



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 19, 2016
CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON WNYC'S BRIAN LEHRER SHOW

Brian Lehrer: The White House also says though, that the city and state failed to spend \$620 million Homeland Security dollars out of the \$700 something-million New York was given in recent years. How did that happen? We will ask the Mayor about that and other things – and in fact, Mayor Bill de Blasio joins me right now.

Mr. Mayor, thanks as always for coming on. Welcome back to WNYC.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, Brian. Good to be here.

Lehrer: I don't know if you were on to hear those clips –

Mayor: Yes, yes, I was.

Lehrer: Do you agree with the Commissioner that this is payback for Schumer's position on the Iran nuclear deal?

Mayor: Look, let me broaden it. First of all, it's a huge mistake by the White House to submit a budget that cuts anti-terrorism funding just as the terror threat is increasing, and we're the number one terror target in the country. So that's the key issue here – this is a budget mistake. It's a policy mistake – it's going to hurt our ability to fight terror, and what happens here obviously has national and international ramifications, so continuing to help us build our anti-terror capacity is crucial.

By the way – the people of New York City, the taxpayers, are covering the vast majority of these expenses. We've created a 500-person-plus, 500-officer-plus Critical Response Command. It is the largest anti-terror force of any police force in the country – highly trained, highly equipped, full-time – this is what this unit does, nothing else but preventing terror. Most of those costs we cover ourselves. We need some of what we do covered by the federal government. They should be actually looking to help us more not less – but I found it outrageous for Josh Earnest to attack Senator Schumer.

You know what – we said at the press conference, Senator Schumer, Commissioner Bratton, and I – we commended the Obama administration historically for their efforts against terror. And I was with the Obama administration on the Iran treaty, but to impugn Senator Schumer who's been an incredibly effective leader and clearly has been a powerful voice for protecting this city and this state and nationally – I found that outrageous.

Senator Schumer is doing the right thing here. He is pointing out the common sense reality that we need more resources to fight an ever more complex terror threat – and I think the White House would be better served to simply say that they appreciated his concern and that they would work with us to fix the problem rather than the personal attack, which came across to me as absolutely underhanded and inappropriate.

Lehrer: The Times says Senator Schumer acknowledged that the city and state failed to spend the \$620 million out of the \$700 million-something over the last few years given to us for Homeland Security.

Mayor: Well, that's inaccurate reporting. I was standing next to Senator Schumer, and we all said with one voice every single dollar had been spent or was already booked to be spent because a lot of what we do is we buy sophisticated equipment, vehicles, all sorts of equipment that does not appear instantaneously. You go into a contract for something that could take a year or two to arrive, but is going to be absolutely necessary going forward. You pay the bill when the actual product arrives, so what happens in one budget year naturally stretches forward – but we're already up ahead spending a huge amount of money to build up our anti-terror capacity, and that's part of why this city has always stayed ahead of the terror threat.

And I also mentioned – you know when the Pope came, when 170 world leaders came in September – you have the federal government help us with some of those expenses, but a lot of them were borne by the City of New York, and you talk about the need to prevent terror – what a focal point moment for the world. We had to pay the brunt and bear the brunt of those costs. It's only fair that the federal government continue to help us since we are again the number one target. And we don't go to sleep on that, Brian. We have to bear those costs. We have to have that capacity every single day here.

Lehrer: So to be clear, you're saying there was no unspent or at least unallocated money out of those federal funds?

Mayor: Correct. I'm very current on this – every dollar – I can't speak for the State of New York, and I think the White House conflated the city and state. I have every reason to believe the state's doing exactly what we're doing – I can say for sure, the City of New York, every dollar is being spent on necessary elements of our counter-terror efforts. We have tremendous needs going forward. Every new dollar will be spent.

Lehrer: Mayor de Blasio with us on WNYC, and we can take some calls for the mayor. 2-1-2-4-3-3-W-N-Y-C, we're going to move onto some other topics. You can call him on whatever is of concern to you and the people of the city. 2-1-2-4-3-3-9-6-9-2.

You and I haven't spoken since your State of the City address. I was there covering it at Lehman College, as a guest on New York 1's live broadcast of the speech. One of the things I saw you propose, which hasn't gotten much press is a retirement security account for New Yorkers whose employers don't provide one now. But as I read it – only the workers' own money would pay for it. Can you explain how that would work and for whom?

Mayor: Yes, so right now – shocking statistics, fewer than half of working New Yorkers have access to a retirement security plan of any kind. And beyond, obviously Social Security – and we all know what a small amount that ends up being for most people. And most people have only saved a very small amount personally towards retirement.

This is a dangerous situation, and we can't have – in a society where more and more people will retire and be senior citizens and live longer – we can't have so many people with no ability to protect their own interests. So, since the private sector has increasingly stopped giving pensions and stopped providing retirement security, we wanted to create our own local version of a retirement savings plan that we will require all employers to offer to their employees for firms over a fairly modest level.

And it's something that workers will have the option to pay into that will then be there for them later. The City of New York will provide the framework and the upfront expenses to make this work. And it is something to me that is so obvious that since we don't have what we should have – more broadly in the private sector and public sector, greater guarantees for retirement – localities have to come up with alternatives. And this is something that's been supported very warmly by the AARP and a number of labor and business voices have come out in support of it because we can't have so many people fall off the edge economically when they get to the point of retirement.

Lehrer: Other workplace equality measures that you have proposed, like a \$15 minimum wage and Paid Parental and Sick Leave puts the burden on the employer – at least some of the burden on the employer – why

not require some percentage of employer match because otherwise people could just set up their own individual retirement accounts right?

Mayor: Well, I think the fact is that for a lot of people they haven't – so let's start with that. Navigating it has been challenging, navigating this whole reality has been challenging – obviously anything that is employer-based is much easier for people to deal with.

Remember Brian – we're in a world where people used to normally, in the private sector, experience pensions and expect pensions. My own mother is a create example – she worked for the Polaroid company for many years, she got a pension, and then one day a few years after retirement she got a letter saying her pension was no longer valid and had basically been taken away by the company.

This happened to people all over this country. And the fact that the private sector doesn't live up to this obligation is a huge problem – what we knew we could do right now was say if employers are required – and again this would be for businesses of ten or more employees – if employers are required to offer the option it will at least maximize the chance that people will start saving towards their retirement, and the City of New York will be involved to make it work, so the public sector will have a good hand in the situation.

Over time I agree with you, there's other things we need to do for retirement security. Many of those things need to be done at the federal or state level. But we have a right now problem – we have a huge number of people who are unprotected at this point, this is at least a way we could get started to provide them the protections they need.

Lehrer: 2-1-2-4-3-3-W-N-Y-C for some phone calls for the Mayor. And let's take – I thought I had this caller ready to go, but she's not ready. Let me take Lumière in Harlem, Lumière, you're on WNYC.

Question: Hi, thank you so much for taking my call, Brian.

Mr. Mayor, I'm glad to get on and speak to you. I am really in a very upset situation. I'm very upset with the City – that the rhetoric that I keep hearing about the homeless situation isn't matching the reality. And all of this money that's being put in is not really, you know, on a reality level for the people who are suffering without getting housing are still left in this situation.

I had a voucher that over a year ago I spoke to the Commissioner on Brian Lehrer, and I brought to his attention that you weren't allowed to work and other situations with this voucher. I fought again to get back with this same agency HomeBase, and it's the same voucher and the same problem. And I'm saying to myself, "What is going on here?" Is there some kind of perception management that is continuing in the media – that we hear all of this, "We're taking care of this, and we're taking care of that," but we out here are not getting housing.

Lehrer: Mr. Mayor, talk to Lumière.

Mayor: Yeah, I understand the concern, but I want to disagree because there's a whole lot of facts behind what we're doing. First of all, 22,000 people who were in shelter we got to permanent housing. Second of all, 91,000 people have been served by the HomeBase program. Now, I don't know the specifics of your situation, and if it didn't work for you – that makes me unhappy – and I want to figure out how we can fix that. But what we've done with that HomeBase initiative is helped a lot of folks who might have become homeless to stay in their homes, whether it's through rental subsidies or anti-eviction legal services. We have greatly increased the amount of anti-eviction, anti-harassment legal services – ten times as much being applied to legal aid and legal services as a few years ago. And these things are having an effect. So I want to make sure – look I want to make sure everyone's served – and this is what I truly feel. I want to keep working to make sure our efforts serve each person. And in fact, we take a very personal view of this. There are people in shelter right now. Each one of them needs a solution to get out of shelter.

We obviously have a very intense effort focused on veterans. And we ended chronic veterans' homelessness in the city and now we're working to make sure a lot of other veterans who have experienced at least occasional

homelessness end up in permanent housing. We have 3,000 to 4,000 people on our streets, and I talked to some of them the other day when we were doing our outreach efforts. Our new HOME-STAT program – we are literally going to come up with a plan for each of the 3,000 to 4,000 people to figure out how to get them off the streets to [inaudible]. It will take time. I ‘m not going to tell people it will happen overnight. But it is meant to be an individualized approach for each person – either stop them from going to shelter in the first place, or getting them out of shelter or homelessness and in to permanent housing. That is our game plan, and I can say that in the case of the 22,000 people who got out of shelter in to housing – it worked for them for sure.

Lehrer: Matt, in the Bronx, you’re on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio. Hi, Matt.

Question: Hi, how’s it going? Thanks for the opportunity to talk. I wanted to discuss the mayor’s greenhouse gas emissions goals. I think the reduction is 80 by 50. I commend that. I know the building efficiency is a big part of that, but I want to see –

Lehrer: 80 percent by the year 2050.

Question: Correct, and I wanted to know what renewables – what kind of that look like – how – and specifically offshore wind. How does off-shore wind help us get there and how does the mayor see that as a piece to this puzzle?

Mayor: Well I absolutely do see it as an important piece, Matt. Thank you – thank you for the question. So yes, first of all, we made the commitment to reduce emissions in this city 80 percent by 2050. And that is something we want to try and intensify – we don’t want to wait, we want to keep building that every day. So I’ve said every public building in New York City will be fully retrofitted over the next, now, nine years and we’re requiring the same of the private sector – either voluntarily or we’ll come up with a mandate if the voluntary approach isn’t working. We just got rid of No. 6 heating oil, which is a great step for this city. But in terms of renewables – so we are greatly intensifying our focus on solar on city buildings – and obviously trying to help individuals to use solar as much – to the maximum extent possible. But offshore wind is a big piece of the equation. And we’re exploring now how the City of New York can get more and more of our energy from offshore wind and what role we can play as a force in the market because we’re obviously a huge customer – to encourage offshore wind. The bottom line is we have to get away from fossil fuels – couldn’t be a simpler dynamic. The well-known leader on issues of climate and poverty – Jeffrey Sachs, Columbia University – has used a phrase – I was at the Vatican on a conference of mayors focused on fighting climate change – and he said we have to strand fossil fuel resources in the ground – he’s absolutely right. The future is about renewables – renewables – it’s about solar, it’s about wind, it’s about geothermal – it’s about all of the ways that we get the energy we need while protecting this planet. So absolutely, offshore wind will be a big part of the equation for the city going forward.

Lehrer: Danny in Rockaway Park in Queens. You’re on WNYC. Hi, Danny.

Question: Good morning, Brian. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. We have spoke before. I had called in and asked you for more NYPD cops. But this is a different subject – about your affordable housing. On the Rockaway Peninsula here – I am not against affordable housing – but it should be in the right area. Rockaway Peninsula itself is actually a flood zone itself. We’ve got three main arteries to get out [inaudible]. Right now, one of them is down because they had some kind of problem on Beach Channel Drive, so that’s closed down until approximately May. And we’re loaded here with adult homes, health care facilities, nursing homes, and we have big projects already. Now to get off this – God forbid we have another Sandy, I need to get off this peninsula with all this added stuff which put more parking – they’re going to need more cars which we don’t have parking availability here. I don’t understand it. I mean –

Lehrer: You’re saying you don’t want – and Danny, through the luck of draw you got in, I guess, in two of our recent call-ins with the mayor. So this might be your quota for the year. But are you saying you don’t want new development in the Rockaways under the mayor’s affordable housing program?

Question: No, what we have – what we’re saying is, it’s not we’re against affordable housing, but we have to be able to get off this peninsula in case there’s another Sandy.

Mayor: Right, Danny –

Question: And right now, we’re loaded with – the mayor does know this. We’re loaded with healthcare facilities, we’re loaded with nursing homes, adult care centers. We have project developments –

Lehrer: I see. And Danny, I’m going to cut you off just to get an answer with the clock ticking. Go ahead Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Right, go ahead. Very quickly. First of all, Danny, thank you for the call. I’m happy to say as you now know, we’re going to be increasing NYPD patrol strength by 2,000 officers by the end of the year – first increase since 2001.

On the Rockaways – bottom line – look, where we think we can build more affordable housing and put in the infrastructure in place to support it. We don’t just drop it in the middle of the community. We make sure that the infrastructure is there to support it. But we’re looking to do this all over the city. My plan is 200,000 affordable units either built or preserved all over this city. So, a lot of that is preserving affordable apartments in place. I obviously share your concern about future storms. We’ve done a lot of resiliency work around the Rockaways. Some of the most important resiliency work has been achieved already – it’s been reinforcing the Rockaways and building up the beaches and dunes – and that’s been very important. That’s making a difference. So, we’re going to continue. We have a \$20 billion resiliency plan that will help the Rockaways and a lot of other places. Also, the Rockaways will now have ferry service starting next year which means there’s going to be a lot of accessibility, even when there are some other disruptions from time to time because of the weather – when the weather clears, the ferry will be another option. So, I do understand your point. I have been out there quite a bit but we are trying to make those choices, always taking into account resiliency and infrastructure needs as well.

Lehrer: You mentioned NYPD – what should we make of the 20 percent increase in knifings so far this year that’s been reported?

Mayor: Well, we have, over the last two years – and this is important frame – over the last two years, serious crimes, major crimes are down almost six percent. We’ve also seen tremendous effectiveness in the NYPD going at guns. So, gun arrests were up 10 percent last year. Our new gun courts are going to speed up gun prosecutions quite a bit. But we have seen more use of knives recently. It’s very much a concern of mine but I think the fact is the NYPD is going to put more and more emphasis on finding any patterns of violent crimes – since they’ve done such a great job at getting at the worst crimes, they’re going to go at every kind of crime now with 2,000 more officers to help them do it. And NYPD now has better training, better technology than ever before. So, it is a worrisome trend but at the same time, the ability of the NYPD to make the adjustments – and this is the beauty of CompStat now – resourced more than ever before, the ability of the NYPD to take that strategic direction and execute the planning and fight these trends is greater than ever and I know they will achieve this.

Lehrer: We’ve got five minutes left. Let me cut through some other issues and see how many we can get to. I see you signed, this morning, the City Council pay raise bill. The Daily News editorial page takes you to task for that, today, saying you had set a pattern of 27 percent increases over ten years for most city workers, yet you’re granting 32 percent raises to City Council members. And the editorial says the rationale – that it comes in exchange for banning outside income doesn’t hold up because only three Council members currently earn any outside income and they get to keep it under exceptions in the bill. So, how do you respond to the News editorial?

Mayor: Yes, very quickly – I don’t agree with their interpretation of the numbers nor does the chair of the commission who created this proposal, Fred Schwartz, one of the most eminent public servants and civic

leaders this city has had in decades. So, he will speak to those details and why the numbers are wrong. But beyond that, ending the practice of outside income, making the City Council job full-time, permanently with a reform that's been sought for decades in this city, plus ending the use of favoritism that is the "lulus" – the special compensation for some Council members. Those two things are gone now as a result of these reforms. That's a huge, long-sought change. I think the package of compensation that was put in place was fair. And it's going to allow [inaudible] good public servants but also make sure they are 100 percent focused on public service.

Lehrer: Can I get your reaction to City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito's proposal to close Rikers Island and replace it with a smaller jail in each borough?

Mayor: A noble idea and we're going to work with Judge Lippman who's leading her commission to see what's possible. But I've been very clear about the fact – first, we have to, right now, keep fixing Rikers Island. Any proposal like that would take many years to be achieved, Brian. We have to, right now, fix the problems at Rikers Island which are still unacceptable. We're doing a lot to reduce the amount of violence. Our new initiatives have shown that they are greatly reducing violence. We have gotten adolescents out punitive segregation. We're going to get more young adults out. A lot of changes have to be made in the culture there, now. They cannot wait. But look, we're going to look at every alternative going forward. I have to remind people, it could well cost many billions of dollars and we have to prove that we have the money but we'll certainly work with the Speaker and Judge Lippman.

Lehrer: What's the latest on your BQX streetcar proposal for the Brooklyn and Queens waterfront? I heard Governor Cuomo say he's not promising any state funding because it's a project within the city.

Mayor: We're not asking him for any. This is a city project. This is something the city is going to achieve – the Brooklyn-Queens Connector, the BQX, is going to serve, now, there's about 700, 000 people who either work or live in these neighborhoods from Astoria in the North to Sunset Park in the South along the East River waterfront. I think it's going to greatly improve the quality of life for people in the neighborhoods and it's going to help attract a lot more jobs. We're going to do it ourselves. And, I'll tell you, there's tremendous enthusiasm – I was in Red Hook, Brooklyn the other day, an area that's been intensely underserved for years. The notion of having a streetcar coming through is very exciting to community residents including the 40,000 residents of public housing who would be served along this route. So, I think it's going to be a real benefit for this city.

Lehrer: It's only February but people can sign up already for pre-k for next September?

Mayor: And we need them to because, you know, I'll tell you one thing – what pre-k is already proving is that it's having an amazing impact on the lives of the kids who are experiencing it. I've heard from so many parents – every neighborhood of the city, every background – that their child went to pre-k, they became more able to learn, more able to thrive in the school setting. A lot of parents have said that kids became better behaved because they were in pre-k. Parents need to realize this is an extraordinary investment that you get to make in your child's future. Guess what? It's free and it's in every part of the city. The first deadline for this next year is March 4th. So, March 4th coming up soon. Call 3-1-1 or go online – nyc.gov/pre-k. And I remind parents, your best chance of getting the seat you want – the one either nearest your home or in the particular pre-k center you want – is if you act early. If you wait, we're always going to have a seat for you, but the one you want may not be there. If you want that, act now.

Lehrer: Final thing – we started the show today on Apple versus the FBI on encryption and all of that. Do you have a position?

Mayor: Sure I do. And I agree with Commissioner Bratton on this 100 percent – look, I want to reference the New York Times editorial today, which I thought was well-reasoned on the fact that we have to be very careful. There are very important precedents that we have to think about and, obviously, civil liberties that have to be taken into account. But the central problem is – we had a terrorist who killed 18 people. We do not know, still, if there are other associated people that we may need to stop – and, obviously, as District Attorney Vance said

the other day, so many other violent crimes that we don't have all the information we should have on, that could help us protect people's lives. If the companies want to come up with a voluntary approach with appropriate checks and balances, I think there's a very fair conversation to be had – how do we minimally invade here. But my job as the Chief Executive of this city is to protect human life. And the notion that our law enforcement officials cannot have access to the information they need to protect people's lives – that to me is the ultimate imperative. I think we can balance these needs but it must be in a way that still allows law enforcement to do its job.

Lehrer: Mr. Mayor, thank you very much.

Mayor: Thank you, Brian.

###