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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Well, good morning, everyone. It may be cloudy outside, but a lot of us have a real warm and sunny feeling in our hearts today, because it's opening day for the baseball season. That is so wonderful. It is another moment to feel good, to feel a feeling of rebirth and recovery of the city moving forward, life moving forward. This would be a great day any year, but it especially feels great this year to have Opening Day happen, to have it happen on time. This is an important moment. And I've got to tell you, I've been thinking a lot about Opening Day and what it means, and it reminds me of the things we've got to do to make life better in our city. And, you know, we've had a real commitment in this administration to a universal approach. You know, one of the things I'm proudest of – Pre-K for All; now, as we talked about last week, 3-K for All. The whole theme of our recovery, a recovery for all of us. We need big, bold approaches that are universal, that cover everyone equally. That's what we believe in.

So, today on Opening Day, I want to announce a major new initiative. We're very proud of this. I think it's going to change things a lot. It's an important new initiative. We call Designated Hitter for All. Designated Hitter for All will bring justice, and fairness, and equality, something that's been long overdue. The era of the automatic out every nine batters will end once and for all – a pain, a challenge we've been dealing with for years. We're going to end the pitcher striking out as we know it and go to a bold new era.

Now, this is such an important initiative for fairness, for equality, but it's also a recognition that we have to protect that New York City's most precious asset, Jacob deGrom. Jacob deGrom must be protected at all costs, and having him go out there to hit, that's just a formula for an injury. And the Mets are going to need him, New York City's going to need him. So, Designated Hitter for All ensures that Jacob can have the kind of season that he's capable of having – that could be a very big deal for the New York Mets and for all in New York City. Now, this idea, we all know what it means – more offense, more hitting, more displays of awesome power. It is going to be something that that will fuel a recovery, a recovery for all of us. There's no question, seeing the ball leave the ballpark, because there was an actual hitter who could hit it out of the ballpark – that's exciting. That's going to recover – that's going to fuel a recovery. That's going to create real energy in this town.

I want you to know this such an important initiative that it's already receiving crucial bi-partisan support and from a true Met fan, I want to present to you now the Borough President of Staten Island Jimmy Oddo. Borough President?

**Staten Island Borough President Jimmy Oddo:** Yeah. Mayor, bear with me one second. Just give me a minute, I'm breaking down some really important video of Clayton Kershaw striking

out Nick Pivetta, because nothing screams America's pastime than putting highly skilled, highly paid, somewhat fragile athletes into a position to have them fail time and time again and possibly hurt themselves. It is so pointless. It is so futile. It is the baseball equivalent of expecting help from City Planning.

[Laughter]

So, let me tell my friends out there, those sports fans, if you want to see hitters flail helplessly at pitches, I will happily send you a video of a softball game a few years ago between the Mayor's Office and the New York City Press Corps., a game, obviously, which we won. Although I have to say in truth, those Lemire boys, they have game. And, of course, we can send you video of our game against the City Council at Richmond County Ballpark when the Council came into my backyard as an alum and did not ask me to play for them. And, as Michael Jordan once said, I took that personally.

[Laughter]

If you want [inaudible] hit, go to YouTube type in "Bartolo Colon home run," watch it on a loop again and again and again –

[Laughter]

I know I've done that, mostly after having meetings with City Planning.

[Laughter]

I went to college with Pete Harnisch, who had a great major league career, had a few Opening Day-starts with the Cincinnati Reds, won 16 games and had an ERA of 2.98 in 1993. And in 2004, Pete Harnisch hit it 404-foot shot of Ryan Dempster off the centerfield wall, and the boys from Fordham went nuts not because Pete hit the ball, but because we got to watch Pete waddle down to second base.

Lastly, Mr. Mayor, I want to address the issue of expediency. I know someone out there saying that Oddo is pulling a Mayor Quimby-like flip-flop and that there is some self-interest involved here. I am not – I've evolved, like other elected officials, on important issues. I've evolved. This has nothing to do with the fact that Dom Smith needs to play every day or anything to do with the construction of New York Mets lineup, or the fact that Zach Gallen, an up-and-coming great young right-hander in the national league got hurt swinging a bat, and he may or may not be on my fantasy baseball team. So, I will close with this, Mr. Mayor, please send someone to check in on our friend Gersh. He probably has palpitations stronger than when he read my ad in the New York – in the Staten Island Advance assailing that monstrosity of a project, trying to bring our R-7 zoning into Staten Island. By the way, City Planning, complicit in that as well.

[Laughter]

Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** You know, Borough President, first of all, thank you for your support for this new initiative, for Designated Hitter for All. Because, again, this is now bipartisan. This is something we can unite around. I admire what you just displayed there, tremendous knowledge of the game, passionate Mets fan, clearly you have strong feelings about City Planning. I did not realize that previously. So, I understand that now. But Borough President, thank you for joining me as we write a wrong, this a historic day for New York City. Thank you. And I do want to tell you, Borough President, I have some exciting news for you on another front, very important news, and important for Staten Island – you have been, again, passionately advocating for more vaccine sites in Staten Island, particularly the South Shore. I am pleased to say, thank you for the good work you and your office did with us to find the right site, and I want to formally announce to you that starting on April 8th, next week at the Saint Joseph-Saint Thomas Parish, we will be having a vaccination site for the South Shore. So, thank you for your passionate advocacy. And I know you'll have something to say on this. So, I pass back to you.

**Borough President Oddo:** Yeah. On a serious note, Mr. Mayor, we have 270-some-odd days left. You know my plea to you – let's maximize it. We have some big news looming, some big projects we're working on. It's taken awhile. We were frustrated, quite frankly, but we appreciate it and the good folks on the South Shore have a facility now right in their backyard and we thank you for that. And, listen, good luck to the Boston Red Sox. You're going to need it.

**Mayor:** Well, good luck to the – I'm going to ignore that and say good luck to the New York Mets. Congratulations on Francisco Lindor. I hope you have a really great year. And with our new initiative, I have no question, you'll have an even better year. Thank you, Borough President Oddo. Thank you so much.

All right. Now, Opening Day is good news, as we said, but it's not the only good news. We have some great news in terms of continued progress on vaccinations. Today's number is, again, really climbing all the time – 4,134,399 vaccinations given from day-one. And we are expecting a lot more supply soon, that's what we need. In the meantime, we're focusing on equity, we're focusing on bringing vaccinations to the grassroots, and that's why you're going to see a lot more sites as part of our effort to reach public housing residents. So, these popup sites in different developments have been incredibly effective. We're going to be doing a lot more this weekend. So, in the Bronx at Castle Hill Houses and Forest Community Center; in Brooklyn, at Van Dyke Community Center; Manhattan, St. Nicholas Houses, Johnson Houses, Gompers Community Center; Queens, Jacob Reese Community Center. We're going to continue to deepen this grassroots effort. We find it is what helps people feel comfortable with vaccination, is if it's in their own development in their own community. So, you're going to see a lot more of that, a lot happening this weekend.

Now, in continuing our effort for equity. We continue to move resources where they're needed most. And, yesterday, I was out in Brownsville, Brooklyn, a community that has been through so much and has rarely gotten its fair share. And we're trying to right a wrong yesterday by investing in Brownsville, an amazing renovation at Betsy Head Park, a historic park in Brownsville – a \$30 million effort that's going to do so much to help the Brownsville community move forward and help our whole recovery. So, focusing on open space is a big part of the

recovery for all of us. And, today, I'm pleased to announce something that's going to be great for New Yorkers all over the five boroughs, especially for Brooklynites, we have good news, because we're announcing that Governor's Island will be reopening for visitors on May 1st. And Governor's Island, absolutely beautiful, a jewel of New York City. Last year, the opening was delayed because of COVID. This year, we're able to open on time – that's good news. And, for the first time, the Governor's Island ferries will have two stops in Brooklyn for the weekend service that'll be provided – Brooklyn Bridge Park and Red Hook. And we want to make sure that people have access to Governor's Island, and we talk about a recovery for all of us, we mean all of us. We want to make sure that folks can get to a beautiful place like Governor's Island. So, for a public housing residents, the ferry rides will be free; for seniors, free; children, free; anyone with an IDNYC card, the rides will be free. We want to make sure people get to experience the wonder of Governor's Island. We're all looking forward to a beautiful spring and summer, and part of our recovery will be enjoying everything about this city again, especially outdoors. So, this is good news all around.

Okay. This week, an important time of year for so many New Yorkers. It's Holy Week. For people of Christian faith, this is an extraordinarily important, deeply felt time of year. It's Passover – I wish a *Zissen Pesach* to all members of the Jewish community. It's a special time, a very important time. It's an important time in terms of faith. It's an important time in terms of family. And, as everyone's planning their gatherings, especially their Easter gatherings, I want to wish everyone a very happy Easter, and a time of renewal and hope and rebirth, but it's also a time to be safe, because we love this time of year, and we love when our family's gather, but we've got to do it the right way. Remember, I know it's been tough, I know 2020 was extraordinarily tough. We miss so many of our traditions and rituals. We missed the big family gatherings. I have such beautiful memories of Easter gatherings in my family, one of the most beautiful times a year. But this is the last time we have to go through this, because we will beat COVID once and for all during 2021, and then, in 2022, all of our gatherings can go back to what they were. And I can't wait for that. I know you all feel the same way, but, this year, let's focus on safety, because we want everyone who's with us this year to still be with us next year. So, we've got to focus on the safety of our family members, particularly our elders. Here to give you tips for any family gatherings, everything you do this special time of year, the City's doctor, Dr. Dave Chokshi.

**Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:** Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor. And I want to first extend warm holiday wishes to all those who are celebrating this weekend. Whether you're celebrating Passover or Easter, I wish you a joyful, but, most importantly, a healthy holiday. To make it the safest that it can possibly be, I urge you to follow some very simple but important advice. If you are going to have a gathering, keep it small, optimally limited to members of your own household and keep it outdoors, if at all possible. I know we all want to celebrate with our families and with our loved ones, we all want to be united again, and we will be soon, but our unity in the fight against COVID is the most important thing right now. And, remember, that the virus hitches a ride on our relationships. If you do choose to celebrate in-person, please wear a snug fitting face covering and keep distance. This is particularly important to protect older adults and other people who may be more vulnerable. Fully vaccinated people can gather with other fully vaccinated people with fewer

precautions, but, remember, most people remain unvaccinated and you are not considered fully vaccinated until 14 days after your last dose.

Many New Yorkers are marking painful one-year anniversaries of those dark days last spring. Let's do everything we can to ensure that the future is indeed brighter than that past. So, even though we are all tired, now is not the time to let our guard down. Since we're in the midst of March Madness let me try to put it this way – you don't playing defense until that last buzzer sounds. The next few weeks will be an absolutely crucial time in this public health crisis. We're seeing a worryingly high level of cases. And, as we reported yesterday, new variants are making up an increasing share of those cases – over 70 percent of all specimens sequenced for the most recent week.

As the weather gets nicer, our vaccine supply increases, and our historic vaccination campaign ramps up to an even higher level, we must continue to follow the public health guidance we've been talking about for so long. Wear a mask, maintain distance from those who are not in your household, stay home if you're sick, wash your hands, get tested regularly, and get the vaccine when you are eligible. Stay safe and happy holidays. Back to you, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Thank you so much, Dr. Chokshi – really appreciate the advice you're giving everyone. Everyone, have beautiful holidays. I want it to be a special time for all New Yorkers, but let's keep safe. And I like your analogy, your March Madness analogy – play until the final buzzer sounds – excellent advice to all of us.

All right, let's talk about our indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report, 194 patients. Again, that's a good sign, but long way to go. Confirmed positivity, 59.8 percent. Hospitalization rate, 3.84 per 100,000. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average – today's report, 3,491 cases. And number three, percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19 – today's report on a seven-day rolling average, 6.64 percent.

Okay, we're going to do a few words in Spanish, and we'll talk about the guidance that we're giving for the holidays, how to keep families safe.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, we turn to our colleagues in the media. 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 Dr. Chokshi, by Dr. Long, by Claire Newman, the President and CEO of the Trust for Governor's Island, and by Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. First question today goes to Roger Stern from 1010 WINS.

**Mayor:** Roger? Roger, can you hear us?

**Moderator:** We'll go back to Roger. First question today goes to Marcia Kramer from WCBS.

**Question:** Mr. Mayor, long time no speak. How are you doing today?

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

**Question:** I'm doing great. I'm doing great. And I really appreciated your April Fool's joke. My question today is no joke, it's a question about the homeless and what your administration plans to do as we come back from COVID. What plans do you have for opening homeless shelter [inaudible] from homeless shelters to permanent housing and getting them the mental help they so desperately need?

**Mayor:** It's such an important question, Marcia. Thank you. We absolutely are planning to, first of all, ensure that folks who have been in hotels go back into shelter settings, because shelter settings are where people can get the proper mental health support. So, we will be doing that the first available opportunity. Continuing to deepen efforts to address mental health challenges as we find them. We have more and more teams we put together that can do rapid response with anyone who is seriously mentally ill. We'll be talking about that a lot more in the coming days. I want to say, everyone – Health Department, Health + Hospitals has been working in coordination with Homeless Services to make sure that any situation where someone is troubled, that they get assessed quickly and they get the mental health services they need. This is an ongoing challenge, but we're going to throw everything we've got at it. Go ahead, Marcia.

**Question:** I just wonder if you have plans to open sort of assisted living housing where the homeless can live in apartments, but also get social services and mental health that they need? And how large a scope is it? Did your original homeless – helping the homeless plan have to be put on the shelf because of COVID and will you be able to revive it before too long?

**Mayor:** That's a great question. Thank you, Marcia. No, the plan that we put forward a few months before COVID hit, the Journey Home Plan is active. We are implementing it as we speak. In fact, during COVID we found, even with the challenge of COVID, that we were able to get hundreds and hundreds of homeless people off the streets and get them into shelter and keep them in the shelter with the Safe Haven approach, with the closing of the subways at night, which was very productive, with sending out outreach workers – and outreach workers were heroic. Even in the midst of COVID, they went out, they engaged homeless folks, they got them in – that continues and we're now going to be able to ramp that up a lot more as we are fighting back COVID. And supportive housing, what you referred to a moment ago – housing for folks who have been homeless, who have mental health problems, who need services. We've been expanding supportive housing, even as COVID continued. We put together a plan for 15,000 supportive housing apartments. That plan is moving and it's now going to be able to move a lot quicker as we recover. So, all of those efforts are going to deepen. We need them all. And this is part of, I think, an important part of our recovery.

**Moderator:** Still waiting on Roger, so we're going to go to Kristin Dalton from the Staten Island Advance.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Thank you for the South Shore announcement. You know, you stole one of my questions. I was going to ask you about it.

**Mayor:** No, Kristin, look at the bright side – I saved you a question. So, I'm happy to, and thank you for continuing to remind us that we had more work to do there and we found the right site and it will be open next week. And I'm really happy about that.

**Question:** Yeah. The people of Staten Island thank you for that, it was definitely needed. But I wanted to ask you about appointments. So, it looks like there are some restrictions on the vaccine finder websites, specifically the Ocean Breeze location, which says appointments are restricted by age and ZIP code. I know that residents, you know, 30 and over are now eligible and as well as the announcement that New Yorkers can go to any location. So, I'm just wondering why there is still some restrictions for appointments?

**Mayor:** I'll start, and I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi and Dr. Long. Kristin, we want to make access as easy and universal as possible, but I also want to note, and I think the doctors will back me up, we are still most concerned about those who are oldest and those who have pre-existing conditions. Those are still the most vulnerable folks. So, whenever there is a preference given for older folks, for example, that's for purely medical reasons. And we're also, of course, trying to address many of the areas where we've seen COVID hit the hardest and have the most devastating results. So, that's why we find some of those preference structures are important, but the real goal Kristin is to just have more and more supply and go deeper and deeper into communities, to Staten Island and all communities, with more and more hours and be able to reach more people. We still don't have anywhere near the supply we need, and so that's why it's important to keep some of our focus on the folks who are most vulnerable. Dr. Chokshi?

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Yes, well, the Mayor said it well and covered the important points here. First, it's important to understand that eligibility has widened quite a bit, so there are now millions of New Yorkers who are eligible for vaccination. And remember it, that's a great thing because we want as many people to get vaccinated as possible. But second, just as the Mayor has said, we do know that vaccination is most important for people who are most at risk, either because they are older or have some other type of medical vulnerability to severe COVID-19 disease or because they come from a neighborhood that has been hardest hit during pandemic. And so, we are doing these things to ensure that people are adequately prioritized according to those health and equity considerations. The final thing that I'll say is, that despite that, we do want to make sure that not a single appointment goes to waste. So, if we're finding that that appointments are not being booked, then those do get opened up to a broader tranches of eligibility so that every single dose of vaccine gets into someone's arm as soon as possible.

**Mayor:** Thank you, Dr. Long. You want to add?

**Executive Director Ted Long, Test and Trace Corps.:** Yeah, I would just add that we have a focus on ensuring that we can remove all barriers to vaccinate as many of our seniors as possible. Right now, you mentioned age, we have a new walkup program at our City Field, Bathgate, and Brooklyn Army Terminal sites where if you're 75 or above, you don't even need an appointment. You can come anytime, they're open 24/7. You can even bring an escort with you, and if that escort is eligible, we'll vaccinate both of you, no appointment needed. We're going to continue that focus because it is so important to vaccinate our most vulnerable New Yorkers and to tear down every single barrier in order to accomplish that as quickly and safely as possible.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead, Kristin.

**Question:** Great. Thank you so much. And I wanted to ask about an update for the timeline of the mass vaccination site at Empire Outlets. I know you said that the supply would be increasing. You know, we haven't really seen anything yet this week. And to Dr. Long's point, you know, is Empire Outlets a good candidate for maybe a 75 and older walk-up site as that supply increases?

**Mayor:** I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi and Dr. Long whoever has the best update on the timeline. We – again, we intend to do more for sure with Empire Outlets, it's a great site. As we're getting more supply, we want to make sure there is more and more appointments. And so, I'll just say that – and I'll say on the walk-up point, Kristin, is we're piloting it now in just a few locations. Really want to see if it will work and encourage seniors to get appointments who haven't gotten them yet. We are also watching carefully to make sure we don't end up with a different kind of problem, which is lines, and you've raised good concerns about lines and putting seniors in a tough situation, and obviously we're concerned about people being close proximity. So, we're piloting over these next few days to decide where to go. If we think it'll work, then we'll talk about how far we want to go with it. And which sites would be the best, but in terms of the build-out of more appointments at Empire, Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Long, who wants to speak to that?

**Commissioner Choskhi:** Yes. I can start briefly, sir. Just to say that that appointments are contingent on a supply, as the Mayor has said, we are here on the first day of April and April is the month we do expect a significant uptick in the supply allocated to us from the federal government. Over the last couple of weeks, we've seen more modest increases, and we expect by the end of the month for those increases in supply to get much more significant for New York City. As that additional vaccine comes in, we will ramp up appointment availability at Empire Outlets and other sites. So, I expect you'll start seeing a noticeable difference by the middle of the month, and then a market difference by the end of the month.

**Mayor:** Thank you.

**Moderator:** Next, we'll go –

**Mayor:** Wait, what do you got, do you have Roger?

**Executive Director Long:** Can I talk to them real fast?

**Mayor:** Oh, Ted, go ahead. I'm sorry, Ted, go ahead.

**Executive Director Long:** Just to be clear, and I appreciate your advocacy for Staten Island, Empire Outlets is open now, and as Dr. Chokshi said, we're going to be ramping up as we get more supply over the next two weeks. But it is open which we're very excited about because this is such an important thing for Staten Island, and I appreciate your suggestion about having us consider walk-ups and empire outlets too. So, we will consider that. Thank you.



**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** Next we go back to Roger Stern from 1010 WINS.

**Question:** Hi Mayor, good afternoon – good morning, I should say, how are you doing?

**Mayor:** I'm doing good, Roger. How you doing?

**Question:** I'm great. I have two questions involving the vaccine, one of them is the controversial issue of vaccine passports. How do you feel about them, especially when it comes to reopening Broadway, being able to have more people in movie theaters and sporting events?

**Mayor:** Yeah, I'll start, and I'll turn to Dr. Varma. I think that passports could be an important part of our recovery. We got to get it right. We've got to respect people's privacy. We got to make sure that the system is accurate. There's definitely more to be worked through, but I think there'll be part of the solution. I think rapid testing is part of the solution, as well. In fact, Dr. Varma and I spoke to a wide range of leaders of the Broadway community and the theater and cultural community a few days ago, and this is one of the things that's really exciting to people, these different tools that are going to help them bring back audiences and when the time comes, and I'm really looking forward to September in particular, bring back larger audiences because you'll be able to know exactly who's been vaccinated or who just got a test and tested negative. Dr. Varma. You want to speak to that?

**Senior Advisor Jay Varma:** Yeah, I would echo exactly what the Mayor has said. You know, we know that it's going to be really important to achieve the recovery for all of us, that people feel safe. They feel as if the places that they're going indoors that we've been telling them for so long to avoid doing are actually going to be places where they can go back and return and enjoy the activities that they've had for us. And so, part of that assurance includes a verification that people are either immune through vaccination, or if they haven't been vaccinated, that they show evidence that they are not infected, such as through the use of a rapid test. I don't think these are going to be required everywhere, but it certainly makes sense for private businesses to require these as a way to ensure that when we return everybody back to these shared indoor spaces that those activities can be done in a way that is enjoyable and productive and not at risk of transmitting infection.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead, Roger.

**Question:** Yeah. The other question is, for people who are vaccinated and want to socialize with other people who are vaccinated, the guidance is still fairly restricted [inaudible] people in your home, that may reduce the incentive for people to get the vaccine. People were reluctant to get it. Should the guidance be more liberal when it comes to contact between vaccinated people?

**Mayor:** You came in and out a little bit there, sound quality wise. Dr. Chokshi, did you hear it well enough to answer?

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Yes, I believe I did. The question, sir, was about how we should think about people who are vaccinated interacting with other people who are vaccinated. It's an important question, and you know, I want to be candid that we expect these guidelines to change over time. As more and more people get vaccinated, and we see the protection that that affords, I do think that, you know, you'll start to see some relax relaxation of the guidelines further. But there are some very important provisos that I want to make sure to communicate as part of this. First, is the notion of being fully vaccinated, that means you're either 14 days after your second dose of the Moderna or Pfizer vaccines, or 14 days after your J&J vaccine. So, it's not the case that you're considered vaccinated or protected just a few days after getting the first dose of any of the vaccines. That's important to keep in mind. The second part of it is, remember, part of getting vaccinated is not just about protecting yourself. It's about protecting others the same way that we have encouraged people to wear masks, both to protect themselves as well as others, it's how we should be thinking about vaccination as well. And right now, particularly with the level of transmission where it is in New York City, it is very important for all of us, including people who have been vaccinated, to continue following the precautions that we're advising.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** The next is Henry from Bloomberg.

**Question:** Well, Mr. Mayor, you going to Yankee Stadium today? That's not my question, but I'm going to ask it.

**Mayor:** We will not count that question. No, everything's virtual they're doing today, except for folks who are just going to enjoy the game. So, there's no ceremony I'll be a part of, but I am happy they're back, and Henry, I expect you to do a very extensive article on our new initiative to bring fairness and justice to pitchers everywhere.

**Question:** It was, I was noticing Borough President Oddo's remarks there, he was much more of a troll than I've been, but I saw –

**Mayor:** All right, what do you got today?

**Question:** Well, I want to get back to this question of passports because it's becoming a bit of a political football with some people, mainly Republicans, questioning whether government should be making these rules that would dictate people's behavior and, you know, kind of insist that they be vaccinated. And their argument is that it creates a kind of, two classes of people, those who are, and those who aren't. And I'm just wondering where you stand on that, should this be a decision of private businesses, office buildings, restaurants, theaters, arenas, or should government actually be making these regulations?

**Mayor:** I'll start, and I want to get Dr. Varma back in. Look, Henry, this is something – it is definitely complex. We got to think it through. I think we're still at a phase now where our most foundational concerns are getting people vaccinated and making sure people stick to the smart guidance that keeps them safe and really reinforcing that and acting on that. But look, I see the passport approach as another tool. I think it's one of many tools and I respect folks who choose

not to get vaccinated, and we'll work with that as well. But I think particularly for some private sector settings, it could be a really valuable tool. I think government has a role to play in setting it up and making it work. But again, I wouldn't make it more than it is. I think the most important thing is to get people vaccinated, get people to follow healthy habits, put smart health and safety measures in place in all parts of our society as we fight our way out of this. Go ahead, Dr. Varma.

**Senior Advisor Varma:** Yeah, I would concur with what the Mayor has said, and I agree that there's a lot of specifics about the things that need to be taken to be addressed. So, let's go through just a couple of critical issues. First of all, I don't think we should be requiring that people show proof of vaccination until vaccines are widely available to everybody, and that includes, you know, right now, we – you know, our biggest issue is supply right now. And so we need to get to a point where, you know, vaccines are widely abundant, available, and people all have been reached and given the information they need to make an informed decision. So that's number one. Number two, as the Mayor said, I do think we need to think carefully about what the role of government is in this versus what the role of the private sector is in this. I think it's absolutely critical for government to assist in making sure that there are standards, that there's uniform and fair application of these when they're used.

But we also need – and I think related to that – we also need to make sure that that is not the only pathway for you to receive services. Again, an alternative pathway, it's similar to what we do in health care facilities, where all health care providers in inpatient facilities are required to get the influenza vaccination every year, and if they choose not to get that vaccine, they have to follow a certain protective measures, and in some situations even have to have identification attached to their ID badge. I'm not saying that that's what we would do in this situation, but I'm just saying that there's a model that can be followed for these things. So, I think we're going to have to adjudicate this obviously with the court of public opinion, with the laws of our country, but I do think it is a pathway that needs to be strongly considered. Because again, it's going to be very important for people to have the assurance that when they participate in activities that we have been telling them for over a year are very high risk, that there is actually a way to do those activities that ensures that they are actually more likely to be safe than to be harmed.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead, Henry. Henry?

**Question:** My next question has to do with the city's role in opening up theaters. It's kind of related to this passport question because central to it is the confidence that an audience might have in attending a theater. Is the city going to assist theaters in any way in controlling the audience or weeding out the audience through vaccination, or helping theaters financially get ready for reopening all of these buildings that have been shut for months, or is it really on the theaters and they will use whatever federal assistance has been, you know, created through these stimulus funds?

**Mayor:** We're going to be active participants helping the theater community to come back. Obviously, the announcement last week, Henry, that we are going to provide vaccination centers and mobile vaccination specifically aimed at the theater community, the cultural community, we're doing that proactively. We're going to help them figure out crowd management. We're

going to provide medical advice and support as they're figuring out their plans. We're certainly looking at ways that we can be helpful materially. I think you're right, the federal aid is crucial, but there's other things that we might be able to do. This is exactly why we had a, a really big kind of summit meeting with members of the cultural community leadership, to think through these approaches. And again, for what we're ultimately talking about, Broadway – using Broadway as an example – coming back full strength, you know, that's September or so that we're looking at now. There is a lot of time to do that work and plan together, but we need them to come back. We absolutely need them to come back. So, we're going to be shoulder to shoulder. We're going to partner with them to get it done.

**Moderator:** The next is Matt Chayes from Newsday.

**Question:** Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor. That April fool's gag was Inner Circle level funny.

**Mayor:** Matt, that is a true compliment, if you know – I know you're a devotee of the Inner Circle, so if I've reached that Pantheon, I want to really – I'm feeling good today. But I where do you stand? Where do you stand on the issue?

**Question:** I'll let you decide whether that's a compliment.

**Mayor:** No, I'll take it as a compliment, but Matt – Matt, I want to – I'm going to be the journalist now. Where do you stand on the designated hitter?

**Question:** You know, I report, and you decide.

**Mayor:** Oh, wow.

**Question:** I don't want to wade in between you and Steve, and Nolan, and Gersh. So, I got two today for Dr. Varma. The first is why are states like Arizona, Mississippi, Texas, which dropped mask mandates and lifted gathering restrictions, all trending down in infections and other metrics, and yet we've plateaued. In Texas's case, the mandates were dropped almost three weeks ago. So, what falsifiable evidence would you need to say – to see that we're doing something – that they're doing something right, but New York isn't doing?

**Mayor:** Dr. Varma.

**Senior Advisor Varma:** Yeah, no, it's a great question. It, it requires a much longer answer than we can do during this press conference, but I really want to be very clear because this issue keeps coming up. If there was a simple preventative measure other than vaccinations available for COVID, then we would have figured it out. But what we have said repeatedly over and over again, is that the best way to prevent COVID, before we had vaccines, and even until everybody gets vaccinated, is multiple interventions done together, all of which are imperfect, that all need to be added up together. So, if you want to answer the question, the way you phrased it as like a falsifiable hypothesis, you have to account for every single factor that relates to COVID transmission. One of those is not just the policies on mask wearing, but it's where are people wearing them, what people are actually wearing them, and how frequently they're using it. So,

that's masks, but you also have to account for distance, which includes the density of your population. You have to account for frequency of hand-washing, because we know some things can be transmitted by person to person. You have to account for ventilation, you have to account for climate conditions. So, there are many, many factors that determine why some populations have higher rates than others, and then you have to also get into the much more complicated questions about the completeness of testing, and recording, and reporting of all of those things, and we know for example, that in New York, we test per capita [inaudible] talk about separately, you know, higher than any other jurisdiction on a regular basis. So, I, you know, I'll stop there because it's much harder to answer. But basically, the answer is to say, I know it would be nice to be able to give a simple answer that says, locations are going down here, and they're not going there – therefore it's due to a policy. No, that's not actually the case. You need to have much, much deeper information so, we know that.

**Mayor:** I think that is before we go back to Matt, Dr. Varma, I think that's a fantastic answer, and I think that last point we are going out of our way to test a lot of people and be very transparent with the results. I think a big question in other parts of the country is: are we seeing the whole picture, given the level of testing? Are we actually getting the whole truth or not? Go ahead, Matt.

**Question:** Well, before you get to the second question, I would love to hear the more complete answer offline. But onto the second one, which steps or components in the ordinary FDA approval process are missing for the coronavirus vaccines to be approved by the FDA, with regard to safety, not durability beyond an emergency authorization use, and if nothing, why haven't the vaccines has been approved yet?

**Mayor:** Which vaccines? I want to make sure we're not missing you, Matt. What are you saying specifically?

**Question:** All over.

**Mayor:** Okay, go ahead, Dr. Varma.

**Question:** Moderna.

**Senior Advisor Varma:** Yeah, what Matt's getting at is the difference between an emergency use authorization versus an approval, and there are basically – as you note that all of the steps that were used for authorization can also be used for approval. I confessed that I actually don't know all of the regulatory differences that are needed. My understanding has generally been that there is a larger packet of information that is needed for the, first of all, for the approval process, and second of all, a longer term of follow-up in terms of the vaccines themselves. But we can look into that to get you the exact information, but yes, there is a distinction between these vaccines are officially authorized by the FDA. They are not yet officially approved.

**Mayor:** Thank you, go ahead.

**Moderator:** The next is Steve Burns from WCBS 880.

**Question:** Hey, Mr. Mayor, happy Opening Day to you and yours.

**Mayor:** Happy Opening Day, Steve. How're you feeling today?

**Question:** I'm good. Always a sense of optimism on day one here, before reality sets in for some of our teams.

**Mayor:** This is a day when all teams are potential winners.

**Question:** Exactly, exactly. First question on a more serious topic, I'm sure you saw the Times article last night that went into detail on the Governor's book deal, looks to be \$4 million. There's a question of whether he used public resources to help put it together, and then there's the issue of the three-page long "broadside" as the Times put it that was included in a first draft, where he said, you have very little interest in governmental operations. You have obvious ego-driven narcissism, annoying and counterproductive. I wanted to get your take on those words, and in general, the book deal as we have more details on it.

**Mayor:** Well, Steve, first of all, I think you see every day the level of focus I bring to all these issues we're facing, and I'm deeply committed to leading us in this recovery, and that's what I'm about. I'm not going to focus on petty insults. The issue here is a profound one. This is – what we're hearing now in this new report, the facts that have been laid out by the Times indicates very clearly a pattern of corruption, pure and simple, a clear, consistent pattern of corruption. The Governor wanted to personally profit and politically profit from his book deal. He covered up the truth about the nursing home scandal and his team covered up the truth to benefit himself financially and politically. That's what we're seeing. He inappropriately used government staff to further his own personal aims. I mean, there's some great detail there. This requires a full investigation. The impeachment investigation now needs to look into this, and the federal investigation, the Attorney General's investigation. Now, they have to add corruption related to the book deal and misuse of public staff and public funds on top of the deaths of thousands of people who were in the nursing homes, the cover-up of those deaths, the fact that there have been numerous instances of sexual harassment and sexual molestation, the scandal related to the Tappan Zee Bridge. Every day we learn something new, but it's all one clear pattern of corruption. That's what we're seeing. Go ahead, Steve.

**Question:** Thanks, and given that the kind of numerous allegations here and that there's still more adding up obviously this is a very important time of year for New York State, as they're still putting the budget together. Do you feel like the process has, at all, slowed down in terms of holding the Governor accountable? The assembly still looks like it's in the beginning stages of its impeachment investigation. Would you go as far as to make the call to speed up the process to hold this Governor accountable?

**Mayor:** I have a lot of respect for the Assembly and the work they're doing right now and the whole legislature. Thank God they're there. I mean, they're leading the State right now. Speaker Carl Heastie, and Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins. They are leading the State of New York. They are holding things together. As I've said, the Governor should resign because at this

point, he cannot lead any, he cannot keep the faith of the people anymore. So, clearly, it's creating distraction, it's creating confusion and we need to move forward, especially as we're fighting the coronavirus. But, I think that – I have a lot of faith that the legislature and the Assembly will, you know, they will figure out the timing. That makes sense. They've got a lot to cover those to heat. I mean, this is, I'm sorry to have to say this, but look at every day we hear new revelations that require their own investigations to get to the truth.

**Question:** This is a lot that has to be unraveled, but it all points in the same direction, just blatant corruption that the Governor got away with for years, and then on top of it, you know what we're seeing now about the impact of campaign donations. What happened with the nursing home industry and the coverup? How much was it related to campaign donations from the nursing home industry, from the big hospital systems? And obviously some very good reporting lately. You know, he received a huge amount of donations from billionaires directly, and he has been the number one reason why we haven't had fair taxation of the wealthy in New York State for years. I mean, I tried to get them to do a tax on the wealthy in 2014. He fought it with all he's got – why? We're now seeing more and more because his pockets were lined by billionaires. So, all of this needs to be investigated.

**Moderator:** We have time for two more for today. The next is Dana from the New York Times.

**Question:** Hi, Mr. Mayor. Some, if not, most of the people targeting Asian Americans, in these attacks, involve people who are mentally ill, maybe homeless and frequently involved with the criminal justice system. Is the City doing anything different to address that aspect of the hate crime phenomenon?

**Mayor:** Everything that we're doing on a policing level recognizes that we're seeing some patterns. It's not the only thing that's happening here, Dana, but we are seeing some patterns. That's why the Asian hate crimes task force is using undercover officers and decoy officers. We're obviously focused geographically where we think there might be a tax to try and prevent them. That is part of the approach, but I think there's another piece that has to be pulled out and put in the open here. The horrible attack on West 43rd street, a state parolee, an indicator of the fact, and this is something that we've tried to bring to light for years. I know Commissioner Shea has tried to bring to light, but it has not gotten the attention it deserves. Now, maybe that the imperial governorship is being challenged that we're going to see a different discussion on this topic. The parole system in New York State does not work, takes people coming out of prison, including folks who have committed violent crimes, dumps them in New York City with no plan, no housing, no job, no mental health support. The State just dumps the challenge on the City, no coordination, and it creates tremendous problems, and it has to be changed, and it's time to have a very different discussion. It's time to hold the State of New York, responsible for their parolees and for actually providing the services that will give us a chance of avoiding these horrible situations. Go ahead, Dana.

**Question:** Thanks, and just to follow up, are you doing anything to sort of focus on that nexus between mental health and hate crime? Is there anything the City can do?

**Mayor:** We have been focusing for years on the nexus between serious and documented mental health challenges and violence. Remember, this is a very small number of people. The vast majority of people who have a mental health challenge are of course not violent, but there's a small number who have a documented mental health challenge and have a documented history of violence. With those folks, we have a very aggressive follow-up structure, but in some cases we see someone committing a crime who never has before or someone who didn't have a documented mental health challenge. It's not a simple, clear pattern. So, it is a combination of trying to identify folks with mental health challenges, get them support. It is a case of trying to be as proactive and preventative in terms of the policing element of this. It does not present itself as a clean, consistent pattern, but we're trying with all the tools we have to get ahead of it in any way possible, and again, want to emphasize stopping the hate crimes is just – it's – all of us have to be a part of it, and anyone who needs more information on how to participate, how to support the Asian American community right now, please go to [nyc.gov/stopasianhate](http://nyc.gov/stopasianhate). Go ahead.

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

**Question:** Well, Mr. Mayor, thank you for taking me clean-up again. You know, I always ask you about street safety issues and how we can reduce road violence, but I know that you as a Mayor, want to make front page news all the time, but let's – I know you were kidding about the DH thing, but let's make some back page news today. I honestly believe that the sports writers, and obviously ones more gifted than I am, should make some news with this thing about the designated hitter rule. In all seriousness, you are a baseball fan. I do respect that about you, but this contention that the designated hitter rule needs to come to the National League is it is bizarre to me given that you are a purist about the game. So, in all seriousness, I believe you need to, for the record, explain why you want to desecrate our national pastime with a rule that changes one of the most basic parts of the game, which is all players should hit.

**Mayor:** Gersh, I think that our, you know, our belief in a respectful tolerant New York City that respects all people, all belief structures includes a traditionalist like you lost in another time, who don't understand progress, and so this is why I would say, I do remember when the designated hitter first came to the American League – you are a student of the game, the Boston Red Sox had Orlando Cepeda, who the only thing he could do was hit. He could barely run anymore. His knees were shot, but he really could hit, and it was kind of exciting, and it was a lot more fun than watching a pitcher strikeout, which was inevitably pretty much what happened. So, I, long ago, I started being a traditionalist purist, but then I had the experience of seeing how the designated hitter made more sense.

Now, Gersh, here is my serious answer: for today's game, people getting injured all the time. It's unbelievable. True baseball fans, each, you have your own example. Jimmy Otto gave his example. Mine is Steven Wright, pitcher for the Red Sox a few years ago, knuckle-baller, he was doing great. He was having an all-star caliber season. They sent him in inexplicably as a pinch runner, and he injured his knee, and he has never been the same since. It's just, we are losing too many pitchers to injury the way conditioning and it all works nowadays. So, my honest answer is protect the pitchers, allow them to do what they do, don't make them do something they can't do and make the game more interesting. Because as a true baseball believer, we are competing against a lot of other sports and we got to keep the game relevant and interesting and more



hitting, more action, more excitement. So, there is my passionate argument and Gersh, I hope you're going to get full coverage to our new initiative.

**Question:** I have to say, I hope a sportswriter is listening because there are so many holes in that answer. But I do have a serious question today because I don't want to make it all about baseball although, I'm excited about Opening Day. So, this morning, Comptroller Stringer sent a letter to the MTA, kind of demanding that the MTA ensure that these contractors who've been providing all this subway cleaning overnight – you know, there was a report that they are not being paid prevailing wages and they're not having benefits the same way a union contractor would with the MTA. So, I think you've addressed the issue of the need for the cleanliness in the subway, and that certainly understood, but the workers' rights here. I wonder if you could address that a little bit, I'm sure you probably – I'd like to think you share Comptroller Stringer's concerns for workers' rights.

**Mayor:** Oh, I deeply care about workers' rights. It's something I've worked on for years and I want to make sure everyone is treated fairly, safely, fairly compensated, especially people doing such vital work to protect the rest of us. I haven't seen the report. I don't know the details, but I would say clearly the decision, which I strongly supported, to have some hours when the subway was shut down during the COVID crisis, to clean the subways better, to help people feel safer, come back to the subways because our future is mass transit. There's no question. That was a very good initiative, and the folks who did the work did something wonderful for all of us. So, they deserve fairness. But that is an example of a decision that worked and that's going to help us as part of our recovery.

And so I will conclude today with this, that, you know, this week and particularly this weekend coming up, you know, a time to focus on renewal, a time to focus on rebirth. This is – if ever there was a week, that's a metaphor for recovery it's this one. The spiritual importance of this week and, of course, for so many of us Opening Day of baseball as well. It all points in one direction. We're coming back and we're coming back and we're going to come back together. We're going to make sure this is a recovery for all of us. It is a very exciting time. It's a very hopeful time, but everyone please stay safe. Be there for each other. Do the thing that New Yorkers do, be compassionate and kind to each other, support each other. Let's go through this week, keep it safe and let's move forward to a recovery for this city. Thank you, everyone.

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