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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. Well, we all know the last six months we've been through so much in this city. Coronavirus has touched every single family and has, in so many ways, upended lives. And we talk every day here about the health reality about fighting back against this disease, making this city safer and healthier all the time, helping to bring us back in a way that emphasizes health and safety. So, let's talk today about the people we're depending on the people who have been heroes throughout this process, our City workforce, our public servants, the people who have stood up for this city through thick and thin, put us in a position now to be the envy of the nation in terms of the battle against the coronavirus. One of the lowest infection rates anywhere in America and our public workers have led the way. And our public workforce is crucial to restarting the city and moving us forward. We have so much to do, and yet we are also facing an unprecedented budget challenge. Literally unprecedented.

Now, I have to tell you, here we are in the middle of September, I couldn't have imagined no action by Washington, D. C. up to this point. I could not have imagined. Honestly, if you go back to May, June, July, I thought it was an article of faith that there would be a federal stimulus. There hasn't been, and I see no indication there will be for the remainder of this year. I truly believe that our colleagues in Albany would have acted by now on long-term borrowing. I still believe that can happen and hopefully very soon. But right now, we don't have that support and we have to keep making tough choices to move the city forward, to keep our budget balanced. That's the law, something we have to do, but also protect our workforce at the same time.

Now, I'll tell you something over the last seven years, we've proven that you can be fiscally responsible and make investments in this city that reach working people, that reach every neighborhood, all five boroughs; can invest in the public workforce and you get so much back for that investment. And there's so many indicators of that. Look, at the investments in our Health + Hospital system. Look how crucial that was when this crisis came in terms of protecting New Yorkers and then allowing us to come back. Look at the investments we've made in our children through initiatives like pre-K, 3-K. Look at how much that has yielded for this city. The investments that we have made consistently to improve life in the city, also before this pandemic gave us the strongest economy we've ever had and helped us to keep moving forward. So, we've got to protect our investments while at the same time being fiscally responsible, that's the balance we've always struck.

And we decided to create record reserves, put aside money constantly to prepare for a crisis. We never knew this would be that crisis, but we were ready with huge unprecedented fiscal reserves. We created a new Capital Stabilization Reserve to give us further protection. We found billions of dollars in savings every year, including health care savings, working with our partners in labor. All this work happened years and years before the pandemic and all this work continues right now and will continue in the future. So, in the worst days of this pandemic also was the time we have to put together the budget for the year we're in now. We achieved the largest savings plan in the history of this administration. We continued to find billions and billions of dollars in new savings. This current fiscal year budget is \$7 billion less than what had been projected in February. And, look, even with the crisis we saw in the years leading up that New York City was regarded by the larger financial community as a very smart bet. In fact, our bond rating was increased last year, upgraded. So, we have to remember that all those strengths have been historic, and we will continue to build on them. In fact, we find new ways continually. We actually created a rainy-day fund, something no previous administration had ever done. So, we keep layering year after year, these additional protections.

But now dealing with the biggest jolt to our lives, to our families, to our neighborhoods, to our economy, to our budget that we have seen in generations. We lost \$9 billion in revenue. And that's why, as I said, it led to a \$7 billion cut in this year's budget. And a constant focus on finding additional savings and efficiencies, and we will be talking about this constantly from now until the last day of this administration. Now, look, we've already had to make some tough cuts that have affected the city and the services we provide. We're trying to do everything we can to stop from those cuts becoming worse. We do not want to take away jobs from public employees. We do not want to take away services from communities that need it. We're going to try and do everything we can and keep fighting for that stimulus from Washington, keep fighting for that long-term borrowing from Albany, but also keep making additional moves here. So, the Mayor's Office has focused – my office directly, the people who worked directly for me here in City Hall and in the offices that make up the Mayor's Office, we focused on savings. And over the previous budgets, we found \$12 million in savings within our budgets. We've had a hiring freeze, we've had constant focus on downsizing teams, wherever appropriate. And today is a day where we have to take another step. So, I'm announcing that as of October 1st every Mayor's Office employee will be taking a furlough. And that obviously it includes myself.

This is something I want to be clear about. Everyone will be taking a week's furlough. This is a step you never want to see for good hardworking people. The folks who work here throughout this crisis, they have not been working 35- or 40-hour weeks, they've been working 80-hour weeks, 90-hour weeks, 100-hour weeks because they believe in this city and they've been fighting for all of you. So, it is with pain that I say they and their families will lose a week's pay, but it's something we have to do. It's something I have to do. And with these furloughs and with the additional savings and cuts that we achieved in the June budget, the Mayor's Office budget will now be 12 percent less this fiscal year than it was last fiscal year. So, we're showing that at the very top of the operation more important actions are being taken every day and that we will make the choices we have to, to keep this city going forward. But, again, I want to thank all of the folks who do this work, and it was not a decision I made lightly to have to do this, it is painful for them and their families, but it is the right thing to do at this moment in history. Now, we'll keep fighting for those bigger changes. And I want to ask every New Yorker to join in that fight, pushing your federal representatives to help us get that stimulus, pushing your representatives in Albany for that long-term borrowing. We need to find bigger solutions, but this is another step today to find every answer we can right here within the City government.

Let me talk today about another challenge that we have faced. And as I said, this crisis, the coronavirus has affected every neighborhood, every person, every family, and it's had a lot of different impacts, health, first and foremost, the people we've lost, the families who have gone through pain, but it's not just the horrible losses within families or the people who have lost jobs, it's also that we've seen something very ugly, very negative throughout this crisis. And that's discrimination, hatred, bias directed at our Asian American communities. And so wrongly, so unfairly.

These are communities that contribute so much to this city. Our Asian American communities are part of what make New York City great. In fact, sadly communities in this city in places like Chinatown, Flushing, Queens, and Southern Brooklyn, were feeling the effects of this crisis even before many other New Yorkers were because they were suffering discrimination.

People wouldn't go to their stores or the restaurants, that was painfully wrong. And I tried to show through my own actions that that kind of discrimination was wrong and wasn't acceptable and wasn't consistent with the values of the city, but we still see, unfortunately, hate crimes directed towards Asian Americans. We see verbal attacks, physical attacks. We see people blaming a community here for a virus that originated far away, and that people here had nothing to do with at all. And yet, somehow, they're being blamed and that's unacceptable. We will not allow it and we'll fight back against it. So, that's why the NYPD has created a permanent Asian Hate Crimes Task Force. That's dedicated to working with the community to make sure every attack, every incident of bias is reported, and acted on. The best way to stop these things, besides educating people and leading by example, is to show that there will be consequences, and how the NYPD is devoted to this work. And I want you to hear about the details from the leader of the Asian Hate Crime Task Force, NYPD Deputy Inspector Stewart Loo.

Deputy Inspector Stewart Loo, NYPD: Thank you, Mayor de Blasio. Good morning. I'm Deputy Inspector Stewart Loo of the NYPD's newly formed Asian Hate Crime Task Force. It's an honor for me to be here today to talk about something and announce something that I find very special and positive. If I may, I'd like to start with a quick quote from Martin Luther King that I found relevant to current events and today's topic. "Darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate. Only love can do that." And yet too often today's times we see actions and rhetoric filled with hate and discrimination only to be [inaudible] with using more hate and more discrimination. I think we all stand to benefit by reflecting on the wisdom and the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. To touch on what the Mayor said, COVID-19 has had a tremendous impact on all of us. It's affected our health. It's affected our finances. It's affected our overall well-being. Some of us have even lost loved ones, but it's been a little worse for the Asian American community. Since the pandemic, Asians have faced a concerning increase in unprovoked racism, verbal attacks, some of them leading to physical assaults. They have become victims of crimes for no reason other than the fact that they are of a certain race. This is the impetus for the formation of the Asian Hate Crime Task Force.

There are many unique obstacles in helping an Asian crime victim, whether it's language barrier, cultural differences, fear of retaliations, general reluctance of making a report, or distrust of the police. This task force will bridge that gap. And we have already done so successfully on a number of occasions. Just to be clear, this task force is a support unit under the overall Hate Crimes Task Force Commander Mark Molinari, which investigates all hate crimes. Underneath him, the Asian Hate Crime Task Force is myself, two captains, two sergeants, and 25 of the world's greatest detectives, skilled and dedicated Asian American investigators who are fluent in a variety of languages, including Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, [inaudible] Tagalog. Okay. And more important, to help solve these crimes, the task force serves two purposes. The first one is it brings awareness to the problem – awareness leads to education, which I believe ultimately will lead to prevention. And the second one, it sends a clear message, a clear message from the leadership of this city and that messages that we support justice. We know the hardship you're going through. We care and we are doing something about it. So, I encourage anyone who is a victim, or knows someone who's a victim of a hate crime or any crime for that matter to come forward so we can help prevent this from happening again. The only thing right now, that's more contagious than COVID is hate. So, I ask everyone to do their part and stop the spread. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Deputy Inspector. I want to thank you and the whole team you're working with for the great work you're doing, it's such an important work. And Deputy Inspector, you heard the passion with which he spoke about this work, but he also in describing the members of his team and all the languages they speak, the rich heritage they bring to this work, it's a reminder of today's NYPD that represents every community of this city. That is a more and more diverse force reaching deep into communities with a strategy of neighborhood policing. And this fits perfectly the strategy. We want to be shoulder to shoulder with Asian American communities fighting hate, and the NYPD is leading the way. So, Deputy Inspector, thank you for your great work and thank you for invoking the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. because that's one of his most powerful quotes, because it reminds us, as angry as we get, when we see hatred and bias, we have to overcome it with something more positive, and we do need to educate, we do need to change hearts and minds. So, another important initiative to fight against prejudice, to fight against racism, to fight against bias is being created by our Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes.

This is another part of the Mayor's Office that does such important work, working with communities, working at the grass roots to help educate everyone, but particularly our young people. And so a new contest, and it's a beautiful one, it's called Heart Work Against Hate. And the idea is to invite young people, to submit positive messages, positive images, ideas that will help us create respect and unity in this city. It's the most diverse place on earth, where there is a lot of sense of common cause especially now, as we fight this virus. We've got to keep showing those positive messages, messages of love will win the day. And so we're inviting these young people to submit their best ideas, their messages, and then we'll choose some that will be showcased on the office's website. And we'll use social media to spread the word all over the city. We're going to let the youth of this city speak to the future. We want to let them speak about the city they want to create, in a city that works for everyone.

Okay, let me switch gears now – a couple of things I want to say that relate to again, our public workforce and the important work they do. So, we have more work to do, even with huge budget constraints, we have more work to do to keep working on the quality of life every day in this city. And we know with a tight budget that it's been tough in terms of what we've seen in some of our streets and parks. And, we want to improve the cleanliness level. So, we will be restoring approximately 65 litter basket pickup trucks through the Sanitation Department every week. That'll be a 24 percent increase over current levels. And that Sanitation – the Economic Development Corporation they'll restart a great initiative, it's called Clean NYC, working with the DOE Fund. A lot of you have seen out there, good, good men and women out there turning their own lives around, but doing great work, helping communities to be clean. We're going to be extending that effort in a number of neighborhoods and parks around the city. So, those efforts, and we've found some additional changes that we've made in our budget to allow for those. But we're also recognizing there's a lot of people beyond the City government, a lot of community-based organizations, elected officials, a lot of folks in the private sector are sponsoring their own cleanup efforts with their own employees or with volunteers from the community. And that's fantastic. I'm seeing that happen more and more all over the city. Want to thank everyone who's doing community cleanups. We need your help. We're going to keep doing everything we can to get the most done from the public sector, but everyone else who is contributing, it makes a huge difference. And, of course, I want to thank all the good men and women at the Sanitation Department who do this work every day for us. No matter what the situation they're always there for us. I remember after Sandy, the heroic role they played bringing back the city. I remember what has happened in snowstorm after snowstorm. Whatever's thrown at the Sanitation Department, they respond and they're going to help us through this crisis as well.

And while I'm thanking and appreciating public workers, these folks don't work for the City of New York, but they sure do serve every one of us, our postal workers, everyone who's part of the United States Postal Service. Thank you. You know what? We need you more than ever. You, in fact, are not only our lifelines for so many people, you bring medicines, you bring the resources that people will wait on regularly when they need help. You bring information. You keep families united. The work you do is absolutely precious. And dare I say, you are also guardians of democracy because more and more people are going to be casting their votes through you. So, to all of you, thank you. Thank you for everyone who works for the postal service. There may be all sorts of debates and controversies in Washington, but here on the ground in New York City, we just appreciate all of you and we need you, and we're going to do everything we can to help you be strong.

Okay, let's go to our daily indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 that threshold is 200 patients, and today's report is 75, with a confirmed positive rate for COVID amongst those patients of 11.54 percent. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average, that threshold 550, today's report 277 cases. And number three, percentage of people testing citywide positive for COVID-19, threshold is five percent, today's report 0.87 percent. A good number thanks to all of you. Few words now in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

Moderator: Hey guys, we'll now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Deputy Mayor Laura Anglin, Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza, OLR Commissioner Renee Campion, Deputy Inspector Mark Molinari, Deputy Inspector Stewart Loo, and Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. With that, our first question today goes to Hazel from WCBS.

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

Mayor: How's it going, Hazel?

Question: Good, good. I have a question for you and for Chancellor Carranza. We were at P.S. 63 on the Lower East Side yesterday, where we found classrooms with broken windows, others that wouldn't open more than maybe three inches or the windows were screwed shut, and they had very poor ventilation. Now, these are classrooms that teachers tell me they reported for poor air circulation years ago, issues before a COVID-19, yet these classrooms were given a passing grade by the ventilation action team and students will be in these classrooms on Monday. Now, we've received similar complaints from several other schools. We had a teacher literally in tears yesterday, worried about students and teachers getting sick and getting a family sick. So, my question is, will the City go back to P.S. 63 and other schools and fix these issues in classrooms where teachers feel the inspections were flawed?

Mayor: Hazel, I appreciate you telling me about this. I don't want to see any classroom online that shouldn't be. If a classroom isn't ready for our kids and our educators, it shouldn't be used. So, we will absolutely send the team back to P.S. 63 today to see exactly what happened. And if any classroom is not up to snuff, it'll be taken out of circulation immediately. And it will not be used until it is fixed. So, I welcome any reports, anything that needs to be fixed we will either be able to fix it immediately in time for Monday or we will not use that room until it is fixed. It's as simple as that. Go ahead.

Question: My second question that's the principal's union still saying 2,000 additional teachers is not enough. Some teachers are now concerned that they're being assigned to teach subjects they've never taught before. For example, teachers finding out – PE teachers finding out they're now teaching math, and they just have a few days before school starts and little time to prepare. How do you respond to the critics that say, this won't be the best education for New York City public school students?

Mayor: Look, Hazel, I've been around our public schools a long time as a parent, as a public servant, and I can tell you that there's constantly adjustments that have to be made, but this year more than ever, because we're in a pandemic. And we're asking everyone to use their skills, their talents to help our kids. Of course, people are only going to be asked to do things they can do. We're not going to ask people to do things they can't do, but we are going to ask everyone to dig down deep to serve our children. Our children are hurting, Hazel. They have missed months and months of in-person instruction last year, they've been through a lot of trauma, they need the support of educators, they need positive adult role models, they need people to help them. And I have not met a single person in our labor unions or anywhere else who says that we can serve our children as well remotely as we do in-person. And we're not starting from, you know, scratch here. We're talking about kids who already have been set back months and months. So, we're only going to ask people to do what they can do, but we're going to ask them to do a lot, because our kids deserve it. Chancellor, would you like to add?

Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza: Mr. Mayor, I think you covered that right on.

Mayor: Okay. Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: For our next question, we'll go to Andrew from WNBC.

Mayor: Good morning, everyone. Mayor, for weeks, you've been saying that there were going to be enough educators, but our understanding – and maybe we'll get the Chancellor to weigh in on this as well – is that late last night, the DOE concluded there will not be enough to guarantee live instruction on the blended remote days. So, I'm wondering what you say to parents who have been told you'll get live instruction every single day and have now been told, maybe not.

Mayor: I'll start and turn to the Chancellor. Andrew, look, we are starting up a huge endeavor to serve our children and our parents. From the very beginning, parents of this city spoken said they wanted their kids back in school. And we've heard this from parents of all backgrounds, every neighborhood, every walk of life, but we've particularly heard this from parents who are less privileged, whose kids need more help, whose kids are dealing with a lot of challenges and desperately want the positive environment of the classroom again. So, we're starting on Monday. We've said repeatedly, it will not be a perfect start, we'll be making a lot of adjustments in the weeks after we begin to continue to improve things. But the important reality here is to say, we're going to start by providing the best education possible in-person, the best education possible remotely. We're going to keep making improvements as we go along, we're going to keep adjusting and figuring out what we need in terms of

staffing. We've come this far. We're going to keep doing what we have to do to make it better every single day. It's not static, Andrew. It's not like what happens on the first day – by the way, this is true in a typical school year – what happens the first day is not the same as how things are two weeks or three weeks or four weeks later after a lot of things have been worked through. Even in a regular school year without a pandemic, they're adding staff into schools even a few weeks into the school year. So, we're going to make adjustments, but, over time, we're going to be continuing to improve the quality both in classroom and remote. Go ahead, Chancellor.

Chancellor Carranza: Yes, sir. What I would add is – I would amplify what you just said. This is the start of the school year. We're going to continue to make adjustments. But also, all of the variables keep adjusting as well. How many students are in-person? How many students have chosen remote? How many of our staff members are seeking medical accommodations and what does that look like? And then, the space issue. So, there are constant variables at play here. And what we've chosen to do is be honest and transparent with the public and say to folks our goal has always been synchronous instruction every single day. But as we look at the first day and know that we're working through some of these staffing challenges, we're being honest with the public, nobody's hiding anything here. So, you're almost darned if you do and darned if you don't. But we're going to be transparent with families and let them know that this will be some of your education remotely will be asynchronous. And that can still be very rigorous assignments, very rigorous lessons that students complete. And as we continue to ramp up, as you've said, Mr. Mayor, we're going to continue to add capacity to provide and meet our goal, which has synchronous instruction every single day.

Mayor: Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: Yes, on a totally different topic. As we speak, at this moment, Former Mayor Rudy Giuliani is holding a news conference, outlining what he views to be the way to bring back the city from some difficulties right now. And specifically, what he's calling for is the hiring of 9,000 additional police officers to help deal with the rise in shootings and the homeless problem. I wonder what your reaction to that is.

Mayor: I think he has amnesia. I think he's out of touch with reality. I think we've seen more and more Rudy Giuliani become unhinged, and I'm just not waiting around to hear what he thinks. We have the greatest police force in the country. Up to this pandemic, this police force had driven down crime year after year after year. They've been dealing with a perfect storm and yet they're fighting back really valiantly. But, unlike in Giuliani's time, this police force works with the people in New York City, works with the neighborhoods, listens to people and tries to create unity and common cause with the people in the neighborhoods of the city. And that's what's going to work in the long haul.

Moderator: Next up is Michael Gartland from the Daily News.

Question: Hey, Mr. Mayor. How are you doing?

Mayor: Hey, Michael. How are you?

Question: I'm alright. So, on these furloughs you talked about at the top of the press conference, why – why now? I mean, you've been talking about borrowing for months now and, you know, the fiscal hawks and, you know, some of the State lawmakers we've talked to said, you know, we need to find more savings before we take that step. So, I mean, why wait until now? Why not – why not kind of take this step earlier on in the process?

Mayor: Michael, look, first of all, as I said, for months, I think many, many people, including folks who are pretty objective about politics and government thought there would be a stimulus. I think we're all shocked that hasn't happened. Based on lots of conversations with leaders in Albany and members of the Legislature, I thought they were going to move forward long-term borrowing. They did it after 9/11, they should do it now. But since it hasn't happened, we're looking for every possible way to make the moves that we can make while continuing the conversations with long-term borrowing, while continue conversations with labor over savings. But, Michael, I don't think you would like it if your boss said, hey, Michael, you're going to lose a week's pay. I don't think it's something that we want to do to anyone, especially people have been working so hard. These folks have worked nonstop. A lot of the people in this building have worked every single day since the pandemic began. I don't want to take money away from them and their families, but it's at the point where we have to show that we're going to do anything and everything to get through this. Go ahead. Michael – Michael?

Moderator: Do you have a second question?

Question: Can you hear me?

Mayor: There you go.

Question: Yeah. I'm sorry about that. Does it give you some leverage, moving forward? Have you gotten any feedback on that? As far as the borrowing in Albany, and as far as – you know, the negotiations, I know you you've been in with labor leaders as far as, you know, figuring out some things there to find savings?

Mayor: Look, the work we're doing with labor has been going on nonstop and they've been, you know, productive and respectful conversations. I think a lot of the folks who lead our municipal unions understand this is about saving the city and our future. But we're taking this action because it's the thing we have to do now. I certainly think it says to people, you know, everyone's trying to do what they can, everyone sacrificing in some way. Let's all keep working together. I mean, I hope it does send some of that message.

Moderator: Next up is Henry from Bloomberg.

Question: Hello, Mr. Mayor. I'd like to ask you –

Mayor: Go ahead.

Question: How are you doing?

Mayor: How are you doing, man?

Question: Okay. So, I'd like to ask you a couple of questions about this furlough program. Do you think you'd extend it citywide to the entire workforce? What the intent of this action today and how much money will you really save doing this?

Mayor: The amount we save by this action is somewhere in the neighborhood of a million dollars, combined with the other actions we've taken. As I said, the Mayor's Office budget is now 12 percent less this year, this fiscal year we're in now compared to the fiscal year that ended in June. I think everything's on the table – to your original question, everything's on the table, Henry. We're talking to labor about any and all ways to save money. We're going to be looking at all options at this point, because, again, the things that we needed the stimulus, the long-term borrowing, they're not here. And times a-wasting, we're going to look at every option to address the situation. Go ahead.

Question: I'm wondering why you have gone this route instead of any – several other ways that you could raise money that are, you know, just as draconian, perhaps, but would raise a lot more money. A one percent property tax increase, which the City has power over would raise about \$750 million. It would cost the average homeowner about \$75 a year. Why not look at other possibilities?

Mayor: I just don't believe a property tax increases the right thing and I won't do it. And I just won't do a property tax increase. That's off the table, period. People in this city are hurting in a way that is unprecedented. The only thing that compares, you have to go back to the great depression. The last thing we're going to ask people to do is to have to pay more – working people, middle class people, struggling to keep it together and over a million people have lost their jobs. We're not going to ask them to pay more in property taxes – off the table. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next up is Reema, from Chalkbeat.

Question: Hi, everyone. Good morning. I have a couple of questions. My first one is about the budget. So, obviously we know that with schools, there are new costs the City is shouldering while reopening. For example, the PPE, the cleaning supplies, but with the 20 percent of school aid being withheld from, you know, the recurring payments from the State, we know that districts outside of New York are already cutting staff and making other cuts. So, I'm wondering how is New York City able to pay for these new costs with essentially 20 percent less in payments coming in?

Mayor: Well, Reema, obviously what we get from the State is one part of the resources to go to schools. And again, our fight is going to be to make sure we do get that money, eventually. But the bigger answer to you is the team at Office of Management and Budget manages our money very carefully. A lot of other parts of the state are in a really horrible situation, and I feel for them, and they don't have a lot of flexibility. We at least have some flexibility, because our team manages our client cashflow well and we have resources that continue to come in. That's not true of a lot of other places, the way that they get their revenue is just different. But the bottom line here is, we're going to keep doing everything it takes to serve our kids – well over half-a-million kids who need our help and deserve it, and parents are demanding that we serve them. And we're going to keep fighting for the long-term borrowing, we're going to keep fighting for the stimulus and all of the things that would make things right. But, in the meantime, we have to serve these kids. Go ahead, Reema.

Question: Okay. My second question is about the protocol for when somebody tests positive for the coronavirus, like a school staffer or a student or someone. So, the teachers union and the principals union both brought up [inaudible] delays in informing schools about positive tests. We know last night we got a list from the DOE about which schools so far have staffers who've tested positive. But the City's protocol says the City needs to confirm a self-reported positive case. And in the spring, we know this meant getting confirmation from DOH, which slowed down the process of closing schools at first. So, could you explain – or, can somebody maybe from the Health Department explain exactly how the City is confirming tests? Like, we've heard it can take as little as minutes, but how does that confirmation process work and how is it being done any more quickly than this spring?

Mayor: I appreciate it, Reema. It is being done a lot more quickly, a lot more effectively, because we have the situation – what I'd like to do, if the team here thinks we can pull it off, is get Commissioner Melanie La Rocca on the line and have Reema come back as soon as Melanie joins us, because she can give you a very precise answer to how the process is working and why it's so much quicker. I've talked it through with her, but I want you to hear it from her. It is a very different situation than March. March was horrible for everyone. We didn't even know in February that the pandemic was already spreading in the city because we didn't have testing. By the time we got into March, we had a much bigger problem than anyone knew, and we were all trying to do our best. This is a situation today where we've had six months to prepare. We have a situation room that's able within minutes to verify those tests, but I want make sure you hear it directly from Melanie. So, we'll take a timeout on Reema, get Melanie, and we'll go to the next question in the meantime.

Moderator: So, next up is Brigid from WNYC.

Question: Good morning, everybody. My first question is for the Chancellor. Chancellor Carranza, can you talk more specifically about what the DOE has done to close the digital divide over the summer to ensure that all school families will have access to internet for reliable remote learning today?

Chancellor Carranza: Sure. So, Brigid, what we've done is we've distributed over 340,000 Wi-Fi-enabled devices. We've also worked with the internet providers, and they were very helpful in March by providing free Wi-Fi service for students in temporary housing, low-income students, etcetera. We are working with them to continue that service to our city during this academic year as well. But in addition, we've also purchased some hotspots – a good number of hotspots. I believe that number – we'll verify it, but it's over 40,000 of these hotspots that we are also assigning to students that we know don't have internet connectivity as well. We've also set up on our website, a place where students or families can go and indicate that they need a device or they need internet connectivity. Also, they can call 3-1-1. And then, I know that our schools, as they're preparing for the start of the school year, have reached out to families and students to make sure that they do have a device, they do have kind connectivity. And if they don't, then we're in communication with them to provide them those either devices or connectivity.

Mayor: Just a quick follow-up on that Brigid. This is, you know, we've been through a horrible crisis, but even in the midst of crisis something striking happened where everyone pulled together. DOE did an amazing job mounting this effort to get devices and internet service to hundreds of thousands of kids that didn't have it. They did that within a matter of weeks. A lot of companies really stepped up and helped us in that. It was an extraordinary effort in the midst of crisis, but it also ended up being one of the biggest efforts in New York City history to address the digital

divide. And really one of the most profound actions that's ever been taken to address the digital divide. So even in the midst of crisis, something positive happened and I really want to credit the Chancellor's team for what they did to pull that together. Go ahead, Brigid.

Question: And for the Mayor and the Chancellor. I know we've talked some about this this morning, but of course we're still hearing from schools that they haven't gotten the additional staff that they need despite, you know, this thing 2,000 teachers are arriving. We know it's the beginning and things will evolve, but I'm wondering where some of these are [inaudible] when they're were arriving and how are you keeping track of the schools that have these needs?

Mayor: I'll start and turn to the Chancellor. One thing that this Chancellor did and I give him a lot of credit for it. He created a much stronger system. First Deputy Chancellor, Executive Superintendent, superintendents, a really smart system for having leadership that connects down to the grassroots and backup to the Chancellor. So that system is working every day, determining exactly what each school needs. Again as the Chancellor said, as you get different numbers coming in about which students will be where et cetera. As I said yesterday, we have hundreds of schools that now are reporting that they do have what they need. We have others that definitely need at least a handful, more teachers. Those teachers are being assigned. They're arriving today, tomorrow, the next day, some will arrive even on Monday, but honestly that happens even in a regular school year. But that's going to be constant. And if we identify greater needs, I've said it before. I'll say it again really clearly. If we need to go beyond those 2,000, if it turns out there are additional needs and we've gotten all the folks that we have in the DOE who are classroom ready and they're all out in their assignments. If we need to go deeper into our substitute pool, we will. There's thousands and thousands of substitutes ready to go and we can bring them on and we can bring them on in a longer term manner. So whatever that true number is, as we keep working school by school to define the final need, they will get what they need. Go ahead, Chancellor.

Chancellor Carranza: I would only add sir, that the superintendents are working very closely with schools. So we are monitoring what the actual needs are of schools in terms of staffing as they're putting their models together. And I mentioned earlier in another response about all of the changing variables that principals are having to juggle with right now from enrollment to accommodations, et cetera. So superintendents are really the vehicle by which they're communicating that up to us from a human capital perspective. And then as you said, we're assigning licensed personnel to be in schools. And that's a process that's been going on this week. We've narrowed the list of schools that have some really difficult staffing challenges, and we're obviously concentrating on them. But as was also mentioned one of the variables is that teachers have to be teaching in their area of expertise. So all of those things are happening as we speak and will continue to happen even after the first day as the new school year gets started.

Mayor: Excellent.

Moderator: Next up is Luis from New York [Inaudible].

Mayor: Luis? Luis, can you hear me?

Moderator: Luis, we are waiting for you?

Mayor: I'm not sure he can hear us. Do we have, in the meantime, do we have Melanie La Rocca on?

Moderator: We do not have Commissioner La Rocca, almost. In the interim –

Mayor: Okay. We're getting – all these pieces will come together like a ballet. Okay. Luis, can you hear me? Why don't we go to the next person and bring back Luis as well?

Moderator: In the interim, we'll go to Abu from Bangla Patrika.

Mayor: Abu, can you hear me?

Question: Yes.

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

Question: Good. How are you?

Mayor: Good.

Question: Okay. My question is as you mentioned, the hate crime and all this stuff going on, as you know, the highest office of the nation and the [inaudible] the United States is telling this disease, Chinese disease – he's calling again a Chinese disease and you are telling about the discrimination And stop the discrimination. What is your comment on it? And do you talk too many times to the president – I know we know it's a strained relation between you and the president, but did you ever tell him to stop Chinese disease, calling it Chinese disease?

Mayor: You know Abu, the times I've talked to the president, honestly, were in the very height of the crisis and I was trying to get us medical supplies and PPE and testing. So that was the focus then. I also think, unfortunately, this president is making a very conscious choice. When he says something as awful as that Abu, it's a purposeful effort to divide. It is part of a political strategy. There's been a lot of demagogues over time who have tried to divide people ethnically and racially and by religion. And it's unfortunately a very, very old part of human life that there are people who will do that, no matter how painful it is, no matter how wrong it is. So no, I don't think anyone's going convince him – this is a guy who remember back in the 1980's called for the execution of the Central Park Five. Even though they were innocent, he wanted these young men executed. Thank God they are alive and well today and out of prison. In fact, it was this administration that settled that case once and for all. But no, he's not going to change. And he just has to be defeated. Go ahead.

Question: Also, my question is since coronavirus happened the [inaudible] ICE, you know, they paused deportation, but they announced again, aggressively deporting people. Catching the people and deporting. And New York City is a sanctuary city, what kind of assistance you are going to provide the people who need you know the help?

Mayor: Yeah. I'll tell you Abu, it's a great question. And I do think despite the bluster, and we see this pattern constantly coming from the president and from Washington of all the horrible things they're going to do to us, that never happened. Of all, you know, they're going to have massive raids, all these things they threatened that they don't do. And thank God they don't do them because they're wrong and they're counterproductive. And they would hurt people. It would be bad for this city in this country. But what we've seen in reality is that people in our immigrant communities, I really believe have heard the message that New York City is a place that respects all immigrants, regardless of documentation status. That our police department, our school system, our public hospitals, none of them will allow ICE agents on their property. The NYPD will not ask documentation status. We provide the legal support for free to folks who are immigrants who are endangered. We want to keep families together. We hate when families are separated as part of what again, ICE has become a political wing of the Trump administration in so many ways. So I do think that message has spread deeply in our immigrant communities. And people know they will get help and respect. And even things like the way we provide support, we've been providing free food to everyone, regardless of documentation status. We provide free health care. Our guaranteed health care initiative is for all New Yorkers, regardless of documentation status. Hundreds of thousands of people who legally are not allowed to have health insurance, they still can get health care for free through Health + Hospitals. I think a lot of folks feel that, and they know they are respected and protected here. Okay, let's go back and see, who do we have now?

Moderator: Do we have Commissioner La Rocca on? We're going to go shortly to Luis from New York Gold.

Question: Can you hear me?

Mayor: There you go. It's all working.

Question: Okay, great. Thank you. Hey there, Mr. Mayor. Regarding street fairs, I spoke with one of the city's largest organizers the other day, and he backed up that what you said to me a month ago. That is these folks are mostly interested in what's best for New York City. And that's a good thing, right? So Mr. Mayor, even though you haven't specifically referenced it lately, I figured the regular street fairs are a no go at this point? But as any thought been given to the holiday fairs and markets?

Mayor: It's a very good question, Luis. Basically I think you're right and I'll check on the latest in terms of our announcements, but in general, as every month has passed we've made the decision not to extend the kind of permits that existed in the past, because we can't have those kinds of gatherings. We need to keep streets clear for a lot of other things that are happening. So, and I think what we've seen overwhelmingly is folks who used to do different events, prefer themselves to do something different, something virtual or something alternative, or just to cancel for a year. The vast majority of organizations, their focus is coming back next year, hopefully in a much better environment. So we will say more on those kinds of holiday markets soon, but I think what's fair to say is everything is going to be decided based on the data and the science and, you know, health and safety first. And we got to be really careful with anything like that. Go ahead.

Question: Okay. So about keeping the streets clear, you mandated that city space be prioritized for outdoor dining and Open Streets, just as you said. And yet you've stated that outdoor dining would be taking place again next year. So, sir, I asked you as long as our health metrics are just as good, if not better than those of today, can you assure the street fair organizers and the thousands of participating merchants that your administration will work towards helping them get up and running in 2021?

Mayor: I can say this, what we've learned from this whole crisis is to make decisions based on the data and the science. That's going to be what determines everything. I do believe as you indicated that we should have Open Restaurants next year. That's the plan, that's where we are going. I think it should be made permanent. I think Open Streets has been a great success. We should be doing that every summer. And combining them has been an extraordinary success. We should do that every summer. I think that's the future of New York City. In terms of the street fairs, we've got to just make sure the time is right. So my hope is that you'll see a vaccine by spring and it is, you know, distributed and people are vaccinated by a late point in the spring, hopefully at the latest maybe even sooner. And then that season, when you see a lot of the big events in the summer, that we will be back to normal. That's my hope, but I don't want to assure anything until we get a lot closer. But I certainly want folks who have those street fairs to understand, like all the folks who have the great events in this city, our goal is to see them back next summer. Go ahead.

Moderator: For our final question, we're going to go back to Reema because we're now joined by Commissioner La Rocca.

Mayor: Do we have Reema? Reema can you hear me?

Question: Yes, I can. Thank you.

Mayor: Why don't you restate your question and then we'll have Commissioner La Rocca answer it.

Question: Okay, great. Sorry. My internet is spotty. So if I go out, just let me know. Okay. Commissioner, thanks so much for coming on. So my question was, you know, the teachers union and principals union have brought up concerns about delays in informing schools about positive coronavirus tests. The City's protocol says the City needs to confirm a self-reported positive case, but we know in the spring, this meant getting confirmation from DOH, which slowed down the process of closing schools. So can you explain how exactly the City is confirming tests this time around? Like, we've heard it can take as little as a minutes. And just how is it being done any more quickly this time around?

Commissioner Melanie E. La Rocca, Department of Buildings: Sure thing. Thank you for the question. So we put together an actual literal space. So we have DOHMH, our Test and Trace colleagues, DOE in a space. We're doing inputting calls from principals. So we want to get principals on the phone with us. So we're talking with them, understanding exactly the scenario. And then once we've got the basics of the information, we're passing that along in the system to DOHMH. DOHMH actually has a team that they've assembled, who are doing nothing but verifying the cases we're sending to them. So this team is dedicated. They're onsite and they are doing this all day throughout our hours. So we're open 5:30 to 9:30, Monday through Friday. And 11:00 AM to 9:00 PM on Sundays. That's all that team is doing. So we are putting ourselves in a place where we are ensuring that we have faster turnaround from our colleagues in DOHMH.

Mayor: Let's stay there for a second Commissioner, 5:30 AM to 9:30 PM, correct?

Commissioner La Rocca: That's correct. Monday through Friday and 11:00 AM to 9:30 PM on Sunday. And so we, again, we very much encourage our principals to contact us. They've -- we've shared the information on how to reach this room. This is really a tool that is meant explicitly for principals to help guide them through the process. Now, we know that principals have lots of questions. That's why our team is there. We want to get them the answer. And the answer may not always be that the case is a verified case. But that's what our job is. We're going to get them answers to the questions they have.

Mayor: And you had nine confirmed cases yesterday?

Commissioner La Rocco: Correct.

Mayor: Okay. And just one more to finish up on Reema's question. I think the original question was about the turnaround time? How long it takes Department of Health to confirm when you've been sent the documentation on a test? How long does it take for that situation room and the people in the situation room to confirm a positive test?

Commissioner La Rocca: Sure. So, we know for New York City residents, the turnaround time is quick. It can be a matter of you know, tens of minutes. So, we know this is a very quick turnaround and we know that the dedicated team they've put in place is ensuring that.

Mayor: So Reema, the answer to your question is minutes. The whole system is predicated on the verification of the test being as quickly as humanly possible, in many cases, just a few minutes. And then immediately taking the next steps. And we need that to go very fast. And that's why we have a situation room that's supposed to make those decisions immediately, act on them. And we have one person in charge and that's Commissioner La Rocca, who is someone who knows how to make decisions quickly to her great credit.

Okay. Everyone, as we close up, look, I just want to say you see a lot of people pulling together. You see a lot of people doing whatever it takes. You heard just then that situation room, making sure that there's action to keep our students safe and our educators, our school staff safe. That's an operation going from 5:30 in the morning to 9:30 at night. Folks are there nonstop to make sure that you're safe, your family's safe. The folks who worked for the City are sacrificing all the time because they believe in this city. The folks here at City Hall, I've been amazed. People worked again every single day since the crisis began. Our first responders, our health care heroes, our educators, the selflessness, the sacrifice that you see among our public workers is outstanding. We're going to be making some other sacrifices here at City Hall as I announced earlier. But this is what we all do. We are here to serve the public. We're going to do whatever it takes. And that's how we're going to see ourselves through this crisis. That's the spirit of this city. We're going to do what it takes to bring this city back. And I guarantee you, this city is coming back and coming back strong. Thank you, everyone.

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