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

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, everybody. We've got a lot to talk about today, a lot of important news about the fight against the coronavirus here in New York City, and also important updates about how we are going to serve our school children this year and next year and beyond. But I need to talk first, just for a moment, about the horrible events last week, the deadly insurrection at the United States Capitol. You know, every time I even say the words I hesitate because I can't even imagine that this happened, and it happened – you know, the fact that there was an insurrection at the United States Capitol to begin with, we've never seen that in the history of this country, the fact that it was fomented and directed by the President of United States is something out of the most fictional possibilities you could have imagined before Donald Trump. If I had told you that story, you would have said that's something that will never happen, that might be a great book or movie, but that could never possibly happen here in the United States of America. Well, it did. The President of the United States directed a mob against the United States Capitol, against the Congress while it was engaging in a constitutional, lawful Electoral College vote count.

In light of this criminal act, the City of New York has determined that it is within our power to terminate all contracts with the Trump Organization. So, we will no longer be doing any business at all. By the contract language, we have the right to terminate contracts, obviously, if a criminal act has been committed and a criminal act has been committed. So, goodbye to the Trump Organization, we are not doing any business with you. By the way, a lot of other people are not doing any business with you any longer. One of the contracts the Trump Organization has had up to now is for a golf course in the Bronx. And in that contract, obligated to have championship golf tournaments there. Well guess what, the PGA just said they won't allow any of their tournaments at Trump Organization golf courses. This criminal act has led a lot of companies, a lot of people to determine that things need to be different, that we cannot accept the status quo where a criminal gets away with this. So, we are acting. I want to emphasize that we're working immediately to find new vendors to take over these facilities so we can continue to provide service to their customers. But it's just really clear this president has committed an unlawful act. He has disgraced himself. He will no longer profit from his relationship with New York City. We will not allow it.

Alright. Now, back to the work we are doing here, and so much work is being done. Let me give you an update. We're speeding up the process of giving vaccines all the time. Yesterday, 28,599 doses given. We are opening up mega sites, 24/7 mega sites. We talked yesterday about Citi Field, and again, thanks to the New York Mets for stepping up, that's fantastic. That's going to serve a lot of people. Well, we've heard back from the New York Yankees and we welcome them into the fold too. We're working with them now to work out a plan to use Yankee Stadium as well. And that's going to be great for the people of the Bronx. So, that plan is in motion. We'll

announce it when the details have been worked through, but there's going to be more and more sites, not just the stadiums, but more sites of all kinds, more hours, reaching more people. And now anyone 65 years old or over does qualify. So, if you're 65 or over, regardless of your health situation, obviously you're vulnerable, we've talked about this before, you have the right to be vaccinated. You can sign up now. Now we're waiting for State guidance on another very important group of New Yorkers, folks who are immunocompromised. The State has not given us that formal guidance. So, to anyone who is younger than 65 and is immunocompromised just an update – once we get that guidance, we're going to put it out immediately. Folks under 65 at this hour do not qualify yet, but we're certain immunocompromised folks will in the coming days. As soon as we get the State guidance, we'll inform everyone. But if you're 65 or older, you qualify right now.

So, we have sites, as I said, 24/7 sites and sites with other hours, extended hours, all over the five boroughs. On the 24/7 sites yesterday, we opened the site at 125 Worth Street right here in the City Hall area, Lower Manhattan. Today, Staten Island, the Vanderbilt Clinic on Staten Island, open 24/7 from this point on. And again, more sites coming in Staten Island. Saturday, the Health + Hospitals Corona clinic in Queens will go to 24/7. And obviously, Citi Field will be right behind that. We're going to just keep building and building out capacity. And look, we're seeing the appointments booking up really fast. And we keep adding more appointments. So long as we have doses, we add more appointments every day. So, keep coming back. There will be times when all the appointments are taken up. When I look at this week and next week, the vast majority of appointments have already been booked, but whenever there's new appointments available, they go up online. So, keep coming back to it. But look, the key thing here is we need more vaccine. As we have set up this system and finally won the battle for the freedom to vaccinate New Yorkers, the inevitable has happened. Tens of thousands of folks who've come forward, wanting the vaccine rightfully, and we're going to provide it to them over the next few weeks. And then we're going to run out of vaccine.

I confirmed with our health care team yesterday that even with the normal supplies that we expect to have delivered next week, we will run out of vaccine at some point next week, unless we get a major new resupply because so many New Yorkers want the vaccine, and we have the ability to give it to them. What do we need? We need the federal government, the State government, and the manufacturers to step up and get us more supply immediately. Now, look, one question here, and this is a place again where President-elect Biden has been a strong, clear voice, and I thank him. He is pushing hard on the current administration to release more vaccine. He's calling for the release of the vaccine that was held back for second doses. I want to affirm President-elect Biden, he's right. All doses being held back by the federal government need to be released right now. Right now, we can use them right now. We can use – the same dose could be used for a first dose or a second dose. It doesn't matter, but holding back vaccine, when we have tens of thousands of New Yorkers ready to be vaccinated right now makes no sense at all. So, I'm calling on the federal government, release everything you can give us, we need it. And we need to speed up this system going forward because we're going to continue to build. Our goal, 175,000 doses this week, we're going to hit that goal. And then we're going to a higher goal next week, a higher goal the week after that. We won't be able to meet those goals if we don't have the vaccine. So, again, everyone, I want everyone who's getting an appointment to understand there's a lot of demand, to be a little bit patient, to keep coming back until you get your appointment. But I have no patience for the federal government and the manufacturers. We need them to deliver a lot more, a lot more quickly because we can use it right now. If you're

looking for an appointment again, go to [nyc.gov/vaccinefinder](https://nyc.gov/vaccinefinder), or go on the phone system, 877-VAX-4NYC. And again, that phone reservation system that's open currently 8:00 AM to 9:00 PM, seven days a week. That will go to 24/7 later this weekend. We'll give you an update as soon as we are at that 24/7 capacity, but again, our goal, and we're confident of this goal, a million doses in January. That's what we want to do, but we need the vaccine to do it.

All right. Let me shift gears now and talk about our schools, and vaccine, obviously has a lot to say about our schools too. A lot of our teachers and school staff are stepping up. They want the vaccine. That's great. The more we can vaccinate the quicker we can continue to bring back students to our schools. The Chancellor and I are very anxious to get more kids back in school, and it's going to be great to see more and more of our team vaccinated so we can do that. So that part's going well but let me give you some other good news. We said last month in December that we wanted to transform our schools as much as possible to five-day-a-week instruction. That it was so important for kids to get five -day-a-week instruction wherever possible, wherever the space allowed for it. That for parents, obviously for their lives, for their schedule, something parents desperately wanted. Here's an update almost every one of our 878 schools now is offering some amount of five-day-a-week instruction. Some cases it's all the kids all the time and other cases, it's a majority of the kids. Some schools, because of space and other reasons, they can't yet do a majority, but they're prioritizing kids in greatest need – kids who live in shelters, for example, or kids with special needs. That effort has gone really well.

So, I want to give you an update. Right now, we have 247 schools, 247 that are providing five-day-a-week instruction to all their students. I want you to hear this clearly – 247 schools providing five-day-a-week instruction to all their students. That means they have effectively gone back to normal for the students who signed up for in-person instruction. Now, to put that in perspective, that number of schools, that alone, those 247 schools would constitute alone the eighth largest school district in America. That's the magnitude of what's been achieved here in terms of returning to five-day-a-week instruction. And we want to build on that. We want to keep building that out. And obviously looking ahead as more and more of our teachers and staff get vaccinated, that's going to open up a world of possibility. So, we're excited about what's happened already, and we're excited about what will happen in the weeks ahead.

We're also extremely focused on making sure that this moment, this horrible moment of the coronavirus crisis, that some good comes out of it. Some transformation comes out of it. One of the most powerful examples of transformation has been the closing of the digital divide because in this crisis, and I want to give the Chancellor's team a lot of credit, when we had to go to remote, Chancellor Carranza and his team made a commitment to getting kids, not just devices that they could use for remote education, but the very best devices, the most current up-to-date high-quality devices. And that's what they proceeded to do in record time. I want to give you an update that now we have 450,000 devices have been delivered for free to the children in New York City, to help them with digital learning. 450,000 devices, 50,000 more on the way. And we're going to get those right to the kids who need them. This has been a very successful effort. The scale is unbelievable, and it's worked, and it will continue now through our schools. We're going to give the responsibility to each and every school to keep track of each family and what they need, make sure their devices are working, they have the right service, and if they need something else to get it for them. So, this is going to be an ongoing effort because digital education can be crucial not just this year. Next year we have our 2020 student achievement plan

go into effect to close the COVID achievement gap, we need to make sure our kids have the right technology. Each school will follow through on that mission with each family.

Now another important update and this comes to the point about serving all kids the best way – announcement last night that we're sending forward to the PEP a plan that would have the gifted and talented test administered this spring in April as it has been done but that will be the last time the test is administered in this fashion. The gifted and talented test is the definition of a high stakes test. A single test that determines so much. This approach to testing is not something I believe in. It's not something the Chancellor believes in. It's something that has caused a lot of frustration for so many families. At this point in the year, a lot of families had already prepared. They were counting on the opportunity. We respect that. So, we'll go forward, but we will not be providing that test in the future. We need a much better approach to serving kids who have a lot of capacity. That's great. Some kids have a lot of talent. Some kids are ready to learn faster. But that's a lot of kids, a lot more than are benefiting currently from the very small amount of gifted and talented programs that exist.

You know, the Chancellor spoke about the fact that next year we're going to be doing a lot more individualized education for all kids. We're going to be using the new digital tools to allow teachers to do so much more. That's also going to allow us to reach kids with a lot of talent and tailor-make the approach for them. So, we're able to do some very new and more powerful things to help our kids and to help a lot more kids. I guarantee you, there's a hell of a lot more kids who have talents and abilities and the need for special opportunities than just the few who have been in gifted and talented to date. So, we're going to have an intensive public engagement process through the spring and into the summer to really work with stakeholders of all kinds, parents, elected officials, community leaders, obviously our PEP to think through what's the right approach for the future. It will not be a single test. And we think we have an opportunity to do something so much better that can reach so many more kids, but we're going to work closely with stakeholders to get this right. And then we'll announce the new approach by September.

Okay, let me give you an update on another topic. And this one is one we're all focused on. We are all concerned about how we bring New York City back and how we bring New York City back strong. By the way, everything we've talked about so far is part of that, getting the people in the city vaccinated, bringing back our schools strong in September, all of this is how we bring back New York City and have a strong recovery and make this city not only as great as it always has been, but even greater, because we're going to address a lot of the inequalities and disparities as part of our recovery. So, we know that to bring the city back, we have to bring back small business, and a lot of efforts have been underway to help small businesses survive and thrive ahead. But one of the key things was the fight that has been going on for months and months to get the federal government to actually provide direct support on a much higher level. In the recent legislation – again, won't call it stimulus, because it wasn't truly stimulus. It was COVID relief. In the recent COVID relief legislation, the Small Business Administration federally as now reopened the paycheck protection program. PPP, that reopened on Monday. Now, are loans. They're forgivable loans that support the notion of keeping workers on payroll. And this, now, has been an allocation of \$284 billion for small businesses. We want and make sure every small business that wants to participate is able to. We want to make sure New York City gets its fair share. We want to make sure this process works for small business. So, our Department of Small Business Services has created an approach to help any small business service – excuse me, any small business owner who needs help getting through the process applying. We now can help

them through our City Department of Small Business Services. We can help them in English, in Spanish, in Chinese, and other languages. There'll be an outreach effort to small business to let them know this help is available. And anyone who wants to be a part of it, we're calling it the Fair Share program, because we want New York City to get our fair share, we want our small businesses to get their fair share. Anyone who wants this assistance, small business owners who need this help, can go to [nyc.gov/ppp](http://nyc.gov/ppp), or you can call the Small Business Services hotline 888-SBS-4NYC. Want to make sure that help gets to people that need it. And, again, all of this contributes to our recovery, but nothing more important than getting the maximum number of people vaccinated as quickly as possible. We need the federal government to help us to do that. We need the manufacturers. We need the State. We need everyone to get us the vaccine we need, so we can do that.

And that brings us our indicators. Let me say at the outset, as I go into the indicators, I want to give an update. This is information that's just come forward. So, we've got the latest information on testing, and the State of New York has reported across the state 12 new cases of the coronavirus with the variant from the United Kingdom present. Two of those cases are New York City residents. One of whom traveled to the United Kingdom. Again, although I appreciate the federal government is finally acting to restrict who can get on international flight and require them to have a negative coronavirus test, that's not good enough. There should be an immediate travel ban from the United Kingdom to the United States. Here's proof positive, someone who is in the UK has brought the variant back here. We need that stopped. Flights from the United Kingdom should be canceled immediately by the federal government. So, two cases, obviously, they're being followed up on and supported, test and trace has engaged with them, and we'll keep people updated as we have more information.

Now, to the indicators. One, the daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report, 279 patients. Obviously, way too high. Hospitalization rate per 100,000 is 4.62. Again, amazingly, our hospitals continue to hold and do very well, but those numbers are daunting. We have a lot of work to do. Number one thing we can do is get people vaccinated. On current new cases, seven-day average 4,855 – also way too high. And the percentage of New York City residents who tested positive, seven-day rolling average 8.39 percent. We know what we have to do. We have to stay disciplined in the meantime, follow that smart health guidance we've gotten time and again, get vaccinated. And this is the last big battle against the coronavirus, we just need to be tough and to see our way through it.

A few words in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

**Moderator:** We'll now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Chancellor Carranza, by Dr. Mitch Katz, by Dr. Dave Chokshi, by Dr. Ted Long, by Commissioner Jonnel Doris, by Corporation Counsel Jim Johnson, and by Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. First question today goes to Christina Vega from Chalkbeat.

**Question:** Hi, Mayor. Thanks for taking my question. My first is, you've promised community engagement in the past on issues regarding school integration and segregation with the SHSAT and with gifted. We've seen that it hasn't really happened, so what's going to be different this time?

**Mayor:** We're committed to getting it right. Clearly, this is a process, Christina, that the Chancellor and I were expecting to engage in, in the course of this last school year. And we've seen everything disrupted, obviously, by the coronavirus. We got the report from our commission. We were going to follow through with school communities and have a process. Look, I think the Chancellor and I would both say that we've learned from times when we did things well, in terms of that engagement. We've learned from times from we didn't do that engagement well enough. And, certainly, with specialized high schools, we did not. That was our mistake. But in this case, we have a very clear timeline. From this point through to the end of the summer, we'll go through that engagement process for a new vision, and we'll have that formula by September, and then we'll act on it in September. Go ahead.

**Question:** Thanks. And you have appointed a committee to look at these issues that have propose different ways forward. There's well established advocacy on both sides when it comes to what to do about G&T. So, what do you think you'll learn or hear that you don't already know or that you haven't already heard? And with all the pressing issues facing schools, just given COVID and the response, that that's going to require to help kids catch up this year and next, why is it important to dedicate more time to this issue?

**Mayor:** Thank you, Christina. I'll start and I'll turn to the Chancellor. Look, do we know everything there is to know already on any topic? No, I assure you there's always good ideas and possibilities that we haven't thought of. But there is, you're right, already some good proposals on the table. What we need is that engagement process. We need to work with parents with CEC's, with PTA's. We need to work with the PEP. We need to work with elected officials. We need to get out there and really talk through the possibilities and figure out the one that makes the most sense. We want something sustainable. It's really important to get it right, but I think the reason that this becomes so timely, additionally, is the Chancellor and I are fully committed to doing something very different, starting in September, with a more individualized approach to education, with a greater use of digital options to augment the work of our classroom teachers. We actually have a moment where it's really right to reevaluate how we help talented students, because instead of saying, oh, we're just going to help a very small number, we now can do something much bigger. I want to just offer these numbers because they are staggering and I think all New Yorkers should hear them. How many kids do we have in kindergarten, typically? About 65,000. How many apply and take the GNT test? About 15,000. So, right there 15,000 means, 50,000 kids we're putting aside right there. So, now, 15,000 take the test, of whom 2,500 get a seat. Do you really believe that out of 65,000 kindergarteners in the city only 2,500 are "gifted and talented?" That's ridiculous. Many, many more have all sorts of gifts and talents and they deserve opportunity. And we need to re-envision this system. So, since we're going to be doing more individualized instruction anyway, what better time to rethink this approach? Chancellor?

**Schools Chancellor Richard Carranza:** Thank you, Mr. Mayor, and Christina. I would just also remind folks that we did have a very robust engagement process around the screening in the screens issue, which went through the summer and into the spring. And, of course, that led to

some policy announcements as well. Look, the research is clear, there is no question about what good instruction, good pedagogy looks like for enriching students and serving students that are academically exceptional. The jury's not out, but this is a public school system, so, as a public school system, we must engage the public in the decisions that will impact children in the public school system. And what the Mayor and I are talking about is engaging in a process to do just that, to bring people to the table, to have a conversation about what the research says, to understand what historically folks have wanted in our school system. And through that engagement process, then reach a point where we take the research, we take the best practices, we take the input that's been given, and everyone has at least a piece of that conversation when public policy is made. We think that that's a much better approach rather than just saying the research is clear, so this is what we're going to do. Again, it's a public school system, so the public should be involved in the conversation around the policies that are implemented.

**Mayor:** Thank you.

**Moderator:** The next is Andrew Siff from WNBC.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everyone on the call. With regard to the cancellation of the Trump Organization contracts, why are you so confident that you have the legal authority to do this? All kinds of contracts are binding unless there is a confirmed crime or confirmed improper activity. So, before any of that is even formally alleged, how are you so confident?

**Mayor:** I'll start and I'll to our Corporation Counsel Jim Johnson. Andrew, we all saw crime committed live on TV. Come on, it's quite clear the President of the United States committed a criminal act. He directed insurrection against the United States Capitol, period. That's criminal. That's treasonous. Clearly, the Congress understands that and is acting on that right now. We are not going to do business with the Trump Organization. We are not going to do business with a criminal organization. If I said to you, should we do business with the mafia? You'd say, no. Unfortunately, at this point, the Trump Organization is just another organized crime organization, from my point of view, because the President out in the open – you remember when he said he could walk down Fifth Avenue and shoot someone and get away with it? Well, he literally incited a riot and thinks he's going to get away with it. He's not going to get away with it. We're not going to do business with him. Jim Johnson?

**Corporation Counsel Jim Johnson:** Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Our decision is based on the contracts, which clearly give the Parks Commissioner the authority to terminate a contract, actually, at will. Several of them are at-will provisions, as long as that decision isn't arbitrary or capricious. The evidence is clear that he invited criminal conduct. We don't have to wait for standard of proof that you would require at a criminal trial. We have very strong provision [inaudible] and we are prepared to and we'll – right now, we're acting on them. With respect to the golf course, it's even more clear, because he's in an he's now entered into the [inaudible]. One of the reasons that he was given that contract was his ability to track major golf tournaments. With the cancellation of his contract with the PGA last weekend, we're entitled to and are invoking our provisions, our right to declare him in default. So, the language is clear. The conduct is clear. And our basis for moving forward is well-grounded.

**Mayor:** Go ahead, Andrew,

**Question:** As a follow up, a few minutes ago, Eric Trump provided NBC News, the following statement: “Yet another example of Mayor de Blasio's blatant disregard for the facts. The City of New York has no legal right to end our contracts. And if they elect to proceed, they will own the Trump Organization over \$30 million. This is nothing more than political discrimination and attempt to infringe on the first amendment and we plan to fight vigorously.” Any response to that?

**Mayor:** Sure. I really don't listen to the words of treasonous people. Eric Trump's right there with his dad, supporting acts of treason against the United States of America. So, what's clear is we have the legal right to act, and we will, and we will prevail. He needs to take into account that what happened here was criminal. What happened in Washington D.C. at the Capitol, the President's efforts to direct an insurrection against our government is criminal and treasonous. We do not do business with criminals, period. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** The next is Juan Manuel from NY1.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor. I have a follow-up from my former colleague Andrew Siff. Since Donald Trump came down, the Trump Tower escalator in 2015 and called the Mexican immigrants, criminals and rapists have been repeatedly asked by council members to break these city contracts with the Trump Organization. You've always said your team couldn't find any legal basis to do so. The company is now run by Donald Trump's sons. You know what Eric Trump just said about your decision to cancel the contract. Is the city ready if it comes to litigation to pay those \$30 million to the Trump Organization to cancel those contracts? Aren't you convicting the President already have an alleged criminal offense?

**Mayor:** Juan Manuel, again, you saw the crime live on television. You're – I don't understand why you're taking Eric Trump's word for the truth. The bottom line is the President of the United States incited an insurrection. He incited an insurrection, just listen to those words. This is not business as usual, and our Law Department looked at the situation and was quite clear that we could act, and we're confident that we will prevail, and I'm going to let Jim Johnson speak to it, but the fact that Eric Trump of all people suggests that they're going – every time the whole Trump M.O. is to say, they're going to win. Well, guess what? They're not going to win this time. We are going to prevail. Go ahead. Jim.

**Corporation Counsel Johnson:** The sense of irony is pretty strong here. Last week, they trampled on the constitution and this week they're trying to stand on it. You have the first minute right to, to say many things, but just as you can't yell fire, the first amendment does not protect your ability to yell fire in a crowded theater, you are not the first amendment doesn't protect your ability to incite wrongful, harmful, and lethal conduct. It is in the best interest of the City to terminate contracts and revisions of the contracts. We have a strong ground to do that, and we're taking it.

**Mayor:** Thank you.

**Question:** And Mr. Mayor, are there any extra security measures being put in place for now to inauguration day by the NYPD? Any concerns of possible Trump rallies, protests, or violence in the city?



**Mayor:** Juan Manuel, I was – been asked this now three days in a row and I'm happy to answer it every time. I think I was asked on your station on Monday, same exact answer. We are looking very, very carefully at the situation. There are no specific and tangible threats against New York City. If anything emerges of any substantial nature, I'm going to make sure we announce it. Our focus right now is on the problems elsewhere. Obviously Washington, D.C., central concern, and we're supporting the Washington, D.C. Police Department and their efforts, and then the threats posed to state capitals around the country, those look very real. But no, no specific threats direct against New York City. We are absolutely ready if one emerges to move the resources in place to address it quickly.

**Moderator:** The next is Marcia from WCBS.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor. how are you doing today?

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

**Question:** I'm good. Thank you. So, I want to follow up on the questions that you've been asked about President Trump. You most recently, just a few minutes ago, compared his organization to organized crime and to the mafia. Those are really strong charges. Do you really believe that?

**Mayor:** Yeah, we saw him live on TV incite an insurrection. I mean, what do you got to see to be convinced that someone's acting in a criminal fashion? That's absolutely – it's treasonous and I'm sorry, that's absolutely unacceptable. It is the right comparison. Go ahead.

**Question:** So, I wonder what the symbolism is for New York City to slam the door on the Trump Organization and slam the door on somebody who's been one of the most famous or infamous native sons to New York City.

**Mayor:** He's disgraced in his own homeland, and I mean just thoroughly disgraced. He's been rejected now twice overwhelmingly by the people of his own city, overwhelmingly, and now he commits an act of treason and incites an insurrection. I mean, come on. This goes beyond any notion of tragedy and goes much farther than that. This is someone who unfortunately has – for New York City? He has dishonored in New York City by his actions and he also chose not to live here anymore, he's a Florida resident now. Look, what we saw in Washington, D.C., I don't think in a million years, Marcia, you or I could have imagined a President of the United States doing that. It was literally beyond anything we've seen in our history. We should never ever see it again. It was treasonous and unacceptable, and he is being treated as a treasonous individual by leaders of both parties, by companies. All over this country, people are speaking out. New York City will not do business with someone like that, period.

**Moderator:** The next is Amanda Eisenberg from Politico.

**Question:** Morning, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

**Mayor:** Hey, Amanda, how are you doing?

**Question:** I'm well, thank you. So, I spoke with a 79-year-old yesterday. She lives in Manhattan. She took the subway to Bushwick to get vaccinated. When she arrived, she had an ID number

and a confirmation for her appointment. It turned out that that information came from the state and not from the city who was running that site. So, she was in line. They moved her to a different line and again, she's 79, and the people who are working the site from the city, encouraged her to go home and resign up. She insisted that she waits and she had the appointment three hours later. She was able to go home with a vaccine, but no follow-up appointment for a second dose. I know Dr. Chokshi spoke a lot about some of the problems yesterday. I wanted to bring this to your attention and get your feedback on how do we avoid these things happening, especially with people who are older and might not be able to wait in line for three hours and have to stand on their feet?

**Mayor:** Yeah. First of all, I'm very sorry that happened to her, and we absolutely want to fix that. It's first I've heard of anything like that, Amanda, that's not acceptable. We need to fix that, and if you'll be kind enough to make sure Dr. Chokshi's team gets her contact info, we will definitely make sure she gets her appointment for the second shot. Thank God she did get the shot eventually. But no, look, if there's any problem like that, where someone legitimately signed up and we need to just cut through the red tape and get them the shot, we will get them the shot. That's the bottom line, and we'll look to see if there's anything we have to fix in terms of the systems. But what I'm hearing overwhelmingly as people are getting to the vaccination centers and getting their shot at the time and around the time when they were scheduled to do so. But I don't want to see someone like that turned away, obviously. We have to be smart, just get someone in need the shot they need. Go ahead.

**Question:** Great, thank you. And I also wanted to get back to this COVID variant strain that you mentioned earlier. So, we have two new cases in New York City. Are you hearing from your Health Department to sound the alarm bell about having people stay closer to home, maybe not travel to their office with the understanding that if this variant were to spread, something like what happened in the UK could happen here, where we have hundreds or thousands of people with this variant and the hospitals get overwhelmed again?

**Mayor:** It's a real concern, Amanda, I'll start and I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi and Dr. Varma. I'm very concerned about this variant. This is why we need a travel ban immediately. Again, I appreciate that finally – and I've called for this months ago – there's federal action on ensuring that anyone who gets on a plane has a negative test, but in the case of the UK, that's literally not enough. We need those flights canceled and we needed a travel ban until the situation is greatly improved. I am very concerned about this variant. You know, we're just at a point now where we have an opportunity to turn the corner because of the vaccine, and now we have this new challenge. I would absolutely urge people who are vulnerable to be very, very careful. I'll have Dr. Chokshi talk to this. Anyone who's older, anyone who has pre-existing conditions should really limit their movements, should only do the most essential things. With this new variant, it's another reminder if you're one of the folks who's vulnerable, don't take chances. Let's get you vaccinated, but until you have received both shots, don't do business as usual, stay safe, stay close to home. Dr. Chokshi, then Dr. Varma.

**Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:** Thank you, Mr. Mayor, and thanks Amanda for this important question. This variant which is known as the B117 variant, sometimes called the UK variant as well, we have heard, as you know, that the variant has been found around the world but increasingly now around the United States as well, there are over 10 states that are reported cases of that B117 variant. Given that we do have that increasing

number of cases both in the US and elsewhere, on the one hand, it's not surprising that it has been identified in New York City, and I think my clear core message is that it should compel us to be even more vigilant about the precautions that we can take a vote to protect ourselves as well as to protect others.

The Mayor has spoken about this. You've certainly heard from me the importance of the five actions that all New Yorkers should be taking. That's staying home if you're ill, washing your hands frequently, getting tested, wearing a mask, as well as keeping your distance. Those become even more important when we do have this more infectious variant that is circulating. The other thing that I will say about it is that there's no evidence that this variant of the virus causes more severe illness or mortality. But the fact that it is more infectious means that it is all the more important for the people who are most vulnerable to those severe outcomes to take the steps that they need to protect themselves, and for all of the rest of us to do those five actions that I mentioned. I hope you hear that the urgency in my voice, because this is important to avoid further tragedy as we have seen over the last few months.

**Mayor:** Go ahead, doctor – thank you, and go ahead, Dr. Varma.

**Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma:** Yeah, thank you very much, and just to reemphasize what the Commissioner has just said: this is a very urgent and real concern, not just here in New York City throughout the United States and throughout the world, we're really in a race against this virus. We need to reduce the number of humans that are either infected with this virus, and in particular, those that are susceptible to it. That's how viruses get a foothold and mutate, by replicating inside humans and new variants like this emerge. So, in addition to what Dr. Chokshi has talked about in terms of the individual measures that people really need to double down on, we again want to reemphasize the importance that when your turn in line comes up to get vaccinated, it's important to do that. There was some theoretical concern that people who are immunocompromised and maybe, you know, more likely to have mutations arise, or people who are vulnerable, if they're more sick. So again, very important to prioritize them, to make sure they get vaccinated and protected and take re-emphasize what the Mayor has said as well, too. We are connected to the rest of this country. We need the rest of this country also to be taking restrictions and actions to keep infections down, and we need to limit our movement across those different places, both across the country and across the world, and anytime people do move, they need to make sure they're observing the rules about getting frequently tested and staying away from people for the recommended time.

**Mayor:** Thank you.

**Moderator:** The next is Emma Fitzsimmons from the New York Times.

**Question:** Hi, good morning, Mayor.

**Mayor:** Hey Emma, how are you doing?

**Question:** I'm good. I'm good. So, I took a look at the contract with the golf course. It's 450 pages long and super complicated, and your statement this morning referenced the fact that it'll take months to disentangle from this relationship. Can you tell me why this one will take longer,

and are you saying that your argument on this contract, the golf course, relates to the loss of business and not criminal activity in particular?

**Mayor:** I'll have our Corporation Counsel Jim Johnson speak to the details. The central point is we're going to terminate these contracts and get the Trump Organization out of work with New York City as quickly as possible. It takes a little longer with the golf course, but we're going to get that done, and again, focus on getting new vendors in, so folks who receive these services can continue to have those opportunities. Jim, go ahead.

**Corporation Counsel Johnson:** Sure. Emma, thanks for your question, it's important for us to be clear. The contract involving the golf course has within it a provision and what basically it's for default. And one of the things that was very important when we entered into this contract was the expectation that it would enable the city to attract a major golf tournament. Last weekend, the PGA canceled their relationship with the Trump Organization. It is not foreseeable that either they will re-up that relationship or that any other golf tournament will want to associate itself with the Trump Organization. There therefore in default, we will be serving them with notice of default and there are a couple of steps that have to be taken before we can completely unwind this relationship, and we've started those steps.

**Mayor:** Go ahead, Emma.

**Question:** Okay. My next question is about the vaccine rollout. I've been hearing from a lot of people who are frustrated, trying to get an appointment. I helped my own father get an appointment in Texas recently and was quite aggravating. Are you worried that New Yorkers without online literacy or good internet who are working long hours and maybe don't have time to sit on a website and refresh it all day or call repeatedly, are you afraid that these people are going to get left behind?

**Mayor:** I'm definitely concerned, Emma, that the process, if it's a difficult one for people to engage, that we may have people get frustrated by it, definitely understand that, and we don't want to be difficult. In fact, we're working every day to make it smoother and quicker. We're going 24/7 with that hotline, and again, just so everyone hear it, 877-VAX-4NYC. That's going to be 24/7 by the end of the week. We started a week with 750 customer service reps on that line. We're going to keep adding, there is a wait time. That's for sure, but I want to emphasize we're not a patient people in New York City, but the wait time has been between 10 and 15 minutes on average, so it, you know, we want to bring that down, but it is something that people can generally manage. But this is all to me, that's the small part of the problem. When I think about what's going to frustrate people, it's most frustrating when there are no appointments available. And right now, if we don't get more vaccine, there literally will not be appointments available after the next couple of weeks. We must get resupplied on a much higher level. The more we get, the more we can expand our sites and the hours of our sites. So, I think that's the central question. Clearly, I agree with you, I do not want to see folks, especially some of the most vulnerable folks, lose faith and not go to the effort. So, we have to keep making it simpler all the time. But our deepest problem is we might have the most beautiful reservation system in the world, but no vaccine to go with it, and that's where the federal government, the state government and the manufacturers really need to step up. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** It's time for two more for today. The next is Jessica Gould from WNYC.

**Question:** Hey, I wanted to actually follow up on what Emma just said. I also am trying to help boomer parents navigate the systems. In addition to the phone line, is there a way to streamline the website so that you're not then asked to go one by one to all the different places and check their availability?

**Mayor:** Yeah. I'm going to call in Dr. Long on this one because he's been doing so much of the work in terms of how we're reaching out to communities and connecting with communities, and I think he has a really good sense of the people that we are serving, but yeah, I want to see it continue to streamline. We need to make this as simple as possible, understanding, Jessica, that because it's really important we ensure that the folks who are going to get the vaccine are qualified to get it, that they are New York City residents or people who work in public service in New York City, that they are within the right age groups, et cetera. That is always going to be a challenge because it requires a certain amount of questions to clarify that, and there are other legal requirements that have to be met according to the State. So, there is something there that's a challenge under any scenario, but we want to keep working to make the website experience smoother. Dr. Long, you want to speak to that?

**Executive Director Ted Long, NYC Test and Trace Corps:** Yeah, it's a great question, and one of the things that's been very helpful to us is moving forward here. We've gotten a tremendous amount of feedback from New Yorkers about how to make this experience more streamlined for them, or for their parents, and what some of the barriers would be for them being able to schedule appointments. And I'll mention a couple of [inaudible] here that I've been taking notes on after talking with people, and this is what my patients tell me in the Bronx too, one, my patients that work at night, they want to get their vaccinations at night. So, to surmount that barrier, we now have 24/7 access to the vaccine in the Bronx and in Brooklyn, and this week in every single borough, today in Staten Island. And I'm proud of our ability to offer that to everybody, including my patients, to remove that barrier. In terms of the website and being able to schedule appointments, some of the things that we've heard about is, one, not everybody has the internet. And I have patients that are above 65 that have a flip phone, they do not have smartphones and they do not have internet, so I'm happy to be able to tell them now that they can call 877-VAX-4NYC, extended hours, hundreds of operators, and make their appointments over the phone, that helps them to remove that barrier that otherwise would this disallow them to be able to make an appointment.

Another thing we've heard feedback on is wanting to have a language access. So, we have a language line that's incorporated into the call center now, so we can speak to you in any language that you speak so that we can be able to out smelt that barrier and make the appointment for you. As we move forward, I hear you on the point around, can you see where there's more eligibility after you – or more access after you complete the eligibility screen? That's something we're making updates on now, and if you have more feedback, now is the time to tell us, and this goes to anybody listening to me now, we're completely committed to making this accessible to all New Yorkers. That's why we have 24/7 access, why we have a call center, why it speaks many languages, it's based on what you've told us. So, continue giving us good feedback and we're committed to make those changes. So, thank you.

**Mayor:** Thank you, doctor. Go ahead, Jessica.

**Question:** Okay. Thanks. And on Gifted and Talented, I know that we're at the beginning of a stakeholder engagement process, but can you tell me a little bit about what you've seen other places do that might serve as a model for New York City?

**Mayor:** I'll start now, and I'll turn to the Chancellor. Look, I think what's most interesting here is the chance to rethink how many kids need the special opportunities, need the opportunities to take their talents and run with them. The original concept was around kids who had special abilities not getting an opportunity in the classroom to really pursue their abilities and the frustration that came with that, right? The classic kid, who's smart kid and bored in the classroom because they could be going and working even on additional material. Well, we can now address that new ways because we have these digital possibilities that before were pretty limited and used in a pretty limited fashion. Now everyone's using them. That's going to give every classroom teacher a lot of new tools to work with. And again, I – these numbers astound me, how few kids right now get access to anything called Gifted and Talented when there's obviously many, many thousands more kids who in many ways are gifted and talented and deserve it. So, I just want to lay that foundation before turning to the Chancellor that – that I think there's a very different way to think about this, and this moment in history is actually opened our minds to those possibilities because we're seeing it play out right now in education in this city. Chancellor?

**Chancellor Carranza:** Yeah, thank you, Jessica, and thank you, Mr. Mayor. So, I can tell you what the vast majority, in fact, every school system I've worked in don't do, they don't give a single test to four-year-olds and then set them on a path to Gifted and Talented. That just doesn't happen. So, what we've seen be very effective, you know, there's a very powerful quote that I share with my community every year, and it's from a six-year-old child that says my teacher thought I was smarter than I was, so I was. That's the foundational cornerstone of what we're talking about, that there are children in New York City who have the capabilities and they don't always develop at the same time, but have the capabilities to do more enlightened work, a much more difficult work, but you don't do that by putting them in a special program and saying only these students get to do those kinds of assignments or those types of experiences. So, being able to provide that kind of an experience for a broader selection of students while you're uncovering those unpolished gems, if you will, is part of the pedagogy that we're talking about.

The silver lining, if there is any silver lining to this pandemic, has been that, as a Mayor has mentioned, we've bridged the digital divide, there is more Wi-Fi now for our students. There's more capability that our educators have developed and that our students have developed and that our parents have developed to be able to use resources in a digital world much more effectively. So, part of this re-imagining is how do we capture those kinds of practices, make them available to a greater swath of our students, and then make sure that as we're individualizing the learning for each one of our students, we're doing that with the eye towards what that student said about their teacher. The teacher thought the student was smarter than they were, so they were. So how do we make that part of what we see as serving all of our students rather than just a program based on a single test?

**Mayor:** Amen, go ahead.

**Moderator:** Last question for today, it goes to Matt Troutman from Patch.

**Question:** Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor. I want to circle back –

**Mayor:** Hey, Matt.

**Question:** Hey how's it going?

**Mayor:** Good, how are you doing today?

**Question:** Not bad, not bad. Hey, I want to circle back to the UK variants. I want to get some more information about the cases specifically where these cases are within the city by like neighborhood level, any more information on like when these were identified and just anything at all.

**Mayor:** Great. Thank you, Dr. Chokshi you want speak to that?

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Yes, I'm happy to, sir. I'll start by saying that, you know, for individual cases of course we take protecting the confidentiality and privacy of individuals very seriously. So, there is some information that that we want to be able to respect an individual's confidentiality. But what I can say about the two cases, is that one is a resident of Manhattan, the other is a resident of Queens. Both were or originally diagnosed in late December with genetic sequencing, that's the special testing that's done to identify the variant, returning results just within the last few hours. And so those are some of the details that we can share, the other thing that I will say is that, it again, connects back to the importance of our public health guidance. You know, for those cases and their contacts, all of whom were handled appropriately through our testing and tracing system with respect to isolation and quarantine. All of the procedures that we have put in place, both for individuals, as well as for the public at large, become that much more important for us to redouble our commitment to. So, those are that – the five actions that I've already mentioned, but also for people to go and get tested and then to make sure that you are appropriately isolating if you're if you're diagnosed as a positive case or quarantining if you're found to be a close contact of a positive case.

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

**Question:** Okay. I have a question from a colleague, now everyone's noted the impact of COVID on lower income communities. Now, Washington Heights and Inwood currently have the highest COVID rates in Manhattan, but they don't appear to be any city run vaccine hubs in those two neighborhoods, at least in the initial rollout. Are there any plans to bring those out?

**Mayor:** Yeah, let me turn to Dr. Katz and Dr. Long. We absolutely, let me be clear, we have been building out sites constantly and we're building out the hours of sites and again, our central challenge is going to be lack of vaccine soon if we don't get a major new shipment. But I'm turning to Dr. Katz and Dr. Long, because both in terms of this vaccination effort and Test and Trace, but also the work of the Health + Hospitals does all the time, there's a very intense focus on Upper Manhattan. So, Dr. Katz, then Dr. Long, you want to speak to how we're going to make sure folks in those communities get served a vaccination.

**President and CEO Mitchell Katz, Health + Hospitals:** Yes. Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor, and as you say, Health + Hospitals has a long tradition of caring for the uninsured, the low-

income, Black and Brown communities, minority communities, and we are going to keep expanding our sites so that we are able to reach everyone. Right now, both through the website and through the phone number, anyone can make an appointment at any of our existing sites. Thank you.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Dr. Long?

**Executive Director Long:** Yeah, I would only add that as Dr. Katz said, through our 11 hospitals and now seven of our Gotham Community Health Centers, we're proud to be offering vaccinations across New York City. In particular, we're rolling out in Harlem at our site and [inaudible] community center vaccinations now and at Harlem Hospital, we've been delivering vaccinations as well.

**Mayor:** So, we're going to keep building out that capacity all over the city. I really want to emphasize, this is a dynamic situation, Matt, where new operations are being set up constantly and a lot more is going to be coming very, very quickly. And as I conclude the day, everyone, again, I'm going to keep saying, I want everyone understand, we have more and more sites, more and more hours, lots of tremendous folks' medical personnel and others who are helping to make these centers run. I've been to several of them already, amazing operations, I've talked to the folks who went there and get vaccinated. They're so grateful and they also know they're really being cared for and supported by the people that work in these centers. That's all the good news. The bad news is we're going to run out of vaccine if we don't get a major new shipment, what the federal government, State government current plan sending us a hundred thousand doses a week, that's not going to cut it. We already, this week, are planning on doing 175,000 doses, we're on track for that, more next week. We're on track for a million doses for the month. We need a bigger supply and we need it quickly and we need it to be reliable so we can really serve the people of the city. Thank you, everyone.

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