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

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

Brian Lehrer: It's the Brian Lehrer Show on WNYC. Good morning again, everyone. And it is time as it is every week at this time, about 11:05 am on Fridays, for our weekly Ask the Mayor segment – my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio at 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0, 6-4-6-4-3-5-7-2-8-0. Or you can tweet a question, just use the hashtag, #AsktheMayor. I will say precisely that it's 11:06 am right now. I don't want you to be late for anything. But, Mr. Mayor, welcome back to WNYC. Hello.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you very much, Brian. How you doing?

Lehrer: I'm doing alright. Am I saying right that you have ordered the words, Black Lives Matter, to be painted in large yellow lettering on the street on Fifth Avenue in front of Trump Tower?

Mayor: Exactly right, because, look, here's the bottom line, Fifth Avenue, you know, all the greatness of New York City, everything we celebrate, that was built largely with the labor of African American men and women over centuries and often labor that was not compensated the way it should have been, including labor that was enslaved if you go back far enough, a lot of the city built with slave labor. And so, you know, we got to come to grips with this history. We got to be blunt about it. And we got to show the president and the world that Black lives matter. And by putting it right at his doorstep, we're going to draw the attention of the world to it, and then go a lot farther. And part of what I talked about this morning, our Commission on Racial Justice and Reconciliation will have the explicit task of officially naming where structural and institutional racism exists in New York City and then putting forward the policies to tear it down, the changes that we have to make here and now to tear it down. But it begins with acknowledging that Black lives matter in the most public aggressive way.

Lehrer: The president, among other things, tweeted New York City police are furious. Do you have reason to believe the New York City police are or are not furious about painting Black Lives Matter on Fifth Avenue?

Mayor: First of all, the president has no clue what's going on in New York City. All he does, everyone knows it, his only trick – he's a one trick pony, he divides. When he doesn't know what's going on, he tries to divide. In fact, the police force in New York City today is majority people of color. Many, many African American members of the NYPD including some of our leading, top officials in the NYPD who believe that Black lives matter. There are many, many

officers who stand in solidarity of that notion of all backgrounds. So, the president has no clue what he's talking about. In fact, the goal here is to, by acknowledging the truth of American history, the original sin of American history, slavery, and the oppression of Black people and showing that we won't accept it in this day and age, is part of how we heal. That's why I think – you know, again, you think about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, it was about surfacing the sins, surfacing all the things done wrong, acknowledging them publicly and formally, officially, and then delineating everything that needed to change, and going and changing it. So, I think the fact is this is actually how you cleanse and heal. But when the president had a moment there to embrace the notion of Black Lives Matter in Washington, the plaza right outside the White House, here in New York City right at his own doorstep of his home, he could be doing something to heal the nation and embrace. Instead he spits on it and that's just who he is.

Lehrer: But does painting Black Lives Matter on New York City streets, ordered by you, suggest or not suggest that you think there is systemic bias in the NYPD?

Mayor: Oh, there's systemic bias in every part of New York City. And we're going to look at every City agency and we're going to look at every City institution and we have to address it. The fact is, I'll tell you something – I was with the folks who painted it in Bed-Stuy, the very first one. I was with the artists and Council Member Robert Cornegy, who started that initiative. I was with the folks in Staten Island, which was a very emotional, moving moment when we painted it in front of Borough Hall with the Council Member, Debi Rose, and so many of the activists who came to me at Gracie Mansion and said, this had to happen for our city to move forward. I believe acknowledging that systemic bias exists in all facets of government and business, and then saying, let us come up with the specific ways to change it and then do it. Actually, I really believe that this is the moment in history where people can see and embrace that, and then go through that tough exercise. And, boy, South Africa went through the toughest after a war, a civil war. They did it and it brought them forward. We're going to do it here.

Lehrer: Jo, in the Bronx, you're on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio. Hello, Jo.

Question: Hi, Mayor de Blasio. I'm calling from the Bronx, New York. And I just really wanted to ask you about your plan to listen to the demands that are being put forth right now about defunding the NYPD and taking at least \$1 billion from the NYPD and putting it into social services organizations and organizations for children and youth. I know a lot of these organizations are in jeopardy right now, due to COVID-19 and budget cuts. And I think a lot of citizens are just really concerned that so much money is put into the NYPD despite, like you said, all of this systemic oppression within that organization, and not enough money is being put into other community building efforts that are really doing the work. So, could you please share your plans for dealing with this?

Mayor: Yeah, Jo, thank you very much for the question. And just a quick preface. We have now been redistributing tens of billions of dollars over the last six years. Separate from the question of the NYPD, I'm going to answer your question, for sure. Tens of billions of dollars to communities of color, to people who were not getting their economic fair share. Whether you're talking about Paid Sick Leave or pre-K, 3-K, or afterschool programs or guaranteed health care –

only city in America that guarantees health care to all our people – affordable housing programs, rent freezes. I want to be clear that I'm a believer in redistribution. And I think, honestly, a lot of that didn't necessarily get the attention it deserved given the sheer magnitude. You're talking understandably about a billion, I'm talking about before that tens of billions moved into the hands of people of color and working people.

But right now, we're having a very productive conversation with the City Council. I'm not going to name a final dollar figure because [inaudible] that through. I think that the balance here, Jo, is we want the maximum we can get to those youth organizations that have been through hell. You're absolutely right. We need them. I want us to go a lot farther in supporting youth organizations. I got to make sure that I believe we are leaving the NYPD with the capacity to keep us safe, especially as we're dealing with, unfortunately, more and more shootings lately. But I agree with you that one of the root-cause things to do is to support youth organizations. Another is to support the Cure Violence Movement, which is a grassroots way of stopping violence. So, we're going to do both. So, I am convinced in the next days, I'm very hopeful that we'll get to a positive outcome with the Council, a major shift of funds from the NYPD to youth services and other community needs. The specific approach, the specific dollar figure, is still being worked through. But we, I think, are moving in a very good direction.

Lehrer: Follow up. Excuse me, follow up question, I think, from Vaughn in Brooklyn, who says she's on her way to the protest at City Hall Park. Vaughn, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello.

Question: Hi. Hi, it's an honor to speak to you. I actually just arrived at City Hall Park. And I wanted to ask you if you will commit to just – to defund at least \$1 billion from the NYPD and reinvest it in the community in terms of safe housing, specifically going to Black communities within the city limits, and also removing cops from schools. We need to make, like, way less criminalization issues here. We're just calling for – I know the City Council have already committed to this fund \$1 billion, and I want you to commit to that too. You can do better. And we believe in that.

Mayor: Thank you very much, Vaughn. Vaughn, look, I said to the previous question, we have been a hundred percent, for six years, redistributing money to communities of color and that – on a vast scale, tens of billions. And, in fact, in terms of schools, greatly reducing suspensions, putting restorative justice initiatives in place, which are a much better alternative to suspension. Absolutely believe we can do a lot more in that vein –

Lehrer: But not redistributing, Mr. Mayor, from the NYPD whose budget has been going up? Fair?

Mayor: Wait, wait, wait. I, again, the redistribution means – and, Brian, I think this is important. Redistribution of City funds from all other purposes, by definition, to communities of color – look at pre-K, look at 3-K, after school programs, affordable housing programs, rent freeze, look at all these things and look at the impact. Juan Gonzalez did this a few years ago, he did an assessment of the tens of billions that had moved to communities that had not gotten their fair share. This has been done on a vast level. No, of course, you're absolutely right, it didn't come

out of the PD budget. It came out of the whole City treasury across the board and was redistributed to communities that had not gotten their fair share. And we're going to keep doing that.

Vaughn's question – Vaughn, we're working with the City Council right now. We don't have a final dollar figure, but we're going to do something very, very substantial. We'll know more in the next few days. Yes, money will come out of the NYPD. Yes, money will go to youth programs. Yes, we're going to work on changes in the approach to schools, but we also have to keep schools safe because I've heard, Vaughn, from so many parents for years that even though they believe in things like restorative justice, and we've been deepening them and many parents agree with me, constantly reduce suspension, we still have a safety problem in schools that must be addressed. And we're working through the right way to do that.

Lehrer: Vaughn, since you just arrived at the City Hall Park, Occupy City Hall protest, will you set the scene for us? Will you play a reporter for a second? And – oh, Vaughn went away. Oh, too bad, okay. So, I can't get –

Mayor: Good try. Good try, Brian.

[Laughter]

Lehrer: It was worth a try. Well, let me ask you about that protest. Three nights now, I don't know the real numbers, but the organizers claim that over 2,000 people were there yesterday and that over 500 people slept there, over last night, night three. And that, you know, obviously they're there to support the same idea that the first two callers brought up, cutting a million dollars – a billion dollars from the NYPD in the new fiscal year, which begins next Wednesday. Have you gone out to, with social distance, talk with the protestors?

Mayor: No, but I'd be happy to talk to some of the protests. I don't think going out into the large crowd is the best way to have a dialogue, but I'd be happy to talk to some folks. I mean, look, what Jo just talked about and Vaughn just talked about, I've had that conversation with a lot of people, community leaders, elected officials, everyday New Yorkers. But I'm happy to have the conversation with more people. I understand deeply the impulse here and I have come from a progressive movement that's constantly wanted to move resources to human needs, whether it's nationally or locally. And again, that's what we've been doing for six years. I got to make sure the city will be safe. And we are working, unfortunately, against the backdrop of growing crime and violence. And we've got to deal with that, but I think we can make a really, really big move here and do something important and get a lot more money back to those youth organizations that desperately need it. But I'm really happy to talk protestors.

Lehrer: Before you were mayor, you went to Zuccotti Park to talk with the Occupy Wall Street protestors. Why, as mayor, won't you meet with the people's movement occupying City Hall to lobby you?

Mayor: Well, as I said, I'm happy to meet with them. I just think there's a better way to do it than going into a crowd of 500 people. When you're mayor is different than what I've been in the past.

If we're really going to have a dialogue, let's have a dialogue. I've been all over the city, for weeks now, seeing what's going on with the protests firsthand, right up close. But if there's going to be a chance to have a real dialogue about people's concerns and also the things I'm trying to account for in this budget – look, right now, Brian, these issues are huge. But I'll tell you having talked to lots of New Yorkers out in the streets, at the same time, we've got 1.3 million people unemployed. We've got people desperately concerned about their economic circumstance, about their health care, about the future of this disease, about how they're going to pay the rent, how they're going to get food. We have to put all of that into the budget process and make sure those priorities come first, and we preserve safety, and we do the work of justice. So, there's a lot going on, but I'm more than happy to have that conversation with some of these protesters because I know they're trying to do something good and important, and they're motivated by the right things.

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

Question: Oh my gosh, thank you for taking my call. Gosh, what I'm about to say seems so frivolous compared to the discussion that's going on right now, all across the country and the world. However, I just graduated two high school students. My kids are finishing their public school education and one of them goes to a DOE school. The other one goes to a CUNY high school. He was able to get in to get his stuff out of the locker, but the one who goes to a DOE school is not. And you can imagine they have all their stuff, the polite word of saying what's in your locker, from the year and they want it and we want them to have it. And the DOE, the Chancellor, the superintendent aren't doing anything to reunite our kids with their stuff. You helped us, Bill – and I'm a neighbor from Park Slope. You helped us last year to remove our principal who was not great. Can you help us get our kids into the school to get their stuff?

Mayor: Yes. Anne, thank you for the call. I did not know that, and, Brian, this is a great example of the glory of your show because hearing directly from people brings up whole new issues. Yeah, I could imagine, as a parent who had kids in high school not so long ago, that they'd be freaked out if they could not get their stuff. And I don't understand why we can't set up a system to do it. It'll probably be a little bit of a hassle and not necessarily happen overnight, but we can get it done. So, I will talk to the Chancellor directly, Anne. I don't understand why on Earth kids shouldn't be able to get their stuff back and let's figure out a way to do it. And I'm glad you told me.

Lehrer: Robin on Staten Island, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Robin.

Question: Hi, good morning, Mr. Mayor, how are you? I hope all is well with you and your family.

Mayor: Thank you, Robin. How are you doing?

Question: Hi. I'm good. I'm just calling to ask you to provide a little bit more detail to the claim of shifting funds from the NYPD to the youth services, you know, and kind of to stop politicizing our children and staff in the budget dance. You single handedly cut the SYEP program over the objections of the whole City Council and our City educators –

Lehrer: Summer Youth Employment Program.

Question: Yes. SYEP, the Summer Youth Employment Program. You can't just, as abruptly, drop an uncollaborated plan on us at the last minute. You know, there is staff to be reactivated, youth to be re-contacted and to reapply, we have to re-register work sites and a whole lot of things of that nature. So, we just really need a definitive plan and we need it very soon. So, we just are kind of asking for a little more details. When do you expect to have a plan in place?

Mayor: Cool, Robin, thank you. Thank you for the question. And since you do this work, I appreciate that you do the work. It really makes a huge impact on young people. And yeah, I will take issue – no one's politicizing or trying to be anything but straight forward. When we made the decision in April Robin, it was when this crisis, the health care crisis was expanding all the time. And we honestly did not believe we could possibly mount a Summer Youth Employment program. We just physically did not believe it was possible. And our budget was getting worse all the time. And as I've said, we were trying to focus on getting food to people, preserving people's housing, preserving their health. I mean, it was just a horrible, horrible moment. That then finally, after the budget in April started to get better and better. And now we're in a position to talk about restoring. We just weren't then. I truly believed that.

And now that with the conversation with the City Council we are working it through, and I know we and the Council are talking to providers and talking to advocates about how to do it. And what I think we're going to end up with is a certain amount that'll be online. And then anything that can be in person outdoors, we want to do as well. All contingent upon whether the health care situation continues to stabilize or improve. So, Robin, the answer is everything will be known by Tuesday, literally at latest. Because that's the last day for us to vote on a budget. And then we'll go, you know, energetically to get it in place quickly. And you're right, there'll be some lag compared to the past. But I think everyone is devoted to moving very, very quickly to get up and running, whatever we can. The online pieces can be really quick, anything in person will take more time. But I am convinced we can do something very substantial this summer. And I can't give you any detail until we finished the negotiation with the Council. But the vote will be Tuesday at the latest. The details will probably be out even in advance of that.

Lehrer: On those budget negotiations, I see the Daily News is reporting, and you'll tell me if this is true or untrue, according to you. That you're threatening to block hundreds of millions of dollars in discretionary funding for City Council members, the money they use as they see fit in their districts, discretionary funding, as they push for the billion dollar cut to the NYPD. If the story is accurate, it looks like retribution more than bargaining.

Mayor: The story is not accurate. So, there's your first point. No, this is ridiculous. Brian, right now we have \$9 billion less than we had in February, \$9 billion. It's a seismic amount of money. The City budget is shrinking constantly. And we're saying to all agencies, you have to make cuts. We're saying every part of the government. So, we simply aren't in a position to offer everything we did in the past, but no one's threatening anything. We're just having a dialogue with the Council about what's a fair number in light of a massive loss of revenue. No threats whatsoever, just a dialogue to figure out what's the right number.

Lehrer: Also, on the budget. I see you're threatening reportedly thousands of layoffs –

Mayor: It seems to be a theme here. No, that's not a threat. That is actually a budget – and it's tragic. It's horrible. That if we don't get another source of revenue, we literally have no choice, but to start cutting back our workforce, which I do not want to do one bit. So, I am trying to find another source of revenue. And there's only two places I can get it. Washington, which isn't acting and Albany, which could give us the borrowing authority to help us tide over. And I'm hoping to achieve that in the next few days.

Lehrer: But what I saw was thousands of layoffs, if the unions don't come up with their own billions of dollars or billion dollars in cuts.

Mayor: \$1 billion, right.

Lehrer: And Teachers' Union President, Michael Mulgrew says, that's a quote, thank you for your service moment. When the same people who staff the ambulances, created a virtual school system out of thin air, and more might lose their jobs. What's your response?

Mayor: My response is that I'm asking every union to help us achieve the borrowing authority in Albany in a matter of days. I want to remind you, Brian, after 9/11, then Mayor Giuliani went to Albany within days of the tragedy of 9/11, got the authority to borrow billions of dollars, no strings attached, unanimous vote of the Republican State Senate and the Democratic State Assembly. I'm simply asking for the Legislature to help us. They've been very receptive. We've had very good conversations. Give us the borrowing authority, so we don't have to turn to the layoffs. Now, in the meantime, some point this summer, the stimulus may solve all of this, let us pray it does. It should, as a matter of justice. The layoffs would not begin until October 1st. So, there's time to find the resources. But if I don't have borrowing and I don't have stimulus, I'm just out of options. We would still say to Labor, help us find a different kind of savings, and we wouldn't do layoffs. But we need them to come to the table and work with us.

Lehrer: And on head count or the Public Advocate Jumaane Williams was here yesterday. He wants you to cancel the police cadet class for this year. And therefore, shrink the NYPD headcount by attrition as people leave. He says threatening to shrink the civilian employee workforce while continuing to add police officers just makes the imbalance worse. Do you support canceling the cadet class?

Mayor: He, first of all, has not looked at what I said. And I would urge him to do so. The 22,000 layoffs, which again, we hope we'll never have to experience, is every single agency, uniform and civilian, period. And, you know, start with the assumption of the percentage each agency is of our budget, the NYPD you know, including the civilian employees, is over 50,000 people out of 380,000. It's a big chunk of the budget. So, if we got to that point of layoffs, it's going to affect the NYPD. It's going to affect all agencies. In the meantime, we're definitely talking to the Council about all ways to save money, all ways to shift resources from the NYPD to other needs. We're going to do something very, very substantial here. Again, we got to figure out what

preserves safety because unfortunately at the same time we're dealing with every other problem, we're dealing with an uptick in crime.

Lehrer: Is part of the negotiations you're having with City Council over how much to reduce the NYPD budget about headcount? Because that is one of the things that the movement wants, is just fewer police officers?

Mayor: Yes. And I respect the movement and I come out of movement politics myself. I think the central question is not just a movement demand, which I do respect, but now what government has to do understandably is say, okay, there's a demand. It is rooted in fairness and justice. I want to absolutely say that about the movement. We also have to factor in the safety issues. We have to factor in what's going to keep neighborhoods safe as we have a substantial uptake in shootings. And I'm hearing from a lot of people around neighborhoods, including many neighbors of color that they're concerned about the violence problem too. We have the issue in the schools where I want much more of a justice approach, restorative justice, you know, reduce suspensions constantly, et cetera, social emotional learning, all the things we've been doing. But I also do still have a violence problem in our schools. And I cannot ignore that. There's a lot of weapons that unfortunately have been collected in our schools that threaten kids. And so we've got to balance all these factors. A whole lot of different pieces are on the table, Brian. And I think – I really keep saying we're going to do something very substantial here. And I think there's actually a lot of agreement with the Council. But I want people to understand, I represent 8.6 million people. I respect the protest movement greatly, but I'm also listening to the concerns of parents, the concerns of working people in neighborhoods all over the city that are experiencing the increase in crime. We have got to balance all these pieces.

Lehrer: Larra, is your name like my name – in the Bronx?

Mayor: That's right. It sounds like the fix is in Brian.

Lehrer: That's right. Larra in the Bronx, or what is your name? Let me see if I got it right or wrong?

Question: It is Larra. You stole my bit. I always said if I was related to you, I'd be Larra Lehrer.

Lehrer: Is your last name spelled – is your first name spelled exactly like my last name?

Question: No, it's – my dad's name's Larry. So, it's L-A-R-R-A.

Lehrer: Oh right, Larra like that.

Question: But phonetically.

Lehrer: Yes. I do say the R at the end of my, just for the record.

Mayor: It's a beautiful moment, we brought everyone together.

Lehrer: We have covered it. Okay Larra, what's your question for the Mayor?

Question: Thank you for taking my call. And I appreciate being able to speak with you. I live in a little neighborhood in the Bronx Van Nest and we have one and two family homes, like immigrants and kind of older people and small families. And we are recently having some problems with kind of ever enlarging groups of young men that are speeding their dirt bikes, which I'm told are illegal to be ridden on the street, up and down our streets. They're doing wheelies. They're standing up, their girlfriends are on the back. They're kind of vandalizing cars. They're loitering. Last Friday night, we had a – I think the call was a brawl involving 15 people at 3:30 in the morning, which was this group of guys. When the cops show up, they kind of sit at the end of the block. They, my neighbors say that they say they can't do anything because they'll just drive off. So we need to kind of nip this in the bud before -- the fireworks that they're also firing off, burns down somebody's house. And we're just not sure what to do. It kind of feeds into this whole police conversation, I think. But this is what it looks like on the ground.

Lehrer: Larra, can I ask you how this feeds into the police conversation for you? Does it make you more skeptical of the defund movement or do you think they can coexist with solving the problems in your neighborhood?

Question: I think it goes hand in glove. I think that we need to police smart, right? Like, so you don't want to necessarily take – defunding the police if it's going into programs that are going to prevent loitering or what, you know, activity, that's what people do when they don't have stuff to do, works for me. Because that kind of preempts the problem. But I think the police should patrol. I think they should be able to be around if somebody asks for them to come.

Lehrer: Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Well, Larra said something, I think – Larra, thank you. You just summarized it. You know, after many, many years listening to New Yorkers in different roles, you kind of summarized what I think is the majority view in this city right there. People want to see more and more reform of policing, better policing, more sensitive policing, more respectful policing. They want to see when bad actors and the police do something that there's accountability. And that folks who shouldn't be police officers are no longer police officers. And we've got to keep showing all that progress constantly.

But also you still said, I think police should patrol. And I think that is the strong majority view. Folks want to know if there's a problem and they call, that someone will be there to help them. Brian, I remember in New York City decades ago, particularly in communities of color, when there were violent incidents, there were car thefts, there were burglaries and the police just didn't come. There used to be a reality of under-policing. Then there was a reality of over-policing. We have got to get it right, that when someone needs help, help is there and it's respectful and effective. So Larra please give your information to WNYC. I'm going to ask someone in particular to call you. He is the Chief of Patrol Fausto Pichardo. Who knows a whole lot about the Bronx. And I want him to hear your concern directly. I want him to make sure that your local precinct is being responsive and comes up with a way to address this. You're right the dirt bikes are not allowed. And what you just said, if there's people gathering and they start a brawl in the

middle of the night, that doesn't make anyone feel safe and you know, neighbors deserve to see that addressed. We got to have that happen. So the Chief of Patrol Fausto Pichardo will call you directly and make sure there's follow up.

Lehrer: So Larra we're going to put you on hold and you can leave your contact information off the air. I would just say to you that when Robin McNeil retired from PBS, after hosting the McNeil Lehrer NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, my parents said they should hire you and make it the Lehrer-Lehrer NewsHour. So, we just had it for two minutes with you. Thank you very much for your call and hang on and we'll take your contact.

Mr. Mayor, last question, coronavirus reopening. You're saying we're on track for a phase three a week from Monday, July 6th. At the same time, we're seeing record numbers of cases, as you know, in other states across the country and the beginning of hospital bed and ICU pressure like we did see here. Are you worried that we could backslide? And are you at all ambivalent that maybe now we're moving too quickly through these phases just a few weeks apart?

Mayor: Worried? Yes, not ambivalent. Everything was about data. And one of the good things that we've done in New York City is to every day, have the conversation with the people in the city about the data. So today we had really good data and it's been that way for several weeks now, very consistently. I'm knocking on wood as I say it. The most important question is how many people are testing positive. We have been hovering around two percent testing positive citywide. And Brian, importantly, as we constantly increase the number of tests, we're over 30,000 tests a day now. We're going to get to 50,000 tests a day soon. That's massive compared to where we were. And the number of people in the hospitals is, knock on wood again, not going up substantially. And very few are actual COVID cases. So right now I feel like New Yorkers are really handling this. They're very, you know, not perfect, but they're devoted overwhelmingly, to the social distancing, to the wearing the face coverings. The businesses that are opening or being really careful. I think we're good for phase three as of today. But everything is based on the data. And if things start to go the wrong way, we're going to freeze really quickly. And if we even have to take a step back, we would. It's just about watching it every day and communicating with people.

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

Mayor: Thanks, Brian. Take care.

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