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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall. After days of asking for permission to vaccinate more New Yorkers today, Mayor de Blasio got his wish. The Mayor visited a couple of vaccination sites today on our first day of eligibility for the 1-B category, which includes New Yorkers, 75 and older, as well as transit workers, public safety personnel, and teachers among others. de Blasio says that at least 175,000 people will be vaccinated this week, and at that rate, a million will receive doses by the end of the month if we have enough of the vaccines to cover those people. The Mayor joins me now for our weekly Mondays with the Mayor conversation from the Blue Room inside City Hall. Good evening, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good evening, Errol. How are you doing?

Louis: Just fine, thank you, and I wanted to start by asking, how did the first day of vaccine expansion work? Are things going smoothly, what are the concerns that you're hearing at this point?

Mayor: Errol, I've got to tell you, it was just really positive out there today. A very, very hopeful day for New York City. I was out at Hillcrest High School in Queens and out at the Police Academy, also in Queens, and, I got to tell you people were excited. The seniors I talked to, I talked to a 97-year-old woman, amazing woman, Marcia from Southeast Queens, who was so positive about finally getting this vaccine. She had such a sense of relief. I mean, imagine 97 years old and just, it meant so much to her, to so many others that are seniors. So many of the other seniors said to me that they were so worried because of COVID and the minute they got this vaccine, they felt hopeful. They felt like they were going to get through it, and I talked to of course police officers at the Academy, and what I heard there Errol was folks who, you know, are they're putting their lives on the line for us. They're protecting us. They're performing CPR, they're stopping overdoses with Narcan, they're at the frontline. What they said was it gave them confidence to have the vaccine that they could go out and do their job, but also that they could tell their families that they were safe. It was very powerful. So, I think this just proves how this was exactly the right thing to do. We're going to have a great week, 175,000 minimum this week, all over the city, and what's clear is now that we're into folks over 75, there's clearly a lot of demand. That's over half a million New Yorkers over 75 and they want this vaccine.

Louis: Okay. You raised the NYPD and I know that there are different estimates of the percentage of people at the NYPD and elsewhere, city workers who are not comfortable with taking the vaccine for whatever reason, and we've danced around this question, but I wanted to

get a direct answer from you. To what extent can you, as the Mayor, order a mandate that city workers at Health + Hospitals, or the NYPD or other agencies take the vaccine?

Mayor: Well, it's a fair question, legally Errol, but I'm going to answer you from the perspective of the decision I've made at least to date. I'm not going to do that. I don't think that's the right way to proceed. We'll see if things change down the line, but right now I can tell you is voluntary is the right approach. A lot of people obviously do want this vaccine. For those who are hesitant, I think the vast majority are not going to be hesitant for long. I think they want to see other people take it and make sure it's okay. They want to feel a little more confidence. I think ultimately you get a couple more months into this thing and the vast, vast majority of going to want the vaccine. I would much rather do this on a voluntary basis. So, people feel confidence in what they're doing.

Louis: Have you spoken with your counsel or the Corporation Counsel about what you can do if it should come to that? Because I mean, even if even five percent of the city workforce said, you know, I don't want to do it, or it's not my priority or I'm not comfortable with it, you're talking about, you know, 15,000 people.

Mayor: Yeah. It's just not the way I look at it. The way I look at is for this to work, it has to be something people believe in. Look, there's been so much pain and so many challenges in this crisis. I think at this point we want people to feel comfortable. We want them to feel that they have the answers they need, and it's not unfair that some people just want to take their time, but there's so many other people that want the vaccine. In the real world, and I know you're a pragmatic person, Errol, in the real-world problems could be lack of vaccine at the rate we're going, we're going to be out in two weeks or so, and if we don't start to get bigger resupplies, you know, we're talking about a constantly escalating level of giving vaccines here, a hundred thousand this last week, we hit that goal. We're going to hit 175,000 this week. By the last week of January, it could be 400,000 we can do in a week. The question is going to be, is there going to be vaccine to actually achieve our goals?

Louis: What is the answer to that? We're hearing from Washington that the incoming Biden administration is going to release all of the vaccines, the Trump administration had been holding some back for the follow-up shots or something like that. So, if everything is released, do you still expect there to be a shortage or a bottleneck?

Mayor: I cannot tell you Errol how happy I am that in, you know, just over a week, I'll be dealing with Joe Biden and the Biden administration where I know I'll get good, clear answers. I know they want to move this. He has a very aggressive vision of moving vaccines. That's making me hopeful, but I'll tell you something. I can't give a vaccine unless I have it in my hand, right? I mean, we have to have evidence, not just to have the intentions, but the ability to get them to us in time. So I'm hopeful, but I remind all New Yorkers when you're talking at the end of January, we're doing 400,000 people in a week and we keep that pace up – we might even be able to increase that pace – we're going to need a really steady supply, because I know the over 75 folks, again, that's over half a million New Yorkers, but folks over 65 and folks with pre-existing conditions, they're in the next category. They want the vaccine too. I want to keep making it go faster and faster, but we're going to need a really substantial supply to make that work.

Louis: Yeah, in fact, speaking of who's eligible, can you clarify for us, are grocery store workers currently eligible to get the vaccine and you know, delivery workers as well, sometimes they're one in the same.

Mayor: Yeah, it's a good question, and we're looking for a little more guidance from the state, because I know that folks in the grocery industry, supermarkets are supposed to be covered under essential workers, but we're looking for a little more definition to make sure it is everyone who does that work. My basic sense is the answer is yes. But we should have some more clarity on that tomorrow.

Louis: Mr. Mayor, did you, at any point consider just running the vaccination campaign the way that made sense to you and just pay whatever fines the state wanted to impose? Like it reminds me of the idea of the guy whose wife is in labor and he's driving her to the hospital. It's okay to run a couple of red lights because the ticket is not your main concern at that point.

Mayor: Well, of course I was very frustrated last week, Errol. I just didn't understand why the state wouldn't allow our seniors over 75, that most vulnerable group of people, why they wouldn't allow him to be vaccinated, and obviously police officers, educators, essential workers, but I'll tell you something. We do rely on the state to actually get the allotment of the vaccine. So, it's always a balance. It's not like that analogy of driving to the hospital. It's actually, unfortunately, a lot more complicated. What was clear to me was the best thing I could do for seniors and police officers and teachers and grocery store workers was to speak up and county executives all over the state did the same, Democrat and Republican, upstate, downstate. There was a cacophony directly at the state government saying, give us the freedom to vaccinate, and now that we have it, it is night and day. I mean, out there in Queens today – the relief, people felt was palpable. The hope they felt was so, so clear, so powerful. So, I often think the best way to get something done is just build that coalition that becomes irresistible, and that's what happened last week.

Louis: I read, Mr. Mayor, that Israeli vaccination sites allow non-priority people to queue up at the end of the day for a chance. They may not get it, but they can perhaps get a dose rather than allow the vaccine to be wasted or allow it to spoil. Does New York City have any provisions for those kinds of measures?

Mayor: I don't think we're going to have that reality based on what I've seen with my own eyes yesterday at the Bathgate site in the Bronx, today at Hillcrest in Queens – that's not what I'm seeing. What I'm seeing is a highly organized appointment system. Everyone knows when their time is, there's plenty of vaccine. There's plenty of people who want the vaccine. So, it's not a situation where any vaccine is going to go to waste. We don't want people in lines unless they're there with the reservation, just waiting to get to their time slot. We don't want to see people just show up. That's not going to be helpful.

So, look, I think all New Yorkers who now qualify for the vaccine, best thing to do is go online, or now you can call, and I want to give the information once again, Errol, nyc.gov/vaccinefinder – that's the place to go get all the information about if you qualify, see the locations, make an

appointment, or for those who prefer the phone, obviously a lot of our seniors do: 877- VAX-4NYC. Again, VAX-4NYC.

Louis: Will there be a point where a 3-1-1 operators are trained to be able to help seniors and others navigate through this process.

Mayor: This has been a whole – good question, it's been a separate operation on purpose. 3-1-1 has so much that they need to cover. We don't want to overwhelm them. Right now, at the start of the day, we had about 750 customer service representatives on this dedicated vaccine line that number's going to grow undoubtedly. It's daytime hours into the evening now, it's going to go to 24/7. Look, this thing's just going to grow and grow and grow very rapidly. But I want people to be able to go on that number, call, make an appointment, if that's easier for them and know that, then they go at a very specific time. I don't want a lot of people waiting in line for long periods of time or hoping they get an appointment. I want people to know they have an appointment.

Louis: Okay, fair enough. Let's take a short break. We'll be back with Mayor de Blasio in just a minute. Stay with us.

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Louis: Welcome back to Inside City Hall, and I'm once again joined by Mayor Bill de Blasio. He's in the Blue Room inside City Hall. Mr. Mayor, it has been reported that the NYPD Intelligence Division sent the Capitol Police and other law enforcement agencies, a packet that described threats and violent rhetoric on social media in the weeks and days leading up to that rally and attack last week. Can you confirm that?

Mayor: I don't have the details on that honestly, Errol, but that's the kind of thing that happens all the time. Our Intelligence Division works with the FBI and the Joint Terrorism Task Force on all sorts of matters. And you remember we talked about this in the last year, more of a focus on domestic terrorism that – ethnically and racially motivated terrorism. That's what the Intelligence Division has been doing more and more in the last year or two. So, it certainly follows that they would be getting that kind of information and sharing it with the FBI.

Louis: Information coming back the other way, there was a warning today from the FBI about protests, some involving armed individuals over the next few weeks. What's the NYPD telling you about that? And what should New Yorkers know about the threat of terrorism here?

Mayor: Right now, there are no specific threats directed at New York City, nothing specific and tangible. The threats appeared to be focused on state capitals, so I'm certainly concerned about Albany whether they may have a problem up there, but right now nothing that would affect New York City. But if we get those kinds of threats or see information, the public needs to know, I'm certainly going to put it out there immediately.

Louis: You mentioned today that any city workers that are found to have engaged in illegal conduct with relationship to that attack on the Capitol will be severed from city service. There have been other reports of law enforcement and other well – former military members and others

taking part in the riots, do you think there's a problem in this country with radicalization, I guess in certain organizations?

Mayor: Yeah, of course. It's not widespread, in my opinion, but it's a problem nonetheless. There are some police officers who in this city and in this country are out and out racist. They should not be police officers. There are some police officers, soldiers who believe in a white supremacy, they should not be police officers or part of our military by definition. Everything involved in a white supremacist worldview goes against the values of the United States of America. So, there are people who should not be in those positions. That's different than folks who happen to have a conservative philosophy or, you know, be members of a particular political party. I'm talking about folks who believe vehemently in an ideology that leads to hatred, that leads to violence. Those folks need to be identified and gotten out of law enforcement and out of the military. And I believe the vast majority of law enforcement leaders and military leaders would agree with that statement. But anyone who participated in the attack on the Capitol should not have a job in public service anywhere in America, they should be drummed out of their jobs immediately.

Louis: Are you – I don't know what the particular arrangements are –but are you planning to go to the inauguration?

Mayor: No, it's -- you know, what I understand and is this is being done so differently than anything that any of us have seen before and that the incoming Biden administration is discouraging folks from attending in-person from other parts of the country. Folks in Washington, obviously that's different, but no, I will be here watching for sure. I'm very, very happy to see Joe Biden be our president, I especially because I know he's going to help us get the vaccine we need. I know he cares about this deeply. I know he's totally angry and frustrated at the slow pace set by the Trump Administration. So I'm excited for January 20th at noon to get here as quickly as possible.

Louis: Okay and you know the channel to watch it on.

Mayor: Of course.

Louis: Let me shift topics to the State of the State, I guess, introductory remarks that were made today by Governor Cuomo. Did you hear anything that's going to work well for New York City, and in particular, do you support legalizing sports gambling?

Mayor: Look, I think like many people, I always worry about gambling and the effect it has on people and the addictive behavior that it can lead to for some people. And, you know, obviously gambling, particularly afflicts folks would fewer resources that worries me. On the other hand, of course, we see it all around us and like so many other things there comes a time when you say, well, if this can bring in resources that allow the public sector to do some good for people maybe that's the pragmatic choice. So, you know, I'm not thrilled about it, but I see some practical value.

Louis: And one other proposal that was put out without a lot of details was this notion of converting vacant commercial space into affordable and supportive housing. What'd you think of that?

Mayor: Well, look, I think in terms of direction, that sounds sensible to me. I know the Governor talked about that today, Eric Adams had talked about that previously, look, if it turns out that there are a lot of buildings available that would have previously gone to something else and they can be appropriately converted, either to affordable housing or homeless facilities or whatever, of course we need to look at that, but the question is going to be the resources to pay for that, especially in the middle of a fiscal crisis. So, I want to emphasize, I agree with the Governor when he said let's push Washington to tax the wealthy. Couldn't agree with that more. In a 50-50 Senate, I don't think I would be a cynic to say that's not going to be easy. I think what we need to do is take the bull by the horns right here in New York State and tax the wealthy right here. The wealthy in this state have prospered during the coronavirus crisis. The rich have literally gotten richer, and by a lot, you just have to look at the stock market to know that. I want to see everyone in Albany come together to ensure the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes and I think there's a lot of energy in the legislature to get that done. That's something we know will happen. Washington, always a question mark, but we could get it done here in New York State?

Louis: Yeah. I mean, when that comes up, the question is always who are we talking about? So the Governor gave some numbers for, if we taxed everyone would be making income of over a million dollars a year, and then a little bit later I saw on social media, in fact it was Monica Klein your former aid, who put out numbers saying, well, if we just taxed everybody – every household making over \$300,000, which is a very, very different kind of a situation. I mean, that's two, you know, two mid-level or senior civil servants will get you to \$300,000 fairly quickly.

Mayor: Yeah. I share that concern, you know, middle-class people, public servants, you're right. You know, you could be talking about teachers, cops, firefighters, you could be talking about a whole range of people who serve us, and a lot of middle-class families that you know, have been dealing with a lot of challenge in this crisis. So, I think we have to be careful about where we set that bar. But what we do know, let's just make it simple as a basic concept, millionaires and billionaires have done really well. Those are folks who could afford to pay a little bit more. They're certainly not paying their fair share. They got a massive tax break from Donald Trump a couple of years ago. If you want to make this discussion simple, just talk about millionaires and billionaires who are not paying their fair share, come on, and they've gotten a lot richer in the last few months, help everyone else out so we can create that affordable housing we were talking about.

Louis: Okay, we're going to leave it there now. Thanks so much for spending some time. We'll speak again real soon.

Mayor: Thank you, Errol.

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