



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. We will have Mayor de Blasio on with us in just a minute for our usual Friday Ask the Mayor segment, 10:00 am every Friday – my questions and yours for Mayor de Blasio at 2-1-2-4-3-3-WNYC, 4-3-3-9-6-9-2. If you want to get in or tweet a question just use the #AskTheMayor. The Mayor, as many of you know, has been at and near the Mexican border this week with the family separation issue front and center and with the revelations that hundreds of these separated kids have been brought all the way here to New York without him being informed.

You probably heard that Melania Trump went to the border yesterday to visit one of the shelters or detention centers, choose your term. FOX News host Laura Ingraham calls them summer camps. And there has been such a strong and puzzled reaction to the First Lady wearing a jacket to travel there and back to show how much she cares she took that trip. But the jacket had lettering on the back that said, "I really don't care. Do you?" What did it refer to? It's been a matter of speculation who, if anyone, that was a message to? Here's what the First Lady said she did care about when she got there.

***First Lady of the United States, Melania Trump:** I'm here to learn about your facility which I know you housed children on a long term basis. And I also would like to ask you how I can help these children to reunite with their families as quickly as possible?*

Lehrer: How I can help to reunite these children with their families as quickly as possible. That's what Melania Trump said she was there to learn. I'm not sure if she did learn anything along those lines. She could ask her husband. But that's one of things we will talk about with the Mayor now regarding separated kids who've been brought by the federal government here to New York. Mr. Mayor, welcome back to WNYC.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you, Brian.

Lehrer: What did you go to the border to see as Mayor of New York?

Mayor: Well I went to see what's happening to the kids who are being taken from their parents and that's being done in our name as Americans, that's being done with our tax payer dollars and it doesn't represent the values of New York City. It doesn't represent the values of this country and what was important here – two things really jumped for me, one that the federal government is denying access to these facilities to the media, to senators and congress members, to mayors, you know folks who are there to demand accountability on the behalf of the American people – uniformly being denied access. That's something everyone should be very concerned about in terms of democracy, in terms of transparency.

But second, on, I hope, a more positive side, I gathered with a group of Republican and Democratic mayors who are absolutely united in revulsion at the policy of family separation, who are all demanding that the families be reunited. And who represent what I think is a growing desire in the grassroots of this country to see comprehensive immigration reform because the absence of a decent and coherent policy is causing this kind of inhumanity and maybe this crisis is actually drawing out something, you know, morally and humanly that could lead to some bigger answers here.

Lehrer: You mentioned the transparency – I saw the NBC News reporter who's been their lead person at the border, Jacob Soboroff on Morning Joe just before you were on Morning Joe today, say they still won't let reporters in and he won't even broadcast anymore, the visual handouts that the government is giving because this is a public function, reporters should be allowed in to monitor as the press is supposed to do, what the federal government is doing in our name and they are not allowing that. They are giving photos, they are giving government produced videos and at least for him, he's not going to take it anymore. I heard you say on Morning Joe that you see a silver lining in a bipartisan response to the separation policy. Is there really a bipartisan response? You know, the polls I've seen say a majority of Republicans, that is Republicans around the country, not elected officials – regular Republican Americans support the policy.

Mayor: Well I do think there is some real bipartisanship. I mean to the first point, Jacob has done an outstanding job, as had so many members of the media here, demanding access. And I do think he's making a powerful point. When the government refuses access and tries to provide, effectively, propaganda that should remind us of governments we don't want here in this country and history we don't want here. So I think the outrage about the lack of information, lack of access needs to deepen because the executive order didn't change any of that and that's a threat to our democratic norms.

On the question of bipartisanship, yes I think it's profound. I'll tell you why. One, there's clearly a majority in this country that wants comprehensive immigration reform, there's clearly a majority that wants to see the DREAMers be allowed to stay, there's clearly a majority that wants to see these families reunited in this current crisis. That's what matters here and the fact is, I do want to say that there have been a number of prominent Republican voices that have spoken out in this crisis. There has been a number of faith leaders across the spectrum including faith leaders who happen to be more conservative politically who have spoken out. So, something is going on here that is different than the normal drawing of lines that we have seen too often on the immigration issue. I think that is what needs to be pressed right now is that there is a critical mass growing that says we have now entered an unacceptable place. The broken, larger policies

have led us as a nation, as a government to do things that just aren't moral and don't reflect the values of this country.

And I'll tell you on the final question alone, this is a nation literally founded by people fleeing religious persecution. And how many of our ancestors, especially as New Yorkers we know this, were fleeing oppression or poverty or persecution? And now to see our government trying to turn away people who are fleeing violence, it just doesn't fit with our American values. And I think it's drawing out some real profound anger in people that is the kind of thing that actually leads to change.

Lehrer: I also want to say something about the racism that I see here. And for you and I having a conversation as two white men right now, I wonder what your take on this is? It seems to me, this is not something I could prove with statistics or anything, but history suggests that if this was white children being separated from their families, the country would be way more up and arms than it is right now. When it's brown kids, it's easier to look at this for many people, for too many people, as kind of an abstraction and there isn't the same response.

Mayor: I have two feelings when I hear that. The first is, there is no question that you are right, the entire Trump project literally began with the attempt to paint Mexicans and Latinos as the other, as something negative and lesser which is horrifying on its face and it's particularly horrifying given that in a few decades this will be a country that the largest ethnic group will be Latinos and we should be proud of ourselves as Americans, as Americans proud of all of our people, and it's self-hating ultimately to be so negative towards our Latino brothers and sisters. So there is no question what the President has tried to evoke here is a sort of creation of the great other. And unfortunately you know, that's something that has not been fully addressed in American society and culture. And you're right that people in the majority still don't feel enough connection to people who are not like them.

But that said on the other side of the spectrum I think this is powerful. Again when you see this kind of moment, something definitional is happening here. This kind of outcry – and it was a sufficient outcry that backed the President down immediately in terms of him feeling that he had to do the executive order even though I don't believe the executive order ends the issue by any stretch. But the outcry was profound – the outcry was clearly across all demographics. It may not be universal but something happened here that drew out a different kind of emotion from people across the spectrum and I think that is something to be celebrated. I think for a lot of people they say this as a human imperative that these kids must be brought back to their parents. A lot of Americans did not react based on race or nationality. They say it as a human reality. And that shows something good about this country.

Lehrer: What do you make of Melania Trump's trip and her question in the clip we played just before you came on about how to reunite the kids with their families. Is there a federal mechanism that you know of and is there a New York City one that you can control or influence?

Mayor: Well you know, obviously it's surreal that the First Lady of the United States is asking the question rather than demanding that her husband give us all the answer. By the way, very striking that previous First Ladies gathered together and played such an important role in this, in

addressing this crisis. But here, I think is the core of this, the executive order by the President did not answer the fundamental question – how and when will these families be reunited?

We don't even know the actual number. We're assuming now it's 2,000-plus kids who have been taken away. But given that so much of this is happening in the dark, it could be a much greater number.

The mechanism, I think, is pretty straightforward. The federal government took these kids. They can reverse the process and bring the kids back to their parents but we have no guarantee they're going to do that. Repeated efforts by the City of New York to get clarity about where the children are, who they are, what they need, how they will be reunited with the parents – we're getting no real answer. So, what we're trying to do is create the legal support both for the kids and the parents and that's literally thousands of miles apart.

So, we're working with folks down at the border to get legal help for the parents while we're making sure the kids have lawyers here to hasten that process of individual reunification in the absence of any real policy. But I'm very interested in this point, Brian, that no one took the bait the other day. The President signed the executive order and I can tell you the Republican mayors I was with at the border yesterday, none of them saw that as sufficient nor did the Democrats. No one, it seems to me, fell for sort of a non-answer to the question. Everyone is demanding an actual plan with actual deadlines for reuniting. And if the federal government won't do it, we're going to try and do it case by case to help these kids get back to their parents.

Lehrer: Do you have any more of the demographic breakdown of the children brought here, first of all, the total number of kids in New York in this situation, and how many from which countries, how many boys or girls, what ages, anything like that?

Mayor: Yeah, I have some of that. So, I was at the center in East Harlem and I, again, want to commend those folks there at the Cayuga Center and the other nonprofits that are just trying to help these kids.

They are – and I think people should really understand that. This is a broken federal policy, blame the federal government. Don't blame the social service providers who are trying to help the kids under adverse circumstances. So the folks at the Cayuga Center were very forthcoming, very open and transparent, took me to a classroom. There, for example, about 30 or 40 kids, almost all of them from Guatemala. I would say they're mainly in the age range of like six to ten years old.

But what we heard overall – so, this is absolutely Central American kids, almost no Mexican kids despite again so many strange stereotypings going on out there. It's Central American families that fled what is obviously a very violent environment, tragically. It is all kids in the case we're talking about now who were taken from their parents. So, some people have said, oh is this unaccompanied minors? No. At the center in East Harlem, the 239 kids were there that day, almost all Central American, all of whom were taken from their parents, most – not teenagers, younger than that. That's what I think we're seeing all over and the numbers at this moment in

the city, we know in addition to that center there are two others so we don't have an exact number but I would assume we're talking 300-plus kids in the city at this moment.

Some came in after the executive order was signed and we're literally trying to get the federal government to just give us those basic answers so we can provide the right support and make sure these kids are being cared for properly.

Lehrer: Rough ratio of boys to girls, any idea?

Mayor: Well, the classroom I saw was pretty mixed. I didn't see a lean one way or another but we don't have the overall numbers.

Lehrer: Why from New York – or, rather, why to New York from so far away as a decision on where hundreds of these kids should be relocated when their parents are probably somewhere near the Mexican border? Any idea?

Mayor: Yeah, I do have an idea and it points out how arbitrary and ad hoc this whole policy was. Now again, this is kind of classic Trump and classic Jeff Sessions. And Jeff Sessions has an almost feral hatred of immigrants and it kind of begs this fundamental question like who are these people that hate immigrants and hate our immigrant traditions so much that they forget that their own ancestors came here often under very humble circumstances.

So, this was thrown together, this family separation policy with no preparation for trying to figure out where kids would go that made any sense. And so what happened according to the folks in the Cayuga Center, it made sense, was that there were not a lot of places near the border that had this ability as organizations to provide the social services and provide a setting for these kids or had enough foster care placements.

That's something that's more typical in bigger cities. And I mentioned the case of this young man, Eddie from Honduras, nine years old. Here's a classic example. His mom and he were in Eagle Pass, Texas – that's 2,000 miles from here. He was taken from her, put on a bus with a federal escort to go 2,000 miles into a country he knows nothing about, and put into a foster family here, and no idea when he's going to see his mother again.

That is because they didn't have – the federal government did not have other alternatives ready. They didn't have a plan. They didn't apply this policy once they had a plan. They just applied the policy arbitrarily and it's going to keep being like this until they reverse the policy fully and say family reunification has to be done on an urgent basis. Otherwise they have no choice but to send kids thousands of miles away.

Lehrer: I gather the Trump administration also did not tell the embassies or the New York consular offices of Guatemala or the other countries where the children originally came from that they were coming to here. Is the City working with those consular offices that exist in the city in any way to identify and reunite the kids?

Mayor: We work with them on many fronts and we certainly will on this as well but they're as much in the dark as we are but more importantly they don't have any agency here, unfortunately, to have an impact. The real – the impact we can make is through our own legal system which is still functioning despite the many efforts of Trump to undermine our democratic process. The courts have been often the corrective. So, it's getting both parents and children lawyers and using the legal process to force the question of reunification in the absence of a coherent federal plan.

Lehrer: Listeners, I apologize that I'm taking so much time with the Mayor, myself, today before we get to you calls but this is a unique situation. We're in this child care crisis where thousands of kids, what many of you probably agree is a moral crisis, a moment of moral crisis in our country and New York has become one of the central locations where this is taking place and obviously the Mayor is involved.

And I'm going to ask you one more question before we go to some calls and that is – we have many listeners no doubt who would like to help these children in one way or another while they're here. I see you're suggesting donations to something called the Mayor's Fund. So, what's that and what else can people do as individuals?

Mayor: Yeah, the Mayor's Fund is our umbrella city charity that helps, among other things, in times of crisis. For example, it played a very big role in helping folks in Puerto Rico after the hurricane. So, anyone who wants to donate to help these kids who are here now, can call 3-1-1 or go online nyc.gov/fund. Right now, what's needed most is financial support for these legal services to help reunite these kids and for the organizations that are providing the kids with direct help right now.

There appear to be enough foster parents available now but again we don't know where the situation is going. At some point there may be a need for more foster parents as well. So, New Yorkers have been very generous as usual in response to this crisis and that's a way that people can help right now.

Lehrer: And one last thing, our reporter Beth Fertig has been talking on the air about how the presence of protesters, even though they're at some of these facilities to support the children, may be doing more psychological harm than good, that various politicians and groups are still planning protests outside facilities that take the children but lawyers say the protests and the presence of police that the protesters attract is extremely frightening to the children –

Mayor: Yes.

Lehrer: Do you think people should continue protesting at these sites or back off and pick other locations?

Mayor: I would urge everyone, pick another location. I mean the good news here is that voices of protest are being raised all over the country. So, there's no absence of activism on this issue. I think what people are doing is nobly intended but let's get away from those centers.

There have been threats to those centers which I understand what people are feeling but it's absolutely backwards to go after the people who are trying to help the kids and yeah, we have had to put up police presence to protect people who work at the centers and the kids themselves. So, yeah, let's separate protests. Focus it on the government agencies that are doing this.

They're really easy to find. Go focus the energy there. Let's give these kids some peace.

Lehrer: James in Manhattan, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Thank you for your patience.

Question: Hello?

Lehrer: Hi, James. You're on the air.

Question: Hi. Thank you for taking my call. Mr. Mayor, I'm calling because I am a disabled New Yorker and I have been trying to get help for a very long time and not been successful. And I [inaudible] nobody has returned my message and that was many months ago. And I'm calling because I'm in a very bad situation in terms of accessing services. And I'm wondering if you can put me in touch with somebody specifically who can help me?

Mayor: Yes, James, I'm very sorry for what you are going through and I'm upset to hear that the Office for People with Disabilities did not respond, that's unusual and I don't know why that happened and we'll make sure that's fixed immediately. Please give your information to WNYC and I will have someone get with you today, right away, to see how we can help.

Lehrer: Khadija on Roosevelt Island, you are on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello Kadija.

Question: Hi, Brian. Hi, Mr. Mayor. Thank you for having me. My question is that I really appreciate your outrage about the 239 kids that were in the East Harlem facility and it also happens to be about the amount of kids who continue to be remanded into New York City foster care. And my question is what protections are being put into place for the families that find themselves labeled at-risk by the metric base management that David Hansel is implementing since he became Commissioner?

And in particular share the concerns that Gladys Carrion expressed at the May 2016 White House Hackathon that predicted analytics and the child welfare system that exclusively serves black and brown children in families, will be widening the net under the guise that we're trying to help them, and she was concerned about how it would stigmatize them. So I was wondering if you could just speak a little about how your outrage about the ICE deterrent removal policy translates to our City's foster care system.

Mayor: Khadija I appreciate the question and you're raising a very important point of how do we make the right choices about foster care and what to do with a child, in many cases, unfortunately, that might be in some distress or danger in our own city. It is always – it's literally an individual decision each and every time how to handle those cases. I'm not familiar with the predictive analytics question to be straightforward but I do want to emphasize to everyone that there are real checks and balances in any decision about whether a child needs to go into foster

care starting with our Administration for Children's Services but also the court system's involvement so there's an independent element of the court system playing a role in these decisions.

I would like to note, foster care has been greatly reduced in recent years and that is something that's actually a good thing happening in our society, there's been a real effort of course to keep families together whenever that can be done. But, at the same time some families go through real trauma and breakdown, some kids are in real dangers, you know, foster care is something we need to have when we need to have it. But I think the bigger trend, the bigger reality is, it's something that is being used less than it was just a few years ago and we want to, particularly with preventative services and other approaches, to help families in place. We want to find ways to support a family when they are in crisis but we have to retain the option that if the crisis is too great, and the child might be in danger, foster care always has to be a fallback.

Lehrer: Pat on Staten Island, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi Pat.

Question: Hey, good morning. Good Mr. Mayor. Good Morning Brian.

Lehrer: Hi Pat.

Question: [Inaudible] caller. I met the Mayor at the Staten Island Open Borough Hall. I discussed Vision Zero and how come there hasn't been a single social media post about people driving with cell phones mounted on their windshield and handicap tags hanging from their mirror? It literally costs zero dollars to make people aware that driving with things on their windshield is illegal and dangerous. How come so much talk about speed cameras and we can't do a simple thing like that? And also every school in New York City should have a raised crosswalk. Europe does it, Morocco does, they do it all over the world, raise the crosswalks. Not speedbumps, just enough to get the pedestrians six inches higher, it doesn't make sense. Spend the money on things that can be done in the immediate, short-term future.

Lehrer: Mr. Mayor?

Mayor: Well I remember – I remember Pat from the open house at Borough Hall in Staten Island and I think he is making a really good point. The raised crosswalk point is a very interest one, I'm not an expert on transportation design, but that's one that I'm going take back and see if that is another piece of what we need to do. It – you know, I want to be clear since we're in the middle of this crisis in Albany on the speed cameras, we've got to get a resolution on this.

Speed cameras around schools have been really outstanding in terms of protecting kids' lives and protecting them against injury. There's been real facts here, 60 percent reduction in speeding around schools because of the presence of speed cameras. Right now it all comes down to the State Senate. The State Senate has to come back and follow through on this issue. The Assembly has already passed the legislation related to speed cameras. If the Senate doesn't act, a lot of kids are going to be in real danger, so the Senate has to come back and deal with it.

To Pat's point, I'm going to pursue the raised crosswalk idea too. I think it's a very interesting one. On the question of the cellphones – we really are trying to crack down on folks texting while driving, that's becoming more of an imperative for NYPD in terms of enforcement. It – some things, I followed up at the time, I know there are some ways you can mount cells in a car appropriately. There are others are not, including for for-hire vehicles. I'll follow up on that Brian and have a more detailed answer for next time.

Lehrer: Pat thank you for your call. And of course it's not an either or, it's not all the things that he raised or speed cameras, what would you say about the failure of the State Legislature before they adjourned for the year this week, to not only expand the number of speed cameras around schools, but even renew the existing program? Are you going to have to take them down at the end of July?

Mayor: Well, let's be really clear the State Legislature has two houses and the Assembly did everything that was necessary to protect the people of New York City and they dually passed legislation to continue the speed cameras we have and add new ones and protect a lot more kids. It is the State Senate that has failed to act and the Senate has to come back and pass that legislation. It's as simple as that. It would take them a matter of hours to get it done.

I think this is becoming a really big issue. Particularly the parents of the family members who've lost loved ones to traffic crashes have really made their presence felt on this issue. But it's another example of one where public consciousness has grown intensely the last few years. People want to see their kids safe, their grandchildren safe, they want to see these school zones protected and I think it would be appalling if the Senate doesn't act and we have, you know, another month or so for this to get resolved, but it shouldn't take that long. It should just come back and pass the obvious legislation to protect our kids.

Lehrer: Let me follow up something from last week's show before we run out of time. We had a caller representing Success Academy charter school students trying to get middle school seats at the P.S. 25 building in Bed-Stuy, and you said you'd see to it that they get a meeting with a high level Education Department official right away.

This morning I got an email from an advocate for that group saying nobody from the DOE has reached out and beyond that it describes about how a bunch of parents from the school went to a meeting on Wednesday night of the school system's Panel of Education Policy, controlled by you, and the email says the board went into executive session to discuss the closure of P.S. 25, they came out and made no announcement. After the meeting two Success people tried to approach a PEP member and Chancellor Carranza and were prevented by security from introducing themselves. This says this how PEP meetings usually work, non-transparent, closed behind – behind closed doors, what can you tell those parents?

Mayor: I'm not familiar with the details, but I can say the history has been very clear. PEP meetings often go very long. There is a lot of public dialogue. This Chancellor has gone out of his way to meet with parents, including from a number of charter schools, he said very clearly is ready to meet with folks from Success Academy and tour their facilities. So I don't know what specifically happened but I do know what normally happens.

And look, of course we want these parents – these parents, they, you know, they are part of our school system too. Their kids are part of our city, part of our schools. We want to address their concerns. I don't know why the follow up meeting didn't happen, I'll tell people again today it needs to happen. But as I said last week, put aside my philosophical difference with Success Academy, a lot of times the message you get from the communications apparatus of Success Academy doesn't, in our view, speak to the facts.

We've consistently provided space to charter schools except where there was a specific policy, reason, or logistic, or legal reason where we thought it wasn't appropriate, and we're going to stick to that, making decisions, calling them as we see them. I don't know the nuances here, but I will again make sure that that meeting is set and if the folks who are reaching out to you, Brian, will – if you will help facilitate, I'll have my team follow up with you today and make sure that meeting happens immediately.

Lehrer: Thank you so much, and Mr. Mayor thank you as always. Talk to you next week.

Mayor: Take care now.

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