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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 again, everyone. And now it's time for our weekly Ask the Mayor segment – my questions in yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio. Our phone number is 646-435-7280 – 646-435-7280 if you have a question for the Mayor this morning or you can tweet a question, just use the hashtag #AsktheMayor. And good morning Mr. Mayor, welcome back to WNYC.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, Brian.

Lehrer: So let me start by following up on the clip that we just played in our newscast of you at your news conference earlier where you talked about a massive public education campaign to let people in the most vulnerable communities, meaning including the hardest hit zip codes know about this. Explain it briefly if you would, but I'm also curious if this means that you're relying on sort of a personal responsibility model for fighting the virus.

Mayor: No, I mean, I would not say that at all, Brian. I think the fact is, one, what the City has tried to do from the beginning is make sure that the places that serve our most vulnerable communities, particularly our public hospitals, were strong to get through this crisis and be able to, you know, literally save every life. That clearly was about what we could do to protect people on top of everything else, you know, the, the personnel we've brought in the, the PPEs to protect the health workers. And it's been a very focused effort to protect health care and to protect that sort of frontline ability, particularly when it was very much looking like this disease was going to keep growing and more and more people were going to have to go to the hospital for lifesaving care.

But what's happened in the last few weeks, especially as we've had more and more evidence of these disparities, it's been at the same time as the sheer pressure on the hospitals has reduced, thank God. And now we want to do much more going out into communities to inform people, but also to make it more interactive. It's not just, Oh, you know, here's a piece of paper and good luck. It is – creating ways for people to interconnect with clinicians, particularly through telemedicine, it's a big part of our plan to teach local health care providers to use telemedicine who haven't really used it before, to work with community based health clinics which we're going to say a lot more on in the next few days but also to create a bigger citywide telemedicine apparatus and then a huge advertising and outreach campaign to help people understand the disease better, understand that what they need to do but also the helped us there for them. For example, one of the big realities is families and crowded households – God forbid someone gets

sick or a symptomatic, they may need to be isolated. We have hotels that we will provide the people and the support to go with it so they can be isolated. That's the kind of information we want to get out of what's there to help people and how they can connect with it and really do that at more and more of a grassroots level because I think we are forgetting sometimes that all sorts of people, 8.6 million people, people get information a lot of different ways. And for a lot of people in the city, if it's not in their native language, it's not as helpful. For a lot of people, if it's not coming from a trusted source, they're not as quick to believe it, which is understandable. That's why we have community leaders and community-based health clinics, faith leaders, we're engaging more and more. So no, it's about, it's about what we can do to help people and also arming people with more facts and more options for where to go to get the information they need to protect themselves.

Lehrer: You know, the last segment that we did just before you came on was about the antibody test results that the State released yesterday. And I have heard from our newsroom that your Health Department apparently sent a notice to physicians cautioning them that antibody tests currently cannot tell people if they're immune because having antibodies isn't the same thing as having actual immunity. It might indicate it. We don't know yet, which is the same thing that our science journalists in the previous segment said. But it appears, I see it reported that you haven't been getting that message out to the general public. People are lining up for these tests and we know that many of the commercially offered ones haven't even been vetted by the FDA. So would you like to get some version of that message out now?

Mayor: Yeah, of course. Brian. And thank you and I said it at my press conference earlier. I was asked when would the City be starting to work with antibody tests and I said, right now we're deeply engaged in that conversation, but we do want to make sure that we get the most reliable version of the test, because there's another topic which is there's a lot of different versions of the antibody test and our health care leadership believe that some are, are substantially more reliable than others at identifying, even if someone's been exposed to the specific coronavirus that we're dealing with now as opposed to other you know, similar diseases. So we're working to ensure that we feel good about the test that we might be utilizing, and when we get to that point where we're ready to act on it, we'll make an announcement.

But I said today, and I'll be saying it a lot going forward. Whatever we do is going to come with all those cautions that this test tells you something – if it's a good test and an accurate test that tells you you've been exposed to this coronavirus. Well that's important to know it does not tell you everything, because the science is clear that we cannot rule out that someone could be infected again. It's probably unlikely because there's not a lot of evidence the other way either showing, you know, large numbers of people reinfected and I want to be clear about that, that you know, that's a vote in favor of antibody testing, but it is not a slam dunk here. It's not clear enough. And for example, for folks who are in health care and first responders who have been using PPEs, we're going to tell them, keep using them. Even if they have an antibody test come back positive and says they've been exposed, we're going to tell people still out of the abundance of caution, keep using those PPEs. So it's a tool, it gives us some information. It certainly tells us people who could be part of providing plasma for the plasma treatments and those do seem promising, so that's important but we're going to be really clear about the limits of it as well.

Lehrer: Lennox in Brooklyn, you're on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio. Hello Lennox.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor. My name is Lennox, and I'm, thank you, on my high school senior at Brooklyn College Academy in Brooklyn, and I'm also the Policy Team Leader at Teens Take Charge, which is a youth led organization now fights for educational equity in New York City. And my peers and I were really devastated to hear that you decided to cancel SYEP for the upcoming summer. and so are the 28 City Council members, and over 28,000 New Yorkers who have signed our petition calling on you to reverse your decision and we appreciate like that you said that you wanted to make sure young people have opportunities this summer and working – you were working with SYEP providers to create some remote solutions. But is it possible for you to start putting out plans in place when all the funding has been cut because you cut over, you cut the complete \$124 million of the SYEP funds, but like how can plans be put in place if there's no money?

Mayor: Thank you for the question, Lennox, I appreciate it a lot. And Teens Take Charge. I really appreciate the work you and your colleagues have been doing. In fact, we all work together on things like social emotional learning and restorative justice and I think we've made a lot of progress and I think Teens Take Charge, it's really been a great, a great voice in the city, so thank you for that. On this question, let me just give you the facts because I think I do understand why you and so many other people would like to see summer youth employment up and running this summer. But I think we got a couple of problems we have to be honest about the first is at the time when we had to make the decision, the question was could we devote money to an initiative that it looked very unlikely could exist? And just think about the basic reality. You know, summer youth employment starts right after the school year and that means you have to have employers and they have to be able to take in young people and be able to give them the option to do the work. And, right now, we don't even know if the vast majority of employers will be up and running by that point. Certainly, they won't – a lot of them will not be up and running the way they would have been. And then what about social distancing? What about the standards? You know, is it going to be safe to bring a lot of people together? So, when we looked at all of it, Lennox, it was like we did not have the possibility of even saying we knew if summer youth employment could work in any way, shape or form, especially could it be safe. And with that in mind, we said, okay, well we can't spend money on something that we don't even know if it'll happen. But beyond that we just had a horrendous budget crisis. We, what I announced last week that we are – we project a gap of \$7.4 billion and we still have gotten minimal aid from Washington. We're going to fight for a lot more now in the new stimulus bill. But we have to be clear that, you know, these budget cuts were necessary under any scenario and we had to make choices. And, right now, what I'm focused on is getting literally getting people food, getting people – making sure people have a place to live, making sure they're safe, making sure they're healthy. I mean, that's the priorities right now. So if we get to the point Lennox where you know, things move fast in terms of beating back this disease, we don't know that yet, but let's hope and pray that's the case, and we started to be able to open things up and then we see there are some actual things we could do to support young people. We know we will then look at every option and see how we do that. But we couldn't put money into something that at the time looked like it literally would be impossible. So you, you have my pledge that if the situation changes for the better quickly enough and we think there are creative options that we can put in play, we're

certainly going to work with the city council on that. But we just got to, we've got to focus on health and safety first and we're certainly not there yet.

Lehrer: What is the situation with the budget? You heard Mitch McConnell this week and you just kind of referred to it say states should consider bankruptcy and cutting retirees pensions rather than get federal help. He called the idea for federal help, a blue state bailout. Obviously, you're going to hate that, but can you give our listeners a picture of the City's financial outlook and how many layoffs or cuts to services we can expect just as there is more demand for emergency services that you're now looking at?

Mayor: Yeah, and I'll start on McConnell. I don't need to, I've already said what he said was profoundly inhumane, that he obviously, you know, he claims to care about the cops and firefighters, but what he said would literally lead to all over this country first responders not being able to do their jobs and it was just sick and insensitive that he would act like it's okay to see America's cities go bankrupt and America's states go bankrupt. It means that he is okay with human beings not being safe and not being healthy, but it also means he doesn't seem to worry that it would show a nation falling apart. I think he's contradictory on a moral level. I think he also, if he has any interest in a recovery and a restart, it's not going to happen if cities and states can't provide basic services, and that's what would happen for so many places if they don't get a bail out here. I remind you, Brian, that the airline industry got a \$58 billion bailout. He was very quick to approve that. But if cities and states are in trouble, he politicizes it. It's just disgusting. But what it means for us, it means that, you know, which \$7.4 billion missing, we're going to have to find things to cut if we don't get a lot in this stimulus. And we'd have to at some point look at cutting basic services and, and that's going to really – it's going to harm a lot of people and it's going to set back the ability of this city to recover.

Lehrer: Do you have projected city worker layoffs for the new fiscal year on July 1st assuming no federal help?

Mayor: I'm not going to say it like that yet because I want to be sensitive. There's a lot of people out there who it's their livelihood, let alone all the good they do for this city, so I'm not going to project. My job is to go and fight for that stimulus funding. I'm working with Senator Schumer. I've been talking to Speaker Pelosi, I've been pushing the President of the United States, and I've had several conversations with them. I'd be very blunt. He's the one who actually could have the most impact here. If President Trump said a full bailout of cities and states, replace all the revenue that they lost, it should be a priority, the Republican Senate would do it. So really it comes down to Donald Trump and whether he's going to help his hometown back on our feet or not, and every place else. But I am, I was clear when I presented the budget, Brian, that I consider layoffs a last resort, but it's all going to come down to does the federal government help us or not? And if they do, there's a lot we can do to get back on her feet. If they don't, we're going to have to make very, very painful choices.

Lehrer: Electra in Harlem. You're on WNYC with Mayor de Blasio. Hello Electra.

Question: Hello. Thank you, Mr. Mayor and Mr. Lehrer for all of your work. I'm the director of a youth-based organization supporting youth in their communities in Harlem. We're in New

York City owned building, which is solely occupied by nonprofits, community organizations. We've been locked out of a building which we understand in the light of the pandemic, but we have not been offered any relief or any adjustment payments schedule. One of our crucial programs includes a language interpreter helpline, which prioritizes African languages. We support these communities in their everyday function and survival. We were helping them with the census and critical information for overcoming the pandemic and now all of this is service by phone and we've been cut off. So, my question is, is there any way Mr. Mayor, that the city could offer a letter of recommendation to give service organizations in our New York City on building and others like it, the support to get back to the community?

Mayor: Yeah, Electra, thank you so much for calling. First of all, thank you for everything you do and your colleagues do, appreciate that very much. I've come to know the growing African communities in Harlem and around the city and you know, very, very important. We provide people support, especially in their own language whenever we can. And we want to help – definitely want to help you. Everything you said made sense to me that if you have service and support, you can provide the community right now by phone. We have to help you, you know, be able to do that. So, I'm going to have my team follow up with you today. If you please give your information to WNYC, I am certain there's something we can do to help you get back and running and figure out how to do that the right way and if there's other organizations like yours, we want to know about it, and you know, whatever we can do, we will. It's a really important that we get maximum trusted voices speaking to community members, particularly on health care, but obviously on the economic challenges people face and all that we have to provide them the food and all the other services we have to provide them. So, the answer's yes. We want to help you get back in the game.

Lehrer: We'll continue in a minute with more of your questions for Mayor Bill de Blasio. And I'm going to ask you, Mr. Mayor, if you support the City Council's new grocery store clerk bonus bill, in fact, mandated hazard pay for those grocery store clerks who have to be on the front lines. So prepare for that and everyone else stay with us as we continue with ask the Mayor.

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Lehrer: Brian Lehrer on WNYC as we continue 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. And as I said before the break there are increasing calls for hazard pay for people on the front lines. In the private sector, City Council has a grocery store clerk bonus bill. Crain's which publishes from the business perspective has a headline that says City Council grocery store bonus bill could bankrupt supermarkets. Maybe they're crying wolf, maybe you think they're not? In the public sector, I see it includes doctors, not that same bill, but there are calls for doctors in training at city hospitals and other municipal employees who've had to continue work, first responders, also others to get bonus pay or in effect hazard pay. How much are you for this for city workers who are in those categories and would you support that? Do you support that bonus bill for grocery store clerks?

Mayor: So the biggest sort of way to think about this in my view – the sort of the most universal I guess is the right way to say, way to think about this is I think all of these efforts are going in

the right direction. So, you know, all the folks, the frontline workers, essential workers, the health care workers, the first responders, but also definitely the grocery workers, et cetera. Everyone deserves something special in light of this, the challenge is how do you do it the right way? And the best way, and I really think people need to realize just what time it is in terms of what has happened here to the sheer, painful reality of what we're going to be able to do to feed people in the future, given what I told you about previously, the kind of deficits. We're running now, cities and states all over the country are running. I know a lot of businesses are struggling to keep going, really struggling to come back.

The best way to handle all of this is to do a federal bonus program and this is what Senator Schumer is called for, A Hero's Fund for the frontline workers. And again, the federal government's in a position do it and we just have to be real about they, you know, they do print money and they've obviously come up with very, very genuine – generous stimulus for big corporations. I want to see the stimulus reach these essential workers. I think it's right to give them a bonus structure. I think that's the best way to do it. That's the most universal way to do it and would allow that to happen while everybody else, the cities, the states, the businesses that are trying to get back on their feet. So that's – that's the way I think we can resolve it and that's going to be decided in May one way or another. I mean that's the one thing to understand about everything stimulus. There's – everyone said it, the stimulus for which is the one word this kind of bonus pay will be taken up, will be decided in May. So we do not have to wait long to get this answer.

Lehrer: Laura, in Crown Heights, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hi Laura.

Question: Hello?

Lehrer: Hi, you're on the air.

Question: Oh, hi, hi, hi Brian, hi Mr. Mayor. Thank you so much for everything you're doing. My question is, is there some sort of move to mandate toilet seat covers in New York City going forward or even as a condition of reopening? We know that toilets flushing aerosolizes feces and that viral shedding from COVID-19 can occur in feces as long as 30 days after infection. So for me, I'm picturing a place like a public bathroom in Grand Central or JFK and that these could be incredible vectors for transmission of infectious disease without toilet seat covers. Is there anything being done about this?

Lehrer: You're talking about public restrooms?

Question: Well, not just public restroom, but even in restaurants and bars and any other places where a flushing could aerosolize COVID-19.

Lerher: Mr. Mayor?

Mayor: Well, I will tell you, thank you Laura for the question. I am never going to tell you I'm an expert when I'm not, so this is the first time and I've obviously had a lot of conversations with our health care leadership on a lot of different issues, it's the first time I'm hearing this one, but I

promise to follow up. If you'd please give your information to WNYC, I'm talking to our Health Commissioner and our other key health leadership all the time and I'll ask them about this issue. I think if it – if they regard it as a priority, then as something we will focus on and figure a way to act on it. So let me get – let me get their guidance. But I'm glad you raised it and you know, if it was something that proved to be a priority need to to reduce the spread of COVID. Of course, that's the kind of thing we're putting our energy and our resources into.

Lehrer: Question via Twitter from a listener who apparently reads our website, Gothamist, that says, please ask the Mayor about Gothamist reporting on open streets. Other cities don't need a large police force to open their streets. Neither do we. And I guess this refers to the proposal from some people to open up as much as 75 miles of city streets throughout the five boroughs in order to give pedestrians and cyclists room to maintain proper social distance and obviously slow the bread – the spread of COVID-19. And I know that the Gothamist article and question points out that other cities are doing it right now, Oakland, Minneapolis, Boston, Berlin, Paris, Portland, and Bogota have all instituted similar programs according to the Gotham article. What's the impediment for you if all those cities are doing it?

Mayor: So, I spoke to this a number of times, including earlier today. The – you know, we're going to work with the City Council. The council has some interesting ideas on how to look up an initiative like this. We're going to work with the Council on it. I want to make sure whatever we do is safe. I think I heard that list of cities and some of them are more like us and others are more not like us, but I think we are singular in terms of some of our challenges, particularly given how densely populated we are and the question has always been safety. In fact, our Health Commissioner Dr. Barbot was asked this morning, you know, was there a public health way of looking at this? And she said, look, we all of course want to see everything could be done to give people good options and we have to keep going with social distancing.

But the other part of the equation to worry about is what Vision Zero has always taught us, that we have to be careful to make sure that we don't put people in a situation where they think they are safe from cars and trucks and they turn out not to be some of these other models around the country, which I talked to our Transportation Commissioner and our Police Commissioner yesterday jointly about this. Some of the models around the country are more of an honor system kind of model, where the streets are closed off but not in a way that is entirely secure and there's no enforcement and you sort of hoping that drivers do not end up on those streets, and I'm worried about that kind of model. Now if we can find a way to do some of these streets that did not require a lot of NYPD presence but still are truly safe and secure, I would definitely be open to that.

But the problem to date has been we do not want to create a new – we certainly don't want to create a new gathering point because that would violate social distancing. We don't want to create a new safety problem where we would need enforcement but we don't have it. But if we can find a way to address those issues, of course I'm interested and you know, up to date the - I mean up to now the problem has been the NYPD, the personnel levels have been way, way low because of this disease. They're starting to come back, but I think it'll be weeks before they get back to something like normal. But if we can find places where this could work or the right approach that could keep people safe, then of course I'm interested.

Lehrer: One more call, let's see if we can do a quick question and a quick answer and about our remaining minute. Jessica in the East Village, you're on w NYC with the Mayor. Hi there.

Question: Hi Brian. Thank you so much. Thank you for everything you've done. Hi Mr. Mayor. I have a brother in the police department and a brother in the fire department. Five people in my brother's house in Queens have tested positive and he has still not received any antibody testing and that [inaudible] my brother and the police department, can we expect to have our firefighters and police officers tested for antibodies?

Mayor: Thank you Jessica, and thank you to your whole family for all they do for New York City. Please thank them for me. Yeah, that's what we're working on right now. And even though as I said, there are real questions still about the right kind of antibody testing, it is certainly our hope to find an antibody testing quickly that we could feel is reliable and then employ it on a larger level and immediately, you know, the first priority would be our first responders and our health care workers. So I hope to have an announcement on that in a matter of days. But as soon as we have that up and running, it would be something that we'd make available to all members of PD and FD who want to be a part of it.

Lehrer: I see that the high absentee rate from the police department and is starting to ease, quick update on that? And crime stats, I see that crime is mostly down because people aren't out, but some categories are up. I'm curious about domestic violence?

Mayor: Yeah, that's very troubling reality Brian. And you know, this is a horrible crime in so many ways and one – that's one of the very hardest for our police to, you know, see proactively and enact on, because obviously it happens in private spaces behind closed doors overwhelmingly. But look, the thing we have to emphasize here is NYPD has a very aggressive initiative. Once anybody reports someone engaged in domestic violence, they not only follow up with all the charges, consequences, et cetera, but then there's an ongoing monitoring of that household or literally the NYPD shows up regularly on announced to keep clear to the survivor of domestic violence that they'll be protected and the send a warning to anyone who wouldn't consider engaging in domestic violence.

But the problem now is we are not hearing, as usual, we don't hear enough about people who feel they're in danger, and I understand why. I understand how hardly intimidating the situation could be. My appeal to anyone who feels they're in danger of domestic violence is, please pick up the phone. Call 9-1-1. We need to know if you feel you're in danger, you know the NYPD can help you and anyone who knows of someone who's in danger, please ask them to make that call. The other crime realities Brian. Yes, they are going down broadly a few exceptions, but generally crime has been going down and we're going to keep building on that, but on domestic violence, we definitely have more work to do and we need maximum reporting so we can get out there and help people.

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

Mayor: Thank you, Brian.

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