

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 1, 2021, 10:00 AM
CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. Well, this is a day for reflection. One year ago, today, we had our first confirmed COVID case here in New York City, the first person in New York City that we knew had the coronavirus. And it's amazing – this has been the longest year in the history of this city. Longest year, the toughest year, and a year where there was so much that we had to overcome together. New Yorkers had to together – band together, find a way to deal with an enemy that we knew so little about in the beginning, and we are still learning about. But what I reflect on after the year is the heroism of New Yorkers, I reflect on the strength of New Yorkers, the fact that this city came back time and time again, overcame this virus in so many ways. We still have a fight ahead, but this is the last great battle against the coronavirus right now. And right now, we are fighting back, and we are winning. We will win in this city because people are doing the right thing. Folks are coming out in huge numbers to get vaccinated. Folks are still getting tested, which we need. Folks who are still wearing the masks, practicing social distancing. We're going to do this together. We're going to overcome this disease once and for all.

I have to tell you that everywhere I turn I see tremendous examples of people helping each other and helping to bring this city back. The recovery is coming. It's going to be a recovery for all of us, and that's going to be based on the principles of equity. And that's also true in the vaccine drive. We're going to make sure everyone is served, including the communities hit hardest by COVID. We're going to make sure everyone is included, no one is left out. And I saw that powerfully on Saturday at First Corinthian Baptist Church in Harlem, extraordinary community institution that does so much good for the community, now going the next step, going the extra mile, and setting up right there, in the church, a vaccination center. And I was there with Pastor Mike Waldron and his amazing team. I saw something beautiful. I saw people who feel trust in First Corinthian come out, because they knew there was a vaccination center there they could believe in. And I talked to folks who were getting vaccinated. I wanted to understand, you know, if they had felt hesitancy and what made them comfortable. And everyone said it's because it was at a church they knew and believed in that they felt more comfortable, but it was interesting. Everyone had their personal story.

I talked to a woman named Joyce. She was there with her home health aide, Viola. And they both had some hesitation, but they decided the best way to resolve it was to go together and both get vaccinated together. And they said it was easy. They said it was not painful, simple. They decided it was the right thing to do. They felt their decision was right. You know, because once they got vaccinated, they felt very good about the experience. And I talked to two people, two

sisters, Wanda and Diane, and they admitted to me, they were really hesitant, and they were not sure at all they were going to get vaccinated. But they said they heard one voice, the truest voice, telling them it was important. Their 83-year-old mom said, “Hey, I got vaccinated. You should too. I want the whole family to get back together. I want everyone to be okay, you should go get vaccinated.” So, these two women, two wonderful women, they heard their mom's voice. They showed up at First Corinthian, they got vaccinated, and they were also really satisfied with the experience. So, this is what's going to make a difference. As more and more people get vaccinated that word-of-mouth is going to travel. That confidence is going to build, and it's going to allow us to go farther and farther to address inequity and build trust and really make sure everyone is vaccinated. So, this today was an example of the shape of things to come. More and more sites at the grassroots in community institutions people believe in.

I also have good news about the sheer speed with which we can vaccinate people because Friday we set a new record in New York City. Over 76,000 New Yorkers were vaccinated on Friday. 76,000 people in one day. That is the most we've ever done in a single day. And that proves the point that I've been saying all along about where we could get going. Last week was our best week ever, 338,000 vaccinations, but we could get all the way to half-a-million a week and more. Clearly, the infrastructure's there. Clearly, there's plenty of people who want to get vaccinated. We have the staffing. We have everything we need except the supply. Now, it has been getting better and it will get better in the coming weeks, but I'm not going to be satisfied until we're vaccinating at least half-a-million New Yorkers a week. Here's the update as of today – and it is good news that we're closing in on the two million mark – since the beginning of the vaccination effort, 1,944,673 doses have been given, more than the entire population of Phoenix, Arizona, which is the fifth largest city in America. So, these numbers are really adding up, closing in on two million vaccinations given from day one. Our goal, five million New Yorkers fully vaccinated by June. That goal is in reach, unquestionably. And with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine about to arrive literally in a matter of days before we start to receive Johnson & Johnson vaccine, I am more confident than ever that we can hit that five million mark by June. Now we still need more help from the federal government. We still need more help from the State government. We still need more help from the manufacturers to make sure the supply is consistent, to make sure it grows, to make sure that red tape is cut, and we have the freedom to vaccinate.

And we've got to fight disparities, which means more grassroots vaccination centers getting more of the vaccine and recognizing the limitations of some of the big sites that have existed previously. Unless they are targeted properly, these big sites do not actually help us improve equity and fight disparity. Unfortunately, unless they're targeted properly, they could exacerbate disparity and the numbers we have now from the big State-run sites, the Javits Center site, 42 percent of the shots going to non-city residents; the Aqueduct site, 75 percent of the shots going to non-city residents. So, look, I want everyone to get vaccinated. I want everyone in the tri-state area to get vaccinated. Everyone in the suburbs to get vaccinated. We need – we're all in this together. We all connect to each other. I want to see that happen, but I want to be clear that in terms of New York City, these sites do not perform what we hope to see, which was more and more focused on equity. But what does work – unquestionably, what does work is the grassroots sites like we saw First Corinthian, like we've seen at public housing, senior centers, and more and more of this type of approach go right down to the community. The one of the – sites we've

had at high schools all over the city and obviously the sites that we've targeted, Yankee Stadium targeted for Bronx residents, Citi Field targeted for Queens residents, taxi drivers, food service workers. Empire Outlets targeted for Staten Island residents. These approaches work. So, going forward more and more of the vaccine to the sites meant for people from each borough to the sites down to the grass roots in communities. That's what's going to help us achieve more and more equity.

Now, whenever I talk about a recovery for all of us, it means bringing back and every element of this city. And obviously the foundation is vaccinating five million New Yorkers by June, but there's so many things we have to start doing right now to bring back our livelihoods, to bring back our energy, our vitality as a city. And this is a city that builds things. That's one of the things that's truest about New York City. We build things. We keep building, we never stop building. It's one of the things that makes us great. So, we are going to get fully back to work with a host of major construction projects, capital projects that will build the future of this city that will make life better for generations to come. And will employ a lot of people in the meantime. The City is restarting, as of today, \$17 billion in major capital projects. \$17 billion that will change lives and communities all over the five boroughs. We need to get school construction going again. You know what, kids are going to be back in September, full strength. We'll be ready. Lots of communities still experience overcrowding in schools. That's going to be the reality again in a few short months. So, we got to get back to work building more school capacity in the communities that need it most. We got to get back to work building and preserving affordable housing. The future of New York City depends on working New Yorkers, having someplace to live that they can afford. We're going to get back to it. We already have the biggest affordable housing plan in the history of New York City on target. Amazingly through the pandemic continues on target. And another congratulations to everyone that our Housing Department, HPD, and our Housing Development Corporation and Economic Development Corporation, Deputy Mayor Vicki Been and her team. They have kept this effort on target, even in the hardest hit moment in the city's history, the most difficult time to keep building affordable housing. It keeps going. We're going to now double down on that.

Coastal resiliency, fighting climate change, protecting our communities. We're getting back to work on that. Improving our city streets, creating safety, Vision Zero, deepening our efforts there. And, of course, one of the places we've come to love even more during the pandemic, our parks, continuing our investments in our parks. So, that \$17 billion is going to make a huge impact and help New York City come back strong. I want you to hear more about this from the leader who is making sure that – you heard a lot of different pieces there; they all have to come together. The chorus has to sing together. The symphony has to play together. The conductor of the symphony, our new Recovery Czar, Lorraine Grillo.

Senior Advisor Lorraine Grillo: Thank you, Mayor. I promise not to sing.

[Laughter]

Okay. This is really truly great news for the city and great news for the dozens of contractors who work on City projects. So, as someone who's spent 27 years of my life working in this industry with design professionals and construction professionals, I have really firsthand

knowledge of how devastating this pandemic has been to so many architects, engineers, and construction professionals. I've been especially concerned for MWB/E contractors, small contractors who've struggled over the last year with these – when these projects were paused. This is going to give them an opportunity to put them back to work and give them the opportunity to rehire staff. So, by the end of March, as the Mayor said, more than 1,700 projects will have been given the green light to restart. Planning and procurement will resume citywide on everything from, as the Mayor said, new schools, major library projects, protecting cyclists and pedestrians as part of the Vision Zero initiative, to upgrading parks, repairing and replacing and upgrading sewer and wastewater management infrastructure. It's just really a great opportunity. And I would like to especially thank the Office of Management and Budget for working so hard to find a way to make this happen. This is exactly what's needed to bring this city back and make this a recovery for all of us. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you so much. And thank you Lorraine for everything you're doing to supercharge this recovery a lot to come. You know, we had our first war room meeting on a Friday. Deputy mayors and key figures from City Hall and from the agencies, everyone's ready to go with Lorraine's leadership. And we're going to give you constant reports on what's going on, because a lot's going to be going on. And you're going to see a lot of it in ways that really show you how fast, how intensely the city can come back. Because that's who we are as New Yorkers. We are comeback artists for sure. And we're going to show it again. And I want to talk about – speaking of artists – I want to talk about artistic community or cultural community theater, dance, music, so many of the things that are part of who we are, part of our identity, part of what makes New York City great, part of our life in this city. And so, our Open Culture initiative is going to bring culture back to our streets.

Now, look, we know for now it's important to stay outdoors. So, you're going to see live performances outdoors at about 200 locations around the city, some of the greatest artists in the world of all kinds, dancers, musicians, everyone performing out in the streets of New York City, in the parks of New York City bringing culture back to life in the city. It's going to be safe. It's going to be socially distanced. It's going to be done the right way, but it's also going to be the beginning of a resurgence, a renaissance of culture in this city. And it's going to be exciting to see it coming back more and more. Now, we're inviting cultural institutions, dance troops, theaters, everyone – apply to be a part of this extraordinary program. We want your performances to be seen. We want the great artistic contributors to each of these wonderful organizations to come out and get the accolades they deserve and a chance to work again. Applications open up today at 12, noon. So, if you are an artist, a cultural institution, a venue, please apply nyc.gov/openculture. Let's get started, let's do this. It's going to be an exciting spring, summer ahead. And let's face it, this is so important. It's so important for the artists who, you know, even in good times, a lot of artists struggle to make ends meet, the pandemic's been very tough on the cultural community. Let's give our artists a chance to get their livelihoods back. Let's get a chance to see these beautiful performances that so much to us, but let's also realize this is going to boost morale. This is going to energize the people of this city to see the things that we love again. So, this is an exciting, exciting moment for us all.

Now, as we start March, we recognize this is another moment to reflect, not just because it's the one-year anniversary of everything we've been through, but March every month, every March,

excuse me, every March is Women's History Month. And New York City has a powerful history, a powerful lesson to teach in terms of women's leadership, not just in recent years, but for generations. And we've got to keep adding to our understanding of that history. And we need to do that in particular in our New York City public school curriculum. So, we will be more and more addressing the contributions of women to our city in our public-school curriculum. Obviously, this effort will be led by our new Schools Chancellor, Meisha Ross Porter, who is a history-maker herself. And we're going to look at extraordinary figures who haven't been given enough attention and understanding. Examples – Emily Roebling, the woman who ensured that the Brooklyn Bridge got built. If it weren't for her contributions, one of the great iconic sites in this city would not exist. Shirley Chisholm, first Black woman elected to Congress, a trailblazer, someone who changed the assumptions of what leadership could be. And we're feeling that today, all over the city and country, because she helped lead the way. Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, the nation's first woman doctor right here in New York City. She provided free health care to New York City's immigrants, someone who was way ahead of the curve in terms of understanding how we need to value and cherish those who join us and become part of us. So, we're going to keep ensuring that that history gets celebrated, but we're going to live in the present too, and do the work we need to do to bring back the jobs that women in New York City have lost. Remember a disproportionate number of the jobs lost in this pandemic were held by women. As we recover, as we bring back our economy, we do the actions that Lorraine was talking about that are going to help us revive, we need to make sure there is fairness and equality in those jobs coming back to women who lost them and making sure our economy is for everyone, a recovery for all of us.

Okay. Now let's go to today's indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19. Today's report, 233 patients, with a confirmed positivity level of 64.73 percent. Hospitalization rate, 4.33 per 100,000. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average. Today's report, 3,358 cases. And number three, percentage of people testing citywide positive for COVID-19, today's report, seven-day rolling average, 6.13 percent. A few words in Spanish, back on our vaccination effort –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

Moderator: We will now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Recovery Czar Lorraine Grillo, by Dr. Chokshi, by Finance Commissioner Jacques Jiha, by Dr. Katz, and by Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. First question today goes to Dave Evans from WABC.

Question: Hi, Mayor. Can you hear me?

Mayor: Yeah, Dave. How are you doing today?

Question: I'm doing fine. Hey, I wanted to ask you, I read your statement over the weekend regarding Governor Cuomo and your call for investigations. But since then, he issued late yesterday, this apology, I guess you could call it an apology, saying if my kidding was

misinterpreted, then I'm sorry that you misinterpreted that way. I've made kind of insincere apologies like that before, but I wanted to see what did you think?

Mayor: That's not an apology. He seemed to be saying, oh, I was just kidding around. You know, sexual harassment is not funny. It's serious. It has to be taken seriously. And he just clearly was letting himself off the hook for something that for the women involved, sounded pretty terrifying. And no, we need a full investigation. We need the whole truth of what happened. We need to make sure it never happens again. And we need to look at the nursing home issue. We cannot just look at one or the other. We need a full investigation of the nursing home issue, where thousands of people died. Information was covered up on purpose. And we still don't know if our seniors are safe going forward. Our elders, we don't know if they're safe because we have not got a full accounting of the facts. So, both these issues need to be looked into independently, thoroughly. And we need to know what has to change as a result. Go ahead, Dave.

Question: My other question is along kind of the same line and feel free to jump all over this. But as I read that apology last night, it – to me, it kind of reminded me a little bit of the Al Franken case. Yeah, it was inappropriate. Yeah, it was – he shouldn't have done it. It was kind of creepy, but should he resign for this?

Mayor: I don't think you can compare different situations that are truly different. I don't pretend to understand all the facts of the other case. What we can say here is we've got two women who worked for him. And one of the things that we've all come to realize because of brave women who stood up, because there's been a fundamental change in understanding of this society, long overdue. If someone works for you, they're in a position of some vulnerability. They worry for their job and their future. And when anybody, but particularly an older man trying to take advantage of a younger woman, does something that makes that woman feel if she doesn't consent to what the man wants, she may not keep her job. And these are horrible, horrible things that are unacceptable in our society. So again, full investigation, we've got to understand what happened here. Anything like that, if someone purposely tried to use their power to force a woman to have sex with them? Of course, that's someone who should no longer be in public service. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Yehudit from Boro Park 24 News.

Question: Hi, good morning, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

Mayor: I'm doing well. How are you doing, Yehudit?

Question: Great. Very well. Thank you. So, last week at the beginning of the week, you talked a lot about fighting and not tolerating, tolerating hate crimes. And you often speak about respecting cultural diversity and minority viewpoints. So, my question relates to the ongoing fight over the extent to which the Department of Education should interfere with the curricula of the yeshivas? Which once again has become a contested topic as mayoral candidates are asked where they stand on this issue. Which sometimes falls off the radar of a city that sometimes – that usually promotes respect for cultural diversity and sensitivity. So, last week in Gothamist,

Susan Lerner, the Executive Director of Common Cause New York, an organization that claims to shift power to the people, as part of her criticism and dismissal of the candidates' support for the yeshivas to design and determine their own curricula, she painted the quite large and diverse, Orthodox community as a quote extremist block. So, from my perspective, the word extremist is usually used for terrorists and violent people and not people who simply want to send their children and determine the curricula for – with schools that reflect their own values, texts, and traditions. So, I'm wondering if you, Mr. Mayor would describe the use of the term extremist block, to describe the community of 250,000 people who are comprised of widely different viewpoints and 275 vastly different yeshivas as reflecting inclusive language and respectful of cultural diversity? And I'm wondering if you think Ms. Lerner should perhaps reconsider her inflammatory words or resign her position?

Mayor: Yehudit, thank you for the question. And I want to begin where you began. I was at a rally on Saturday and solidarity with our Asian-American communities that have really suffered a horrible spate of hate crimes. But Yehudit, as you know, I've had to stand with our Jewish communities, our Muslim communities, our Sikh communities, we've seen hatred and violence directed at different communities. It's absolutely unacceptable in New York City. And in every case, the answer is all other communities should come to the defense of whatever community is under attack. So, I urge all New Yorkers now to come to the defense of Asian-Americans, support them, stand with them. Just as we stood with our brothers and sisters in the Jewish community, Muslim community, Sikh community, and others, we have to be there for each other. And of course, we also have to ensure that anyone who does these attacks is found and prosecuted and pays the price for what they did.

But when you talk about the situation you just described, I know Susan Lerner and she's someone I've worked with and I respect. But I find her comments absolutely, wrong. And I find them unacceptable. And I think she should immediately clarify them and recognize that that's just not fair to characterize such a large and diverse community that way. I have a very long personal relationship with the Orthodox Jewish community. I feel a deep connection and warmth in the many, many personal relationships I've had. And Yehudit, you describe it exactly right. And a very diverse community, a community that contributes a lot to this city, a community that is often misunderstood. No, that's a really horrible characterization and unfair characterization. We all need to work together on behalf of our children. So, I would say what we've tried to do is to work with the yeshivas to improve education for our children. That is our responsibility and the State Department of Education's responsibility. But you can do that in a respectful manner that also respects people's constitutional rights. That's the balance we have struck. And in fact, what we found overwhelmingly, is a good outcome with real work, there was agreement on how to improve the curricula for the benefit of everyone. So, that's the way to work, together. That's the way to move forward. Go ahead, Yehudit.

Question: Thank you so much. And last summer you shifted, I thought it was \$1 billion away from the NYPD. Is that the right number?

Mayor: It was \$1 billion in a variety of different actions over different timeframes, but yes, that was the right number overall.

Question: Okay. So, I'm wondering whether considering the rise in crime in the last year, how you think shifting some of that money back could perhaps increase manpower in the neighborhoods that are experiencing crime and, or bring back the anti-crime unit of plain clothes police officers who can focus in on gun violence in the city and kind of bring the violence under control? Do you think any of those things would have an effect?

Mayor: Let me, it's a good question, Yehudit. I appreciate it. Listen, Commissioner Shea made the decision to disband that unit. And he made it because he felt that there were not the best outcomes from it coming from that approach, in terms of fighting crime. And it was not helping in terms of drawing communities closer to the NYPD, which is the ultimate way you fight crime when community and police are really unified. Since then gun arrests have gone up intensely. Which I think proves the Commissioner was right. We have seen a steady, steady increase in gun arrests. And it's important to note that the January statistics showed a market decrease in crime compared to January a year ago, which was before the pandemic. So, I think the new approach is working. And I think we have to constantly work to bring police and community together. So, it's consistent with that focus. Now, after the changes we made with the City Council, in terms of the budget for the NYPD, I think we're in the right place. We're around 35,000 officers. I think that's the right place to be. So, I do not anticipate additions or subtractions. I think we have the number we need. I think we have to keep working on what is the right role for the NYPD, and some of the changes we've made, for example, getting the NYPD out of vendor enforcement. You know, changing the approach in a number of fronts to make sure that the right agency is handling the right situation. I think that's what we're going to keep perfecting. And that's the way forward.

Moderator: The next is Hazel from WCBS.

Question: Good Monday morning, Mayor de Blasio. How are you?

Mayor: Good, Hazel. How have you been?

Question: Good, good. Earlier you spoke about focusing on equity when it came to the vaccines. I wanted to talk to you about the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. It's one shot, 66 percent protective compared to 90 plus protection with the other vaccines like Pfizer and Moderna. So, will you be using these Johnson & Johnson vaccines for homebound seniors and harder to reach communities? And if so, how will you address some of the concerns of people in these marginalized communities, who may think they're getting an inferior product?

Mayor: I really appreciate the question, Hazel. I think there's a lot of misinformation out there that we have to overcome. So, I'm going to start, and then let the doctors say what they feel passionately about this – we've had this conversation. They thoroughly believe in the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. I thoroughly believe in it. The fact is the focus has to be on saving lives. And the Johnson & Johnson vaccine will save lives. I'm going to turn to Dr. Varma first. And then if Dr. Katz or Dr. Chokshi want to add. But simple point, we don't have enough vaccine. Every day someone's not vaccinated, they're in danger. When they are vaccinated, they're protected. We're about to get a lot of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, and it's a single dose. One and done. Once you're vaccinated, you're protected. It makes so much sense to use it. And I'm really worried that people are going to get the wrong understanding of it and then hesitate to get vaccinated exactly

when we need them most to get vaccinated. The only way we're going to reach homebound seniors is with a vaccine that does not require as much refrigeration and is easier to use. Those homebound seniors, our elders, they need to be vaccinated. So, we got to encourage people, not discourage them. And that's why getting the truth out is so important. So, Dr. Varma, let us hear what you feel?

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: Yeah, no, thank you very much for the question. And we do understand this is going to be a communication challenge. So, I want to start with the single most important message. The single most important message is that the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is 100 percent protective against people dying from COVID. And it is almost 100 percent protective against people being hospitalized. It basically has the exact same effectiveness that the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines do against people being hospitalized and dying. So, if you want to prevent the severe complications of COVID, which is what we all want for ourselves and our loved ones, take the first vaccine you have available. Because they all do exactly the same thing. One of the reasons that the vaccines show slightly different numbers, when you look at all sorts of different metrics is because the J & J vaccine was actually at a disadvantage. It was conducted at a time later when we started to have new variants of this disease. And it was specifically conducted in, in countries, including Brazil and South Africa, which we know have a high incidence of these variants. So, when you look at the sort of minor outcomes, it was always going to look like it performed a little worse. But again, just to get to the single most important point, when it comes to preventing hospitalizations and deaths, it is extremely effective and just as effective as the other ones.

Mayor: Thank you. Dr. Katz, you want to add anything? Dr. Katz, can you hear us?

President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals: I think Jay did such a great job. I, you know, I can only say that I believe very much our hospitals will see decreases in the number of hospitalized patients and deaths if people take the first vaccine that they have available. And that I totally agree that the Johnson & Johnson product was at a disadvantage compared to the others. And so, I intend to recommend it for my patients, especially my homebound patients. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you. Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Yes. Thank you. The bottom line for New York City and for our fellow New Yorkers is that we have another safe and effective vaccine that will save lives. And as we've mentioned, the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is easier to ship and to store and to use. And that's an unmitigated positive thing. That means we can reach more people with a vaccine that will save lives.

Mayor: Yeah. And one more point, Hazel, you get one shot and you're done. You don't have to worry about when is your next appointment going to be? Or is it going to be a delay in the supply as we saw, you know, a week ago with the storm? I like very much, the notion that someone gets a single shot and then they know they're protected. I would certainly happily myself, when my time comes, I'd be very happy to take the Johnson & Johnson vaccine and know that I was covered with one shot. Go ahead, Hazel.

Question: Thank you, gentlemen. My second question is for my colleague, Lisa Rozner. In some of the crimes said to be targeting Asian-Americans, police say one was possibly gambling crime related. And in another, the suspect was emotionally disturbed. So, by calling these hate crimes against one group, is there a concern by you that perhaps people are being scared unnecessarily? And could some of these incidents be more along the lines of a mental health issue?

Mayor: It's a fair question, Hazel. And that's why, you know, NYPD is very, very careful about where the facts lead them and, you know, reporting back what they find. We have specifically an Asian Hate Crime Task Force led by a deputy inspector who you heard from last week. The idea is always with all hate crime investigations to determine was it motivated by hate or not? As he, as the inspector told us, you know, once it's determined factually that there was a hate motivation, it adds to the penalties. So no, we can't, pre-judge each incident. We need the facts, but that said, there is clearly a horrible trend right now, disgusting trend in this city and in this nation, of attacks on Asian-Americans. Most horribly, what we saw in San Francisco where a man was killed just walking down the street, no provocation, no reason, just killed because he was Asian-American. And again, this hate emanated first and foremost, from the White House of Donald Trump. Trump is gone, but the hatred is not gone. And we have more work to do. So, I would say we have to determine each case individually, but we also have to recognize there's a clear trend here. And we all have to work together to defeat Asian hate. And that message, stop Asian hate has to keep be repeating until we see – we have to keep repeating it until we see that this horrible trend is over.

Moderator: The next is Katie from the Wall Street Journal.

Question: Hi, good morning, Mayor de Blasio. I have a question for you given, you know, this is the one-year anniversary of the first reported COVID case in the city. I wanted to see if you could opine a bit, apologies for my colleagues if you go on too long, but I guess I'm looking back on the past year, if you could maybe look at three things that you would change about the City's handling just, I guess reflecting a bit the last 12 months?

Mayor: I will try and keep it brief. It's a huge conversation, but I'll just try and keep it brief right now. The number one thing to know about this crisis is the difference would have been testing. If we had had testing, we would have known that the disease was already here in February. We literally – no one understood it because we had no evidence. That's the biggest difference maker here. That's the most painful part of this. That we pleaded back on January 24th, 2020 for testing from the federal government. It never came. I'd say the second thing is that the action in terms of shelter-in-place. I called for it obviously, the State resisted. That was a huge mistake. We should have done it immediately. Thank God it happened, but it should have been done immediately. And then the third thing I'd say is the vaccine, it's a miracle it's here. It really is. But I think from the beginning, there was a lost opportunity in 2020 to use the Defense Production Act fully. And really have the entire pharmaceutical industry involved. And I think that framed this whole crisis. If we had all had a lot more information, we could have done things differently. But I've talked to a lot of folks around the country and one of the themes that keeps coming back, because when you're dealing with an international pandemic, you can only truly defeat it with national leadership. And that was not there from day one. Go ahead, Katie.

Question: Thank you. And speaking of the vaccine, I know that there is this data showing the percentage of non-New York City residents getting vaccinated at places like Javits and Aqueduct in Queens. But do we know how many New York City residents are going to like a Jones Beach or something? Just to show that maybe because of the lack of supply and the lack of closer vaccination centers, maybe some New York City residents did also have to travel? If there's kind of a back and forth there?

Mayor: Yeah. And that could be to some degree, and I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi to see if he has any specific evidence of that. But I think what's important here is to recognize that the sites that are not focused on the immediate area always run this risk of there being some disparity. Again, I want to see everyone vaccinated in the city, in the suburbs, in the tri-state area – that's good for all of us. But as we're fighting these disparities, we need more transparency about what's going on to make sure that we're making the adjustments. And I think the biggest adjustments keep pushing the vaccine to the grassroots, because that's proven to be the best way to fight disparity. But Dr. Chokshi, you speak to whether we have any data on the question Katie is asking?

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you, sir. No, we don't have a specific data regarding non-New York City sites serving New York City residents. But what I can tell you is, in our conversations with other large cities around the country it is, you know, a broader phenomenon with respect to places like New York City, having so many people who come into the city for vaccination. And that's why it's so important, as the Mayor has said several times, that we get our fair share of the allocation so that we can keep pace, and, most importantly, get as many New York City residents vaccinated as quickly as possible.

Mayor: Thank you.

Moderator: The next is Kristin from the Staten Island Advance.

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

Mayor: I'm doing well Kristin. And I want to give credit where credit is due, thank you for raising concerns about the Vanderbilt Clinic. And I spoke to Dr. Katz, and my understanding is now that a tent has been put up to make it more comfortable for folks waiting there for their vaccination and you are the person who sounded the alarm. So, thank you for that.

Question: I appreciate that. So, you know, I wanted to talk to you about these priority neighborhoods last month. You announced that they're – they were expanding. Now, there was 33 instead of 27, and that Port Richmond was added to that list, along with St. George and Stapleton. However, Port Richmond isn't listed on the City's website when you go to the priority neighborhoods, and I'm hearing from residents that do live in Port Richmond in the 10302 and the 10310 ZIP codes, that they have not been able to make vaccination appointments, because they're told that Port Richmond is not a priority neighborhood. And I was just wondering if you were aware and if there was a reason why that maybe Port Richmond isn't on the list?

Mayor: I'm going to have Dr. Chokshi speak to the initial question of why it wouldn't be listed on the website, etcetera. But I want to confirm, no one should be telling anyone that there's not an appointment for them because it's not in a priority neighborhood. We've been over this so many times, but let me do it again. When we say priority neighborhoods, it means that's where we have to make an extra effort to get people vaccinated, because that's where the danger has been greatest. Again, it's very straightforward – where did people die the most? If I could be painfully blunt, where did people die the most? Where is there the most poverty? Where has been the least access to health care? This is how the 33 neighborhoods were determined, based on longstanding historical trends and what we've seen in the last year. It means we make an extra effort to reach the places where people are in greatest danger, but, obviously, people from every neighborhood are accessing the vaccine and we want that – that's why we have almost 2 million doses so far. It's been every part of the city. There are sites all over the city and we're expanding as we get more supply, finally, we're looking to build out more local sites. So, no one should be telling someone, you know, you don't get a vaccine because you're not in a priority neighborhood. For example, Empire Outlets, where you and I were the other day, is any Staten Islander from anywhere. So, I'd like to know who said that, because it's just not accurate. But to the question, Dr. Chokshi, about the website and all, can you speak to that?

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, sir. I'll be happy to. My understanding is that Port Richmond is on the website with respect to the list of priority neighborhoods. We can make sure that that's true across different sites and follow up with respect to the specific site that you're looking at. And I will just add, it's one of the reasons – you know, Port Richmond in particular – one of the reasons that the City has really focused on these neighborhoods in locating our vaccination sites. And so, for example, we have a Health Department site at Port Richmond High School. I actually did a shift there myself a few weeks back and I can tell you that I saw with my own eyes that there were many people from that surrounding area, that neighborhood who were coming in to get vaccinated.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Kristin.

Question: Thank you so much. And then, wanted to talk to you about opening schools, you know, in the fall. I heard that some high schools may have contracts with the City to continue their COVID testing and – or their vaccinations through October. Schools, obviously, you know, start in September. So, you know, could you just talk about any contracts that the City has with high school buildings and when those contracts would be up and if it would cause any complications to the reopening effort?

Mayor: Yeah. I mean the priority is going to be schools. So, if we have a school site – I mean, when you say contracts, I think you mean with the providers doing the work in the schools and we would simply move the location. And we've done that already with middle schools. So, same providers still providing whether you're talking testing or vaccinations in the community as needed, but just different locations, other public or private sites. But no, we intend to be back fully in September and any current activity that needs to be moved out to accommodate school coming back, the priority will be reopening schools fully in September.

Moderator: The next is Emily from NY1.

Question: Good morning, Mayor de Blasio. I remember, of course, in 2015, when you spoke to Governor Cuomo, having – being a person who has a, sort of, vendetta against people. Do you believe this crisis that he's facing now, the lowest point perhaps in his political career, is a terminus or a culmination of sorts for his behavior toward everyone these past years?

Mayor: It's a good question, Emily. Look, again, I don't know why he has done these things he's done over the years, but he has. I was talking about it in 2015, because, to me, it had become unacceptable and it was important to bring it out in the open. I think more and more people are going to be talking about what they've experienced. And I think as people see more and more evidence, it's going to be clear this is not the way any leader should treat anybody. What these two women went through is absolutely unacceptable. What Ron Kim went through, having his life – you know, having his career threatened. I mean, again, just look at this pattern of abuse. It's unacceptable. So, I think a lot of truth is coming out, I think more truth will come out.

Go ahead, Emily.

Question: And Mayor de Blasio, if you didn't see the Governor's statement yesterday as an apology, how do you believe he should have responded ahead of the investigations? Just what sort of position you should be taking amid everything?

Mayor: I think when someone's done something wrong, they need to say I did something wrong and decide what action they're going to take as a result. But it's even more horrible if it's something like sexual harassment or taking advantage of high office and intimidating a young woman, to laugh it off is even more troubling. It's not a laughing matter. So, you know, people have done something wrong need to admit it and then talk about what needs to change, and I certainly didn't hear that. Go ahead.

Moderator: We have time for two more for today. The next is Jacob from The Forward.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor. How are you?

Mayor: I'm doing well, Jacob. How have you been?

Question: Doing great. So, you described the news on the vaccination as exciting, and you set a goal for 5 million vaccinations at June. In June – in the end of June, there's primaries for your successor. Do you feel that if you reach that goal and 5 million [inaudible] and the city sort of gets back – a little back to normal, that, that will [inaudible] your legacy when it comes to handling this pandemic and also dismiss this criticism of some of these candidates, criticizing your approach or saying that you failed in this crisis?

Mayor: Look, all candidates criticize – it's as old as time itself. But the people know best and the people are experiencing the results of everything we're doing – the fact that there's been 2 million vaccinations now, even though we, for so long, have struggled to get enough supply. We have to struggle and fight for the freedom to vaccinate, but we fought those fights and won, and the people see that, they know it. All those seniors who have gotten vaccinated now know it's

because I fought for them and the City fought for them. Folks who go to the vaccination centers consistently say, they know they're being well cared for. You're going to see a vibrant recovery this year against all odds. And even last year, you saw us fight back from being epicenter, to being so safe by the summer. You saw us create the biggest Test and Trace Corps. in America. You saw us bring back our public schools when major cities around the country didn't even dare to. I mean, the record's pretty clear and I think people know it. So, I never get too worried about what folks are doing to try and get themselves elected. I care about, are the people getting what they need, and more and more we're able to reach people and get them the help they need. Obviously, food as well, Jacob. You know, you saw the other day, 200 million meals delivered. We made sure that no one went hungry in this city. That's what we're here to do, that's what matters. Go ahead, Jacob.

Question: You had your fair share of [inaudible] treatment by Cuomo. Do you feel that now whatever's being revealed about the Governor, and also your call for an inquiry of his handling into the nursing home situation, that – number one, that people will start looking in to his entire handling of the State in all crises, but also that now that people are questioning his approach, that this sort of complicates – adds to the distrust that people have in government and complicates people complying with restrictions and coronavirus guidelines.

Mayor: It's a very thoughtful question, Jacob. And I have to say, when leaders do the wrong thing, it certainly does not help faith in government – that's a fair statement. But I think, thank God, so much of what's happening here, it goes beyond any one elected official. I think the people have learned so much in the last year about the coronavirus. I think the vast majority of people take it very seriously and are listening to the doctors, the experts – Dr. Fauci, on a national level and the other national health care leadership – you know, Dr. Varma, Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Katz here, I think people hear their voices. So, I think that's what matters most. I think the fact is that we need to make sure there's full investigations here of everything that happened, of these allegations of sexual harassment from the two women that come forward and any other women who come forward. The allegations about the nursing homes, what was covered up, but what was done as well. What happened? Why were these lives lost? And did it have any connection to campaign contributions to the Governor from the nursing home industry? The big questions have to be asked. And as you as you remember, Jacob – I know you're a student of history – the famous phrase from Watergate, follow the money. I think whatever investigation happens here has to follow the money. In the meantime, local control needs to be restored. Localities that – people trust their local governments and believe in their local health care leaders. We need the power to reach our people. We need the freedom to vaccinate. We need to cut the red tape. And I think if that is done, if local controls restored it's going to help us keep people's faith, because they hear best from the voices closest to their lives. So, I think we can keep continuing forward if those actions are taken. Go ahead.

Moderator: Last question for today, it goes to Gersh from Streetsblog.

Question: Hello, Mr. Mayor. How are you?

Mayor: I'm doing well, Gersh. How have you been?

Question: I love going last, because I could – everyone hangs up and I can say, you know, it's not going so well, because I hate remote learning. Just thought, I'd throw that in, that's not a question.

Mayor: Gersh, you are always a man of integrity who tells us exactly what you're feeling. But Gersh, on the plus side, the first games have begun in spring training. So, that means good things ahead.

Question: This is the year. This is the year. Anyway, I want to ask you, today, Transportation Alternatives and a coalition of more than 80 community groups are asking all local officials to commit to creating 25 percent more public space by converting more of our roadways, you know, which is the largest public space we have, for use by people rather than by drivers. You know, drivers have about 76 percent of our roadway space. So, if the City cut car space, by just one-quarter, it would have space for 1,000 miles of open streets, 500 miles of protected bus lanes, 500 miles of protected bike lanes, and you could [inaudible] every one of the City's 35 – 39,000 intersections. So, I want to throw that out there, because they're doing it as a challenge to the mayoral candidates – 25 by 25 – what do you think of a 25 percent reduction in car space across the board? You've got 10 months to make at least part of that happen.

Mayor: Well, I appreciate the question, Gersh. Look, we've had very good experiences opening up more space. Obviously, Open Streets, Open Restaurants, we've had a positive experience. And, as I announced in State of the City, we intend to go farther – Open Streets, permanent; Open Restaurants, permanent. More bike lanes and bus lanes – obviously, the changes we're making on the Brooklyn Bridge, the Queensboro Bridge – this is all moving in the right direction. I haven't seen this proposal. I'd have to think about it and talk to folks with specific expertise, but a direction that we need to lean more and more into opening up public spaces, getting out of our cars, focusing more on public transportation. This is the way of the future, unquestionably. So, let me get a look at this plan. I'll have more to say as I assess it. Go ahead, Gersh.

Question: All right, I'm going to go in a different direction. You know, following up on [inaudible] question and also referring back to Commissioner Shea's comments on NY1 last week when he said the cost of all these additional cops in the subway would come from overtime. You know, at the time, Commissioner Shea also said he was sort of pleased that people were now calling for more cops in the subway, compared to back in June when there were so many calls, obviously, to cut the NYPD budget, etcetera. So, let me ask you, because you're a man who champions his progressive beliefs, but you're also about to spend tens of millions of dollars on additional policing. Do you share Commissioner Shea's, sort of, I told you so sense when he was talking about reallocating the NYPD's massive budgets, or do you favor reallocating that to other agencies that deal with the roots of these social problems?

Mayor: I don't think it's neither-or. It's a very – Gersh, you're asking a very important and sincere question, but I don't think it's neither-or. And I wouldn't characterize what the Commissioner said the way you did. I think he was acknowledging something, but I don't consider that – I don't think it was the spirit you're hearing or saying. The bottom line is, and I've learned this from decades of working with people in communities all over the city, including my

own experience as a Council Member, working on, you know, block by block with people in my community. I think folks want to know there's consistent police presence and it's fair, and just, and non-discriminatory – that is the balance point. That's what neighborhood policing has been consistently moving toward, a relationship between police and community, literally community residents and police officers on a first-name basis with each other. More and more of our officers, as you know, are reflective of this city, that's the direction we need to go in, going forward. But, right now, the size of the police force is allowing us to make sure we can provide police presence in the many ways people do want, including on the subways. I can't tell you how many people have said to me, I'm reassured when I see an officer on the subway. And that's our job to do that for people, but to continue to make it as fair as possible to make it non-discriminatory, non-biased, inclusive, representative. And when something doesn't need to be done by police officers, move it, which is why we're doing crisis calls now. When folks have a mental health challenge and there's no indication of violence involved, we don't want to see that handled by NYPD, going forward. We want that to be done by paramedics, by social workers, and mental health professionals. That's the direction we're going in and you're going to see more like that. So, I think there's a way to strike that balance properly. But I listen to people, every-day people, working people in communities all over the city, they want us to strike that balance. They need us to for their safety and for the respect they deserve.

Okay. Everybody, as we conclude today – look, this city has an amazing ability. After this incredibly difficult year, this city has an amazing ability to come back strong. There's just no place on earth that has that get-up-off-the-mat approach like New York City. And I always say, it's not how many times you're knocked down, it's how many times you get back up. New York City is getting back up and getting back up quickly right now. You see the life in the city. You see the energy in this city. You see people getting ready for things to reopen on a big scale. We're going to get those 5 million people vaccinated by June. Every day, we get more and more evidence, almost 2 million vaccinations already as of today. What we have now is a chance to do something historic, bring this city back strong, but also address the mistakes of the past. It's a transformative moment. They only come around once every generation or two. This is our moment. Every day I get more evidence of that. So, when we talk about a recovery for all of us, we say it, I say it, because I believe it. I believe we can do it now. I believe it's all of us, it's our time, it's our moment in history to do that, and we will. Thank you, everybody.

###