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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON THE BRIAN LEHRER  
SHOW**

**Brian Lehrer:** We begin as we usually do on Fridays with Mayor Bill de Blasio and our Ask the Mayor segment. Mr. Mayor, thanks as always and welcome back to WNYC.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, Brian.

**Lehrer:** And this has become such a popular thing that for the first time, I'm looking at my caller board and without me even giving out the phone number all our lines are full. I don't know if that's good or bad –

**Mayor:** That's a good thing, Brian. Democracy in action, brother.

[Laughter]

**Lehrer:** It might mean that the ten most active New Yorkers have put us on their speed dials and are calling you every Friday. But nonetheless, as some of those folks finish up, it's 2-1-2-4-3-3-W-N-Y-C, 4-3-3-9-6-9-2 for the Mayor or you can tweet a question because there, the lines never get full. Just use the hashtag #AsktheMayor.

Let's begin on the cold weather. We're at a point now where people can get frostbite on exposed skin in about a half hour. How is the Code Blue process going with people living on the street?

**Mayor:** It's going very well. NYPD and Social Services are working very closely together. We had about 20 people we brought in last night primarily voluntarily. I think at least one was involuntary.

And you know it's a great focused outreach effort to make sure people are safe but I want to remind all New Yorkers, if you see someone homeless, who's out there in the elements, call 3-1-1. We'll get help to them right away. If it appears to be an immediate, urgent situation call 9-1-1. But we're very adamant about getting people in and making sure they're safe.

**Lehrer:** I read that six NYCHA public housing complexes were without heat or hot water at times yesterday. Can you confirm that and tell us if it's all been restored?

**Mayor:** The update I can give you, Brian, is that as the problems have been occurring, we've been getting the heat back on in each development. There are still a few, for sure, that we have more work to do.

Here's the bottom line. I went out to Woodside Houses in Queens yesterday and actually met with the general manager for all of NYCHA, Michael Kelly, and the guy who's in charge of all heating for NYCHA. And it's fascinating to see the challenges they face every day.

They've got a boiler in one NYCHA development that goes back to 1954, many others that are 30, 40 years, or more older.

Look, the blunt truth is because for decades NYCHA did not get the investment it needed a lot of these boilers are in really tough shape but the folks who work at NYCHA do a great job every day figuring out how to keep them going.

So, we definitely have some developments right now that need heat restored. That, in many case, can take only hours. That was the case in Woodside yesterday. I went out there because we got the report that it was down. Within hours they got it back.

Some are more persistent problems but bluntly, we're going to deal with them every single day and in most case we can get them online quickly.

**Lehrer:** Last week, we mentioned the complaints about inadequate heat at Rikers Island you said you were going to look into it. Have you?

**Mayor:** Yes I have. I spoke to Commissioner Cynthia Brann. And here's the overall situation on Rikers Island. There are ten buildings that house inmates. Two of them have had sporadic heat problems. One of those is the one we just announced we're going to shut down for good in the next few months by this summer.

So, there's two buildings that have problems. The other eight generally do not. On those two, typically, where there is a problem, like NYCHA, it's a matter of a few hours. Again – older boilers that have problems sometimes but usually can be fixed quickly.

If there's – I think there's one instance where it took longer and they had to move inmates to another building temporarily. So, the overall situation is stable. Generally when we have a problem it's brief but the good news is of the two buildings that have had more consistent problems, one of them will be shut down entirely. No inmates will be in them within a few months.

**Lehrer:** And anything on plowing? There were eight inches in Manhattan but more in Queens. I guess every Mayor knows the legend of Mayor John Lindsay's popularity going way downhill after Queens wasn't effectively plowed following a big snowfall in 1969.

**Mayor:** Oh, yes. And unfortunately for John Lindsay people had every right to hold him accountable. It's one of the most important things we do. After public safety, you know, one of the most important things we do is make sure that streets are passable. And here's what I found, you need to leap from the front. I was out and around the city yesterday. I visited with Sanitation workers, went to see one of the garages where work was being done to repair the vehicles and get them back out immediately, talked with elected officials.

I mean what I think is important is to lead from the front in these situations. But the other thing is we needed better equipment. [Inaudible] what we learned when I came into office that actually Sanitation did not have the right equipment for a lot of outer borough areas that have smaller streets. We now have well over I think it's 160 of the smaller snow plows and the kind of vehicles that can get down any side street and clear them and salt them.

Now that we've pumped up those numbers, we see the coverage much better, much stronger. But overall especially the blizzard we had – you know we had the biggest blizzard in New York City on my watch and Sanitation did an amazing job of clearing the streets after that basically in a day and change. So, I think New Yorkers should hold us to a high standard but I feel very good about how Sanitation handled this last storm.

**Lehrer:** Just be glad you're not going hiking on Mount Washington in New Hampshire today. I read the wind-chill is supposed to be close to minus-100.

**Mayor:** That's crazy. But you say that – I want to warn all New Yorkers, remind you, tonight and Saturday night, we're talking with wind chill negative-10, negative-20 kind of range. So, I really want to remind people, you know, stay in if you can. If you go out, be careful.

**Lehrer:** The Mount Washington story did make me look up today what New York's highest peak is in the city – the highest point in New York City – and it's Todt Hill on Staten Island at 401 feet. Not quite Mount Washington.

**Mayor:** Not quite.

[Laughter]

**Lehrer:** And the highest point in Manhattan, I looked it up. I figured it would be the Cloisters which it's not but it's nearby there in Bennett Park which is very near there in Hudson Heights at 265 feet above sea level. So, a little New York trivia for you.

**Mayor:** Very good, Brian. You've educated the people.

**Lehrer:** Andrew in Harlem, you're on WNYC. Hi, Andrew.

**Question:** Hi, thank you. Mayor de Blasio, I think it's incredibly telling that when you spoke with former DNA INFO and Gothamist reporters you had no idea what percentage of New Yorkers are car owners and you had no idea what the medium income of a car owner is. It's a dead giveaway that you're uninformed about transportation policy in your own city and that you

haven't immersed yourself and deeply studied what congestion pricing is and what it would do. Rather, you dismiss it reflexively either because you think it's regressive or because you're afraid of the political risk.

Here are the answers to those two questions that you couldn't answer. Forty-five percent of New York City households have a car and the median income of those households is double – double that of car-free households.

[Inaudible]

**Mayor:** I appreciate the script you're reading but what the what the point is – I don't think it changes the core reality. I have proposed a millionaire's tax as a way to address the MTA issue. I think it's the best and most sustainable tool to fund the long term repairs we need in the MTA.

And given that the Trump tax plan was a giveaway to the wealthy and corporations, I think it makes even more sense to have a millionaire's tax. I think there are problems with every congestion plan I've seen and we still haven't seen a new plan in Albany.

So, my basic views are not changed by those specific points you make. It doesn't change the fundamental problem that there has not been a plan that has addressed the regressive nature of congestion pricing.

**Lehrer:** Regressive nature in what way? He talks about the, sort of, regressive nature of who can own a car – let me ask you it this way. The Governor floated this idea in general of congestion pricing. No, he didn't reveal in the State of the State address this week what the details what be – and I think you've said recently that you're open minded though skeptical on this at this point. When he does reveal it, what would be deal breakers for you in a congestion pricing plan?

**Mayor:** I appreciate the question. So, I'll answer it in this order. First – the first concern I have is that I don't think it is the best way to address the MTA crisis. I think a millionaire's tax is a better way and it's a live, actual proposal. You can see it. You can touch it –

**Lehrer:** You can do both, couldn't you?

**Mayor:** You could in theory, this is true. But I would say, here's the point. I would urge everyone who's interested in this topic to actually pay attention to the plan that's on the table now and decide how you feel about that. And if you agree with it, help us get that done.

On the question of congestion pricing, what the Governor put out was very, very proud. The things I've said consistently I'd like to see addressed, first of all, disproportionate impact on Brooklyn and Queens. How is that going to be addressed? What is going to – if there were such a plan – what would be done for Brooklyn and Queens to make up for the disproportionate impact on people from Brooklyn and Queens who would be affected?

Second – regressive tax. Despite these specific points that Andrew made, there are huge numbers – so 45 percent of the city is car owners, that's almost four million people – a huge percentage, it

doesn't matter was the median is, a huge percentage of those people are working class and middle class people for whom a congestion pricing-style toll would have a real impact.

A lot of people in public housing own a car. A lot of working class people own a car and use it for work or use it because they have to get to a hospital or whatever it may be. What is going to be done to address their needs? What's going to be done to address hardship cases particularly around medical care which is as everyone knows overwhelmingly is centered in Manhattan?

So, those are issues that could theoretically be addressed but I've never seen that addressed in a congestion pricing plan.

**Lehrer:** Fanny in Brooklyn, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Fanny.

**Question:** Hi, how are you?

**Lehrer:** Okay.

**Question:** So, I just called to say, I love you, to both of you because I called last week and we didn't have heat, Mayor de Blasio as you remember, and the City got on it right away. I got a call from one of your commissioners a couple hours later and they sent HPD and DOB, and everybody started doing the work for the irresponsible landlord who by the way still hasn't even wiped the snow off in front of the house, and we haven't heard from him nonetheless. HPD and everybody who was sent to do the work was really great. So, I truly appreciate both of your help and it was quite amazing we have heat and hot water [inaudible] –

**Mayor:** Alright, Fanny, thank you for saying that. And the folks at HPD and Buildings – it was really something they wanted to fix and they did it with tremendous energy. I want to make sure that you and all New Yorkers don't have to go through something like that in the future. I want to urge everyone – please, you know we have more work to do to make things better, but please always call 3-1-1 when heat or hot water is out. And I really am glad you called in Fanny because you do have a bad landlord and we're going to go after him and make sure there's consequences.

**Lehrer:** Jeff, in Washington Heights, you're on WNYC. Hi, Jeff.

**Mayor:** Good morning, Brian. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. I'd like to speak to you as well about the cold weather and how it's impacting many New Yorkers including myself. If you'll give me 30 seconds, I'll paint you a word picture.

I am a senior DRIE tenant living in Washington Heights. I'm looking outside my bedroom window and I see the Hudson River and the George Washington Bridge. I mention that because in the winter time, when the winds come off the river, my building and many along this avenue, feel it with greater impact than perhaps east of here.

I'm sitting here talking to you. I'm under the covers. I'm wearing gloves and a football hoodie over my head because my digital thermometer tells me it is 62 degrees in this apartment in my

bedroom – this despite the fact that I had a senior organization come in earlier before the winter and winterize my windows. I think, I don't know, but I think my problem is a combination of not enough heat, there is heat coming up, but not enough heat and also possibly faulty windows that just cannot keep out the cold. That's my micro complaint.

**Lehrer:** And what are asking for from the City?

**Question:** Well you might ask Brian, why you would call the Mayor when you could just call 3-1-1 and my life experience teaches me that when you call 3-1-1 in these situations you'll get an inspector come out maybe in a week, three weeks, a month. I heard Chris Cimino on the news tell me next week is going to be a good 20, 30 degrees warmer than today. That won't help me –

**Lehrer:** Right.

**Mayor:** Okay, I got it.

**Question:** If an inspector comes out when it's –

**Lehrer:** Right Jeff, certainly when you have access here to ask the Mayor, why would you call 3-1-1?

**Mayor:** No, and 3-1-1, look I want to say to everyone – if 3-1-1 is not responding more quickly in these kind of weather conditions then that's on us to fix. What I keep reporting to New Yorkers during any cold emergency is our expectation from our own, you know for our own team is to get out quickly – either make the building management fix the problem themselves or the City does it for them. Now the City has to do it, we have to mobilize resources. That can take a few days unfortunately. The best option is always to get the building management to fix the problem immediately. But the response to find out what's going on should be very, very quick and if it's not happening I need to fix that. In this case, Jeff, this is a private building I take it?

**Lehrer:** Look, Jeff still there?

**Mayor:** Okay, we'll follow up –

**Question:** Yes I am.

**Mayor:** Let's make sure Jeff gives his information, Brian, to your folks. I'll have HPD follow up with him directly today.

**Lehrer:** Privately owned building Jeff?

**Question:** It is indeed Brian.

**Mayor:** Okay, HPD will follow up today.

**Lehrer:** He said 62 degrees in his apartment. What's the legal minimum? Is it 62 degrees at night and higher in the day?

**Mayor:** I want to check my facts, I believe it is 68 during the day but I want to check that. I do not know the night time. When we come back next week I'll have that for you.

**Lehrer:** Okay. In the Governor's State of the State, because of the new Trump tax law, the Governor floated this idea of a payroll tax which might still be federally tax deductible to replace the state income tax which would be subject to the new cap. Could you do anything like that with the city income tax?

**Mayor:** Look Brian, we are going to look at all those solutions. As I said after the Governor's speech I think it is a creative idea and certainly a timely idea and I'm glad he's focused on the concept of anything that will provide relief to folks who are now going to go through double taxation because of the republican tax bill in Washington. You are talking about 600,000 New York City residents who will be hit real hard. The average is about \$5,000 more in taxes per person because of what is a wildly unfair piece of legislation that obviously was meant to benefit the wealthy and corporations. And anything that can blunt the impact is worthy. So we are going to work with the Governor to see if something can be done on the state level. We are also looking for anything that could be done on the city level.

**Lehrer:** But he's got that specific proposal and I realize it has to be vetted and there might be complications with his payroll tax idea, but he's got one there for the state level. You don't have one yet for the city level?

**Mayor:** No. We again, the notion of trying to figure out something that would change our whole approach – I mean remember this legislation for quite a while we were hoping we could defeat or fundamentally modify. The President only signed it right before Christmas. Our first concern was to make sure that people had an opportunity to do early payments on their property taxes which a number of New Yorkers took advantage of. But the issue now is looking for anything that would pass legal muster that would allow us provide additional relief. That is something we are still working on.

**Lehrer:** And the Governor had some anti-sexual harassment proposals in the State of the State including that any companies doing business with the State would be required to disclose the number of sexual harassment adjudications and nondisclosure agreements that they have executed. Will you do something like that with city contractors?

**Mayor:** Yes, I think that is a great idea. And I give the Governor credit for that. I think that makes a lot sense and we are going to look to do something similar at the city level. I mean this is a powerful moment in American history and a lot of truth is finally coming out. And there needs to be an atmosphere of consequence so I think holding private companies responsible makes a lot of sense.

**Lehrer:** And we have a question by a twitter that asks what does the Mayor and the new New York City Council Speaker Corey Johnson plan to do in response to the second allegations of sexual harassment against Councilmember Andy King? Now this is the first I've seen of a second allegation. There's been one allegation of improper conduct having to do with – sorry I'm looking it up here, I'll get that in a second. But are you, can you confirm a second allegation and what do you think they should do about even one?

**Mayor:** The, Brian, again the City Council has responsibility to address its own ethics concerns. My understanding – the allegation was made formal recently and has been looked at by the City Council Ethics Committee. I have not heard back on what they are going to do. That's the first

step for the City Council Ethics Committee to investigate – historically I think that’s happened pretty quickly so I think everyone would like to hear an answer on that as soon as possible and then that will tell us how to respond.

**Lehrer:** The Times on December 14<sup>th</sup>, just to clarify, said a New York City councilman from the Bronx is facing an ethics inquiry over inappropriate comments made to a staffer. When asked whether he denied making sexual inappropriate comments, Mr. King did not respond, walking further back into his office beyond staffers to a group of waiting children. That was back in mid-December but that’s the reporting that I have on it. Peter in Astoria you are on WNYC with the Mayor, hello.

**Question:** Thank you Brian and I’m calling [inaudible] property tax and your initiative to I guess reformat property taxes throughout New York City. I know that you own two two-family buildings in Park Slope. Your combined property taxes Mr. Mayor equate my one two-family, you know, much much less boogie area way down in Flatlands, Brooklyn, far from the subway. So what are you going to do? Are we actually going to see some tax reform for property?

**Mayor:** Yes, many people have asked me this question on the air and at my 50 town hall meetings and I’ve answered the same way over and over again. We have to have an overall property tax reform for New York City. I’m going to initiate a process shortly to do that. It’s going to have to take both city legislation and state legislation. It’s going to be a very complex process.

Here’s the ground rules – the property in the end will need a more transparent, more consistent property tax system. The thing that you are talking about is not fair – it doesn’t make sense that people in neighborhoods where values have moved in different ways end up having to pay in different manners. That’s what this is about. It’s not that someone sat around in the beginning and said this neighborhood will pay this much and another neighborhood pays a different amount. It’s all about the speed with which the values of the homes are increasing and what that does to the assessment.

There has not, I emphasize has not been a property tax rate increase in the four years that I have been mayor, there will not be one in the budget that we are going to put forward coming out. I don’t believe in that approach. The assessments are the issue but the assessments currently are based on the structure that I think is unfair and inconsistent.

So we are going to create a new system, it will take a lot of work. Here’s the kicker though. It cannot lead us to less overall revenue in any appreciable way because if we get less revenue that means fewer police officers, fewer teachers ect. We need to keep the level of city services high. It’s working for New York City. We’re at a very strong point right now, we have to sustain that but we can have a more consistent and transparent tax system, especially across neighborhoods and boroughs.

**Lehrer:** By the way to update the answer on the required indoor temperature during the winter for providing heat to residents, we looked up the official City website page and it’s says ‘between the hours of 6:00 am and 10:00 pm if the outside temperature falls below 55 degrees the inside temperature is required to be at least 68 degrees Fahrenheit’ – so you got that right Mr.



Mayor, ‘and between the hours of 10:00 pm and 6:00 am the inside temperature is required to be at least 62’’. So if –

**Mayor:** Well you got that one right. Okay so one for one each.

**Lehrer:** If the caller is – from Washington Heights is seeing his temperature accurately, 62, then that landlord is in violation.

Last week we talked about the record low crime rate or at least murder rate that the city seemed to be on track for as the year was ending including under 300 murders for the first time since the 1950s I think. And you did make that – we did make that goal right?

**Mayor:** Absolutely Brian. The lowest overall crime since the 1950s. And specifically the last time we had under 300 homicides was 1951 and this is just unbelievable what has been achieved by the NYPD. And the fact that they’re achieving it more and more working with community partners, working with neighborhood residents and tenant patrols, and deter violence moment. This is very much about neighborhood policing.

I had a great experience out in the 7-5 Precinct in Brooklyn a few days ago. I talked to our neighborhood coordination officers who are the core of our neighborhood policing strategy. This is a precinct that 20 years ago would average well over 100 murders in a year. I think they had 11 murders last year. We want to keep driving that number down but the contrast is stunning. I asked these officers what’s different now in the neighborhood policing approach and they literally, one by one, told me instances where residents who had gotten to know them, who had their cell number, who had their email alerted them to someone who had an illegal firearm, someone who was selling drugs, someone who had been part of a robbery pattern. They literally said there was a robbery pattern they were trying to figure out who was behind it and one of the resident they had befriended pointed out the person to them and it proved to be the person who was behind the robbery pattern. I mean this is stopping crime in a whole new way.

But the amazing achievement here, it’s across the board in the vast majority of the major crime categories but particularly on homicide. I think a lot of people thought we’d never below 300 homicides in a city of eight and a half million people. This is the first time it’s been achieved since 1951 and everyone should be very proud of that.

**Lehrer:** There is an article about you in the LA Times today comparing you to Mayor Eric Garcetti out there, spoiler alert the prefer Garcetti –

**Mayor:** Hello?

**Lehrer:** And one –

**Mayor:** Hello?

**Lehrer:** Did we lose the Mayor’s ability to hear me just now? Did something happen to that line? It sounds like the Mayor thinks he’s been disconnected. Mr. Mayor are you there? Can you

hear me? Can the Mayor hear me? We lost the Mayor, well we're going to try to get the Mayor back in just a second and finish up, we've only got about five minutes left if this segment.

[...]

I think we have the Mayor's line reconnected.

**Mayor:** Hey Brian. Sorry about that.

**Lehrer:** Sorry about that. No problem. So I was just asking about this LA Times article that compares you to Mayor Eric Garcetti out there, spoiler alert they prefer him. And one line about you says 'He – de Blasio, has been dismayingly tentative in challenging the powerful and pugnacious police unions. More than three years after the killing of Eric Garner, an African-American resident of Staten Island not a single police officer in New York has received implicit bias training.' Do you dispute that as a true fact?

**Mayor:** I don't dispute the fact that implicit bias training has taken too long, and I'm unhappy about that and I've made very clear to the Commissioner and his whole team that that has to be up and running immediately. But I want to be clear, I'm not seeing the article, I think people should be very clear about how much reform has taken place in the NYPD. The entire police force has been retrained on de-escalation techniques, 5,000 plus officers retrained in how to handle emotionally disturbed people, the neighborhood policing initiative has changed the entire culture of policing, and the fact that crime is down to these levels while we're creating a closer bond between police and community, that's profound reform.

I don't – again I haven't seen the article, but the things that have been moving have been aggressive and consistent. We have never let the union leadership stand in our way on any of these things. We're going to have body cameras on all of our patrol officers by the end of next year – by the end of 2019. I mean this is – this is exactly the blueprint for reform that this city hoped to achieve and I think we're now becoming a model for the country of both crime reduction and improving police-community relations.

**Lehrer:** We have time for one more call and it's going to be Leslie on the Upper West Side. Leslie, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi.

**Question:** Good morning Mayor, I am a fan of yours. But I have a serious problem on West 100th Street between Amsterdam and Columbus and then between Columbus and Manhattan Avenue. It is a self-enforcement area because the 24th Police Precinct, Fire Company 76 Ladder 22, Riverside Health Center building, and Frederick Douglas Houses all are on that block. It is impossible for Sanitation to do routine street sweeping because the cars are not only illegally parked but they're illegally double parked. It is impossible to get that street cleaned on a routine, regular basis. The area in front of the 24th Police Precinct as well as around the fire building are never cleaned. Anybody else would get a ticket for having such filth on their – in their alleys and we need some coordination of Sanitation, Police, Fire so that that street can be cleaned on a regular basis.

**Lehrer:** And I have heard this about other – and I'd like you to address that particular block if you're familiar with it, but I've also heard this about other police precinct blocks where the police officers park their own cars willy-nilly and just consider themselves exempt from the laws that apply to other people. But go ahead.

**Mayor:** Leslie, thank you very much for raising this and please leave your contact information with WNYC so we can follow-up with you directly. I think it's a really good point Leslie is making, I think we have to do better. Brian I think this is kind of in the vein of it's not just about police I think in many ways we've had situations like this around the city that were just tolerated for a lot of years that obviously there are solutions for and we have to shake things up and figure out a better way. So I want to get that done.

I will have our team follow-up on what can be done specifically on West 100th Street. But I think bluntly we need to come up with and we need to publicize a broader strategy because this is a fixable problem. If it means that we want people to not park for a certain hours so things can be cleaned or move their cars temporarily. There are ways to achieve this. We cannot leave neighborhood residents feeling their area is too dirty. So I'm going to work on this and get my team on it and we'll follow-up with Leslie.

**Lehrer:** Is there an explicit policy pertaining to police officers' private vehicles around precincts?

**Mayor:** You know there's clearly an understanding that our officers – it's a very sensitive reality, they have to be there and a lot of times they're going to be there long hours and we have the need sometimes to keep them on for an additional shift, etcetera. And they're – and they may be called in at any time so the notion that there is a defined parking for them right near their precinct makes lots of sense. That being said, we can work with our officers and work with precincts to figure out how to also accommodate the need to keep the community clean. I think it's a fixable problem.

**Lehrer:** Mr. Mayor, as always thank you very much. Talk to you next week.

**Mayor:** Thanks Brian.

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