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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning everybody. You know this city has fought so valiantly against the coronavirus. And here we are now in phase four, a real important step for the city, that we've gotten this far, this fast. And yet so many New Yorkers are struggling and this disease has had so many painful, powerful, negative impacts on the people of this city. And we have to keep focused on the folks who still need food, the folks who still need to make sure that they can keep their home. There's so much to do as we fight our way back, as we restart this city. So we're going to talk about a couple of the key things we're doing to make sure that people get what they need as we fight our way through this crisis.

But before I go into that, I want to say a few words about a wonderful young woman who we lost way too early, CBS reporter Nina Kapur. A tremendous young talent, filled with potential, filled with a lot of life and energy and compassion. Someone who people just loved to be around and a great, great future ahead of her. She loved this city. She was positive about the people of the city and loved to be all around the neighborhoods of this city. And we lost her in a tragic accident just a few days ago. So our hearts go out to her family and let's keep them in our thoughts and prayers, and to all her colleagues in the media. I know you're feeling this loss so we will remember the good work and the good heart of Nina Kapur.

Now, when it comes to the things we have to do to help New Yorkers through this crisis, you know, when I talk to people all over the city, one of the deepest concerns of course, is people worry that they won't be able to keep their home, that they won't have a roof over their head for their family. That there's so many people who now don't have any money to pay the rent because their jobs are long gone. And they don't know when they're going to come back. And they're worried about being evicted. We are about to go over a cliff here in this city, in terms of people potentially losing their housing and we have to stop it. We need help from the federal government. We need rental assistance money for the people of this city and people all over the country who are facing this challenge. We need the State of New York to pass the laws that will give people the ability to pay the rent when they finally have an income. But make sure no one is evicted simply because they can't pay the rent. We have so many things we have to do, and we're looking for every possible innovation.

So one important new approach comes out of our Task Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity, leaders of color here in our City government who are coming up with new ideas all the time for addressing the challenges that we are facing with the coronavirus. Particularly the challenges of disparity that we've seen with this horrible disease. And all the impact is having on the neighborhoods of this city. So one very powerful approach, which we're going to now go deeper into, is the Landlord Tenant Mediation Project. And the idea is to try and resolve problems outside of the court system, find a way to keep people in their homes in a better way. And here to

tell you about it, Commissioner who has done so much to make sure that New Yorkers have affordable housing and is fighting through this crisis to keep them in their housing, Commissioner for Housing Preservation and Development, Louise Carroll.

Commissioner Louise Carroll, Department of Housing Preservation and

Development: Hello everyone. I want to thank Mayor de Blasio for his partnership in bringing this program to life. I also want to thank the First Lady and Deputy Mayors Thompson and Perea-Henze, for their leadership of the Racial Inclusion and Equity Task Force. Too many families wake up and ask themselves if they can afford this month's rent. While some families can pay July's rent, others are concerned about how they're going to afford it. And what will happen to them if they can't pay? There are others who are already behind in their rent and they live in constant fear of losing their homes. As members of the Task Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity, we are continuously working through ways that the City can use pandemic resilience to address long standing racial disparities in our neighborhoods. COVID-19 created a level of uncertainty about the future in all of us, but especially for people of color who are more likely to be seriously ill, more likely to work in vulnerable occupations and more likely to suffer loss of income or to lose their jobs entirely.

To date over 2 million New Yorkers have filed for unemployment benefits. But as the extra \$600 a week boost from the federal government expires at the end of the month, and the eviction moratorium, and mortgage foreclosure ends, many will have difficulty making ends meet and many will face the threat of being taken to court or possibly evicted. The consequences of eviction can be devastating for families and the lessen in the tenant's ability to get future housing. We don't want that as a city. Also at the time when many people are staying home for public health reasons, stable housing, good housing is crucial. Today, we're helping families find a little peace of mind about what's ahead. For New Yorkers hit hard by the pandemic this citywide Landlord Tenant Mediation Project will be a valuable resource. It will help tenants solve issues with their landlords without the threat of eviction and without going to housing court. Through this project, the City will partner with community dispute resolution centers in all of the five boroughs to offer free assistance to tenants, struggling to pay rent as a result of COVID-19 pandemic. This recognizes that business as usual is not enough. We don't want to put residents through the trauma of the eviction process just to get help.

The Landlord Tenant Mediation Project will be just one more tool of the many tools that our tenant portal provides. And it will prioritize the 27 neighborhoods that we've identified as the hardest hit by the coronavirus. As we enter this new stage of recovery, we are determined to be better than before. We cannot do it alone. More than ever. We need the federal government's help to spur our economy and to give tenants the rental subsidies that they need and that they deserve so that they can come through this crisis intact. In the meantime, we're going to continue to do everything that we can to help New Yorkers stay housed. My agency has been charged with working on the Mayor's affordable housing plan, and we're way past the halfway mark of providing 300,000 units of housing for New York City residents. But by making this a fairer and more equitable city, we can only move from the stronger. And for this reason we're prioritizing the most vulnerable. And giving them the help and the tools they need to negotiate their rent with their landlords and to stay stably housed.

Mayor: Thank you very much Commissioner. And Commissioner, thanks to you, to everyone on the task force. I want to thank as well, Sideya Sherman, who's the Executive Director of the task

force and is with us remotely today. This work will continue to deepen because we have to find ways to keep people in their homes. And as I said, this crisis is causing stress on people in so many ways. Another thing we're seeing as people have lost their incomes, it's become harder and harder for people to afford the basics, including food. Think about it. This extraordinary city that as recently as February, was in as top economic state as it had ever been in our history, now we have over two million people who are experiencing food insecurity and need help. It's shocking to see, it's painful, but New York City has really rallied to the defense of our fellow New Yorkers who need food. And I want to thank all the community soup kitchens, food pantries, all the restaurants who have participated, everyone who's been part of the Get Food NYC program. An amazing effort and all the City agencies that have come together in common cause to make sure that whoever needed food, got it anywhere in New York City for free. That has been our commitment from the beginning of this crisis.

Now we've reached a milestone and it's one that should make us simultaneously proud as New Yorkers that we stepped up for our fellow New Yorkers, but also sad because so many people have needed so much help. We've now reached a point where we've distributed 100 million meals for free to New Yorkers in need. So that gives you a sense of just how big the challenge has been. Now we are going to continue this initiative for as long as we need to because New Yorkers can never, ever have to wonder where their next meal is coming from. That's not acceptable given the values of this city, the sense of fairness and compassion. We're going to be there for whoever needs food, always. But again, as the Commissioner said, we need help. And as the Congress is gathering in Washington to discuss the stimulus, here's another example -- provide stimulus funding so cities and states can provide food aid to people who need it. Make sure that all of the different ways that we get food to folks in need are funded fully, can't have any New Yorker, any American go without food in the midst of this crisis.

Now let me turn to one more topic before we do our daily health indicators. And I want to come back to a topic, we talked a lot about in recent weeks for very good reason. And that's our young people and all our young people have been through in this crisis and the fact that we have to be there for them and give them new and better options as we move forward. Look, we want our young people to have positive options, to have places to go that are safe and nurturing and get them on the right path, and get them away from a lot of challenges that they face. So what that means is more community centers, more recreation centers, more positive places for young people. And that's particularly true for kids and families who live in public housing.

So, we're announcing today a \$22 million investment in creating community centers, reviving and renovating community centers in key locations around the city. And this will include at the Monroe Houses in the Bronx; Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn; Wagner in Manhattan. This is money that was in the NYPD's budget, now has been shifted to these youth-focused programs. We're also using additional funding through to the Department of Youth and Community Development to expand services at Ocean Bay in Queens to make sure there's more available for our young people. So, all over the city, we are committed to doing what really will help young people not only through this crisis, but on the right path in their life in general. And let's give them these positive options. This is one of the best investments we will ever make as a city.

Now, to our health indicators. Indicator one, daily number of people admitted to hospitals for suspected COVID-19, threshold is 200 – today's report, 52 patients. Indicator two, daily number of people in Health + Hospitals ICU's, threshold 375 – today, 297. And number three, number of

people – I'm sorry, percentage of people testing citywide positive for COVID-19, threshold 15 percent – once again, two percent. New York City, well done – a credit to all New Yorkers who continue to stay focused in fighting our way through this crisis.

A few words in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish:]

With that, let's turn to our colleagues in the media. Please let me know the name and outlet of each journalist.

Moderator: We will now begin our Q&A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Deputy Mayor Vicki Been, Commissioner Carroll, Commissioner Garcia, Dr. Mitch Katz, Executive Director of the Racial Inclusion and Equity Task Force Sideya Sherman, and Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. First question today goes to Juliet from 1010 WINS.

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

Mayor: Good, Juliet. How are you doing today?

Question: I'm okay. Thank you so much for asking. My first question is, what are your plans if the President sends in federal police to New York City?

Mayor: It's an important question, Juliet, but I have to start by saying this president blusters and bluffs and says he's going to do things and they never materialize on a regular basis. So, first, we should not overrate his statements. They are so often not true. Second, if he tried to do it, it would only create more problems. It would backfire, it wouldn't make us safer, and we would immediately take action in court to stop it. From my point of view, this would be yet another example of illegal and unconstitutional actions by the President. And we have often had to confront him in court and we usually win. So, hopefully, it doesn't come to that, but, if needed, we will do that.

Question: Okay. I also wanted to ask you about the Partnership for New York report. It lays out the concerns and a roadmap of how to get the city back on its feet economically. So, I was wondering, who you talking to about that and how are you planning to increase funding and finances in the event the stimulus money isn't in forthcoming?

Mayor: Well, first, we all have to fight for that stimulus money. And I want to tell you, a lot of folks in the private sector, a lot of business leaders have joined in that fight. They've been reaching out to members of the Senate to really push the point that, for New York City and the whole country, the stimulus is crucial to get people what they need, the basic services, but also to revive our economy. The private sector cannot thrive without the stimulus either. It has to be there for cities and states, or we won't be able to provide the basic services and business will not be able to come back. So, I met last week with the co-chair of the partnership. We have a lot of common ground we want to work on together. Our Deputy Mayor for Housing and Economic Development Vicki Been is talking to leaders of the business community constantly. We want to work together with all parts of the city, that's why we have these advisory councils from each sector of city life and the economy to help us build that bigger roadmap. And so, we'll have a lot

more to say on that in the coming weeks, but there's a real spirit of cooperation. And there's a spirit of hope, Juliette. People know New York City as strong and has come back many times before and we'll come back again.

Moderator: The next is Shant from the Daily News.

Question: Yeah. Good morning, everyone. I wanted to ask about yesterday's cover story in the Daily News by a colleague of mine. He reported that, going back to May, 2014, you know, around the Campaign for One New York, you cold called Carl Weisbrod about a zoning matter of concern to a developer who had also donated to the Campaign for One New York. I wanted to start by asking what your comment is on the fed's investigative theory at the time, which was that people with business before the City would be solicited for donations, you would then give the donor facetime, as I think happened in this May 2014 example, threw out their concerns, delivered concerns to the relevant city agency, but knowing the donor wouldn't get what they want. What's your comment on that investigative theory? Is there any truth to that? And then I have a follow-up. Thank you.

Mayor: It's 2020. That issue has been looked at many times, spoken to many times, I really have nothing else to say.

Question: Okay. I mean, I think, you know – I appreciate that it is from some years ago, but, you know, new things are coming out about it. I mean, can you say whether the FBI ever questioned you about the dinner with Andrew Penson, Jonah Rechnitz, and others – and would you still maintain that you barely knew Jonah Rechnitz, who arranged meeting, as well as Jeremy Reichberg –

Mayor: Shant, you're newer on the beat, but it's been covered many times. I really have nothing else to say. Thanks.

Moderator: The next is Henry from Bloomberg.

Question: Hello, Mr. Mayor. How are you doing today?

Mayor: Hey, Henry. How are you?

Question: I'm good. I wanted to ask you about another report, the IBO report, which was out this morning, which really says that the overtime estimate on the Police Department that is in the City budget is out of whack with reality, that the budget adopted assumes that overtime spending will fall to about \$268 million this year. And they figure it will be about \$400 million more than that. And, you know, how on earth are you going to be able to achieve a \$268 million overtime spending –

Mayor: Look, Henry, let's put aside, you know, truly unexpected events and seismic events. Let's just talk about something like normal times. This is the theory of the case, we don't have a lot of the things that NYPD used to put money into for overtime. We don't have a big parades and events. There's a lot of things are not happening in New York City for the foreseeable future. We don't have details that are having to be at the sports stadiums for, you know, different games. We don't have a lot of things. So, the hope here is that because we're dealing with a changing

dynamic, we can deeply reduce the amount of overtime. And we just have to find a way to tighten our belt with all agencies, because we're in the middle of a fiscal crisis. So, it's a goal that we believe with a lot of tough, tough decisions can be met. But it won't be easy, I'm the first to say that. But we just have to find ways to save the money. And that we were all devoted – I was and the City Council – to transferring some of that money over to things like these youth programs. That's why we did it. It was the right thing to do.

Question: Okay. Thank you for that, Mr. Mayor. My second question has to do with how prepared the City is for a rebound, or boomerang or, you know, a second wave of this epidemic, which the Governor says it's inevitable. I mean, what kinds of other preparations are being made and how confident are you that the City will be prepared for this?

Mayor: Yeah. We are entirely better prepared than we were when we were first trying to understand this virus and had never confronted it before and had to learn through painful experience. The world is better prepared, Henry. I mean, there's just so much more knowledge now than what we had in February or March. But look, we know from the game plan we had put in place that if we were faced with a resurgence, we know how to expand hospital capacity, we know how to tighten up restrictions in terms of making sure the disease doesn't spread. We have the game plan and we've obviously gone through a trial run with it, because we lived it. So, you have to be ready for some kind of resurgence, because we've been doing very well for quite a while now, and you always have to be ready for some challenges. But it's quite clear how you would walk back some of the stages if you needed to. I don't hope to, but if we needed to. And certainly, another big feature is we have the Test and Trace Corps. We didn't have that in the beginning. We now have, by far, the biggest such initiative in the country, it's reaching people constantly. That's an X-factor in our favor now, if we do deal with a resurgence.

Moderator: The next is Rich Lamb from WCBS 880.

Question: Mr. Mayor, good morning.

Mayor: Good morning, Rich. How are you?

Question: I'm doing okay. Mr. Mayor, just about the encampment next to City Hall. What makes that legitimate at this point? I mean, there's been all of this graffiti that's been sprayed, even on the David Dinkins Building. I mean, would you like to see that encampment end? Do you think they've made their point or is this just going to be going on for good?

Mayor: Rich, look, first of all, the graffiti is just not acceptable. And I want to be very clear, graffiti on public buildings will be removed, period. We've been dealing with budget challenges. We can't do everything that we used to do in terms of private buildings, but graffiti on any public buildings we won't allow it, we will remove it. Again, there is a balance we always strike between the right to protest and especially public safety. And I always put public safety first while respecting constitutional rights. That decision will be made by the NYPD as things emerge. We're looking at the situation every day. But again, I think we look at the specific facts of what's going on and then decisions will be made day by day.

Question: Okay. If I may follow on that though, I mean, how do you – why is this still called a protest? It's an encampment and they seem to be just staying there and not doing really any protesting as far as – maybe you have a different definition?

Mayor: Rich, that's part of the important point to understand. And again, we're trying to assess regularly. We do – it's an American value to respect the right to protest. I've also said we don't allow encampments around this city. We haven't for years, unlike the past. It's something we have to assess because this is not like the other types of situations we've seen historically. We have to assess it day-by-day to determine what's really going on, and, again, what's the safety need, first and foremost. So, that is a daily assessment and we'll just play it day-by-day.

Moderator: The next is Julia Marsh from the Post.

Question: Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everyone else on the call. I'd actually like to follow up on, on Rich's question, and Errol Louis got at this last night, you've said the graffiti is not acceptable on the Dinkins Building. You know, which honors the city's first and only African American mayor. But it's been up there for a month now and whenever the Black Lives Matter mural in front of Trump Tower is defaced, it's cleaned up immediately. So what is the timeline for cleaning that graffiti and why hasn't it been cleaned yet?

Mayor: It is, it will be clean. There are some challenges just technically with the surfaces, as I understand, I'm no expert on this. But it will be cleaned. That's the bottom line. It will be done because it's important. I agree. It should not be there. It will be cleaned.

Question: Okay. But what's the deadline? And again, why take more of a precedence to cleaning the Black Lives Matter mural than this building named after our first and only African American mayor?

Mayor: Situation's very different. And again, the cleaning off the graffiti in this case, as I understand it, with the particular stone, one thing or another, comes with a lot more work and complication than one would think. Paint on the street is a much simpler matter, but the bottom line is we're going to clean the graffiti off. It shouldn't be there on public buildings. It won't be there. Nor should anyone deface the Black Lives Matter mural, which is a statement of recognizing the value of people in this city, in this country who have not been given the respect and value. No one should deface that. And we won't allow that either.

Moderator: The next is Emma Fitzsimmons from the New York Times.

Question: Hi, can you hear me Mayor?

Mayor: Yeah. Emma, how are you doing? Welcome back.

Question: Thank you. So I have two questions for you. First of all, regarding President Trump, what happens if you don't win in court? I mean, I know you say he's prone to bluster. Officials are in Portland. What if they come here?

Mayor: Look what's happened in Portland has been a travesty, Emma. It's totally backfired. It's totally made things worse. It's created a huge amount of pain and confusion and anger in that

community. It's literally the federal government coming into a situation that local officials were addressing and making it much worse. And then on top of it, appearing to violate basic constitutional rights, arresting people without identifying who the arresting entity is, you know, using unmarked vehicles in a way that's totally confusing people. I mean, it's a very disturbing reality in Portland and it -- look, more than once we've wondered where this President is trying to take us and whether he's trying to take away the basic rights of Americans and what you see in Portland really makes you worry. New Yorkers are not going to take kindly to anything like that. So I do believe it's bluster. I do believe we can beat him in court. If for some reason they showed up and we couldn't beat them in court. I think it's going to make limited impact in terms of anything involving safety. It will just create a lot of pain and confusion. Maybe that's what he wants, Emma, but it will not change what New Yorkers feel. We're going to continue to do the work of moving the city forward.

Question: And the second question for you. So in terms of – I've been hearing a lot about delays in testing for COVID testing and a family member of mine actually had a fever and he got tested and we're still waiting for results more than two weeks later. So how do we sort of continue to make progress on this when people can't even get basic test results?

Mayor: Yeah it's a big issue. So Emma, real quick, I'd say this, first of all, any New Yorker who wants to get tested, go to Health + Hospitals, those results are coming in much more quickly to those hospitals or clinics. You can call a 3-1-1 for those locations. That's typically a few days' turn around. What's happening with the private labs is a real delays because of the huge uptick in testing around the country and the resurgence around the country. We are having some success with the private labs here in New York City in terms of expanding capacity. But Emma, I think the real solution is the President needs to invoke the Defense Production Act, needs to have a nationwide effort to expand lab capacity with federal support, federal direction, including producing the chemical reagents needed for the testing. Unless there's federal intervention, I fear this will be an ongoing problem.

Moderator: The next is Emily from NY1.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hey Emily, how you doing?

Question: I'm well, thank you. Just actually following up on Emma's question about the time it takes to get these tests done. Is there nothing the City can do? I mean, conceivably someone who gets tested on Tuesday, can contract COVID on Wednesday and not know – you don't get a negative result and not know they're positive going forward. This really appears to be a crucial problem in combating the COVID?

Mayor: Yeah, I think it is a real problem, Emily. I mean remember the diagnostic test gives you a point in time. And you know, you could have a very different reality even a few days later in any situation. But what's important is to get the test back to people quickly. Again, first thing I'd say to folks, go to Health + Hospitals, because they've been able to make those times a lot quicker than some of the private entities. But what I would say to people is it is crucial to get tested. The quicker you go to get tested, the quicker you're going to get results back by definition. So folks that have been delaying it, it just makes sense to go get tested, call 3-1-1 for

those locations. But I think we really need to ask the fundamental question, I mean, if there's a national resurgence going on and we don't have enough lab capacity nationally, we can't just sit around and admire the problem. This is another thing that the Congress should act on in the stimulus, is put the money in for greatly expanded national testing. We're at now up to 40,000 tests a day. We'd like to be much higher than that, but we need the funding and we need the federal government to step in and enforce the production through the Defense Production Act.

Question: Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Do you have anything else?

Question: No.

Moderator: Last question for today goes to Matt Chayes from Newsday.

Question: Hey, good morning all. Mr. Mayor [inaudible] Streets program, who's responsible for making sure –

Mayor: Your voice skipped out for a minute, which program?

Question: I'm sorry. Under Open Streets. I'm wondering, who's responsible for making sure that the barricades that are blocking the streets stay in place and aren't removed or damaged or permanently set aside? So for example, on 34th Avenue in Queens, the barricades are in place as they should be, but on Underhill and on Carlton Avenues in Brooklyn, the [inaudible] are broken or missing, cast aside. So is the precinct responsible, DOT or there spot checks? And I have a second –

Mayor: It's a very good question. I appreciate it, Matt. It is – look, we rely on local partnerships in many cases. They are supposed to first and foremost, keep those situations secure. If there's a problem they're supposed to alert the local precinct or DOT. But yes, there are regular checks and if we need to do more of them, we'll do more of them. So I appreciate you mentioning those locations. We'll have DOT follow up on those today. And any New Yorker who sees a problem with the Open Streets. If for some reason the barricades are not up call 3-1-1, please report that right away so we can fix it. But it's a combination of the local sponsor first, and then yes, the precinct, DOT, others are supposed to keep an eye on it as well. Go ahead.

Question: On another matter, how, if at all, have the anti-crime units duties been redistributed elsewhere in the PD? Can you detail specifically what the unit's duties were and whether -- and how those duties are being or aren't being carried out by others? So for example, as I understand it, one of the duties was to drive around high crime areas in plain clothes and unmarked vehicles in search of criminality. Is this being done by other cops?

Mayor: Look obviously the Commissioner has spoken at length about the vision here and he can give you and his team can give you more. But here's what I would say from my conversations with him, I think as the essence of this. That there's ways to pinpoint the specific individuals who are causing most of the violence and to do that more effectively. I think one of the things the Commissioner came to feel about the anti-crime approach was that it was too broad. It was not providing enough focus on the individuals doing the greatest violence and putting together the

information needed for successful prosecutions. That needed to be more pinpointed, because more and more we see that what we need is to go after those few folks, provide what the DA's need for a successful prosecution. Of course, we need the DA's to follow through aggressively. We need the court system up and running, but that's the core here of how we succeed. So those officers are all out doing their work, but with more precision. And we think less disruption in the relationship with the community as well.

Okay. Everyone, let me just close up here with this point. Now this is a city that is always there for its people, the City of New York, our City government, we do not give up on New Yorkers. We are always there for New Yorkers. If someone needs food, we're going to make sure they have food for free. If someone is trying to stay in their apartment, we're going to do everything we can to help them. We need to see each other through this crisis. So the City of New York throughout has said, we are not going to let New Yorkers be harmed. We're going to protect their health, their safety, make sure they have food, make sure they have a roof over their head. That's been our commitment, but meanwhile, our federal government has not been there for us. So once again, once again, a debate on a stimulus begins in Washington. Let's get it right this time. Here is a chance for the Congress and President Trump to right a lot of wrongs and provide New York City and cities and states around the country with the help we need. So we can get back on our feet, serve our people, protect our people, and restart our economy. That's what we need. Let's see if they can get it right this time. We all need to fight for that stimulus because once and for all, this may be our last best chance to get the help we need so we can move forward. New Yorkers, you have done your share. Let's see if Washington is going to do its part now to bring us back. Thank you very much, everyone.

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