



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
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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'll begin as we usually do on Friday's with our Friday Ask the Mayor segment. My questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio at 2-1-2-4-3-3-W-N-YC, 2-1-2-4-3-3-9-6-9-2 or you can tweet a question. Just use the hashtag #AskTheMayor who is in Puerto Rico this morning. Hello, from New York, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, Brian.

Lehrer: What's up in Puerto Rico?

Mayor: Well, we're here for the SOMOS Conference, which is a big annual gathering where Latino leaders from all over New York and actually also from all over the country gathered to talk about an agenda for change, and a lot of the leaders from New York from all different offices come down here and participate and a lot of good meetings happening down here because people have time to actually catch up and address a whole host of things. So, so far so good.

Lehrer: It's a New York democrats retreat, basically, right?

Mayor: Well, it's not just democrats, but I would certainly say especially given the elections Tuesday it's more democrats than ever.

[Laughter]

Lehrer: More than ever, right. And so as we've discussed a lot on this show, Tuesday didn't just flip the House of Representatives in Washington from red to blue but decisively flipped the New York State Senate from red to blue. So now the democrats control the legislature, and of course the Governor is a democrat. What are your top priorities for the city for bills they should try to pass that they couldn't pass under republican control?

Mayor: Well, first I have to say, Brian. This is an extraordinary moment for the State of New York. You know, several state legislative bodies flipped on Tuesday night around the country,

which is actually the beginning of the bigger changes we need not only in the state but around the whole country.

It really begins with state legislators both because of the crucial work they do with an often paralyzed federal government but also because they govern over redistricting and redistricting has often been very unfair in a number of states. It's part of where the republicans gained so much ground in the House of Representatives by creating districts that were gerrymandered wildly to achieve their ends. We're going to have a chance now to have districts in this state, and I think you'll see it in other places too that actually reflect the demographics and the views of the voters, and that's going to lead to even more change. So this is a very important election – what happened on Tuesday in New York State, and as you said not just a majority, a resounding majority for the State Senate Democrats. Something a lot of us have been fighting for, for many, many years. In terms of the substance, look, I think the things that matter to everyday New Yorkers are going to be on the docket finally. We have a chance to strengthen our rent laws. We know we have a housing affordability crisis in New York City.

We the City government have a plan to build and create 300,000 affordable apartments that's well underway, but we need stronger rent laws to protect over two million people who are rent stabilized, rent controlled. We finally have a chance to do it. The landlord lobby is not going to have the same kind of influence over the democrats, they had with the republicans. And so door is wide open for stronger rent laws that can keep people in their homes. The second, of course, fixing the MTA. We have a chance now to finally have a long terms funding source that the MTA needs. The MTA needs \$30 to \$40 billion over 10 years. That's finally going to be something we can act on, but I have to say everyone should put pressure on everybody in Albany to get this done by the April 1st budget next year. That's the crucial moment. So that's huge, and then on education we have a chance to really consolidate some of the progress we've made in New York City. A chance to address funding issues that have long gone unaddressed, a chance to of course get the kind of governance we needed, mayoral control of education extended for a longer period of time. The Assembly has said three years regularly, the governor has said three years regularly, now with a Democratic State Senate there will be an opportunity to actually have a serious conversation about the value of mayoral control as opposed to the politics that swirled around it in Albany. Under mayoral control, graduation rate up 50 – 50 percent in 15 years, a lot more we can do.

So these are really, really bread and butter issues that are going to have a huge impact on the people of New York City.

Lehrer: A long term funding source, as you put it for the MTA. Are you sticking to your guns on a millionaire's tax but no congestion pricing?

Mayor: Look, I want to be clear. I have said first and foremost, we need a long term solution. It may be multiple pieces to achieve \$30 to \$40 billion. I am open to different things that might get us there. Obviously I believe the millionaire's tax is fair, I believe it's something that people can – I mean the polling shows it. The people believe in it, and I think therefore their representatives may feel it's fair, and that would only be on millionaires, and billionaires in New York City who I think are doing really, really well right now and can afford it. But the congestion pricing debate has moved forward. I have said it many, many times publically that the governor's commission

came up with a better proposal than anyone we had seen previously. There are still real issues to be addressed for me to be comfortable with congestion pricing. But I do see progress. I am certainly open to that discussion. And there may be other ideas beyond that. But it has to happen in 2019. It has to happen while there's finally momentum for change and while the urgency is there and it's all going to culminate I think around the state budget on April first. So whatever combination, Brian, will work, I am open minded. But one thing to me that is the bottom line, I think all New Yorkers should start to really rally around this. We need a long term solution to the MTA problem by April 1st 2019.

Lehrer: Let's take a question from Adam in Queens, that has to do with what the legislature might do next now that they're democratic controlled. Adam, you're on WNYC with the Mayor, hello.

Question: Hello, Brian. Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Good morning.

Question: I just wanted to touch base with regards to recreational marijuana use where Governor Cuomo received significant donations on that level. His changing opinion – especially his report that came out in July I believe it was of this year, this election cycle with regards to it being a legitimate piece of action moving forward for the city government. That being said –

Lehrer: For the state.

Question: - Mr. Mayor, is there a way for the City Council to pre-legislate roll outs of a program that could very well be happening in the next 12 months? So can we prepare, instead of seeing areas where it was – fail, making it successful in areas, and create real job growth and green opportunity for local residents here.

Mayor: So it's a great question. I would say first I am not a lawyer but I do not believe there is a place for city legislation or city executive order or anything like that. I believe fundamentally this is a state legal matter and has to be addressed through state legislation.

I think there's a decent chance it will be addressed next year in Albany. But here is what I have said because I am still not 100 percent comfortable with the way that traditionally we have gone about major changes in our society without putting the proper regulations in place, the proper balance. Look at everything with the technology sector. I have a lot of respect for some of the good that has come from new technology but often times we've seen as with the sharing economy that a lot of the things that are needed in place to protect wages protect health and safety just weren't put in place and we were doing it way after the fact. I would say the same thing about autonomous vehicles. Where there's very little regulation and yet it keeps marching forward. I want to parallel that to marijuana. We have a chance to get it right. We know what happened that went wrong with the tobacco industry; we know what went wrong with the pharmaceutical industry with opioids. There was not enough regulation in place. Before we put legalization in place in New York State, why don't we actually figure out the things that are necessary to protect health and safety to avoid the corporatization of the industry so that we end

up having a huge amount of corporate money pushing a new drug, if you will, and not a brand new drug to people, but pushing the availability of the drug as they did so painfully with both tobacco and opioids. Why don't we make sure the economic opportunities I think you're pointing to this, that the economic opportunities actually reflect economic justice.

So rather than just saying open the doors wide to the private sector, do whatever you want. Why don't we put some ground rules in place to make sure that communities that have suffered from mass incarceration also have economic opportunity in this new industry?

Lehrer: And I think that's what the caller – part of what the caller is asking you to kind of pre-create in anticipation of state legalization.

Mayor: Yeah, Adam, I think you're on the right track. The difference again you mentioned City Council legislation. I don't think we do that. I think we can, we consistent with the question put together a vision, which I have my team working on now of all the things that need to be in place by the time the state acts, and present that as a vision for smart approach to legalization, smart regulation, getting ahead of the problems. That I think we can do and we're going to definitely do that in New York City, but what I want to emphasize is we all should recognize we've got a chance for makeshift first time in a longtime to get something right up front and we all should demand that those measures, those protections, are in place at the beginning.

Lehrer: Adam, thank you for your call. One other State Legislature issue now that the Democrats have the Senate, you know they were only like one vote away from New York State single payer healthcare, but after the election on Tuesday I had two Democratic State Senators in here and I said okay now we're going full steam ahead with New York single payer and they were like well, this is complicated, it's not going to be the first thing out of the box so – and you've endorsed this in the past, now that they could actually pass it, do you want to be more cautious?

Mayor: No, I think they should do it but look I do want to say, the amount of pent up energy – remember the State Senate has been in Republican hands for 50 - five-zero years - of the exception of two years and unfortunately those two years some unhelpful folks were involved in the leadership of the State Senate and not much happened that should have. This is the first time we have a chance to really get it right. We've got really fantastic leadership in the State Senate, particularly Andrea Stewart-Cousins, she has a great Deputy, Mike Gianaris from Queens, and others that I think are really going to step up but they have a huge number of items that have been waiting for a long, long time.

The things I mentioned, the strengthening rent regulation, addressing the MTA once and for all, addressing educational issues more foundationally, all that stuff didn't happen under the State Senate Republicans, so you're going to – of course we have to talk about election reform, campaign finance reform, that you just mentioned legalization as a huge issue with complexity, they do have to figure out what they can do in the first year versus what will take more time or what they can start versus what they can finish right away. I think single payer makes all the sense in the world. I think we just saw an election around the country, the last figure I heard were Democrats overall won about nine percent more votes than Republicans, nine percent nationally

is a huge, huge number, and why? Because the number one issue that Democrats put forward was the right to healthcare, making healthcare available, making it affordable, protecting those with pre-existing conditions, clearly the people of the State, the people of the country want to see progress on making healthcare more affordable. Single payer is the way to do it my view –

Lehrer: But you – but you – it sounds like you wouldn't prioritize it over or even equal with those things that you put on the list in your first answer, like the rent laws and the voting expansion, because you didn't mention it.

Mayor: Well I want to clarify part of the why, which is very specific to the law. Rent regulations are up for renewal that happens I believe it's every three years. Mayoral control is up for renewal. The MTA issue has reached an absolute urgent emergency point where this is the best single opportunity we'll have in a long time to address it and if we lose this window in 2019, I'm really worried about what would happen thereafter.

Lehrer: Okay.

Mayor: My prioritization is about both literal legal timelines and also the urgency of the matters. I think single payer is the way to go. If we can get that done now, that's great. If it's going to take more time, I understand, but it is the way to go and we should be able to achieve it now in New York State.

Lehrer: Ramona in Queens, you're on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio, hi Ramona.

Question: Good morning Mr. Lehrer, good morning Mr. Mayor, it's an honor to speak to both of you. I have a complaint. On Monday night my daughter comes, she goes mommy you have a lot of candy, you have cookies, maybe we could put it in a little bag and then in the train I could distribute them and tell the people vote, vote. So I ran away to get bags, and we did that, we bunched up a whole, like 150 little bags, and she took the F train to John Jay and she was giving them out and the people were happy, thank you, thank you. And two police officers stopped her, first they asked her for I.D., and my daughter is half Ecuadorian and half Lebanese Muslim last name, and she really thinks they stopped her because of that – because – I'm sorry, I'm very emotional about it –

Lehrer: It's okay Ramona.

Question: And they told her, stop doing that. And everyone came to her defense in the train because you're not doing it – she's not doing anything bad. Leave her alone. She is pushing us to go to vote with a little bag of cookie and candy. Leave her alone. And these were two police officers on the F train.

Lehrer: And you think she was profiled right Ramona?

Question: What?

Lehrer: You think she was profiled because of her appearance?

Question: Yes, yes, yes.

Mayor: Okay, Ramona, I'm so sorry that happened. The story that your describing to me – if someone is trying to encourage their fellow New Yorkers to vote, and you know, they are doing it in obviously such a positive way, I don't understand why there would be any action taken against such an individual. I wasn't there, I didn't see all the details, but from the story you are telling it does not make sense to me. What I would like you to do Ramona, please provide your information to WNYC, we'll do a follow up with the NYPD to understand what happened there.

No one should ever be profiled and I obviously hope and pray that is not the situation because we train our officers very clearly, we've retrained the entire police force explicitly not to profile and to work with everyone, and I think the NYPD is doing that more and more. We're doing implicit bias training for all officers, explicitly to get at any underlying issues. All of us have some form of bias, and all of us need to have it addressed, but I will say that does not – that's not consistent with the NYPD is doing today, but in this instance I understand why it is so upsetting to you and I really want to thank you and your daughter for trying to encourage people to vote. So please get your information to WNYC so we can follow up and see what happened here.

Lehrer: Ramona thanks, and hang on we will take your information off the air if you want to follow up. Mr. Mayor, we have some breaking news, I don't know if you've heard this yet but the Wall Street Journal just dropped a story – headline, New York's MTA chairman Joe Lhota resigns. Did you know he was doing that?

Mayor: I just heard myself. Look I think the bottom line here is there's clearly a lot of other leaders at the MTA who can carry forward the work. But no one is going to be able to get the work done of fixing our subways and buses if we don't have a permanent funding source. So I wish him well and the other folks there I think can do the job but they need a plan from Albany and the other thing is they need accountability. I mean one of the things that did not happen in the last few years sufficiently was clear accountability about how money was spent including the money the City has contributed to the MTA. We still would like to see a lot more detail to confirm that that money was used to address the problems in the subway. There's obviously bigger issues like East Side Access that you've seen a huge amount of money, cost over runs, and delays that need to be addressed. So something more fundamental needs to change in the MTA going forward but most especially we need a permanent funding source.

Lehrer: Acting, sorry – named as the acting chairman for the moment is Fernando Ferrer, the MTA's current vice chairman and the former Bronx borough president. That's not a permanent appointment but any comment on Fernando Ferrer running the MTA for now?

Mayor: Yes, Freddy Ferrer is a very, very good public servant. I wish he had been mayor. I supported him when he ran back in '05 and I think he would have been a good mayor so I clearly think he will have the ability to keep the MTA moving forward. He knows New York City like the back of his hand. He understands the lives of everyday New Yorkers. So I think he will be able to do a lot but again the bigger questions are getting the permanent funding and creating a

culture of accountability that still doesn't exist with the MTA and that we need so that the public really can have assurance that the money that goes in is used effectively.

Lehrer: Claude in Manhattan you are on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello Claude.

Question: Hello guys, good morning. Thank you for taking my call. I should preface this by saying I've been a follower, I've been listening to Michael Hudson for a number of years now and an idea that he's brought up on many occasions in his interviews is that with the City investing our tax money in infrastructure, the Second Avenue subway. I mean there is probably a list of you know ways the City has improved the infrastructure, which has allowed land lords to raise their rents. And after they raise their rents these landlords still are not paying, arguably, probably their fair share of taxes. And the City could be coming back on these guys and then say, hey you guys have raised your rents because we've improved the infrastructure of the city and your tenants are paying it, now we are going to take this money back from you and put it back into the system. And there you could have a big chunk of change from that I believe to help improve the MTA.

Lehrer: Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Well Claude, great minds think alike I mean that's basically the millionaires' tax. That's basically the same concept of saying that those who have done very well should contribute more to the MTA which is vital for all of us. And obviously look the folks who happen to own companies and own buildings, all of their employees, all of their tenants all depend on the MTA. It's part of the ecosystem, you know folks who are wealthy have benefited from it as well in many ways. I think they need to pay their fair share. So I think this is the way to get at it and I've continued to believe it's the single best way to address the issues of the MTA.

Lehrer: Thank you for your call Claude. Here's a question coming in on Twitter. Oh where did it go? Just flipped off of my screen – well I'm going to paraphrase the gist – it's what if any incentives has the City offered to Amazon to move to Long Island City? And I'm going to back out of the question for one prior question, for background. Amazon for listeners who don't know is reportedly choosing Long Island City as one of two places in the US to locate a major new headquarters with 25,000 jobs. So Mr. Mayor, has this been confirmed to you yet as a real thing by Amazon or anyone?

Mayor: Amazon continues to be clear that they have not made a final decision. And I want to respect their process. We've had many, many conversations with them but they have not made a final decision. Now, I want to frame this and say I believe strongly that this will have a positive, deeply positive impact on New York City and our future. That Amazon, you know, we don't know if it's one headquarters or two headquarters they are creating. We do know we are talking about tens of thousands of quality jobs in any circumstance. This will in my view, consolidate New York City's role as an international technology hub. We've been growing, growing, that's an ecosystem if you will and economic ecosystem that already has hundreds of thousands of jobs. We have an opportunity to take it much, much farther. Given Amazon's prominence, given the scale of what they are talking about here. I think it will consolidate our position and help

secure the city's economy for the long term. But just alone when you are talking about adding tens of thousands of high quality jobs, that's a huge impact.

If it is in Queens, if it is in Long Island City, I think it has a tremendously positive impact on the future of Queens as an economic hub and a place for new jobs to be created. So there's a lot here that's very positive. And look, what we are doing is we are working closely to make sure that sites are available that make sense both for Amazon and the surrounding community. And to make sure that for the broader community and this is really the crux of – if it is Long Island City, if it is Queens, this is an area that has seen extraordinary growth, in many ways very productive growth over the last years, we are going to need to address real infrastructure needs in the community. We would either way, Amazon or no Amazon. But we have a lot of infrastructure investments we have to make to address the future needs of the community. And I think everyone is focused on getting that done. The City of New York does not do direct corporate subsidies. My administration ended that practice. The State has, as I understand it by state law, effectively an automatic structure for providing certain tax incentives when new jobs come to the state. And that apparently is applied to any company that brings new jobs to the state. So that would be a part of the picture here. But you know, in the past the City used to do direct corporate incentives and tax breaks and things. We do not do that anymore.

Lehrer: So you think that because of the state program, your refusal to do that would not be an impediment for Amazon to locate here. Because if the reality is that in the real world, these tax break bidding wars between cities do exist even though they are grotesque, we would all agree when it comes to giving a lot of money to very profitable corporations out of tax payers' pockets, but these tax break bidding wars do exist between cities so if we lose all of those jobs and presumably much more tax revenue then the tax break would be to Dallas or somewhere – are you prepared for that loss or do you think the state law prevents it?

Mayor: One, this is a matter of both recognizing both New York City's strength today and avoiding as you said that kind of, that kind of bidding war that unfortunately often hurts a lot of different places involved. But the number one reason, you know my view is the number one reason for Amazon to come here – this is my personal opinion, is the talent that's available in New York City, which I think is unparalleled in the nation. And I believe this was the number one reason they wanted to have an additional headquarters and not just be in one part of the country. So I think we really satisfy that concern, I think we have an environment with not only the most talent but the most diverse talent, obviously one of the world's great international cities which I think is important to them as an international company. I think there is a lot of great, great reasons to be here. It's a place where talented people want to be. So, we start with that strength but it's also just a philosophical matter of having watched all of those years of what you refer to with subsidies often I think unfortunately causing other, you know problems. We aren't doing that as a city anymore. I do think –

Lehrer: You're willing to take that risk then?

Mayor: In the sense that when I look at the whole picture, I think we are in a very strong position. That doesn't mean that the ball game's over. But again the State, look the State has made decisions long since about providing a basic level of support when a company comes in.

That is a fact on the ground and I think that is important to the equation. So we know that's in place and that's substantial. But I think it's everything. I think when you look at this whole process, and I obviously have some window on it from being briefed over the last months. A lot of different factors go into the decision — no one knows what their final decision will be but them. But a lot of factors go into it. What I can safely say is, we have what I think is the number one thing they want, which is an extraordinary talent pool and a place where talented people want to be. We know they would contribute greatly to New York City's economy, not just with all the jobs they would bring but with the bigger impact on our economy and our tech sector. So I think it's just a good fit and that's what wins the day in the end.

Lehrer: And there's one other thing about this that I want to ask you. There's some resistance to Amazon coming here at all because of all the gentrification that it would cause. We got some phone calls like that earlier in the week and I wonder how much is San Francisco, with even more expensive housing than here, apparently from all of those Silicon Valley jobs — how much is San Francisco a cautionary tale in any specific policy sense or if you even want it?

Mayor: Well, look that's a great question because we need to, we need to really examine the difference between us and San Francisco. San Francisco made the decision a long time ago, not to expand public housing, not to build up and create affordable housing on a substantial scale. By freezing in place what they had, and it's beautiful, don't get me wrong, it's a beautiful city but by freezing in place what they had, they created a path way to a city of an elite. There are still some working people and low income people and even some middle class people in San Francisco but more and more it's city for the wealthy. And that's because they did not have the kinds of things that we have that we are proud of. We have 400,000 people living in public housing, we have got a lot we have to do to make the public housing better but we are devoted as a city, have been for decades to the number one form of affordable housing, public housing. You know, that's 400,000 people, we have over two million people in rent regulated housing so their affordable housing is being protected, obviously our plan for building and creating new affordable housing will reach almost 700,000 New Yorkers.

It's night and day the difference here. The things I just mentioned to you reach over three million people ultimately versus San Francisco that did not have those protections in place. So I do think, look we have to keep building our economy. We learned that the hard way back in the '60's, '70's, and '80's, we have to build our economy, diversify our economy. A strong economy, a strong tax base, allows us to fund those affordable housing programs and to fix our public housing and do a lot of things that our economically diverse city needs. So I do think Amazon is part of helping us create a strong New York in the future but the absolute difference between us and San Francisco is we believe in economic diversity, we believe in ensuring there is a vast supply of affordable housing and unfortunately decades ago San Francisco went on a different track.

Lehrer: Aeliana in Brooklyn, you are on WNYC with the Mayor, hi Aeliana. Aeliana are you there?

Question: Yes.

Lehrer: Hi, you are on the air.

Question: Hi, my name's Aeliana. I'm a transgender New Yorker in Brooklyn. In 2011, I was the named witness in the Occupy Wall Street lawsuit, Norman Siegel one against the NYPD. I have since been arrested multiple times, ran over by an FDNY ambulance, it was a hit and run the day before graduating grad school, and then assaulted at the disability office by city workers while using the women's restroom. I'm in multiple law suits, my friends have created a petition for me which we brought to the Mayor's Office a couple weeks ago. I was hoping to get the Mayor's input on the situation, the FDNY continues to ignore the processes of court so I'm not even having a fair trial and it's a huge mess. Thank you so much for having me on.

Lehrer: Thank you for your question. Mr. Mayor, my understanding is that Aeliana's story was in the Daily News this summer, are you familiar with it?

Mayor: No, Brian actually I'm not familiar but Aeliana I'm very, very sorry for the things you've gone through and want to find out, you know what has happened and what we can do about it here because this is news to me. Aeliana if you will share you information with WNYC I will make sure that one of our senior folks gets to you right away and discusses with you what's happened here and what we can do about it. Obviously you know, a lot has changed in the way that for example the NYPD operates since the days of Occupy Wall Street in 2011, it was a very different time and we approach things very differently today. We made a lot of changes, a lot of reforms but I am very concerned about what you are saying and I want to make sure that we follow up right away.

Lehrer: So whatever petition she referred to to you didn't reach you?

Mayor: No, I have not seen that petition but I certainly look forward to seeing it and seeing what we can do.

Lehrer: Okay we are out of time except for one last question. Now that the midterms are over Senator Gillibrand was on Colbert last night saying she is considering whether to run for president in 2020, are you?

Mayor: I am Mayor of New York City. It's one of the best public service jobs anywhere in the world. And obviously we are getting a lot done here in the city which I am proud of. That's what I am focused on. I got three years and two months more and that's what I am doing?

Lehrer: That's not quite ruling it out is it?

Mayor: You know, look I can only say about the time after being Mayor, I intend to continue in elective office if there is an opportunity to do so but my focus is on being Mayor of the city for the next three years and two months.

Lehrer: So after being Mayor, not 2020?

Mayor: That's the plan.

Lehrer: Mr. Mayor, thanks as always, good luck with the meetings in Puerto Rico, thank you for joining us. Talk to you next week.

Mayor: Thank you very much Brian, take care.

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