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CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. And Happy St. Patrick's Day to everyone. I want to talk about the celebration this morning, which was very powerful and filled with hope. But before I get into that, I've got to talk about something really troubling and something I think for so many New Yorkers is causing them a lot of pain and a lot of fear right now – the horrible attacks in Atlanta, the murders of innocent people simply because they were Asian American. We have to be clear that what we saw here is nothing less than domestic terrorism, people killed in their workplaces, going about their lives, simply because of their ethnicity, and a systematic effort to harm people. At a time when so many people in this country are trying to work together to overcome the pandemic, to see this hatred, to see it takes such a violent form is extraordinarily distressing. And we all need to understand the pain that Asian Americans are going through right now in this city and all over the country and we need to be there for them. We have to stop Asian hate. We have to focus our energies on supporting our Asian brothers and sisters in this moment. And beyond solidarity, and beyond education, and beyond speaking out, we also need to use the strength of the NYPD to protect our Asian-American communities. And so, there is today a major deployment of NYPD counter-terrorism forces in communities around the city, including some of the most prominent Asian communities in Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn. Wherever we get any reports of concern, we're going to make sure to have real strong presence. Of course, as usual, the NYPD is assessing the pattern of what we saw in Atlanta, looking for anything that might tell us additional information we need to know here. But I want to assure all New Yorkers, and particularly Asian-American New Yorkers that we are here for you, NYPD and all New Yorkers will stand by you in this incredibly difficult moment.

Now, talk about standing by each other and the incredible work the NYPD does to protect us, an amazing story last night from Staten Island, the 1-2-0 Precinct. [Inaudible] officers flagged down, because an eight-month-old child was losing their life – life, leaving the child as this was occurring. And these officers immediately responded, performed CPR, saved the life of an infant. This the kind of thing that means so much to know that a child is alive today, because of the bravery, because of the quick thinking and the commitment of these NYPD officers. So, I want to salute them all and say to everyone at the 1-2-0 Precinct, you have a lot to be proud of today. And, thank God, that eight-month-old child will live to have a long and good life, because of the work that you all did. God bless you all.

Now, let me go back to this special day. And this is a St. Patrick's Day like no other. Everyone who was this morning, very early, around 6:30 AM, holding a version of the traditional pray. This is a pray that goes back over 260 years. The St Patrick's Day Parade goes back before the founding of the republic. It's an amazing tradition. And it's a tradition that has been in so many

ways stressed and challenged by the pandemic, and yet it has survived very, very modestly last year. And this year, a little bit bigger, a little bit better, and people could feel that sense keeping the tradition alive, keeping the history alive, but on the way to something much, much better, which is next year, where I think literally millions will be on Fifth Avenue to salute the marchers and to celebrate the day as we all come back together. But this was a very special moment, because it was about preserving that tradition and I think everyone felt that they were keepers of the tradition. And there was a sense that, you know, this is the gateway to spring, this is the gateway to renewal, that this parade today, small though it was, marked the beginning of something better and the world changing for the better for all of us.

Now, there are so many amazing Irish-Americans in this city and so many who have contributed so much. I want to salute one today who I'd hoped would be here to receive his honor in person, but, unfortunately, for some medical reasons, could not. But he is a living legend – Malachy McCourt is someone who, if you know him, if you have heard him on the radio, if you have met him and heard his energy, his brilliance, his wit, you do not forget it. And he has an amazing story, born in Brooklyn, but raised in Ireland, came back here and did just about every job in the world, including longshoreman, dishwasher, actor, writer, and, yes, gold smuggler – that's one I want to know more about – but particularly became famous as a radio host and a storyteller and someone who captured so much of the Irish-American experience, but also believed in a society that included everyone, respected everyone – a voice for respect, for a multicultural society, for a society that really could be for everyone. That's what I think of when I think of his incredible presence and his voice in this city. So, Malachy is not able to be with us. He had a fall recently. He needed to watch this on television. So, I'm really happy you're out there with your wife of 56 years, Diana, and blessed by five children, nine grandchildren, and one great grandchild on the way. That's pretty good. And so, this proclamation, I was hoping to hand it to you, but I'm going to hold it up for you, Malachy. Today, I proclaim Wednesday, March 17th, 2021 in the City of New York as Malachy McCourt Day. Congratulations.

So, let's talk about some other good news and go to what we talk about every single day, vaccinations. We finally have more freedom to vaccinate. And I'd like total freedom to vaccinate, I'd like the City of New York to have absolute local control so we can get the job done. But we're making progress, we're getting some greater freedom. A recent decision by the State of New York so that public-facing government workers are now eligible for the vaccine. This is important. We fought for this. We're finally getting it. And it's going to help us reach people who serve us and do so much for us. But again, we could do so much more if we had more freedom to vaccinate, and if we had more supply. Everything comes down to supply and we're going to keep fighting to get the supply we need and we deserve. In the meantime, we have passed the 3 million mark in terms of vaccinations from day-one. So, as of this moment, 3,019,434 vaccinations have been given in the City of New York. That number is growing intensely every day. That's really good news.

Now, we have focused our vaccination efforts in so many ways to reach neighborhoods hardest hit by the coronavirus, to reach people who are most vulnerable – our seniors, folks with pre-existing conditions. One of our particular efforts has been to reach folks who went through some of the most horrifying events in history – Holocaust survivors. And I had the honor of being with some of them yesterday in Coney Island at a wonderful Passover food distribution organized by

the Jewish Community Council of Coney Island, amazing organization. Rabbi Weiner, and everyone there, I appreciate the great work you do. And I had a conversation that just deeply moved me – 95-year-old woman, Sarah Teichman, born in Poland, her family and she ended up in the Bergen-Belsen camp. She told me about her experiences. She told me what she went through and she told me what life was like when she was freed and how she came to this country and found here in New York City everything she hoped and dreamed of. She got vaccinated through our special effort to reach Holocaust survivors. And the joy she was feeling was so powerful, knowing she was safe. And just the sense of history, I met another amazing woman, Frederica [inaudible] 82 years old, lived in the Warsaw ghetto in the years of Nazi occupation and was smuggled out of the ghetto as a young child in a potato sack and gotten to freedom. And when you meet these incredible people who went through so much and now who we're working to help in so many ways, it's a reminder of the resiliency of the human spirit and the strength of all people, but particularly New Yorkers. And it's very life-affirming to know folks that went through so much are here with us alive, well, filled with life and hope – an amazing, amazing experience.

All right, now, let's talk about what we do in this city today and the way we look to the future when it comes to protecting New Yorkers, when it comes to making sure people are safe from many, many challenges, and from the unexpected. This is why we have an emergency management system here in this city to get us ready for anything. Really extraordinary professionals who prepare for the unexpected, who are ready for anything that we get from mother nature or any other challenge that may exist. And our emergency management team has been led with extraordinary ability over the last few years by Commissioner Deanne Criswell, someone who did so much to help this city through the pandemic. And I'm really happy to say her extraordinary achievements were noted in Washington D.C. and President Biden has nominated her to be the next FEMA administrator for the entire country. And we're so proud of Deanne and know that once she is confirmed by the Senate, she'll take over that role immediately. And we know she'll be a great friend and ally to New York City in that new role. But we also understand that emergency management is something we work on every single day and we need to be ready for the moment when Commissioner Criswell becomes Federal Administrator Criswell. And so, today, I'm announcing the person who will take over this really important role and will step in as our next Emergency Management Commissioner, and he is someone who has served New York City for a long time in a lot of different ways and really has shown his love for this city and his commitment. John Scrivani, is someone who by every definition a true New Yorker – fourth generation Staten Islander, and has worked in so many parts of the City government to help people, including Emergency Management, including the NYPD, and been here and served during some of our toughest times in our history – 9/11 and Hurricane Sandy, and even came back to the City to help us as we struggled with the pandemic. He has been a leader of emergency management in the State of Virginia, so he has dealt with a host of challenges on a statewide level as well. He brings experience and wisdom and a great depth of knowledge of how to prepare. And this is something we're going to work on more and more, preparing for anything and everything. That's the kind of leader we need, a true New Yorker, who's going to help us into the future. My pleasure to introduce to you John Scrivani.

Incoming Commissioner John Scrivani, Office of Emergency Management: Thank you, sir. Good morning, and happy St. Patrick's Day. Thank you, Mayor de Blasio and Deputy Mayor

Anglin for the opportunity to come back to New York City, my hometown, and serve as the next Commissioner of Emergency Management. I'm looking forward to continuing the exceptional work that Commissioner Criswell has put in motion and, once again, serve the great people of New York City as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. I've devoted my career to serving my fellow citizens in good times and in times of crisis. I have wonderful memories of working parades, major sporting events here in New York City as a member of the NYPD and the Office of Emergency Management. But I've also had more than my share of heartbreak, as the Mayor mentioned, during Hurricane Sandy and 9/11.

I've seen the worst that can happen, but I've always brought out the best in us – but it's always brought back the best in us. The strength and resilience of my fellow New Yorkers always gives me hope and this is no different. Last year, I came back to New York City to help this great city during the height of the pandemic. And, today, the Mayor is inviting me to return to finish the job. As the Mayor mentioned, my work in Virginia on hurricane preparedness, on natural disaster preparedness, implementing the know-your-zone, similar to what New York City did years ago, and working on mass evacuation will only help me bring that skill here back to the city from doing it at the statewide level.

Public service has been a tradition in the Scrivani family with multiple generations, working for our City agencies over the last 100 years. My mother's family came to this city, originally from Sicily, and I am, as the Mayor mentioned, fourth-generation Staten Islander. I cherish this opportunity to, once again, return to my hometown with my wife, Michelle, and my children, Jack, Emilia, and Leo, who are here today with us. I'm also looking forward to rejoining the New York City Emergency Management team and, once again, working side by side with many of my former colleagues as we help our city recover from one of the worst years we've ever seen.

New Yorkers have had to go through so much over the last year. They deserve to get their city back, and back swiftly, and safely as possible, and to be truly prepared for the future. I am thankful that Mayor de Blasio is entrusting me with this important role. I look forward to helping New York City continue to prepare, recover, and respond. When New York City needs me, I'll be there. Mayor de Blasio, thank you again for your confidence in me. And I'm ready to hit the ground running. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you, John. And welcome. I should say, welcome back. And to the Scrivani family, we're very happy for you and thank you for also being a part of this really wonderful moment. All right, everyone, let's do the indicators for today. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report, 234 patients. Confirmed positivity level, 46.99 percent. And hospitalization rate of 3.68 per 100,000. Number two, new reported cases on the seven-day average – today's report, 3,001 cases. And number three, percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19 – today's report, seven-day rolling average, 6.44 percent.

A few words in Spanish, and we're going to go back to the topic of the new vaccine eligibility and freedom to vaccinate.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, let's take questions from our colleagues in the media. And please let me know the name and outlet of each journalist.

Moderator: Hi, all. We'll now begin our Q-and-A. With us today is our next OEM Commissioner, John Scrivani, Dr. Chokshi, Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma, and Dr. Mitchell Katz, CEO of Health + Hospitals. With that, we'll go to Steve from WCBS Radio.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Happy St. Patrick's Day to you.

Mayor: Happy St. Patrick's Day, Steve. How are you doing today?

Question: I'm all right. I appreciate it. First question relates to testing. I know we're kind of entering a new phase of the pandemic here, but both data-wise and anecdotally, I think we're seeing a decrease in the amount of people going out to get tested. Anecdotally, I can tell you, I was at a City MD last night in Park Slope and they said, so few people are going out to get tests now that their usual five-day turnaround is now down to around two days. So, I wanted to see if that presents any new challenges in, kind of, placing a benchmark on where we are in the pandemic, figuring out, you know, where the spread might be? Just, in general, what kind of an effect less testing has on us right now?

Mayor: It's a great question, Steve. I appreciate it. At least there's a silver lining with the turnaround time, but no, you're raising a really good point that we need people to get tested. And it's understandable if there's a little more confidence that things are getting better, people might let down their guard. That's exactly what we have to guard against. Vigilance is what's gotten us this far and we have to keep with it. So, I'm going to let Dr Chokshi speak to this, but definitely we need people to keep getting tested. We'll encourage folks once a month, on a regular basis. And, obviously, if folks are symptomatic, so that we can make our whole test and trace operation work, we can protect people. Dr. Chokshi, why don't you speak to it?

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thanks Mr. Mayor, and thank you so much for this important question. As the Mayor has said, testing remains a cornerstone of our approach to curbing the spread of COVID-19. That remains true even as we ramp up our vaccination campaign. And so, I want to hear – I want all New Yorkers to hear it from us that it remains important to get tested. And particularly if you're at higher risk to get tested frequently. We aren't seeing yet, a major down tick in the data with respect to the total number of tests happening. That's both PCR and antigen tests, although we are monitoring that closely. And our message remains the same, which is we do encourage testing because it can help us break the chains of transmission for COVID-19.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Steve.

Question: Thanks for that. And on a related note, Friday's a big day for indoor dining, both in the five boroughs and region wide. New York City goes up to 50 percent, suburbs going up to 75 percent. Connecticut goes up to 100 percent. I know the city didn't really have much of a say in that, it came down from the State. Is that a move to 50 percent that you would have made if you

had the choice? And relatedly, does it concern you at all to see 75 percent outside of the city, 100 percent in Connecticut given where we are right now?

Mayor: Steve, look, I think there should be local control. I think these decisions should be made locally. I really think we have the best sense of what works for our own people on all these issues. On the freedom to vaccinate, and on what standards to hold to keep our people safe. But the State has made that decision. Now it's our job to implement it as safely as possible with inspections, with education for – excuse me, restaurant owners and managers, for customers. What's really important – Dr. Chokshi put out great guidance to restaurant goers, to make sure to follow the right approaches to keep everyone safe, including the people that do the work in the restaurants, who we really are concerned about. They're in contact with lots and lots of customers all day long. We want to keep the restaurant workers safe. So, you know, I want to focus on what we can do. And what we can do is implement this effectively, but also be very vigilant watching the impact of it, collecting the data, watching to see if there's any trends that come from it that we're concerned about. And if there are, we're certainly going to talk about that publicly. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next we'll go to James from PIX 11.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everyone on the call.

Mayor: Hey James, how have you been?

Question: I appreciate your asking. Not bad at all. Thank you. And Happy St. Patrick's Day from an African American Irishman.

Mayor: There you go. You're covering all the bases today.

Question: But I actually am of Irish descent, just for the record. Thanks. My first question look, the Governor is in the city today at an African American church, promoting vaccinations. Now that there is greater freedom, as you say, for vaccinations of people in the city, how do you feel about the Governor's support, especially with him making his appeals for more vaccinations made in African American settings? Might that be exploitative even?

Mayor: Well, I'd say it more broadly. I think the question here is how we get to the truth. And I don't think photo ops obscure the truth. I think in the end there's going to be a number of investigations. And we need everyone who has information to come forward and we need to find out what really happened. And I think, unfortunately, we're going to find a lot of things that are very troubling. So, I don't think all the photo ops in the world can mask that reality. I think you raise a good point though, James. You know, if it is an effort to distract, you know, that's unfortunate, but I don't think anyone's going to fall for that. Go ahead.

Question: I guess related, I mean, President Biden made comments saying that the Governor should resign if the Attorney General's investigation shows there was sexual harassment or any other wrongdoing. And said the criminal prosecution could happen. Can you elaborate on how you feel regarding those comments?

Mayor: I think President Biden is right. I think the offenses we're talking about here are absolutely, not only might require resignation, but might require a criminal prosecution. There's no question. And we've only begun to hear the facts. Look, I think it's very meaningful that the President spoke out and I think it's because more and more evidence is coming forward and people are, you know, less and less willing to support a governor who clearly has lost his ability to be credible. That's the bottom line here. You know, the – so many people who matter in government on so many levels are saying they're not comfortable with him continuing in this role. So, I believe a lot more information is going to come out. I think it'll come out pretty quickly and I think that will decide the whole situation for everyone. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next, we'll go to Juan Manuel from NY1.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

Mayor: Good, Juan Manuel. How are you?

Question: Very good. That was a really early parade this morning. I don't know if you have any details – I mean, now it's a different situation from last year. Do you have any thoughts, any plans on parade season in the City of New York this year?

Mayor: Well, clearly, we're not there yet. This was obviously a very, very small version of the St Patrick's parade, which is one of the biggest parades in the country in a normal year. But this was about keeping the tradition alive. And I really respect that. The folks who had put so much of their heart and soul into the parade wanted to make sure there was an unbroken connection to 260 years plus of history, and that did occur today. But in terms of the full-scale parades we're used to? Look, it's conceivable later on in the year and the fall maybe, maybe. I certainly think you'll see them back next year. But what I've said is first of all, we're going to do all our decisions based on the data and the science. Our health team is going to be a part of making every decision about whether we're able to handle bigger events. And we're certainly not there yet. And second, when we believe we're coming up to the point where parades can start to occur again on a larger scale, the first parade is going to be one to honor our health care heroes and our first responders. And that will go down the Canyon of Heroes and really be a moment for this city to thank the folks who saw us through this pandemic. Go ahead, Juan Manuel.

Question: You keep talking, Mr. Mayor about talking to the federal government about giving you the freedom to vaccinate, more freedom from the State to do your own way of vaccinations. Have you had any clear signs from the federal government that the federal government is willing, or the President is willing to give you that and to give New York City that? And I think you're a front facing government worker. Are you getting your Johnson & Johnson shot anytime soon?

Mayor: Yes. On this – the two very different questions, but yes, as I've said publicly before, I'm going to get vaccinated soon. And will be getting the Johnson & Johnson shot. And I look forward to that and I want people to know it is safe and I'm going to prove it with my own arm. But to the Biden administration, look mayors all over the country are, are engaged in a dialogue with the Biden administration right now on increasing local control, increasing direct allocation

without strings attached, to localities around the city, particularly the bigger localities with large health care departments and public health systems. Because it's quite clear that we've seen everything from states interfering, to states not providing transparency and information to localities or just being ineffective. And we know cities know how to do this work. We're where the rubber hits the road. So, those conversations with the Biden administration have been happening with a lot of mayors around the country. I've been a part of those as well. And I see some progress. I don't, they haven't made a decision yet, but I am hopeful. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Nolan from the Post.

Question: Good morning, everybody.

Mayor: Nolan, can you hear us? You sound a little lower than normal.

Question: Yes.

Mayor: There you go. How's it going?

Question: Yes, I can hear you. Can you hear me? I'm all right. All right. Good. I'm glad this is working. Just to the top of the schools reopening here for a second, you put a lot of emphasis on getting kids back in the classroom. And I – you know, some colleagues both at the Post and at other papers in the city have had their kids return. And I'm sort of curious as to how in this – how in your mind this qualifies as reopening? So, one former colleague has a ninth grader whose kid is going back to school. Their student's first day, ninth grader I think I said, is April 5th. They're only getting two days a week of in-person instruction and it's only in front of a screen and there will be no teacher in the classroom. How was that reopening and how are kids benefiting from it?

Mayor: Well, Nolan, please share with our team that specific school information, because I want to look into that. Look, we said when announced the reopening of high schools, that most of our high schools are going to do either five day a week instruction for all their kids, or for most of their kids. And they're going to prioritize where – where that's not possible, prioritize five days for the kids that need it most. But increasingly we've seen this across elementary school, middle school, you'll see it with high school. We've been moving to a model where kids are in school a lot more days. And then what we want obviously is the maximum time with teachers instructing them in the traditional manner. There are some times particularly the high school level because of specialized topics and the reality of the pandemic, where a kid could be in school and be doing some work online, but we want the maximum work possible being done, of course, with a teacher instructing them as per usual. So, I think you're going to see more and more progress each week. And I am very hopeful that as the situation improves, it's going to give us more options of how to get more kids back into school. Go ahead, Nolan.

Question: Right. But I guess I still don't really understand how putting kids back, you know, if the schedule holds my former colleague, Melissa Katz's kid will be in school for all of 20 days for the rest of the school year and with no in-person instruction. And so, I'm wondering again,

how that really constitutes any sort of reopening? Beyond the sort of getting the doors back open?

Mayor: Again, respectfully. I want to know the details from the DOE of that. The fact is the vast majority of kids are getting a lot of in-person instruction when they're in school, if not exclusively in-person instruction. That certainly is what we want and what we need. Kids being in the school building means that teachers and guidance counselors, principals, everyone is there connecting with them, making sure they have the help they need. That is extraordinarily valuable. And any number of days where kids are getting that help and support in a really, you know, warm, positive atmosphere, is really good for kids. So, I want to see the most kids getting the most days. But whatever number of days can be managed, depending on the reality school, all of it helps. And then in September, we intend to be full strength, all kids who are ready to be back in the classroom will be accommodated. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next is Juliet from 1010 WINS.

Question: Oh, Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor. How are you? Happy St. Patrick's Day.

Mayor: Happy St. Patrick's Day. How are you doing?

Question: Yes, I'm good. Thank you. So, you know, you've talked about wanting to get five million New Yorkers vaccinated by, you know, end of May, early June. So, to what end, what do you hope to trigger or change when you hit that milestone?

Mayor: Well, I'll speak to this and I'd like to get our doctors into the mix here. I'll start with Dr. Varma and then if Dr. Chokshi or Dr. Katz want to add in. Look, we talked a lot about this, what would be a number that would really be transcendent for the city? What would really change things in terms of a number of vaccinations? And we all agreed that five million fully vaccinated New Yorkers out of 8.5 million would be a sea change from what we have been experiencing. Obviously right now the vaccine is for adults. So, if you're talking about five million vaccinated New Yorkers, you're talking about the vast majority of adults. And it's going to allow us to do more and start to move past some of the restrictions and bring back much more of the life of the city. So, that's why we thought that number was so important. And I'm very, very pleased to tell you we're on track for that number right now. But Dr. Varma, why don't you speak a little bit about what that would mean for the city, health wise?

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: Great, thank you very much for the question. This is an enormously important question that I think people all over the country and all over the world are struggling with. You know, what is the point at which we feel that our vaccination coverage is high enough, that we can get to a point where, you know, people can go back to a world in which they feel close to normal? We basically, focusing on two major issues. One is bringing the rate of disease down, particularly severe disease down because we know that there are going to continue to be people, particularly children, who are not eligible for vaccination. So, that's number one. So, we need to get to a level where we have better epidemic control. But then number two, we need to get to a point where vaccine supplies, you know, greatly exceeds demand, so that any adult who hasn't gotten vaccinated yet, and, you know, maybe they have some concerns, maybe

they're waiting for it. Maybe they just can't get it. Vaccine supply is abundant, so that anybody who decides to get vaccinated can simply go to a pharmacy or their local doctor and get vaccinated. So, I think once we get to those two points, where supply greatly exceeds demand and the rate of disease is low enough that we don't have to worry about people who are unvaccinated, particularly children, being at very high risk. We're at a stage where there's a lot of possibilities for really reopening dramatically. And I think that's where the Mayor and all of us have settled on this target of at least five million vaccines and a point somewhere in the very near future, because we think disease rates will be down.

Mayor: Thank you, Dr. Chokshi or Dr. Katz, anything you want to add?

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, sir. I'll just add briefly you know, we set this bold goal of five million people getting vaccinated by June for some simple reasons. One, it will save lives. Two, it will save livelihoods, and three beyond you know, those effects on physical health and the economy, it's so important from the mental health perspective as well, because we know the toll that isolation you know, separation from our loved ones, all of the things that we've had to do to stay safe over the last few months, those exact their toll as well. So, it will have major benefits for the mental health of New Yorkers as well.

Mayor: Thank you, Dr. Katz, anything to add?

President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals: Nothing to add. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead Juliet.

Question: Okay, great. Thank you. So, as far as getting vaccines to people in neighborhoods in need, you know, there are a lot of these volunteer organizations that are reaching out and, or, you know, putting together or helping people to get to access, whether it's a website or a signup sheet. Is the City working with any of these groups so that they are going to people rather than having people go to a site or go to a website? Is there any work being done with the City and some of these volunteer groups?

Mayor: Yeah, it's an interesting question. I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi, but let me just say, you know, what we've tried to do with our Vaccine Command Centers is really stay connected to the grassroots. We're working with community-based organizations, faith organizations, elected officials, you name it, to spread the word, to get people vaccinated, to address the hesitancy. And you know, more and more we're setting up vaccine sites in different community settings. But I think it's an interesting point, if community organizations want to help sign people up or in some way, you know, add a piece to the equation that we don't have now, it's something we'd be very open to if we can figure out the right way to do it. Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. This is a core part of our outreach efforts with the first back to embedding in neighborhoods and communities and reaching the people whom we most need to reach. We are already working with dozens of community-based organizations. You know, often these are – these are smaller organizations, but the ones that have been working for years or decades in specific communities, and we partner with them, you know,

on all of our efforts. As the Mayor mentioned, this is all coordinated through the Vaccine Command Center, under the leadership of Deputy Mayor Melanie Hartzog. And we're always looking to expand the avenues that we have to partner with community groups, because we believe this is truly an all-hands-on deck moment that requires not just a whole of government approach but everyone in the city banding together for it.

Mayor: Yeah. And Juliet, one of the things we're doing more and more is, you know, the door-to-door canvassing, particularly with seniors. We've done this really successfully in public housing. We're going to keep expanding that because obviously a lot of seniors are not as comfortable signing up for the vaccine online. We do have the phone option, but there's nothing better than someone being right there in front of them saying, "Are you ready to get vaccinated? Great. Let's set up the appointment right here with you." So, that canvassing effort's been good. We want to keep expanding that as well. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next, we'll go to Chris from Gothamist.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. First question for you, you mentioned earlier that the NYPD was going to send officers to certain parts of town to protect against Asian-American or against anti-Asian hate crimes. Can you talk about what your administration is doing beyond that to combat this sort of prejudice?

Mayor: Yeah, this is – we've seen something really horrible, Chris, of this uptick in Asian hate crimes in the last weeks. It has been devastating for the Asian American communities. And we're doing work, first of all, really listening to community leaders and community organizations, and they say consistently, they want us to spread the message, stop Asian hate, to really encourage people to come forward in support of Asian Americans and their communities. So, some of this is, you know, public support for the community. Some of this is education which means putting out the right messages publicly, obviously, literally, the work we want to do in our schools and beyond to foster respect and understanding for Asian-American communities. And some of it is very much the work of our Asian Hate Crimes Task Force in the NYPD identifying who has been doing these acts, finding them, prosecuting them, and that sends a message to everyone that this will not be tolerated. So, it really takes all the above.

There's a – we learned this, unfortunately, in other situations. We've seen hate crimes against the Jewish community, Muslim community, Sikh community. We've had different really challenging moments, obviously hate crimes against transgender New Yorkers and hate crimes against the LGBT community in general. The fact is we follow what a lot of community folks have asked us to do. We follow their desire to see the outrage, to see the desire for solidarity exhibited, and called for from the top plus the effort to be out there physically with presence. And in this case, after this horrifying attack in Atlanta, it was very important to reassure communities. And we also are going to do more of what we started doing in some other situations with community patrols, where people from different ethnicities and neighborhoods gather together to be out together in solidarity to support each other. That's also a really effective tool. Go ahead, Chris.

Question: Thanks. I appreciate that. And my second question is last summer when you and the City Council were coming up with the budget, you oversaw cuts to the NYPD's overtime by

several hundred million dollars. When reporters pointed out that the NYPD routinely blows their overtime budget, you said, “What we're talking about is the kind of overtime that is normally relied upon, the NYPD is particularly well-managed today. It has gotten better with every decade and every year. And Commissioner—”

Mayor: Chris, are you there?

Moderator: Chris? Did we lose you?

Mayor: Chris, can you hear me? All right let's get Chris back and go on to the next question. We'll bring Chris back when you get him. You got them or not. All right.

Moderator: We're experiencing some minor technical difficulties.

Mayor: That is well said. Do we have another question ready?

Moderator: Yeah.

Unknown: [Inaudible]

Mayor: Okay. Good to know. Quickly call Emergency Management –

[Laughter]

We have a situation. Guys, it wasn't that hard a question. I could've handled it.

[Laughter]

Unknown: [Inaudible]

Moderator: We're back.

Question: Okay. I think. Okay.

Mayor: Can you hear us, Chris?

Question: I'm here. I can hear you now, yes.

Mayor: All right. You were in the middle of my eloquent quote. Go ahead.

Question: Oh, I'm sorry. Okay, eloquent quote. You said, “What we're talking about is the kind of overtime that is normally relied upon. NYPD is particularly well-managed today. And it's gotten better with every decade and every year, and Commissioner Shea is a very smart data-driven modern manager.” At the City Council's NYPD budget hearing yesterday, though, the public learned that the NYPD has again exceeded their budget by more than \$700 million. And much of that is overtime. So, why is this happening? And what is the point of view setting a

highly contentious police department budget, if the police department is just going to ignore you and the Council and spend the money anyway?

Mayor: Well, I disagree with that characterization and I'll speak to it. Let me just take back once – take you back one step on your previous question because I really want to emphasize on addressing hate crimes, directed to the Asian community. I want to just urge all New Yorkers to turn to nyc.gov/StopAsianHate which is a place where people can get real information about how to support the Asian American community, and also if you see a hate crime or have any information about one, you can report it there.

But to your question, Chris, the bottom line is that we said the NYPD would reduce overtime. They are reducing overtime. We had some very big challenges since then. Everyone knows that. We had an extraordinary amount of protests, that it was important to have presence at. And we've been changing the approach to how we use that presence, but it's still important to have that presence. That did affect the outcome, but no, NYPD understands they are under a mandate from me and the City Council to keep reducing overtime and they have been reducing overtime and they will reduce it more. That's the bottom line. And the number of officers has been reduced overall. So, those are two things happening simultaneously. But no, we're very committed and there's a lot more time left in this fiscal year to continue reducing overtime. Go ahead.

Moderator: We have time for two more. First, we'll go to Abu from Bangla Patrika.

Question: Hello, Mayor. How are you?

Mayor: Good, Abu. How are you doing?

Question: Good. Thank you so much. The first question is we have a television in our community, Bengali community, which is called Time Television. And then every night the doctors came to show, talk about the virus and other stuff. And there's a medication called Ivermectin is getting popular and a lot of people are getting benefits. People who are infected, they're taking this medication and they're getting benefit out of it. So, I want to have any kind of comment on this, on this medication. I very much –

Mayor: Okay. I'm going to turn to Dr. Varma and then if either of the other doctors wants to join in. Are you familiar with this medication, Dr. Varma?

Senior Advisor Varma: Yes, I am. And I think it's very important that we make it a very clear message that this is a medication that has absolutely no effect whatsoever on the treatment of COVID-19. Unfortunately, you know, as we've seen throughout this epidemic there have been many people that have tried to sort of take advantage of our scientific uncertainty and to promote medications that may or may not have an impact and calling them wonder drugs. And we need to be very clear that this is a medication that has known potentially dangerous side effects and has no proven benefits for the treatment of COVID-19.

Mayor: Thank you. Dr. Chokshi or Dr. Katz, anything to add?

President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals: I would just add, sir, I fully agree with Dr. Varma that this has actually been studied and shown not to have any impact. So, it's not just that we don't know, it's that it's been looked at, and it does not in fact improve the health of people with COVID.

Mayor: Thank you. Okay. Go ahead, Abu.

Question: And then there is – the second question is, there's a lot of other variants coming. CNN has reported today that is – could be dangerous and more contagious. What is New York City thinking about, and what is the focus or any idea that, what is next on a contagious new variant?

Mayor: Yeah, I'll turn to Dr. Varma. Look, we've really tried hard, Abu, to educate people to understand variants are a part of the reality, not just with this disease, but other diseases as well. The fact is there's a lot of concern for sure, but as we've seen them play out, it has not been the kind of outcomes that tell us that we need to change our strategy. You know, Dr. Varma can speak to this. We saw the challenge in South Africa. Now it appears the case levels are going down there quite a bit. There was concern that the variants might not respond to the vaccine. So far, we're not seeing that. There was a concern they may be more deadly. So far, we're not seeing that, but we want to keep vigilant and they clearly are more infectious, which is keeping our case numbers high. But I think this is about not – it's about demystifying the variants, not letting people see more in them than there is, but constantly updating as we get new information. Dr. Varma.

Senior Advisor Varma: Yeah. Great. Thank you very much. I think the Mayor summarized these issues very well because they are really quite complex. You know, first we are concerned. You know, we know the virus has the ability to fight back against it, through the power of evolution. It can – the selection and it can try to become more infectious over time, and in some situations, become more dangerous to people. So that is a concern. Second, we've seen that concern play out in many parts of the world that the Mayor noted. Most of these variants tend to be more infectious. Some of them have shown to be more deadly. The one in New York that seems most dominant right now from our preliminary analysis, does appear to be more infectious, but does not appear to be more deadly. And then third, and really this is really the most important point to keep emphasizing over and over again, nothing that we've seen so far changes our strategy. Our strategy has to be based on all of the things that we know prevent infection, wearing a mask, well-fitting masks, washing your hands, keeping your distance, getting tested often, and when your turn's up, getting vaccinated, because we have seen that the vaccine can be effective, in fact, perfectly effective, in some situations maybe a little bit less, but all the time protecting you against severe illness and death against these variants.

Mayor: Thank you very much. Go ahead

Moderator: For our last question, we'll go to Reuven from The City.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor. Happy St. Patrick's Day.

Mayor: Happy St. Patrick's Day. How are you doing?

Question: Good. Good. Thanks for taking my question. And again, as always, appreciate the opportunity to get to questions and I really, really appreciate it.

Mayor: Absolutely.

Question: So, I was wondering about – in a story that we published the other day and highlighted that over the last four years you know, the two commissioners, the police commissioners, Commissioner Shea and Commissioner O’Neill have embraced this prerogative that they have to alter the punishment that’s found at the NYPD trial room. And they’ve done that 43 times, including one case against the police lieutenant who was captured by traffic camera pushing a guy from a packed sidewalk into traffic. As I’m guessing you’re familiar, yesterday Commissioner Shea actually during an interview on NY1 defended the decision, that specific decision, but the NYPD has ignored, or it hasn’t really – has ignored our request for a copy of the video. First thing I was wondering if you agree with these decisions that the Commissioner makes to kind of overrule the trial room cases. And also, I’m wondering if, you know, if the Commissioner says that this video actually exonerates the officer, why not share it with the public?

Mayor: Well, I think that’s a great question and I’ll have our team follow up right away and I don’t know why there would be a reason it couldn’t be shared, but if it can be shared, we will, for sure. On the bigger point, I believe that the right approach – and this was after a two-year very careful process – the right approach is the discipline matrix and the MOU binding the NYPD to the discipline matrix. So, from now on there’s only one way to do things, to follow the discipline matrix. If an officer, God forbid, has done something wrong and there’s due process, they’re proven to have done something wrong. The penalties will be those stipulated by the matrix within the range allowed. And that is the only range in which the police commissioner can decide. And the MOU is formally – excuse me, the NYPD had formally signed on to that. So, that’s the way we should do things. That was after real careful study and the realization that we need a more transparent and consistent system. Go ahead, Reuven.

Question: Thanks. You know, on the topic of the disciplinary matrix, I’m a little bit confused and I was hoping you might be able to clarify for me, when this issue came up during the Charter Revision Commission, the people that you had pointed to that commission actually opposed creating that matrix, or, you know, a similar idea. Why was that? And what made you change your mind?

Mayor: I don’t recall the specific conversations, but I wouldn’t say that anyone from my memory opposed finding a new approach. It’s just we didn’t have one available at the time that had been worked through. This took a two-year process starting with a blue-ribbon panel that Commissioner O’Neill named to figure out something that would really work, that would be transparent and consistent. And again, any New Yorker – I want to emphasize – anyone who’s interested in this topic, go online, look at the discipline matrix. It’s extremely clear about the range of penalties. There’s a number of penalties where the high end is termination. It’s very clear, it’s also consistent. The commissioner has to stay within these boundaries according to the MOU. And that’s the way forward. But I think it took a lot of work, including working with the

CCRB and advocates and criminal justice experts to figure out exactly what those penalties should be. And I think if you look at it, it's an extraordinary piece of work. It's rigorous. It is very clear. If someone does something wrong, there has to be consequences. But what I love about it, is it's transparent. It's there for every New Yorker to see.

Okay, everyone, as we wrap up today, I just want to go back to the joyous part of this morning. The really wonderful moment celebrating St. Patrick's Day, because it, yeah, it's the beginning of something bigger. You can just feel it this morning, the sense that we are consistently moving towards bringing our city back towards a recovery for all of us. And there was a great energy this morning, also celebrating that extraordinary New York City tradition, that is people coming here from all over the world and making New York City even greater. That is the experience of Irish Americans, again, going back hundreds of years to when the parade was started, even before the Declaration of Independence. And the contribution of Irish Americans has been outstanding to this city. But it's still a contribution that's growing as people continue to come here from Ireland and from countries all around the world. So, that's who we are as New Yorkers. We keep rejuvenating. We keep coming up with new ways of doing things. That's our personality, that's in our DNA, and that's why we're going to have a recovery for all of us, because you cannot hold New York City down. The best and the most energetic and creative people from all over the world have made New York City what it is, and we're not stopping now. Thank you, everybody.

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