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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everyone. Well, we start today with some really good news. Another important milestone in our vaccination effort, reaching so many New Yorkers more and more every day. So as of today, over six million vaccinations have been given in the City of New York since we began. We're just going to keep moving forward no matter what, because you're going to see the indicators later on today. They really, really look good. And this has been more and more of a good pattern. Why do we see constant improvement in COVID situation? Because of vaccinations, because of over six million vaccinations to date, you can just see the cause and effect right there. What's the exact number? 6,004,406 vaccinations today.

Now we want to do a lot more. We want to get everyone in who hasn't been vaccinated yet. We want to make it simple. We want to encourage people and let's face it, convenience matters to New Yorkers. We're getting busier and busier again. Life in the city is coming back, including the fact that we're the busiest place in the whole country. So, we want to make it simple for folks. So, I'm going to go over a couple of things we're doing today and calling on others to do, to simplify the vaccination process and get more and more people to come in. First of all, all City-run sites, as of now, will be open to all New Yorkers, regardless of any geographic restrictions that existed previously. We want to make it simple. You can go to any City-run site, Health + Hospitals, Department of Health, any site, you can go there and get a shot, doesn't matter where you live. Second, all City-run sites will be open for walk-ins as of today for all sites for all age levels. So, you can just walk up and get vaccinated if you're 16 years old or older for the sites using Pfizer, 18 years old and older at the sites using Moderna.

We did a walk-up pilot project focusing on the oldest New Yorkers. We saw really good results. Lot of people said it was the reason they came and got vaccinated, that it was a lot simpler for them. And we did not have the kinds of lines we were worried about that might be a problem. So, we're quite confident we could accommodate a much higher volume of walk-ins. So, we're going to make that universal at all the City-run sites again, for all ages. Third, we're encouraging community health centers, including the federally supported health centers to allow walk-ins. We think this approach is exactly right for this point as we continue to move forward. So, we want them to do that. And fourth, we're urging private health care providers to reach out to their patients very specifically, not just emails, but reach out one by one, personal contact, encourage folks to get vaccinated. Let them know that it's free. Let them know it's safe, let them know it's effective. Let them know it's easier than ever. That – we're it all over the city, that personal contact, whether it's knocking on the door, or seeing someone on the street and telling them there's a vaccination center right nearby, the same with health care providers that people know and trust. We think that personal contact is going to make a huge difference. So, this is how we

bring our city back. I want to keep encouraging everyone, go out there and get vaccinated if you have not already. It's simpler than ever. And if you want to find a site for today and walk-up and get that vaccination, you can go to nyc.gov/vaccinefinder, or call 8-7-7-VAX-4NYC. Now you want to recovery? Get vaccinated. It's as simple as that. This is what will bring us forward. This is what will create a recovery for all of us. The most possible people getting vaccinated as quickly as possible.

Okay. Now talk about recovery for all of us. Who's been heroic during this whole fight against COVID? Of course. our health care heroes, of course, our first responders. So, many everyday New Yorkers who did incredible acts of kindness for each other. But also. our nonprofits. This is the city in America that has the most and the strongest and the best nonprofits out there. Community-based organizations that we depend on to do so much to help our community. They have shown so much heart, so much grit in this crisis. They have been absolutely indispensable. So, I want to say I've taken the occasion over the months to thank lots of different folks. I want to thank everyone who works for community-based organizations, everyone who works in the social service nonprofits, and all the other nonprofits that help New Yorkers. You do such good and important work. And you've been heroes in this whole crisis. And you're a big reason why New York City is coming back. Now it's time for us to help you because what you've done, if a family needed food, you were there for them. If folks needed mental health support, you were there for them. If folks were struggling to figure out how to make sense and get information about this pandemic and make the right decisions, you were there for them. There's so many ways that nonprofits saw people through this crisis.

So, today we announce a major initiative, and this is something that the City Council has really focused on as well. We've been working with them on this. And I want to thank Speaker Corey Johnson for his constant focus on the needs of nonprofits. And really. we're talking here about the basics, the overhead, the infrastructure nonprofits, so they can keep going. It doesn't happen if they don't have those basic resources. So, today we announce \$120 million investment in New York City's nonprofits for this fiscal year and next fiscal year, to help them continue to keep the city's safety net strong. We need it. We need it more than ever. This is the indirect costs that nonprofits have that are so basic to their operations – the rent, the information systems, administration, all the things that they can't do without. If they're going to be there for people, if they are going to be there at the frontline of their neighborhoods, these indirect costs, these infrastructure costs really count for a lot. So, we want to put our money where our mouth is, \$120 million to help them stay strong as the City comes back.

Now, I have to tell you that New York City innovated this approach of focusing on the fundamental needs of our nonprofits, because we depend on them so much. And we've been leading the country in recognizing that this is how you keep the safety nets strong. This is how you create a lot of jobs, grassroots, local jobs for people. And this is how working families know that they're going to have someone to turn to in their neighborhood who can help them. So again, thanks to the City Council, Speaker Johnson, and everyone in the Council who focused on this. And I want you to hear from one Council Member in particular, this has been a passion for her. It's an issue that doesn't get enough attention. And so, she has made sure it got attention and has continued to bring this forward and represents a neighborhood that has some of the most amazing nonprofits and community-based organizations in the whole city. But I can safely say

this issue wouldn't have gotten the attention it deserved, if not for her strong voice. My pleasure to introduce Council Member Helen Rosenthal.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you, Council Member. All right. We talk about recovery for all of us, and that means the grassroots – it means the grassroots in our communities with the neighborhood organizations. But we all know, when we think about our neighborhoods and what we love, and how we identify our neighborhoods, the character, the charm, the things, the life, the vibrancy, what do we think of? One of the things we always think of is our community small businesses, the mom and pop stores, the stores and the restaurants that have been there for generations that are part of our identity. If we're going to have New York City back the way we need it to be back, we have to be there for small businesses. A recovery for all of us must include small businesses and a recovery for all of us has to take us someplace better than we were before the pandemic and that means focusing especially on small businesses in the hardest-hit communities, the communities that bore the brunt of COVID, bringing them back, keeping them strong, helping them thrive and grow for the future.

So, we know – we saw – to coin a phrase – we saw a tale of two cities during the pandemic. Wall Street did great. The stock market did great. Small businesses suffered deeply. A lot of them didn't make it. A lot of them are now hanging on by a thread, but we found ways to help. And one of the things we did, which clearly worked was the Open Restaurants program, that brought back about 100,000 jobs and it proved that with just a little bit of help a lot could happen for small business. Obviously, what Joe Biden has done, and Nancy Pelosi, Chuck Schumer, everyone, to get help from the federal level – the State Legislature stepped up recently, Carl Heastie, Andrea Stewart-Cousins – there's a lot more help coming, but we know there's still so much more needed. So, focusing today on the needs of small business and how we bring them back. It's the backbone of our city. Small business has to work for New York City to work. So, we're announcing some major new direct support to small businesses, a combination of different approaches that total over \$155 million that will go directly to small business as grants and direct support with a special focus on communities of color, immigrant communities, communities hardest hit by COVID.

A lot of different pieces that you're going to hear about in a moment. I want to shout out one in particular that's really been effective and sometimes it was threatened, but it's been saved. And one of the champions of this was Council Member Mark Levine. I want to give him a special shout out for his strong advocacy. The Commercial Lease Legal Assistance program to help small businesses that needed that legal assistance to keep going. This has proven to be really effective and I want to thank the Council Member for making it a priority. And it's something you're going to hear about now as the kind of thing we're going to be doing, going forward, including a lot just plain direct support, direct grants to small businesses. Here to tell you about it, someone who is undoubtedly passionate about this topic, and has been out there in the community of the city, talking to small business owners and helping them through this – our Commissioner for Small Business Services, Jonnel Doris.

Commissioner Jonnel Doris, Small Business Services: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. It's an honor to wake up every day to fight for our small businesses. And as a former small business owner myself, I know firsthand the challenges that it takes to start and run a business. Every entrepreneur knows, building a business, taking on risks, working hard, putting in long nights was difficult before the pandemic much less after and now – during and after the pandemic. And we at SBS have been their strongest ally. And today, we have some amazing news – really good news [inaudible] small businesses around the city and job seekers with a new investment of \$155 million to help small businesses recover and train New Yorkers for the economy of tomorrow. First, we are providing more financial relief and [inaudible] a brand-new \$100 million small business loan fund and a \$100 million dollar program for businesses that were unable to relieve – to get access to relief, and over \$10 million in new funding for free legal help in our commercial lease assistance program, as the Mayor mentioned. These programs will focus on low-moderate income businesses in the hardest hit communities and also help our beloved businesses in the arts, entertainment, recreation, and food services. These are the businesses that draw visitors from all the world, making New York City a world-class attraction, but have been completely shuttered. We are revitalizing our commercial quarters also with an additional \$1.2 million investment in our Avenue NYC program, bringing it to \$2.6 million so that we can energize community organizations as they help small businesses recover during this vital time.

Second, we are providing more help as you reopen. We are investing in additional \$5 million to make New York City the friendliest place to start and grow a business by creating a one-stop shop GPS for small business owners, guiding them through the process of getting their doors open and eliminating anxiety and roadblocks.

Third, we're provided more support for workers in the new economy ahead. The pandemic has created this economy put in sectors like health care and technology at the forefront of our recovery. So, we're investing in our most precious resources, the workers who keep the city growing, and our businesses running. We'll do this by boosting our training and apprenticeship programs with close to \$6 million. And to prepare New Yorkers for jobs in areas like web development, nursing, and [inaudible] building. And most importantly, we are making sure that folks who are underrepresented in the workforce get their fair share of these opportunities.

To conclude, it is said that everything that is done in the world is done by hope. There are over 240,000 small businesses in the city who made their dreams a reality with infinite hope. They are the model of the New York grit and determination, and the reason why we are keeping our hope alive even now. With all the support that is coming in the days, weeks, and months ahead, let's keep our small businesses in our city strong. And we continue more than ever right now to build a recovery for all of us. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Commissioner. I love what you said – everything done in the world has done by hope. It's true. And we not only hope that our small businesses are going to recover, we're going to be there for them. And you're going to see an amazing comeback of our small businesses this year in New York City. I'm going to tell you something else that makes me hopeful and makes me proud and makes me happy. Something we're happy to talk about today that just happened yesterday. Our own Deanne Criswell, who has been our amazing Emergency Management Commissioner over these last years, she was confirmed yesterday by the U.S.

Congress as the new federal FEMA Administrator. What amazing work she did here. One of the heroes of the COVID crisis in New York City, one of the leaders of the fight-back, helped us see our way through this incredible unprecedented crisis.

I'll tell you about Deanne, you saw it a lot of times when she was part of these press conferences – cool in the saddle at all times, just clear-headed, a leader, a strategist who helped us figure out even a thorniest problems. And I got to tell you, I'm proud that one of our own here in New York City has now been elevated to lead all emergency management efforts of the federal government for the entire nation. That makes me feel really, really proud. And Deanne, I think you're out there, I just want to say a profound thank you on behalf of the people in New York City. We're going to miss you, but we know you're just a phone call away and, you know, we know you're going to be looking out for us, and that means a lot to this city as we come back. But just so proud of all you achieved here and so proud of your new role. So, I just wanted to thank you publicly and give you a chance to say a formal goodbye or fare thee well to the people of New York City.

Commissioner Deanne Criswell, Emergency Management: Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor. Just making sure you can hear me? All right. Great. You know, it's really has been a true honor to serve in New York City and lead the nations really preeminent emergency management agency that has an exceptional team of public servants for the last almost two years. And I'd also like to thank President Biden for nominated me to be the administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, as well as the U.S. Senate for confirming me yesterday for this very important role. You know, after the last two years, we've experienced a variety of emergencies here in New York City. You know, just a few weeks into my tenure here, we had the blackout in Manhattan, plunged into darkness. And then that was quickly followed by a heat wave that we had not seen in many years – record heat wave, which brought even more power outages across the city. And I was really impressed and I immediately witnessed how the City employees come together, how New Yorkers come out to help New Yorkers, and I'm proud to say that I was able to serve here as your Commissioner for the last two years.

You know, the last year itself though – you know, we've been focused on leading the City's response to COVID 19 pandemic and, happily, we're now aiding in the City's largest vaccination efforts in history. And I think it's such an important part of the recovery that we're going to see not only here in New York City, but across the nation. And we all have a responsibility to make sure that every American gets vaccinated so we can move on to that road to recovery. And even during the pandemic with all that we were doing, we also faced the impacts from coastal storm Isaias, summer heat, and then we had an incredibly snowy start to our year this year. And again, and again, the women and the men here at New York City Emergency Management, they rose to the occasion. They have worked day and night to support New Yorkers. And they constantly amaze me with their knowledge, with their professionalism, and with their dedication to helping the people of the city. And I'm incredibly proud, again, to have been able to be part of this. And as I move on to FEMA and to work to help all Americans, I will forever be grateful for the opportunity that you gave me, Mr. Mayor. I know that I'm leaving you in good hands, and John Scrivani is going to do a fantastic job to continue leading this incredible agency. And I just wanted to one, thank you again for this opportunity, and thank New Yorkers for making my time here so memorable.

Mayor: Well, Deanne, listen – I remember when we first spoke during the interview a few years ago, and I said it will not be dull. And I love that you gave – you gave the list of –

Commissioner Criswell: It was not wrong.

Mayor: I wasn't lying, right? You gave the list of all the interesting things that happened [inaudible], but we did not expect what we got thrown last year, but you really handled it with just extraordinary poise and focus. And we could not have gotten through COVID without you. So, we're going to miss you a lot, but thank you. And, as you said, your successor, John Scrivani, coming on duty today. And you did a great job working with John on a very smooth transition. So, until we meet again, I think is the right phrase. And thank you again from the bottom of my heart.

Commissioner Criswell: Thank you, sir.

Mayor: All right, everyone, let's go to indicators. And we have more good news today. Again, we've got to earn it every day and we got a long road ahead, but we definitely have good news and that's just really clearly because of where I started, over 6 million vaccinations from day-one, it is clearly having an effect. So, here we go. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for a suspected COVID-19 – today's report, 155 patients, well below the threshold. Confirmed positivity has gone down to 40.76 percent. And the hospitalization per 100,000 is at 2.55, that's been going down steadily. We want to get below the threshold of two – but, again, those are really good to see. And also, number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average – today's report, 1,835 cases. I mean, look at that graph, it just is everything we were hoping for it. We've got to sustain it. We've got to keep driving it down, but that's fantastic. And, as we always say, the one that's the ultimate measure – number three, percentage of people testing citywide positive for COVID-19 – today's report, on seven-day rolling average, 4.45 percent. So, now, even more below that five percent threshold we set a long time ago. That number is great and declining, and we want to keep it declining. Guess what? Go get vaccinated.

So, a few words in Spanish – and the topic is getting vaccinated.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

Moderator: We'll now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Commissioner Doris, by Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Katz, and by Senior Advisor, Dr. Jay Varma. First question today goes to Marla Diamond from WCBS 880.

Question: Good morning, Mayor.

Mayor: Hey, Marla. How are you today?

Question: Great. We're right at the Museum of Natural History under the blue whale this morning. I wanted to find out –

Mayor: That's the place to be.

Question: I know, I'm telling you, it's very popular. Although, I have to say, that we haven't seen that many people this morning and there are still dozens of open appointments. So, I wanted to find out if this will now be a walkup site as well for 16-plus, because this morning we were told it was appointment only. And will the City be offering other incentives or sweeteners or fun places to be vaccinated to lure in those that are hesitant to get a vaccine?

Mayor: Definitely, Marla, we are going to be, we're going to make it fun and we're going to make it easy, and we're going to make it exciting in lots of ways and, and a lot more to say on that in the coming weeks. This is an example – I really do think a lot of people are going to just love sort of the special moment, the novelty value of getting vaccinated under the blue whale and something you can talk about for the rest of your life, as a good news story. But we got to keep looking for every way that attracts people, and I said, you know, I really think some of this is just making it convenient, making it fun, making it easy.

As for that site, Dr. Chokshi will update us on that. You know, with a lot of the sites, we've all been working with this appointment approach for a long time, and it obviously worked. We are looking to transition in many cases to a walk-up, but it really depends on the site and what works for each site flow. So, for that site, Dr. Chokshi, do you know if there is a walk-up plan for that site yet? Or what are we looking at there?

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, sir. The American Museum of Natural History is also a walk-up site so all eligible New Yorkers can walk in starting today to get vaccinated at that site as well. I'll be there later today, as I believe you will be as well, Mr. Mayor, we're looking forward to it, and I just want to add one thing to what you've said, which is in addition to those places that really capture the imagination of New Yorkers to get vaccinated, we're also going to site more and more in places where we know people already frequent. We opened up a new site in the Queens Center Mall last Friday because we know there's a lot of foot traffic in that area as well. That's also one of our walk-up sites, and so we're going to be reaching more and more New Yorkers in the places that they already are.

Mayor: Excellent. Go ahead, Marla.

Question: So I'm wondering, you know, we've got a lot of vaccine out there and seems like, you know, demand is kind of dried up. Have you sent any of the unused vaccines elsewhere, and can New York sort of keep these and keep them frozen indefinitely or, you know, is there a shelf life?

Mayor: Yeah, and I'm going to turn to Dr. Katz to explain just how long-lasting the supply is so long as it's properly kept, but listen, Marla, I do understand really, I understand that we all think in terms of trends, I just would be a little careful to overstate the trend. It was a week or two ago where it was really hard to get an appointment. I'm really happy it has become easy to get an appointment. This is what we wished for all along, and this is what's going to encourage a lot of people. I think there are hundreds of thousands of people who will happily get a vaccination when it's easy, and the fact that it's easy now is something we embrace and we want to make it fun and inviting. We're certainly hanging on to all the vaccine we have because we're going to have millions of people still to reach, and you never know what happens with supplies, so you always want to have some reserves. So, no everything we got, we're going to be using for sure. As to how long it keeps, Dr. Katz, please educate us.

President Katz: Thank you, sir, and thanks for all the effort you've put in to get us to this space. I know I have a lot of patients who are ready to get vaccinated, but they need it to be, as you say, easy and convenient and connected to their doctor, and I'm certain in the next few weeks, we're going to be able to vaccinate them. To the specific question while the vaccine is in the freezer, there really is no problem with spoilage. The shelf life is, is in the order of months and we will use it way before then. I think what people are thinking of is that once you puncture a vial, you need to use that vaccine within a six-hour period for the vaccines we have, and so we're very careful that when we puncture a vial, that we have enough people to give that dose to make sure that we do not waste it, but it for the vaccine that is in our freezer, sir, it's quite safe and we'll be using it in the next weeks to come. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you very much. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is James Ford from PIX 11.

Question: And good morning, Mr. Mayor and to everyone on the call and happy Friday.

Mayor: Happy Friday, James. A lot to celebrate just because it's Friday.

Question: Absolutely, and many other things. I'm trying to just get a sense of this and this may follow Marla's question in some way. I mean, are we, the fact that there is universal walk-in now, does this mean we are at a point where supply has met demand or might we even be above that, like where we might have oversupply, especially noting that the Johnson & Johnson vaccine may get the green light to be off-pause as early as today?

Mayor: Yeah. No, I don't think that's the, I mean, it's a great question, James, but I don't think that's the whole story. First of all, you're right. We need the answer on Johnson & Johnson. I think it'll be a helpful answer, clarifying that we can move forward. But then, you know, that's, that's the theory. The reality is there's not a lot of supply of Johnson & Johnson being produced right now. So, you know, you obviously know there's issues in the Baltimore factory and all that. So, I don't – you know, I think getting the green light on Johnson & Johnson will be good for everyone to get clarity, to feel a little more comfortable, to understand what's going on. I don't think we're going to have a lot of doses to be able to use in the short term with Johnson & Johnson. What I do think is the, we shouldn't overstate the moment. Right now, supply and

demand have come into much better balanced than they were before we spent months with way too much demand to meet the supply we had. It is again, wonderful to have even a few weeks where there's enough supply, but there's a long road ahead, and we have to understand that if we're going to make sure the variants don't come back and keep this progress, we've got to keep getting vaccinated, and I think as we tell more and more people, the direct relationship between vaccination and the fact that the city is getting safer and we're going to be able to open up more. I think people will want to get vaccinated. I think a lot of people just want it to be convenient and easy. A lot of people have questions they want answered. They're going to get those answers, including from, as Dr. Chokshi said, they're their own personal doctor who will now have more ability to get vaccine directly, or their local community pharmacist. So, I think we should assume for the next few weeks, we're going to have ample supply. But let's be clear. We intend to reach millions more people, and I think the more new approaches we bring in the more people will want to come forward. Go ahead, James.

Question: Thank you for that also, and forgive me, if you've mentioned this in the past few days but you have encouraged greater tourism for the tourism sector to come back to New York City. I'm wondering what concerns you might have if any of people coming into the city who aren't vaccinated or for that matter, don't want to be vaccinated, as you've pointed out, and as federal officials have pointed out, vaccination hesitancy looks to be our next big challenge. What concerns do you have that people who are vaccination hesitant will come to New York as tourists?

Mayor: Let me put it this way. I mean, you know, President Biden very proudly announced the reaching the 200 million vaccination mark that's astounding in and of itself, how many Americans have been reached, and I think there's a very high correlation, James, between the folks who are choosing to travel and the fact that they've been vaccinated. I think a lot of people didn't feel comfortable traveling until they were vaccinated. So, I do not fear a disproportionate impact if you will. I think you're going to see, amongst travelers, a propensity to having gotten vaccinated, but we want to just keep encouraging it in every way here and all around the country, and I think it will add up over time. I just think we're going to see constant growth of the number of people vaccinated. What matters most is are we driving back this disease, and so far, because of relentless vaccination efforts, the answer is, yes, we're driving back to this disease. You can see it clearly in the indicators. We're going to keep doing that. I think visitors are going to come more as we get into the summer. So, we still got a few more months. We're going to get a lot more people vaccinated. I think a lot more people around the country are going to get vaccinated. So, at this moment, I don't think that is a pressing concern, but as with everything else, we're going to keep a close eye and watch the variants, watch the data, watch the science, and make adjustments as we go along.

Moderator: The next is Andrew Siff from WNBC.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everyone on the call. If Johnson & Johnson ends it's pause today, how quickly would the City resume using it, and what would that look like? Would it go right back into the homebound seniors as soon as today or tomorrow?

Mayor: It's a really good question, Andrew, and I'm going to turn to Dr. Chokshi and Dr. Katz. Let me say, I hope we do get a really clear answer because it is a vaccine that really allows us to do a lot of things we need to do to protect people, particularly the homebound seniors, and as someone who got it myself, you know, I believe in it and I want to get it back in the lineup.

In terms of how quickly we can make that adjustment, Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Katz, what can you tell us?

Commissioner Chokshi: Sure, Mr. Mayor, I'm happy to start. We are, of course, following this very closely. We're planning for you know, different eventualities coming out of the CDC Advisory Committee's recommendation, and of course the hoped-for outcome is that we will be able to resume using the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. With respect to the timeframe. Some of this is contingent on exactly what is determined by the federal government's review. But operationally we will be ready, you know, as soon as tomorrow to resume using the Johnson & Johnson vaccine depending on exactly what that outcome is. It may take one or two more days depending on those nuances but we'll be ready with our operational plans as soon as tomorrow.

Mayor: Excellent. Dr. Katz?

President Katz: I would agree with Dr. Chokshi. Depending upon what the exact guidance is, we have supply, we believe that there are patient groups for whom the one-and-done is particularly attractive and who are not concerned about these very small risks and recognize the tremendous protection that the vaccine provides, and so we will be able if it's a go ahead today to be vaccinating them tomorrow, using this vaccine with, of course, full disclosure to everybody about what has been found. So, people get to make their own choices.

Mayor: Excellent. Thank you. Go ahead, Andrew

Question: Mayor, former President Trump told the New York Post that the vaccine is a great thing and people should take advantage of it. I'm wondering, given the audience that he still commands, how valuable you think that message might be?

Mayor: I think it's really valuable. I'm glad he did that. We've got to speak to everyone. We've got to tell everyone is so important to get vaccinated and including folks who have had doubts. I don't think we, my belief in life, let alone, when it comes to dealing with COVID is don't give up on people, keep talking to them, keep the dialogue open. So, definitely that's helpful.

Moderator: The next is Michael Gartland from the Daily News.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hey Michael, how've you been?

Question: I'm good. I'm good. First question I want to ask you as far as the city's goal to get New Yorkers vaccinated, it's five million through June, I believe, right? Okay. So, how many

New Yorkers are fully vaccinated at this point? And, and are we on pace to reach that goal? Like where are we with that?

Mayor: Yeah, we can reach that goal. Look, we had obviously a curve ball the last couple of weeks with Johnson & Johnson, and that wasn't part of the plan, and it wasn't helpful, but we can still reach the goal. So, the numbers today are roughly 2.2 million fully vaccinated, 3.3 million have received at least one dose. So, obviously, we expect the vast majority of folks who got at least one dose to follow through. When you look at our five million goal, if you look at it in terms of the folks with one dose, we're almost two thirds of the way there. So, I feel really good that, you know, if we get the clarity on Johnson & Johnson and we continue to get supplied, and right now everyone's saying, oh, supply's not a problem. I'm a little bit more jaded. Like I want to make sure it's not a problem a month from now or two months from now, but if we continue to get steady supply and no other curve balls, we can hit that goal. Go ahead, Michael.

Question: Thanks, Mr. Mayor. The second question has to do with the mayor's race. You know, there's been a lot of talk recently about some of the rhetoric coming out of the Yang Gang which, you know, nebulously defined Yang Gang. And I'm wondering if you could talk about, you know, for a political candidate or an elected official with a following that can be at times unruly, what you view as the best way – and I get this as kind of a sticky issue probably for candidates in this position or elected officials – what is the best way for someone to, you know, police followers that can sometimes be unruly from your perspective?

Mayor: Okay, I'll try, and it's a complex question. It's an important question, but I'll make it real simple as I can. I think one, you know, if people have thousands of people connected to their campaign, you can't watch all of them at all times, and obviously you don't speak for all of them. They don't speak for you all the time. But I do think it's incumbent upon candidates to send the right message to their followers of the kind of approach they expect, and its folks, you know, claim to be supporters but are doing reprehensible thing you have to separate from that. I think those are the simple rules, in a really imperfect circumstance because there's just so much going on, obviously with social media. But I think that's the simple way I think about it.

Moderator: The next is Kevin from the Brooklyn Paper.

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

Mayor: Good, Kevin, how you been?

Question: Doing good. My first question, I kind of want to go back to the organics recycling you mentioned yesterday. Your former Sanitation Commissioner, Kathryn Garcia, mayoral contender, said that the opt-in and enrollment didn't go far enough and that it would lead to making composting a luxury that is available to only certain New Yorkers. I want to see your response to that given that other cities like San Francisco have had mandatory composting for like more than a decade, what makes New York City different in that it can't do that now?

Mayor: Yeah, I think, Kevin, this is about doing things in stages. We are not San Francisco. There's many, many ways – you know, people will compare sometimes to San Francisco, we're two very progressive jurisdictions, but we are just profoundly different. We're a much more densely populated place. San Francisco is a place that has become, you know, almost a gilded city at this point and a very, very, very high-income city across the board. You know, we're a city of people of all different backgrounds and incomes, many of whom live in really tight quarters. So, I think what we've got to do with organics is get people bought into it. I think this is the right way to begin. We expect this is something that can be extended all over the city, every kind of neighborhood, and I believe people will get the hang of it over time and like it, and then it can go more and more and more. But in this moment, coming off the pandemic and with all the struggles and stresses people going through, I don't think it's the time for mandatory now. I think it's the time to restart and then build up over time to it being a true city-wide initiative. Go ahead, Kevin.

Question: Okay, my second question is a longtime Brooklyn Paper issue you know, what's going on with the long-term plans for the BQE? I asked you in January about this and you said there would be news on this in the coming weeks, so I just wanted to see where things are down there. I know DOT is doing some smaller fixes on like sidewalks, but what's the long-term plan that you want to implement before you leave office?

Mayor: As a long-term Brooklyn Paper reader, myself I appreciate the question, and I spoke to this earlier in the week. I would say the latest I've heard from Commissioner Gutman at DOT. I think we'll have some more to say on this on in May, a lot is being worked on right now. First, of course, protecting the BQE as it is now, so that we can work toward a future different vision, but we first have to make sure it's secure for the here and now, but Commissioner Gutman and his team are thinking of lots of different ways of approaching it going forward. Hopefully in a circumstance where we have a very different reality in this city in terms of a lot less car usage. So, we want to be mindful of that. And so, I can say next month, we'll start to talk about those specific plans.

Moderator: The next is Nolan from The Post.

Question: Hey, good morning, everybody. How are you?

Mayor: Good, Nolan, how you been?

Question: I'm all right, Mr. Mayor. I'm curious Councilman Brad Lander racked up eight speeding tickets in a little more than a year – well, actually in the last year through school zones, would you characterize that as reckless driving?

Mayor: I would characterize it as hypocrisy. You know everyone who says they believe in a Vision Zero has to live by it now, you know, we're all humans. We're going to make mistakes sometimes, but that's too many to chalk up to just a single mistake, obviously. So, I'm surprised, honestly. Go ahead, Nolan.

Question: And I guess this is sort of more to the point, one of his defenses that he offered on Errol last night, I understand he's taken a little bit back and in a posting on Streets Blog this morning was that, you know, the bulk of his violations were parking tickets of which there were a great many and nearly a dozen in front of fire hydrants and in bus stops. Are those, somehow not, you know, sort of - those somehow kosher, are those somehow like things you can just brush aside, parking in front of a fire hydrant or in a bus stop?

Mayor: No. Look, I respect him. He succeeded me in the City Council. He's done some good work, but I don't understand that, you know, I was a City Council Member, and I never would have parked in front of a hydrant or in a bus stop, everyone knows you don't do that. So, I don't know what that is. I don't think it's appropriate. Simple as that.

Moderator: We have time for two more for today. The next is Emily from NY1.

Question: Good morning, Mayor de Blasio, and everyone on this call. James asked about vaccine hesitant tourists. I want to ask you about some of the vaccine hesitant New Yorkers that I had been meeting around the city as I cover the mayoral race. Does the city's plans for reopening factor in a certain percentage or number of residents and citizens who don't want to get the shot?

Mayor: Well, look, Emily, we anticipated, you know a goal of five million out of 8.5 million people. Obviously, some of that is kids, and we don't yet have vaccine for younger kids, but, you know, I think that number was a sensible number from the beginning, because from the point of view of our health leadership, if you got to five million vaccinations you fundamentally changed the health care reality. You really made it hard for COVID to exist in this city. It does not require every single human being to be vaccinated as great as that would be. But, you know, I think we always knew there would be a certain level of hesitancy. What I think we're seeing is two things, Emily, our reduction in hesitancy from the beginning, and more and more people as Dr. Katz was pointing out who are not hesitant and some sort of ideological level, they just want it to be very convenient and it wasn't convenient enough for them before and now we sort of opened up a new reality where it's going to be really, really easy to get. And we're going to make it fun, we're going to make it easy, we're going to do all sorts of things. So, look, we're going to keep moving toward that five million number, and I think that's an amazing number. As I said, if you go by first dose, we're almost two thirds of the way to that number. So, I'm really hopeful about that. Go ahead, Emily.

Question: Excellent. And I'm glad, of course, to see that there are walk-in appointments available at all city run sites now, that's very good news. I'm also glad to see you cheerleading the city and its recovery, but that makes me wonder if you would consider running again for mayor, if you weren't term limited?

Mayor: That is what we call a theoretical question. Look, Emily, I very much believe in term limits, and I was shocked in 2008 when Michael Bloomberg tried to buy a third term and I'm very sad he succeeded at it, and I was one of the people led the opposition to it. So, I really believe term limits are here for a purpose. It's been an amazing honor to serve the people in the city and I really, really have appreciated it. And I'm going to appreciate it to the very last minute

of the very last day. But you know, two terms is enough for anyone, if you do eight years in a row, it's time to do something different. Go ahead.

Moderator: The last question for today goes to Sonia Rincon from 1010 WINS.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor, yesterday a monument in Columbus Circle was vandalized. Just wondering if I can get your reaction to that?

Mayor: Yeah, Sonia, look, I really keep saying that folks who want to work for change, you know, vandalizing property, monuments doesn't achieve change. Assaulting, sometimes fellow protestors – we've seen some of that – or certainly assaulting police officers does not achieve change. These are all the wrong way to go about it and it's not legal and there will be consequences. You want to make change, go out and protest peacefully. You want to make change, you know, work with other leaders and organizations to achieve it. But it's just wrong. It's just wrong. And look, we're going to keep trying to make clear to people, if you see folks, if you're a peaceful protester, and you see folks planning violence or planning to destroy property, separate from them, you know, don't let them undermine the meaning of what good peaceful protest is trying to achieve. Go ahead, Sonia. Sonia? I don't hear Sonia, you there.

Question: I'm here. Okay, great. We received a release from your office today about workers returning to their offices in greater numbers. I don't the last time you were asked this question, but any idea when these daily briefings might be held in person again?

Mayor: Not yet Sonia. I mean, look, as we've said we still have a ways to go. I want to, you know, health care leaders and I have been real clear, keep your masks on, certainly through at least June, continue to social distancing. We obviously want to get more and more people vaccinated. I think this setting has really helped us to get a lot of information out to New Yorkers in a great way, and it's obviously allowed us to bring the voices of a really broad range of the media into this, and, you know, it's a lot of questions each week, which is good and healthy. So, I think it's a good format as we go along, we'll figure out where to go from there.

But look, everyone, as we conclude, bottom line is, you know, it – you can see, you can feel so much more energy, so much more activity in this city and more confidence and more hope, but it is directly related to the fact that there's been more than six million vaccinations, which is just an amazing figure. And we said from the beginning of this would be the greatest vaccination effort in New York City history, it's living up to that, but we got a long way to go. So, I'm going over to the Museum of Natural History later today. I'm going to try and figure out how the hell they got that vaccine up to the whale there. I really want to understand that. That's like engineering feat, I'm going to have a lot of questions on that. But come on over to the Museum of Natural History today or any day, come and get vaccinated in a totally amazing, memorable place. You'll be able to tell your children, you'll be able to tell your grandchildren, and you'll be safe, and that's what matters. Thank you, everyone.

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