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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON  
THE BRIAN LEHRER SHOW**

**Brian Lehrer:** And we just have 15 minutes for Ask the Mayor this week because of his schedule and our membership drive schedule. But listeners, it's still my questions and yours for Mayor Bill de Blasio. So, get your mayor calls in. I'm just going to ask you to be really short and to the point today, so we can get to you still, as many of you as we can. 646-435-7280. And our mayor lines are already full. That's obviously not the same as our pledge drive number. Or you can tweet a question using the hashtag, #AsktheMayor. And hi, Mr. Mayor. Welcome back to WNYC.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Hey there, Brian, how you doing?

**Lehrer:** Good. Can I get your reaction, real quick, to President Biden directing all the states to open vaccines to all adults by May 1st, specifically, is it good or bad or neutral for vaccine equity in the city, in your opinion?

**Mayor:** It's good for vaccine clarity and simplicity. I mean, I think having a simple rule, everyone knows if you're 18 or over you're eligible has real advantages. By May 1st, I mean, right now today, we're about 2.6 million vaccinations since day one. So, you know, we'll go through all of March, all of April. We're going to be at a much higher number. I think it's a pretty sane time to go to that new standard.

**Lehrer:** Let's take a phone call right away and let's see, how about Jeff in Park Slope with a COVID-related question. Jeff. You're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello.

**Question:** Good morning, Brian. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. First of all, really quickly, I want to say thank you, Mr. Mayor, for what you've done throughout this whole COVID thing. Really, we all appreciate it. I want to ask about long-term COVID care. Experts say about ten percent of people who get COVID wound up with long-hauler. I'm one of them. I got sick on March 21st of last year, almost a year later I'm still dealing with a slew of medical issues and I can't find resources. There's not a lot of ready resources through the City, neither Health + Hospitals website nor of the Department of Health website have a tab for long haulers. And like, it's very confusing. Most doctors don't even know how to treat it. I've seen more doctors in the past two months than I have previous 15 years.

**Lehrer:** And so, is your question, is the City going to provide certain health resources for long haulers?

**Question:** Yeah, I think – well, I think they need, even if it's just information, a portal where people can get information because there's so much confusion and we have such medical expertise, I think since we got hit so hard so early, we have 75,000 people in this city who have this without a lot of guidance of where to go or how to even interpret what this is.

**Lehrer:** Jeff, Jeff, I'm going to leave it there and get a response from the Mayor. Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** It's a really important point. Jeff, thank you very much for raising it. Please, first of all, will you please, Jeff, give your information to WNYC because I'd like our medical folks to follow up with you and make sure we can connect you to the efforts we have. We started a new initiative called COVID Centers of Excellence through Health + Hospitals, our public health system, exactly to focus on folks with lasting impact from COVID, to get them concentrated support from different specialists. We're really concerned about this. So, I think you're right though, we got to do a better job and I'll make sure we focus on it in the next few weeks in our public work, telling folks who are still experiencing impact, where they can turn for help, getting them information. I think your point about a portal is real smart. But definitely, we do have services available through Health + Hospitals and we'd like to connect you to them.

**Lehrer:** All right, hang on Jeff. We'll take your contact information. Hopefully, the Mayor will help. That's so terrible, a year of having COVID, said he got it on March 21st. So, long haulers, we hear you. Let me ask you a question about high schools reopening the week before spring break. Many people fear that spring break itself will include a lot of travel and touch off new outbreaks right afterwards. So, why not wait until two weeks after spring break when that would have played out rather than risk opening the high schools and having many of them shut right down again?

**Mayor:** Well, first of all, the reason to move quickly is that our high school students need – deeply need to be reconnected to teachers and mental health professionals and get the support that is available only in the school building and they're clamoring for it. I mean, parents want their kids back in school. Kids desperately want to be back with their friends, but also to get the help that they get in the school building. And there's a lot of caring, you know, professionals in the school building. You cannot replicate that online. So, it's really important even just to get kids back for a few days, that we would in that week, matters. For some kids, it's been a long, long time. But vis-a-vis spring break, look, I think it's still a matter where our schools are literally the safest places in New York City. I look at the test results every day from our schools. We're testing literally every school every week. A stunning consistency, Brian, very, very low incidents of COVID in our schools. And I'm convinced with all the precautions taken that even after a spring break, you're still going to see these [inaudible] and we saw it by the way after the holidays, we've seen it after every break. The same thing, the numbers in schools are extraordinarily consistent.

**Lehrer:** Also, I heard a stat that something like 80 percent of high school families have chosen all remote, anyway, up until now. I don't know if that's the exact number, but will you open more opt-in or one more opt-in period for the home stretch of the school year?

**Mayor:** Well, there's definitely still a lot of school year left. There's all the rest of March, all of April, all of May, all of June. Right now, what we want to do is get high school back, maximize the number of kids who are in five-day-a-week classes. And that's what most kids will be seeing.

And then see if it's time for an opt-in based on what's happening with COVID. If, you know, there's a bad scenario, which we worry about if the variants have too much of a negative impact, but there's a good scenario where the vaccination levels continue to rise constantly as we get more supply. 2.6 million vaccinations, again, given already in New York City. That's going to jump up as we get supply. If things got a lot safer, that's when I want to do an opt-in for this year,

**Lehrer:** Megan, in Midtown you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Megan.

**Question:** Hi, Mr. Mayor. I'm going to try to make this quick. I just got my first job in a restaurant since last March and I felt very unsafe because I was breaking every rule that I was told to follow, to keep myself safe from COVID. So, I went home, I immediately started looking for appointments and the only appointment in all five boroughs and in parts of upper New York were only at commercial pharmacies. Commercial pharmacies aren't allowed to give restaurant workers the vaccine, and I just don't understand why there's this push to get more and more indoor dining, more and more unmasked people sitting in one room for hours at a time, every single day, open. And yet there's not an equal push to get restaurant workers vaccinated. And I've been looking for a week now and there's still no appointments available for me, even though I've been coming in contact with strangers, every single shift without masks on.

**Mayor:** I appreciate that question a lot, Meghan, and I'm sorry that you're having that experience. Look, we're trying to change that by getting control back to this city for these kinds of decisions. These decisions have been made in Albany. I think a lot of them have been made inconsistently like, the very fact that you can only go some places for vaccine and not others makes no sense. I want everyone who is eligible to be able to get their vaccination, any place that is providing vaccine. I'm still fighting with the State over that. The State made the decision to reopen dining the way they did. Our job is to try and make it safe with inspections and other actions. But I'm really concerned, especially with the variants out there. So, please, give your information to WNYC. We will certainly, you know, help to find the right locations for you. And we – you know, we've got protect restaurant workers. We depend on this community. It's a big part of New York City and we've got do it safely. And I'd say to all the restaurant owners and managers out there – you know, if you see unsafe practices, you've got to do something about it. You know, we have clear guidance for all the folks going to eat at restaurants, keep your mask on the [inaudible] amount of time when you're not dining, put your mask on if you get up to go to the restroom or anything else. You know, we need people to follow this guidance to protect everyone, including the folks who do the work, and that's something we'll be doing inspections on and enforcement on.

**Lehrer:** And I know you haven't been happy in general with some of the State-dictated pace of reopening. I saw you didn't like Governor Cuomo declaring that out-of-state travelers to New York won't have to quarantine upon arrival anymore, starting in April. So, let me ask you a bigger-picture question about that. You've been talking a lot to me in recent weeks and elsewhere about local control. So, do you think with Cuomo being politically weak right now, there's an opening to get substantially more local control through the Legislature? And I don't mean just on COVID – you and past mayors, I don't have to tell you, are frustrated all the time that the City can't make its own rent control policies, its own standardized testing policies, its own progressive taxation policies like you'd like to do. Even our own traffic laws, like how many speed cameras

near schools, need State approval. So, is this an opportunity for pushing more control by the City over its own quality of life?

**Mayor:** Really important question and big-picture question, Brian. I appreciate it. I do think it is. I think – you know, I've said it's a neo-colonial reality that one of the greatest cities in the world still can't make such fundamental decisions on their own. You know, we are not given that right. It makes no sense. We're 43 percent of the entire state's population right here in the five boroughs. If we want stronger rent laws, if we want to tax the wealthy at a higher level, we deserve the right to do that. And, certainly, if we want to protect our people – and we have a great Department of Health, great Health + Hospitals corporation – they say, hey, we need to do some of these things differently and the State stands in our way of protecting our own people. So, I do think it's a time for re-examination. My hope is the Legislature is willing to make some of those changes, but this is also something that we need to follow through on in the months and years ahead. If New York City is going to be able to reach our full potential, we cannot – you know, it makes no sense that every little thing needs approval in Albany. That's not the way forward.

**Lehrer:** Arnold, in Astoria, you're on WNYC with the Mayor. Hello, Arnold.

**Question:** Hello. Brian Lehrer, I love you. Mayor de Blasio, I love you, just not as much as Brian Lehrer. I work in the Broadway community –  
[Laughter]

**Question:** It's a high bar – so, you know. And I work in the Broadway community, I'm a casting director, and so many of us on social media talk so much about how all that's going on with vaccine distributions and the difficulties and some of the chaos – I took my 94-year-old mother to be vaccinated and it was a little bit chaotic there. How – if you've got a few Broadway stage managers or Broadway casting directors or people whose expertise is controlling crowds, making appointments, moving people in and out – you see a Broadway show cast, we've been through thousands of people to select those people, very organized, very efficiently. And I just want to remind you, as we went to NYU at the same time together, and I remembered you – tall, curly hair, down at the [inaudible] ticket center – I want to remind you that that resource exists for you and for no one else in the world, and please tap into it in the weeks and months ahead where we're all at a work, we're all looking to contribute and to help the Broadway Relief Project happened. It was extraordinary. There's a documentary about that coming out tomorrow. And we're here for you.

**Mayor:** Thank you. I'll be quick, Arnold. First of all, few are as loved as Brian Lehrer. So, I just take no offense if I don't reach his level. But to my fellow NYU alumni –

**Lehrer:** I'll put that on my resume.

**Mayor:** Yes, please do. Arnold, please give your information to WNYC, I'd love to talk to you, because I appreciate what you're saying and I also love to connect with people from our youth at NYU. But, look, I think it's a great point. I think there's a lot of people with expertise who we should be bringing in more. We're getting there on vaccination, but, clearly, we can do some things better, so I would welcome the help. And, you're right, like, who knows more about filling a room and, you know, and then un-filling a room than the folks on Broadway. And I thought

you were going to ask about, you know, Broadway coming back, Off-Broadway coming back. I'm increasingly optimistic that we're going to see, you know, a clear plan where we talking with folks in the Broadway community about that so people can get their jobs back, because I really think things are trending in the right direction. But listen, please give your information to WNYC and I look forward to talking to you about how we can bring the community more into this work.

**Lehrer:** We have a minute left and I'm going to end with a Cuomo question, because you probably know that many members of the New York congressional delegation just this morning called for the Governor to resign, that includes Jerry Nadler, and Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, and Yvette Clark. Are you ready to do that?

**Mayor:** Oh yes. I was very clear on – look, I think my statements over the last week have been pretty clear that I think he can no longer govern. And I said very explicitly today, he has to resign. He has lost the faith of the leaders of this state. He has lost the faith of the people. He has been covering up scandal after scandal. I mean, what came out in the last few days about explicit efforts to cover up the nursing home scandal, explicit efforts to intimidate former staffers from talking about sexual harassment. It's just coverup, after coverup, after coverup, it needs to end. He needs to go.

**Lehrer:** Even as the investigation goes on into the sexual harassment allegations?

**Mayor:** The investigation has to continue with or without Andrew Cuomo being in office, because it is about much bigger issues. Who enabled the sexual harassment? Who did not act on it when it was reported? Who covered up the nursing home scandal? What does it mean for our future? The investigation has to be completed any way you slice it.

**Lehrer:** Thanks, Mr. Mayor. As always, talk to you next week.

**Mayor:** Take care, Brian.

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