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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT THE YANKEE
STADIUM VACCINATION SITE**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: All right, everybody, welcome. This is a truly historic day. We sometimes say things are historic. This one's really historic – opening day at Yankee Stadium. Opening day at Yankee Stadium, but a different kind of opening day. Opening day for vaccinations at Yankee Stadium, opening day for the people of the Bronx. This site is for the people of the Bronx and only for the people of the Bronx.

[Applause]

And I got to tell you, this is an important moment. This is about equity. This is about fairness. This is about protecting people who need the most protection because the Bronx is one of the places that bore the brunt of this crisis of the coronavirus. The Bronx has suffered, but this is a place where the people of the Bronx will now be protected. Yankee Stadium means so much to New Yorkers. It is iconic in every sense, but today it is a place of healing, a place of protection for the people of the Bronx. And so many people came together, the City and the State worked together. The National Guard – look at the men and women of the National Guard. Let's thank them for being here and all they do. We thank you. We thank you.

[Applause]

Our great friends from SOMOS, who you're going to hear from in a moment. But this day was also made possible by the generosity, the cooperation, the concern of the New York Yankees organization. And I want to thank the Yankees for stepping up. I want to thank – I got to say it, Randy. I want to thank the Yankees for stepping up to the plate.

[Laughter]

We're going to do a lot of baseball analogies today – and doing something very special for the people of the Bronx. So, I'm going to turn to Randy, but I want to say this. Some of you may know that I have a different baseball affiliation and I feel it very deeply, but this is such an important day – the Yankees stepping up to save the lives of Bronxites, to save the lives of New Yorkers – that for one day only I will declare myself a Yankee fan.

[Applause]

All right, I'm going to take a moment to linger with this, and then it's going to come off very quickly. So, let's enjoy it for just a moment. I'll talk about the full emotional experience later.

But I feel gratitude to the New York Yankees. And so, I'm honored to join with you today.
Former Deputy Mayor of New York City, now President of the Yankees, Randy Levine.

[Applause]

Randy Levine, President of the New York Yankees: Well, let's linger just a little bit longer to take a lot of pictures, a lot of video.

Mayor: [Inaudible]

[Laughter]

Levine: Mayor has become a New Yorker today, absolutely.

[Laughter]

Mayor: [Inaudible] one day –

Levine: In any event. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. We're so pleased and honored to be your partner along with the Governor and the State, and SOMOS, in order to provide this stadium to the people of the Bronx, in order to get vaccinated. Yankee Stadium is part of the Bronx. We're part of the community and the fabric of the Bronx, and it's our honor, and our privilege, in order to host this. This is bigger than baseball, much more important than baseball. This is about saving lives and hope. You know, I was out here earlier and seeing all the hundreds and hundreds of people who are out here trying to make appointments for vaccinations, getting appointments for vaccinations. And I saw hope in their eyes, and it's such a wonderful, wonderful experience.

So, on behalf of the Yankees, welcome. As everybody out there in the community who is listening to this, if you're a baseball fan or a Yankee fan, in addition to getting your vaccine, which is the most important, we have some Yankee trinkets and gifts to try and incentivize you to come down here. So, on behalf of Hal Steinbrenner, of the Steinbrenner family, and the New York Yankees, we're honored, Mr. Mayor, and we're here to do whatever it takes. There is no request, no request too big for us. Thank you very much. And –

[Applause]

We have our manager, Aaron Boone, here. So, I'd like to call him up to say a few words.

Aaron Boone, Yankees General Manager: Thank you, Randy. And thank you, Mr. Mayor. The hat looks excellent on you.

[Laughter]

You're very tall. I think you got a little taller.

[Laughter]

Mayor: [Inaudible] from Aaron Boone makes it more [inaudible] –

[Laughter]

It's hurting.

[Laughter]

Boone: This is a very special day, obviously, and this is a very special place to many of us up here and to many of the millions of people here in the Bronx. And this has been the host and the site and the place of so many iconic moments and so many big games and so many opening days that are just so special to us, that work at this as a profession. But today is as special an opening day as Yankee Stadium's ever seen. And it's an honor to be a small part of it. And the hope I know that is being provided today is special to all the people here in the area and all the people that will come through to get that vaccine. So, thank you for being here and thank you for allowing me to be a part of it.

[Applause]

Mayor: Okay. We have a lot of wonderful people here who made this happen. You're going to hear from some of the folks who did this extraordinary work to bring this together, but we have a very, very special guest. And there are some people who achieve things that are almost beyond human belief. There are some people that are so good, we look up to them in a way that just transcends – it doesn't matter what team you're a fan of. If you're a baseball fan, if you're a sports fan, or something just appreciates what a single human being can do, then you care about the next speaker. And I really appreciate that he is here because he cares about the people in the Bronx and he wants to encourage them to get vaccinated. His voice is going to make a huge difference. So, for years and years, he used to save ballgames. Now he's helping us save lives. One of the greatest players in the history of Major League Baseball, my honor to introduce Mariano Rivera.

Mariano Rivera: Amazing. Thank you, Mayor. Guys it's a privilege and honor to be here and seeing what the people in New York are doing, but a special place like Yankee Stadium, an iconic place, like the place in the Bronx, opening the door for vaccinating hundreds and thousands and millions of people, especially the people here in the Bronx. And I appreciate that, Mayor and Randy Levine. Thank you for opening the door, and the Steinbrenner family, because I'm here to support the people that have supported me for so many years, you know, played here. I grew up, I saw a baseball player here at Yankee Stadium and see so many fans that love the game and supporting me and the organization, the New York Yankees. But now it's that to support you, unless you know that it's okay to be vaccinated. I'm online. Okay. When my turn comes, I'm online to get it because yes, I say – with the many players that we play here. We say so many games here, but now it's about saving lives and that's what matters, you know? And again, that's what I'm here to support.

[Mariano Rivera speaks in Spanish]

Mayor: Mariano, thank you so much. It really makes a difference because I know Bronxites are going to hear your voice. They're going to hear your voice, and it's going to help people to protect themselves and their families. Now, everyone, look, the folks at the SOMOS organization

have done amazing work, and they have been heroes of this whole vaccination effort. They've been heroes of the testing effort and it's time for this city to appreciate SOMOS and all they have done. These are community-based health providers in Latino communities, African-American communities, Asian communities out there for the people. And they're making this site come alive. So, I'm really appreciative. I want you to hear from the two people who are the spearheads of SOMOS who have made it the strong organization, it is so that it can serve the people of our neighborhoods. First, a dear friend – and I admire him, he's been a leader during this crisis, Dr. Ramon Tallaj.

[Applause]

Dr. Ramon Tallaj: Thank you, Mayor. Thank you everybody here for coming. Before I start, I want to say thanks to the Lord. He's the one who gives us strength for all of us to be for so many months trying to help our community. And before I start, I want to pledge to the press to get the right direction, to get the right information to the people. It's easy, easy. [Inaudible] vaccine, what do you prefer? You could die from the virus, you could be saved from the vaccine. It's as simple as that. That's what the Yankees are offering here. Thanks to the Governor of New York and the Mayor. We are here because they asked us to come. We're more than glad to bring our patients and take care of them. These are the icon – number one in the world, probably. And here we are.

And I know that doing this, we're going to save many lives. Thank you, Mr. Mayor, because this is a reality come true. Still with [inaudible] president, we need vaccine in the arms of the doctors, hospitals are for secondary tertiary care, urgent care centers, I say urgent, it's urgent care. Pharmacies to deliver medicine. We, primary cares in the community, know how to do prevention. We are champion on that, and this is why, probably, the Mayor and the Governor, choose us to do this because we don't have to do it. For now, the most important piece is you get a message to them, how to get in. People say 30 seconds spot, how to sign in. Every time that you got some information – so, then they will see that will be good news for them to know how to sign in, how to get to the place. To finalize my comments is only one simple thing –

[Dr. Ramon Tallaj speaks in Spanish]

[Applause]

Mayor: And a man who has helped to build SOMOS up to the extraordinary organization it is, he is nationally recognized as a leader calling for more and more support and recognition for businesses owned by people of color and for the kinds of policies that will reach into communities and create equity. My pleasure to introduce Henry Muñoz.

[Applause]

It's an honor to be in this place where heroes are created to send a message to the heroes of our community, the people who have kept the city and this country moving, who never stopped driving that bus or that subway, delivering the food so that we could continue to eat during this moment of crisis. As my partner, Ramon Tallaj said, today is a day of hope. We're here because the Mayor decided that he should listen to the doctors and the health care professionals who, for years, have been taking care of the people who need health care the most, the people for whom

health care is difficult and complex, for whom health care is not easy to navigate. And I want to thank the Mayor for taking the time to allow the doctors and the people who needed the most to be involved in the design of a system that we actually believe is going to create a national model.

What is happening inside of this building is not just a vaccination of hope, it's a new way of looking at this pandemic that allows the trusted voices in communities across this country, in cities that are becoming increasingly cities of color, to put the vaccine in the arms of the people who need it the most. So, I want to thank everyone involved in this effort. The people that you won't see up on this stage today, the doctors and the nurses and the vaccinators who are inside of this building, the people who from day-one in March, never hesitated, never stopped going to a parking lot to administer a test, making sure that you didn't need to prove your citizenship to get a test, to make sure that this vaccine is free to anyone who needs it. You do not need insurance to get this vaccine. This vaccine is free to every person in this community. So, thank you, Mayor. Thank you, Governor Cuomo. Thank you, National Guard. Thank you to the Yankees for hosting us in this place of heroes. You're going to help a lot of heroes to receive this vaccination, this vaccination of hope. Hope is here.

Mayor: Very quickly to finish and we'll take a few questions – the point that Henry made is what we don't talk about enough and we should talk about every day, the hero's giving the vaccine. The frontline workers, the essential workers, the health care heroes, they were there every single day – no matter how tough it was, they were there. They were there.

[Applause]

We have to honor them. And I want to emphasize what Henry said so there's no confusion out there. You do not need to have health insurance to get the vaccine for free. The vaccine is free for everyone, regardless of documentation status. So, want to be very clear, anyone who's trying to get the vaccine here at Yankee Stadium or any place else in New York City, it is free for all.

Now, I want to thank the people who have done such amazing work, protecting New Yorkers through our Test and Trace Corps. They have been heroes too. The Chief Equity Officer of the Test and Trace Corps. is here with us today. Annabel Palma, thank you to you and all your colleagues.

[Applause]

Thank you to the elected officials who have supported test and trace, supported the vaccination effort, been there with us every step of the way. Council Member Diana Ayala, thank you so much. New Assembly Member Amanda Septimo, thank you and congratulations to you.

[Applause]

And the facts, again – we are going to bring this city back. This is a fact. We are going to bring this city back, bring this city back strong. New York City is coming back strong, but it will only work if it's a recovery for all of us – all of us. Not just Manhattan, for the Bronx as well, for all five boroughs, for people of all backgrounds. Today is part of making sure that everyone gets vaccinated and it's a recovery for all of us. We're going to be out there in communities, door to

door, flyers, phone calls, whatever it takes to encourage people. And anyone who wants to come here, any Bronxite who wants to get vaccinated here go to somosvaccinations.com – somosvaccinations.com – or call 8-3-3-SOMOSNY. This site right now is 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM each day, but it will be, when we get enough supply – doctor, I think you'll agree – 24 hours is what we want to do here for the people of the Bronx.

[Applause]

A few words quickly in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, let's take a few questions. Andrew?

Question: Mayor, you mentioned the website and the phone number. We talked to some of the folks who were lined up out there who told us that it wasn't working, and there's a whole bunch of people in line who are able to get appointments today because they're waiting. Is the – have you tested out the website? And is this going to be a day-to-day thing where folks don't have the technology at home and just come down here and get an appointment?

Mayor: So, I'll bring it up Henry, and bring up Randy, Ramon – look, let's be clear, everywhere around the city, our message is, go online or make the phone call, because the last thing we want as long lines or people being turned away because they don't qualify. The Yankees are trying to go the extra mile and make it possible if people have exceptional situations. But the goal – and it's a new thing, we're going to always be trying to perfect it – is call or go online. Have an appointment, don't just show up. Who wants to speak it?

Levine: Thanks, Mayor. For people who can't get online or telephone, we have opened up four ticket windows here, which are going to be manned by very experienced people from the Yankees and SOMOS. You can come here, register, get an appointment. Four tickets windows will be open as long as the vaccine center is open.

Tallaj: Did you know that as of this moment, of the 15,000 assigned that we got first, 13,000 has been filled already. I mean, people have found out the way to do it. And –

Question: That's 13,000 for next week?

Tallaj: For this week [inaudible] next Friday. And he said, because we saw that, together we establish a place here where people could register – cannot get vaccine, only register [inaudible] there is an appointment open for them.

Question: Of the total number of appointments available, how many are taken?

Mayor: For here? For this site? 13,000 out of 15,000 so far.

Question: [Inaudible] universe of 15,000?

Mayor: That's the first shipment, but we expect – again, we're fighting to get more and more vaccine to free up those second doses. Our goal is, keep adding to this site more and more. But of the original 15,000, 13,000 take up.

Question: Just a follow up. Is there a health expert here? I wanted to ask, once someone is vaccinated, let's say they're a grandparent, they haven't been seeing their grandkids – can they now go and see their grandkids, you know, maybe with masks?

Mayor: Dr. Tallaj, can you speak to this? Anyone else from your team?

[Inaudible]

Hold on one sec, very important question. We want to really remind people – first, vaccination provides substantial protection, but you really need ultimately to get both vaccinations. But even with that, there's still a concern about transmission and who you come in contact with. We want people to keep wearing masks. We want people to keep to those precautions, certainly for the first half of this year, maybe longer. That's something Dr. Chokshi. Dr. Katz, Dr. Varma have spoken about a lot.

Question: [Inaudible] a little more relaxed?

Mayor: I would say no.

Tallaj: Social distance must remain. Washing your hands must remain. If you don't need to be outside, stay home. Yes, I would like to embrace my grandkids. I want to wait. Why? I have a vaccination already, and I know I still could get the virus. I probably will kill it, because I have the antibody, but I still have [inaudible] can pass it to somebody. [Inaudible] the majority is vaccinated, we have doing until the authorities tell us different.

Question: [Inaudible]

Mayor: There will be more all the time. The Citi Field site is coming in a matter of days. We need supply. I want people to understand – right now, New York City is giving about a third of the vaccinations we could if we had supply. It's just troubling to me. It is deeply troubling that we could be right now doing 400,000, 500,000 vaccinations a week, and we can't get supply. So, I'm saying to the federal government, you have to get the rest of the pharmaceutical industry into this fight. We need more help than just what we're getting from Pfizer and Moderna. I'm saying to the State government, you have to give us flexibility. You have to let us use the second doses, because we could have Citi Field up and a lot more sites if we had the supply to go with it. We'll do a couple more. Go ahead.

Question: So, 13,000 of 15,000 – for follow-up on your point about supply, how are you doing on supply for this site specifically? And I wondered if you or someone else here could speak to the question of vaccine refusal or doubt around the vaccine? Part of what was said here today, it's safe to come out and get the vaccine, but we know that in communities of color, low-income communities, there's some real hesitation and concern about whether or not it's safe. So, is there anything additional going on here to ensure that people feel confident?

Mayor: So, on the supply question, what's projected, going forward – Ramon and Henry will speak to that – but let me just say, this is exactly how we deal with hesitancy, Gloria. That we need – people see voices they trust, people they admire, organizations they admire, their local elected officials – these are the things that build trust – and word of mouth. Again, I can't say strongly enough, until we have supply, we can't create the momentum and the word of mouth that will really bring this home. When your neighbor got vaccinated and it went well, when the person you worshiped with got vaccinated, when the person you work with got vaccinated, that's when it's really going to pick up steam. But we don't have that critical mass we need. So, I know this is a kind of thing though that will help us to get more people to feel ready and able to get the vaccine. To the supply and also speak to the hesitancy.

Tallaj: We have 15,000. We have it here. We have the vaccine. There's no question about that. It's there. We have the freezers there. [Inaudible] to the city. 15,000 will be given. And SOMOS network is prepared to do 40,000 a day if we get the vaccine. I was telling the Mayor earlier today in [inaudible]. But let me tell you one thing about – I've said it before – through the history of humanity, why do we live longer? Why is polio not there anymore? Why is there no smallpox? Because the vaccines and treatment change. And people say, too fast, they gave it to fast – yes, we [inaudible] have computers. [Inaudible] have to do tabulations with hands and check numbers. Now, it's so easy. We have to trust, you know? And I believe that when I say the vaccine of hope – what do you prefer? You want to have the disease that could kill you? Or you want to have the vaccine, that could save you.

[Reporter speaks in Spanish]

[Dr. Tallaj speaks in Spanish]

Mayor: Two more – two more, who hasn't gone? Yes.

Question: [Inaudible] open indefinitely right now?

Mayor: Yeah. Absolutely. Go ahead.

Question: Mr. Mayor, you said several thousand appointments are still available [inaudible] do you think more needs to be done –

Mayor: 100 percent. We need more supply. We want to do more appointments. We want to go to 24/7. And we're going to spread the word constantly.

Question: [Inaudible]

Mayor: The way we're going to spread the word, this is what our Vaccine Command Center is doing right now all the time, is getting churches, synagogues, mosques, you name it – houses of worship, spread the word. Community leaders, elected officials, grassroots organizations, door to door, phone campaigns, texting campaigns – we're doing all that and it's going to keep building. That's not going to stop the hesitancy in the first instance. It will take time. It will take people, seeing people in their life, getting vaccinated and feeling comfortable. But we're going to be nonstop on the ground, showing people this is how they get safe, this is how their family gets safe. Thank you, everybody.

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