

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
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NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 15, 2021, 10:00 AM
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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. I hope you got to watch the memorial last night, last night marked a year since we lost the first New Yorker to COVID and it was an extraordinarily moving memorial. I want to thank everyone who was a part of it because it really spoke to the love we have, the love we have for those we've lost, what they meant to us, what they still mean to us, and the strength of our families, but the fact that our families need our love and support too. There was a chance to really focus on them, focus on those who are carrying on. And it was also a beautiful tribute to this city, to the goodness of the people of this city, the compassion, the way people were there for each other throughout the COVID crisis last year. So, thank you. Thank you to everyone who was a part of it. Thank you to the family members who sent photos of your loved ones in that were projected onto the Brooklyn Bridge. It was absolutely extraordinary. I've seen many great things in this city, but this was a particularly moving moment to see one of our great iconic places in this city filled with the faces of beloved New Yorkers. It was very, very powerful, and we think about those we've lost, and we carry on. We think about those we've lost, and we're inspired by them. We have a lot of pain. I talked about that last night, we have a lot of pain, but we also have a lot of joy because we knew them and what they gave us matters so much.

But let me now talk about strength and resiliency and the stories of people who somehow survived. And this case, I'm going to talk about our efforts to vaccinate people, but it connects to one of the most horrifying moments in the history of humanity, the Holocaust. Yesterday, I was in Brooklyn, in Borough Park, and I saw an incredible effort to vaccinate Holocaust survivors and extraordinary community effort to reach people in need, to help them to reach folks who had been through so much and now needed help at this moment in their lives and the person you see on your screen, Cilia Jankowicz. I have to tell you, I was just immediately moved, deeply moved, but also mesmerized by her story. This wonderful, beautiful woman filled with joy for the fact that she is alive, filled with appreciation for all the people who help her and take care of her, filled with faith, and there was a sparkle in her eyes, but let me tell you about Cilia. She is 97 years old and we had a wonderful conversation, and she was present and focused on every detail of what was happening around her at the age of 97. But she started talking about her life and she talked about being confined in Auschwitz. She talked about literally encountering Dr. Josef Mengele, one of the most horrifying figures of one of the worst moments in human history, and knowing every moment of every day, she might not come out alive, but thank God she did. And she talked about the joy she felt when she was free, she talked about her determination to carry on.

And imagine if after everything she had been through, it was COVID that – after all of her history, COVID had come to take her, but no, because of the great doctors and nurses and community members who said we're going to reach Holocaust survivors, Cilia got her vaccination yesterday. And this was an initiative of the City of New York to say we're going to reach all Holocaust survivors, including those who are homebound. And I got to tell you, I came away from this meeting, this moment with – just filled with hope and appreciation for a human strength and resilience and faith. Just remarkable. And also, a reminder that anyone who thinks history is behind us, it's not, we are still learning these painful lessons and every moment we have to overcome. So, thank you to everyone in Borough Park and everyone around the city who is vaccinating Cilia and others who need this help so much.

Now, speaking of vaccination, look, we continue to make progress. I'm always going to say the thing we need is supply, supply, supply, but we are making some progress for sure. The Biden administration every day is getting better at getting us supply and we appreciate that, they are so focused on increasing supply rapidly. Also, the stimulus is going to make a huge impact in every part of our lives, but a lot of that stimulus money is supporting vaccination efforts. So, to date, in New York City from the beginning of our effort, there've been 2,827,346 vaccinations. That is more than the total population of Chicago, extraordinary effort, and it's going to take off as soon as we get the supply we need. But one of the things we're going to focus on is the painstaking work, literally apartment by apartment, house by house, the work of reaching the homebound, those New Yorkers who cannot leave their home and need the vaccine, whether they are senior citizens or they are disabled, whatever the reason, we will reach them. Our goal is to reach everyone homebound who wants to be vaccinated by the end of April and anyone who is ready to be vaccinated, please, go to vax4nyc.nyc.gov, and there is special section there for anyone who needs the homebound service. Again, this is for seniors, for folks with disabilities, anyone who needs it, we want to be there for, and I want you to hear from someone who has done so much to help people with disabilities, who has been a champion, an advocate, but has really worked the leavers of government to do more and more to reach people, and he's helping us to put together this initiative so we can ensure that literally everyone who needs the service will get it. My pleasure to introduce our Commissioner for the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, Victor Calise.

Commissioner Victor Calise, Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Appreciate your leadership through this difficult time, and I really want to put a special love to the people of New York City and everyone that has lost someone. I know how difficult it is during these times to be cooped up in your house and then see people pass away. It's definitely difficult. And I also want to thank the City of New York, the workers of the City of New York. We have done so much. We've had so many initiatives to make sure that we're taking care of the people of New York City, and I don't want to forget about the workers, the sanitation workers, people in Media and Entertainment, the Department of Citywide Administration and Services, Department of Transportation, Parks, and Department of Health, because we've done so much, and we've been here from the beginning, and I want to thank the MTA workers for everything that they do to move everyone around so we can help everyone.

And what have we been doing? The Mayor's Office of people with Disabilities has been here since the start of pandemic, and we've heavily been involved in the city's COVID-19 response, to

ensure that equitable and inclusive response is for people with disabilities. We have connected our community partners with protective equipment. We have ensured that communication from the Mayor have been captioned and include American sign language. We have also had our digital accessibility coordinator check all of the Department of Health online content to ensure it is screen readable and accessible for people with disabilities. We've seen that this hasn't happened in any other places in the country, and we wanted to make sure that it happens here. And most importantly, we have kept in constant contact with the community to understand the issues that we may be overlooking. This work has continued with the city's extensive outreach plan for vaccine distribution. Our office has been working with the Vaccine Command Center to address issues that we have heard from the disability community surrounding accessibility and communication. There is more work to be done, but we have come a long way. Most recently, we have been excited and encouraged by the approval of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine and subsequent outreach plan to vaccinate both seniors and people with disabilities in their home. I'm going to say that again, to vaccinate both seniors and people with disabilities in their home. We have been messaging this information out throughout our network of disability advocates and community-based organizations. We are in the process of reaching out to our own list of individuals with disabilities unable to leave their home and getting them connected to this program. As I said, we have more work to do, but with increased access to vaccines, things are becoming more promising by the day.

On the first Friday of every month at 1:00 PM, my office has a virtual meeting with the disability community to share the latest information on the COVID-19 response. In addition, we open the floor to listen to community concerns and questions. I invite anyone from the disability community who is not part of these meetings already to join us. Registration is available on our website at nyc.gov/disability-coronavirus. Our next virtual meeting is Friday, April 2nd, at 1:00 PM. Once again, registration is available on our website at nyc.gov/disability-coronavirus. You can also call us at 212-788-2830. If you are deaf and prefer to communicate directly in American sign language, call our ASL direct video phone at 646-396-5830. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you for the great work you and your team have done throughout this crisis, helping so many New Yorkers. And, everyone, help keeps coming in, and this is what we are so moved by, things getting better. A lot of challenges ahead, but things are getting better. And one of the examples of help arriving was the fact that the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is here. This is a game-changer. It's a vaccine that's a lot easier for us to use and it only takes one dose. And I'm looking forward to getting it myself very soon, but first I want you to hear from someone who just got vaccinated himself. And he got his shot on Friday and I think he can give you a little bit of an expert opinion on the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, our Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi.

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor. And yes, last Friday, it was my turn to roll up my sleeve and get vaccinated against COVID-19. As the City's doctor, this moment was especially meaningful for me. I thought about my neighbors, my fellow health care workers, and all of the New Yorkers whom we have lost to this devastating illness over the past year. I also felt hope. Even though I'm grateful for the protection that vaccination offers me, like so many others who have already been vaccinated, I was thinking about what it means for my loved ones as well, like my young

daughter who hasn't seen her grandparents in over a year. And with every vaccination, as a city, we advance a little further and the virus is forced to give up more ground. The vaccine I received was the one dose J & J vaccine. I had some mild arm pain, fatigue, and a headache about 24 hours after getting the shot, but they had all resolved within about 48 hours.

Now, each member of the City's health leadership on this conference has received a different brand of vaccine. Dr. Katz received Pfizer, Dr. Varma received Moderna, and I got the J & J shot – this is a personal illustration of what each of us has said publicly, all of the authorized vaccines are safe, effective, and lifesaving. All of them offer strong protection from severe illness. So, the best vaccine is the one that you can get now.

Last week, we saw eligibility expand to New Yorkers 60 and older. And on Wednesday, public-facing government employees, not-for-profit workers and building service workers will become eligible. To them, I say, the sooner you get vaccinated, the sooner you are protected from COVID-19 and protecting others from infection. This also goes for New Yorkers who had COVID-19, like I did. Get vaccinated once you've recovered. This is because we don't know precisely how long natural immunity lasts and vaccination almost certainly offers additional protection.

Finally, for those New Yorkers who have already been vaccinated, I have some doctor's orders for you as well. Please share your story about why you got vaccinated with your family members, your neighbors, and those in your temple, church, or synagogue. I'm counting on you to create a snowball effect for vaccination, even as we head into the warmer months of spring and summer. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Commissioner. Everyone, everything we're doing is to protect New Yorkers and also to bring our city back strong, to create a recovery. And this has to be a recovery for all of us, this has to be a time where we address a lot of the mistakes of the past and we move forward together. And a recovery for all of us means not just bringing back jobs or getting people vaccinated. A recovery for all of us means creating safe communities, creating communities where everyone feels supported, everyone feels respected. Now, this takes us to such an important topic, the work of improving safety at the grassroots with the people, by community members. Policing matters, but the work of community members matters crucially and it needs to be elevated and uplifted. It needs to be more a part of the solution. I had a long talk with our Public Advocate Jumaane Williams a week or two ago, and we talked about different ways of re-imagining policing, going forward. And I appreciated the different ideas, the different concepts he brought to the table as he thought about the reforms we need. And one of the things he talked to me about was the Advance Peace Model, a really powerful idea of reaching young people in a different way, in a more sustainable way, and helping to move young people away from any involvement with gun violence and helping them on a better path. But it takes a deeper commitment to do that. So, today, I'm announcing that we're going to begin acting on this idea presented by the Public Advocate. We're going to implement a pilot program using the Advance Peace Model. And I'm very, very hopeful this will be something that has a profound impact, and we can prove its impact here and then expand it. I want you to hear from the Public Advocate about why this is so important and how this is going to work. And I welcome Public Advocate Jumaane Williams.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you so much. I really appreciate what you said, Public Advocate. The – I agree with you, the way out of a crisis is through investment, not austerity. That's an absolute governing principle for me as well and I thank you for advancing this point, because the Advance Peace Model – I think you're absolutely right, this has tremendous potential in this city, and we have to start it, and we have to start it aggressively. We'll be in the five precincts. And if it does follow the pattern, as the Public Advocate said, of the Crisis Management System and Cure Violence, you'll see this expand rapidly and have a huge impact. So, I really want to give the Public Advocate credit for bringing this to the fore and working with his team and so many other stakeholders to get this model ready for New York City. And now, we will implement it.

Now, to hear more about why this matters someone I really admire who's done extraordinary work in the community. I want to give him and all of his colleagues credit for just extraordinary improvements and changes that have happened in the Queensbridge community and other places where he's worked, perfecting the model of Cure Violence and showing that community-based solutions can make a huge impact. So, he is in fact one of the co-founders of the New York City Crisis Management System, and also Executive Director of the community – of Community Capacity Development. My pleasure introduced K. Bane.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you so much. And again, K. Bane and I have worked closely together, and he's been one of the people has shown me the power of all these models, and I appreciate that deeply. We are seeing community-based solutions like we've never seen before in this city, but we have to invest in them. And so, this investment in the Advance Peace Model, I think, is going to be a big difference-maker and it's a beginning of something I predict will become much bigger and will help save a lot of lives in this city.

I want to talk to you about another part of what a recovery for all of us looks like, and it is understanding our past so that we can live a better future, taking full account of our past, seeing the truth that we still live with, what we've received from our past allows us to move forward. That includes looking at painful realities, it also includes looking at the times when people did the right thing, when people stood up, and took chances, and did something to change the world. This case, I'm talking about a part of New York City history that doesn't get enough attention, our crucial role as a city in the abolitionist movement. The city has a painful, sad role in the history of slavery, but it also has a very powerful and good role in the history of the abolitionist movement. But that history hasn't been told enough and it needs to be preserved and action needs to be taken. So, today we have a major announcement on that front, and I'm going to turn to someone who has been passionately working to make sure that this day would come. And for her, it has been a labor of love, and she happens to be my partner in all things, the First Lady of the City of New York, Chirlane McCray.

First Lady Chirlane McCray: Thank you, Bill. And good morning, everyone. It's a wonderful thing to start a Monday morning with good news. This is a great day for our city, and it's a great

day for Black history. Today I can announce that the City has officially purchased 227 Duffield Street in Brooklyn. Which means it will be protected and celebrated for a very long time to come. A few weeks ago [inaudible] talk about what this home means to our city's history. It's a place where abolitionists risked their livelihoods and lives so that African people who were enslaved could travel safely to freedom. And we told the story of Mama Joy, the brave owner, who not only protected this property, but spread the word about the important [inaudible] had taken place there. And we said it was time for all of us to learn about and understand the full history of the Underground Railroad and those who fought against the institution of slavery in New York City. The purchase of 227 Duffield Street is a first step toward making that happen. And I just want to wish everyone who worked on this, a big congratulations. It is a big step forward and back to you, Bill.

Mayor: Thank you so much Chirlane. I know you and I talked about this a lot. That this was a priceless opportunity to protect history and start a re-examination of both the problems, the bad things, but also the good things. Also, the things that should give us inspiration for the future. So, 227 Duffield now will be protected, preserved, and we're going to do something very special there to show people the history and help everyone, new generations to feel it and understand it.

All right, everyone let's conclude with our indicators. And today's indicators are number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19. Now, today we have some interesting numbers – again, every day is subject to some variations that may be indicative or may not, but it's notable. We have for the first time in a long time, a number well below our threshold, 154 patients. Confirmed positivity level of 60.59 percent. Hospitalization rate 3.68 per 100,000. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average. Today's report, 3,123 cases. And number three, percentage of people testing citywide positive for COVID-19 Today's report on a seven-day rolling average, 6.16 percent. I'm going to do a few words in Spanish, going back to the earlier topic of vaccinations for homebound New Yorkers.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, we'll turn to our colleagues in the media. And please let me know the name and outlet of each journalist.

Moderator: Hi, we'll now begin our Q-and-A. With us today is Health Commissioner Chokshi, MOPD Commissioner Calise, DFTA Commissioner Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez, FDNY Commissioner Dan Nigro, and Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma, and First Lady McCray. With that we'll go to Marcia from WCBS.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. How are you doing on this bright Monday morning?

Mayor: I like your positive sunny optimism, Marcia. I'm doing well. How about you?

Question: Okay. You know, the sun. It's nice. It's a great day. So, my question to you is this, when was the last time you spoke to Governor Cuomo? I know that there's been a lot of important issues from vaccinations to indoor dining, all kinds of things that would have to do

with the city's recovery. And I wonder when the last time you spoke to him was? And what you talked about?

Mayor: Weeks ago. I know we were talking about COVID, specifically some element of the vaccination effort. And look, as I've said, our teams – no matter what's going on in Albany, our teams keep talking and working together the best possible. And our health care teams as well with the Albany health care team. And we're all going to keep moving forward. But that said what's happening in Albany is making it harder to get things done. And that's why I think change is needed there. Go ahead, Marcia.

Question: Well, I guess the big concern now is that the budget is two weeks away. And are you at all worried about the role the Governor will be able to play in terms of making you know, negotiating with the Legislature?

Mayor: I think the Legislature is going to be the lead in this process. I think the Governor is in crisis and his crisis has become a distraction to the whole state. But thank God, the Legislature is strong and moving forward. And I have a lot of faith in Speaker Heastie and Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins to get the job done.

Moderator: Next is Juan Manuel from NY1.

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

Mayor: Good, Juan Manuel. How are you doing today?

Question: I'm very good. Thank you. Mr. Mayor, now that President Biden, when asked about whether Governor Cuomo should resign, has said we should wait for the investigation, giving the Governor some breathing room. And now that it's been reported that the person in charge of the vaccination effort in the State is calling county officials, gauging support for Governor Cuomo do you think that what you've said about the Governor in the last few days could end up harming New York City and its vaccination efforts? Do you fear any sort of retaliation?

Mayor: Juan Manuel, what we've heard about the Governor and his team trying to link vaccine supply to political support, that is the definition of corruption. It is disgusting. It is dangerous. There are lives on the line and it cannot be tolerated. There needs to be now a full investigation of that on top of the investigation of the nursing home scandal, the investigation of the sexual harassment and molestation. There needs to be investigation of what happened with the Tappan Zee Bridge, but now on top of it, there needs to be an investigation of why a senior official in the Governor's Office clearly tried to link vaccine supply to political support. And I'll tell you something, he better not call me because I'll tell him what he can do with that. No, it's unacceptable and we are not going to stand for it. And if we see any effort to reduce the vaccine supply to New York City as political retribution, we will bring it right out in the open. Go ahead, Juan Manuel.

Question: Thank you Mr. Mayor. And looking at the indicators today, it looks pretty good for the City. A positivity rate right now, 3.16 percent. Is it now that after being so worried about this

so-called New York City variant for the last couple of weeks, is it maybe that that New York City variant is not as dangerous as initially thought?

Mayor: Well, I'd say this Juan Manuel. First of all, you know, we go by our Health Department indicators. So, our positivity rate is a different one than what you noted, but clearly there's progress. And when you're getting close to three million vaccinations, of course that's going to have an impact and you're going to see a lot more in the weeks ahead. So, I am hopeful. As our health care team has said, there's still a lot we need to learn about the variants. But so far everything we've seen suggests that the vaccinations are the best way to stop the impact of the variants. And our goal is just to get everyone vaccinated as quickly as possible. I wouldn't get overconfident Juan Manuel. I wouldn't say we know everything we need to know. We're going to remain vigilant. But we know what the game plan is. Get everyone vaccinated as quickly as possible.

Moderator: Next is Jacob from The Forward.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: How are you doing Jacob?

Question: I'm doing great. You visited yesterday a vaccination site that serves Holocaust survivors. Would you mind to share your experience speaking to the people and seeing the operation?

Mayor: Thank you, Jacob. Incredibly moving. First of all, I talked a lot of the doctors, nurses, the staff running this incredible center and their commitment to all their patients and particularly to the Holocaust survivors was beautiful, just beautiful. Just incredible sense of, they understood exactly how important it was to reach people and particularly to be part of healing. Because what Holocaust survivors went through, one of the worst episodes in human history and their survival is one of the signs of hope for humanity. And every time I've talked to a Holocaust survivor, I come away sobered and saddened. But also somehow inspired because every single one I've talked to has a story of faith and perseverance. And they're still here. And the people who oppress them are gone and history has renounced them. So, it was very moving, particularly with Cilia Jankowicz. I mean, there's just light in her eyes, 97 years old, lived through Auschwitz, confronted Dr. Mengele. I mean, I couldn't believe what I was hearing, except I knew it was true. And again, I felt like that history was way too close to us. And we need to remember that history, whether it means recognizing the danger of anti-Semitism that lurks in this nation and around the world. Or whether it means recognizing the danger of any effort to take away democracy, which we all know is alive and well. I put everything in perspective, but thank God she's alive and thank God she's vaccinated. And now she'll be safe. Go ahead, Jacob.

Question: So, we are marking now the anniversary to the outbreak. You, on television said that Governor Cuomo was a little late to issue certain guidelines on lockdown. Looking back, I know we are probably chewing the same gum, but looking back do you have some reflections on how you responded earlier to the outbreak, especially responding to the outbreak in the Brooklyn Orthodox community?

Mayor: Jacob, look, I'll just say there's so much to think about particularly the people we lost. So much that could have been different had we had the testing we needed, had we had a federal government providing leadership. But I'm very pained by that moment where, you know, I saw the evidence. And I heard from people, including people from outside New York City and outside the government, you know, really pointed out the power of shelter-in-place. And when I called for it, the Governor would not even listen. He wouldn't even consider it. I mean, he literally called it imprisoning New Yorkers. It was a horrible moment. And an example of the arbitrariness of this Governor that has had a horrible consequence for everyday New Yorkers. But then later, as you said, we had the real challenges and in Brooklyn and Queens. I look back on that. And I really appreciate that even though there were a lot of tough conversations and a lot that people had to do to find common ground, we did find common ground. Community leaders in Brooklyn, Queens really stepped forward, made sure people were getting tested, really emphasized mask wearing. And it made a huge impact. And it's an example of in the end, the way to attack COVID and to address some of the other problems is with the community, is listening and engaging the community. And I think that was a good moment ultimately.

Moderator: Next we'll go to Kayla from FOX-5.

Question: Hey, Mr. Mayor, can you hear me?

Mayor: Yes. How are you?

Question: I'm well, how are you?

Mayor: Good. Good.

Question: All right. So, I'm asking about Governor Cuomo, like most people. I know you've called for his resignation a few times now. Among the reasons you say he needs to resign, is so that local control can be restored. But even if the Lieutenant Governor does step in my understanding, is that the decision you would want to have control over or the decisions I should say, would still be up to the State unless Hochul hands those powers over to you? Am I right about that? And if so, what makes you think she'll do that?

Mayor: It's a very important question and I certainly won't speak for her. I think there's all over the State, county executives, mayors, town supervisors saying restore normal democracy, restore the powers that we had before the pandemic. Because we're coming out of the pandemic thank God. And we need to get back to work and we need to make our own decisions. The State has consistently stood in the way of the actions we would take. I use the example of shelter-in-place. It would have happened almost a full week earlier if we had the power to do it here. The executive authority, the emergency authority that the Governor has, should be revoked. And I do think, look, anyone who understands the state and listens to leaders and listens to people around the state will understand this. And the Lieutenant Governor, I'm hoping is someone who would listen in that fashion, it would make that change so we can protect our people better. Go ahead, Kayla.

Question: All right. And to that point, I know you've mentioned that local control would give the City the freedom to vaccinate, but are there any other measures the Governor's taking that you don't agree with? So, for example, indoor dining resuming at a 50 percent capacity this Friday, catering halls resuming it at 50 percent capacity today. If you had local control today, are those measures you'd walk back?

Mayor: Kayla, look, I don't want to do a theoretical on things that the State controls, but what I can tell you for sure is we would be watching each of those very carefully and focusing on the data and the science. And if anything changed, we would move aggressively to make an adjustment. Right now, I don't have that power. Let's say we find a problem in one of these new decisions that the Governor made. Let's say we see it doing – having an impact that we think is endangering New Yorkers. I can talk about it. I can scream about it, but I can't change it per se. That's why we need local control. So that we can make those decisions and then adjust as it goes along. Also, fair share of vaccine. We're not getting our fair share. We're vaccinating New York City residents, suburban residents, people from New Jersey, people from Connecticut. I want to vaccinate everyone we can vaccinate, but give us a greater supply and a greater proportion of supply given all the people that we are covering. Right now, we don't have the power to achieve that. So, I think this structure isn't working the way the State's handling it. And then on top of it to hear that there may be trading political favors in exchange for vaccine? I mean that's disgusting. This is another reason why we need local control.

Moderator: Next is Nolan from the Post.

Question: Hey, good morning everybody.

Mayor: Hey, Nolan. How are you doing?

Question: I'm doing okay. Larry Schwartz seems to need a roommate and I'm thinking of volunteering myself. I was curious, so you said Larry Schwartz, hasn't given you a phone call. Do you think the Larry Schwartz phone calls should warrant beyond sort of a State investigation, a federal probe as the vaccination program is a federal effort?

Mayor: It's a good question, Nolan. I think it all deserves a very thorough investigation. State, federal, either both, but it deserves investigation immediately because the idea that this is how we save lives and it must be handled, not with politics, not for political gain, but to actually help people and to do it fairly. That's what's at stake here. And I – you know, I'm very worried about the corruption we're hearing about here. If vaccine supply is being given out for political reasons, that in many ways is the single worst thing we've heard in all of these scandals and they're all horrible. Because it literally means some people may not get the help they need and may not live as a result. So, we've got to – we've got to get to the bottom of this quickly. Wherever that investigation can happen as quickly as possible, that's where we need it. Go ahead, Nolan.

Question: Do you think Larry Schwartz is fit to remain on the MTA Board? And I know you guys have been asking the State to boost the City shipments. Under federal regulations, those are guaranteed to be 43 percent of whatever the State received. Have those requests been formally rejected, and do you think politics have played a role in that rejection?

Mayor: We've asked repeatedly, we've never gotten additional help, we've never gotten a real answer. There's no question in my mind that the State does not try to make those decisions based on where the need is greatest, but constantly lets politics into those decisions. Again, how many times – I'm sure my team could provide you a list of the number of times I've called for something publicly, and the Governor has just immediately said no out of spite. And that's dangerous. So, it's clear we deserve our fair share. The numbers speak for themselves. But despite all the times we've asked for it in private meetings or publicly, we don't get our fair share. I think that's everything you need to know.

Moderator: Next is Derick from WABC.

Question: Good morning. I had a question about the Schools Chancellor who obviously started this morning and we're here in Brooklyn where she was touring P. S. 15. A lot has been said about segregation in New York City public schools. And I'm just curious, I know everyone wants to tackle this, it's been an issue for a long time. How hard is it going to be for her to do something meaningful about segregation, given that there's going to be a new administration coming in less than a year?

Mayor: Well, that's a fair question, Derick, but I'd flip it on its head. I think this is an unparalleled moment of change, and I think a lot can happen this year. I think our Chancellor is an extraordinary educator and just a great, great New York story, you know, that she came up growing up in the Bronx, going through – excuse me, growing up in Queens, going through our public schools, moved to the Bronx, became a teacher where the need was greatest, rose from teacher all the way up to Chancellor. So, Meisha Ross Porter understands our city and our schools as well, or better than any chancellor we've ever had. And we're going to act right now on diversifying our classrooms, on fighting segregation with the plan that you'll get this September to change Gifted and Talented fundamentally. You're going to see changes this year in screened schools. You're going to see things that will have a lasting impact. And, you know, there will be another mayor and that mayor will certainly look at her work and I hope they'll realize how important it is and make their own decision about the future. But we have a chance to make an impact right now. Go ahead, Derick.

Question: And just to ask this question, what do you think should happen to entrance exams in the future both at the high school level and also the pre-K level as well?

Mayor: Well, Derick, if you're talking about the approach to Gifted and Talented and the tests that were given at the pre-K level, those are gone now. We said very clearly, I've said – and our new Chancellor agrees deeply – that, you know, we're not doing standardized testing for pre-K kids anymore. We're going to go to a whole new approach to Gifted and Talented, and that will be unveiled in September. We're going to work with people and stakeholders all over the city to develop that approach. We're going to make more changes. We've made some already, we're going to make more related to screened schools and ensuring that there's maximum opportunity for kids from all over the city to get into those great schools. The one that always bothers me, Derick, is the specialized high schools. The status quo is absolutely broken. The plan we put forward didn't succeed. It's well known, but we need change with the specialized high schools.

And I'm sure there's lots of good ideas out there on how to do it. But the one thing I know is they do not represent the people of this city and they have to be changed, and that won't happen on my watch, but I sure as hell hope the next mayor can get that done in Albany.

Moderator: We have time for two more. First, we'll go to Caroline from Gothamist.

Question: Hi, thank you. Mr. Mayor, first of all, I am interested in a study that came out last week that found that it is safe to have students distancing three feet in schools rather than six feet. And I'm wondering if this is something the city is taking into consideration, and if this could allow all students to return to school five days a week.

Mayor: Yeah, I'm going to start, and I'll turn to Dr. Varma and Dr. Chokshi because we have all been discussing this idea for quite a while, and this new study is important. There's no definitive answer yet from everything I've heard, but what it does tell us is it's something we need to start thinking about especially because we are making real progress against this disease. The number of vaccinations is just moving constantly upward. We're talking about, you know, a typical day, we're getting 50,000, 60,000 or more people vaccinated. That's having an impact. We're watching the variants closely, but I got to tell you, the overall trajectory looks very good right now. So, people have asked me, would we consider an opt-in? We are certainly going to consider one, but we need to see the health care situation really get stronger to get to that point. But obviously then that will beg the question of distancing as well. So, we're examining this closely right now. Let me just get a quick comment from Dr. Varma then Dr. Chokshi.

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: Great. Thank you very much for the question. Yes. So, first as it regards to this specific study it's absolutely additional useful information. I do think there are some important limitations because it was, you know, comparing large areas which may or may not have had identical measures in place, but it does point to what we were increasing in the learning, which is that the school settings, in which careful measures are applied, it can be conducted, it can have safe in-person learning. And we also know that children, particularly young children, are less likely to be the source of outbreaks than older adults. So, we're eagerly awaiting a further analysis of this. We've been in regular communication, for example, with CDC, which is doing a number of studies particularly in laboratory settings to try to define this. And once the evidence becomes stronger, we do hope to look at ways that we can make in-person learning more available and more like the way it has been in the past.

Mayor: Thank you. Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes. I agree with Dr. Varma's assessment of this study and we'll just add that what has characterized our approach to opening schools in the COVID-19 era from the beginning has been a commitment to rigorous health and safety standards. And the Mayor has charged us to continue doing that. And so, we interpret any new evidence in that context, one additional factor that will make a difference in the coming weeks and months is vaccination. Particularly because we know that it will curb spread further within, you know, adults who are in the school setting. So, we'll take all of those factors into consideration. But always with the focus on the health and safety of students, which importantly also has to take into account the health

benefits of in-person schooling. So, those are the things that we'll be looking at to evaluate the evidence in the coming weeks.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Caroline.

Question: Thank you. Yeah, because I've heard a lot of, you know, frustration. I think we've heard a lot of frustration from people about schools, you know, opening and closing. And I think there's some hope maybe resulting from that study. But I have another question about the fact that so many more New Yorkers will become eligible for the vaccine this week. I heard, you know, the figure is 80 percent of New Yorkers statewide will be eligible after this new phase. So, I'm wondering, does the City have the vaccine supply and staff in place and other things it needs to meet that demand?

Mayor: Yeah, let me, first of all, say, okay, before this most recent one, it was already over five million New York City residents who were eligible, 76 percent of our adult population. I have to get the latest count with these additional categories. But clearly, we can say now, you know, a vast majority of New York City adults are now eligible. And I agree with President Biden entirely, May 1st, everyone becomes eligible. I think that's a great plan. Do we have the vaccine centers? Yes. Do we have the space and even more space available as needed? Yes. Do we have the staffing? Yes. And we're adding 2,000 more members of our Vaccine for all Corps. What are we missing? There's one thing and one thing only, supply. Right this minute this week we will be, give or take, 200,000 doses below the supply level that we could provide to the people of this city. If we had 200,000 more doses dropped on us this week, we could use them all. So, Caroline, we have the capacity, we've had the capacity now for many weeks. It is just about supply. And if that gets worked out both with greater supply coming from the manufacturers and the federal government and getting our fair share from the State, we can just really, really move forward intensely because we're ready. Go ahead.

Moderator: For our last question. We'll go to Alexa from News 12.

Question: Mr. Mayor, how are you today?

Mayor: I'm doing well. Alexa, how you been?

Question: I'm good. Thank you. So, another question on vaccines for you. The 24-hour pilot program at the mass vaccination sites has stopped. Can you tell us if it was successful when it was running and if it just stopped because of supply?

Mayor: Well, I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi, but I'll say, look, we have a couple of different things we need to achieve simultaneously. We've got to get the vaccines out into all communities, particularly the communities hardest hit by COVID. We've got to fight disparity. We've got to have the most grassroots effort possible. So, the more local centers you can have, particularly in trusted neighborhood institutions, the better off you are. But the bottom line is the supply problem. If we had supply, we would be running, I think, a number of places 24/7 because there was clearly a lot of demand. So, I'd say it worked, but it only works if you have a huge amount of supply. So, to me, this goes back to the central problem. I also think the biggest sites, you

know, the ones that the State put together, Javits Center and Aqueduct, the problem we found there was that they were – those sites were not reaching enough New York City residents and they were not helping us fight disparity. So, this is again why, where we have 24-hour sites that are in the right places, it really makes a difference. Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. And first I'll just start by clarifying that the City sites that are running 24/7 those will continue running on that 24/7 schedule. My understanding is that the Javits Center, which is run by the State, may be reducing its schedule to not be operating 24 hours a day. But what we have found is that as the Mayor was saying, it's so important for us to have a reach of our vaccination campaign, both in terms of space, getting into the neighborhoods and the communities through the trusted institutions where people get their health care, but also in terms of time. We know that particularly for essential workers, having hours early in the morning, late in the day, and overnight those are critically important as well to ensure that people are able to access vaccination in a way that is convenient for them.

Mayor: Go ahead, Alexa.

Question: We're seeing the Javits Center is going to take away some of its overnights, but what about Yankee Stadium? Is it also going to have less appointments?

Mayor: What about – say again where.

Question: Yankee Stadium, because that's like in the Bronx, which was a hard-hit community because of COVID.

Mayor: Yeah, again, what the State is doing is its own thing. And then again, you won't be surprised if I can't comment for the State of New York, they make their own decisions. I often don't agree. But the Bronx operation was put together by the City and State working with the extraordinary organization, SOMOS, that has been doing great work. And that's a place I think absolutely a 24-hour approach works in, exactly for what you said. The Bronx is a place hit so hard by COVID, we need to reach people nonstop, lots of health care workers, lots of folks who work the night shift, and one thing other, who would benefit from a 24/7 approach. So, Dr. Chokshi, do you want to speak to anything latest, information about Yankee Stadium?

Commissioner Chokshi: Sir, I don't have any more updated information than that. We'll just say again, when we have the supply, we are committed to expanding days of the week, hours of the day, whatever it takes to get shots into arms as quickly as possible.

Mayor: I want Dr. Chokshi to repeat one important thing. What is the best vaccine, Dr. Chokshi?

Commissioner Chokshi: The best vaccine is the one that you can get now.

Commissioner Calise: Mr. Mayor, can I say something about –

Mayor: Of course, Commissioner Calise.

Commissioner Calise: So, I just want to say on the vaccine sites, our office has been doing a tremendous amount of work to ensure accessibility is there. We've heard some feedback from the community about seating for people that may need it. We've been working on that, have implemented that in areas as well. I've had the fortunate ability to get the vaccine, for my underlying condition, so I am happy and grateful that I'm able to do that. I encourage every person with a disability to get it because our lives depend on it. And the people at the vaccine sites and the accessibility is there. And like the Mayor said, we have the ability to do it. I am confident in the people of New York City to be able to get this throughout and – through, everybody for everybody, because we are the City of New York and we get things done.

Mayor: Amen. And you are a true New Yorker, sir. I can hear it. Everybody for everybody. Let me tell you, that really summarizes beautifully everything we're talking about today, but also the very moving moments we had last night at the memorial, because so many of the stories we heard was about – were about people being there for each other, everybody for everybody. And that's how we'll come back. That's how we'll come back. There's a lot of places in this country and this world where people look to New York City, they have a lot of respect for New York City, they look up to New York City, but sometimes maybe they think New Yorkers are a little bit cold, but you know what, I always say New Yorkers have hearts of gold and New Yorkers are amongst the most compassionate people anywhere in the world, and people who really look out for each other. So, that's how we come back. That's who we are. Thank you, everybody.

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