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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. Good morning everyone. And we begin as we usually do on Fridays with our weekly Ask the Mayor segment, my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio. And our phones are open at 2-1-1-4-3-3-WNYC, 2-1-2-4-3-3-9-6-9-2. Or you can tweet a question, just use the hashtag #AskTheMayor. Mr. Mayor welcome back to WNYC.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you very much Brian.

Lehrer: So the big news all across New York State this week is obviously the resignation of Eric Schneiderman after the New Yorker Magazine revealed four women accusing him of intimate partner violence. Are there any legal or policy implications that you see for the city in the short-term with that position being temporarily filled? Like with cases or investigations? That it'll be harder to conclude or anything like that?

Mayor: Well it's a good question Brian. That's not what I think at this moment. I mean Barbara Underwood, who has stepped into the acting role, is tremendously talented and experienced. And I would not expect her to change the direction of the office in the short-term. So you've got a lot of professionals at the Attorney General's office. I think they will continue doing their work. Obviously, you know, there will be a new permanent Attorney General in place in a matter of months. So, you know, I think it – you'll see a lot of continuity.

Lehrer: Were you completely surprised by this Schneiderman story? Or had you heard any inside buzz of like Schneiderman has a big drinking problem or the actual incidents or anything like that?

Mayor: It was shocking. I mean it's truly, literally shocking. As I read the article, I mean it was painful. It was painful first and foremost for the women who suffered, and the way they suffered. And the fact that they were intimidated and told, you know, threatened – told not to say what they knew, which is just disgusting in any situation, but especially from someone who purported to be a progressive and an enforcer of the law. It was sickening. And it was sickening also that someone who a lot of us thought was doing important work proved to be someone very different.

Now let's hasten to say, he will have his day in court and his chance to offer his side. But, you know, when you see that much laid out it's deeply, deeply troubling. And no, I didn't see anything at all that could have suggested so many horrible actions of this magnitude.

Lehrer: A lot of people are weighing in on who should be named Acting Attorney General until the election. Do you have anyone you'd like to see appointed in the short-term? Or for that matter, anyone you would like to see run and be elected?

Mayor: Well it's not yet, for me, the time to talk about the 2018 elections in New York State. That time is coming, but it's not today. And that's where my focus will be. And obviously the legislature will exercise – or we believe they will exercise their state constitutional mandate to fill the slot.

But the real decision of course will come in the primary in September and the general election in November. So before that time I'll certainly weigh in. But no, I don't have anything initial to say on it yet.

Lehrer: And let me follow up on two kind of related stories at the City level. One is that the Wall Street Journal this week advanced the story of the Department of Investigation's report in March that found serious understaffing in the Special Victims or Sex Crimes Unit. The Journal said Michael Bock, who retired from Special Victims last year as a Sergeant, said in an interview that most detectives handling more than two dozen cases at a time are too swamped to conduct interviews in a way that makes victims feel comfortable. And the story adds that about half the patients at the non-profit Crime Victims Treatment Center, which helps people who have suffered rape and sexual assault who report to the police, have experienced dismissing or lack of communication, according to the Center's executive director Christopher Bromson. So my question is can you report any progress in this area since the DOI report came out in March?

Mayor: Well Brian I take these issues very, very seriously. We have to make sure there is sufficient staffing at Special Victims, and we have to make sure that all victims are treated properly and supported. I think a lot of people in that unit are doing very, very good work. And that unit has grown in recent years for sure but that doesn't mean we're necessarily where we need to be.

We have a new Chief of Detectives, Dermot Shea, who I have immense faith in. He is reviewing all the operations of Special Victims and all of the units under his new command and he'll come back with recommendations on how we should proceed.

But if we need to make more investments or changes in approach, we're going to do it because – look we have a serious issue here that's even more, I think rightfully, in the public eye for good reason. More and more people are coming forward whether they are, God forbid, a victim of rape or of harassment, more and more people are coming forward. That's a good thing in terms of making change and catching perpetrators and changing our culture. But we have to answer that with sufficient resources and with the right respect and sensitivity.

So, I want to make sure that's happening and I have great faith that Chief Shea will figure out the next steps we have to take.

Lehrer: And my other follow up is, I haven't asked you here about your comment two weeks ago that the large number of sexual harassment complaints at the Education Department is from what you called a hyper-complaint dynamic that's different from other departments. But then after a backlash to that comment you tweeted that every person who comes forward deserves to be believed. So can you clarify that and what you think needs to be done in your opinion with respect to the Department of Education in particular?

Mayor: Well everyone has to be believed is exactly right and every case has been fully investigated and will be. In fact we've added additional personnel, additional investigators for the Department of Education because they needed it. That's what we found, is they needed additional personnel to do faster investigations.

We obviously – look this week I signed 11 new laws that will strengthen our efforts to fight sexual harassment. Every City employee will be retrained. We'll be annually reporting what's happening in terms of harassment complaints and consequences that come from them. We have obviously also included actions that require the private sector to do more, and we've increased the statute of limitations to give victims more time to report on any harassment. So we're making a lot of changes.

The bottom line is anyone who comes forward will be believed and we're going to make sure every complaint is fully investigated.

Lehrer: Is there a pattern of false complaints in the Department of Education?

Mayor: I think that there are some specific things we need to look at in the DOE. Writ large, the much, much bigger point, and the new Chancellor will have an opportunity to do that –

Lehrer: What's the point?

Mayor: But the bottom line is that anybody who comes forward in that agency or any agency will be believed and it will be fully investigated.

Lehrer: What's the pattern in the DOE?

Mayor: Again, I want to keep that broad and say the new Chancellor will look at the things going on in general in the DOE, that's part of his mandate. And we'll have more to say after he does that.

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

Question: Good morning to you Brian, and good morning Mr. de Blasio. Thank you very much for taking my call. I have two things I want to say and I want to point out because I have your ears and your attention. One of the things that I feel very passionate about because I've never had

an opportunity to speak on it is what happened with the election. I know – and as long as the Electoral College is still has a decision in when we vote. They tell us to vote, and when we vote there is an entity that is there, which is the Electoral College, that cancels our vote. I will never vote again as long as that exists because what – to me it's a joke. When you say vote and when I vote there is something that can cancel my vote. My vote did not count.

Lehrer: Christine let me – I know you told our screener you wanted to ask the Mayor a question about NYCHA for you as a NYCHA resident. I don't think the Mayor can do anything about the Electoral College, unfortunately –

Question: But I also – let me move on. I just wanted to put that out there about the Electoral College – how I feel about that because –

Lehrer: Thank you.

Question: Now –

Lehrer: And I think you have a lot of people who agree with you by the way in the audience.

Question: – I live in NYCHA and in my building – I'm not against the smoke – they said they're going to enforce nonsmoking in the building. They want to make NYCHA smoke free. And I'm all for that. But my question is how is it they can enforce people not smoking in the building and cannot fix – keep the front door of the building or keep the doors locked. The building I live in – I called about this before and I spoke to Mr. Gerard Andrews at your office and he dismissed me like I was a plague. And to this day – for over a decade the building that I'm living in [inaudible] On February the 17 a young woman fell to her death and NYCHA is probably responsible because that door was wide open. Walked into the building, come in to have – to discuss something with her boyfriend and it escalated to her climbing out a window because –

Lehrer: Oh boy.

Question: – police came.

Lehrer: Christine, hang on. Let me get the Mayor to address your questions. Sir she's talking about security in her building and she's talking about a no-smoking or – what is the smoking policy that you're developing for NYCHA?

Mayor: There's a new federal policy, which I think is a good one, that refers to smoking in the public areas in NYCHA. And remember that NYCHA is an entity chartered by the federal government and regulated by the federal government. And a new federal policy was put together in the Obama administration to limit smoking in NYCHA buildings for health reasons. It's a good policy. It is a challenging policy to enforce. We're trying to still sort out the ways we'll do it. I'm not exactly sure on the timelines for implementation, but it's the right idea but with some real enforcement challenges we need to work through.

At the same time, to Christine's larger point, look we have to do a lot to fundamentally change the Housing Authority. We need a lot more federal support to do it. You know the latest estimate will be coming out of what the pure dollar figure we would need to bring all the buildings up to the standard they deserve to be. It will be well over \$20 billion. There's no way the City can do that alone. We need federal support, we need State support. We need State support to actually arrive, which has not been the case in the past.

But we have great new leadership at NYCHA with our Interim Chair Stan Brezenoff and our General Manager Vito Mustaciuolo and I think some real big changes will be occurring soon. And you're – we're also going to have new plans to show people ways that we can expedite the bigger changes needed. So, to her bigger point I think you will see continued change but we're going to need federal and State support to really sustain that over years.

Last point on the Electoral College, I agree with Christine. It's outdated and it's unfortunately undermining democracy. It should be abolished. Someday I believe it will be abolished. But everyone should vote none the less. I disagree with her on her conclusion. Despite our frustration everyone should vote and we try and make this change. It's the only way to make the change.

Lastly, I'd like Christine to leave her information with WNYC because I want to understand what happened in interaction with the employee that she mentioned, because we don't want to see anyone feeling disrespected by a City employee. So we want to look into that.

Lehrer: Okay. Christine hang on we're going to take your contact information off the phone, and hopefully somebody can deal with that issue which sounds serious in your building. Thank you. Julie in Manhattan, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi Julie.

Question: Hi, good morning. So my question for the Mayor is, Mr. de Blasio I've been in the shelter system for two years. I have a great job which unfortunately I can't afford an apartment and we've been there since June 2016. I [inaudible] two children and my partner. Now one of my children got so depressed, the older one, that he had to – I actually had to send him to live with my mother which is the first time that I'm ever separated from one of my children. The program that they gave me was LINC I because I'm the only one who actually has a job right now. And I've – wow Craigslist, Trulia, Apartment Connect, Apartment.com no one wants to take that program. No one.

Mayor: Well Julie the bottom line is – first of all thank you very much for calling in because it's important for everyone to understand that there are so many good, hardworking people who have done everything right but still end up homeless just because of the ridiculous cost of living in this city and all the challenges that people face economically.

We want to help you. I want to make sure you give your information to WNYC. I'm going to have senior folks at Homeless Services follow up, because if you're working now I believe we can get you the kind of support that can get you out of shelter.

Now you're right about the underlying problem. We have a lot of specific rental subsidies that it's harder for people to use than we want it to be. But it is illegal, I want to make sure you

understand that and all the listeners understand it, it's illegal for any landlord or realtor to turn someone away because they have a type of housing voucher. That's against the law in New York City. And if someone does that, if they violate that law there can be really substantial penalties including having to give the apartment to the person in question. So, we need to – we're trying to work with the decent realtors and landlords who want to work with us to make sure that we get this done.

But if anyone is discriminating because you have a government supported housing voucher, that is against the law and there are real consequences. So I'll have our folks follow up with you today.

Lehrer: Julie, hang on and we'll get that contact information. Let me give you some question coming on via Twitter. NextAriel writes "what is the Mayor doing to protect yellow cabs? They're really hurting. Drivers are losing their livelihood. What about a taxi lane going from LaGuardia into the city? Paris has one and it works great." writes Ariel.

Mayor: I – that's the first I've heard that idea. That's an interesting idea. I'm not sure how we physically could do that, but it's an interesting idea for sure. Look, I'm very concerned. The taxi drivers have gone through a lot in recent years and the world changed very, very quickly. Technology changed, the consumer habits changed and left a lot of cabbies in a really tough situation. And we want to do everything we can to right this situation.

Now, one of the things we had to do and we have done is provide more parity between the taxis and the rest of the for-hire vehicle sector including, you know, making sure everyone is held to similar standards on things like safety and disability access. I think the – we have to make sure that the deck is not stacked against one group or another. And I think in the past it was. And now with new regulations we've put in place, it's putting more balance into the equation. We've got a lot more to do on that.

Obviously the City Council is looking seriously at the question of other big steps we could take to create more balance in the industry. I think those are the kinds of things we need to do to really get to the underlying problem here. But the taxi lane idea – again, I haven't heard it but we'll look at it for sure.

Lehrer: And a follow up to that. I read that the City is not planning to sell any yellow cab medallions for the next five years. I think there was originally, you know – I guess, well, as of a few years ago there was a projection in the City budget of more revenue from the sale of taxi medallions going forward. So is this the tacit acceptance that the yellow cab industry is all but dead?

Mayor: No, absolutely not. Brian, there is a very strong yellow cab industry still. There's a difference between the value of the medallion versus what's happening in the industry. More and more the industry is adapting to new technology and is holding a very substantial place in the market. And beyond the question of technology, just the traditional street hail still has a lot of people who prefer and go about it that way.

It is, in many ways, the single fastest way to get a ride if you're in a busy place. And the right time of day, you put your hand, and then there's a cab there immediately. That is faster than any app.

So, I think what we find is it's a sector that has still a lot of strength and, I think with some additional policy moves, will be strengthened further and we want to do that. But at the same time, you know, the medallion problem is a real problem. So we decided that the best way to address it was to no longer, for the foreseeable future, next few years, do anymore auctions, keep the medallion market fixed to try and bring up the value of each medallion a little bit more.

We think medallions will have value in the long term, we think the market will correct but for now part of what we have to do to move that along is not sell more.

Lehrer: Next question from Twitter and as a little prelude to this, we had the new schools chancellor, Chancellor Carranza, on the program earlier this week for the first time and we talked a lot about segregation and desegregation and this listener writes, "Ask the Mayor why do you refuse to use the word segregation to talk about New York City schools?"

Mayor: I've covered this so many times, I don't know why it still needs to be clarified but I'm happy to do it again. And I've spoken to the Chancellor at length and we are absolutely on the same page that we are going to do a series of efforts to address what's going on in our schools. We have two really promising models in District 3 on the West Side of Manhattan and District 1 in the Lower East Side that show a way to diversify classrooms that is based in a real community dialogue and simultaneously focuses on making sure schools are getting better all around.

That is the way forward. I think that model is going to be something we can use citywide. I think we're going to be able to have much more diverse classrooms and we're going to have a bigger plan coming forward about that. But the reason – the terminology point is real simple.

I have no problem saying there is structural racism in New York City and in America. I have no problem saying there's segregation in all facets of our city and our country. I got no problem saying the word.

I have a problem with – and I am asking advocates to acknowledge this so if we want to have semantic debate, I'll push back – I have a problem with people focusing on the end-point in the process rather than root causes. The schools didn't create segregation.

Segregation is based on economics and structural racism and then that plays out in employment and in housing and then eventually all that affects who goes to school where. And I just think that – I have a long, rich history with advocates. I know the vast majority are well-intended but to suggest the schools can solve this problem without first focusing on the root causes, I think it's a mistake.

We can do some very good things and we need to do more. There's definitely much more we need to do to have diverse classrooms. We can't solve the problem to the degree I think a lot of people would like to if we don't go at all those other issues first which is why this administration

is entirely devoted to addressing income inequality. The whole theme, the whole concept of the second term is to make this the fairest big city in America.

That is about economics first and foremost.

Lehrer: Marilyn in Harlem, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Marilyn.

Question: Hi, Brian. Hi, Mr. Mayor. I'm calling about trash. I live in Harlem and we are really making a concerted effort to clean up Harlem and a lot of people are working very hard to do that. What we were discovering – have discovered over the course of the last year is that there is a huge discrepancy between the number of corner trash cans in other parts of the city and in Harlem. I'll give you an example.

The blocks between 106th Street and 96th Street on West End Avenue, there are trash cans on all four corners at every single intersection. That does not exist on Fifth Avenue which is also a residential block like West End Avenue. There's really not – there's few commercial stores on that block. And we have anywhere from four to no trash cans. In the last year on the corner of 127th and Fifth Avenue, we have gone from four to three to four to none to one to two to three and now we're back at two.

So we've met with the Department of Sanitation. They have shifting responses as to the reason for this. We were told that when Mr. O'Reilly – Chief O'Reilly was put into his position about a year ago, that he had conducted a study and it was at that point in time that we went from four to the shifting number of cans on the corner. We asked for a copy of the study, we were denied that. We have been given many responses to the reason why we've lost our cans.

One was that it was a residential avenue and we told them about West End. Then we were told that people were abusing it with household trash. I don't deny that but [inaudible] –

Lehrer: Let me get you an answer from the Mayor about the discrepancy there versus on the Upper West Side. Mr. Mayor?

Mayor: Well, first of all, I'm really glad you're raising the issue Marilyn because we want to make sure that there are public trash cans in the places they are needed. And I am concerned that it sounds like it's been a real uneven situation with your immediate block. And also, I'm always concerned about anything that suggests disparity between different communities. So I think it's very helpful that you raise the question of Fifth Avenue versus West End Avenue.

The last part you said is a challenge. There are situations where if we put out more public trash cans and people fill them with their personal, residential big, garbage bags – and that kind of defeats the purpose for everyone. So that's something the Sanitation Department grapples with in communities all over the city and that's a legitimate strategic challenge, if you will.

But your central point, I take to heart that we got to have fairness in every community and people want by and large more public trash cans and more pickups. We should be doing that wherever it proves to be needed, where there is sufficient demand and where we can make it work.

There are definitely residential blocks all over the city where we don't put in public trash cans because there's not the kind of street activity and commercial strips with people coming and going that would make sense for a public trash can. But you know every block needs to be looked at individually. So, I will direct the Sanitation Department to take another look at this and to get a straight answer to you and to make sure if there's a need that we're answering the need.

Lehrer: I have another trash-related question for you. I want to ask about the issue of pollution and traffic from so many private garbage pick-up companies that pick up from private businesses. People may not realize the Sanitation Department picks up your residential trash but these private haulers pick up all the commercial trash and the complaints were mostly that so many different companies are being hired by different businesses in the same neighborhood that way too many trucks are on city streets driving millions of miles a year in total, causing way too much pollution.

So as you know, the City floated the idea of exclusive contracts for each zone of the city. The industry hated that. Now the Sanitation Department is proposing compromise, as I understand it, two to five carters per zone but environmentalists say that's still too many and won't solve the problem. Do you have a position on this?

Mayor: Well, it's something we're working on hard because the one position I definitely have is that the status quo makes no sense. We've got private companies with trucks going all over without a rhyme or reason. There's definitely an environmental impact. There's real safety concerns that have been raised.

The proposal put forward by the Sanitation Department was an effort to fundamentally change the shape of things and localize. We want to have stricter regulation on many levels including safety. So, we're going to be working with the Council on some additional changes to tighten up our approach towards that industry with the folks on safety but also what the Sanitation commissioner put out in terms of a more localized approach, I think is the right direction.

I haven't seen the latest iteration but something like that, I believe we will get done and it will reduce the amount of movement that these trucks will make around the city.

Lehrer: Another question via Twitter. A listener asks, "Are developers paying for streets and sidewalks they've taken over? New York City has become an obstacle course," this listener writes. "In the past, construction rarely exceeded the limits of private property. The city feels like a developer's wonderland, no concern for citizen safety," the listener writes.

Mayor: Well, I'm not sure I understand that. We – look, we've been very tough on developers that they have to play by the rules and that is on everything from requiring them when they need a new permit to provide affordable housing as a mandate – no way around it, it must be provided or they don't get the permit – straight on through to being much tougher through the Department of Buildings on any violations on construction sites. We've got a lot more Building inspectors and they have the instruction to be very aggressive.

I think if the question is – some of the sites, you know, a certain amount of the sidewalk is taken up because of just the sheer reality particularly for taller buildings of what it would take to put the equipment in place and keep everyone safe with that equipment in place, sometimes that does involve sidewalks that get cut off for a period of time.

From my understanding that is first and foremost about logistical reality and safety. But if there's instances, which I am sure there are some of – including right down to the local level with an individual contractors in homes where a contractor or developer is taking up too much sidewalk or taking up spaces in the street that they should not, we want to investigate each of those. The Department of Buildings would do that. The police department would do that. And there's lots of different ways we can do it depending on what it is.

So, my point, Brian, would be anyone who feels there's something inappropriate, should call it into 3-1-1 because if in fact the developer or contractor is taking up too much space or doing anything that compromises pedestrian safety in particular we will act on it.

Lehrer: Before you go, I wonder if you have a reaction to something that White House Chief of Staff John Kelly said to NPR that aired on Morning Edition today. I know you've been, of course, a big advocate for immigrants in America. He was talking about undocumented immigrants especially from Mexico, and he said it's not that most are gang members or anything but too many will have a hard time assimilating. Listen to these 26 seconds of the White House Chief of Staff.

John Kelly, White House Chief of Staff: Let me step back and tell you that the vast majority of the people that move illegally into the United States are not bad people. They're not criminals. They're not MS-13. But they're also not people that would easily assimilate into the United States. They are overwhelmingly rural people. In the countries they come from fourth, fifth, sixth grade educations are kind of the norm. They're coming here for a reason and I sympathize with the reason but the laws are the laws.

Lehrer: Now, I will say, Mr. Mayor, by way of full disclosure that I may be biased because all four of my grandparents came here with basically no education and their descendants have universally done pretty well in this country. But I'm curious if as Mayor of this city with hundreds of thousands of undocumented immigrants, many from Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, how much it's your experience that assimilability is or isn't a problem or if there's any lesson for General Kelly to learn from the New York experience in response to what he said.

Mayor: That's very striking. I'm glad you raised it, Brian. First we have, you're right, a strong, proud Mexican community here in this city growing all the time more and more important and very proud by the way of our new schools chancellor, Richard Carranza, who is an example of the American dream. His grandparents came here from Mexico. He grew up speaking Spanish. He is now the chancellor of our schools. So I would immediately point out that example to General Kelly.

But what's the core of this is what really bugs me. The – you said it about your family. My grandfather, Giovanni, and my grandmother, Anna, came from very small towns, absolutely rural

in impoverished southern Italy around 100 years ago, with no ability to speak English, and very limited skills, and they absolutely lived the American dream and their grandson is the mayor of this city.

I mean, let's get real about this. Are we a city of immigrants and a nation of immigrants or not? It's just – it's deeply troubling because there's an attempt to rewrite the history in this administration and the nativism is out of hand.

Look, you start in that clip – you start by hearing what seems to be a concession from General Kelly about the vast majority of people being good people but then turns into this ahistorical negative take that just absolutely disregards the history of this country.

So I tell people everywhere, I told people last night – we had an event at Gracie Mansion for Asian-American and Pacific Islander New Yorkers, and I said look, we are the safest big city in America, we have the biggest number of jobs we've ever had in our history, we have the most immigrants we've had in 100 years.

New York City is strong today because of immigrants, not despite them. And that's true all over the country and we've got to stop this sick attempt to somehow paint immigrants as the problem.

And when Donald Trump says chain migration it drives me crazy even more because that has been called by everyone else family reunification, and I can tell you my grandparents came here because family members came ahead of them from those small towns and they wouldn't have been able to make it otherwise. And this is how America has worked.

So I don't think – honestly, I don't think Trump and his gang win the day on this. I think the American people are already moving aggressively in their viewpoint toward a belief that we need comprehensive immigration reform. I think the American people are able to understand history and understand that their neighbors all come from different places and all became part of America and contributed.

But someday this rhetoric will be unacceptable because it does not reflect our history.

Lehrer: Mr. Mayor, thanks as always. Talk to you next week.

Mayor: Thank you, Brian.

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