

THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
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NEW YORK, NY 10007

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** December 22, 2020, 10:00 AM

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

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, everybody. Well, there is definitely good news in this world. Yesterday, we saw the first shipments of the Moderna vaccine arrive in New York City. So, this is really, really important. We already had the Pfizer vaccine now – a whole new second opportunity to keep people safe with the Moderna vaccine arriving. This is going to give us much more capacity, but it's also, again, a moment to appreciate the extraordinary effort that the scientific community undertook in the year 2020 to create these vaccines, to keep us safe – not one, but two now, and potentially more on the way. So, this is really miraculous. It's something to appreciate that these really safe, effective vaccines have been created. And they're going to allow us to move forward. They're going to allow us to turn the page once and for all on the coronavirus.

Now, we are underway with the leadership of our Vaccine Command Center, we're underway in the largest vaccination campaign in New York City's history. This is going to be a huge logistical operation, but already you're seeing what New York City can do and how New York City sets a very high bar. We're already vaccinating people at twice the national average. There's a lot of focus, there's a lot of intensity in the approach to make sure the maximum people get vaccinated as quickly as possible. So, we need to do that – the logistics, the hospitals, the doctors, nurses, everything has to be coordinated through our command center, but we also have to educate people, we have to get people comfortable with the vaccine. Obviously, very importantly, President-elect Joe Biden got the vaccine yesterday and showed the world that. I think that was a great act and very important. What we're going to do every single day is educate New Yorkers about the importance of the vaccine and we're launching a new campaign to get the word out.

It's [inaudible] very clearly, NYC Vaccine for All. The idea of this campaign is to let people know this is for everyone, this works for everyone. It will be free. It will be easy. It will be effective and safe. These are the messages that we have to get out – safe, free, easy. We're going to keep saying that over and over again. And we have so many community leaders who are stepping up making clear to people who listened to them, who trust them, that this is the right thing to do to protect every New Yorker, protect your families, protect yourself. We're going to not just talk about, we're going to show through evidence, through the testimony of New Yorkers, trusted, respected New Yorkers that this really works. And we're going to push back against misinformation. We know there will be misinformation. We know the rumor mill will be working overtime. We will the message out using all types of media and different languages, whatever it takes to help people understand that this is the difference maker. This vaccine is what will allow us to move forward. All the pain, all the suffering, all the loss can be defeated through this vaccine. That's what we want to get across and the best way to get the message across is for

you to hear from every-day New Yorkers who have received the vaccine and so they can explain why it's so important to them and their families, why it's so important to you.

And so, we've got three folks who work at Health + Hospitals and our New York City public hospitals, and clinics who do such important work for all of us, who really are heroes for what they've done to protect their fellow New Yorkers. And we want them protected, but we want to hear their voices, because they made the choice to get the vaccine, and it's important for you to know why and what it means for you and your family. So, first let's hear from someone who helps every day the people of the Bronx, he works at North Central Bronx Hospital for our Health and Hospitals system – and we welcome Kevin Cruz. Welcome, Kevin.

[...]

**Mayor:** Kevin, I really, really appreciate that. And I think you – I think you just gave all the reasons in the world right there. I just think you spoke from the heart about what we saw, what we know. I really appreciate the point you made, people worry about side effects. We know the side effect of getting COVID and how horrible it can be. We know that that can lead to people losing their lives or lasting consequences. So, I want to thank you for putting it in real perspective, that this is something that people need to do and do it for yourself, do it for your family, but also do it for the health care heroes who were in harm's way, but fought through to save us. Kevin, thank you. That was very, very powerful. Thank you. And thank you for all you do.

Everyone – and I want you to hear from someone who does so much for us in Queens. Suja Mohan is the Director of Nursing for the Emergency Department at Queens Hospital. another place that was right in the epicenter of this crisis. Thank you for all you've done. And tell us what you think about this vaccine, Suja.

[...]

**Mayor:** Thank you so much, Suja. Thank you for all you have done through this pandemic to save lives, to help support all your colleagues. I know it's been really tough, but thank you for your leadership and thank you for your testimony today on how important this. I want you to hear from one more New Yorker, and this is someone who watches out for the people who do this crucial work, watches out for our health care workers, watches out for folks who are in hospitals and need solace and comfort and support. Very, very crucial that we recognize that all the members of the clergy who are there for people in their hour of need, help sustain us and have helped us sustain us through this horrible time. So, he does his good work at Coney Island Hospital, part of Health + Hospitals, a place that also really, really struggled and fought through the worst of the coronavirus crisis and really appreciate his leadership and his voice today. My great honor to introduce Rabbi Jonas Gruenzweig.

[...]

**Mayor:** Thank you. Rabbi, thank you so much. That's such a clear, powerful message. You don't want to get COVID-19 and you don't want to give it to anybody else. Well listen, everybody, the

rabbi said about as clearly as you possibly could, this is why everyone should take this vaccine, because, Lord knows, you don't want to get this horrible disease and you certainly don't want to pass it onto those you love. So, we're going to keep giving you the opportunity to hear from your fellow New Yorkers in the weeks and months ahead to really understand why people believe in this vaccine and their own personal experience with it. I think that's going to be what's most compelling to people. I really want to thank all our guests today for all they do for us and for also helping New Yorkers to understand this vaccine and believe in it.

Now, today, we're going to talk about a couple of more things, but they all have to do with saving lives. And this is a season where we really focus on our blessings, this is a season of reflection it's a season of thankfulness, and it's also a season for giving back. I'm asking everyone to help in every way they can their fellow New Yorkers in this season. And one of the things that's most important to do to save lives is to give blood. And we've talked about this over the last few weeks quite a bit. There is a real challenge in this city with our blood supply, because all the normal ways that we normally maintain our blood supply, the corporate drives and colleges, government offices, all the times that people so kindly blood to help others, that all isn't happening the same way and we've got to make up for it. So, we started the Give Blood NYC campaign to really help people understand this is something you can do. This is a lifesaving thing you can do – literally, lifesaving and just make it personal. If it was one of your loved ones – rush to the hospital and they need a transfusion, there was no more blood. You know, that would be heartbreaking. We can't let that happen. So, this is why everyone needs to come forward and help. I went and gave blood at the New York Blood Center with my wife Chirlane, we were honored to do so to help our fellow New Yorkers. Now, people have been responding, thousands of people responded to this campaign. I want to thank – there's almost 11,000 people this month who have come forward to give blood in New York City. Thank you, thank you all for what you're doing for your fellow New Yorker. But we need more – we've set a goal for the month of December. We need 14,000 more donors by December 31st. We only have 10 days, but we can do it. New Yorkers can do it, but we need everyone to step up right now. This is, again – if you think about how can you give back in this season, if you're thinking right now what can I do? How can I help the world? This is what you can do. It's simple, it's fast and safe and there's locations all over the city. All you have to do is sign up at [nybc.org/givebloodnyc](http://nybc.org/givebloodnyc). You will be saving lives literally. So, please, we need you now.

All right, now talk about saving lives – Vision Zero. Vision Zero is a difference-maker for now seven years. We put the most aggressive approach in this country and the place to save the lives of pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists. And Vision Zero has worked, and Vision Zero is powerful because it changes behavior, it changes minds, changes laws. It does so many things, changes the way that our streets look and feel and their safety. There are so many parts of Vision Zero, and I believe in it, but we have to go farther, because we know there's still too many people in danger, there's still lives are being lost that should not be lost. So, this year we've seen a very, very painful reality. And, obviously, the coronavirus, the number-one challenge has thrown off everything else. Now, one thing that is true and is a very good thing amidst this very painful year, is that for pedestrians this has been our safest year. 2020 has actually been our safest years for pedestrians, but not for motorists and cyclists. There've been too many crashes. And, in fact, we've seen that rate go up in alarming fashion. We have to do some different things right away to address this situation. So, we have new Vision Zero initiatives, we're launching. Some will be

done by the city. Some will need the help of the State of New York. And we're appealing today to New York State, to the Legislature to help us do more, to help us save lives, help us with the most fundamental step, which is taking what works – speed cameras, they work. And let me say, anyone who hears the word speed cameras and they immediately don't like that, they don't like to hear those words, speed cameras remind them of tickets, they'd get, I can sympathize. I've said it before, I've had moments as a driver where I wasn't careful enough and I got one of those speeding tickets and no one likes it, but you know what? They change behavior. They get people to start slowing down. They get people to obey the law. They work and we need more, because we need to save lives. What we need is for New York State to allow New York City to operate speed cameras 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We still have too many restrictions holding us back from saving lives and these restrictions don't make sense. Remember, most basic facts – if you're not speeding, you're not going to get a ticket. Let me say again, if you're not speeding, you're not going to get a ticket. If you're not speeding, you have nothing to worry about from a speed camera. So, extending them to greater hours only makes sense. Particularly, the overnight hours where we've seen, unfortunately, some really horrible moments and people's lives lost. We're also going to be cracking down through the Police Department on drunk driving, which we know is a challenge in every holiday season. We're really worried about this season with such a horrible year people have been through. So, you're going to see the NYPD out in force, addressing drunk driving and making sure people understand that are real consequences.

But when it comes to the speed cameras, want to just make sure people understand this, and these facts speak volumes – three quarters of traffic fatalities this year happened in times or places where no automated speed enforcement is currently allowed under State law. So, right there, there's a problem. And over a third of the non-highway fatalities occurred in school cameras zones during hours when the cameras could not issue tickets. So, think about that. In those school zones, we fought hard to get those cameras in school zones. They work. They've saved the lives of kids and parents and grandparents. They work. But even in those school zones, we're seeing people's lives lost because we can't operate those cameras enough of the day, doesn't make sense. It is time to change the law. We know there are colleagues in Albany ready to lead the charge, and we thank all of them. This is about saving lives. So, I want to ask everyone to support this crucial Vision Zero initiative. Let's use the speed cameras to the maximum to save lives.

Okay, one more quick point before I do our indicators, just an update for people in the Bronx today, that there is a special election today in the Bronx, an open seat for the City Council in District 12, and that includes neighbors of Baychester, Co-op City, Edenwald, Eastchester, Wakefield, and Williamsbridge. Polls are open. They have been open since 6:00 AM. They will be open until 9:00 PM. So, it's a special election. It's important for the community to be represented. And even though we know it's not the same focus and energy of a typical election day I still want to reflect on how just weeks ago, New Yorkers came out in droves to make their views and voices heard. So, I'm asking folks in the 12th Council District in the Bronx, come out, make your voice heard, make sure you are represented. Polls are open until nine o'clock today.

All right, let's go over our indicators. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19. Today's report 193, 193 patients. We want to be under 200. We're barely under 200. But again, the hospitalization rate per 100,000 is a problem –

3.09 per 100,000. We want to be under two. So, again, that number is too high. Case numbers continue to be astoundingly high. Today's number, on a seven-day average, 2,889 against a goal of 550. It speaks for itself. We have a lot of work to do. We got to bring that down. Now, the third indicator, percentage of New York City residents testing positive, seven-day rolling average today 5.88 percent. We want to be under five percent even. We have real work to do. 5.88 percent, a little lower than yesterday, but still higher than we need to be. A few words in Spanish

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[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

**Moderator:** We'll now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Dr. Chokshi by, DOT Acting Commissioner Margaret Forgiione, and by Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. The first question today goes to Allison Kaden from PIX-11.

**Question:** Good morning to you. I want to talk about holiday travel. My first question is, some New Yorkers may be listening, some New Yorkers probably aren't, whether that means getting in their cars, going to the airports, they're going to see friends, going to warm locations, going to family. They will eventually have to come back to New York City. What is your message to them?

**Mayor:** Thank you, Allison. Couldn't be a more important topic. First my message, again, you heard it from Dr. Dave Chokshi, our Health Commissioner yesterday, if you have travel plans right now, cancel those travel plans if there's any way you can. Look, some people, I know it may be, literally, an emergency or something that they don't have a choice. If you have a choice, cancel your travel plans. Why? Because we finally have the vaccine. In a few months, it's going to be widespread. Things are going to be a lot safer. Postpone your travel to when it's safe, protect yourself, your family, your loved ones. But let's say someone says, 'nope, I'm traveling no matter what.' Okay. Then I say to them, you've got two choices. One, when you travel, of course, you have to maintain social distancing with people around you, wear your mask, do all the things we normally tell you to do. But if you're going to come back and expect to go on with your regular life, that's not going to happen unless you do exactly what the State rules say and you test while you're away and test negative and come back and within the stipulated period of time, test again and test negative. That's the only way you're not doing a quarantine. Right now, that's a two-week quarantine. And we will enforce that quarantine. We'll follow up with every traveler about the quarantine. We expect them to honor the quarantine. We'll help them, but if they don't honor the quarantine, there are serious financial penalties. And we need people to understand that we're not doing this for the fun of it. We're doing this to save lives. So, don't travel, ideally, but if you do travel, get ready to quarantine. Go ahead, Allison.

**Question:** My follow-up question obviously is this concerning strain in the UK, a lot of travel between London and New York. We've been talking about this for a few days. Still, it doesn't seem like the federal government is in any rush to stop UK travel. Have you had any talks with the federal government, with our federal leaders, and what is your concern level?

**Mayor:** My concern level is high, Allison, because we're looking at a new strain that is more infectious and simply makes the job harder, just when we're about to be able to turn the corner. So, I believe in a travel ban from Europe at this point, a temporary travel ban. I believe in, at minimum, if there's going to be travel requiring a negative test for anyone who gets on a plane. I'm going to be talking to a variety of federal leaders to try and get it done. Obviously, we have not seen much receptiveness from the Trump administration. We will keep trying, but if we can't get it done now, we're certainly going to try and get done under President Biden. But yeah, I'm worried just because it leads to more spread. Let me have Dr. Varma jump in here and just help people understand why this presents a new challenge.

**Senior Advisor Jay Varma:** Great. Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. And I did want to just react to the comments that you made, which is that we have always known and been worried about travel as a threat to our ability to control this infection. So, the more that we can do to, you know, limit the amount of travel that's happening and for people who do travel, ensure effective testing before and after, as well as isolation and quarantine, the better we can do to slow the spread of this virus. Now specifically regarding this strain, what is most concerning to us is the fact – are really two things. One is the fact that the evidence from the UK is reasonably strong that this virus spreads more easily than other strains of the coronavirus. And so again, that means that our room for error is even less. Everything that we do to prevent infections, keeping distance, wearing mask, washing our hands, we need to be even more rigorous about. So that's one concern. The second concern is we are seeing other strains, not the same one, but similar types of strains emerging in other parts of the world, like in South Africa. And all of that again is an indication that the only way that we can really return back to some version of normal is to reduce the number of people infected. This virus mutates when it's inside humans. So, we need to keep it out of humans. And again, so it circles back to the same thing, really being very strict about all the precautions that we normally follow. And we're going to be looking very carefully for introductions of this virus here in the U. S. as well as the possible emergence of similar types of strains. It's something we need to be wary about. But we do have the tools to prevent this. We have a vaccine, and we have all of our individual measures.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Go ahead.

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

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

**Mayor:** Good morning, Michael. Are you ready for the holidays?

**Question:** I am. I apologize, I've got the television on, in the background. I hope it's not too loud. I've got the kitty crowd control going.

**Mayor:** We want to support you in your crowd control efforts. That's okay.

**Question:** I wanted to ask you about – going back to the DOI report on the protests. Commissioner Shea said to the news yesterday that it really didn't seem to paint the full picture

of what was transpiring. He was commenting on the DOI report. You know, I think his issue with it was it didn't kind of put things into the full context and I was wondering do you agree with that assessment? Do you think the report should have done that better? Just in general, what do you think of the Commissioner's comments on that? Do you agree?

**Mayor:** Let me be very clear, Michael. I said it really from the heart on Friday. I agree with the report. I agree with what the Department of Investigation did. I agree with their analysis. I agree with the recommendations. I think it is clear that we all needed to do better. I needed to do better. Commissioner Shea needed to do better. The leadership of the NYPD citywide and down to the precinct level needed to do better. I also said there were some areas where I thought the report – you know, I wouldn't have said it the same way and I think there were things that needed some more acknowledgement, but that's small compared to the real truth of this report. It is a fair report. I think it is a tough, clear view on what happened, and it makes clear we got to do better. So, I, a hundred percent, accept the report. And the Commissioner said very clearly that he accepts the recommendations and will implement them. Go ahead, Michael.

**Question:** Thanks, Mr. Mayor. You've – a lot of people have asked you about when you get the vaccine and we've seen some elected officials getting it. I wanted to ask you another question about that. Once you do get the vaccine, what do you plan to do, I mean, differently when you get it? Do you see your behavior changing much? Are you going to be out and about doing things you haven't done since March? What do you got planned once you get it?

**Mayor:** It's an important question. I think we all need to just keep being careful because it's the smart thing to do in this moment that we're all going through here. So, what I've found is that the basic health rules we've all been following make sense, and we want to keep everyone in that mindset until we really have widespread vaccination. Want to keep wearing those masks, keep the social distancing, the small gatherings, all those things until our health leadership says, okay, it's time to change now, it's time to relax and approach things differently. Look, we've said, we think it's going to be roughly until about June before we can get really, really widespread vaccination. I think every week is going to get better, Michael. But I'm saying, if you say, when you're really going to be pervasive in New York City, probably give or take June. I'd say from now to June, we should all keep to these basic precautions. And then we'll assess as we get to that point and we'll listen to our health care leadership. But in terms of how, and when I get the vaccine, I am ready, willing, and able. And Dr. Chokshi is going to tell me when it's my turn in line.

**Moderator:** The next is Marla Diamond from WCBS 880.

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

**Mayor:** Good morning. How you doing?

**Question:** Good, how are you doing?

**Mayor:** We are – I'm hanging in. Just a few more days to Christmas, so I'm feeling good.

**Question:** I got a couple of middle schoolers here who are eager to get back to the classroom. Any guidance on that and on high schools, when you might give us some sense of when the older children will be going back to school?

**Mayor:** I would like them back in school as quickly as possible. What I can tell you right now is we're going to look at middle school first and then high school. Right now, we got to fight back the second wave, obviously. We've got to get this vaccine distributed widely. We're going to start looking at January as a first opportunity for middle school, but it will all depend on what's happening with the larger health care reality and what our health care leadership is saying. So, we've got more work to do, but I am very anxious to get our middle schoolers back as you are. I can't give you a date yet. It's going to need some more time, but my goal is as soon as humanly possible. Go ahead.

**Question:** And just to follow up on the vaccine, you mentioned at the beginning that you were very hopeful about the Moderna vaccine. Do you have any idea when that might be coming to New York City and who will be getting it?

**Mayor:** Absolutely. And we have a lot of idea, and it's the fact that we, now – this is on the playing field right now, the Moderna vaccine, and that's huge. And Dr. Chokshi will go over with you, you know, the kind of number of doses we expect and the impact we think it's going to make. Go ahead, Dr. Chokshi.

**Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:** Thank you, Mr. Mayor, and yes, I certainly share the excitement about that Moderna vaccine. A really important point that distinguishes it from the Pfizer vaccine is that it can be stored in regular freezers, which means that we can expand the points of access and distribution beyond places that just have that special ultra-cold freezer. In terms of the timeline for arrival and distribution – actually we got our first few doses of the Moderna vaccine yesterday, about 25,000 of the approximately 149,000 that we expect for this week have already arrived in New York City. Those along with the Pfizer doses that we're receiving as well, will continue to be distributed according to New York State prioritization guidance, which right now focuses on health care workers, particularly health care workers who are at highest risk, as well as nursing home staff and residents. And we're looking forward, as you heard from my amazing colleagues earlier in the call, we're looking forward to getting it to as many people as will benefit from it as quickly as possible.

**Mayor:** Thank you, go ahead.

**Moderator:** The next is Nolan Hicks from the Post.

**Question:** Hi, sorry. You caught me in the middle of nuking a cup of coffee.

**Mayor:** Nolan, we want you to be well caffeinated.

**Question:** There's really no other way to live Mr. Mayor. How are you?

**Mayor:** Doing well. I share your view.



**Question:** To circle back to the DOI report real fast, can you say specifically what parts of the report, or what conclusions in the report or what pieces of it you disagree with? You hinted at some disagreement.

**Mayor:** Yeah, Nolan, I don't think disagreement is literally the right word. I think the importance of the fact, for example, that we were able to make sure that the National Guard were not brought into New York City, it's referenced in there, which I appreciate, but I think it's a very big deal. The fact there was no loss of life, which tragically occurred in many other cities. Many of the more extreme policing tactics that other cities resorted to were not used here, you know, the kinds of things that really we felt were so important to avoid using. And I just feel like when you read the report, it rings very true. And that's what I appreciate about it, but I think some of that context should have been emphasized a little bit more. Go ahead, Nolan.

**Question:** Secondly, to the questions about policing tactics. The police department for weeks denied the fact that it was kettling protestors, they had a similar strategy, it was called encirclement. Do you think that was appropriate? And to follow on that point, there were many reporters over the course of May and June who described those tactics to you. You frequently dismissed those reports, most infamously telling Gothamist's Jake Offenhartz, 'I believe you believe what you're saying.' Do you regret those comments?

**Mayor:** I think actually, Nolan, I wouldn't call that infamous to say I respected that someone believed what they were saying. And I did respect – I like Jake, and I think he's a very earnest person. But what I got was a lot of different information that suggested different realities. And what I needed was an objective analysis, a thorough analysis, because I wasn't taking anyone's word for it. Bluntly. I want to be really clear about this. Didn't take NYPD's word for it, or someone who opposed the NYPD's word or it or anyone in between. I wanted objective analysis of what happened. And that's what the Department of Investigation provided. It is clear that tactics were used that should not have been used. They will not be used again. There should not be kettling. There should not be encirclement. As someone who has been in protest many a time as a protester, every peaceful protester deserves the opportunity. If they want to leave the protest area, they must be given that opportunity. If arrests are imminent, there must be clear, constant reminders that that's about to happen. If folks choose civil disobedience want to get arrested, that's great. If they want to move away, they should be given that opportunity. We don't accept and allow kettling or encirclement. You will not see it in the future. And if any police commander utilizes those tactics in the future, they will experience discipline and consequences. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** The next is Dana Rubinstein from the New York Times.

**Question:** Hi Mr. Mayor.

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

**Question:** Fine, thank you. So, you've stopped elective surgeries at HHC Hospitals. Case numbers are in your words, astoundingly high. Is the State waiting too long to shut down as it arguably did last time around?

**Mayor:** Dana, it's such an important question and it is something we are all talking about every day. I've had numerous conversations with the Governor. My team, his team have been talking constantly. We have, I think, a complex situation here. The case numbers are astoundingly high. I don't like what I see one bit. I'm really worried. And we are seeing an impact on our hospitals. At the same time, we are seeing our hospitals handle these cases much, much better than in the spring and with much better outcomes. The Governor has presented a plan that really focuses on the hospital issue because that is the single most sensitive and crucial issue. And I agree that that's where you begin and we are seeing better outcomes in the hospitals. But there's also the worry that as the case numbers continue to grow, you have the challenge of the spread of this disease and the question of what will stop it? What will slow it down until we get the vaccine really, really to be widespread? And those bigger restrictions are the only tool we have. So, we keep assessing daily. We keep having the conversation with the State daily. And I think particularly if we see more stress on the hospital system that there is a likelihood you will then see those restrictions. Go ahead.

**Question:** Thank you. And then secondly, does the extension of unemployment benefits in the new federal stimulus, does that impact your thoughts on the matter at all, given your concern about people being able to hold on to jobs?

**Mayor:** It's a good question, but I'll tell you again – I really, you're asking the question with a whole heart. I try to urge people, not even to call it a stimulus, because it's not a stimulus. It is, you know, barely a survival plan. You know, it's short-term at best. It will not help us turn things around in a substantial way. The amount of direct aid, that's, I'm glad there's direct aid, but the amount of direct aid is so small that for many, many New Yorkers, people all over the country it is not going to make much difference. So no, it does not make me feel that, you know, Oh, that's going to tide people over or everyone's going to be okay. No, I do not feel that. I think we always are concerned about protecting people's livelihoods. I am. I'm really concerned about folks who are trying to save their jobs, save their businesses. That matters, but of course, what matters most is protecting people's lives. So, we're trying to balance all of that. But no, I don't think what happened in Washington gives me much solace. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** The next is Ben Evansky from Fox News.

**Question:** Hello, Mr. Mayor, thank you for taking my question. First question, will you follow Joe Biden's remarks yesterday, give credit to President Trump's administration for getting the vaccine out in such a speedy way?

**Mayor:** Yeah. Look, I have many, many criticisms of President Trump in general and specifically his handling of the coronavirus. But I've also been very comfortable saying when I think they did something right. During the worst of the crisis, March, April, May when the President himself and the people around him helped us to get some of the PPE we needed and supplies we needed, I made it a regular point to thank them and give them their due praise for the ways that they helped New York City. I'll also always say when they failed to help New York City. So, you know, in terms of getting the vaccine? Yes, I do think the President and his administration contributed substantially to getting a vaccine in this kind of timeframe. That's a

really good thing. I would also say, you know, they dropped the ball profoundly in the beginning of this crisis and exacerbated it throughout with their actions, with their words. And also failed to provide us a stimulus which obviously the President could have been the difference maker on. But if you're saying, did they play a valuable role in getting us a vaccine quickly? Yes, I do believe that. Go ahead, Ben.

**Question:** Thank you. And the second question, last week there was a report about an exodus of NYPD officers leaving the force. Is that something you're concerned about?

**Mayor:** Look, there's a lot of good veteran officers who have contributed a lot to this city and have made the decision to leave, a lot of them for obviously financial reasons, but other reasons as well. And I do honor the service they provided the city. But I'll also tell you there are thousands and thousands of young up and coming New Yorkers who want to serve in the NYPD, who represent every neighborhood of the city, every background. Who bring a lot of energy, a lot of skills, and we're going to be welcoming them into the NYPD. So, the NYPD is going to be strong in all scenarios. And one thing we know there's always plenty of good New Yorkers who want to serve their fellow New Yorkers through the NYPD.

**Moderator:** We have time for two more for today. The next is Yehudit it from Borough Park 24 News.

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

**Mayor:** I'm doing well. How are you?

**Question:** Good, thank God. We want to wish you – we want to thank you for all your beautiful Hanukkah wishes last week. And also wish you happy holidays this week.

**Mayor:** I appreciate that. I always appreciate – you have a good energy about you and I thank you for the good work you do.

**Question:** Thank you. Thank you so much. Well, my question is actually about on an unfortunate recent surge of incidents, this was a couple of weeks ago coming to Borough Park and they were actually running out of their cars and trying to scare children and adults as if they were going to attack them. And then just, I'm sure you saw that – I think you wrote on Twitter that there was unfortunately some vandals who spray painted a swastika on a girls high school. And then also I think it was a week or two ago, somebody from our community saw some anti-Semitic graffiti in a subway station while they were just taking the subway. And I'm sure that you remember the devastating anti-Semitic murders and tragedies of last year's Hanukkah in Brooklyn and Jersey City and Monsey and you said then that you really wanted to help fight anti-Semitism. And this is obviously always on our minds. And you said there was so much more to be done. I was just wondering what your perspective is in terms of police presence or anything that can be done to patrol the streets of Jewish neighborhoods, just to be aware that this is always on our minds and always an issue?

**Mayor:** Thank you. Thank you for the question. We've got a lot to do. We've been doing a lot, but we unquestionably have a lot to do. And look, it's such an important topic. The first thing I want to say is on a very human level, I have met many Holocaust survivors in Brooklyn. And I often talk about, very painful moment that I experienced and sort of another moment of realization on top of everything else that I had always known, at a Shabbat dinner when a woman who had been in Auschwitz rolled up her sleeve and my family was with me to see this. We were at Assemblyman Dov Hikind's house. This was years ago, and his mom rolled up her sleeve and the numbers from Auschwitz were there on her arm. And my children saw that, and it was very effecting to them. So, the reason I say that to you is when you talk about someone scrawling a swastika on a yeshiva in the year 2020, whatever that person is thinking they don't for a second, understand what that symbol fully means, the horror of the Holocaust and the fact that people right now in our city lived through that. And when they see that swastika, what horrible pain that causes them and the memory of those they lost that surges through them. This is not ancient history. This is history we're living with right this moment, all over the world. And I'm very troubled by what I'm hearing in Germany, where you see neo-Nazis having more and more of a role again. This stuff is very real. So right here, the message is to constantly spread the message of respect for the community, embrace the idea that in New York City the Jewish community, all communities will be protected. And that police presence is crucial when needed and many, many times that has helped us to really ensure that nothing like this happened again. But it's also education. And I think one of the things we were starting to do before the pandemic was really go deep into the school system and do education about the Holocaust, about the Jewish community and Jewish history. And also, other communities that have suffered discrimination. We've got to get back to that. I think it was one of the things we'll be able to focus on again, when we finally turned the page on the coronavirus. Go ahead.

**Question:** All right, great. I just wanted to respond before I ask my second question. I just wanted to quote Benjamin Netanyahu, who said that when people tell us that they want to kill us, we believe them. So, it's really about police presence and that's just really something that's a concern. But you've talked a lot about loans, grants, and other help for small business owners. And you're asking New Yorkers to shop the city. And I know just speaking for myself, I think shopping online, especially with future lockdowns, it is going to be a really hard habit to break. And I think one thing that could really help as I speak to a lot of business owners in the community, are help with the websites because a lot of us are not so tech savvy. And that can be something that I think can really, instead of trying to compete against Amazon, I was wondering if the Small Business Services would ever be able to provide technically savvy people to help small businesses to create websites so that people can keep shopping online? Because I don't know if that's really going to be something that people can stop doing.

**Mayor:** That's a really good point all around. First of all, I'm happy to tell you, yes, we're doing that already. But we should be doing a lot more. I want to take your point and run with it. I'm asking all New Yorkers, I know a lot of people are still doing holiday shopping. I certainly am. So I want to say that all New Yorkers shop local, shop your city. You, I hear your point about folks may be tempted to for health and other reasons do all their shopping online, but you can still shop from local stores online to the maximum extent humanly possible. But I think it's a really great point. So Small Business Services is already doing this, but I think they should do more and deeper into communities. I'm going to ask our Small Business Services Commissioner

Jonnel Doris to follow up with you about how we can do a special outreach into Borough Park and other communities. But yeah, this is exactly something government can do to help people, provide that technical expertise, show people how to set up those websites. Let's keep these dollars right in the community. So, however you shop, shop local this holiday season.

**Moderator:** Last question for today. It goes to Juliet from 1010 WINS.

**Question:** Yay. Happy holidays to all on the call. Merry Christmas, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Merry Christmas, Juliet. Hi. Have you done all your shopping?

**Question:** No way.

**Mayor:** Alright, I like that. That was a badge of honor right there.

**Question:** Yes. You know what? I'm baking, I think people are getting home-baked goods.

**Mayor:** That is the best present.

**Question:** But that is not done yet either.

**Mayor:** That's the gift of love Juliet.

**Question:** Thank you. Thank you. Actually, I wanted to ask you about stimulus money or lack thereof? Because in the short term with your preliminary budget due next month, what are your plans for City services and personnel? Because Politico today is reporting that City agencies have to cut three percent. So, is that translating into service cuts, personnel cuts?

**Mayor:** We have a big challenge ahead. What's happening now with our budget is we're getting ready for a presentation in January. We're turning to all City agencies and saying you're going to have to find more savings. This is going to be a version of what we call a PEG which is an effort to get savings from every agency. What has been put out there initially is simply to get ideas and proposals back from agencies. It's not the final plan by any stretch. That will be developed for the presentation in January but then there's much, much more after January, you know, in April and June. The big X factor, what I hope and believe will happen, that President Biden will come in and really focus on a serious, large stimulus. But until we know that we have to prepare for the worst. So, this year's budget, Thank God we're doing okay from now until June, but next year is very, very tough. And that's why we're saying we have to be ready for anything and everything. We're going to ask every agency to put forward savings ideas. Unfortunately, we have again, talk about something, no one wants which is layoffs, but that's going to be part of the discussion again, unless we get federal or State help. So, it's a very sobering moment. And certainly, this bill, again, I will not call it a stimulus. This bill that was passed in Washington did not change the equation in any big way because it just didn't provide the kind of relief that we need to turn the corner. Go ahead, Juliet.

**Question:** Okay, so how long do you think you can hold off on layoffs? And if or when the stimulus money does come? What are your priorities with it?

**Mayor:** So, first of all, so far, we've been able to avoid layoffs with a lot of help from labor, defraying some costs that we would have to spend this year. Some things we wouldn't have to address this year, and that's been immensely helpful. I want to thank our labor partners for that. And we've had some other revenue we were able to get. We've doing okay so far. But there's so many unknowns here. And there's revenue that we need that if we don't get could put layoffs and other cuts back on the table even for this year. But certainly, if we're talking about next year, starting the next fiscal year, starting in July, unfortunately it is a live possibility. Because there's so many missing pieces here. Over a \$4 billion-hole, minimum going into July. And you know, I just want to put it in perspective Juliet in the spring, the House of Representatives passed a true stimulus, a true substantial muscular stimulus that would have helped cities and states get them back on their feet. That was the spring. Here we are now this week, we get something much, much less. It's really disappointing. And it just says to us, you know get ready because if we don't get help from the federal or State government, we're going to have to make some very, very tough choices, painful choices. And choices actually will make it harder for us to recover. I don't want to do that. I want to try and avoid that all costs but right now, you know, all options have to come back on the table because we haven't gotten the help we need.

Everyone look, as I conclude and that was a sad note there, but I want to go back to the positive. Especially in this holiday season, the positive really comes from voices of our good colleagues at Health + Hospitals that you heard earlier. The incredible work they're doing, the people all over the city who were there for each other, who helped to save lives, who stood up, who just showed amazing compassion. I want to thank everyone who was there for us, every health care hero, every first responder. I had the opportunity yesterday to send out a thank you with Chirlane to all City employees that just do such good work. And you've all been heroic. I'm going to be using the word heroic a lot going forward, because that's the story of 2020 in New York City. And you all did that heroic work. And now here's another chance to be heroes. Let's go out there and get everyone vaccinated. Let's show the world how well we can do that here in New York City, how fast we can do it. How much we can protect each other with the vaccine. And look, we're going to keep telling people it is safe. It's easy, it's free. And when everyone gets vaccinated, the city moves forward. So, let's start building our future right now and get everyone in the game, off the bench, in the game, helping us move forward. Thank you, everybody.

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