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

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, everybody. I want to talk to you about the days coming up this long weekend. In most years, we all look forward to this time of year so much. Most years, we think about Labor Day weekend as just one of the most joyous times of the year. And that is true in every community of New York City. It's particularly true in our Caribbean community. It's a time of amazing celebration. This year is going to be very, very different. We want to speak about that in a moment. But I want to say at the outset, as we go into this long weekend, during this year of the pandemic, we want to make sure we protect each other. We want to keep everybody safe. The best way to celebrate who we are as New Yorkers is to make sure we get through this weekend safely. And we continue our fight against the coronavirus. And today we're going to talk about the ways we're going to keep everyone safe this weekend.

But before I go into that, I got to talk about something that is very, very troubling. And that's what we heard last night from the President. The President of the United States, a New Yorker by birth, threatening to take away federal funding from this city while we're still in the grips of this crisis. It just makes no sense. It's a time when we should be seeing solidarity with New York City, support for New York City, understanding for New York City and we're seeing the opposite. So I want to speak directly to the President. Mr. President, we asked you to help New York City and you weren't there for us. We asked you for testing at the beginning of this crisis, never came. We asked you for a stimulus to help us get back on our feet. You didn't lift a finger. We asked you for the truth about the coronavirus, so we could all move forward together. And you refused to tell New Yorkers and the American people what was really going on. So you failed us and now you want to punish us? It makes no sense. By the way, your words don't carry much weight on this topic because the Supreme Court has spoken. The President of the United States can't interfere with federal funding for cities and states just because he feels like it. We have laws in this country. So if you persist in trying to deny the funding, that's keeping New York City going in the middle of this crisis, we will see you in court. And once again, we will beat you in court. Why don't we stop the words and get on with some actual action to help New York City and help the people of this country? That's what we actually need.

Now, let me go back to what we're doing to prepare for these days ahead. And everybody again, when we talk about Labor Day weekend, it immediately brings up positive images. Things we love. We love going to the beach and we love family gatherings and barbecues. And again, all these wonderful celebrations of our Caribbean community. We think about the origin of the holiday. We think about the labor movement, all it's done for this city in this country. Labor Day weekend says something very good. I want to make sure even in this year of crisis, we keep it good. So first I want to talk about all the folks who may be traveling this Labor Day weekend. If

you are traveling, if you're coming to New York City from one of the states you see on your screen, these are the states that according to the laws of New York State still require a quarantine for travelers coming to New York. And if you're a New Yorker and getting ready to travel this weekend for pleasure, or to see family members, look, I would urge you not to go to one of those states. That's the simplest thing I could say. Right now at this moment in history with all the challenges we're facing, the best thing for any New Yorker to do is avoid going to one of those states or territories. If you must, then you must respect the quarantine upon your return. And if you're someone traveling from those places, visiting New York City, visiting family, friends, whatever it may be, you have to respect the quarantine. Because we've come this far. The city has come so far. We have to keep fighting this disease and we have to hold on to the progress we've made. So my number one messages, you don't have to go to one of those states, please don't. If you do go to one of those states or come from one of those states, you have to quarantine, nothing to discuss. It's the law.

Now let's talk about this weekend and the things will be happening here in this city. So of course families will be gathering. People will be taking time to appreciate each other's company. And that's a good thing. But what we can't have is large gatherings. This is a time where we've really learned the hard way. Look what's happened around this country. Look, what's happening in other parts of the world where large gatherings are the cause for a resurgence of this disease. We can't let that happen. And a lot of the reasons that people gather just aren't happening this year. The amazing West Indian parade, one of the great events in New York City each year is not happening. The J'Ouvert Festival is not happening. What you can do is celebrate those amazing events and all the celebrities and stars who are part of them. You can celebrate that virtually. And then know that next year, God willing we'll be back on Eastern Parkway, but not this year. And I want to say to everyone in communities where there have been historically gatherings, please, for the safety of yourself, your family, your community, if there's a gathering, it has to be kept to under 50 people. And it has to be kept smart, cannot take a chance with people's health.

Now, a few days ago, we had a call with leaders of the Central Brooklyn community, elected officials, clergy, members of the Cure Violence movement, and Crisis Management system, folks who do amazing work every day representing our communities and supporting their communities. And it was a call filled with unity. Members of my administration and leaders of the NYPD joined, and we all talked together about how each and every one of us in our own ways, will be protecting the community as we go through this weekend. I want to thank everyone who was a part of that leadership call. I want to thank all the organizations who will be out there in force, starting today. Leafleting in neighborhoods, letting people know, it's a simple message. This leaflet says no large gatherings are permitted for people's health and safety. This message is being spread all over Central Brooklyn by a lot of great community organizations and local leaders. I want to thank each and every one of them because it makes a huge difference.

The number one best strategy for making sure people understand how to stay safe is hearing voices from their own community. And that's happening in a very big way starting right now. We also are going to have a strong NYPD presence, working in conjunction with community leaders, listening to the community, figuring out the best way to approach safety, being there to support the community, and keep everyone safe. So we're making sure that it's a smart plan. And I want to introduce to you now the architect of that plan and he's done extraordinary work in his

role as Chief of Patrol and he is someone who really understands our communities and listens to our communities. And that's why he has had the success he has had. The Chief of Patrol the NYPD Fausto Pichardo.

**Chief of Patrol Fausto Pichardo, NYPD:** Mr. Mayor, thank you. And thank you to the over 8.6 million New Yorkers, to the folks from the days and the weeks leading up to this weekend. And I'll echo the Mayor's sentiments – powerful voices in the community, grassroots organizers, local community leaders, pastors, clergy from every denomination, certainly our Crisis Management system and our electeds, small businesses. Working together to move not only this city forward, certainly this weekend. And as we prepare for this Labor Day weekend, we all can appreciate that the landscape of what the city will look like is different. One thing that will not be different is that our officers will be there every single day, just like they have been in the past. So you'll see police officers on foot and increased presence, not only in Central Brooklyn, but throughout the entire city. You'll see them in cars, you'll see them on foot, in uniform. And quite frankly, some members from other divisions may not be in uniform. And that's what the overarching goal to keep every New Yorker safe. So I ask and implore everyone in the city to continue what you've been doing, to be safe, to be responsible. So together collectively we'll have a great and safe weekend and we can certainly celebrate next year on Eastern Parkway, just like we've done in years past. Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Thank you very much, Chief. And that call we had a few days ago and I have to tell you nothing more powerful than working together to address a challenge, listening to leaders of the community. And one of the strongest voices on that call and that's – she's been a strong voice so many times, a Congress member who represents so much of Central Brooklyn and is a proud daughter of Jamaica herself. Now I have to tell you what Congress member Yvette Clarke said to all of us and to leaders of the NYPD is, as you're out there in these next few days, really listened to the community. Work with the local commanders who know the community, focus on the Neighborhood Coordinating officers and the Community Affairs officers who know the people in the community. If we all keep communicating and working together, we can have a very good result this weekend. And everyone on the call heard her voice loud and clear. And that's exactly the plan we're going with. So, I want to thank her as always for her leadership and proud to introduce to all of you Congress member Yvette Clarke. Congress member, can you hear us?

[...]

Thank you so much Congress member. And that is the perfect point, you're making that we've come so far through so much hard work. We're not going to let it slip out of our grasp now. We're going to keep working. And thank you, Congress member for your leadership and everyone, I know we can have a great and safe weekend together. And I know that because New Yorkers always find a way to create something good, even in the midst of a challenge and to improvise even under the toughest circumstances. And when it comes to improvisation and making something happen, one of the great examples over these last months has been the Open Restaurants program. It's amazing to see folks in the restaurant community, how resilient they've been, how strong they've been, and how much they embraced this program and made something happen. So now I'm happy to announce that we now have over 10,000 New York City restaurants that have participated. Amazing number, over 10,000 New York City restaurants

participating in the Open Restaurants program. So that's wonderful for those businesses that we want to help in every way we can to keep going. It's wonderful for the people, communities who love to see those restaurants open and love the outdoor dining. But let's talk about the folks who now have been able to get their jobs back. Over 90,000 New Yorkers got their jobs back through the Open Restaurants program. An amazing achievement. I want to thank all of the business owners who did this hard work.

Now we want to keep coming up with ways of supporting your efforts. And so something we're going to be doing this Monday, Labor Day, we're going to treat Labor Day as a weekend day. And that means that the Open Restaurants and Open Streets will proceed the same way they normally would on one of these summer weekends. So Monday will be Open Restaurants on Open Streets, like a weekend, extra day of business. And hopefully it's going to be a great day of business for our restaurants. And we also want to let folks know that the Open Restaurants and Open Streets program has been an amazing success. And we want to welcome any of the sponsors locally, if you want to apply for additional days, we want to hear from you because this is something that's really worked. And I think this is another thing that we need to make part of the future of New York City. I've already said that Open Restaurants are going to come back next year. Open Restaurants on Open Streets has been a great success. We need to continue that not just next year, continue these approaches well into the future because they are working.

**Mayor:** We've already said that open restaurants are going to come back next year. Open restaurants on open streets has been a great success. We need to continue that not just next year, continue these approaches well into the future, because they are working. Now, another crucial initiative has been to help restaurants and some of the hardest-hit communities. Our Task Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity, leaders of this administration, leaders of color in City agencies all over the administration, they're looking at ways to address the coronavirus crisis immediately, particularly in the 27 hardest-hit neighborhoods. And one of the things that they came up with was the Restaurant Revitalization program announced in June to help restaurants in communities of color to survive and keep employing people in their communities and keep their cultures alive. And they've been doing that in an amazing way. I want to thank the Mayor's Fund, which has been front and center in this effort, working in partnership with the organization One Fair Wage. And with the leadership of the task force, now the revitalization programs already awarded \$2.3 million to nearly a hundred restaurants. 71 percent of the restaurants not only are in communities of color, but are owned by either women or people of color. And again, not only helping to employ people again and keep the restaurants alive, but also participate in getting free meals, tens of thousands of free meals to New Yorkers who need it. So, this is a great example of doing something amidst this crisis. Again, New Yorkers, creating, in the midst of this crisis, to help each other.

Let's go to our indicators. One, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19, threshold is 200 patients – today's report, 84. And the confirmed positive rate among those patients is only 4.6 percent. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average, threshold is 550 cases – today's report, 253. And number three, percentage of people testing citywide positive for COVID-19, threshold five percent – today's report, 0.8 percent. I like any day that begins with a zero in particular. Let me say a few words in Spanish. Before I do, since we're going into this holiday weekend, just want to remind people that we will not be

having a press conference tomorrow morning, but we will see you again on Tuesday, the day after Labor Day.

A few words in Spanish –

With that we'll 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 Chief of Patrol Fausto Pichardo, Chancellor Richard Carranza, Commissioner Polly Trottenberg, the Executive Director of the Test and Trace Corps., Dr. Ted Long, and Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. The first question today goes to Dave Evans from ABC.

**Question:** Hey, Mayor. This is Dave. Can you hear me?

**Mayor:** Yeah, Dave. How are you doing?

**Question:** I'm okay. I'm down on Staten Island right now. But I wanted to ask you – and also, if Congresswoman Clarke is still on the line. I don't know if she's still there or not.

**Mayor:** We'll see if we can get her back. If we can, otherwise we'll connect you with her separately, but go ahead.

**Question:** Alright. I just wanted to get her reaction to what the President has been tweeting out about trying to hurt New York with its federal funding. And then I wanted to ask you along the –

**Mayor:** Dave, we lost you for a moment there. You wanted to ask me what?

**Question:** I wanted to ask you if you [inaudible] –

**Moderator:** Dave, we're having trouble with your connection.

**Mayor:** C'mon Dave, what's going on. We've had this problem more than once. Get – stay in one place.

[Laughter]

**Question:** I keep moving around –

**Mayor:** Stay still. Stay still, Dave.

**Question:** The reason why it's unconstitutional in your theory is because budgeting money is part of what Congress does, not what the Executive Branch does.

**Mayor:** Well, that's absolutely the case, Dave. The budget – the Constitution is quite clear about budget authority resting in the Congress, but I'd go even further and say when the Congress

determines a budget, it is meant to impartially distribute resources, regardless of politics, all over this country, according to the needs of the people. And we've been down this road before where the President threatened to take away funding for an arbitrary and political reason. I mean, look, this is clearly a campaign stunt. This is clearly the President just trying to score political points, but the problem is the Constitution doesn't agree with them and the Supreme Court doesn't agree with them. The Supreme Court has spoken to this issue that you cannot hold back federal funding over a political difference, or even a policy difference once it has been allocated by the Congress. So, I think this is another one of his blusters that'll go nowhere. But if he really tries it, we will go to court and I guarantee you we'll beat him again. And we'll let you know if Yvette is brought back, if we can get her. But do you have another question, Dave?

**Question:** No, that's all. Just to if the Congresswoman is still there. That was my second question, if still there.

**Mayor:** Do we have her back? Let me check the team, do you have her back?

**Moderator:** I think we do have the Congressman back.

**Mayor:** Congressman, can you hear us? The team is working diligently. Can you hear us, Yvette? One more time, Yvette Clarke, are you out there?

**Moderator:** We can circle back to the Congresswoman.

**Mayor:** Okay, Dave, we're going to get you back for that second question with the Congressman. Who's next?

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

**Mayor:** Go ahead, Mike.

**Question:** Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** How are you doing, man?

**Question:** I'm doing okay. A couple of questions. The first one is on school ventilation inspections. My understanding is they were supposed to be finalized early this week. Have they been? And what are the results of those?

**Mayor:** Yeah, the Chancellor spoke to this yesterday at the press conference that we did in the afternoon, Michael. Almost all of them were done by yesterday. I think there's a few being finished today. We're going to get the results out publicly. Overwhelmingly, what we're seeing is classrooms – overwhelmingly – the last number I saw was in the high 90 percent that are ready right now. But we'll get you the formal count. Some, if there's a problem, obviously, there's some time to fix them. But we've been really clear, if for any reason the classroom's not ready for the first day of school, it'll be held back. If there's a building with a problem, we either fix the problem or we even hold that back. But overwhelmingly we're seeing good results right now.

**Question:** Thank you. The second question is on kind of this issue of, you know, people leaving the city. And, you know, people I've spoken to about this who are in the process of leaving or considering it are, you know, they're uncertain about their kids' futures – most of them I talked to. You know, this has to do with schools and kind of continuing to be able to get their kids a good education. You know, there's some concern about crime and there's also concern about the possibility that property values will go down. And I know you addressed this yesterday, but, you know, there's this kind of idea that going around, you know, in the blogosphere, the Twittersphere that people are kind of like sellouts if they leave. You know, are you sympathetic at all with people's decisions to leave? And are you concerned – I know you said yesterday people would come – people would come to the city, but are you concerned with the short-term erosion, further erosion of the city's tax base?

**Mayor:** Michael, I take the long view on this. And again, it's so clear – I mean, the history is not even slightly gray here, it's abundantly clear. You go back, you look at the sixties and seventies, we had massive, let's be blunt, white flight from the city. That's when the phrase was coined. Well, guess what? The city regained its strength. The city became more diverse. The city grew. The city, as of February, had reached a point where we had the most jobs we ever had in our history – 4.6 million jobs. We've had a highest population in recent years we've ever had in our history. I mean, if you look back in those times, you would say, there's just no way the city could have come back after having lost millions and millions of people – came back stronger and better than ever. Now, one of the great cities on the earth. And again, you could say the same exact thing after 9/11, after Hurricane Sandy, after the Great Recession, the city comes back stronger. And there's no lack of people in this country, in this world who want to come to New York City. And there's no lack of New Yorkers who want to stand and fight. So, I would say to you very squarely, there's over 8 million people, this is our home, we're not going anywhere, we're going to fight for it. The folks who maybe are newer here who didn't take – you know, really have roots here or didn't feel connected here, if they leave. I think they're making a mistake, because I think we have very, very good days ahead. But I talk to New Yorkers all the time. They're not going anywhere. They're not even thinking about going anywhere. It's just, this is their home. And obviously, people see, for example, you mentioned the schools – the heroic effort to bring our schools back, the heroic effort of our educators in the spring, going all remote, the remote heroic effort now to bring our schools back. People are proud of that. People are proud this city fought back the coronavirus. They're proud to be New Yorkers. They're not going anywhere. And lastly, property values – seriously? Chirlane and I bought a house in the year 2000, in a neighborhood that, 10 years earlier, there were tons of houses available. This is true all over the city. By the time we got to year 2000, we could barely afford our own neighborhood and that's been true for New Yorkers all over the place. Property values have skyrocketed for decades in this city. So, if we have a period of time where they stop skyrocketing, or even they declined some, it's against a backdrop where a property values went up in an astronomical manner over years and years. And New York City is going to be a very good bet for the future. Those property values are going to be strong, no matter what. So, anyone who leaves, I truly believe they'll ultimately regret it, but I want to focus on the people who are staying in fighting – the vast majority of New Yorkers.

**Moderator:** The next is Allison Kaden from PIX 11.

**Question:** Hello, Mr. Mayor. Can you hear me?

**Mayor:** Yeah, Allison? How are you doing?

**Question:** Good. How are you doing? I want to talk a little bit about indoor dining. You have some elected officials – City Council, from the State – talking about, if you're going to save restaurants, you have to bring back limited indoor dining. There's even a lawsuit that's been filed. I know you haven't given guidance yet. You're saying you're going to wait, but people want answers. They want to know what's going to happen and when.

**Mayor:** Allison, I totally understand. I run a big organization, I understand why anyone would answers, and we're trying to be honest with them. I could have pandered and told people something that wasn't true. I'm not going to do that. The health leadership of this city that has guided us through this crisis is very concerned about indoor dining. The State has also been concerned about indoor dining – all over the world, we've seen a problem. Now, again, let me be very clear, restaurants are different than bars and nightclubs. Bars and nightclubs have been even more of a problem. So, we will treat restaurants separately. I said, this week, we're going to come to a decision in the next days, definitely in the month of September, give the guidance based on all the facts, all the data, and then restaurant owners can make their decision. We have Open Restaurants through the end of October. We're looking at whether we should extend it. We have it picking up again in the spring. We're looking at that date. We have delivery. We have takeout. Some restaurants, obviously, with all those tools that are going to be able to keep going. Others are in really desperate shape, and I want to see how we can help them, but it has to be health and safety first. It has to be, how do we defeat the coronavirus? That's the first consideration. So, we will have more guidance, but the guidance will be based on what is in the interest of 8 million-plus New Yorkers who have to beat this disease. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** Alison, your second question?

**Question:** Nope, that was it. Thank you so much.

**Mayor:** Thank you. And then you guys, let me know if you got – you got the Congressman back? Now you got Dave back?

**Congresswoman Yvette Clarke:** I'm back.

**Mayor:** Okay. Let's see if we can get Dave back for his question. Dave Evans also –

**Question:** I'm here, Mayor.

**Mayor:** Look at this. This is a miracle of modern technology. Well done to the team today, putting it together. Yvette, Dave has a question for you about President Trump's comments. Go ahead, Dave.

**Question:** I'll be brief. I'm listening to the Governor also at the same time. So, Congresswoman thank you for coming back, but I wanted to just get your reaction to what the President said last



night about hurting New York City with federal funding. And also, I've been told \$7 billion is what we roughly get from the federal government in New York City. I thought that figure sounds a little bit low, if you could correct that figure. And also, your reaction to what Trump said.

**Congresswoman Clarke:** Absolutely. You know, this is more of the same – the threats, the lack of character, him targeting New York City alongside many of the other major municipalities is a partisan move on his part. He's already said that he's focused on blue states. You know, first of all, yes, the City of New York in the upcoming budget, under the Hero's Act, we have targeted for the municipality close to a \$12 billion so that we can make sure that the City of New York is made whole after all that it has done to navigate us through this through this pandemic. I certainly believe the figure that he has been quoted – is saying in the press is an accurate. But, again, you know, we need to stay focused on navigating our city through this crisis. He does not have the authority to defund any cities in this nation. And we will certainly use every authority we have in the Congress to make sure that he does not begin manipulating federal agencies in terms of how the funds that we're due are disrupted in any form or fashion. So, listen, we are unfortunately dealing with someone who has demonstrated a lack of capacity to lead. And in this climate, we need leadership that will navigate our nation through this pandemic, make sure that our economy is made whole and get us to a point where we're united as a nation, not divided along the lines of blue states and red states.

**Mayor:** Amen. And Dave, one last point, you just heard from a member of the United States Congress, and it's a reminder that Donald Trump has a founding fathers problem – the Constitution so clearly states that the Congress gets to make the decisions on the budget. And so, it may be hard for Donald Trump to hear because he has abandoned New York City to move to Florida, but here's a real New Yorker, Yvette Clarke, and a member of the Congress, telling you in-line with the United States Constitution that Donald Trump doesn't get to make that decision the decision's already been made. And New York City will get the funding that is slated for us so we can serve the people of this city. Thank you, Yvette. And thank you, Dave. Go ahead.

**Congresswoman Clarke:** Mr. Mayor, before we hang up, I've got a lot of friends out there, and let me thank you for reminding me to remove the lipstick from my teeth. Thank you.

[Laughter]

**Mayor:** Your fan club's looking out for you, Yvette. Very good. All right, go ahead.

**Moderator:** Next we have Julia Marsh from the Post.

**Question:** Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor. How are you doing?

**Mayor:** Good, Julia. How are you?

**Question:** Good, so I'm sure you saw Speaker Corey Johnson yesterday called from immediate return to indoor dining. Governor Cuomo was asked about it just now and he said that they're going to contact the Speaker today and that it's up to Corey Johnson to get the NYPD to do enforcement on indoor dining if that's what they decide to do. Given that the Governor's going to

Corey Johnson on this, do you feel sidelined? Do you feel like you've waited too long to make a plan to return to indoor dining?

**Mayor:** I'm totally at peace that what we've done is focused on the health and safety of all New Yorkers, which is why the city is now the envy of the nation in terms of fighting back the coronavirus, having such a low infection rate, thank God, being able to bring back our economy, bring back our schools. Our health care leadership I think has been absolutely right to be careful and cautious and focus on the data. So, we'll keep looking at the issue. And I said, we'll have more to say in the coming days on it, but I feel very confident that we've done the right thing to protect the people of this city.

**Question:** Okay. Okay. But this is ultimately going to be a decision by the Governor. So, do you feel sidelined given that now he's discussing with the Council Speaker about reopening these restaurants [inaudible] –

**Mayor:** He can discuss with anyone he wants to. As I've said, literally, it feels like hundreds of times from this chair, the City and State are in constant dialogue every day, multiple levels. And there's been a lot of harmony on the basic direction. And the State has been right there with us in understanding the challenges that come with indoor activity, especially indoor activity, where people don't wear masks like in dining. So, I'm just not taking the bait, Julia. We are going to make decisions together as we always have, and we're going to do what's in the interest of the people of the city to keep them healthy and safe. And that is what's been working.

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

**Question:** Hello, Mayor. I don't think any of us can easily balance listening to both you and the Governor at exactly the same time, but we're doing our best. And to Julia's point a moment ago, I – one of the things the Governor said just now was you don't have enough sheriffs for them to do the compliance when you do go to indoor dining. He's saying you need three or four thousand dedicated members of the NYPD who will be doing restaurant compliance, otherwise you're inviting a problem. Your response to that.

**Mayor:** Again, I'm not going to comment on whatever the Governor says on any given day. What really matters is the ongoing dialogue between the City and State. Everyone knows our budget situation right now. We, obviously, want to make sure we have people from this City government in the right places at the right time doing the work. The Sheriff's Office has done an amazing job, absolutely outstanding job, with restaurant enforcement, with quarantine enforcement. NYPD has a lot on its hands and they're dealing with so many challenges and fighting back the challenges we face. And, meanwhile, our central concern, of course, is where is the federal government with the stimulus? Well, nothing yet. Where is the State government with long-term borrowing? Nothing yet. In fact, there's a threat of cuts from the State government that will cause us to have to cut even more New York City personnel. So, I'm just not going to engage that. Let's get to the work of figuring out what is healthy and safe for New Yorkers. And then let's get to the work of giving us the resources to actually protect people. And what Albany needs to do is give us that long-term borrowing authority. Go ahead, Andrew.

**Question:** My second question has to do with the schools with regard to the COVID testing, which was an essential part of your deal with the UFT. Our understanding is it doesn't really start until October, but the students return September 21st. So, are you not risking all kinds of asymptomatic spread on those first days? Or do you have some plan to get a representative number of students and faculty tested before the 21st?

**Mayor:** We're going to do what surpasses the standard around the world, even in the countries that have had the best efforts to fight back the coronavirus and the best efforts at reopening our schools, we're going to make free testing available on a priority basis, fast turnaround, for all our educators and staff in our school system from this day forward. We're going to constantly encourage them to get that testing. I know the unions will as well. We're going to encourage parents to get their kids tested. We now have over 200 sites where people can get testing for free. This is an extraordinarily comprehensive effort. And then part of the agreement, we'll start the systematic testing in October. And I think that combination is going to give us what we need.

**Moderator:** The next is Jillian Jonas from WBAI.

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

**Mayor:** Jillian. I want you to see, thank you for your suggestions.

**Question:** I know, I saw it yesterday. I wanted to thank you for the – I wanted to thank you for the shout out. It's totally not necessary, but I have to mention WBAI because the station needs all the help we can get.

**Mayor:** Fair enough. It's a noble cause.

**Question:** It might be a noble cause, but it might be a pointless one. I don't know. Anyway, also yesterday you talked separately about disparities and then later ferries. The CBC reports that taxpayers are subsidizing, per ride, those ferries around \$10, almost 10 times the New York City transit, subway, and bus rides. The ferries recouped just 24 percent of [inaudible] costs last year, the lowest of all transit systems in the city, and an expansion could require bigger taxpayer subsidies, as much as \$25 per ride. The Daily News analyzed CBC data and reported a majority of ferry riders are white with an average median income of between \$75,000 and \$99,000 a year. Meanwhile, there's no data that proves low-income New Yorkers are being served by the ferries. Then in July, the City cut \$65 million from the Fair Fares program, which serves those low-income New Yorkers. Isn't this the quintessential example of the kind of disparities you say have to be corrected?

**Mayor:** No. The – you're mixing a couple of points together in a way I wouldn't agree with. Jillian, the issue around Fair Fares, which has been a very good initiative, is that people weren't taking the subways and people weren't using that subsidy. That's what happened there. But, look, no, the ferry ridership has been coming back very, very strong and it is part of bringing back New York City. And I think one of the things that is constantly missed in this discussion, first of all, look at where the ferry routes are now and look at where they're going to be. They're already in places like the Rockaways, Red Hook, Astoria near Astoria Houses, Soundview in the Bronx,

places that needed a lot more mass transit. We're going to be going to Throggs Neck. We're going to be going to Coney Island. We're going to be going to Staten Island. This is the future of New York City, to have more and different types of mass transit. We're not using our waterways the way we need to. So, this is an investment in the future. Anyone can raise any concern they want about the here-and-now, but I'll keep saying to them, you're missing the forest for the trees. The future of this city is to get people out of their cars and, more and more, get people into mass transit. And we're not going to do that if we don't use our waterways. So, I'm very confident that we're moving in the right direction. And as the system builds out, it's going to go much, much more deeply into communities that are underserved. And that includes a lot of communities of color, a lot of lower income communities in this city that are desperate for this service. Go ahead

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**Question:** If I remember correctly – if I remember correctly, you were opposed to Fair Fares for a long time before it finally was enacted, but [inaudible] –

**Mayor:** I'm a just – I want you to get your question, but I just want to correct. Never was opposed, I said from day one it's a good idea. Originally, what I said is, given that it was the MTA and given what the City was going through fiscally, even then, I wanted the MTA to cover the cost. And we ultimately came to an agreement with the Council that the City would do that. It was a major priority for the Council. So, no, I've always said it's actually a very good idea. It's one, I think, the State should have covered, but we ultimately made the decision to move forward.

**Question:** Fair enough. What's the status of the Brooklyn Queens Connector?

**Mayor:** Well, everything's been slowed down by the reality of the coronavirus. Just before the coronavirus hit, the beginning of the EIS process had started. I need to get an update because I know that was disrupted by the coronavirus about how and when that will start again. Now, obviously, we're going to continue to do the work to prepare. The decisions will have to be made by-and-large in the next administration given the time that's been lost here. But I still think, again, the idea is to maximize mass transit in New York City. We've added, in addition to NYC Ferry, a lot more Select Bus Service, we've added the new busways, which I think are going to be tremendously helpful, we greatly expanded Citi Bike and bike lanes. All of this has to keep going. And I think light rail is an important part of this equation. It has been all over the country, very successfully. So, again, a lot of the decisions will have to be deferred to the future, but the more we can build out mass transit in the city, the better off we're going to be.

**Moderator:** We have time for two more for today. The next is Abu from Bangla Patrika.

**Question:** Hello, Mayor, how are you?

**Mayor:** Good, Abu. How are you?

**Question:** Good. Thank you so much. My first question is to you, and next question is to Yvette Clarke. The first question is –

**Mayor:** Yvette's not here anymore, I'm not sure – or is she? Still with us?

**Moderator:** [Inaudible] with us.

**Mayor:** Okay, I'm sorry. Abu, go ahead. She is still with us, go ahead.

**Question:** Yeah. Okay. So, my first question is since the school is going to be open do you have any idea of what would be the difference between in a physical class and the student who will be in the home? What kind of different – both will be, you know, in terms of the education, in terms of social, you know, evaluation?

**Mayor:** Yeah, it's a really important question, Abu. Look, we're going to serve every child. That is the mandate of public education. We believe in that. I believe in that fundamentally. The fact is it's harder to do remote for everyone. It's harder for educators. It's harder for kids. It's harder for parents, but we're going to do our best job possible and continue to always improve it. It did improve a lot in the course of spring, it will continue to improve. It is harder to evaluate a child remotely. It's harder to provide counseling and emotional support. It's harder to provide, obviously, mental health and physical health services that can be provided in a school. So, we will do our best to achieve as much parity as we can, but I've been very honest, we have much more ability to serve children in person. And, look, yesterday a great example, the school I was in, in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn, just a perfect, perfect beacon of what a community needs and why a school building can be such an inspiring place for children. We can't do all that online, but we'll do the very best we can. Go ahead, Abu.

**Question:** [Inaudible] could answer. The President of the United States stopped all kinds of immigration activities, I mean, issuing visa, issuing any kind of, you know, immigration process, and all this stuff is stopped by the executive order. And the immigrant community is suffering. You know, nothing is going to be happening. A lot of people are stranded here in the United States and they don't know what is their future? What is your comment on it? And, Yvette Clarke, do you think you can do anything in the Congress?

**Mayor:** Yeah, I'll start it, and I'll pass to Yvette to talk about. I know this is a very deeply felt issue for her as a child of immigrants herself. Look, it's – ironically, and I don't know if the president could understand that, but what he's doing is un-American. This is a country of immigrants. This is a city of immigrants. He's literally trying to break up families and destroy what has worked for America for generations. It worked for my grandparents who came here from Italy, people bringing their extraordinary energy and talents to this country from every corner of the world. That's what has made America great. And this president is single handedly trying to stop that. But more humanly, as you said, he's stopping families from being united, which has never been allowed previously in recent history, at least. And it's just horrible on a human level that we would ever have a policy that stops families from coming together who want to be a part of this nation. So, let me, turn to Yvette who can talk about what she thinks and what the Congress might be able to do about it. Go ahead, Yvette.

**Congress Member Yvette Clarke:** Well, thank you so much, Mr. Mayor. And thank you for raising that, Abu, because, of course, the City of New York has been a longstanding gateway for

immigrants to embrace the American dream. Part of that has been family reunification. And Donald Trump and his administration have totally disrupted what has been a historic pathway for individuals to seek the American dream, whether it's those who are seeking asylum or those who have been lawfully trying to unite with their family members, by applying for visas. You're absolutely correct, this administration has slowed down that process, has made it more difficult for individuals to even afford to purchase the services of the USCIS. We have been very focused on this in the House of Representatives. Unfortunately, we don't have shared values in the U. S. Senate. And so, right now, things are somewhat at a standstill. We're able through our offices to do some limited work with the USCIS. Unfortunately, though, for the most part the Muslim ban that was put in effect, the closing of the borders due to the excuse used by him, of course, the spread of the COVID-19 which ironically, now no one wants us to travel to their nations, but all of this amounts to a xenophobia, a political agenda that Donald Trump believes will gain him favor with a certain segment of the population. We will continue to push for the reunification of our families for the agencies under the Department of Homeland Security to do their job, their mandated job. I don't anticipate a major uptick in that work to take place, unfortunately, before the general election. This is the reality that we're living in. We've been living in it for quite some time, but it's gotten worse as we've approached the election season.

**Mayor:** Isn't that the truth? Thank you very much, Yvette.

**Moderator:** The last question for today, it goes to Dana from the New York Times.

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

**Mayor:** Hi, Dana, how are you?

**Question:** I'm all right, thank you. On long-term borrowing, I'm just curious for your thoughts on why it makes sense to take on more overhead in the form of annual debt service since, you know, there's a widespread expectation that the revenue that would support that service, the personal income tax, is poised to decline over the next few years.

**Mayor:** Dana, it's a very important question, and I'm glad you asked it because I think we need to have a fuller conversation about this. So, again, let's go back to the history. In the aftermath of 9/11, a really tough time for this city, then-Mayor Giuliani went to Albany, got the borrowing authority, long-term borrowing authority, 20-year pay repayment basis. Asked for \$2.5 billion in authority. Michael Bloomberg came into office over time, used \$2 billion of that \$2.5 billion, did not use the full authority, and that has been paid back steadily. But think about it as with anything in life, if you're paying back over 20 years, you can handle the payments when you're talking about, of course, a budget on our scale. Now you're right if you say, hey, what about the next few years with revenue? We do expect challenges with revenue over the next few years, but not the kind of challenges that would stop us from paying back a modest amount of borrowing over, what we are asking for, a 30-year term. Our request to Albany right now is the ability to borrow up to \$5 billion over a combination of years. I think this is really important to recognize. We've asked for \$5 billion. We do not want to use that authority if we don't have to.

For example, if a stimulus was passed and made us whole, we wouldn't borrow at all. If we only needed to use a small amount of the borrowing, we would use a small amount. But when you're talking about repayment on a 30-year basis, the debt service is quite modest. It does not change the fundamental reality of the budget. We're talking, this year, about an \$88 billion budget. It is a small amount. So, what I would argue, Dana, and this is to connect the dots I think that underlie your question – okay, well you could, well, just keep cutting, just keep cutting, and, you know, you might have more challenges ahead, you might have less revenue, just keep cutting. I argue to you that if you keep cutting, you're actually going to set the city back. If we don't have basic services that are strong, we're not going to be able to bring back our economy as well, and actually amplify our revenue and strengthen our revenue, speed our recovery. Also, if you go to layoffs, you're putting more families in a horrible place. You're putting people out of work. We want to avoid that at all costs. So, my argument is, look, anyone who tries to make – you have not, but I'm saying people would like to immediately jump to the 1970s and compare to 40 or 50 years ago, fundamentally misunderstand how strong New York City is today, how strong we were as recently as February – again, all-time high in jobs. We have a very extraordinary, really, economic profile, diverse, strong economy at this point that will come back. But if we don't invest in keeping City services strong, it will actually hinder that comeback. That is what I fundamentally believe. Go ahead, Dana.

**Question:** Thank you for that. On a completely different topic, the Park Slope Y is reopening September 8th. Are you planning to go back? Are you comfortable working out in a gym at this point in the pandemic?

**Mayor:** It's not about comfort. It's just – I'm not planning to go back right now. Someday, someday, but not now.

All right, everybody. Look, everyone, as we started, I'll finish. Thank you, especially to Congress Member Yvette Clarke, my old friend who is talking to you today has talked so powerfully about her community as we get ready for this holiday weekend. Everybody, again, let's make Labor Day what it's always been for us, an extraordinarily warm, positive part of the year. Let's make it safe. And you know what? New Yorkers really care. I mean, this is what we've found in this crisis. We've asked the people of the city to do extraordinary things, to do heroic things, to look out for each other in amazing ways. Whether you're talking about our health care heroes, our first responders, the folks who work in grocery stores or pharmacies, our educators, New Yorkers just look out for each other. They're there for each other. Neighbors look out for neighbors. This is who we are. So, this weekend look out for each other. Be careful, be smart, help each other out. Let's avoid large gatherings. Let's avoid anything that could spread this disease. Let's be safe. Let's understand this is a weekend to really focus on health and safety. This city has shown time and time again that no one cares more than New Yorkers. No one has more heart and passion than New Yorkers. So, let's use that heart and passion to keep each other safe. And with that, everyone, a very happy, healthy, safe Labor Day weekend. Thank you.

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