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OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
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**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

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

**Brian Lehrer:** Good morning again, everyone. And it's time as usual at 11:05 on Fridays 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 you can use the hashtag #AskTheMayor and tweet a question, we'll watch our Twitter feed go by. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Welcome back to WNYC. Oops. Do we have the Mayor?

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** No, my mistake, I was on mute. There we go. You know, it's like all the Zoom calls where people are on mute and they don't realize. Good morning, how you doing Brian?

**Lehrer:** And sometimes Zoom mutes me by itself. So there you go. I want to acknowledge that we're aware that people who are out protesting the last few nights, some of them have been organizing for a lot of people to call in and talk to you about police behavior today. And we'll take a few of those calls. I want to acknowledge that we are aware of that, and we're not going to take caller after caller on the same issue today. There are various things that we need to get to with the Mayor. But Mr. Mayor, people feel strongly about this. And once again, NYPD behavior toward protesters is being called into question. Kettling again, what appear to be unprovoked physical attacks on peaceful people again. What are you defending or not this morning?

**Mayor:** Okay. Let's be really clear. What I expect of the NYPD is to go into any situation and work to deescalate it and to keep everyone safe. And I believe fundamentally having been a protester myself for a long time on many issues, that the vast majority of people come out to protest have only the most peaceful intentions. There are some, we've seen it clearly in the last few months who do not have peaceful intentions. They are clearly only a few, but they do make unfortunately a lot of impact. So the issue here is always to start with the understanding that most people come there for peaceful reasons, but if some mean to do violence, they have to be addressed and isolated. Now listen to all the people who protest, if you see folks among you

doing violence or planning violence, or they've got, you know, chains or hammers or anything in their bag, you need to separate from them. And you need to point out what they're doing because that's not what most protesters are about for, to say the least. So I do think people need to create that separation and understand that problem. That being said, I expect police to respect peaceful protesters to use the lightest touch possible. I want to be really clear. I had a long talk with the police leadership yesterday. Kettling is not an acceptable practice. It's not a part of NYPD tactics in the patrol guide. It's not something I want to see. If there's an individual who's committed an act of violence or broken a law and is going to be arrested, surrounding that person to arrest them is something acceptable. But not to surround a crowd of peaceful protesters. I have made very clear to the NYPD they have to constantly let people know if there's something going on. If one way of a route is closed off, where the places they can turn to go if they want to leave the scene, they have to do a good job of communicating. For example, if people are in the street and the street needs to be cleared, giving people ample opportunity to move before arrest. I want to see that done a lot better going forward.

**Lehrer:** So, on kettling, Human Rights Watch tweets, last night New York police appear to have kettled protestors in with nowhere to go. After chanting, let us disperse over and over again NYPD still arrested people, body slamming and tackling some to the ground who appear to have posed no threat. That from Human Rights Watch. Our reporters from Gothamist report hundreds of heavily armed riot cops who swung batons and bikes at the largely peaceful demonstrators seemingly at random. Do you acknowledge that those things happened and say the NYPD acted wrongly on Wednesday night and Thursday night?

**Mayor:** No, I don't have information that tells me that, I want to be very straightforward with you. I think first of all the presumption that everyone is the same in the protest is just wrong. We've seen ample evidence, unfortunately, that a very small number of people, but a meaningful number of people, are not there for peaceful purposes. And that's from what I've seen, generally, the folks who are getting arrested. And we just cannot act – again, I'm going to say this with real talk, conversation with people who I think I share a lot of values with, that if a peaceful protester is going about their business, they deserve absolute respect. And they should be treated with deference and they should be given clear instructions. That's what's happened overwhelmingly in the history of the city and overwhelmingly in most of the protests, even in the last six months. But what's not acceptable is one, if someone aims to do violence, we're not going to allow violence. We're not going to allow people to hurt other people or to damage property. We're just not going to allow it. And two, if any police officer does not respect peaceful protest, and there'll be a follow up on that. And if there has to be discipline, they'll be disciplined. But I don't accept the kind of broad brush attempt to describe this. Because it's not one thing. We're seeing more than one thing happening at a time. We do need to make sure there's no kettling, period. And that has to be achieved by very, very clearly showing people where the exits are that they can take. We cannot have a situation where people are saying, let us disperse and they don't know where the exits are. The police have to articulate, if you can't go north for whatever reason, you could go south, you can go east, you can go west, whatever the situation is. And there should never be

more force used than necessary. And again, the goal here is to de-escalate, to use as little police presence as possible. But it's not always a simple equation. And that there hasn't been an honest enough conversation about that. And it begins with protesters themselves being honest about if some people they see are trying to do something that's different from their intentions. And then the police have to do a better job of communicating, knowing that in most cases, the vast majority of protesters come with intention only to be peaceful.

**Lehrer:** Amanada in Brooklyn. You are WNYC, hello Amanada.

**Question:** Hi, I just, there are so many – I just think that's not a strong enough response, with all due respect, Mr. Mayor, I don't think that's a strong enough response. There are so many live videos of police officers arresting people brutally with no provocation from last night. And it is incredibly sad to see that you are not taking a stronger stance on this. These are people who are taxpayers. These are people who probably maybe might've voted you into office. And we are just trying to exercise our right as individuals to protest. And the police are being incredibly menacing for no reason. I mean, there's so many other things that they could be doing, attacking people who are literally just minding their visits and protesting should not be one of them. It just is not, it's not right. And I mean I think that, you know, there has to be something else that's done. You have to take a stronger stance because it's just it's not okay.

**Mayor:** Amanada, I appreciate truly what you're saying because I want to be clear. It's not acceptable to me. If someone is there to peacefully protest and is going about peaceful protest, and in any way they're mistreated, that's not acceptable to me. It just isn't. I think the question is when we are debating over videos or quote unquote evidence of what happened, I really don't think we're getting a clear enough picture from anywhere, honestly, of the situations in which someone, in fact, their only intention was peaceful, versus in fact their intention was not so peaceful. And we did not have this phenomenon before this year typically, we really didn't. It was quite clear we've had protests with tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands in New York City, with no police intervention whatsoever, just facilitation. So something different has happened this year that we've unfortunately had to address. And it's hard to deal with. But I agree with you. If a police officer mistreated a peaceful protester, did not communicate to them what they could do and couldn't do in terms of where they needed to be. Or, you know, was violent to them when they weren't doing anything wrong, that's unacceptable. And that has to be followed up on. And there has to be discipline.

**Lehrer:** So based on the videos –

**Mayor:** I just don't think it's one thing at this point. And the videos often are inconclusive Brian. That's the other problem with all due respect to all the people. I've seen videos where you take a clip and it looks horrible and you take the whole thing and it looks very different. I don't think the videos are this always clear piece of evidence that they are sometimes portrayed as.

**Lehrer:** One more on this, then we're going to move on to other things like the pandemic and the election. Katherine in Brooklyn, you're on WNYC with the Mayor.

**Question:** Yes. Hi. You know, Mr. Mayor you seem to be missing the obvious point, which is the sheer volume of the police officers. I mean, I marched four years ago after Trump won for many, many hours with thousands of people from Union Square to Trump Tower with little to no police presence. You know, and now the nights after the election there are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of police officers in like full military gear, chanting move as if they're in the army you know, for like a fraction of the protesters. So I think, you know, I think we need to take a step back and like, you know, ask you why there are so many police officers? Because I think if we had a fraction of them, it would cost less money and you would see far less violence. So, you know, I'm, you know, like our previous caller not happy with your response either.

**Mayor:** No, Katherine, I appreciate it. I think this is, look, we – this is a good dialogue. I'm dealing with a lot of information that I think everyday people don't get obviously. But I think it's good that we just air it all out in the best way possible to help people understand. First of all, your point is powerful and it is the exact point I'm making. Think of the huge marches after President Trump won, there was not a major police presence. There was no need for a major police presence. Think of, I could name you any number of movements I've been in, anti-war movements and solidarity movements with other countries and you name it, almost no police presence. In fact, facilitation, you know, agreement with the police on what the route would be, agreement on civil disobedience procedures. This is the norm until this year. And what happened this year was a shock to all of us. And it is a fact, a new element came into the equation this year, not only in New York City, but all around the country. I've talked to mayors, progressive mayors, mayors of color, all over the country having the exact same reality of a small group of people who aim to do violence. And they'd bring tools of violence and they plan on it. And it's caused a different approach to be necessary because we can't have people being hurt. We can't have property being destroyed. We can have looting and it's really changed the reality. Now here's what I would say – one more point, Brian. To Katherine's point, which is very fair. If people are feeling there's a kind of militarism going on, that's not acceptable. That's not what we want. If they feel there's too much presence, that's not what we want. The goal is to constantly reduce the presence and have it be more consistent with the values of neighborhood policing that we've been implementing and that have really changed the relationship in neighborhoods all over the city. We've got to make sure that we do that while also protecting against this unfortunate reality. We saw it in Brooklyn just a week ago. Folks who aimed to do violence and succeeded in

several cases. And that balance is what we have to strike, but it has to be with the lightest touch possible. That's where we need to do a better job in this city.

**Lehrer:** We're getting so many follow ups from so many quarters, but let's button it up with this specific. What specifically triggered your officers to make violent arrests last night? Our reporters on the ground saw no evidence of any kind of violence or threat. This was a march for Black Trans Liberation, unlike the night before, when at least you can say one fire was started before the police moved in.

**Mayor:** We're going to evaluate everything that happened. But I'll tell you I've been in enough of these after action discussions to know that what you see in front of your eyes is not always the whole story, including what someone did in the course of the evening, or if they have weapons on their person and there's reason to believe they're about to use them. And there's a lot of factors here that go into it. It should never be – look, I get the fact, Brian, I think a lot of your listeners looking like here's a peaceful protester, they should never be slammed the ground. Of course not. Someone who doesn't break the law should be left alone by the police, period. There should be no violence, no intimidation, no negativity. I understand those feelings. I've been in a protest where people felt that there was too much police presence, for example. But there's something else going on and we're trying to separate and address this. And the police have to do a better job. I have to do a better job. But also folks in the protest and a number have done this Brian. They've said, we see people here who obviously have a different goal. And we're separating from those people. We saw that on Wednesday night. There was a very peaceful protest that came down from Midtown downtown and folks in that protest had carefully organized with the police. And when they saw another group coming in that had some other intentions, they separated quickly. I do want to say to the peaceful protesters, if you see people planning violence, if you see people with bricks or chains or hammers, you need to go the other way. Because that, they are not there to do what you're there to do.

**Lehrer:** Liz in Brooklyn, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello Liz.

**Question:** Hi. Thanks for taking my call. I am calling about admission screens Mayor de Blasio. And there have been 180 plus letters sent to your inbox with the subject, another parent who supports eliminating all competitive admission screens for 2020 - 2021. And they just if you don't mind would love to read this a little bit of that letter Brian. And it says Mayor de Blasio, you wrote in your 2019 op-ed, we came into office determined to end the notion of so-called good schools and bad schools. We set out to ensure that every student has a school where they can thrive. And you directed the Chancellor Carranza to infuse every aspect of our schools with the mission of equity. So these letters are asking you to do away with high school and middle

school screens this year. And will you do that? I have a second quick follow up which is about the opt-in. And as a parent who is supposed to figure out if I'm going to opt my child into school, in-person school, without the ZIP code data, I can't make that decision. If you don't provide me with daily at the very least seven-day averages ZIP code data, I can not determine whether or not it's safe for my child to school.

**Lehrer:** We're going on the localized COVID rates. All right. Mr. Mayor do take both questions.

**Mayor:** Yes, indeed. It's a good question, both of the questions. The second one first. I understand your point about the ZIP code data. Although I want to say we've seen in the schools overwhelmingly, massive amount of testing happening in school, and much, much lower positivity level than anywhere in the city or anywhere in the country in our public schools. That's been proven now, you know, for weeks and weeks and weeks, very consistently, but the good news is we are going to be releasing ZIP code data again, starting next week. So you'll have that, the opt-in period goes until the 15th of November. You'll have that data starting on Monday and that can help inform your decision. But I think what's happening in the schools, bluntly, has been very different than what's happening in surrounding neighborhoods and in the city consistently, even in those zones where there were problems in Brooklyn and Queens, schools had a much better situation in terms of the disease consistently throughout.

On the admissions questions, a very important question, we're looking at that right now. I'd had lots of concerns about the admissions process from the beginning, starting with specialized high schools, but also the screened schools for sure, and we need to make a decision quickly about how to handle everything this year, because this year so aberrant and what it will mean for the future. So a fair question, I do hear your concern loud and clear, you did quote me accurately, and we're going to have an answer on that soon.

**Lehrer:** Well, the ultimate question that she's asking I think is why not do away with all screened schools?

**Mayor:** I understand the question we're evaluating again right now the unusual circumstance of this year, that is the first thing we have to make sense of, and then what we think makes sense going forward. But I'm hearing the concern loud and clear. I share a lot of concern. We're just not there yet because there's been other things we've had to do to get the school year started, but we're going to turn our attention to the screened schools now.

**Lehrer:** Alright, and on the opt-in, we want to clarify something from last weeks show. I had asked you about a parent who told me their kid's school said sign up quick or all the spots will be filled, and the kids will be assigned to something other than their usual school. You were surprised, and now that school has clarified to that parent that that will not happen after all. So

we don't want to mislead anyone or cause undue fear, but what's the policy on that if all or a large percentage of kids in a given school opt-in?

**Mayor:** It's a really important question. I'll give you the once over here. Look, here is an opportunity for parents to really make a decision, we're now into November, you know, school has been going on for a good amount of time. Obviously they've been very safe. People now understand what it's like in the school community. A lot of parents chose blended learning and their kids are going to school and they're having a very good experience. A lot of parents chose remote and that works better for them and that's great. Well, we've got to resolve as two things. One, the parents who want to come back into the schools, having the opportunity now, that's now through the 15th, and two the kids who are signed up for blended, but aren't showing up, we need to resolve that. We're going to put out very clear guidance so everyone will see it next week about what we expect if you're in blended, you know, the whole idea of being in blended is for your child to show up and we need that so that we can make sure every seat is filled. Kids are learning and if a parent actually doesn't want blended and would prefer remote, that's cool because that means we can give more days in school for the kids who want to be in school and the families who want the kid in school, they can actually have more days in classrooms, we want to give them that.

So that's what we're trying to make sense of right now, and really communicate better with parents and get everyone in the right spot for them. But if you had a substantial number of people who chose opt-in, the first point is that might be compensated in part by kids who are currently signed up for blended, but actually are not attending, and those kids being clarified and ending up in remote. So I think there'll be some balancing out there, but if an individual school, for example, Brian had a lot of kids who wanted to come back – if I were a parent, I would certainly be doing that – then we're going to adjust the schedule accordingly. We're going to first make sure that the kid signed up for blended really intend to be in blended. If not, we're going to move them over to remote with, you know, talk it through their families, move them over, and then if we have to adjust school schedules, we will –

**Lehrer:** Meaning hypothetically, if it had to be every three days instead of every other day, so they could still socially distance, that kind of thing?

**Mayor:** Yeah, for now, and I would say, I think you're going to see potentially examples in both directions. I think you might see some schools that when everything gets sorted out, everyone truly becomes real blended or real remote that you've seen some schools have been able to offer days in school to their kids. Some that might have to offer fewer, but then the more powerful question over the horizon is right now, of course, we're dealing with a very challenging time of this virus, but at some point we're going to have a better medical situation, whether it's vaccine or just a decreased infection rate, and then that's an opportunity to do even more. And at that point, we might even have an opportunity to do another opt-in period if the health care situation changed profoundly in a good direction, but for now, I think we're going to see the numbers.

I'm not going to be surprised that they even out Brian, where you get a certain number of kids coming in, a certain number of kids going out to remote and schools are pretty much the way they are now, but where we can give kids more days in school, we will, if for some reason we

have to make an adjustment to spread out because a lot of kids want to be in school, we'll do that. But it's all – look it all could vary depending on the health care situation, and I've got to give you, Brian, an update on today's indicators because it actually is a reminder of what we have – the work we have to do –

**Lehrer:** Thank you.

**Mayor:** Because although the hospitalization level is better at 78 folks today, the new report of cases is not good, 702, overall testing 1.81 percent today, and a seven-day average now at 1.96 percent, that's a problem. That's a problem. That says that we are now really threatened with a second wave in New York City if we don't quickly get a handle on this, and that says that we really need to emphasize the mask wearing, the social distancing, avoiding gatherings and sadly avoiding travel and large family gatherings for the holidays, because we just cannot allow a second wave here. It's just so dangerous on so many levels.

**Lehrer:** The Governor announced a new policy for people coming from any state besides New Jersey and Connecticut, we're just too integrated with New Jersey and Connecticut to enforce something like this from there, but that in negative COVID test would be required within three days before travel to New York from anywhere else. Is that your understanding and will that be enforced and airports or other entry points? Do you know?

**Mayor:** First my understanding is he covered all – exempted all the bordering states, so it's New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, and also by extension Pennsylvania. So second, you're right, you have to get a negative test before you leave the state and you have to get one within several days of returning. That's the way to avoid quarantine. If you don't do those things, you go through the full two-week quarantine and I've spoke with the Governor about this yesterday, there's going to be greater intensity in the enforcement of quarantine, because again, we are now really threatened by a potential second wave. So we've got to make sure that quarantine is something that people take very, very seriously, and we have to enforce that rigorously to make sure that happens.

**Lehrer:** One more opt-in question from Jean in Brooklyn, you're on WNYC, Jean.

**Question:** Hi. thank you. It's actually not an opt-in question, but it is a school question. I have two grandchildren in the public schools here in Brooklyn, in second and fourth grade, and I'm sorry to tell you, but the education they're getting they're doing hybrid or blended, it's terrible. It's just doesn't compare to what my own children got who went to a PS 31 and 321 in Brooklyn in the second and fourth grade age. So my question is what planning is being done to help all these kids catch up after this year, after this is over? I don't think my, my grandchildren are getting an adequate second and fourth grade education –

**Lehrer:** Also, Jean, can you, give one example of how not since they are in the hybrid learning to school –

**Mayor:** And which school please? Which school?



**Question:** Well, I don't want to condemn the school, but they're in Kensington there in PS 130.

**Mayor:** Okay, I know it well, go ahead.

**Question:** My daughter reports that her second grader is very bored. He's a very good reader. He gets his work done in like five minutes of the remote learning more. They're very happy when they're back in class and I don't know how that's going, but they only go two or one day a week –

**Lehrer:** So it's a remote learning critique, Mr. Mayor, which we get so much.

**Mayor:** Oh, we do hear it so much, and remote learning is, you know, I want to thank our educators and parents who are trying their damndest to make remote learning work, but remote learning is just profoundly imperfect, and that's why we want to get as many kids back in the classroom as many days, a week as possible. And really the hope here, Brian, is with opt-in to get folks in who want to be in clarifying with the blended parents and kids who are not yet attending, you know, if you want to really be remote, let's just get you over to remote. If you really want to be in class to show up, let's get everyone in the seats and maximize the opportunity for every child that wants to be in school. I think what Jean is talking about is an unfortunate residue of the challenge we're facing. We have to overcome it by trying to make both the in-person and the remote better throughout the school year. We can make it better. We saw improvement in the course of the spring, as we were trying to acclimate to remote.

I know we can make it better, but I think for kids like Jean's talking about, it's really important for parents, to the best to your ability, to talk to the teachers or the principal about what your child is or is not getting and see if we can make adjustments because remote does allow, for example, for a kid who's doing well, they can be easily given additional assignments and additional support even remotely. So, parents, you know, really engage your schools on that, but the truth is we have to make it better while also acknowledging that the cure here really is to get past this virus and get all our kids back in schools, and then we are going to be playing catch up. Jean is right, we're going to be playing catch up and we have to lay those plans in now for next September to really try and supercharge the situation as best possible.

**Lehrer:** We have three minutes left and Mr. Mayor, as you're probably aware, there's a little post-election thing going on in America.

**Mayor:** Yes, a little bit.

**Lehrer:** Some news, just in the last few minutes, Mark Kelly has been declared the winner of the Senate race in Arizona, the Democrat former astronaut defeats Republican Martha McSally, that's been called now. And Georgia has announced that they will have a recount because it's going to wind up so close between Trump and Biden that they're going to do a recount. So Georgia is not going to be called for some days. My question is, as it relates to New York City, that it does appear Biden will win, and Governor Cuomo said yesterday that he expects that to result in federal aid to solve this year's budget problem, at least for the State, even if Republicans control the US Senate, do you agree?

**Mayor:** Yeah, I do, and let's just celebrate America for a moment. Mark Kelly winning Arizona is very important, two Democratic senators from Arizona now, looks likely to go Democrat in the presidential election as well. That's a huge change for this country with lasting impact for Democrats and progressives, but also for New York City. That's a big deal, that suggests a Senate that's going to be even tighter. If it's a two vote margin in the Senate, and I don't even know if it will be because those two special elections in Georgia are going to be very, very hotly contested in January. But I agree with the Governor, Vice President Biden becomes President of the United States, there will be a major stimulus even with a Republican Senate. We know a couple of times it came close to happening in the last few months, even with the current leadership. If the Senate just a two vote margin, I don't have a doubt in my mind that the Vice President's team will be able to pull some senators over and get us something substantial, not the same as what we would have gotten with a Democratic Senate, but it's something substantial to help us get back on our feet. So I remain very hopeful on that front Brian

**Lehrer:** However, the Citizens Budget Commission projects the City and the State and the MTA face budget deficits of some \$88 billion over the next four years, and fiscal experts say, there's no way the feds will send that much money our way, but your labor deals merely move \$600 million or so from this year to next year, do you not need to find real savings to deal with the long-term problem beyond what you have?

**Mayor:** I don't agree with the assumption that the federal government will not come in to address this. I think that's a faulty assumption. Right now –

**Lehrer:** \$88 billion?

**Mayor:** Well, again, in federal terms, honestly, over multiple years, that's not a lot of money. For putting one of the biggest states in the country and the nation largest city back on their feet, so we can lead a national economic recovery, no, I assure you. Look, how much has been spent on wars, Brian, I mean, for God's sakes, you know, this country spends hundreds of billions of lightly on wars, let's recognize there's an opportunity here to really rethink our spending priorities, pull away from so much military spending right there. You're going to have a huge amount to deal with, but also take the lesson of the new deal and invest now to get the cities and states back on the feet. It will pay off many times over in terms of the economic activity and the revenue it will generate. So no, it's not fair to say the federal government won't put us back on our feet. We should not be doing austerity measures, which is what the Citizens' Budget Commission is calling for. We should not be putting people out of work. We should not be decimating city services. We should be fighting for the best possible stimulus and keeping those services and that employment level high for the good of the city. And in the future, there are tough choices to make, we'll make them, but we should not be deciding that in advance when there's a chance of a federal government doing right by us and now we have a lot of the preconditions we need if this election comes out the way it looks to achieve that bigger change. And by the way, there's more Senate elections in two years, and that's another chance to get that majority and go even farther.

**Lehrer:** Thanks as always Mr. Mayor, talk to you next week.

**Mayor:** Take care, Brian.

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