

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 18, 2021, 8:30 AM

CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON MSNBC'S MORNING JOE

Mika Brzezinski: Life expectancy in the U.S. fell by a full a year in the first six months of 2020, the largest drop since World War II. According to a new report from the National Center for Health statistics, life expectancy at birth for the total U.S. population was 77.8 years – a decline of one full year from what it was in 2019. The group that suffered the largest decline was non-Hispanic Black males, whose life expectancy dropped by three years. Deaths from the coronavirus are the main factor in the overall drop, according to the report. And joining us now, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio. Mayor de Blasio, thank you for being on this morning. Looking at that report, along with other factors, tell us, first of all, how New York City is fairing as it pertains to coronavirus.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: I'll tell you, Mika, just some reflecting on what you just said – and I'm just thinking of the people we've lost. You know, I'm just thinking about the families who are suffering right now, because someone's missing. And we're fighting back – you know, we're fighting back here in New York City, and we're making progress, but our biggest problem is we don't have enough supply the vaccine. Last week, we vaccinated almost 320,000 people, but I could be doing literally half-a-million a week if I had the supply I needed. And this is the frustrating part, I've talked to some of our seniors who – this is like, it's not overstating it – it's a life and death matter for them. They feel it's a life and death matter. They feel that if they can get that vaccine, they'll be around to see their grandchildren. And if they don't, they may not. It's really frustrating when we can't give them that opportunity, but we're going to keep building the capacity. We just need the supply so we can reach people.

Willie Geist: Mr. Mayor, it's Willie. So, where is the bottleneck in this? For people who are frustrated who get their appointment at the Javits Center canceled or postponed when they were excited to go in and get it, what do you say to them? Why don't you have the supply at this point that you need?

Mayor: Willie, it's such a fundamental question. I mean, look, I believe the Biden administration is doing everything possible to speed up the supply, but I think something's still broken in the way the pharmaceutical industry is handling this, because we've got three companies – precisely three in the entire nation who are producing vaccine. There's a huge – there's a huge pharmaceutical industry. They've got lots of resources. They've done really, really well. I don't see them on the playing field, the rest of these companies, giving their assembly lines over to the war effort, if you will. And that's frustrating to think we're not getting all the vaccine we could get. There's also bottlenecks, because of State rules – there's so many things. I talk to mayors around the country, and, Willie, they say, just give us the vaccine directly. When it goes through

states, including some state governments that are very hostile to their cities, it just slows down everything and confuses everything. So, I think it's about getting the allotments of this vaccine directly to the cities. Where is the greatest danger in so many cases? In the big cities. And that would help us just speed this effort.

Geist: Yeah. I mean, the pharmaceutical companies are the ones who pulled off the miracle of developing this in less than a year. They say they're making it as fast as they can. But you're right, it's got to get to the places where it needs to be. Let's talk about schools in New York City. A lot of excitement, I can tell you, about next week as you're opening up the middle schools in this city. I know a lot has gone into that, a lot of planning. There's been some question – some contradiction between the City and the State about whether or not students will have to be tested when they go in. It sounds like you've worked that out. So, what does the school day look like for those kids? How did you make it safe? And are you confident it will be safe for both students and teachers?

Mayor: Yeah. Well, let's first talk about the joy, Willie. There's a lot of parents in New York City who are really, really happy that middle is coming back next week, who are relieved to have – they love their children, but they're ready for a break. Let's put it that way.

Geist: Correct.

Mayor: And also, kids who want to be with their peers and want to have all the good that comes from kids connecting together again. So, in a week, middle school comes back. It's going to be safe, because we've really set the gold standard for this nation. We looked at the very beginning of opening schools in September, we said let's take the best – the best approaches from around the world. So, our kids all wear masks, for example. Our kids are tested – a big sample of each school, tested every week. You know, these are the things that have worked. Our schools are the safest places to be in New York City. So, first middle school. And then, I look forward to high school. And I've got to tell you, Willie, this whole country has got to reopen our schools. You know, enough is enough. Our kids need it and they're suffering – you know, really, let's be clear, it's not just academic loss. Our kids are suffering emotionally. And if they're not in school, it's bad for them. It's bad for their emotional development. For a lot of kids, it's very, very painful to not have that chance to go to school. And we've got to pay more attention to that.

Brzezinski: And they don't learn as much. Mr. Mayor, this morning, we've been talking about New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, being under investigation by the FBI and the U.S. Attorney's Office in Brooklyn. It's a preliminary inquiry into the Cuomo administration's failure to report, until late January, the number of nursing home residents who died of the virus after being transferred to hospitals. And now, over the last month, significantly increasing the official death count at nursing homes to more than 15,000. What I want to ask you about is, earlier in the show, we had on Democratic Assemblyman Ron Kim, who has been questioning the nursing home death data for months. He says, Governor Cuomo threatened him in a phone call for that criticism. Here's some of what he told us this morning.

Assemblyman Ron Kim: *Governor Cuomo called me the next day at 8:00 PM, while I was about to bathe my kids, I was with my wife, and for 10 minutes he berated me, he yelled at me. He told*

me that, you know, my career would be over, he's been biting his tongue for months against me, and I had tonight – not tomorrow, tonight to issue a new statement, essentially asking me to lie and asking me – like, I just – I heard and I saw a crime the other day, and he's asking me that I did not see that crime. And that was the line that he – you know, the line that he crossed that can't be undone. And that's why I had no choice but to come out and speak up.

Brzezinski: So, a senior advisor for Governor Cuomo says Kim is lying, that at no time did anyone threatened to destroy anyone with their wrath. I've got to ask you, I don't want you to weigh in on that specifically, but you know Governor Cuomo, you guys have jostled in the past. He says – Kim says that he got this irate phone call that started out, are you an honorable man? And it went for 10 minutes of him yelling and then threats to publicly tarnish him. Is that – have you ever heard of anything like that from Governor Cuomo? Has he – have you ever spoken with him and anything like that happened?

Mayor: Yeah. It's a sad thing to say, Mika, but that's classic Andrew Cuomo. A lot of people in New York State have received those phone calls. You know, the bullying is nothing new. I believe Ron Kim, and it's very, very sad – no public servant, no person who's telling the truth should be treated that way. But yeah, the threats, the belittling, the demand that someone changed their statement right that moment – many, many times, I've heard that and I know a lot of other people in this state have heard that.

Joe Scarborough: So, you believe assemblyman Kim, that he was threatened?

Mayor: 100 percent. First of all, I know him, he's a good public servant. I've always seen him as a person of integrity, but it's just the script is exactly what a lot of us have heard before. It's not a surprise. It's sad. It's not the way people should be treated. And, you know, a lot of people get intimidated by that. I give him credit for not being intimidated.

Scarborough: Yeah. So, let me ask you about the DOJ investigation. Obviously, some – I'm sure some of these deaths involve people in the city. How concerned are you about the DOJ investigation and do you believe they need to conduct an aggressive investigation, because of things that you have seen?

Mayor: Yeah. Joe, we need a full investigation, unquestionably. This is about thousands of people's lives. This is about our elders and there are families right now in New York State that lost a grandma, a grandpa, they lost an aunt or uncle, they're not sure what happened here. They worry that something was done wrong. And the big question, how do we make sure it never happens again? This really hasn't been investigated. The truth hasn't come out yet and we need it. We need it. These are people's lives. And the notion that information was held back for political convenience instead of the blunt truth coming out so we could save lives, something's profoundly wrong there.

Geist: And the State Attorney General, as you know, Mr. Mayor, is looking into that as well. I want to ask you about the state of the economy in New York City. As I walk out my front door in New York City, my diner closed over there, my dry cleaner closed there, my barber shop two weeks ago went out of business. They're all fighting to figure out how to make it work for their

next steps. That's just one corner of thousands across New York City, as you know, where small businesses are closing. What do you say to those small business owners who are so desperate for relief? Obviously, they're going to be looking to this massive package from the federal government, but what should they expect from the City?

Mayor: Listen, we've got to bring them back. And I really believe, Willie, we're going to bring back so many of our small businesses. You know, this is a small business city. This is a city where people, especially immigrant New Yorkers have made their dream and created their own family business, and that's our heart and soul. So, we're going to have tax breaks for small businesses. We're going to provide additional loans on top of the very good efforts we've seen the federal and State level. I want to make sure that, that federal aid gets to the small businesses, particularly in communities of color that often have had real challenges with the way the aid was constructed. We want to cut through and make sure they get their fair share, but I know New York City's coming back. You go all over the five boroughs, Willie, you see it beginning already. But when 5 million people are vaccinated – this is my goal, I want, by June, 5 million New Yorkers fully vaccinated. If I have the supply, I absolutely can do it, because I can make sure half-a-million people get vaccinated every week. That's the capacity we have right now. Maybe we can go even farther and faster, but when the city is vaccinated at that level, this economy is going to come booming back, because there's so much pent-up demand. And those small businesses, people want to go to them. No one's traveling around the country, they're going to spend their money in their neighborhood at those small businesses. So, I truly believe you're going to see a surge of activity once we get to that vaccination level and that second half of the year is going to be very strong in New York City.

Brzezinski: All right. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, thank you very much for being on this morning. We wish you the best in the efforts in New York City to combat the coronavirus.

###