approach to policing, and I want us to be fairer in policing, but still safe. And that's the balance we'll strike. We're going to have this conversation with the Council. We're going to work together, but we have worked for years to make this place safer. And we cannot leave that piece out of equation, working people in this city constantly talk to me about their fears in neighborhoods around the city, their fears about safety, that is central to making sure this city can work for everyday working people, people of color, outer borough people, the people I talk to all the time, and we've got to strike that balance and that's what we're going to do with the City Council,

**Lehrer:** Mayat, and actually, I don't know where my Mayat is, but my Mayat you're now on WNYC with the mayor. Hello?

**Question:** Yes, New York City, Brian, thanks for taking my call. A point of clarification, Mr. Mayor, with all due respect, but you are using the word investigation seemingly as a foil, unlike Atlanta when they don't come up, we don't [inaudible] believe [inaudible] eyes in that we saw police plow into basically upset, but peaceful protesters with two vans. We saw the Andrea - and I understand the young lady asking a question around possibly social distancing and about why they couldn't use the street, and the response was to cause her to have seizures and concussion, to be hospitalized, and the supervisor Edelman, not even coming to an aid that she obviously couldn't immediately get up. So that's the first part. The last part is what is your strategy in terms of what we have been called unions that are not, they basically have used an association to cover up, obscure, and to codified policies of abusive brutality –

**Lehrer:** And Mayat, we're going to leave it there. I apologize. The mayor has to go in one minute and I want to give him a chance to answer your call. And if you can, mayor, I'd appreciate you mentioning do - does the PD need to use the technique of kettling in protesters?

**Mayor:** Okay, let me first speak to Mayat's very, very important question and I'll quickly respond to you, Brian. Mayat was starting to talk about police unions. I believe deeply in the labor movement and what unions were supposed to mean, and I've been explicit for years that too often, the police unions, particularly certain unions, there's five different unions, they are all different different leaders, but some of the leaders, some of the unions have spent a lot of time dividing the city and holding us back. And instead of participating in positive change, they've tried to stand in the way of it. And they have opposed me for six and a half years running, and they are opposing me today, and they always oppose me. And I'm going to keep fighting against that because this should be about actually how we heal and bring police and community together.

And accountability is actually in the interest of all working people. How about the 36,000 to do it right when there's a few, do it wrong. It is better and safer for everyone that those few be addressed and if necessary removed from the force. Commissioner Shea said on Friday, that horrible incident on Lower East Side, that those officers – there had been a full investigation – and the charges being brought and there was going to be the next stage of the trial. That's what we need to see more of when there was something wrong, fast investigation, fast trial, fast action.

Mayat's question is very fair. When you see something with your own eyes. Mayat sometimes what we see with our own eyes is the whole story and that means fast investigation, fast action. Sometimes it's not the whole story. Sometimes there's more going on than a short video shows. That incident was horrible with the pushing to the ground. Made no sense to me. That if someone's pushed to the ground, a protester was pushed the ground like that, and then hurt, police are supposed to help her, not one, push her to the ground and two, ignore her. So that's unacceptable. That's one of the ones that again is being immediately acted upon, but I want to see much faster. And the Commissioner said yesterday, the discipline is coming in a number of the cases in these videos, including suspensions, and I want any time that something like that, this Mott Haven situation is good example. The underlying reason the police were acting was because there was evidence of violence about to happen, but if there were specific things done wrong, that has to be investigated and acted on. So, Mayat's question is really essential and we have to do better, but yet do the union stand in the way of that process constantly, absolutely. And in other parts of the country that have different laws, different union dynamics, the due process, which we all believe in due process, but here in this city, we have many more layers because of the union contracts and all that require us to do more than is necessary in other cities. And that's an issue, but we're going to honor that.

To the kettling, Brian, no, I don't – look, I don't want to see protesters hemmed in if they don't need to be and I'll have this conversation with Commissioner Shea. Sometimes there's a legitimate problem and it does not, is not visible to protestors, and they're seeing one perspective, or the cell phone video picks up one piece of the equation, but sometimes there is an act of violence or another problem that is being addressed that leads to that pause, and that hold on people and it's not a good feeling. I've been in protests where it's happened. It doesn't feel good, but this is against a different backdrop where we have seen enough violence coming from again, a small number of protestors systematically to know we're dealing with a much more complex reality and keeping people safe sometimes means stopping things in place while a situation is

addressed and then reopening again. So, I don't like it as a practice unless there's a very specific reason and it should be for as brief a period of time as possible.

**Lehrer:** Mr. Mayor, thank you as always. I hope that all the police officers are safe in this, and I hope all the protestors are safe in this, and I'll talk to you next week.

**Mayor:** Amen. Thank you, Brian.

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