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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everyone. You know, these last five months, New Yorkers have been fighting this battle against the coronavirus, fighting the battle against the economic crisis, the hunger crisis, all the things we've been dealing with at once, and I know people have felt often alone. This has been a tough, tough time. So many challenges in everyone's personal life, family life, work life, you name it. But I also mean that people felt alone because New York City's had to stand on its own. We have not gotten help from the places we need it from, and most expected from. That begins from Washington, D. C. It is, unfortunately, a statement of fact that the many, many times we asked our federal government for help, we didn't receive an answer. We didn't get the help we needed. We didn't get it when we needed it, and that is reminder of how important it is to have strong representation in Washington fighting for us, and that is a reminder that right now, in these coming weeks, the amount of representation we're going to have in the Congress going forward will be determined. It will be determined by the census, as well as a host of other key decisions of how much funding we're going to get. So, we're going to come back to that in a moment because it sounds abstract, but it's not abstract at all. This is literally one of the most important things that's going to happen to New York City in a long time, whether we can maximize this census count or not. So, when you think about all the things you wish we had gotten from Washington, and we're still fighting for at this hour, as the stimulus discussions go on, think about our levels of representation. Think about how much we would be damaged if we had even less, and that's a motivation right there to focus on the census.

We'll come back to that in a moment. But first back to the economic crisis, back to the pain that so many families are feeling. So many New Yorkers simply can't pay the rent. It's not their fault, that they didn't ask for a global pandemic, but if you don't get a paycheck, if you don't have a paycheck, what are you going to do? The last number I heard was 1.3 million New York City residents had filed for unemployment benefits in the course of this crisis. 1.3 million people – that represents families, so millions more effected by that. If you don't have a source of income, how the hell are you going to pay the rent? It's as simple as that, and on top of that, people are trying to get food, medicine, you name it. So, there have been eviction moratoriums over these last few months and that's been right because the last thing we want to see is a lot of people put out on the street, the last thing when I see is people flooding into our shelter system, but the eviction moratorium expired at midnight last night, and that is a huge problem for the people of New York City, and it must be addressed, and I'm going to say again, in these next weeks, you're going to hear a lot from me calling upon our State government to create a new system, to allow those who simply cannot pay for lack of income, to be able to have a payment plan model that will take them into next year, allow them to pay off the rent over time when they finally have resources. But no one should be put out on the street because they can't pay. They literally can't pay. So, while we're fighting that battle in Albany, right now I want to tell all New Yorkers who are threatened with eviction, that if you need help call 3-1-1, because we want to get you help.

We can get you legal support and that really can help stop an eviction. Here to tell you about it is someone who's devoted his life to keeping people in their housing, our Commissioner for Social Services, Steve Banks.

Commissioner Steven Banks, Department of Social Services: Thank you very much. Look, as the Mayor said, eviction cases are now being filed. No actual evictions are moving forward right now because of an order of the court, but we're not waiting. We reached out to 14,000 people who had eviction warrants pre-COVID, to let them know that legal help is available. So, if you're somebody that's got an eviction warrant, as the Mayor said, call 3-1-1 and we can help you. We've also been paying back-rent through emergency renter grants. A sad fact is tens of thousands of people can't pay their rent. They were struggling before COVID, and now, as the Mayor said, they've lost their jobs, they've lost the ability to pay their rent, and to add insult to injury the Republican leadership in the Congress and the Senate has allowed the cutoff of the \$600 a week in unemployment supplemental funds that was so essential for keeping people in their homes. But, you know, behind these cold numbers are devastating human costs. I remember when I was a housing lawyer at Legal Aid, how heartbreaking it was to talk to families in shelter who had been evicted in cases in which a lawyer could have kept them in their homes, and the impact on children in these cases is particularly harsh. And that's why New York City did something about this to prevent evictions through the first in the nation, Right-to-Counsel law. It drove down evictions pre-COVID by 41 percent while evictions were going up all over the country, and that's why it's critical that we've got legal help in place to address this new crisis. So, call 3-1-1, if you need legal help. But as the Mayor said, there's so much more we can do. We need help from Washington. We need help from Albany to extend the moratorium, and in the federal stimulus bill, we clearly need to provide rental assistance to help struggling families pay their rent in this period of time that the Mayor spoke so directly about. Mayor, I'm going to turn it back to you.

Mayor: Thank you. Thank you very much, Commissioner. I want to thank you, Steve, everyone at Social Services for the work you're doing. Those 14,000 New York City families right now, who are on the brink – thank you for not waiting, but for reaching out to them to offer help, to do everything in our power to keep them in their homes. But look again, the bigger solutions reside in Albany with a law to allow people to have a payment plan, the best solution resides in Washington, D.C. Rental assistance for everyone who's lost their job so they can keep their home and landlords have the money to keep up their buildings. But we're in such a broken situation in Washington right now, and yes, there is an election coming and a chance to address that. But right now, let's go back to representation in Congress because this is where it all begins and ends – the census.

Please, everyone, every single New Yorker can help. If you haven't filled out your census, we're going to tell you again today, how crucial it is. If you know people who haven't filled it out, family, friends, it's so important to tell them. This really matters and everyone can participate and everyone can help, and if it sounds abstract, I keep coming back to it, it's not. Do you want less representation in Congress? We could lose a seat in Congress. We could lose two. Do you want hundreds of billions of dollars less in federal aid for education, mass transit, so many things that people need? I don't think anyone wants that, but we have to participate and people are cynical and they're hurt and they're in pain and they're distrustful. I get it, but we have to participate.

Now, this is not a new thing. It's in the Constitution, literally, how important it is to have a regular count of our people to determine representation and where funding and support goes. So, what did the president do? What any president would normally do, Democrat or Republican, is say everyone needs to be counted. What this president has done is tried to throw in a monkey wrench every single time he could. Now the courts have seen otherwise. They pushed back every time the president's tried to undermine the Congress, create fear, make immigrants fearful to fill it out, say he's not going to count undocumented. Every time that gets pushed back – it's unconstitutional, what he's doing. But now he tried something else. He decided to cut the response time for the Census by one month. Now think about this. We're trying to get people counted and we're in the middle of pandemic, but the president decides he should take a month off the count. Why? To explicitly under-count people of color, to explicitly under-count immigrants, to explicitly under-count America's cities. So, the previous deadline was October 31st. The president has now moved it to September 30. We're going to fight that fight, but in the meantime, we need to do everything we can this month and next month to maximize the count. I was out in Queens a few days ago there, I saw once people engage the census and they understand how important it is, it is really powerful and everyone needs to be a part of this, and you saw in that photo, I was with my colleague, Deputy Director of the New York City Census, Amit Singh Bagga, and one of the leaders of this effort. And Amit thank you for your great efforts, and I know you've been taking it to the streets with me. Tell people what we need to do now to keep moving forward on the census.

Deputy Director Amit Singh Bagga, New York City Census: Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor, and thank you for your support of a complete and accurate count here in New York City. Today, the 2020 Census count enters a new phase here in New York and also across the country: door to door outreach. This means that census takers will be going to those homes across New York City that have not yet responded to the census. Here in New York City. We currently have a response rate of 54.8 percent, which means just approximately 40 percent of New York City's households are currently scheduled to get a knock on their door. This year, the Census Bureau is doing something a little different than they did in 2010. They have recruited their door knockers directly from New York City's neighborhoods. These are folks who are your neighbors. They are from your community. They speak your language. We strongly encourage you, if they come to your door, please do speak with them. They are highly trained and your information is going to be completely confidential. We still have time to complete the census online, if you'd prefer not to get a knock on your door – my2020census.gov. It's really very simple. As the Mayor mentioned, we now have less time than we originally did, and I'll come back to that in a moment.

This year, the census door knockers will be doing things a little bit differently. They will be wearing face coverings but they will have clear identification badges and bags as well as identification on their devices so that you know they are from the United States Census Bureau. They will also be ensuring to keep their distance. Even though things are happening a little bit differently this year, the goal is still exactly the same – to ensure that every single New Yorker is counted. It's safe, simple, and secure. And as a reminder, there are absolutely no questions whatsoever about immigration, citizenship, criminal history, income, social security information, or anything of the sort. And, lastly, if you are a New Yorker who has left town temporarily, please remember to go online to my2020census.gov and fill out the census using your New York City address.

As we mentioned, New York City is currently lacking in participation at 54.8 percent. This means if we don't get this rate up, we are going to lose approximately half of the money and the power that New Yorkers deserve. But we are New Yorkers and we should settle for absolutely nothing less than a hundred percent. This move to shorten the census by a month is nothing but a partisan political ploy to steal the census from New Yorkers. As the Mayor mentioned, we have two seats in Congress that are potentially on the line. So, it is critical that every New Yorker is counted now. The 40 percent of New York City households that have not yet been counted are largely in Black, Brown, and immigrant communities. Trump knows this, and this is exactly why he's trying to steal the money, power, and respect that are rightfully ours. But the census is a count of all of us. Please don't let the president count you out. The best way to fight back is simply to go online and respond now, my2020census.gov or call 8-4-4-3-3-0-2-0-2-0. If you'd like to help us get out the count, we've been making phone calls and going into the streets every single day. For more information about how you can assist us, go to nyc.gov/censuscalls and sign up to help get your fellow New Yorkers counted. Thank you so much, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Amit. And I want to say, look, everyone, what a difference it makes if you participate. And, again, it's so quick, ten questions, ten minutes. It's easy. We need everyone to be a part of this. And there's good folks who are part of this census effort. If you see anyone out there going door to door, if someone calls you on the phone, please thank them because they are simply trying to make sure you are recognized and counted. And they're doing great work. I'm very, very appreciative to the whole team doing this. But let's get it right. It takes so little time to make such a big difference. By the way, everyone in the – our colleagues in the news media, please spread the word, my2020census.gov. Please, in all of your reporting include the fact that it is ten questions, ten minutes, and you go online and immediately can get this done.

All right, on another very important point. Thousands of New Yorkers right now are suffering because the power is still not back on. And look, I think we've all been frustrated over the years. We depend on Con Edison and we don't always get the answers we need and the follow through we need. I've been pushing Con Edison over the last few days on what they're doing. I spoke to the President of Con Edison in New York City, Tim Cawley, earlier today. And I said, first of all, we, the City of New York, anything we can do to help with our agencies, we want to do. And we have a lot of our agencies out there right now, clearing trees and trying to assist in every way. But Con Ed is of course the only folks that can actually put the power back on. Originally Con Ed had said that they were going to need until Sunday. And I think that was very distressing to lots of New Yorkers. Who wants to wait that long? Why should you have to wait that long?

So, based on conversation this morning, I have an update for you. First of all, where this started, once the winds died down after the hurricane, there were 180,000 customers in New York City that did not have power. Con Ed has restored 110,000 of those. So, there's about 70,000 households and customers left. They project today that they will restore between 15,000 and 20,000 of those customers. And then again, tomorrow between 15,000 and 20,000 of those customers. So, what I'm pushing for is that more than half of the outstanding households will be resolved by tomorrow, not Sunday, by tomorrow. And then everything else followed up on rapidly from then. We're going to keep pushing because we just can't have people wait that long. It's not fair. And the City of New York will do everything in our power to make sure that Con Ed keeps moving and gives people back their power, especially with everything else going on.

Okay, let's go to our indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to hospitals for suspected COVID-19, threshold 200 patients, today's report 75 patients. Number two, daily number of people in Health + Hospitals ICUs, threshold 375, today's report 303. And number three, percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19, threshold 15 percent, today's report, the best ever, one percent. That's an amazing number. And that's again, because of you. Because of your hard work, stick to it. A few words in Spanish –

[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: Good morning, all. We'll now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Commissioner Banks, Commissioner Criswell, Deputy Director of the New York City Census Amit Bagga, and Senior Advisor. Dr. Jay Varma. First question today, it goes to Marcia from CBS.

Question: I know, but I need to, I need one of the union guys –

Mayor: Marcia, can you hear us?

Moderator: Marcia, you're on the line.

Mayor: You're live. Marcia?

Moderator: We can circle back to Marcia.

Mayor: Okay. We'll come back.

Moderator: The next is Arthur from FOX 5.

Question: Thank you so much for taking my question. I have to have two, Mr. Mayor. I hope you are well. My first question is, what do we do to track tourists who are coming to New York City and perhaps may not be staying in? The honor system, as we know, does not necessarily work. Is there a way perhaps to use cell phones to make sure that that individual is remaining in quarantine and not putting others in danger? Because we have learned of some cases where tourists come to New York City for two, three days. They're not coming just to sit in a hotel room for two, three days, and then to leave. That they have been out – they've been on, people have been posting on social media that, 'Hey, look, I'm in New York City, I'm doing these things,' when they are coming from a state that should be in quarantine.

Mayor: Arthur. Very, very good question. Thank you. First of all, let's be clear. There were 15 states that thank God are not under that quarantine order. So, people visiting from them would not have to go through that. But the ones – the majority, clearly, do. And so, what we said yesterday, we're going to be pumping up this. It has to become clear that this is serious business and it comes with consequences. Both for people, for our health, for our community, but also for the individual. If they don't follow those rules there can be serious penalties up to \$10,000 per person. We do not want to fine people in this environment unless we have to, but if we need to

use that tool more, we will. And the City and State have been on the same page. This really matters that we get this quarantine, right. So,, what we announced yesterday, checkpoints at entries to the city, it will be random. It will be moving, but I think it'll get the message across. What we're doing at the airports, working with the State and the Port Authority, what we're doing at the bus station, Penn Station for travelers coming in from those states. Getting people to the point of contact, getting them to fill out those forms and then following up aggressively with them. We're going to be doing a lot more. We're going to engage every business and institution to be a part of this. But now we've entered a phase where it has to be ubiquitous, Arthur. You have to feel it wherever you go. And people have to start seeing that if they don't follow it, there'll be penalties. So, we can, we can stay in touch with people. And I think most people just, if they're reminded and if you stay in touch, they do follow the rules. Really most people do. But for those who don't, we're going to have to start showing the consequences. Go ahead.

Question: Okay. Thanks. Hopefully monitoring social media can be part of that solution. My other question, if I can shift gears, is to Open Streets. There are a lot of people who feel like looking at other cities that have taken advantage to evolve their city, to create more spaces that are livable, that we're not doing enough to preserve those. That barriers that are put up are run over. And there's still this tug of war, that we're not making the most of this moment. Do you agree with that or are there plans to sort of solidify the gains that have been attained during this pandemic to make the streets more livable for New Yorkers and not just all about cars?

Mayor: Yeah. Unquestionably, Arthur. Look, it's been a very good experiment. We had to structure it carefully, but once we have – I think here's what I've heard back. I'm sure there's been some cases where there were mistakes and some cases where people didn't abide by the rules. But overwhelmingly what we've seen, Open Streets, Open Restaurants when we combine the two, overwhelmingly a success. So, we're going to build upon it now. We're going to keep adding everything we can in the short term. And this is a model that has tremendous promise for our future, particularly in the warmer months. So, we'll be coming out with more and more on that. The bottom line is the future of New York City is more and more about mass transit, biking, walking, less and less about the car. Any spaces we can open up, particularly in the nicer weather we're going to be working to do that. We're also the single biggest city in the country, one of the most densely populated places in the country. So, we can't do everything that some other places do, but we can do a lot. And that's what we intend to do.

Moderator: Let's try Marcia Kramer again from CBS.

Question: Thank you very much for taking the call. Mr. Mayor, I wanted to talk to you about the suit that the police unions have filed against, to challenge the constitutionality of the chokehold law that you signed into law just a few weeks ago. They're talking about it in terms of being constitutionally vague. They say that State law may supersede the City law. And they also point that police chiefs and sheriffs around the area, including the State police, have ordered their people not to do law enforcement activities in New York City. I wonder how you feel about the suit and whether you think that the unions will prevail?

Mayor: Look the NYPD is the obvious organization that keeps New York City safe. So, I respect the choices of other police forces, when it comes to getting, ensuring the safety of New Yorkers – I mean, this is the simplest statement you ever are going to hear in your life. When it comes to ensuring the safety of New Yorkers, the one organization that we can depend on is the

NYPD. And I've not seen the lawsuit, but I can say, and I've said this publicly, numerous times in the last few weeks, Marcia. State law does very clearly say that if an officer – if the officer intervenes in a situation and an individual's life is in danger or the officer's life is in danger, that that must be taken into account in terms of how the criminal justice system looks at any particular issue. That is a very important and appropriate protection for all officers. So, again, won't comment on a lawsuit, I don't know anything about the details of that. But I do agree that State law provides important protections for officers who are out there doing their jobs, risking their lives and trying to save people's lives. Go ahead.

Question: But Mr. Mayor the suit takes issue with a portion of the law, which is different from the State law. And that's the part that talks about the diaphragm, putting your knee or your hands on somebody's back or stomach. They're not talking about the chokehold part. They're talking about the other part. And even the NYPD [inaudible] both raise questions about it. Chief Monahan, even telling me that other district attorneys have told them it's not constitutional. So, do you agree with the assessment of your own police department that parts of this law may not be constitutional and maybe should be overturned?

Mayor: I have not seen the lawsuit. I'm not speaking on a legal matter. I want to hear from my Corporation Counsel on that. I agree on only one point, which is evident, that there is State law that protects officers who are duly and appropriately doing their job. Again, I've said this publicly before, NYPD has raised concerns, for sure, about that legislation. And it was important to allow those concerns to be aired. But in terms of how we follow through on it now, it is the law, everyone needs to follow through on it. There's been retraining and, again, State law does provide important protections for our officers who are doing their job the right way.

Moderator: Next is Juliet from 1010 WINS.

Question: Hi. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. How are you?

Mayor: Good, Juliet. How are you?

Question: I'm fine. Thank you. I wanted to follow up on the checkpoints. I was wondering if you'd be collecting information from these checkpoints, making them public, as far as Test and Trace results or the number of people that are being put in hotels. And also, do you think COVID tests will be required for anybody coming in here from out of state?

Mayor: So, a couple of things, one – the checkpoints and everything that's part of Test and Trace we will regularly report. We have the biggest, strongest Test and Trace program in America. We also have the most transparent program in America. We regularly report on the results. I think it's very important. This will now become a bigger part of that because we want to show that if we have people working directly or with the State and the Port Authority, airports, train stations, bus stations, checkpoints, that all of that's going to add up to a lot of contact and that contact is going to take follow up. We want to show you how that's going. It will take time to build up unquestionably, Juliet, but we want to show you that for sure. I think the most important thing is that people from those 35 states quarantine. We always want people to get testing, but really think about it this way, they're quarantining. That's what – that's the action that matters. They're not going to be in circulation with other people. So, the test is less important than following through on the quarantine order. Go ahead.

Question: Okay. My next question is for you and Commissioner Banks. Homeless shelters are being emptied out. Residents are getting relocated into hotels. What is the City doing to retrofit shelters to keep residents safe from the virus so that they can return to the shelters?

Mayor: It's a great question, Juliet. And, actually, I just want to modify one part of your beginning. You're saying people are being moved out. That really happened earlier in the height of the crisis. You're exactly right to be saying now what's going to be the next step to bring folks back to shelters as is appropriate. So, the Commissioner will talk about it, but I want to emphasize, at the height of the crisis, there was an honest and real problem of folks being in close quarters and we needed to spread them out for their health and safety. That was our concern for all New Yorkers, including folks who unfortunately lost their home. That's why we went into some hotels, but that is a temporary reality. We're going to be coming back from those hotels over time into the shelter system. So, Commissioner, can you give a sense of that approach?

Commissioner Banks: Absolutely. And just for context, I appreciate the question and thank you for that context, Mayor. Just go back a little bit in time. There was an apt headline that said we were facing a ticking time bomb in our congregate shelters. And remember that our congregate shelters are only a part of our overall shelter system. We've got about 55,000 people in shelter now and about 17,000 adults who normally would be in congregate shelters. And we said in order to defuse that ticking time bomb, we implemented a massive emergency relocation of human beings from those congregate shelters throughout the city, more than 10,000 in about eight weeks. We've now got a total of 13,000 single adults in hotel rooms in different parts of the city. We were able to get hotel vacancies. And in some of the congregate shelters, we're now able to implement appropriate social distancing for some individuals who can't appropriately be served outside of that kind of environment.

But I think we're going to be guided by the health guidance. We're guided by health guidance in implementing this massive relocation of human beings in a very short period of time. And we'll be guided by the Health Department and Health + Hospitals in terms of when it's time to return, but I can assure you, we will return when it is safe to do so. That is – this is not a permanent state of operations to be in commercial hotels. We were working very hard, we have a plan to get out of commercial hotels. Before COVID, we had driven down the number of commercial hotels the City was in and we were continuing to make progress in that plan. We opened more than 60 hotels in the last eight to ten weeks in order to deal with this crisis.

Mayor: Yeah. And just to finish this, Juliet, this will unquestionably – we're going to be coming back to where we were, and I want to keep reminding people the extent of the challenge in this sense. You can listen to different people, Jay Varma and I talked about this a bunch of times, is it five months? Is it six months? What is that exact number of months it's going to be until there is a vaccine and people are widely vaccinated? That unquestionably is going to be the watershed moment, but it's finite. That moment is coming. I think the consensus is it's coming in the first months of 2021. So, as much as we have a real issue that we have to deal with, and when we put people in hotels, we have to work with the communities to make sure everyone is safe and secure – the original impetus was to save lives and that remains an imperative, but this is not forever. This is for a limited period of time.

Moderator: Next is Reuven Blau from The City.

Question: Thank you, Mr. Mayor for taking my question. Industry City City Councilman Carlos Menchaca opposes the City's expansion plan. As you are aware, there's an unwritten rule of this, the Council that lawmakers defer to individual members on projects in their districts. Some are now calling on the Speaker and to kind of step in and push through the development plan. I was wondering where do you stand? And do you think the Speaker should kind of step in and save this plan that you put forward?

Mayor: Look, I was a City Council member so I have a particular understanding of all the realities here. I respect the Speaker and I respect the Council. I'm not to tell them how to do their business, but I will say this, that history was for a reason. Of course, a local member knows something particular about their district. It was never codified. It's not a hard and fast rule. I think you're right, it's more of a tradition. But I do think we have to think about some of the overwhelming dynamics we're dealing with right now. We're in the middle of a pandemic and we've got to get people back to work. We've got to find every way to get the livelihoods back to people and need them. So, that needs to be taken to account. So, I won't get into the inner workings of the Council, but I think it's important for them to look at the whole picture. Go ahead.

Question: Thanks. Separately, your Corporation Counsel is refusing to release substantiated CCRB case information saying that the information is not worthwhile even though those documents are actually not tied up in the ongoing lawsuit brought by multiple unions. Why isn't the City releasing what it can on that front?

Mayor: Again, I would say it this way, Reuven. We believe that we're in a very, very strong position legally that finally having gotten rid of the broken 50-a law in Albany, which I fought for, for years, that we now can have really wide scale and effective transparency. The Corporation Counsel is concerned about piecemeal release of information that doesn't give the picture. It's much more effective and efficient and clear to show the whole picture. And hopefully that's something that's going to be resolved soon. So, I think he's looking at it in terms of trying to be as complete and clear as possible in the release of information, trying to be as transparent as possible. We don't want to be piecemeal. And I don't think we're going to have to be piecemeal ultimately.

Moderator: The next is Nolan from the Post.

Question: Hey, everyone, can you hear me?

Mayor: Yeah, Nolan. How are you doing?

Question: I'm well, Mr. Mayor. In June, you announced that your administration would be rolling out a new busway on Main Street in Queens. It's now August, the busway hasn't been rolled out yet. And the Transportation Department announced that they were canceling a key community meeting. Is the busway dead? And why is – the project remained unfinished?

Mayor: Nolan, it's a good question. And I know at the time that we announced it, unlike the others, to the best of my knowledge, there were some very particular local concerns and we were

trying to see if we could make adjustments to address that. That's a very fair question. I'll get you an update on that. Obviously, we intend to move forward, but we also – sometimes we hear an unintended consequence that wasn't fully realized to begin with and we try to make that adjustment. So, we'll get you an update on that quickly. Go ahead.

Question: More broadly on questions about the city's infrastructure and the post-pandemic pre-vaccine era, cities around the world, whether it's London, Paris, Milan, Mexico City, have all rolled out ambitious plans to expand busways to expand bike lanes. The City has nothing comparably ambitious. Every time you've been – every time this question has been put to you, you've said, one of the reasons is New York's exceptionalism. What about New York's exceptionalism means that we can't get the same infrastructure improvements that London and Paris, both old cities, dense cities with millions of people living there, can enjoy?

Mayor: Yeah, respectfully, I don't think any two cities are comparable. I think the way we are built and concentrated is different really than almost any other. And we intend to keep building. I would just disagree on a fundamental reality. This is a city with one of the great mass transit systems in the world. Our job is to strengthen that mass transit system. That's what we were all working on before the pandemic, and obviously getting congestion pricing done, getting long term funding for the MTA was crucial to that, building out Citi Bike, building out a Select Bus Service and busways, building out NYC Ferry. We've been doing this on many, many levels to give people more options. I just don't accept the notion that there's one way to do things. And I also think it's a little bit easy for people to look to other places and say, you know, that looks so wonderful, but I would ask people to look right here at all the different pieces that have been built over recent years and a lot more has to come. So, we, right now, are dealing with the health care crisis, getting our economy restarted, getting our schools back. That's where our focus is. But soon we're going to be saying more and more about the future planning for the city's economy, future planning for mass transit. There's a lot to come, but my focus right now is on the steps we need to take to restart. I think that's where the most important priority is.

Moderator: Next is Chris Robbins from Gothamist.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. Two questions for you. The first is about evictions. Have you directed the City's marshals to not carry out evictions right now? And have you spoken to the Governor directly about this problem because it doesn't seem to be going away. And what is the long term solution here?

Mayor: Well, it's a great question. In terms of long term solution, Chris, there's been constant back and forth with the Governor's team. I've been very, both in our private conversation with public conversations with Albany, that we must have a resolution and the Governor's a piece of it and the Legislature's a piece of it. The best thing to do would be, when the Legislature comes back, which as I understand it could be this month or next month, pass a law creating a payment plan so anyone who simply can certify, you know, objectively and factually that they just don't have an income source, can stay in their apartment, sign onto a payment plan, and pay back the rent when they do have an income source. That's how we could, I think, fix a lot of this problem. Obviously, the rental assistance from the federal government would be an even more profound solution, but it doesn't look in reach at this moment. Now that might change – whoops – it might change in a few months because Washington might change in a few months.

On the question of marshals – very good question. We’re looking at that right now – we want to make sure – we got to follow State law, but I also want to make sure we are being as smart and flexible as possible to avoid economic evictions. There may be some evictions under certain circumstances for totally other reasons that are pertinent, but the economic ones I want to see us avoid. Go ahead.

Question: Thanks, the second question has to do with these barricades that keep – that remain up around NYPD precincts around the city. There was one coffee shop owner in the East Village who said that he had to close his shop down because the public couldn’t access it because it was being blocked by these police barricades. The barricades are still up on Chambers Street. Why are these barricades still up and what purpose are they serving at this point?

Mayor: So, Chris, I go all over the city and I watch very carefully. There’s not a lot of barricades up in the bigger scheme of things. There’s – as we said the other day, what’s happening here around City Hall is being addressed day by day. You’ll see variations over time. Around some police precincts where there had been challenges about safety and security, some of that still exists, but again, that’s being modified over time. Everything we’re talking about is temporary and very limited in the city. So, you are going to see that presence of barricades reduced steadily over the weeks to come.

Moderator: We have time for two more for today. The next is Erin from Politico.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor, I’m wanting to check in about the checkpoints since they were, in fact, actually supposed to be rolled out yesterday, hoping you can just give us an update on how exactly that went. Where were they? How many people did they stop? What kind of reactions did they encounter?

Mayor: Erin it’s a great question, and I cannot tell a lie. I should have had that report here for you. And we probably should have had the sheriff on the line to report. We don’t. I will get that certainly in the next few hours and we’ll have the sheriff follow up with you. But I do think the checkpoint process is both going to reach a whole lot of people directly, but also send a broader message to New Yorkers with many, many other tools we’re going to use. This quarantine situation is serious and must be abided by, so we’ll get you those numbers.

Question: Okay, great. Thanks. And then my second question, I just want to follow up on a couple of the previous questions about, you know, transportation and pedestrian options. Because there was a report earlier this week from the Regional Plan Association saying that, you know, there’s going to be gridlock as more people turn to cars. I guess I’ll phrase the question maybe in human terms, as you might put it, you know, because I think this is a conversation a lot of families are having. You know, to use myself as an example. I don’t have a car, I’ve never had a car, never wanted one. My husband has suggested recently that maybe we should get a car because, you know, taking the subway brings some risk. It’s not something we want to do all the time and we’re kind of stuck in the neighborhood. You know, biking, isn’t safe everywhere. There’s a limited number of options. So, to someone in that situation would you tell them that they shouldn’t buy a car? Would you give them an argument as to why there are other options that they should utilize? Or would you say, sure, go ahead and do it if it’s right for you? What’s your advice to New Yorkers?

Mayor: My advice to New Yorkers is, do not buy a car. Cars are the past. The future is going to be mass transit, biking, walking, and there's so many options right now. And there'll be more and more as we go forward. I'm never going to own a car again. I can tell you that much. Now, Erin, it is a very honest question and people are concerned about their health and safety. I fully understand that, but here's why I would say, especially don't buy a car now, the crisis – what defines the end of this crisis? A vaccine that works and the vaccine being delivered and people being inoculated on a wide, wide scale. Remember, you're in a city right now, many regard as you know, the safest city in America right now in health terms. We're down to a one percent infection level. You know, we have a handful of people going into the hospital at any given day related to COVID.

The crisis will be over. Will it be four, five, six, seven months? I don't know the exact day, but it will be over. And I think the greatest likelihood is it'll be over in the first months of 2021. And then a whole lot of action will happen to restore things. It won't happen overnight, but it'll happen steadily. I just think cars don't make sense in New York City with all the other options, let alone the for-hire vehicles and everything else, and the fact that this is a crisis that has an inherent time limit. So, I would note, Erin, people really have been coming back to the subways and buses. It's not a torrent, but it's been steady, very steady increases. And I think when you add all that up plus, tragically, a lot of people do not have a job to go to yet, and that will take a while to restore and a huge number of people are working from home. So, I don't think we're going to see overwhelming numbers of folks on mass transit for those reasons. And I also don't think you're going to see overwhelming car traffic for those reasons. So, I think we can build up what we have, but I would not tell any New Yorker to buy a car unless there's a really urgent reason for it. Go ahead.

Moderator: Last question for today is Ben Evansky from Fox News.

Question: Mr. Mayor, thank you very much for your question. Just – first question on the checkpoints. Do you see any constitutional problems with that? How do you balance the two between constitutional rights and stopping people, asking them these questions?

Mayor: It's a very good question. We thought about that a lot. And the sheriff has been – I think his remarks yesterday was really clear, or the day before. He was really clear that we want to do this in a respectful way that is based on information. It's not punitive. It is letting people know that there's a new law in effect that is an emergency law based on health and safety. And we need people to understand, whether they're coming from one of those 35 states or a New Yorker who went to visit one of those 35 states, that they're obliged by law to quarantine, and we need their information so that we can get them the support in that. I think it is going to be in a smart, straightforward way, but I will tell you, we cannot take the risk of this virus reasserting. We've had now two months of incredible success. God bless the people in New York City. We're not going to let it slip away now. Go ahead.

Question: And second question. Governor Cuomo was discussing ways to try and persuade rich friends, millionaires to come back to the city. Is the City keeping track of how many residents have left since the pandemic and the crime wave? I'm hearing a lot of anecdotal evidence [inaudible] the Governor, obviously yesterday or the day before – is the city keeping track of this?

Mayor: Yeah. Yes, but I want to put things in a very quick perspective. We are having a problem in the last few months. There's been an uptick in crime, but it is a problem directly related to the coronavirus. Just as I said, you're going to see the crime situation turn around because the NYPD is employing new strategies, working more closely with communities, because the summer will be over soon, because the coronavirus crisis will be over soon. So, I do not hear a lot of people making decisions based on that. I think there's a pretty strong understanding out there, people are paying attention to, this is a temporary reality caused by a perfect storm of problems. But the issue of folks who left because of the virus, I think you'll see a certain number of people who leave and after an appropriate time, after there's a vaccine, will come back. I think you'll see some people who maybe decide they want a different kind of lifestyle. I think a lot of those people will be replaced by other people coming in. For decades now, as people have left New York City they've been replaced, and then some, by more and more people coming in.

So, I think that pattern will start again over the next couple of years, but to the point about the folks out in the Hamptons, I have to be very clear about this. We do not make decisions based on the wealthy few. I was troubled to hear this concept that because wealthy people have a set of concerns about the city that we should accommodate them, that we should build our policies and approaches around them. That's not how it works around here anymore. This city is for New Yorkers. This city is for people who live here, work here, fight to make this place better, fight through this crisis. So, there's a lot of New Yorkers who are wealthy, who are true believers in New York City and will stand and fight with us. And there are some who may be fairweather friends, but they will be replaced by others. But we must build our policies around working people. And if our federal government fails us and doesn't provide a stimulus we should immediately return in Albany to the discussion of a tax on wealthy New Yorkers. Because as we see from the stock market, while everyone else is suffering, the rich are getting richer, and it's time to look that in the face and say, you know what, wealthy New Yorkers can afford to pay a little bit more so that everyone else can make it through this crisis. That's where this conversation should be centered.

Okay, everybody, look, just want to wrap it up. Coming back to the most foundational idea, something we all feel in our hearts. What do you think about, what matters most to you – your family, your home, where your life is centered, where your heart is. So, home. We told people, for months, stay home. We told people for months, fight back this crisis, fight back this virus, stay home. Guess what? New Yorkers did stay home. And home became more important than ever before. And now we see thousands of people may lose their homes for no fault of their own. They didn't do anything wrong. They didn't ask for a pandemic. It wasn't, they weren't working – it's not that they weren't working hard enough. They had their jobs taken away by a global crisis. We must protect people's homes. So, we have mediation programs to help tenants and landlords get on the same page and keep people in their homes. We have the legal support to keep people in their homes. We need action in Washington. We need action in Albany. We cannot let people lose a roof over their heads. And so, I can tell you one thing with every fiber in our beings, the City of New York will fight to keep New Yorkers in their homes and to make it through this crisis. Thank you, everybody.

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