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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. Another beautiful day in New York City, and we have some beautiful news for you – some really great news. As of today, for the first time since October 13th, over seven months ago – for the first time, all of our health care indicators are below the thresholds that we set. All of the indicators have now gone entirely into the right direction and that is because of all of you. It's because of what you have done, New Yorkers – going out there, getting vaccinated, seeing us through this crisis, kicking COVID out of town. So, this is a really important day, it proves vaccination works. And let's talk about how much has happened. From the beginning of the vaccination effort, 7,682,972 vaccinations have been given in New York City – by far, the largest vaccination effort in the history of New York City, and it's working. So, all the indicators down and let's keep pushing them down.

Now, we all are going to get ready for a new world, a world of more freedom, because we've earned it by getting vaccinated. And, by the way, you want more freedom on top of that, go make sure everyone in your life is vaccinated. Or, if you yourself have not been vaccinated, get out there and do it. So, because of the success here and around the country, driving back COVID via vaccination, the CDC came up with new guidance related to masks. And there's been a lot of questions about it, which is fair, but I want to try and break it down, make it a little simple, because I think it is pretty straightforward. The bottom line is, if you're vaccinated, you have more freedom. If you're vaccinated, you can breathe easier and you are safer. If you're not vaccinated, it would be smart to go get vaccinated.

Now, some of the CDC guidance applies regardless of whether you are vaccinated or not. So, whether you're vaccinated or not vaccinated, we want you in certain settings keep the mask on – obvious settings, hospitals, nursing homes, schools, mass transit, people are all together in a small space. Settings like that, it's just common sense. The masks have helped us all to be healthier. We're still fighting off the last part of COVID here. Keep the mask on in those settings, whether you're vaccinated or not. But if you are vaccinated, you have a lot more freedom, and that's important to recognize. If you are vaccinated and you know you're around fully vaccinated people, you have more freedom. If you're vaccinated and you're outdoors, you have more freedom. When you're not sure, my personal advice is, wear a mask when you're not sure. If you just prefer to wear a mask, that's okay. Whatever you want to do in that case is fine. In our City offices, for example, we're going to keep the policy of wearing masks, because you've got vaccinated, unvaccinated people together in the workforce. You have vaccinated and unvaccinated New Yorkers coming into the offices, seeking help. You know it's going to be a mix of people, keep your mask on. But look, the bottom line is this – vaccination equals personal freedom and vaccination equals freedom from COVID for all of us. So, it still comes back to a

simple thing – if you haven't done it yet, we need you to do it for everyone's good. And you can go to nyc.gov/vaccinefinder.

Okay. Now, every day we talk about recovery. You can see the recovery with your own eyes. You can feel it. I've talked to so many New Yorkers – they are feeling hopeful, they are feeling energized. But it has to be a recovery for all of us. A recovery for all of us means it has to reach every neighborhood, every borough. A recovery for all of us means more equality, not less equality. A recovery for all of us means breaking the status quo of the past, really thinking about what we have to do for working families, for struggling families, for folks who haven't gotten their fair share. And we know we need to do these things right now, which is why we created the Task Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity. And this is a ground-breaking approach – leaders of color within this administration in every agency, coming together in common cause to develop strategies right now to affect life in the communities they come from right now. And it has been a re-imagining of how government can respond to a crisis. And the leaders and the members of this task force have done extraordinary work and have moved so many important policies into place here and now.

Today, we're going to talk about one of them. And this is a new effort to reach families – families in need in the 33 neighborhoods we've identified as those hardest-hit by COVID, those that bore the brunt of both the disease and historic inequalities. An approach that has worked and is very promising for the future is Family Enrichment Centers, positive locations where people can get help and help that will allow them to navigate this crisis and all the other challenges they face in life. We're going to strengthen this approach. We're going to bring it to all 33 neighborhoods. The three we've had in East New York, in Highbridge in the Bronx, and Hunts Point in the Bronx have been really successful and they provide a positive space, a nurturing space to allow families to get a lot of support that they often struggle for. And you're going to hear what this means now and why this is a way to get ahead of problems before they happen and help get families on a very positive path.

First, I want you to hear from someone who's just provided tremendous leadership and has built up this task force to be a powerhouse within the City government and a change-agent. And it's something that will now be permanent in New York City government. I'm very proud of that fact. It's going to be a difference-maker, going forward, as well. The Executive Director of the Task Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity Sideya Sherman.

Executive Director Sideya Sherman, Task Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity: Thank you Mr. Mayor. And good morning. I'm so pleased to be here this morning to be part of this important announcement. Parenting and caring for children is, obviously, one of the most rewarding jobs there is, but it certainly is not without its challenges or stress and this year has been no exception. Now, more than ever, families need support and connections to the resources that will ensure that they can thrive. Family Enrichment Centers are innovative centers that put communities and families first. Whether you need help managing stress, connections to financial supports or local resources, or you want to strengthen your social ties with your neighbors and other families in the community, these centers serve as one-stop shops that meet families where they are.

The FECs are led by community-based organizations that know and reflect the community. Parents and families are involved in every aspect of the centers, from the types of services that are offered to how the centers actually look and feel. COVID-19 has had devastating impacts on communities of color. And, as we know, it has laid bare long-standing health and socioeconomic disparities. Over the past year, the Task Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity has been laser-focused on ensuring that the communities that have been hardest hit by COVID come back stronger.

With this announcement, all 33 task force neighborhoods will now have access to a local FEC. These centers have helped countless families throughout the pandemic. And through this new investment, they will be a critical resource for us as we recover. I want to thank the Mayor on behalf of the task force and applaud Commissioner Hansell for serving as a national leader in [inaudible] prevention, and thank the team at ACS and our local partners for making sure that the communities that most need this resource are receiving this groundbreaking service. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Sideya. And Sideya gave me a perfect segue to Commissioner David Hansell, who has really done extraordinary work. I, for years and years, worked on issues related to child welfare and to ensuring the families got more support when I was – way back when, when I was in the City Council. And I know the work that everyone does at the Administration for Children's Services is sacred – that's the word to use for it. It is extraordinarily important work, supporting and nurturing families, protecting kids even in the toughest situations. These folks don't get enough thank you's. I want to say thank you right now to everyone at ACS. I've watched your extraordinary work, I know it's not easy, but I thank you for it – it's lifesaving. David Hansell has continued to do the work of reform in ACS to make it a more forward-looking agency, a more proactive agency, an agency that figures out how to solve problems before they happen, and that's what these centers are all about. So, my pleasure to introduce the Commissioner for Administration for Children's Services, David Hansell.

Commissioner David Hansell, Administration for Children's Services: Thank you very much, Mayor de Blasio. And, I have to say, we could not do the work that we're doing without your wholehearted support. So, I very much appreciate that. And Director Sherman, thank you very much. I am so excited to be here with you for this announcement. This citywide Family Enrichment Center expansion is a transformational investment in ACS' family-supportive and community-centric service system. It's also a major step forward in our work to further race equity across our entire child welfare continuum. When I began as Commissioner four years ago, one of the first things I did was to create a new division at ACS called Child and Family Well-Being, making ACS the first child welfare agency in the country to spearhead what we call a primary prevention approach. Through this approach, we've been working to reach families proactively with resources that can support healthy children, healthy families, and healthy communities, and reduce the likelihood that families ever come into contact with the traditional child protective system.

As part of this work, we launched three Family Enrichment Centers, or FEC's, as we call them, located in three neighborhoods that have historically experienced high rates of reported child abuse and neglect. Now, anyone who has visited one of the FEC's can attest, these are warm, inviting family-centered spaces. No two centers look alike, every one is unique, because it is co-

designed with those who know what the community needs most – members of that community. For example, at our place, the FEC in Hunts Point, community members look forward to Millie's Closet, a pop-up shop named for its founder who saw a need for community members to have access to items of clothing and shoes. Anyone can drop off donations, knowing they're going to be used by local residents. Ms. Millie set up a shop at FEC with support from the staff, and it continues to be a huge success. In fact, all three of the existing FEC's have proven to be a lifeline for families during the pandemic. For example, the Crib in East New York regularly distributes food to its neighbors, and neighbors have come to rely on the fact that they can get help from just around the corner from friendly and familiar faces. And last summer I participated in a virtual story time for children who frequent Circle of Dreams in Highbridge. I had the opportunity to read to children virtually a children's book called Why We Stay Home, Susie Learns About Coronavirus.

This FEC expansion from three FEC's to 30 reflects our commitment to addressing racial equity and inclusion in the communities that have suffered disproportionately during the pandemic and our commitment to investing in primary prevention services. This is the right direction for New York City, building and reinforcing protective factors for parents and caretakers in their own communities is the best way to keep children safe and families strong. Thank you, Mayor.

Mayor: Thank you so much, David. And, again, David, thank you to you and all your colleagues at ACS for the incredible work you do, and such important work. Please pass my thanks on to all your colleagues.

Now, we have wonderful allies, wonderful partners out in communities all over the city who do this work – community-based organizations, nonprofits we depend on – and they're also doing life-saving work. Children's Village has partners with – partnered, I'm sorry, with Bridge Builders to operate the Circle of Dreams. I love this name, Circle of Dreams, which is a Family Enrichment Center in Highbridge in the Bronx. And this is the whole idea, helping families, even struggling families, to see ahead, to reach out for those dreams, to get the support and realize their potential. Here to tell you about this amazing work, the President and CEO of Children's Village and the President of Harlem Dowling, Jeremy Kohomban.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you so much, Jeremy. Jeremy, thank you for being one of the pathfinders to help us figure out the right way to find those community-centered, community-based solutions. Thank you for your great leadership. And now, everyone, I want you to hear from one more important voice and she represents one of the communities that's been very hard hit by COVID, but also a community where we've seen the positive impact of these Family Enrichment Centers. She is a passionate voice for social and economic justice and believes we got to invest in people. And here's an example of doing that right now. My pleasure to introduce from the Bronx, Council Member, Vanessa Gibson.

[...]

Mayor: There you go. Thank you very, very much Council Member and listen. Thank you for expressing your really passionate feelings about Aurelia Greene as well. We miss her. I had the joy of knowing her over the years and what passion she had for the Bronx. She helped lead the Bronx through the tough times to much better times, and also was a mentor to so many great leaders of today. So, a life well lived, and we miss her for sure.

Okay. I mentioned early on – good news in the indicators. It's that time, everyone. Here we go. Remember, this was the first time since the middle of October, over seven months, that the indicators have all been below threshold in New York City. This is a very big day. Number one daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19, today's report: 96 patients, confirmed positivity 23.96, hospitalization rate 0.92 per 100,000. Love that graph. We want to see more of that. Number two new report cases on a seven-day average. Here we go below threshold and let's keep going lower, lower, lower – today's report: 537 cases. And number three, percentage of people testing citywide positive for COVID-19 – today's report on a seven-day rolling average: 1.44 percent and declining. Go get vaccinated. Let's go farther.

Okay. Few words in Spanish, back on the topic of the Family Enrichment Centers.

[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'll now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by ACS Commissioner David Hansell, by the Executive Director of the Task Force on Racial Equity and Inclusion Sideya Sherman, by Dr. Chokshi, Dr. Katz and by Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. First question today goes to Juliet from 1010 WINS.

Question: Oh, Hey. Good morning, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

Mayor: Good. I can't tell if I'm hearing real Juliet or computer voice Juliet yet?

Question: Oh, no, I don't know why it does this. It's very strange. We'll have to look at this technology.

Mayor: There's a new technology called a hard line phone so I can hear your full voice.

Question: Okay. But let me try this for now, because I don't hear myself obviously. You know, shootings are continuing as are these unprovoked attacks where people are just getting a slashed, assaulted, hit on the head, and I'm wondering, where is your sense of outrage on this and why aren't you calling out this behavior and level of violence?

Mayor: Juliet, I've been really clear about this throughout. Violence is unacceptable. I've spoken to it so many times. It's something so clear to me. Really, are we going to say, oh, it's bad when someone commits an act of violence? Yes, we say it every day. We know it. We feel it. We don't have to reiterate. What we have to do is get out there and bring the city back, and recovery

equals public safety, public safety equals recovery, which is why we now have the largest police force in the subways we've had in over 25 years, which is why we're rebounding police in community, which is why we're investing in community-based solutions to violence that have really worked like the Cure Violence movement, Crisis Management System. I don't want to talk about, I want to do the things that will fix the problem. Go ahead, Juliet.

Question: All right. But I guess what I don't hear is you saying this is not acceptable behavior. This is not going to be tolerated. We're not going to have this in our community.

Mayor: I've made it so clear. Very, very much with respect for you, we've known each other a long time. Every day, I'm working NYPD is working, community leaders are working to stop violence, of course it's unacceptable, and that goes without saying, we're doing the things to turn this city around. That's what we need to focus on.

Moderator: The next is Sydney from Gothamist.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor. I wanted to ask a question about kids getting vaccinated. Now that 12 to 15-year-olds are able to get the COVID vaccine, I'm wondering if you, or what is the City going to do to try to make sure as many kids as possible get the vaccine? You know, it, with the new announcement you just made today, are there going to be efforts to try to get kids at those centers vaccinated or any program with the Department of Education?

Mayor: Yeah, look, we're going to do all of the above, Sydney. We have now tremendous ability to reach families and kids. We're going to use all of it. One of the things Dr. Chokshi has talked about is pediatricians. I think this is a single biggest piece of the equation. Getting pediatricians to reach out proactively to families support and encourage vaccination to help make it happen for families, obviously at every pediatric appointment talking about vaccination, but yes, Family Enrichment Centers, schools, we're going to be promoting it in lots of different ways, and what we're seeing, you know, I said yesterday already, we had 20,000 kids in that 12 to 15-year-old range as of yesterday, parents are ready. We're going to make it easy for them. We're going to reach out to them, and I think we're going to get a very strong response. Go ahead, Sydney.

Question: Okay. Thank you, and then yesterday The City reported on a Department of Investigation interview obtained by – the news outlet, The City – showing that Police Commissioner Shea said he had never read the Human Rights Watch report on the NYPD's actions and Mott Haven last summer in the Bronx, and the Commissioner said, he knows the facts, has learned not to trust what he reads in the paper. So, he wasn't going to read the report and this Human Rights Watch report was produced over several months, and this is an internationally recognized group, which found that the NYPD had violated international human rights in that particular evening. Do you agree with your Police Commissioner's description of this report and if not, are you going to ask him to read it?

Mayor: I look at it this way, Sydney, we asked the definitive entities in this city, Department of Investigation and Law Department to go and do very full, complete investigation, and they came back and said there were a lot of things that needed to be done better, they came forward between them, I think it was almost 20 recommendations. All of which have been fully

implemented or are being implemented right now by the NYPD. Commissioner Shea and I both a hundred percent accepted and agreed with the conclusions of the reports and the recommendations. That's what I believe in, and that's what we're acting on.

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

Question: Hey, good morning, Mayor de Blasio. How are you?

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

Question: Good. I have to say that you and the Nets hat and the jersey that yesterday, that seemed like, you know, maybe one of the more effective Knicks ads in years, you know, it goes back to maybe there was a mad rush for suddenly Knicks fans. Just kidding, of course.

Mayor: You know, I love both teams, Katie. If I brought joy to the hearts of Knicks fans too, that makes me very happy.

Question: That was like John Starks, dunking over Jordan level-marketing.

Mayor: I feel I'm in the pantheon there. All right.

Question: My question is actually it's about you know, with the shifting regulations from the CDC teachers, are still getting required to get mandatory testing in schools. Will you shift that? Especially if teachers are fully vaccinated, I guess it would free up some tests. I don't know that they're in as much demand now, but I don't know what the plan is for that?

Mayor: It's a fair question, Katie. We're keeping the current approach in place. It's been highly effective. All our schools are open. Positivity is very low. I think what we've been doing is working. We're going to stick with it for now, obviously, you know, the fall when we expect to bring all our kids back a whole different discussion. We'll be speaking to that in the weeks ahead, but right now I think we have an approach that works. We're sticking with it. Go ahead, Katie.

Question: Thanks, and my second is sort of a follow-up to Sydney's question about Commissioner Shea. I know that you and the Commissioner often seem to be at odds over your interpretation of things, especially when it comes to policing, and I know he hasn't been on in a bit, I don't know if that's kind of a continued conversation that you have with the Commissioner, especially, you know, as there are more policing issues and public safety issues coming into the news with an increase in crime at some parts of the city?

Mayor: What I'd say is, first of all, we talk all the time and we agree on strategies, tactics what we're going to focus on in terms of bringing the city forward. Look, there was a very intensive reform effort in the NYPD and the Commissioner brought in community leaders, Wes Moore and Arva Rice, and Jennifer Jones Austin to help lead that effort – led to an extraordinary series of reforms passed overwhelmingly by the City Council. You had the apology that this Commissioner did for the past actions of NYPD that went far beyond what any previous Commissioner had said, and that was very important, and then a series of changes that have been

made to really change the leadership of the NYPD, the composition of the NYPD , the fact that you saw an extraordinary recruitment effort to bring in African American applicants, stronger than anything we've seen in years and years, and obviously the decision we all made together to double the points given for city residents, to encourage more and more residents to be in the NYPD. These are all the kinds of things that have moved the force forward, plus a constant focus on deepening relationships with communities for neighborhood policing. So, we're very aligned on those approaches and that's what we're using right now, as we bring the city back.

Moderator: The next is Paul Liotta from the Staten Island Advance.

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

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

Question: I'm well, sir, thank you. I asked you about a homeless shelter in Stapleton, I think last week. Councilwoman Rose is organizing a protest this weekend. She says the siding of the shelter perpetuates environmental injustice and structural racism. I just wanted to see if you'd like to respond?

Mayor: I have a lot of respect for the Council Member and we work closely together. Obviously don't agree with that assessment. We believe in an approach where every community has shelter capacity to support folks from that community who become homeless. Remember, Paul, for decades until I changed it. If you are homeless and you came from Staten Island, you might be sent to a shelter in the Bronx or Queens. You might be totally disconnected from family, from your house of worship, from your kid's school. We've been steadily changing that to say, God forbid, you are homeless for a period of time. We want to be as close to your home community as possible. We want to get you back on your feet, over 150,000 – and please it'd be nice if someone really focused on this very important fact – 150,000 New Yorkers who became homeless in the last eight years, we got to permanent affordable housing. We got out of shelter into affordable housing, but that works much better if people are closer to their home community and we will work with communities to make sure shelters are operated well, but it's imperative that we give people that second chance and that opportunity. Go ahead, Paul.

Question: Thank you very much for that, and for you and the health professionals on the line with a lot of, you know restrictions being reduced today and eliminated in some cases I'm hoping to get a sense of what you thought of the federal government's announcement of this last week, and if you saw it that the timing was appropriate?

Mayor: All right, let me get everyone in the mix. I'm going to speak and then follow up first, Dr. Varma then Dr. Katz, then Dr. Chokshi. I'll start, Paul, really important question. I think President Biden has done an absolutely outstanding job of fighting COVID and bringing this country back, and I think one of the most important things he did was to professionalize the CDC, to actually make it about the judgment of healthcare professionals again and not politics and not, you know, people being scared to offer an idea because of an arbitrary leader who didn't want to hear it. This President's asking the experts to do the talking and listening to them and acting, and so the experts believed it was time to start making these changes because people had

embraced vaccination so much. I think vaccination was proven, right. Period, and in fact, when you say to people, Hey, it worked and you did the right thing, and now we're rewarding you with more freedom. It is an incentive for even more people to go out and get vaccinated and let's finish the job. That's my view of what the federal government has done. Let me turn to my colleagues, Dr. Varma.

Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma: Great. Thank you very much for the question, and I would concur exactly with what the Mayor has said, that this is a, a good sign that we see the CDC is taking the lead on following the science here. We feel very strongly based on our review of the evidence that people who are vaccinated are at very low risk of being infected and in the rare situations where they do get infected, very low risk of transmitting infection to other people. I think challenge that all of us are facing, and you hear that in the questions you see it about and the different guidance that's coming out from institutions is how do you manage this in the real world in a play in a world in which you know, that a certain percentage, lets t say a very high percentage, more than 50 percent of your customers or your employees are unvaccinated, you have to think carefully about what you make an assumption on. Do you make the assumption that everybody is essentially on their own? And then they can do whatever they want, or do you try to say, well, look until we get to lower disease rates or higher vaccination rates, people should wear a masks. So, I think that's the challenge, that all of us who are working at different levels of governments trying to work with the sciences, right. CDC got that right. now the question becomes, how do you apply that in real world settings to keep everybody as safe as possible?

Mayor: Thank you, Dr. Katz.

President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I very much support this direction because we needed to show people that we really believe in vaccination. I think before it was very much a mixed message. We're saying vaccination works, vaccination protects you, vaccination lowers the risk of transmission, but we want to wear a mask all the time. Well, that doesn't exactly make sense for that individual. So, I think what the CDC has done is made it clear to all Americans. The vaccine does work, as you always say every day. We want everyone to get vaccinated, and as Dr. Varma talked about, we do have work to do in settings where there are both vaccinated and unvaccinated people. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you, Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Thank you, sir, and I agree with you and my colleagues that the key to a joyful June and July and a safe summer is vaccination. But I also want to sound the note that if you're not yet fully vaccinated, that means you should continue taking the precautions that we've talked about. If you're not yet fully vaccinated, you should be wearing your mask any time you leave home, maintain physical distancing, and get tested regularly. But if you want to get vaccinated, there has never been an easier time to do so, and you can visit nyc.gov/vaccinefinder to get an appointment or figure out where to walk in today.

Mayor: I want to – thank you – I want to summarize what Dr. Chokshi said, vaccination equals freedom. Simple as that. Okay, go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Erin from Politico.

Question: Mr. Mayor, I want to ask, you know, Dr. Varma actually kind of asked the question I was going to ask and now I'm hoping someone can take a stab at answering it, which is, you know, these new rules for the masks I understand as an individual, if you're vaccinated, you don't have to, if you are not vaccinated, you do have to, but for anyone who's trying to implement this, you know, someone who runs a business or whether it's a museum or theater or whatever the case may be, how are they supposed to handle this? How are they supposed to distinguish who's vaccinated and not vaccinated? What is the best practice for them to follow under the regulations which take effect today?

Mayor: Look, I think it is a choice and this is another element of freedom. Each business, each cultural institution, whatever it is, has a choice in how they want to do this, and if they say for now, we'd like to ask everyone to keep a mask on, that is there right. Or if they want to state the policy at the entrance, say, if you've been vaccinated, you can have your mask off, if you haven't been, keep your mask on and let people do that on an honor system, that's their choice. I really don't find this, personally, Erin, as much of a challenge as some of the questions might've suggest. I think people are working this out. New York has done an amazing job, absolutely amazing. We have to take stock of this. People listen to the guidance, they followed it, and a lot of people are going to keep their masks on now because they just want to be careful, and I think that will go on for a while. But I think most people respect each other, and if the rule is, if you want to come in here, we're asking you to keep your mask on, people will honor it. I think that's the simplest way to proceed. Go ahead, Erin.

Question: Okay, thanks. And then I'm wondering, you know, with regard to the vaccination numbers, you've been throwing out all these incentives, we've thought about something – doing something more dramatic like Ohio, I think did a lottery for a million dollars if you get vaccinated. Have you thought about doing some kind of like big ticket thing that would really get the numbers up?

Mayor: Yeah, we are talking about whether that kind of approach with add something. Look, I think Erin, right now, what we're seeing is a lot of people are every day, we're seeing continued progress on vaccination. I think the number one reason that's happening is because we've made it ever more convenient, more local, walk-in, mobile vaccination centers. I think all of this is just making it real easy for people. And I talk to people all the time who say, oh yeah, I'm just finally getting around to it, oh yeah, you know, there's someplace now near me, I'm going to go. I think that's the driver right now. I think the incentives are also helping and generating a lot of interest and focus. I mean, yes, they talk about it's an opportunity to get Nets playoff tickets if you get vaccinated, that's going to motivate people, a lot of the other incentives are going to motivate people, but yeah, we're looking at models around the country and a lottery type idea is real interesting. So, we'll be assessing that, and we'll have more to say on that soon.

Moderator: The next is Juan Manuel from NY1.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

Mayor: *Buenos días. ¿Cómo estás?*

Question: *Muy bien, muchas gracias.* You just said that the vaccination equals freedom and Dr. Katz also said that the CDC wanted to send a message, if you vaccinate, then you can resume some sort of a normal life, right? And take your mask off. So, I'm sure that you're thinking also about setting an example, how is your mask use going to change starting today?

Mayor: I am in the camp that says you judge by the setting. I'm fully vaccinated and proud of that fact. If I'm some place where I'm a hundred percent certain, there aren't other people nearby outdoors, for example, or I know I'm around vaccinated people, there may be circumstances where I take the mask off, but there's other cases where I'm like, I'm just going to keep it on out of abundance of caution because maybe I'm going to be in and out of contact with people. Maybe some people around me are vaccinated, some people are not. When in doubt, for me, when in doubt wear the mask, simple as that, we've done it for God's sakes for a year, we can do it a little bit longer to finish the job. That's the approach I'm going to take. Go ahead, Juan Manuel.

Question: And the second question would be – I mean, recovery is the most important thing for New York City right now. You have a conversation about this every day. So, among the candidates for mayor, from the things that you're hearing, who do you think has the best recovery plan for the city?

Mayor: Juan Manuel you are extraordinarily persistent, and I admire it. I think, you know, your creativity and coming up with different variations of a question is something to tip my cap to. Listen, I think we still need to hear more from the candidates. The last debate, as I said, didn't shed a lot of light. I hope the next one will give us a lot more. I'd like to hear a clearer vision from any and all of them, honestly. I do think as we weigh the candidates and we get closer, you know, most people are going to make their decision last week or two, truly, it'll be, what is that combination of vision specific ideas, experience, heart and, you know, empathy for people. What is going to be that combination that makes us feel someone can really take the baton and deepen the recovery. I'm going to hand the baton over with this city well into recovery, who can take the baton and keep going? That's going to be the question, but it's too early to decide that right now.

Moderator: We have time for two more for today. The next is Michael Garland from the Daily News.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hey Michael, how you doing?

Question: I'm good. So, I wanted to ask you again about, you know, the, the CDC guidance. You know, there seems to be like a lot of room to create confusion here, where, you know, you can have restaurants open at a 100 percent capacity, but you know, unless they have plexiglass – sorry for the dogs barking in the background. I don't know if you could hear that –

Mayor: You're bringing personality to your question. It's all good.

Question: The windows are open in the neighborhood. It's a beautiful day out. So yeah, I mean, you can have a 100 percent capacity, but unless you have plexi up, you know, if you have plexi up, you don't have to six-foot social distance, and if you have a vaccination, you don't have to social distance. There are a lot of kind of caveats within certain pieces of this and it just seems like, you know, from the business side, like that could create a lot of confusion. I'm wondering if you have any kind of guidance for business owners and how to navigate that? It seems like potentially really unwieldy and confusing and fraught.

Mayor: I just don't feel that. I respect the question, Michael, I really do. And if anyone is feeling that I have empathy, but I don't feel that way. We have been through so much worse. We went through hell a year ago and the challenges that business owners are dealing with then, you know, we're so much greater. Everything we're dealing with now pales in comparison to what we went through. 7,682,972 doses of the vaccine given already and climbing every day. That is what we need to know. New Yorkers are doing the right thing. I think people are shown a lot of honor and respect for each other. I think you're going to see a lot of people continuing to be careful and cautious. A lot of people are going to continue to wear the mask even when they don't officially need to. But I think restaurant owners understand they have an obligation to keep people safe, they're in a business of thinking about the needs of their customers, and I think they've been very honorable overwhelmingly in this crisis, so they'll make the adjustments. And I think any restaurant owner wants to err on the side of caution, they have plenty of ways they can do that, and I respect that, you know, they will make good choices. I really believe that. Go ahead, Michael.

Question: Going back to a previous question, you know, in the mayor's race –and you've been asked this a few times and the answer is similar, you're given as it was today that you'd like to hear a clear vision. And so, I'm wondering, like, what does it say about the candidates that, you know, a month out from the primary, from your perspective we still don't have a clear vision from them as to how they're going to do things. I mean, should the vision be clearer at this point? I mean we're a month away from the primary vote.

Mayor: I think they all need to step up a bit. I think they have had a tough situation because normal campaigning hasn't been possible because of COVID and so much of the attention obviously has not been on the campaign, it has been on COVID, but we've all known that. I think all of them need to think about how to clarify where they want to take us. So, I feel that equal opportunity. But there's still plenty of time on the clock. I mean, I – again, you know, Michael, you live deeply in the political world, most everyday New Yorkers are not even beginning to think about it at this moment. They will solidify their judgements in the last week or two, or even the last few days, before the election. That's how it works in general, but especially in the moment of COVID. So, there's plenty of time for the candidates to tighten up and clarify where they're going to take us, and then the people will decide.

Moderator: Last question for today goes to Gersh from Streetsblog.

Question: Yeah, as you know, Mr. Mayor, I love going last because you and I can talk like gentlemen when everybody hangs up, but I'd like to disagree with Katie Honan right at the top –

Mayor: Gersh, wait a minute, I see you as a classic number eight hitter. That's just how I feel. I've played softball with you. I just feel like that eight hole was meant for you.

Question: I'm all glove, no bat. We know that. Anyway, I got to disagree with Katie Honan and say that seeing you in the Nets uniform yesterday made it possible for all of us aged New Yorkers to feel comfortable modeling basketball swag. So, I appreciate you for that –

Mayor: I'm not going to comment, I'm going to say, thank you, Gersh.

Question: Okay. That's all I that's all I need. Anyway, now to my question, so one of the legacies of your handling of the pandemic was your creation of Open Streets and Open Restaurants, which repurpose space that's typically used for car storage, into vibrant space for the public. And given that context, we've been asking around, and now I'm going to ask you what you think about the recent calls for the next mayor's debate to be held outdoors, preferably on one of your Open Streets to highlight how they have transformed that space, but also New Yorkers understanding that public roadways can be transformed into, if you will, the new public square where things like debates should happen. What do you think about that?

Mayor: I kind of like it. I have the fondest memories as a proud Italian American of being in the piazza in my grandfather's hometown and many other places I've been in Italy and where there's a real public square and people gather, and here in this city, we know the long history, the street corner orators on 125th Street in Harlem, I think there is something there that's very real, and I think people are turning to outdoor spaces more and more. I would like to see, obviously an in-person debate and if outdoors was the way to do it, that's – I think that's a clever solution. Go ahead.

Question: All right. We obviously appreciate being called clever and I'll pass that along to Dave –

Mayor: A high point in our relationship that even you are a number eight hitter, I have had to call you clever objectives today.

Question: Wow. That's awfully nice. Again, [inaudible] Dave Colon. But let me now talk to you about the thing I always talk to you about, which is the notion of this open space and the Open Streets program, and you've called it permanent, and we know that it, thanks to that Council Bill that you signed, is a permanent part of New York life, but let's talk about Barcelona because I don't know if you've ever been to Barcelona, but as you know, the singular architectural feature of that city is something called superblocks, which basically eliminate through traffic for cars inside residential blocks, and it turns it into like five-mile-an-hour plazas. Now, as you may or may not know, that singular feature of Barcelona started with just one superblock that became beloved, and when the city tried to expand it, drivers tended to fight back, but residents eventually won, and the rest is history. So, the reason I bring it up is because when you talk about permanent Open Streets in New York City, right now, the plan is to still have volunteers who, as you know, who've been beaten and harassed by car drivers in their advocates during this program, putting out the barricades and taking them out and [inaudible]. There is a possibility,

however, as you know, to create ostensibly New York's first superblock by maybe closing off some of these streets permanently with design solutions. So, I'd want to ask you again about that, and I'd like to get Dr. Chokshi on that because as, you know, as Health Commissioner, he knows how much safer roadways are when cars are simply not on them.

Mayor: I want to say, first of all, Open Streets clearly has been a huge victory. I appreciate that you're pointing out some of the issues that have arisen, but it's in very rare instances, overwhelmingly people have respected Open Streets and communities have embraced open streets, and again, I want to accent what I think is not just the positive but is the overwhelming majority of circumstances. So, just wanted to offer that correction, but look, we're finding new options all the time that work. I'm open to, you know, we talked about, for example, we've now had the concept of Open Boulevards which takes open streets, makes it multi-block long. We're going to do that this summer. I think it's going to be a big hit. We're going to learn from that. I think there are more and more opportunities to experiment and figure out what works. I don't think we're exactly like Barcelona on many levels, but I think these models are something worth looking at. I was very struck in, again, close to my ancestral hometown and Napoli, the way that they closed off waterfront roads in a really productive way. I think we have to keep looking at different models, some temporary, some permanent. I do think it's going to be a bigger part of our future. I really do. Dr. Chokshi, you get the last word today, what do you want to say about how Open Streets connect with public health?

Commissioner Chokshi: I will. Thank you so much, sir. First, Gersh, I understand it's your birthday. So, I wanted to wish you a very happy birthday, and with respect to your important question you know, I agree with what the Mayor has said, and I'll just add sort of my personal take on it. I've enjoyed both an Open Boulevard and the Open Streets in my neighborhood of Jackson Heights in Queens, and I do think that you're right to connect it to health. We have to think about all of the benefits that people get from congregating outside. There are social benefits. There are the benefits, of course, of promoting a more physical activity, getting people out and walking as well. And so, we have to take that very holistic approach in thinking about the links between our transportation infrastructure and health.

Mayor: Thank you very much and Gersh. I was about to wish you happy birthday, Dave Chokshi beat me to it, but I want to say Gersh, next year, when you're 40, you're going to find that the 40's are a great, great decade. So, enjoy this last year of your 30's. And thank you for your question and everyone, it is a beautiful day in New York City. Go out – go outside. Yes, we all agree. Go outside and enjoy it. And while you're outside, if you have not yet been vaccinated, go and walk into one of those vaccination centers and get safe and healthy. It's easy. It's fast. It's free. Thank you. Have a great day, everyone.

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