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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON MSNBC'S MORNING JOE

Mika Brzezinski: Mayor Bill de Blasio joins us now. Boy, do you have your hands full, Mayor de Blasio. So, I know we're here to talk about a lot of different things, some really important discussions about how to get the vaccine to the American people on a grand scale, but first, how is New York doing with trying to continue the vaccination when you have the city basically swamped in ice and snow?

Mayor Bill de Blasio: You know, what do they say – when it rains, it pours? You know right now we're hearing we could have as much as 22 inches of snow. I declared a state of emergency last night. I said to folks, stay off the roads. It's dangerous. You know, job one right now is to protect people's lives by dealing with the snow first. We really want to get back to vaccination tomorrow, God willing. But Mika, you can't make this stuff up. You know, there'll be locusts next at the rate we're going.

[Laughter]

Brzezinski: I know, I know, it's not good. So, let's talk about the vaccine distribution overall. There are some major companies that are making headway on creating the vaccine. Then there are some other companies that are getting there or starts and stops. You have ideas as to how to streamline this. What are they?

Mayor: Thank you. Mika, look by my analysis, there's 27 companies in this country in the pharmaceutical industry, in the biotech industry that could right now be part of the vaccine effort. There's 27 major American corporations that right now could be producing vaccine using what's already been discovered by Moderna and Pfizer. But, unfortunately, Mika, we have a situation where, because of patent issues, because of corporate rivalry, because of concerns over profit, these companies are not in the game. And so, it's as simple as this, the federal government needs to step in, get every company on the same page, producing the vaccines that we have now that we know work. Now, this may sound way outside the box if you're talking about business as usual in this country, but this is a war time dynamic, and I'll give you a simple example, it's so powerful, in World War II Boeing and Lockheed, competitors, agreed to work together for the war effort.

Lockheed built planes from Boeing's design. Ford motor company didn't make aircraft engines, but they took a Pratt & Whitney aircraft engine design, they retooled their assembly line, they started making aircraft engines. Right now, why is Merck, Novartis, Eli Lilly – why are these

companies not making the vaccines we have under the direction of the federal government? Because everyone should be on the same team at this point to save lives. But instead, what's happening, Merck tried to make a vaccine, didn't succeed. And now they're going to go off and do other types of drugs. Well, I disagree. I think the federal government should, should say, no, Merck, you're producing the vaccines we have now because we have a massive shortage. In this city, hundreds of thousands of doses were not given in the last week because we didn't have supply. We could have given them, but we didn't have the supply. We could have protected lives, but we didn't have the supply.

Brzezinski: I mean, this is the key to America moving on. Jonathan Lemire.

Jonathan Lemire: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Pandemic or no, clearing the streets during a major snowstorm is a major test for any big city mayor as you well know. So good luck with that, sir. I wanted to ask you, as you just painted a picture here, a very serious one of needing the vaccines to be distributed because of how serious the matter is right now in New York City. At the same time, the Governor has announced that on Valentine's Day, assuming the positivity rate stays where it is now, indoor dining is going to resume, 25 percent capacity. But for the first time in months, New Yorkers will be able to eat inside restaurants. Restaurants, of course, we know are a major source of transmission. So, do you think – do you agree with that decision, sir? Do you agree that right now with the new variant arriving in the United States, with the urgency of the vaccine program, but one that is still falling behind schedule, at least at this point, is now the right time to reopen indoor dining in the nation's largest city?

Mayor: Jonathan, look, that call is one for the State. They get to make that decision. I've said very clearly, I am worried about the variants. I am worried about what we could be facing next. But this is why in the end indoor dining isn't the central issue, vaccine is. And when we can't vaccinate our people for lack of supply, I mean, that's the whole ball game at this point. And I think what's striking here, Jonathan, is this country sometimes we look at a problem and we don't think about what we could do differently. We're so used to assuming that the companies out there that we depend on will do things in a rational way. What is rational about a bunch of companies being on the sideline when they could be producing vaccine right now? What's rational about there being such a profound lack of vaccine supply all over the country and people dying for lack of vaccine. We are not really on a war time effort yet. And I have to say the Trump administration never got us to that wartime effort, but I do think Joe Biden has that instinct. And I think if he ordered the companies of America into line, we could have the vaccine supply we need.

Reverend Al Sharpton: Mr. Mayor, Al Sharpton. As you have fought through efforts with the First Lady around trying to educate a lot of areas in the city – and for that matter around the country, but you focused on your city – that had questions about the vaccine, giving vaccine education to them, and comfort to them, as you make this appeal for companies to provide more of the vaccines, tell us about how important it is that that be distributed in areas that been neglected because not only have you run out of vaccines, when we have them come in and when we have had them coming, they've not been as fairly distributed as you've tried to argue and tried to maintain. And I think this is a problem nationwide that on one hand we have people that have

genuine and well-placed fears because of history, and once we get them past that, the vaccine is not available to them.

Mayor: Talk about catch-22, Rev. You're exactly right. The disparity problem with COVID and with the vaccine is one of the clearest advertisements for the problem with structural racism in this country you're ever going to see. When we saw the original information about which communities were hardest hit by COVID where the most people died, it was exactly the same map we had known for years of where people had not had their fair share of income, where people had not gotten enough health care in this city for decades and decades. So, this is structural. The answer is supply, supply, supply. If we have enough supply of this vaccine, what will happen is by focusing on communities of color, by focusing on where the need is greatest, more and more people get vaccinated and then the most powerful thing happens, Rev – word of mouth. When you know someone in your family got vaccinated, your neighbor got vaccinated, the person you worship with in church got vaccinated, that's when people start to have a little more faith, because there is massive distrust out there towards government, towards the medical community because of that bad history.

But the same problem is answered by the same answer in my view, which is supply. You're right. We can't convince people to believe in something if it doesn't show up or it shows up sometimes, and then your appointment gets canceled the next time. So, this is why it's so troubling to me that the country is really not on that wartime footing. You know, you'd know, if this was all hands on deck, you would see every pharmaceutical company, every biotech company in America contributing to the creation and the manufacture of vaccines. We don't see anything like that. We've got two – two companies in the game. It's really not like the nation is unified around the concept of vaccinate everyone as quickly as possible so people are safe and we can bring our economy back. And I think that's a residue of Trumpism. He was a free market here. He did not want to push Corporate America to do things they didn't want to do. But Joe Biden has been much more aggressive about saying the federal government's going to use the Defense Production Act and lead. If you had enough vaccine, you could really go at that disparity problem too. And we've got to get there. If we want to have a recovery, we damn well better get enough vaccine.

Brzezinski: Mayor de Blasio, thank you very much for coming forward with those ideas. Before you go today is the start of Black History Month. And all month, we're going to be asking our guests to talk about a Black American who has inspired them. And you've chosen someone pretty close to home, who did you choose?

Mayor: I chose my wife, Chirlane, because you know, as First Lady in New York City, Chirlane has created something that never existed before. The strongest approach to mental health, anywhere in the country, Thrive NYC, the most comprehensive way of getting mental health services to people who need it. And it's being copied all over the world in London and Toronto and cities all around this country. She made history by putting mental health on the map in a different way in this city and de-stigmatizing and telling people it's okay to come forward if you need help. And I love her, and I honor her, and that's my choice, Mika.

Brzezinski: I'll send her my love as well. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio. Thank you very, very much for coming on the show this morning.

Mayor: Thank you.

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