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

Brian Lehrer: And now, as usual on Fridays, it's 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. Or you can tweet a question, just use the hashtag #AskTheMayor. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Happy New Year. Welcome back to WNYC.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, Brian. Happy New Year. And despite the bad we saw in Washington, our country's in a lot better shape than when we last spoke with a new president coming for sure and a Democratic Senate.

Lehrer: And you had to push this back by a few minutes from its usual time to here at 11:30 today, because you were holding a news conference. Did you make any policy announcement that people should hear you say as well around city?

Mayor: Yeah, what I announced is we are putting in place the apparatus on Sunday and Monday to begin vaccinating New Yorkers over 75, who are the most vulnerable New Yorkers. And first responders and essential workers. We announced the site that would be available and ready. But also had to acknowledge the State of New York will not legally allow us to vaccinate New Yorkers over 75 who are vulnerable nor essential workers. And we're just going to be ready on the assumption that the public outcry and the sheer facts and what our health care leaders are saying are finally going to break through to the State and that they're going to allow us to do this. So, we'll be ready on Sunday and Monday. But we're still fighting for the legal right. We're fighting for that freedom to vaccinate that we need.

Lehrer: And for people who don't know the background here, some of it is that some doses are apparently getting thrown away in some locations after frontline workers get their shots and the State won't let you give them to other people whose turn isn't officially here yet, like people 75 and up. So you said you're waiting for the State's permission and setting this up for Sunday or Monday to pressure them. Why not just do it? Like do it and ask for forgiveness later if you know what I mean, rather than ask for permission first?

Mayor: Look, I understand that. And I feel that, but here's the problem. I mean, as I understand some breaking news, just now that in the City of New Rochelle, which obviously was in the epicenter of the beginning of the crisis, they just proceeded to vaccinate first responders and essential workers. And the State of New York announced that they are fining that city and taking away their vaccine. Which is punitive, which is counterproductive, which is stopping vaccine from actually being used. You told that story, it's in the Albany Times Union is terrifying, of

local health officials upstate having to throw away vaccine, even though they had people immediately available to take the vaccine because State law would have literally fined them a million dollars, doctors' licenses would have been threatened. This is, I mean talk about arbitrary and capricious. That the State has to relent here. They've created a situation that's creating fear and confusion and where doctors can't act, even when they know someone's vulnerable. But we are going to have the sites ready on the assumption that reason will win the day. And we will finally get that authorization from the State.

Lehrer: Let's take a phone call and I think it's related. Anthea in Manhattan. You're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Anthea.

Question: Hello. I know, I'm 89. My husband is 90. We live on our own and we need to be vaccinated. I want to know how – I've tried to look on the web but I'm legally blind so it's a bit difficult. I can only find appointments and things for health care workers. I need a phone number or website where I can really find out when we can be vaccinated as soon as possible?

Lehrer: We're going to give you that. We're going to give you that Anthea. Let me ask you one other question. Are you homebound or do you have the ability to go out to a vaccination site?

Question: We do both have the ability to get to – I'm legally blind, but I can get around. My husband is, he's okay. He can get around too.

Lehrer: You can go to a vaccination site, especially nearby I would presume. Mr. Mayor, can you help Anthea?

Mayor: Absolutely. Anthea, I'm very moved by what you're saying and exactly. This is exactly the point. You're 89 years old. We need to protect you. We need to vaccinate you. You should have the right to get vaccinated. The State has to approve it. But for everyone starting on Monday, we're going to have a phone number because we know there are seniors and others who need to make a reservation for vaccination, need to make an appointment by phone or for whom it's a lot easier to make it by phone. So, we're going to have a phone reservation system starting on Monday. And that is going to make it, I think a lot simpler. But right now, even with that system, unfortunately we're not legally allowed. It makes no sense. But I will say for all New Yorkers, if you qualify right now, because you're in that first category, health care workers or folks who live and work in nursing homes, et cetera, anyone can go to nyc.gov/vaccinelocations, nyc.gov/vaccinelocations to see all the locations. We started the week with 125 locations and are adding constantly. And the process for making an appointment. But I want to now go much farther. I want to be able to bring in everyone over 75, who wants the vaccine. Again, anyone can go to that website right now, to start knowing where the locations are. As soon as we get the authorization from the State, we're going to open up immediately to people over 75. And that phone system will be up and running on Monday.

Lehrer: Let me ask you about another point of priority. The US, I should say New York at the moment, is not prioritizing the jails and prisons, let's say just behind nursing homes, despite the rates of spread that have been associated with jails and prisons as congregate living facilities. Will you prioritize Rikers and other City jails higher than they have been?

Mayor: Unquestionably. If we get authorization from the State for what's called a phase 1-B, we're going to make a high priority of reaching everyone in our jail system, our Correction officers, our inmates, we want to reach everyone. We've gotten a small narrow authorization to do high risk detainees. And we're vaccinating 457 high risk detainees right now. But we are not authorized to vaccinate Correction officers. We're not authorized to vaccinate the rest of the detainees. We want to do everyone. But we need the State to give us the legal right to do it.

Lehrer: Ryan in Manhattan, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello. Ryan?

Question: Yes. I'm here. Hi. Hi Mayor. How are you? Happy New Year.

Mayor: Happy New Year. How are you doing?

Question: I'm well, thank you. My question is, I'm curious in your final term as mayor, how you're going to tackle the uptick in crime that we're seeing across the city? You know, with you know, everything that's been going on, I'm curious as we're rounding this corner with the virus, how you're going to tackle the crimes? Because I know a lot of people are scared and a lot of these people that are committing the crimes are then released right back out to do it again. So how in your final term are you in these final months going to make sure that New Yorkers continue to stay safe from this crime? And sort of fight back against what is going on and if you could give a specific example other than it's perfect storm, I'd appreciate it.

Mayor: I'll absolutely give a specific example. And thank you for the question. It's an important question. Look, six years we used precision policing and neighborhood policing in tandem to drive down crime consistently across all neighborhoods. It – clearly, the strategies work. We know that when there's a pinpoint problem, you put more officers there and you use strategies to address it. That's what we'll be doing in 2021 again. But this time we will have the advantage of, as soon as the vaccination efforts advance, including wanting to vaccinate police officers so we don't have so many out sick. When we have the full force available to us, which has not been the case for so much of 2020, we'll be able to do that precision policing a lot more effectively. When our court system is open, we're going to be able to move cases, which is going to stop some of the phenomenon that you referred to. There's going to be much more ability if someone has committed a crime to have the case adjudicated. And if they are meant to experience penalties, including imprisonment, that that will actually happen, which isn't happening right now. So, I am confident that the vaccine actually is the gateway to also solving the crime problem, because it will allow us to go back to the very strategies that worked absolutely consistently for six years.

Lehrer: Are you saying that people who've been arrested on charges of violent crime are being released because the courts aren't functioning?

Mayor: It's a mix, honestly. Clearly, we have folks who, because of – and I've said this real openly, I have concerns about the choices the district attorneys are making. And I have concerns about the court system functioning. I understand everyone's dealing with incredibly challenging problems. So, I want to really say that squarely, Brian. I feel for the folks in the court system, I feel for the district attorneys, everything they're trying to juggle. But we know there's a hell of a

lot of people who have a gun charge who still are out. We know there's a hell of a lot of people with a charge pending who are not going to trial because there aren't courts in session and there aren't grand juries and there's a host of things interrelated. So, whether someone is being held in jail awaiting trial, or whether they're on the street, the absence of the trial either way is a crucial factor. It's really – Brian, I don't understand why this doesn't get more attention. It's so central. If there's no consequences, if there's no outcome, by definition it is changing the reality on the ground. So, we need the vaccine. We need to see all the folks that work in the court system vaccinated. We need to see all the folks who work in the district attorney's offices vaccinated, all the folks who prepare the cases in the NYPD. We need to get the whole criminal justice system functioning again.

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

Question: Oh, hi. Good morning, Brian and hello, Mr. Mayor. Good morning and Happy New Year to you both.

Lehrer: Thank you.

Question: I'm –

Mayor: Happy New Year. How are you doing, Oded?

Question: Good. Thank you. I wanted to ask you, Mr. Mayor, a question regarding the existing pause that continues on the issuance of the awards of New York City parks capital construction projects by both your office of budget and your office of contracts. New York City parks projects that have been funded years ago by mayors, including yourself, council people, borough presidents, state and federal elected officials, and are a part of your austerity budget continue to be withheld by your offices. And permission is not being granted to the Parks Department to proceed with this work. As a business owner, this affects our small company, our employees who are now on unemployment, their families, our suppliers, and the communities throughout the city that had been waiting for their local parks and playgrounds to be reconstructed and brought up to current safety standards. During a time when we've seen how important our outdoor spaces are, we know that outdoor construction is an industry that can be performed in a safe low-risk manner to prevent the spread of COVID and –

Lehrer: Oded, I'm going to jump in there because I hear you're reading from an extended script and people are going to have their eyes glaze over. But you get his question about those projects funding that have previously been approved, on hold, Mr. Mayor. So, what's your response?

Mayor: Yeah, first, Brian, I want to thank you. I want – can I just urge all your listeners, when you're reading from a script, it actually – we all can tell, and it doesn't make the question as powerful. Just to speak from the heart. It will be so much easier, and I guarantee you, you'll get your point across better. But to the question, first of all, I oppose austerity as a philosophy, as a governing approach. So, I disagree with all due respect to Oded. I think that's an absolutely unacceptable characterization of what we're doing. This was not even close to that. This was absolutely worse than that. It was a cash flow crisis. When the height of the crisis in the spring

with COVID New York City was running out of money in the sense of cash flow, it was that bad. We weren't getting federal support. Our expenses were skyrocketing and there was no end in sight. When you remember March and April, we didn't know if things weren't about to get a lot worse. So, we suspended certain capital projects simply because we weren't sure we would have the resources to keep going. We had to make decisions based on priority in terms of health and safety, and the most vital needs.

Your question is a really good one this week, because in the course of this week the world changed a lot. The elections in Georgia and the certification of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris changed the entire discussion. So, even though a new stimulus is not here yet, and we're going to have to fight for it, it still greatly improves our potential that we're going to get the relief we need and the actual stimulus we need so we can open up and speed up a lot of the projects that were on hold for really tangible specific reasons. So, we'll take a quick look at the parks. We'll get an update to the public on the park situation on how and when we can speed those up. But I do want to emphasize that if the results of the election of Georgia mean that there will be a stimulus relatively soon, it's going to allow us to do a lot of things that we haven't been able to do so far.

Lehrer: Oded, thank you for your call. And let me follow up on what you just said this way, as I'm sure, you know, the City's Independent Budget Office released a report this week saying they don't see federal aid from the new Congress coming in time for the new fiscal year, which begins July 1st in the city. And that the city is still down about a half million jobs compared to before the pandemic and it'll take a few years to recover them. Assuming you agree with their premise, what budget savings, while meeting the needs of unemployed New Yorkers, are you prioritizing?

Mayor: I don't agree with their premise. I thank you for asking. I don't agree with their premise. A lot of different items in that report. I think their projections on our economy are too conservative. I think there's an immense amount of pent-up demand that's about to be unleashed. And if we get a real stimulus soon, I think we can speed our recovery. But I also think our budget crisis is profound because we lost \$9 billion in revenue. I also do not agree – I've spoken in the last 48 hours with Speaker Pelosi and now about to be Majority Leader Schumer – I do not agree that it is a given that there will not be a stimulus before the April 1st State budget or our April executive budget for the city. I think there's a very real possibility of a meaningful stimulus in February or March. So, we're going to adjust accordingly. I'm presenting a budget next week, preliminary budget. Obviously, we cannot guarantee a stimulus for that. So, we're going to talk about a world without a stimulus. But between then and when the State and the City take their next steps in the budget process, I think there's a decent chance of an actual true stimulus, a stimulus of real magnitude with city and state direct aid.

Lehrer: Scott in the Bronx you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Scott.

Question: Hello. Thank you. I pray for you both, Brian and Mr. Mayor. Thank you –

Mayor: Thank you, Scott. Thank you for that.

Question: You're welcome. The question – I know you want to encourage people to use public transportation. On the buses, the COVID situation, please. How is the revamping of the ventilation system on the buses going? And also, would you please affirm that it's still the law, whether or not you're vaccinated, you still have to wear face coverings on the buses.

Mayor: Yes, Scott, thank you. Very important point. On the ventilation. I cannot give you an accurate comment because the MTA runs the buses and that's a question we're going to have to get from the State and the MTA. But on the masks, I can give you a hundred percent because I've had this conversation with our Health Commissioner, Dr. Dave Chokshi, and he said it in fact, publicly, as I did this week. We want people to assume that from now through at least June, continue all of the precautions, wear the face mask, keep the social distancing, the constant cleaning until at least June, because we know the vaccination effort to really reach deeply into our city is going to take that long. We, again, we could right now be reaching the seniors over 75. We could right now be reaching essential workers. But to reach millions upon millions, we project is going to take us over several months into June. Until we get to that critical mass, we want everyone exercising these precautions. So, yes, it is the law. You go on a bus, you're wearing a mask. And you go into a store, you're wearing a mask. That is the law and that continues to be the law, even if someone has been vaccinated. It's the smart thing to do.

Lehrer: I hope that answers your question, Scott. Thank you very much. I asked you about the apparent contrast between the lax attitude of the Capitol Police toward the insurrectionists on Wednesday and the way the NYPD treated peaceful protestors last year. You promised real change after the Department of Investigation report on that came out last month. Do you have any real change to announce?

Mayor: Everything in that report, I really appreciate what the Department of Investigation did. They issued 20 recommendations. We are literally implementing all of them. Some of them had actually started already because we at City Hall and NYPD already were thinking of doing some of the same things, like a much more extensive training and intensifying the use of our community affairs officers. So, it's all being implemented. I've got to say, on the first point you made, Brian, there's no way in hell that what happened to the Capitol would have happened here in New York City. We have a tradition here of putting together the security needed, whether we're defending the United Nations in U.N. Assembly Week, or the different consulates, or federal buildings, or City Hall. It just never would have happened. This is why I think there needs to be a true independent investigation. I don't buy that Capitol Police were just used to different things or one leader made a mistake. I think there's something worse here. For that magnitude of a demonstration, which was known so well in advance to be a danger on the day that the certification was going to happen, there should have been thousands of security personnel ringing the Capitol, a secure perimeter, and it never should have been close to what happened. Someone gave the order to not have the security personnel there. We need to know who that is

Lehrer: But you understand that the contrast there is between Capitol Police being too lax toward the insurrectionists and NYPD being too tough on peaceful racial justice protesters. You're responsible for the latter half.

Mayor: I've been very clear, the – when we look back on that whole experience, I want to remind you, unlike what happened in the Capitol, no one died during those protests, no National Guard was brought in. We made sure that no matter how many challenges, because there was violence, we know that, there were people propagating violence, they were small minority. There was looting, we know that, we had to end all that while protecting people's rights. Anything that was done wrong is not acceptable and we're changing anyone who did the wrong thing in terms of officers who violated their instructions are being penalized. So, we're going to change it. But I would just caution, this moment reminds us that you have to have a clear ability to protect people and the NYPD did that, but that didn't happen in Washington. I think that's the contrast we need to focus on.

Lehrer: You talked about the problem of the courts being closed because of COVID and we have a caller with a personal experience with that, I believe. Linda in Queens, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Linda.

Question: Good morning, Brian. Thank you for taking my call. I'm a loyal, long-time listener and I have a [inaudible] with the Mayor when he came to the town hall in Queens. So, good morning to both of you. I have a major problem. The Mayor is the only one who can help me. I'm a senior citizen, a good worker in the community, and I was wrongfully arrested and, of course, they dismissed it. But the I have a transcript from the judge and the police are telling me that it's still in the system. It was dismissed over six months – six months ago. But when COVID came, the Police Department said it is not their job to get it out of the system, it's the court system. The court was closed, they're not dealing with this, and they said I have an active order of protection against me and I can be arrested. I was wrongfully arrested four times, Mr. Mayor. And I am a senior citizen, and I was arrested, and I went to three courts. I need your help, please.

Mayor: Yeah, Linda, I'm so sorry you have gone through that. And I want you right away to please give your information to WNYC. My team will follow up with you today. We're going to get our legal team to talk you directly. Anyone wrongfully arrested, anyone who was supposed to have their record erased, that has to happen even in the middle of COVID – that has to happen. You're absolutely right that there's a dangers that come with that inaccurate information still being in the system. So, we will get our lawyers to you today. They'll work with the Office of Court Administration, NYPD to fix this immediately.

Lehrer: Great. Linda, hang on. We're going to get your contact information. I'm glad you got through. We've got about a minute and a half, Mr. Mayor, and I want to share some breaking news and get your reaction – the AP and the New York Times are reporting that President-elect Biden plans to release nearly all available vaccine doses in an attempt to speed delivery, calling it a sharp break from the Trump Administration's practice of holding back some of the vaccine. They say, they'll share more details next week. But from the reporting, this goes against the recommendation from the FDA. But a transition official, speaking anonymously says they will use the Defense Production Act, if necessary, to ensure enough doses are available. I guess the objection from the FDA is that they want to make sure that all the first doses get administered, or that people get their first and second doses. Do you have any reaction to this? I realize it's first blush.

Mayor: No, I do. First of all, I commend Vice President Biden – or, President-elect Biden – let's get the right title here. President-elect Biden is doing the right thing here. You know, while the State in New York won't allow us to give vaccines that 75-year-old people and essential workers and first responders, you know, we're being held back from using the supply of vaccine we have. But if we had the freedom to vaccinate, we would be going through our supply very quickly. Literally, we could be out of vaccine by a week or 10 days from now. So, we need constant resupply. What we need is a lot of flexibility to vaccinate everyone who wants it who's still – these are all high-priority people and get that first dose to them, because the first dose provides a lot of protection. And then we'll keep going and getting the second dose after, but we got to protect people now.

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

Mayor: Take care, Brian.

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