

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. Yesterday, even though, very, very hot, still a beautiful day. And I had the real pleasure of being out on Governors Island with Senator Chuck Schumer, Congressman Jerry Nadler, and our team here from the City government, Deputy Mayor Vicki Been, and Clare Newman who runs the Trust for Governors Island. Amazing announcement yesterday that has huge ramifications for the future in New York City, a global competition, a global competition, to ensure that New York City is the leader, the global leader, in fighting climate change. This is something that we need to do for our children and our grandchildren, lead the way in the fight against global warming. But it's also something that will continue New York's power and meaning as a global capital. This is the issue facing humanity. We all know it, but the solutions are not coming on fast enough. And we have so much more to do to ensure the right solutions are ready and they are acted on quickly. We need a single focal point and to have in New York Harbor, the globally recognized center for addressing climate solutions, that will be a difference maker for the future of New York City. So, a global competition has begun welcoming in academic partners and a variety of organizations to help us build something that the Earth needs desperately, a single place where the solutions are determined, research tested, and so important in an urban environment where so many people in this world live in a coastal environment threatened by climate change. This will make New York City the place to turn when you're looking for climate solutions.

So, in the next months, we're expecting organizations and academic institutions all over the world to apply for the opportunity to lead the way on Governors Island. Remember, this is the place where New York City, as we know it today began, on Governors Island, 400 years ago. Now the place that will lead the way to our future. Also, a lot of jobs will be created in the process, green jobs, good jobs. This city, we all know there's more talent here than any place in the world. And therefore, this is the place to innovate the solutions of the future. Such an important moment, and I want you to hear from someone that I've known for a long time. He has been talking about global warming for literally decades. He was way ahead of the curve, recognizing the problem and the challenge and the need to do something different. And he has fought for real change. Now, back in the New York City Council, where for long he led the way on environmental matters, he's leading the way again. My pleasure to introduce Council Member Jim Gennaro.

[...]

Thank you so much, Council Member. Listen, we're going to need your leadership going forward because the fact that now New York City is stepping forward, inviting organizations from all around the world to come together, to make Governors Island the Climate Solution Center, that's

absolutely crucial. But we're going to need so much leadership to make sure this reaches its full potential. And then that we take the solutions and implement them rapidly in New York City and all over the country, all over the globe. And Council Member, we know when New York City acts people pay attention. So, we have a chance to really set the pace and we're going to need your leadership. And I thank for it.

Council Member James Gennaro: Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor. I'm honored to be here.

Mayor: All right, brother. All right. Now, we know when we actually focus on science, we can do great things. We know the focus on science is what's going to move us forward in terms of fighting global warming and the climate crisis. We also know that in this city, we listened to science and data. We paid attention. We made decisions based on the facts and that led us to our approach to vaccination. And that effort is gathering more and more steam. And again, real good questions in the last few days about challenges we're seeing around the world in terms of COVID. What our health care team keeps saying is the answer is always the same – more vaccinations. And that's what we intend to do.

As of today, from the beginning of our vaccination effort, 9,251,412 doses given. And that effort is going to keep growing every single day. Now because vaccination has worked so well, we are able to now get more and more back to normal. Now in New York City, the City of New York, our City government led the way by bringing our City employees who work in offices back in May. A lot of people expressed skepticism. Guess what? The timing was just right. And people came back, it was done safely. It was done well, but it was also important so that we could serve the people of the city better so that our City workforce could be present and accounted for, building our recovery for all of us. It also sent a very powerful message to the rest of the New York City economy. And in fact, major businesses have now followed suit, coming back strong and telling their employees it's time to come back to the office for the good of everyone. And I'll tell you, it's so important. We know in City government, when people come back to the offices, we get a lot more done, but also so many small businesses – and I hear it from small business owners all the time. They are so thankful to see the office buildings starting to come back. It means so much for the small businesses and the people who work there.

So, we're going to keep raising the bar. We're going to keep going farther. And an announcement today that for vaccinated City workers, we're now going to be able to move forward and have a better approach because we have so many people who are vaccinated. Vaccinated workers now are going to be able to work without masks and they will not be limited by physical distancing. Unvaccinated workers who yet – people who are not yet vaccinated, people who interact regularly with the public will still be wearing masks and still be maintaining distance. Now, as of July 6th, we'll be implementing this in all City agencies. We want to do this because it's the right time to do it. People are ready. We want to do this to set the pace for everyone else. So, as of July 6th, if you're a vaccinated City worker, you'll be able to work without a mask and you will not have to practice the same distancing we needed during the height of the crisis. By September, we'd like to see everyone in our offices back to normal. Now that's going to be, of course, following CDC and State guidance. And we expect that to keep evolving, but we think we're on that track right now that people will be back to their offices basically as they were before the pandemic. And that's really, really good news for everyone.

Okay. Now, a lot of work going on today at City Hall, as we put the finishing touches on our Recovery Budget. We've, together, been through eight budgets. This is the most important. This is the one that will determine the future of New York City and the strength of our recovery. And it has to be a recovery for all of us. This recovery budget makes really powerful, even radical investments in working people. And that's what we believe in reaching every neighborhood, doing things that will change the lives of New Yorkers for the long haul. Some of the things you'll see, and again, the finishing touches being put on the budget today. Tomorrow we'll have the detailed presentation of the budget and the City Council will be voting. But here's some of the things that we're going to be highlighting. Of course, free Universal 3-K for All in every district this September. It's going to be a universal right for New York City three-year-olds within a few years. This puts money back in the pockets of working families, in addition to the fact that it helps kids get the kind of education they deserve, especially when it can have the most impact. So, you're going to see that. You're going to see investments in community-based solutions to stop violence, the Cure Violence Movement, the Crisis Management System, a variety of other community-based approaches to help us turn the tide on violence, get back to the very, very strong place we were before the pandemic. You're going to see New York City Business Quick Start. This is something we're so excited about. Cutting in half the time it takes to start a new small business or reopen. This is what the Recovery Budget is all about. Of course, you're going to see a lot of other things, the continued investments in public health to win the battle against COVID once and for all, you're going to see continued investments in the future of this city, green investments to help us fight global warming. And you're going to see strong fiscal management, something the Council and the Mayor's Office have agreed on consistently. This is what the Recovery Budget will be all about. Again, full details coming out in the morning and the Council will vote on the budget tomorrow afternoon.

Okay. Now this recovery, this Recovery for All of Us, it's going to take real energy and you're going to see more and more spirit, more and more energy in this city throughout the Summer of New York City. The Summer of New York City is well underway, you can feel it. I talk to people all the time and they say, it's just amazing how different everything feels, how exciting it is. The summer is kicking us off and the fall we're going to be in full swing. Broadway back 100 percent. You're going to see travelers, tourists, business travelers coming back and something else we need, something that signals that we are coming back strong and puts a smile on all of our faces. Now, I've got to give you the right backdrop here. So, hold on. Let's get a proper backdrop in place so we can make this announcement. We got to be agile about having the right backdrop for the occasion. Okay, well done. That was very smooth. Okay. Hardly even notice it happened. Okay. Here's the big announcement, everybody. Ready? November 8th through 14th, the New York Comedy Festival returns to New York City and we are ready. Last year we lost the comedy festival for the first time in 17 years because of COVID, but now it's back and I guarantee it will be better than ever and making New Yorkers smile, making New Yorkers laugh, giving us hope again, something that's truly New York and we love. And here to tell you about it, someone who founded an iconic New York City location and iconic comedy club. She is the founder of this great festival. She is a New York City legend. So much so you know her name because it's right there on her club. Caroline's on Broadway. My pleasure is Caroline Hirsch.

[...]

Mayor: Amen. Amen. Caroline, I just want to volunteer. I have an incredible new act where I just eat food live, you know, Shake Shack, pizza. It's amazing. It's just – it's kind of like modern art and comedy together. Okay.

Caroline Hirsch: So, you want to try that out?

Mayor: Oh yeah. I think it's going to be groundbreaking. Yeah.

Hirsch: Anytime you want to come up, you know, come up to –

Mayor: Will you get me an audition?

Hirsch: On Broadway, 49th Street.

Mayor: Okay. Okay. This is – I really think I figured out my next act. Get it. Get it. That was funny, wasn't it?

[Laughter]

You see what I did there. Okay. Yeah. Caroline, thank you. This is so important –

Hirsch: So, looking forward to getting everybody back together –

Mayor: Amen.

Hirsch: Laughing together.

Mayor: And I love that you're doing the smaller venues too.

Hirsch: It's very important to us this year because these venues need it so much to get started again. And hopefully they'll be able to reopen. They're waiting for, you know, the money from the government to get themselves back into the groove again. So, we're going to highlight the smaller venues.

Mayor: That is the way it should be. Thank you so much. Everyone, time to get ready for this incredible festival. So, go to nycomedyfestival.com to get your tickets and share on social media with #MakeNYLaugh. Let's really celebrate that this incredible festival is back and let's support it because this is part of our comeback. This is part of a recovery for all of us. Now that's amazing, comedy festival coming back. We've got another comeback story. I want to announce that another great New York City institution – this one's only been around for a few years, but people love it. Movies Under the Stars coming back. This is a co-production of our Parks Department, our Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment, free movie screenings in city parks all over the five boroughs. We couldn't do it last year. This year, great films coming back. And for the first time ever screenings of New York public school film festival films, 32 short films made by our own New York City public school students. Some really powerful, wonderful stuff

worth seeing. For more details, go to nyc.gov/moviesunderthestars and get to enjoy another great outdoor New York City experience. This is part of the Summer of New York City. It's all coming back together. Get out there and experience it. This is going to be a summer to remember, everybody. And we're all looking forward to being together again, as Caroline said.

Okay, let's go over daily indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19, today's report, 76 patients. Confirmed positivity, 13.75 percent. Hospitalization rate per 100,000 – 0.30. Very, very good. Okay. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average, today's report 185 cases. And number three, percentage of people testing citywide positive for COVID-19, today's report on a seven-day rolling average 0.57 percent.

I'm going to do a few words in Spanish, and this is a preview of the budget that we will announce tomorrow.

[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 Dr. Chokshi, by Dr. Katz, and by New York City Emergency Management Commissioner, John Scrivani. First question today goes to Juliet from 1010 wins.

Question: So, Mr. Mayor the most pressing question of the day, what is your next food [inaudible]?

Mayor: Wait, Juliet, I heard everything until the punchline. Say it again?

Question: Oh, I said, what is your next food trick?

Mayor: Ah. It has come to my attention there's a whole lot of good food in New York City, so I'm going to be out there. I – you know, Juliet, I think a real strength of mine is I do not mind stuffing my face with food while talking simultaneously. It makes for great videos. So, I'm going to be out there sampling the great foods of New York City and I hope you will join me, Juliet.

Question: And I will do that. But, actually, no, my question is I wanted to get back to the issue of Times Square. I'm wondering why can't the bootleg CDs be confiscated out right and these vendors be removed from the locations? The – you know, the merchandise is illegal. So, why can't that all be removed?

Mayor: Any time it's found to be illegal, they will be removed. Anyone who's doing anything illegal in Times Square, there's going to be a huge amount of police presence, plus civilian presence from Consumer Affairs and other agencies, and we're just not tolerating illegal vending. That's the bottom line. So, something like that will in fact, be removed. Go ahead, Juliet.

Question: Okay, and voting results are expected today and still this will be a partial result. How do you advise New Yorkers on how this process is going? That it's still going to be awhile before we know who is actually won some, if not all of these races?

Mayor: You know, if you, if you go to In the Heights, that amazing movie, they keep referring to that line from the matron in the movie, “paciencia y fe”, patience and faith. I – look, this process is moving along well. The – in fact, election day went really well. I actually want to give some credit here. This is an unusual statement coming from me because I've been very critical of the mistakes of the Board of Elections, but they actually did a fine job on Election Day with a brand-new system. It went very, very smoothly. Turnout was great. That's really a hopeful sign. We knew it would take a while for the full count. We expect to know a lot more today and tomorrow, and then the final certification has always been several weeks after the election, that'll happen. But the important thing to remember here is unlike the past, with a September primary, when you have a June primary, the fact that this has taken a little while to sort out is not going to cause any major dislocation. We'll know soon, and then, you know, the candidates will get to work on the general election.

Moderator: The next is Rebecca Solomon from PIX-11

Question: Hi Mayor, thanks for having me.

Mayor: How are you doing, Rebecca?

Question: I have a question – pretty good. Trying to stay cool. Hope everyone else is as well. So, you're talking about a lot of the indicators, things look great. We know the city workers are going to be getting back throughout the fall, which is wonderful. The numbers are down. Things are returning to normal. Broadway is coming back, but what happens with this Delta variant? There's still so little we know, but we know it could be catastrophic. Are there still plans that the city could lock down if this gets worse? Just kind of elaborate a little bit on that with the Delta.

Mayor: Yeah, Rebecca, I'm going to start, and I'll turn to – we have a Dr. Katz and I think we have Dr. Chokshi as well. Yeah, they will both speak to it, and I want to start with Dr. Katz because he went through the whole process from beginning to end last time. Rebecca, we are watching the Delta variant very carefully in the city. Talked about that yesterday. We have a lot of information. We're obviously watching it around the world, but the difference here is a very high level of vaccination. Again, the latest information, we've got 4.2 million New Yorkers who are fully vaccinated, and we've got 4.6 million of you, talk about folks who have had at least one dose and overwhelmingly of those folks will finish out and get the second dose. So, practically we're going to be at 4.6 million very soon and it's going to keep growing. The bottom line is right now, we're winning the race against the Delta variant, but we got to keep winning. And we'll always be ready if we see things start to turn, but Rebecca, I think it's really important to remember, it doesn't turn like on a dime. It takes weeks and weeks. You'll see plenty of evidence if things are becoming challenging and we have to make some adjustments, but we do not see that likelihood at this moment. Right now, let's turn to the first Dr. Katz, then Dr. Chokshi.

President and CEO Mitchell Katz, Health + Hospitals: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. The most encouraging news is that the vaccine works well against the Delta variant, and so the fact that people are vaccinated is the best way for us all to be protected. And concerns – we appreciate the media telling people about the variant because it's another reason why if people have delayed getting vaccination, this is the time to do it. It would make a huge difference and protect them against the Delta and all other variants. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thanks, Mr. Mayor. Well first let me start with what we know about the Delta variant. We do know that it is more transmissible. That means it spreads more easily. It may cause more severe disease, although we don't have strong evidence on that point just yet. But the most important thing is what Dr. Katz has already mentioned, which is that we do know that the vaccines confer strong protection, particularly against severe disease, against the Delta variant and all of the other variants that are currently circulating in New York City. So, our message remains the same. If you've been waiting to get vaccinated, this is one more reason why you should run, not walk to get your vaccine. And we know that every single dose of the vaccination is another brick in the wall against not just the Delta variant, but all of the variants of the virus.

Mayor: Amen. Thank you very much, doctor. Go ahead, Rebecca.

Question: All right. Thank you. I appreciate it. I'm good.

Mayor: Okay, go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Joe Anuta from Politico.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor, how are you doing?

Mayor: Good, Joe. I hope you learned something new at P.S. 39 in Park Slope about the variety of items that can be signed with a Sharpie.

Question: Mr. Mayor, I actually went back there. I think you're going to be getting some invoices for some lunchboxes from some parents there.

Mayor: Uh-oh. I guess I should have thought of that before I started signing lunchboxes, huh?

Question: And basketballs and arms.

Mayor: Yeah, okay. I got a little carried away, you know, Election Day, just the energy, the positive vibes.

Question: We all get caught up in it, Mr. Mayor, it's okay.

Mayor: Yeah, you understand.

Question: So, I wanted to ask you two questions about the budget. You know, this is your last budget. I think there's a lot of good things you want to tell New Yorkers about in here. I'm just curious, usually, you know, we have a big ceremony here with a handshake between you and the Council. Is that going to happen? And if not, I know this is something you hash out with them, why not?

Mayor: Well, Joe, you know, you obviously covered the political process for a living. Everything was affected understandably by the primary elections now being in June. That, you know, for seven years that wasn't our reality in terms of the Council. Now it is. Of course, that affected things. A lot of work went on between the Executive Budget in April, and now we're going to come in for a good landing here, tomorrow's the day to unveil and for the vote. So, look, I'm very satisfied, negotiations with the Council have gone very well. We've been in agreement on a lot of the things we had to do to bring the city back. So, it's a different timing, a different approach, but I think the result will speak for itself. Go ahead, Joe.

Question: And then I wanted to ask you, what do you think is the difference between this year and last year? You know, we saw a lot of attention on the budget, specifically the police department budget, there were protests outside City Hall, people were in camp there, they were going to elected officials' homes, protesting there. And this year we don't see anything even close to that. It just seems a much smoother process and really without that animus from some of the electorate, what do you make of that?

Mayor: I think – I've had a chance to reflect on it. I appreciate the question and I'm going to be, you know, in my view, objective, this is not about my own personal views. I think the absence of Donald Trump is a huge factor in everything. I think in terms of bringing temperature down and reducing frustration and encouraging dialogue, that's actually been a real important X-factor here and everywhere. I think the, obviously, not being in the throes of the depth of the crisis, remember in June last year, it was after people had just been through March, April, May, horrible months, everyone had been cooped up. Everyone felt really frustrated and pained. So many people had been lost. Emotions were running very high. There's a lot of reasons why last year was particular, and the timing was really, you know another perfect storm, if you will. But I think this year we've had calming leadership at the national level. We've had the stimulus, which has really addressed so many of the underlying problems. The vaccine efforts been a success here and around the country. I think the whole atmosphere is more positive and hopeful, and that's made this a much easier process.

Moderator: The next is Andrea from WCBS.

Question: Good morning. I've got a question also about the Delta variant. In places like Staten island, how concerned are you since COVID infection rates there are higher than other parts of the city?

Mayor: I'm definitely concerned for Staten island for everyone, but I'm concerned in general about the Delta variant. We don't take it lightly, but what we do know is vaccination works against it. And you've seen with the intensity of our vaccination effort, you've seen that even

with the presence of the Delta variant, the numbers continue to be very positive, the indicators, the health care reality of the city is much, much better. So, we are watching very carefully, but the answer is the same. Just keep encouraging vaccination, keep making it easier for people, keep building up those incentives, and every single, additional New Yorker who gets vaccinated makes us safer against the Delta variant. Go ahead, Andrea.

Question: Are there other outreach efforts to places like Staten Island, where you're seeing that COVID infection rate, that's much higher?

Mayor: I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi and say, as I do, look, we just continue to refine the effort. To the credit of Dr. Choksi and Dr. Katz and everyone who's been a part of the vaccination effort, you know, now that they've got 4.6 million folks who have gotten at least one dose and, you know, well over nine million total doses given, which is by far the biggest vaccination effort in the history of New York City, we can safely say these guys know how to do this. It's just about reaching people and its very meticulous work at this point. We're really excited about working with community partners with the Referral Bonus Program, we're really excited about the work we're doing with young people, because that's the next great frontier. We have so much more to do with 20-somethings, with teenagers now that they qualify, and then soon – we think pretty soon at least – younger kids will be able. So, it's just about continually refining and deepening the effort. Dr. Chokshi, you want to speak about Staten Island in particular?

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, sir. Thank you very much. And meticulous, the word that you used, is exactly the right one to describe what we're doing in this phase of the vaccination campaign. This involves a lot of door to door outreach, canvassing style outreach, making sure that we are calling people whom we know may not yet be vaccinated, working with doctor's offices, not just the large hospital systems, but the community-based family doctors and pediatricians who we know people turn to for their routine health care needs, independent pharmacies, really going further and further into neighborhoods to make sure that as many people get vaccinated as possible. In terms of where we're targeting that, we use a combination of approaches, but as with everything, it is rooted in our data. In places like Staten Island, we are seeing slightly higher rates of test positivity as well as cases, and so that's been a reason for us to turn some attention there, particularly around youth vaccination, but in other parts of the city where there are lower vaccination rates, that's where we're redoubling our efforts so that we can actually prevent rises in cases from happening in those places as well. The common thread is that we will leave no stone unturned. We'll make sure that everyone has heard from us and knows how to get vaccinated, and that includes extending our in-home vaccination program as the mayor announced last week, which is now available for anyone to get vaccinated in the comfort of their own home.

Mayor: Thank you very much. Go ahead.

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

Question: Hey, Mr. Mayor, I wanted to ask you also about the Delta variant. I'm curious, what is, you know, what's the threshold by which you'll start advising folks to – vaccinate folks, to

wear masks again inside? Because I'm looking at what's coming out of Los Angeles and I'm just a little bit confused.

Mayor: Fair enough. I'm going to turn to Dr. Katz then Dr. Chokshi, and you mentioned Los Angeles, Dr. Katz used to run the public health system there as well. But look, I would say this, we're led by the data and the science, we're watching constantly. You saw the indicators today that continue to move in the right direction. I think that the intensity of the vaccination effort is the underlying reason why. The bottom line is we will make adjustments when we see real, consistent evidence, but so far, the data is telling us, in fact, things keep moving in the right direction. Dr. Katz and Dr. Choksi.

President Katz: Yes, Mr. Mayor, I totally agree with your analysis. Overwhelmingly, the vaccine works against the Delta variant, and so people can keep their masks off if they've been fully vaccinated, and I have confidence that that will keep them protected. Thank you.

Mayor: Go ahead, Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you. I'll just add two points. First is, we can't lose sight of the fact that our recommendation for unvaccinated people is to continue following all of the precautions that have worked for us over the course of the pandemic, and that does remain important. And I – you know, I have to make sure to say that the Delta variant poses a particular risk for people who are unvaccinated. So, in some ways it's even more important than it has been if you are not vaccinated to wear a mask, to continue physical distancing, to get tested routinely, et cetera. With respect to vaccinated people, it does confer strong protection, as we've already said. But there are some settings, particularly schools, congregate settings, health care settings, where we're recommending that everyone stay masked you know, regardless of their vaccination status. But these things can coexist and the fact that we're at the rates of vaccination, that we are gives us a level of population protection that is different from a few months ago.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Dana.

Question: Thanks, and then on the topic of the Board of Elections, I'm curious what you make about their decision to release these sort of iterative [inaudible] ranked choice voting tabulations. You know, like, is there a risk that it's just going to confuse people?

Mayor: I think that's a really fair question, Dana. Look, ranked choice voting has real virtues, but it also comes with challenges. To say nothing on election night, you know, or the next day I think would be unacceptable. I think saying very clearly as they did, as we did as even the campaigns did, you know, we're going to see the number one votes, but that does not mean the ballgame's over. New Yorkers are pretty sophisticated. I think they're quickly catching on to how the system works, and they're understanding that it's better to know something, but that doesn't end the discussion, and particularly with some of the races lower down ticket, you really could see something turn just based on those number two and three votes, et cetera. So, I think this is probably the best option under the circumstances, and look, it's a week after the election, we're going to know a whole lot more tonight, tomorrow, and then the full certification in the next couple of weeks. That's not a bad timeline when you're talking about a June primary. If this

were a September primary, we would have a real problem on our hands, but with the June primary, I think it's quite manageable.

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

Question: Oh, hey, good morning, Mr. de Blasio, how are you?

Mayor: Good, Katie. How've you been?

Question: It's been good. So, I wanted to ask a budget question. I know it was sort of earlier, but it is about the NYPD's budget. I know it was such a big issue last year, the size of the NYPD's budget. Do you want to speak a little bit about what it will look like in this budget? And if you think, you know, I guess, what was behind the calls to reduce the budget was widespread reform in part, so if you want to speak a little bit about that.

Mayor: Sure, I'll say a little bit, but I want to really respect the fact that final negotiations are being concluded today, and again, we'll have a full presentation in the morning. I think the bottom line is we worked very closely with the Council on the reforms in March, and the reforms with NYPD, with a great public input process that the NYPD put together with community leaders. We came up with a really substantial, a series of reforms. I think there's a sense of satisfaction in the Council that a lot has changed including some of the decisions we made last year, and we're striking a good balance with public safety needs and the need for reform. So, again, not going to go into a lot of detail until everything's finalized, but I think a lot has happened, a lot has been improved since what we were dealing with last year. Go ahead, Katie.

Question: Thanks, and since it is your final budget as Mayor, I guess I could toss you up a little bit of – you could reflect – maybe it's an easy question, but do you think that here in your final budget, the promises that you made, you know, as a candidate and in your first years as Mayor, do you think you've kind of – it's come to what you promised? I mean, how you, I don't know if you're feeling very reflective because this is your final budget, but this is your chance to act on it, if you'd like.

Mayor: Thank you. That's very kind of you. Look, I am reflective, obviously. It's been an amazing experience and a very gratifying experience on so many levels. Yeah, go back and look at the 2013 platform, and I'm very proud. I'm so proud of my colleagues here at City Hall and all the agencies. We made that platform come to life. We did Pre-K for All. We're now well on our way to 3-K for All. We did originally 200,000 affordable apartments, built or preserved. It's now going to be 300,000 over the next few years. That that actually ended up being much more possible than we even realized. To go even farther, that's very gratifying. Lot of the things we wanted to do for working people we were able to achieve obviously paid sick days in the beginning, but a lot of other major changes to lift the burdens on working people. So, I've got to tell you, I'm thrilled, really. I know we've got a lot of challenges and we've got a long way to go to fully come out of this pandemic and have a recovery for all of us. But since you took me back to the very beginning, I'd say, Katie, I honestly didn't think we necessarily could get all this done. I really didn't. I thought it was the right direction. I thought we could do a lot of it. I didn't think

we could do almost all of it, and that's what's happened in the end. So, I'm counting my blessings. I really am.

Moderator: We have time for two more for today. The next is Yoav from The City.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor. I wanted to ask you about a Queens veterans nursing home, that's run by the State Health Department, and for some reason they've been storing hundreds of boxes of PPE outdoors, where it's been exposed to the elements, and therefore to rot, and also has drawn the attention of vermin from a nearby vegetable garden, so that hundreds of the boxes have actually been damaged. Given, you know, the shortages that the city went through last year. I just wanted to ask you Mr. Mayor for your reaction to that. But also, I wanted to ask the doctors if either of them could say whether it's ever appropriate to store PPE and cardboard boxes outside for weeks and even months at a time?

Mayor: I'll start, and I'll turn to the doctors, but Yoav that's really disturbing. I mean, we all fought our way through COVID, we needed all the PPE we could get. This begs the question again, you know, what is the State of New York doing with nursing homes? Why is their oversight so lax? What do we got to do to change the laws? You know, something's still wrong here and it goes beyond the horrifying reality of last year. There's something even bigger here about why the state does such a poor job of addressing the needs in nursing homes. So, a lot more to look at there, I think. Dr. Chokshi and Dr. Katz.

President Katz: I can start, sir, since we run nursing homes. There is there is no acceptable reason for keeping PPE outdoors. You keep PPE, not just indoors, but you keep them in rooms, where there's it's the right temperature and humidity to protect the viability of it, and I'll just remind people we needed PPE long before there was COVID, and we will need PPE long after COVID goes away, if we're so lucky, there are a variety of diseases, including tuberculosis, respiratory viruses, that require that people where health care providers have adequate protection, and there's no way you can guarantee that that PPE is still fully protective if it's been out in the elements. So, I fully agree with your analysis that it's never appropriate.

Mayor: Thank you anything to add, Dr. Chokshi?

Commissioner Chokshi: Nothing to add, Dr. Katz answered it well.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Yoav.

Question: And just staying on the same topic, I'm wondering how the City is handling you know, basically its own stockpile? There are some requirements about keeping a certain amount of PPE on hand at each facility. Some of them might not have this space to store it. What is the City doing as far as its own stockpile? Is that being handled centrally out of OEM or how's that happening?

Mayor: Yeah, I'll let – I'll turn to Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Katz and we have John Scrivani on, the Commissioner of Emergency Management. Anyone who wants to speak to it. But let me just say, storing PPE is absolutely crucial and yet it takes some space, but it doesn't necessarily take a

huge amount of space. So, I would argue, this is one of the most essential things you do is have what you need to protect your personnel and your patients. We, in the midst of COVID, realized we needed a strategic reserve, which we've now set up to make sure the city had at least six months of the types of PPE and equipment that we saw we needed during COVID. So, we've built up that reserve. We'll keep adding to it. We will never be in the situation we were in in the beginning of this crisis, and we also have to recognize Yoav, we learned the hard way as a larger lesson for our country, that the United States couldn't produce enough in time and was dependent on other parts of the world. That can't happen in the future. We have to localize the production of all these things we need to protect us. But in terms of the City, I think our numbers are strong right now. Anyone want to speak to how it's being done? Who wants to jump in?

Commissioner Chokshi: Sir, I can start. So, thank you for this important question, and I am grateful to the Mayor and to so many city leaders who stepped up in a time of great need last year to create the strategic reserve that the Mayor has mentioned. It has continued on, and it gives us the ability to draw upon stockpiles of PPE when they are needed, and that will continue on you know, even beyond the COVID emergency. We're in a good position with that. Right now, we have you know, several months of supply for key elements of personal protective equipment, and that's something that is a shared effort across multiple city agencies, including the Health Department, but also Commissioner Scrivani's Emergency Management group and several other city agencies as well.

The other thing that I'll mention is that that compliments two other sources that we're able to draw upon in times of emergency. The first is the requirements for, as Dr. Katz mentioned, all hospitals and health care organizations to maintain their own reserves of personal protective equipment, and both the City and the State have a role to play in ensuring that those reserves are sufficient, and then the second source is of course the strategic national stockpile which we are aware that the federal government is revisiting its policies around to ensure that those stocks are sufficient as well.

Mayor: Thank you. Dr. Katz or Commissioner Scrivani, anything to add?

President Katz: Nothing to add, sir, thank you.

Mayor: Okay, go ahead.

Moderator: Last question for today goes to David Brand from City Limits.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor, how are you doing?

Mayor: Good, David, how've you been?

Question: Good, thanks. So, I've been talking to several nonprofit shelter providers, front line staffers, homeless New Yorkers about returning to shelters from hotels, and they are very concerned because of the vaccination rate remains low among the homeless, and even among shelter staff compared to the general population. So, I'm wondering what will the testing regimen

look like at shelters? And is there a specific threshold for moving people out of shelter and back into hotels?

Mayor: I'll start and turn to Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Katz. David, look, we really want to do everything to ensure that people are vaccinated. Of course, people have to be willing to be vaccinated, but we're going to make it ubiquitous in shelters, the opportunity to get vaccinated for staff and for clients as well. We do see improvement as we go along, including the fact that so much of our shelter population is families, and a lot of parents do want their kids vaccinated. So, that's an area where we think we're going to have a lot more progress. We'll keep doing it constantly. But we can keep people safe. A lot of focus, a lot of medical attention, make sure people are safe and provide them the help they need better in a shelter setting on the way to a long-term affordable housing. Remember over 150,000 people in our last eight years who went into shelter, ended up getting affordable housing and leaving shelter to someplace better, and we intend to do that with everyone who's in our shelter system. With that, Dr. Chokshi. Dr. Katz, you want to speak about the specific approach at all?

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, sir. I'll speak to both vaccination and testing with respect to vaccination. As we've said before, this is the key. It's the single most important thing that we can do to keep people safe whether in congregate shelter or in other settings, and our colleagues at the Department of Homeless Services have made vaccination widely available through things like pop-up clinics, working with shelter providers to ensure that vaccination is readily available from trusted providers and ensuring that other health care settings are providing options for vaccination as well. We have to continue those efforts and redouble them because it is the single most important thing to keep people safe. With that said, testing is another important part of our layered approach for health and safety, and with respect to that, the testing regimen that's in place right now, it occurs both at intake, and people are of course appropriately isolated if they test positive at intake, and there's also routine surveillance testing that's done in the shelters as well, which helps both in terms of keeping people safe, but also having a beat on the spread of the coronavirus in shelters. So, those are things that will continue, and we're very committed to safeguarding health throughout this process.

Mayor: Thank you. Anything to add, Dr. Katz?

President Katz: No, thank you, sir.

Mayor: David, go ahead.

Question: So, it doesn't sound like there's necessarily a threshold for moving people out of shelters just yet. But another question related to that, on a basic level, there is a belief among administrators, front line staff, and homeless New Yorkers that closing the hotels is grounded more in politics and public perception than in public health recommendations, and I wonder what you and some of the other panelists – how would you respond to that perception among providers, staff, and homeless New Yorkers?

Mayor: It's just absolutely false. I'll start, Dr. Chokshi can add. We have been having this conversation for months about the right way to do this. We said from day one, moving homeless

New Yorkers into hotels was a temporary measure in the height of the crisis. We are now, thank God, coming out of COVID. We said it was temporary – in fact, we said years ago. We want to get out of all hotels across the board anyway. Shelter settings are where we can provide people the most support on their way to a better life, and we just have to accept that if we're moving forward in every other way and putting COVID behind us, and we can do this safely and provide people support, it's time to do it. It just is the organic moment to do it and we can do it right, and obviously CDC guidance, state guidance, everything aligns here that this is the right thing to do. Go ahead, Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Chokshi: Thank you, sir. I don't have much to add other than to emphasize that health and safety are paramount in this process, and you know, we work in close coordination with our colleagues in the Department of Homeless Services, but also with shelter providers, because we do know the elements that will keep people as safe as possible, and that's the layered approach that I mentioned – vaccination and testing but also the other ways that we can curb the spread of COVID. But we also have to take a wider lens, you know, to point out that you know, the health of people who are experiencing homelessness is something that requires us to confront a lot of things beyond COVID as well, and I'm hopeful that, you know, we'll be able to mark a new chapter where we can focus on those other causes of poor health as well.

Mayor: Thank you very much, Dr. Chokshi. Everyone, as we conclude today, look, a lot of important questions raised about how we keep moving forward fighting COVID. Bottom line is vaccination. We're going to keep saying it, and you know, we talked about being meticulous, being persistent. One of the things we're learning out there is you just keep coming back. You just keep talking to people sometimes, you know, the first five or 10 times someone's not ready, but the 11th time they are so we're going to keep reminding people today is the right day to get vaccinated. If you haven't already and amazing incentives and prizes, when you sign up to get vaccinated nowadays – I wish they had been around when I got vaccinated, but you know, these are the breaks. So, everyone, go get vaccinated, do it for yourself. Do it for your family, do it for your city. Thank you very much.

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