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NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 28, 2018

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

Brian Lehrer: Before we get to those, for the final time in 2018, we begin as we usually do on Fridays with our weekly Ask the Mayor segment – my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio. Happy New Year, Mr. Mayor. Welcome back to WNYC.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Happy New Year to you and all your listeners, Brian.

Lehrer: And we're all for fewer moordstrookjes in New York in 2019, right?

Mayor: You are impressive in your command of Flemish sayings, there.

Lehrer: Or somebody who is from Belgium will call in and beat me up for how I butchered the word. But listeners, our Ask the Mayor lines are open at 2-1-2-4-3-3-WNYC, 4-3-3-9-6-9-2. And I thought we might look back and look forward a little bit with some big picture questions as well as some particular things in the news right now.

So, what do you think were your administration's three biggest accomplishments this year?

Mayor: Well, crime is down again. That's number one. This has become a safer city and the relationship between police and community continues to improve. More jobs than ever – we now have about 4.5 million jobs in New York City, the most we've ever had which is very, very exciting for the future of this city.

And I'd say making sure that we protect and build affordable housing. We've saved a lot of people from eviction with free lawyers. We protected and preserved a lot of affordable housing that would have been lost and we're building a lot of new ones, and that's how we, you know, painstakingly day-by-day are going to attack the affordability crisis in this town.

Lehrer: Let me invite you to follow up on the crime stats a little bit. I think we almost take that for granted in New York City at this point after many years of decline. I think you just had a news event with the NYPD on that the other day. Do you have basic – obviously there are a few days to do – end-of-the-year topline stats?

Mayor: Yeah, you know, we never count our chickens before they're hatched but unquestionably in a number of areas, crime will be down by the end of 2018 compared to 2017. And I want to give a lot of credit to the men and women of the NYPD and also to their community partners, allies, and people in the community who do important work. The Cure Violence Movement is a great example of community-based folks who help stop violence and help keep our young people away from the wrong choices.

This has been another extraordinary year and we shouldn't take it for granted, Brian. You said something really, really important. We have seen crime go down for five straight years with fewer and fewer arrests. We had 100,000 fewer arrests in 2017 than we did in 2013. That's a stunning number. We even have had fewer arrests in 2018 than in 2017.

So less crime, fewer arrests, better relations with the community. The same on safety could be said of Vision Zero. We continue to drive down traffic fatalities and that's crucial. This is a really big, good news story about New York City and the people of New York City and what we've all achieved. It deserves a lot more attention as we take stock of the year. People should feel really good about the fact that we're the safest big city in America.

Lehrer: What about your three biggest failures of 2018, or frustrating roadblocks?

Mayor: Clearly the issue that, to me, continues to challenge us and we've seen some progress but not enough – is homelessness. I think the strategies we've put in place are starting to have an effect. It's certainly taking time and I'd like it to go faster. So, one of the things I want to do in 2019 is figure out how we can more aggressively, still, reduce homelessness. I think we've done some really important things in terms of reducing street homelessness but we've got a lot more to do and we've got to get the shelter population down. So, that's one of them for sure.

I think in the sort of the pending category, I would say, is the question of NYCHA. We clearly – I can say that the situation for our public housing residents is not what it should be. It's unacceptable to me. We made a lot of investments. We've made a lot of changes. We have new leadership. But we've got to turn the corner in 2019 and that starts with coming to an understanding with the federal government so we can move forward. So, that one – very much in the front of my mind right now.

And I think the other side of the coin on affordability is that I'm very pleased with the progress we've made but the affordability crisis continues to be a huge challenge in New York City. We need more aggressive tools and we have to create some of them ourselves but we also have to go to Albany and get some new powerful penalties to ensure that bad landlords are dealt with because it's still – there's too many bad landlords, doing too many bad things in New York City and that's not acceptable.

Lehrer: As a matter of fact, we have a phone call on just that. So, let's start there with our Ask the Mayor calls today. Nick, in Astoria, you're on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio. Hi, Nick.

Question: Hi, there. Good morning to both of you. Yeah, Mr. de Blasio I did see in the New York Times that there was an article about just that – that bad actor landlord behavior specifically out in West Harlem. And as a New Yorker it just feels to me like I come across this article almost weekly if not monthly at the best.

It feels to me like housing is such an important issues, it's very divisive in our city, and I think it needs much better regulation than it has now. One idea I had thought of and talked about with some friends is that New York City landlords ought to be licensed. There ought to be some kind of regulation and the landlord ought to have to prove to the city that he or she is capable of running a building, they can get a license, and if they're caught acting in an unethical or dangerous way, they lose their license and they can't collect rent anymore. We do it for drivers, doctors, lawyers, nail salon workers as far as I understand. Why do we not license landlords in New York City?

Mayor: You know, Nick, that's a really interesting idea. I have not heard that one before honestly and it's an intriguing idea because – look, I want to start from the beginning. Most landlords, of course, follow the law. And we have been really strenuous in terms of making sure that there's a lot more fairness for renters.

We had two rent freezes in the last five years for example. We're providing free lawyers to folks who face illegal evictions. So there's a lot of things that are changing in the relationship between landlords and tenants and I expect really big changes – and we all need to fight for really big changes in Albany where we have a chance to really strengthen rent regulations. And that could be a turning point for protecting affordability in this city.

But that said, there still are a serious number of bad apples. They must be dealt with very harshly. We found new ways to throw the book at them. The City Council has done a great job giving us some new laws particularly in the area of anti-harassment to strengthen our hand.

But we need more. We need bigger penalties. A lot of that has to be done in Albany. We have added a lot of inspectors but we have to have the kind of penalties that will stop the bad actors dead in their tracks. I think we have to bring more criminal cases when we see situations where landlords have endangered their tenants. We have to do that with law enforcement particularly with the State Attorney General's Office.

But I think your idea is a real interesting one because anything that makes really clear that if you abuse your tenants you're going to pay a longer term price is something that needs to be seriously considered. So, I appreciate that idea.

Lehrer: Nick, thank you for your call. And I want to follow-up and drill down a little bit on what's in the Times article this week that he referenced by Grace Ashford. The headline is, "Leaks, Mold, and Rats: Why New York City Goes Easy On Its Worst Landlords." And I'm going to read a few lines from the article. It says, "The Department of Housing Preservation and Development is supposed to ensure that the city's 2.2 million rental apartments are habitable but the agency takes a gentle hand with landlords who deprive tenants of basic services, declining to enforce the maximum penalties for even the worst offenders, a review of City records shows."

So, then it says, “To examine how the City handled these cases, the Times analyzed City housing data, interviewed tenants and advocates, and reviewed hundreds of housing court cases, taking as a sample the 126 cases filed for serious building-wide issues in Manhattan last year.”

And they conclude, “In more than two-thirds of the cases the City settled for less than 15 percent of penalties available under the law and most were closer to ten percent. The median settlement was only \$4,000. And landlords who lie about making repairs also face minimal repercussions. One landlord, who filed 40 certifications with the City over two years that falsely claimed violations had been fixed, paid less than \$3,000 in fines,” the Times found.”

So my question is – is this news to you and what are you going to do about it?

Mayor: Well, Brian, respectfully, it’s not the whole story. And let’s start with the human reality. I don’t accept in any way, shape, or form a landlord treating a tenant inappropriately, harassing them, depriving them of the services they need. None of that is acceptable. I want to see those landlords pay. I created the Worst Landlords Watchlist almost a decade ago to put pressure on those landlords. We got a lot of those landlords to have to live by the law because we put real pressure and public attention on them.

Since I’ve come in as mayor, like I said, we’ve done rent freezes, we’ve done free legal services so tenants are protected. We brought a whole host of measures into play. They are much more strenuous. But also what that article – I don’t understand why that article left out a huge amount of the information that was provided to the reporter on the fact that the housing court process – we don’t control the housing court. The housing court process can go on for a very long time, and one of the reasons to settle is to get action, to get the repairs made, to move forward the building rather than have something drag out in court for years potentially – literally years – with no resolution that helps the tenants involved. It’s not a good situation. I’m the first to say, I would like much tougher penalties and I would like much faster timelines for resolution. But we also have to look at some of the realities we face in the housing court.

So, what I want to see is action in Albany because that’s where we need the authorization for much harsher penalties and much more ability of the city to act without having to go to housing court, to be able to ensure there are real penalties that have a big impact on landlord behavior. And if landlords are not doing what they should be doing, I want tools to take their buildings away from them –

Lehrer: So, are you saying you don’t have the tools? Like are these housing court cases – if a landlord files 40 certifications over two years that falsely claimed violations had been fixed, is it a matter of a negotiation in court that he winds up with only \$3,000 in fines or is that something the Department of HPD can just do?

Mayor: And that’s – I’m going to go by the best of my knowledge – it is not something we can do unilaterally. The housing court is the venue for resolution of a lot of these matters. That’s the problem. Housing court, historically, is not a fast process and this is not new in the entire court system. When you’re trying to get action, a lot of times people settle in the name of action rather

than dragging it out, again, what could be months or even years – and that's not helping the residents in the meantime.

What the article leaves out is the huge amount of fines that we have levied and gotten, the repairs that we've made and forced the landlords to pay for, the number of cases we've litigated in. It takes a piece of the picture and leaves out the whole big framing of what's going on here.

But I will be the first to say – I don't accept it ever. I don't accept any bad landlord doing what they do and I would like to be able to throw the book at them a lot more quickly and a lot more easily and avoid a lengthy proceeding like housing court. And Albany has the power to give us that ability. I think if a bad landlord is consistently mistreating their tenants, they shouldn't have a right to keep doing that even if it comes with massive financial penalties to force them to change, or potentially to take their building away from them.

And that's the kind of muscular approach I'd like to see. So, I think the article left out the legal reality we're dealing with which is far from perfect and which we don't control entirely. But I'm the first to say, hey, I want the tools so we can go deal with these landlords aggressively and quickly.

Lehrer: So, just to finish this thread, what one tool would you ask for, from who, who has the power to give it to you?

Mayor: Albany, the Legislature – the kind of monetary penalties that will force landlords to good behavior, or if they fail to pay those penalties [inaudible] allow us to seize their building. That's what I'm looking for.

Lehrer: Lauren in the Bronx, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Lauren.

Question: Hello.

Lehrer: Hi, there.

Question: Hi, so, I would like to speak to the Mayor about noise complaints with neighbors.

Lehrer: The Mayor is here.

Mayor: Yeah, right here Lauren. How are you doing?

Question: I'm fine, thank you. So, I have an issue with noise complaints that I think is pretty typical. I have a noisy neighbor and I understand that noise complaints are the most prevalent complaint that get called into 3-1-1. And the police have told me repeatedly that they have no authority to issue a summons or to take any kind of action. And so consequently they have come to my neighbor 15 times. They've told them to turn down the music. At best, they turn it down and then ten minutes later, after the police leave, they turn it back up. And at worst, as happened the last time, they've actually told the police, 'It's our apartment, we can do whatever we want

and you can't do anything about it,' which is true. They've done – the police, I have to say, have done everything they can.

They've come and spoken to them. They've called them and I'm left in a situation where my only recourse would be to go to housing court for years and housing court really, at the end of the day, wouldn't be able to do anything either than to tell the landlord perhaps to make them get some kind of insulation. My question is – all the police have told me that years ago they used to be able to give a summons like you do for double parking and they used to be able to confiscate equipment if there were repeated offenders, and that those enforcement abilities were taken away from them by the Mayor. So, they've all told me contact the Mayor –

Lehrer: Alright so you've done it. Mr. Mayor, is that true?

Mayor: Hey, no. That's not all true. Lauren, what precinct are you in or what part of the Bronx – can you help on that?

Question: I'm in the 50th Precinct, and I will say, again, I think the police have done everything they can possibly do. I mean, they've been really diligent. They've come, they followed through, they've spoken to the neighbors. But they're all under the impression – you know 15 calls, that's 30 policemen because they come in pairs, not to mention the ones I've spoken to at the precinct in community affairs – but they've all told me they cannot give a summons and they cannot confiscate equipment. And without that, there's not compliance, and so if it's not –

Lehrer: And let me jump in, Lauren, forgive me – to get you a response. Mr. Mayor, has anything changed under you with respect to noise enforcement – this kind of noise enforcement?

Mayor: No, not in terms of any law change, not in terms of any policy change. Look, I just want to caution – with deepest respect for all of our civil servants that we should be very, very clear if someone wants to know exactly what the reality is around the laws and the policies, please reach out either to the Mayor's Office, to elected officials and we'll get you the answer.

I don't know why those officers suggested that because those laws are not determined by the mayor. All laws are determined either by the State Legislature or the City Council, let's just be clear about that –

Lehrer: Well, there certainly has been policy in other areas that you and the NYPD have made to cut back on arrests as opposed to summonses etcetera. You're in conflict with Andy Byford from New York City Transit about not enough summonses for turnstiles –

Mayor: That's not what I'm saying, Brian, just –

Lehrer: So, I'm just asking if there's anything like that along these lines.

Mayor: No, I'm saying the – to the caller, it was a very fair point. If we don't have the legal right – if the NYPD doesn't have the legal right to seize equipment for example or arrests or something like that – that's a matter of law.

So, there is a problem here. I think Lauren is right. The fact is there is too much noise in this city. I want to come forward in 2019 with some new plans for how we reduce the amount of noise in New York City because we have to. But on this question, I've asked the very same question of precinct commanders of what can we do differently. I think it's fair to say when the police show up in a lot of places, it does make an impact on people's behavior. But I also think it's fair to say the police need additional tools.

And to the best of my understanding, we need action either at the Legislature or the City Council to provide those tools. I would like to see a more muscular approach here. I think if someone consistently creates noise late at night for example that's disturbing their neighbors, a warning is the ideal to resolve it but if the warning is not working there have to be other ways to have consequences. And I do think even such an idea as confiscating equipment, if it's a repeat offender, is a fair point.

But to the best of my understanding, we will need authorization to take those kinds of steps from one or the other legislative body. I'll happily look into this, Brian, and we can talk about it on the next show. But I share Lauren's view that we can't have neighborhoods where there is too much noise and the police have to have the tools to be able to address it.

Lehrer: Let's take another call. Jerry in Manhattan, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi, Jerry – Jerry, are you there?

Question: [Inaudible]

Lehrer: Jerry? Looks, like Jerry has a housing inspector there right now –

Question: [Inaudible]

Lehrer: Alright, maybe the noise complaint is next from Jerry but he's not actually on the phone with us so –

Question: [Inaudible]

Lehrer: I'm going to click his line off. Although, it would be pretty interesting to eavesdrop on Jerry for a while.

Mayor: Is that legal and appropriate, Brian?

Lehrer: It may be legal but it's not appropriate.

Mayor: You're a liberal, you're not supposed to be in favor of eavesdropping.

Lehrer: That's right, that's right. Anti-surveillance – we're having Glenn Greenwald on later. We can't do surveillance. Matt, can you put in line five for me, it doesn't seem to be working in

here. So, we're going to go next to James in West Orange calling across state lines for Mayor de Blasio. Hi, James.

Question: Hi, I'm glad to talk you. My question to you is –

Mayor: Hi, James.

Question: Hi, good morning, Mayor. Good to speak to you. My question is that over the 80 years of New York's history since Mayor Red Mike Hylan, there has been no aggressive looking of building – building new rapid transit lines in Queens. We are relying on rapid transit lines that were built in 1916 and they are overcrowded. This recent acquisition of, I think, it's Amazon in Long Island City proves the fact that we need more rapid transit. We need to have – starting to build more rapid transit –

Lehrer: What do you mean by rapid transit, James? Do you mean subways?

Question: I mean subways, I mean light rail lines. I know you're pushing for a light rail line in Queens which is important but what does it connect to? It connects two lines that are already overburdened like the 7, like the J and Z –

Lehrer: And let me get you a response. And Mr. Mayor, I'm going to throw in here a question that I had anyway which is that even though Amazon – assuming that goes forward – is planned in Long Island City kind of reinforces the need for your BQX trolley idea. It's – the funding still isn't there, it's been reported. So what do you say to James and what do you say to BQX?

Mayor: Okay, so let me take James' point first. I agree with James that we need more mass transit but I think it's the kind of mass transit that we have to focus on. What is working?

Unquestionably, Select Bus Service is working. So that's the buses with the dedicated lanes and fewer stops. That's been making a huge, positive impact. We have a plan now to add over 20 new lines in the coming years around the city including Queens. Ferry service is working. There's been a stunning amount of ridership – very, very proud of that. We're going to be talking soon about where we go next with that.

Those types of mass transit are working. Obviously bikes are working, a different concept but they are working, the expansion has gone very well, a lot of people using bikes. The next – I agree with you on the need for light rail where it makes sense. Some places, select bus service makes a lot more sense, some places light rail will work, we believe on the Brooklyn Queens waterfront, where the BQX is going to be focused, there is a massive number of people, there is a massive number of jobs, it's a perfect place to put in light rail. There may be some other places in the city too and we certainly want to see how this first approach works and see if we can broaden it.

I think the toughest part of the equation is subways. I mean right now we have got to fix the situation with the subway lines we've got. We've got to get them to run on time and stop all the break downs. That's going to take a funding plan and everyone I talk to I tell, April 1st is D Day.

We have to have a decision by April 1st in Albany on long term funding for the MTA so we can fix the subways we have. I think it's very hard to imagine a lot of new subway lines in the near term. But these other approaches are working better and better. And I want to keep expanding them to the maximum extent possible because that's really what's working. So I agree with James, I would just focus on everything but subway expansion in the near term.

On the BQX Brian, we know it's, there's a massive need and audience for it. I think the existence of Amazon makes the point even more strongly, a huge number of public housing residents live along that route. We are moving forward with it. We do need federal funding. Now the good news is, I think the House of Representatives which obviously controls the purse strings, is going to smile of these big mass transit projects. This is the kind of thing that's getting more and more support around the country locally, I think you are going to see in the new House, starting on January 3rd, a lot of support for it. And if there's a funding bill that focuses on infrastructure, our projects – I mean we go to the top of the line instantly because we would be serving more people than probably any other mass transit proposal in the country with the BQX. So I think that federal funding will be there in the not too distant future and that's going to allow us to get going.

Lehrer: Meanwhile, coming up on New Year's we have the City's Fair Fares program taking effect, half price MetroCard for low income New Yorkers. But David Jones from the Community Service Society who I think originated that idea, certainly pushed for it, is saying there hasn't been much in the way of outreach so even though it involves the transit system which is the MTA, which is not the City, I gather the City is administrating this and in a little while this morning, Councilmember Ydanis Rodriguez is going to be outside of Washington Heights subway station saying the City is dragging it's heels on publicizing these half price MetroCard for low income New Yorkers. What would you say to him?

Mayor: We are totally focused on getting these half price MetroCards to low income folks who need them. This is a great idea, it's something that I came to an agreement with the City Council on back in June. It's something that's never been done on this scale before. And everyone agreed, I mean the City Council understood this fully, I had very productive conversations with Speaker Corey Johnson that this was going to take some serious ramp up and a lot of hard work to figure out how to do it right and to make sure that it would be sustainable. But that work has gone on over these six months and starting next month we are going to roll this out in a very big way. Don't worry, the word will spread quickly, I assure you. When people understand that they can get half price MetroCard because of their income level, people will hear it – you know if you build it they will come. They are going to hear about it, they are going to act on it quickly.

Lehrer: Are there going to be posters in the subway?

Mayor: There will be – everything we could possibly do, because we want to get the word out. But we had to get it, the actual procedure right. This is again something that hasn't been done before on this scale, we have to make sure that it would work and it could reach a really substantial number of people, we now have those tools in place. We will be announcing them very shortly. And again, we will publicize it intensely but I think this is one where the word will spread very, very quickly and people are going to take up this opportunity because it's going to

allow them to get around and to you know, live life in this city and search for jobs and get the education they need to move themselves forward, everything that we want to see for people, everything we want to see in the city that becomes fairer all the time and using the other version of the word fair, my vision is to make this the fairest big city in America, people having access to transportation so they can get the opportunities they deserve, quintessential to that vision. So we are going to make this work.

Lehrer: And was that a yes to signs in the buses and subways or are you not sure yet?

Mayor: I'm not an expert on the exact but when we do a full board, outreach campaign, we do buses, subways, bus shelters, and everything else you have seen. Obviously social media, you name it, where I expect a full board campaign.

Lehrer: Brandon in Crown Heights, you are on WNYC with the Mayor, hi Brandon.

Question: Hi Brian, hi Mr. Mayor. I was calling because I've been navigating my way through the alphabet soup of city bureaucratic agencies, trying to get the heat on in my building because my land lady is dragging her feet. So apparently she replaced the boiler last year without going through the proper procedures and National Grid turned off the meter over the summer. And there's apparently one permit, one permit that she needs for National Grid to come turn the meter back on. And it's plumbing permit from the Department of Buildings. And we've – and over the course of this time I've called 3-1-1 a bunch of times, we've had HPD Emergency Repairs over. And HPD Emergency Repairs in the early days was telling us that if they weren't getting it done in a timely manner that they would come by and do the repairs and bill her later. Which sounds good but apparently this permit can only be filed by the land lady, well only be filed by the last licensed master plumber that the land lady hires. So why does HPD Emergency Repairs exist? Again this is –

Lehrer: Let me get you answer because we are going to run out of time in this segment. Mr. Mayor?

Mayor: Okay Brandon, first of all – if I'm getting your name right –

Lehrer: You did.

Mayor: I want to make sure that you give your information to folks at WNYC. And Brian, it's really important that when people give their information to you that they then answer the call when we reach back out to them. We've had a number of your callers that have called in with concerns and then we have a hell of a time trying to reach them. So please, if people are taking the time to bring up a complaint, give us the best contact information for you, we are going to reach out to quickly and please respond. We want to fix the heat in your building right away. It is important that we go in and make emergency repairs with HPD, sometimes that's the single best way to get the heat back on. But if there's a problem with the Department of Buildings we will try and resolve that today. So please give your information and our folks will be in touch with you in the next few hours to see if we can fix this immediately.

Lehrer: So last thing as we look forward to the New Year, how do you see your role in national politics in 2019? You do speak around the country. Sometimes you get criticized for that. How do you see your role next year on behalf of New York or a greater national good?

Mayor: Look, my hope is to continue to push for progressive change in this country that will have a profoundly positive impact on New York City. And I think this is a moment where there is tremendous potential for change. I think what we saw in the November election is incredibly encouraging. But it has to then result in action that helps people in their lives. We have a chance now to start on a pathway, for example, to address the most essential matters of income inequality like achieving Medicare for all so one of the biggest expenses in people's lives is addressed by having a healthcare system that works for everyone. We have a chance to have a real infrastructure bill that could allow us to do the kinds of things we've talked about right here on this show – you know build more affordable housing, create the kind of mass transit that people need. This is a moment to get that done. So it's not just enough to elect Democrats, we need to elect progressive Democrats; we need to elect people who have a very aggressive vision of what we can do to change people's lives. And that's what I'm going to be working on. I think you know, the national debate has changed intensely in the last few years and in the direction of the kinds of things that I think would be great for the city. But now we have to make it happen, now we have to bring it home. So that's what I'm going to be fighting for an infrastructure bill, I'm going to be fighting for Medicare for all, I'm going to be fighting for all the kinds of things that I think finally will give us the support we need from Washington to make the bigger changes in this city.

Lehrer: Alright. Anything people should know about Times Square, New Year's Eve or anything else, especially safety wise or traffic wise for the big night?

Mayor: Look, it's going to be safe, the NYPD has done a great job, year after year. We are going to have a press conference later on today to go over the security planning, but's very strong, lots of officers will be out. Just remind people, you know bundle up, it's going to be a long stay if you decide to go there. And you can't bring a whole lot of stuff with you. Those are the rules and that's how we keep people safe. But to anyone who ventures out to Times Square, you're going to have a great time, you're probably going to freeze a bit but you are going to have a great time and we will keep you safe.

Lehrer: Mr. Mayor, thanks as always and talk to you next week which means talk to you next year.

Mayor: See you next year, Brian.

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