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

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, everybody. You know, this month, September 2020, is shaping up to be one of the most important in the City's history. So much is going to happen this month that's going to say so much about our future, and we're going to be talking throughout the month of September about what New Yorkers are doing to help this city move forward and what we need to do to keep moving forward. There's a lot to focus on, but before we talk about the present and the future, let's take a moment to think about our past. Tomorrow, an anniversary that every year we feel so deeply on September 11th. For so many of us, it is a very personal moment. For so many of us, it brings back the deepest feelings – what we felt that moment, what we felt that day. And it particularly brings back the memories of those we lost. So many New Yorkers, have a family member, a friend, a colleague, someone in their life they lost. So many New Yorkers come to know the stories of the heroes who served us that day so selflessly and so many who have been lost even since then from the work they did that day, and in the rescue and recovery efforts. This is an anniversary that brings out so much feeling, and, of course, there's a lot of pain, but I hope people every year – and I hope tomorrow you will feel this as well – remember the heroism of not just our first responders, but every-day New Yorkers as well. The compassion, the strength, the resiliency this city showed in our most difficult moment. We will always remember the men and women who served us. We'll always remember the first responders. They are the best of us. But we also have to remember how this city showed the whole world the strength, the meaning of New York City – each person there for the other, no matter who they were or where they came from – people united to see our community forward. And that spirit can never be forgotten.

So, tomorrow. we mourn again. We honor those we lost, their greatness. We miss them, but we take inspiration from them as we move forward. And on that horrible day, we never could have imagined this moment in history. But I think those heroes we lost would tell us to, once again, believe in New York City, believe in each other and move forward. So, God blessed them all. And to all the families grieving again, as we approach this memorial, God bless you.

Well, as I said, this month – now, in 2020, this month will be so important to everything that happens in the future of this city, because we are talking about the beginning of our rebirth. That's what September 2020 will be. We're coming off the summer. Kids are coming back to school. Businesses are reopening. We're fighting back the coronavirus. We are leading the nation in showing that we can get it right. So, there's so much we have to do right now, but there's also something going on in this month that will determine much of the future of our city. And it still doesn't get all the attention it deserves, but it literally will determine so much of what happens

over the next decade in this city, and that is the census – 20 days to go, less than three weeks to go. Again, I don't blame a single person who says, what does the census mean to me? Why is it such a big deal? It's abstract to say the least, but here's, again, why it matters. The census, it's in the United States Constitution. The founding fathers understood the importance of this – it will determine how much representation we get in Washington, and we know that means decisions will be made that will affect every single one of us for years and years ahead, based on how much representation we have and billions – hundreds of billions of dollars of funding get determined according to the census. And if New York City is accurately represented in the census, we get our fair share. And if we're not accurately represented, we lose a huge amount of money. And don't just think about that in terms of a budget, think about that money for your kid's school, for your subway ride to make it better, for affordable housing, your family needs. If we don't have that money, it doesn't happen the way it should. If we have it, we can do so much, but it all depends on the census, and only 20 days left.

Now, where do we stand? As you can see, we've made some progress and our census team is doing a fantastic job going out to the people this city, but we're still behind the national average. And that's what matters here, how we compare to every place else. So, right now, as of the 9th, our response rate – 58.9 percent. Now, the national rate is 65.5 percent. We have to do everything we can to catch up. And, look, it's a horrible time to try and do this, I know – the pandemic, all the dislocation, all the challenges we faced, it's not surprising we're behind the national average, but we have to catch up as best we can. And every effort we all know was made to try and discourage people – and this is a very cynical strategy that came out of Washington. Every effort was made to discourage people from participating in the census, changing the rules, changing the questions, changing the deadline, and particularly attacking immigrants and discouraging them from participating. But you know what, again, the U.S. Constitution says everyone should be counted, regardless of where they come from, regardless documentation status. So, we need to get that word out. This has to be a supreme group effort in this city, everyone together, just like we fought back the coronavirus. So, our Census 2020 team is out there and going to the grassroots, they're knocking on doors, they're making those calls. They're doing amazing work to get people to sign up. Every single New Yorker can make a difference. Remember, if you haven't done it, it takes just 10 minutes to fill out the census form for your whole household. So, please, everybody. We need you.

Now, we've tried to make sure that we focus on neighborhoods, where we needed to see that rate go up and we've done a few competitions, including our Census Subway Series. And last week's contestants were Midwood, Brooklyn versus the Upper East Side, battle of the Q train. And the winner is Midwood, Brooklyn prevailed in that contest. Congratulations to everyone in Midwood. Now, let's keep going. Let's keep making sure every neighborhood gets counted and this city gets its fair share.

Alright, now let's go to some important news from the last 24 hours. Again, absolutely crucial to the future of the city is bringing back our economy, bringing back people's livelihoods, making sure that folks have an opportunity after all we've been through to put things back together and move forward. And our restaurant industry is a huge part of this city, it's part of our culture, it's part of our identity, it's part of what we love. Also, businesses built by people who work so hard to create them and an industry that employs hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers. So, what a

good thing that indoor dining will be back. That is very good news for this city, but I have to emphasize – and I think, throughout, you've heard me say with every part of the life of this city, that every part of our economy, we have to put health and safety first, we have to be careful. So, as indoor dining starts to come back, it will come back with rigorous safety measures with real limits, with careful inspections, because we have to get it right. A lot of conversation over the last few weeks with the State, this was something where a lot of work had to be done to make sure that we balanced the needs – the real needs of the restaurant community, the workers, the owners, the communities that love the restaurants with that thing that we want the most, the ability to beat back the coronavirus. Every New Yorker I've talked to starts with wanting to defeat this disease and recognizing how far we've come. And when I talk to people from around the rest of the country, there's a certain amount of awe at how far New York City has come in terms of beating back this disease, going literally from worst to first, and we've got to keep doing that. So, one of the things that I push very hard and my team pushed hard in these discussions with the State was tight restrictions and smart rules and careful assessment of how we are doing. So, we're talking about, to begin with, a maximum 25 percent capacity in restaurants, tables at least six feet apart. There will not be seating at bars in terms of the bar tops. And then a bunch of additional safety measures, temperature checks at the doors, of course, PPE for all employees provided, regular information kept to make sure there can be testing and tracing as needed. These precautions are going to be necessary, because, unfortunately, what we've seen around a lot of the world is indoor dining has had a direct connection to some of the resurgences we've seen, particularly most recently in Western Europe. So, we have to keep a close eye on this. And I believe firmly that we need to watch our overall trajectory of this disease. And if we get to two percent infection rate on a regular basis on that seven-day average, at that point, we need to immediately reassess indoor dining. Hopefully, we never get there. Hopefully, in fact, we go in the other direction and get better and better all the time. So, it's great that indoor dining is back, but we're going to be very careful – and our health team will certainly emphasize this – we're going to be very careful to make sure it's done right.

Now, talk about doing things right – one of the biggest stories in the last six months of how we have successfully fought back the coronavirus, one of the most essential elements of the whole strategy was also one of the simplest – a face covering. And most people – I certainly use the paper masks, those blue masks, that's what I see mostly when I go around the city, the most popular choice. Those simple paper masks or the cloth masks that people use have been one of the biggest difference-makers in fighting back this disease. We didn't know that in the beginning – the health community, the scientific community did not recognize in the beginning of this crisis how crucial this would be, but, thank God, it was recognized and, thank God, New Yorkers have taken to face coverings as well as you have, because it's made a huge difference. Now, we want to get clear today about the ground rules for face coverings, because since it is literally possibly the single most important element of the strategy, we want people to really get what to do right. And you're going to hear from our Health Commissioner, but I'm going to tell you just to begin with, think about the face covering, just look at it regularly. Is it in good shape? Has it been soiled? Is it torn? Is there any reason it's time to replace it? Keep an eye on it. Think about how crucial it is to make sure that it's in good working order. And those paper masks, those surgical mask – those can work for days and days, but not if they get wet or dirty. And after something like five days, it's a good time to change them. So, you're going to hear now from the expert, who's going to emphasize these rules. And, as our Health Commissioner, Dr. Dave Chokshi has

really emphasized to me the simple power of face coverings, but how important it is to make sure people use them consistently and use them the right way and maintain them well. So, here to hear directly from him, our Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi.

**Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:** Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor. If there's one thing that the past seven months have taught us, it's that we are truly all in this together. Your health is connected to my health and the choices we make from staying home, to observing our distance, those things protect our fellow New Yorkers. As we head back into the cooler months, now is a good time to remind everyone about a few basic facts regarding face coverings. A face covering can include any well secured disposable mask or cloth that covers your nose and mouth. A disposable mask – like this one – can be reused. But you should immediately replace it if it becomes damaged, dirty, or wet. For a cloth mask or face covering – like this one – I have some simple recommendations. Use it for a day, hand wash it with soap and water. Make sure you dry it completely after doing so and rotate your supply. Have more than one so that you can alternate them. Most importantly, choose a face covering that fits snugly against the sides of your face and that completely covers your nose and mouth. Don't share them and store them somewhere where they won't be touched. And don't use a mask with an exhalation valve as it allows unfiltered air to escape.

Since we're approaching the first day of school, a word about masks for children as well. First, if you have a child under the age of two, as I do, it's important to know that a mask or face covering is not recommended for them. For older children, check to make sure the mask fits snugly over the nose and mouth and under the chin. If you're able to find a mask that is specifically made for children, I'll note that all children will be given free masks in our public schools, but we're asking parents to ensure that kids wear masks outside of school, as well.

As with everything, and, as the Mayor has said, we're constantly monitoring the science and we will update you if research determined something different about what's best with face coverings. Face coverings, although simple, are such a vital component of reopening and slowly phasing things in like indoor dining. On that, we're pleased to be able to say that indoor dining will be available in a few weeks. Look, I know how important this is for people's livelihoods. I think about the cooks and the waiters whom I've taken care of as my own patients, but we must make sure our restaurants are safe for them and for our communities. Like our school guidelines, the restaurant restrictions are stringent to ensure that if we see the spread of COVID intensifying above that two percent test positivity threshold that the Mayor mentioned, then we'll have to reassess indoor dining. Capacity will be limited to 25 percent. There'll be temperature checks at the front door. Tables will be spaced at least six feet apart. And one member of the party will provide contact information to our tracers, should they need to reach them.

I know everyone is asking the same question, is it safe? The short answer is that we're able to take these gradual steps because the level of COVID has stayed low. All of us have a role to play in keeping that level low and it comes back to distancing, mask wearing, hand washing, getting tested and staying home if you're ill. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Thank you so much, Dave. And everyone, look, you heard from the city's doctor. What Dr. Chokshi is saying is, let's get this right and let's always focus on the facts, the data, the

science. That's what's gotten us this far in New York City. That's what's going to take us forward. So, I want to thank you, doctor – you and your whole team for always making these decisions with us based on what we are seeing, the pure hard facts, and those facts will actually give us what we need to protect the people of this city. And that leads us perfectly to our daily indicators. Indicator number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19, the threshold is 200 patients – today's report, 78 patients. And the confirmed positive rate for COVID for those patients is 10 percent. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average, threshold is 550 cases – today's report, 213. Number three, percentage of people testing citywide positive for COVID-19, the threshold is five percent – today's report, 1.09 percent.

Now, a few words 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 Commissioner Chokshi, Deputy Director of the New York City Census Amit Bagga, and Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. First question today goes to Erin from Politico.

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

**Moderator:** We will now begin our Q and A as a reminder, we're joined today by Commissioner Chokshi, Deputy Director of the New York City Census Amit Bagga, and Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. First question today goes to Erin from Politico.

**Question:** Good morning. I think a question about the homeless men who were moved out of the hotel we understand that your Social Services Commissioner Steve Banks opposed this policy. I'm wondering, is that accurate and if so, why did you disagree with his view?

**Mayor:** No, it's not accurate. It's just not accurate. It's been an ongoing conversation, and one of the things – and I've talked to Commissioner Banks about our bigger policy approach here for now over three years has been to get out of hotels to get folks into shelter facilities. The only disruption we had was at the worst of the pandemic, and now the – thank God, the worst is behind us, and as has been reported, there's fewer and fewer people in shelter, more room to work with. It's exactly the time to start getting out of hotels.

**Question:** Okay, thank you and then a question about indoor dining. Dr. Chokshi sort of threw out the question that everyone's wondering about – is it safe? I just didn't hear a direct answer. I'm just wondering, you know, as a map for guidance, do you think that this is a safe activity for people to engage in? Would you recommend people go to their restaurants indoor when this happens? And also that two percent trigger has the governor agreed to that? It sounds like that's a reassess as opposed to a front trigger, like with the school. So what exactly is the policy on that?

**Mayor:** Okay, let me speak to the second part and then they can speak to the first part there about his advice to people, how to approach indoor dining and look, again, I'm someone who

loves deeply going to the restaurants of our city. I am thrilled at the notion that restaurants can start to open up indoors, but I'm first and foremost concerned about the health and safety of all New Yorkers and moving the whole city forward, and that's why I take a very cautious view here. So Dave can talk to you about the individual experience. I'll talk to you about the overall situation. We had good conversations with the State. I will be very clear, the City took a very conservative position on this matter, and I'm the person who believes we need to be conservative and cautious. So from my point of view, I think you're right, Erin, to say there was not a hard and fast rule in the state guidance. It was an acknowledgement of an infection rate between two and three percent triggers a reevaluation of the whole situation. I think it should be that if we get to two percent, we pause because if we're already at two percent, it means something's moving in the wrong direction and we need to take quick measures to stop that from growing. So I want to be very clear about that: job one is to beat back this disease successfully, so all of New York City can come back to life. Go ahead, Dave, in terms of the individual diner experience.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** I would echo that caution that you're mentioning, Mr. Mayor, for the individual dining experience as well. So the things that will make it more safe are the ones that that we've described, but it's very important that there is a strong adherence to those measures. The most important ones are ensuring that there is sufficient distance between tables, at least six feet, making sure that people are wearing their masks and face coverings, except when they're unable to, because they are eating and drinking, and really importantly, making sure that we take the steps to protect the staff who are in restaurants, you know, who are there almost every day for their occupation. So all of those things taken together will help make it a more safe dining experience, and then we have to continually monitor as the Mayor has said,

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

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

**Question:** Hi, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Hey Dana.

**Question:** Two questions. First, yesterday you said you could empty the Lucerne of homeless people because it was safe now to return to some of them to shelters. If the number of homeless, single adults increases during COVID, would you do consider moving those who need shelter back into the Lucerne?

**Mayor:** Let me go beyond the question of the Lucerne, Dana, we are going to be focused on the health and safety of all New Yorkers, including of course homeless New Yorkers, depending on what happens with the healthcare situation. These decisions of course are made by the leadership of our social services agencies, working with our health agencies and what happened, which I think was unexpected is the number of people in shelter declined substantially. So there was a lot more space in our traditional shelters and we have different kinds congregate and non-congregate, but the point being, we had space available in the places where services are provided, where we expect to be able to do the best to support homeless folks. We never intended to be in hotels on a long-term basis. In fact, our policy is the opposite. So we would like

to be out of hotels. I mentioned not only the Lucerne in the Upper West Side, but we have the situation in Queensbridge in Queens, Southeast Queens as well. We want to get out of hotels progressively, but if the healthcare situation never demanded that we needed to use hotels again, of course we would.

**Question:** Thank you, and then on a different topic, as far as schools reopening, I mean, what, what, what should parents expect in terms of how many positive cases – I mean, invariably there will be some positive cases, right? So how many should be expected during the first few weeks of school and what numbers would constitute like a success or a failure? Like how many is okay and how many, you know, becomes problematic?

**Mayor:** Right. Two very fair, very fair questions, Dana, that everyday people will have every right to think about and ask. But I think both are hard to give you a very tangible answer to for real reasons. First what do we expect? We don't have a perfect way to expect here. It really depends so much on individuals. You've got, I think folks in the school communities who are really going out of their way to be careful you know, we're emphasizing strongly that people need to watch for symptoms get tested in advance. I think people are doing that. So I think you're going to see a lot of care taken in terms of health and safety, and that makes me hopeful that although you're right, of course there will be some cases it's normal that there would be – that, you know, we'll see a good experience here.

In terms of, you know, what kind of standard to hold for the whole system, I think we're going into something that is different than any experience that we've had before. Of course there will be days where, you know, you'll find a case in the classroom in the classroom has to be shut down. There'll be even some times when a school has to be shut down, but it's a temporary reality, and then people come back and proceed. I think you'll see many schools where that doesn't happen. So there's not an easy way to have a standard. What really matters here is to keep everyone safe, to make sure kids get the best education possible, to provide that support, to working families, that they are desperately asking us for to make sure that kids get both a good education and have a safe place to be. That's the mission, and I'm convinced that we can go through with that mission in a safe fashion.

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

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

**Mayor:** Good, Michael, how you been?

**Question:** Okay, so a couple of things, the first question I had goes back to the Lucerne, and you, you suggested it's part of, kind of a broader plan to get out of hotels. I'm wondering if you could give us some more detail on what the timeline is for that. Do you have, is there a schedule that DHS is putting together as far as moving people from hotels and back into shelters? What's can you give us a sense of what the plan is on that?

**Mayor:** Yeah, that's, that's, what's being worked on right now, but I'll tell you Michael, the Turning the Tide policy, which goes back to April 2017, is what's operative here. The

coronavirus obviously created a very particular condition that we had to address for the health and safety of homeless folks. But again, thank God that situation is changing and improving, and we've had three months plus where we've been in a much better, stronger position and it, this unusual, unexpected reality of shelter population going down noticeably and, you know, in a very major way in the meantime. So what Homeless Services is doing right now is determining a whole series of actions to align back to that policy, and the work has never stopped. We have said from the beginning we want to get out of hotels. We want to get out of cluster buildings. Even through this crisis, Homeless Services has continued to get out of clusters and continued the work of closing down those facilities. So yes, there will be more and the specifics are being worked through right now. Go ahead.

**Question:** Then the other question I had was on indoor dining and it seemed from kind of how things played out yesterday that when you made your remarks yesterday morning, that it wasn't clear that indoor dining was going to be announced by the Governor's Office, and I was wondering if you could tell us when exactly like, did the Governor's Office reach out to your administration or you to let you know, we're going to announce this today?

**Mayor:** Sure. That, as I said, the conversations at very high levels have been going on for weeks. So I do want to be clear on this – lots of back and forth between the City and State, comparing different options, comparing different models. I'm very clear if city consistently took a conservative position on health and safety, and we believe that we should be very careful here because of the history around the world, and Dr. Chokshi has been one of the leading voices saying, be careful. Dr. Varma as well, be careful because of what we're seeing around the world that should give us pause. But there were very productive conversations that went on for quite a while after my press conference yesterday, I'd say sometime in the hour or so after that, the State made clear that they felt they were ready. We expressed our view as the City and they went forward with the policy. Again, very happy there will be indoor dining. That is a very good thing, but the most important mission here is to keep this whole city safe. So as we proceed with indoor dining, we're going to constantly be careful and cautious, and if we see a problem we're going to call it out because we have to keep the city safe and we have to keep the city moving forward.

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

**Question:** Hey, good morning. Mr. Mayor. So my question again is about indoor dining, and I know that the Governor yesterday said that it excludes bars, but under the Governor and the State and the City's guidelines, bars have to serve food. So I think the question is what will happen after October 31st too, you know, bars that can't open indoors by September 30th, but what happens to those bars? They're not restaurants. I mean, some of them are serving like hotdogs and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, but will they have an opportunity to have some guidelines about how they could also open?

**Mayor:** I'll start and turn to Dr. Chokshi and Dr. Varma. Look I – we've expressed concerns consistently to the State about indoor dining with restaurants. We've expressed even deeper concerns about bars and nightclubs. If restaurants have been a challenge around the world, bars and nightclubs have been a profound problem around the world and the cause for so many



resurgences, and we're just not going to allow a resurgence here, if there's anything we can do to stop it. So my view and my understanding is that bars are entirely separate here. Yeah, of course they can do the outdoor dining as long as that's available and they can do the takeout, but that they're going to be treated differently in terms of indoor, but Dr. Chokshi and then see if Dr. Varma has anything as well.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Yes, that's exactly right. Bars and nightclubs are in one of the highest categories of risk when it comes to coronavirus transmission, and so we have to proceed with the utmost caution there. When we look at the weight of the evidence that we have about how this has worked around the world, and, you know, we're paying particular attention to the resurgences that we're seeing in Europe. In Spain and France, in Italy and the UK, many of those cases can be traced back to bars and nightclubs. That's true more broadly across the world as well, including in Asia. So these are all reasons for us to make sure that we bring a very cautious approach to that.

**Mayor:** Yeah. Dr. Varma, you want to add anything?

**Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma:** Nothing for me to add.

**Mayor:** Okay, go ahead, Katie.

**Question:** And my second question is about some high profile departures from your administration this week. I know Kathryn Garcia resigned. She had a bunch of jobs. She was very pointed in her resignation letter. Your Deputy Commissioner for Health and Human Services resigned on the same day. I'm reading about some DOE departures. You know, I know you have still more than a year left of your tenure, but I'm curious if there's should be some concern for everyday New Yorkers that there are people kind of heading for the exits and especially people with very important pivotal jobs. I don't know if I've heard of, who's going to replace Dr. Perea-Henze for his position. So we just want to speak, you know, is it I guess, is it a crisis of leadership of people just sort of fleeing your administration—

**Mayor:** Katie, Katie. I think you're leading the witness, Katie. No, of course not – this is a huge operation with a very deep bench. There's plenty of talented people here. There's plenty of leadership. I mean, I really have to emphasize having now done this for almost seven years, how extraordinarily strong the city government in New York City is, how many talented people are here, including folks who have given their entire life and career to the City of New York, no lack of talent. Some people are leaving after fully seven straight years of doing this work. That's a long, long time to be on the firing line doing such intense work. It's totally normal that people will seek other opportunities at a certain point, but deep bench, plenty of talent available to step up, and we'll announce new appointees as they're ready.

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

**Question:** Hello, Mr. Mayor. How are you doing today?

**Mayor:** Good Henry. How about you?

**Question:** Doing pretty well. I have a question that the census, which of course getting very acute when you needed to test people in Sunset Park, you threw out all these numbers, 400,000 phone calls. You knocked on tens of thousands of doors, tested 10,000 people. Why can't a similar effort be done to collect census signatures, particularly in those zip codes where there's very low compliance so far.

**Mayor:** Well, I'm happy to say that's exactly what's been happening for months, and we have the Deputy Director of the Census with us, Amit Bagga. I've actually been out with Amit, going door to door in Queens seeing the direct frontline efforts, which are extraordinary and the work that's happening with community organizations all over the city. So Amit, why don't you give a flavor of that, but also some of the numbers of just how extensive the outreach has been over recent months.

**Deputy Director Amit Bagga, NYC Census:** Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor, and a great question. As the Mayor mentioned, our outreach has been very extensive over the last several months. Immediately when COVID hit we pivoted to doing a very significant amount of phone banking and also text banking using a peer-to-peer texting platform. Through our phone banking platform, we have now called – we've placed more than three million calls to New Yorkers to remind them about the census, and through our texting service, we have now also sent more than five million texts. Collectively we have reached hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers directly, and I can get you the exact number immediately after the avail, and what this has shown us is that even despite the fact that we were unable to do conduct in person outreach as a result of COVID-19, that the tactics that we have implemented have been successful in reaching New Yorkers despite the situation that we find ourselves in. I should also note that for the last several months, our team, as well as the teams of our complete count fund awardees have been visiting food distribution sites, dozens and dozens of food distribution sites across the city where we are working with New Yorkers and linguistically and culturally competent ways to help them fill out the census, in person, onsite in real time. We've helped thousands of New Yorkers complete the census in this way. And while it's been devastating to see just the desperation and the food insecurity as a result of the pandemic, we've been able to ensure that we are helping New Yorkers in need complete the census in that way.

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

**Question:** Okay, I just – I'm curious as to why it's still seems to be an acute problem that I want to go into –

**Mayor:** Well actually, Henry, can I stop you? I want to hear your next question, but I want to just say the challenge always is that people are always hesitant - it's understandable – to engage on something like the census. I mean, when you look at the national rate, it's telling why is the country after all this, not even to two thirds, we're talking about the combined average of the entire country, because a lot of people are not comfortable opening their door or taking that call or giving up their information, but on top of that, the incessant efforts to discourage particularly immigrants, of course that's having a toll here. It's been for months. Remember when there has going to be a citizenship question, which hadn't existed for 70 years on the census? Suddenly

President Trump insisted on the citizenship question. There's been a lot of messages that have discouraged people from participating. I want to give credit to the census team, to Amit and to Julie Menin, who's running it and the whole team. They've been fighting back against those headwinds and actually making a lot of progress and with everyone's lives dislocated by the pandemic. It's hard to get people to focus on the census, but increasingly they're getting that done. So I do think it's natural that it's a problem and made worse by Washington, but we got to overcome it over the next three weeks. Go ahead, Henry.

**Question:** [Inaudible].

**Mayor:** Wait, go ahead, Amit.

**Deputy Director Bagga:** [Inaudible] So Henry, I just want to point out over the course of the last several months, if you look at the trajectory of New York City increase in terms of sense of self response, we are outpacing every other [inaudible] in the nation. Between May and the end of August, our self response increased by close to 13 percentage points and our closest competitors, is Fresno and I believe El Paso, who're actually several percentage points behind us. And I actually think it's worth noting that as of yesterday, we are now ahead of Chicago, which was four to six percentage points ahead of us this entire time. So what we know is that the tactics that we have been deploying on the ground, phone banking, text banking, in person interactions, very heavy advertising as well, thanks to the Mayor's leadership and his investment on the census really have been working.

**Question:** Thank you for that. My next question has to do with the budget and the looming layoffs and your resistance to the Citizen's Budget Commission, which you feel is to austere in their point of view, but what's more austere than cutting back – cutting the [inaudible] in Parks, or cutting the police department or the EMT personnel. I mean, what they're calling for basically is to reduce the workforce by roughly 9,000 people, which is less than half of what's attrited every year. They're calling for some union agreements that would contribute to their health insurance premiums like everyone else does. And they're talking about a minimal property tax increase of they're claiming two percent would raise almost \$700 million. So maybe you could make it one percent and raise \$350 million. And I – you've got their resistance, the CBCs resistance to the borrowing authority. Maybe if you had them helping you leverage support for the borrowing authority you could get that done as well.

**Mayor:** Listen, I don't – I respect a CBC, worked with them over the years. Don't happen to agree with them on many things and I don't think they are the kind of force that changes hearts and minds in Albany. The fact is the things you talked about, the workforce of this city allows us to provide services to people that make this city strong. We have plenty of evidence of it because up until February, the city was extraordinarily strong, strongest economy we've ever had, most jobs we've ever had. So many things were working and it was because we had a strong public workforce. The notion of wanting to continue to cut back the public workforce, that is austerity thinking. That is the philosophy of the Citizens Budget Commission, and a lot of other corporate voices and other voices in this city, and I think it's a misunderstanding of what allows the city to be strong. Public service employment has worked for this city, but the fact is if we need to find the resources, a property tax would be absolutely horrible - that property tax increase – people

can't afford a property tax increase in this city, no way, no how. So many people have been hurt by the coronavirus crisis, lost their jobs. So many families stretched thin. We are not raising property taxes in New York City. So I reject that out of hand. I reject the notion that a smaller public workforce is a good thing. I believe fully in getting as much savings as possible from the labor community and we've proven that can happen with health care savings, and we're going to do more.

But here's, what's just broken in this whole discussion. The amount of borrowing we've asked for us is \$5 billion that would be used over two fiscal years, when you compare that to an \$88 billion budget. When you think about that borrowing being paid back on a 30-year term, I mean, there's not a real serious investigation here of what this means, because if people are going to be serious about it, that borrowing is going to have a very limited effect on the immediate financial reality in New York City, but it's going to have a huge effect on our ability to serve the people and restart our economy and keep people from losing their jobs. So – I'm sorry, I – this one is just really straight forward. It's not the 1970s, it's nowhere near the 1970s. We just need to have an honest conversation about what a small financial addition, the \$5 billion in borrowing is, but what a big impact it could make at this crucial moment, moving us forward as a city, and then hopefully an actual federal stimulus is out there, possibly in a new administration, which then would make the borrowing moot. And I want to emphasize that, if the right stimulus comes along, we don't need to borrow, we don't want to borrow. The only reason we're going for borrowing is for lack of other options, but if those other options appear, we don't need to borrow. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** The next is Julia from the New York Post.

**Question:** Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor. I just wanted to go back to something you said about indoor dining. You said about an hour after your press conference yesterday that State called to make clear that they were ready and we expressed our view, was your view that you didn't think the city was ready for indoor dining and will you yourself dine indoors on September 30th or shortly after?

**Mayor:** So one, again, the idea of indoor dining coming back is a good thing. Our concerns were around a couple of areas, one the start date, given so much else that's coming back right now, concern that we pace things that we make sure that as we bring back one part of life of the city that we have time to see the impact of that, and then bring back the next and the next and the next. So there is some real focus there on trying to get that piece right. And then again, the threshold point. I mean, I think the two percent is the kind of level at which we really would need to take action. So that was the back and forth, and, you know, my team and I expressed our real thoughts and concerns there. As for indoor dining, I'm sure it will be done properly, and of course I'd be comfortable dealing with it because if it's done the right way for everyone, you know, that's what we want to see happen. Go ahead.

**Question:** And then yesterday Congressman Max Rose called you the worst mayor in the city's history, given that he's an elected official from your own party what's your reaction to that?

**Mayor:** He's a politician running for office and he's wrong. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** We have time for two more for today. The next is Alex Zimmerman from Chalkbeat.

**Question:** Hi, Mr. Mayor. I wanted to go back to the positive cases that were confirmed by the city yesterday in two different public schools. I'm wondering what the total is now in terms of the number of schools that have at least one confirmed case. And what is the plan to release this information publicly gone forward?

**Mayor:** Alex, obviously school hasn't begun yet. We're going to find out each day when there's new cases and take appropriate action, including testing trace activity, but we've said very clearly once school begins, there is a regular process for updating the public on what's happening in each school. That's been delineated previously, if it's a specific classroom that has to be shut down or even something bigger, we'll report that daily.

**Question:** But I mean, there are teachers and schools now, so it does seem important to know like what the city's plan is to release this information publicly given that the city is confirming some cases, and just a follow-up to that is you know, I'm just curious, sort of what the process is here in terms of being notified of positive cases. Like, is it up to the person who tests positive to tell their principal? Like, what if they don't do that? Like, what is the – how is the city supposed to be made aware of these cases in the first place?

**Mayor:** I'll start and Dr. Choksi can add. Obviously it's a combination, the individual gets directly notified but we have a protocol to make sure that we can tell when there's a case in the school and act on it. Go ahead, doctor.

**Commissioner Chokshi:** Yes, sir. That's right. We have multiple information streams. Certainly, you know, if, if someone self reports, that's something that we'll take in to our system. We have other ways of finding out about positive cases, positive test results because all of those get reported to to the Health Department as well. So we take those multiple information streams and we move as quickly as possible based on that information to start with the investigations and the contact tracing after that.

**Mayor:** Go ahead.

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

**Question:** Hey, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** How are you doing Dave?

**Question:** Great. Everything's great, right? So couple days ago, I spoke with Jumaane Williams about a bike crash that he got into. Last week I got hit by a driver, make a left turn to this awful, chaotic intersection down at Bay Ridge. And he told me that he's really worried when he rides his bike on the streets, that it's scary out there is how he put it. So I'm just curious if even the

Public Advocate doesn't feel safe riding on city streets, you know, what does it say about what the city is doing to make the streets safer for everyday New Yorkers?

**Mayor:** Well, Dave, you know the philosophy of Vision Zero on this is something I instituted in this city, and I'm a big believer in the approach that we constantly have to improve safety. And we know that so many things have worked, speed cameras have worked, all the additional enforcement activity has worked. Clearly as we've expanded bike lanes, giving more and safer options. And the restructuring of intersections, you know, redesigning all sorts of pieces have been working and just need to continue and deepen constantly. That's the entire philosophy of Vision Zero. And I think when you consider how extraordinarily crowded this city is, that we have proven through these aggressive strategies you can really make things safer, but they never stop. They have to keep growing all the time. Go ahead.

**Question:** I guess, to make things move faster [inaudible] protected bike lanes [inaudible].

**Mayor:** Dave. Dave, I can't hear you. Just slow down a second. I couldn't hear that.

**Question:** I said, you're talking about the Public Advocate is saying I'm not comfortable riding out there. He's a pretty visible city presence. What does that say about what other people are feeling when they're riding [inaudible]?

**Mayor:** Again, Dave, I think there are so many people in this city who are using their bicycles and understand, even though it's a crowded city, you know, a lot has been done to try and improve the experience for in the safety for bike riders and for pedestrians. That's the whole idea of Vision Zero. We have to just constantly add to it. The reality of this city, this big, intense, crowded place is that, thank God we have vision zero as a strategy. If we didn't, we'd be in much worse shape. And the beauty of the Vision Zero approach is it is evergreen. It keeps moving. It keeps growing all the time. We have to keep adding improvements all the time. And so, you know, I think people can see that and feel that, and they'll make their own choices, of course, but as a matter of how we move forward, that's what will work for New York City.

Okay, everyone, first of all, just want to note because of course the 9/11 Memorial, there will not be one of these press conferences tomorrow, and we'll be focused on remembering the folks we lost. But you know, it's also another moment to say, you think back – think back to that generation of New Yorkers, you think back to those heroes, you think back to the compassion of everyday New Yorkers in that moment of crisis. People all over this country and all over this world watched, and they were in awe of New York City. There was incredible feeling for New York City. There was respect. And people grieved with us, but they also admired New York City in that moment of crisis. And now we find ourselves in a new and different crisis. And once again, people all over this country, people all over this world are looking at this city with tremendous awe. How has a city that was the epicenter of the crisis now become one of the safest places in the entire country? It is because of you and you are doing as that 9/11 generation did. You're showing that strength, that resiliency, that feeling for your fellow New Yorker, that compassion, you're doing something. And it is day after day after day our calling to overcome this disease and bring this city back to its fullest potential and its potential as always as great. But

we look at the heroes of 19 years ago and today a new generation of heroes is bringing this city forward. Thank you.

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