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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. So, we got a number of things to go over today, but let's start with what – the challenge we faced the last few days with the snowstorm. On top of everything else we've had to deal with in recent months, a huge snowstorm came our way. The official number now 17.4 inches of snow hit New York City and that is the most we've had since 2016. That's the bad news. Now on top of everything else, we had a snowstorm. The good news is the amazing effort of the Sanitation Department. The men and women of Sanitation did an absolutely outstanding job and they were helped every step of the way by the people in New York City who headed the call, stayed in, stayed off the streets, helped our incredible sanitation workers to do their jobs so well. So, everyone, do me a favor today, if you see anyone from the Sanitation Department, just thank them. They do a tough job all year round, they don't get enough thanks, just take a moment to say thank you because they really, really did something special and we're very, very proud of them today. And as we continue dealing with the results of the storm, a reminder Alternate Side Parking canceled for the rest of the week.

Okay, now, let's go to the main topic every single day, fighting the coronavirus and of course the vaccination effort. Now, let's be clear, the number one thing we can do to speed our recovery as a city, to overcome the coronavirus and move forward, is to get the maximum number of people vaccinated. So, this is what we focus on every hour, every day. The key here, today, is that our sites will be back up and running now that we've gotten past the storm. That's the vast majority of our sites. Now, some sites are not yet fully opened because of lack of supply, not because of the storm, because of lack of vaccine. This is a persistent problem, but those sites will be open tomorrow. So again, clear majority will be open today. Others open tomorrow. The storm results past, but the problem comes right back to the same one we've been talking about for weeks and weeks, supply, supply, supply. We have to get a better and more reliable supply to be able to take this effort up to where it belongs, which is half a million vaccinations per week. What have we done so far? 8,000 – excuse me – let me try again. We've done so far 837,292 doses since day one. That's really good. That is nothing compared to what we could be doing if we had the supply.

So, we do continue to hear some promising signs, the Biden administration announced a five percent increase in supply to the State. They continue to find – I really commend the Biden administration to finding every way they can to keep adding supply. We see it happen steadily. That's going to help us a lot and of course we're very, very hopeful about the Johnson and Johnson vaccine as well. We also got some good news, I called upon the State to give us the freedom to vaccinate, to help us reach people who really need to be vaccinated. Obviously once the State made the decision to open up restaurants for indoor dining, again, on February 14th, it

was clear to me that the folks that work in the restaurants deserve the right to be vaccinated. They were vulnerable. They needed the right to be vaccinated. The State agreed to let the city make that decision, and my decision is, yes, those folks deserve to be vaccinated, will like everybody, they'll have a chance to get appointments when so many other people trying to get appointments. But the important point is that right to be vaccinated, as we add supply, we'll be able to reach more and more people, and the State guidelines also allow us to do things I've been calling for before, reach folks who work in the taxi industry, for-hire vehicle drivers, TLC licensed drivers. They play a crucial role in the city. They have vulnerabilities in the work that they do. They have – they deserve, as well, that right. And of course, people who live in facilities for developmentally disabled people and those who work there. We want to reach more people. These are all new Yorkers who deserve the right to be vaccinated.

Now, the real freedom to vaccinate means being able to use the second doses that right now are being held in reserve. It makes no sense. This is something I have been talking about all over the city. This is something I've talked to the Biden administration about. We need a clear national directive that states and cities should go ahead and use those second doses right now right now, not holding back for weeks ahead. Use them right now, so we can reach more and more people get them some protection. We need the freedom to vaccinate. We need a clear directive on the federal level. We need the State to be very clear, because right now the State rules do not allow us to use those second doses. We need the right to use them, especially because we're getting more and more assurances from the Biden administration that increased supply is coming, all the more reason we should be using the second doses right now. So, we'll keep fighting for that freedom to vaccinate.

Now, talking about our recovery again. I want to go back to this central issue of the year 2021, a recovery for all of us. This is what it will all be about. Making sure New York City comes back, comes back strong, comes back fairer, that we include everyone in the recovery. We're going to have constant new announcements related to the recovery. You can go to recoveryforall.nyc.gov to get updates. This recovery is going to require a lot of bold actions. It's going to require doing things differently and it's going to require a lot of energy. Luckily, no place has more energy than New York City. So, this recovery is about every element of life in our city. It has to be a transformational time. We've come out of a crisis – or we're still fighting our way out of a crisis better said – but in that crisis is a moment for transformation as well. And this means in every part of our city, including one of the most essential elements of life of the city, how we get around, how we get to work, how we get to our education, how people get to the health care they need, everything, everything, is underlined undergirded by how we get around. And to have an approach to transportation and transit that is equitable, we have to do some things very differently.

So, we announced in the State of the City a variety of changes. We announced making the Open Streets Initiative permanent. We announced bike boulevards in every borough. We announced bridges for the people, on the Queensboro Bridge and the Brooklyn Bridge, opening up more space for bicyclists and pedestrians and doing it in a way that really keeps people safe. And we announced new public spaces in the neighborhoods, hardest hit by COVID. All of this is about transforming our city, but we have to do this very urgently, very rapidly as part of the comeback of the city. So, this to me takes what we've done previously, Vision Zero in particular, the

number one initiatives of this administration. We need to build on Vision Zero. We have to do it urgently and rapidly. We have to go a lot deeper. We have to move away from the era of the automobile. We got to give people more and more and better options. This is the kind of city we have to build. Now, Department of Transportation clearly leads the way and they're going to lead the way even more in 2021. Just let me give you a sense of what they accomplished this last year, the most bike lanes created in one year in New York City history, the most bus lanes created, new bus lanes, the most speed cameras in America. These are extraordinary achievements and on top of that, Department of Transportation working with other agencies achieve something extraordinary. The Open Restaurants Initiative and the Open Streets Initiative together transformed the whole look and feel of many parts of New York City for the better, and these will now be permanent features.

So, so much that will matter for the future of city rides on the Department of Transportation and the leadership of that department. Today, I'm going to introduce to you our new Department of Transportation Commissioner, Hank Gutman, and I want to talk to you about Hank, who is someone I've known for almost 20 years and someone I have tremendous respect for, having served shoulder to shoulder with him in many, many causes. Hank is someone who decided early in life that he was going to pursue a legal career, went to Harvard Law School, ended up having a very distinguished legal career, including arguing before the US Supreme Court. That's what he did by day, but he also volunteered constantly civic efforts, and that's how I got to know him. The fight to create Brooklyn Bridge Park, an 80-acre oasis, a jewel of the city, Hank was one of the leaders of that effort, and there was another effort within that effort, whether that park would be a place that was equitable and for all of Brooklyn, or whether it would be an elitist enclave. Hank fought for an inclusive park, even though many didn't want to see it that way. He led the effort with other good people to make sure the park was for everyone and that's where I gained such respect for him early on.

He engaged many, many different voices and different viewpoints in that process, he always listened, but then he always found a way to bring people together and get things done, and that's one of the central reasons that led me to want him to take on this new role – excuse me – new role in this urgent year 2021. Hank has been the Chair of the Brooklyn Navy Yard Development Corporation, I installed him as the chair and he's played a great role there, helping to take another one of the jewels in New York City, a place that's been extraordinary job creation engine and make it work even better and connect it more deeply to the surrounding communities and ensure there was equity in the job development there. He worked on the BQE Expert Panel and that panel did great work and understood that we had to consider the situation differently. We had to think of a new approach, not the way we did things in the past and that's of course a 100 percent resonant with Vision Zero, which is one of the ultimate transformative efforts and disruptive efforts in the best sense of the word, doing things in a way that we didn't do before, because what we did in the past didn't make sense. So, I am very, very excited to turn to a new Commissioner who will take what we announced in the State of the City, bring it to life quickly and urgently, and then go even farther with the Department of Transportation leading the way as we build a more equitable city. My pleasure to introduce our new transportation Commissioner for the City of New York, Hank Gutman.

Commissioner Hank Gutman, Department of Transportation: Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Mayor, both for the generous introduction and for this opportunity to serve the city that we both love. We have a chance to chart a new path for this city, one that leaves Robert Moses vision behind, beats back COVID-19, protects our environment, and builds a fair, safe, and equitable recovery for all of us. My entire civic career has been spent creating permanent and innovative improvements to the space we all share in the city, from Brooklyn Bridge Park to the Brooklyn Navy Yard, to the Mayor's BQE panel. I fought hard to create jobs, to expand equitable opportunities, to create open spaces for the people who need the most, and to change the way people in goods move around our city. I'm honored to bring that experience and vision to this department. I'm particularly excited to work with the two leaders who are here with us today, Margaret Forgione and Jee Mee Kim. Margaret has faithfully served this agency for decades. She did an outstanding job leading this agency after the departure of Commissioner Trottenberg, and as my First Deputy Commissioner, I'll rely on her experience and insights as we drive this agency's mission forward. Jee Mee Kim is one of the sharpest and most creative transportation minds in the country. As Chief Strategy Officer, she'll craft bold ideas that deliver on our promise of safe, equitable transportation options for everyone.

Now, the Department of Transportation, as the Mayor just noted, completed one of the most challenging, transformative, and productive years in its history, and the Mayor's State of the city address set the table for an even more ambitious here to come. One thing's for sure, one day soon, and we all pray that it'd be soon, we'll be rid of rid of the coronavirus. But the cycling boom is here to stay. That's why I'm excited to build on our Bridges for the People and Bike Boulevards plans with another announcement today. We are going to create, in the next two years, 10,000 new bike parking racks around the city. Let me repeat. We're going to create 10,000 new bike parking racks. And at two bikes per rack, if you do the math, that's 20,000 spaces for bicycles. Now, we want you to tell us where they should be. So, please go to nyc.gov/cityracks and give us your opinion. We do want your input. Now, the Mayor and I believe that if you give people more and better alternatives to car culture, they'll use them. Safe and equitable bike parking is a major part of that equation. And this announcement today, and what we're doing in the next two years, will help transform biking in our city.

But that's not all. In addition, I'll do everything I can to drive equity and to deepen Vision Zero, which has rightfully become a national model. I'll double down on our commitment to Open Streets and Open Restaurants. And that work begins with listening to the communities and the advocates who live in them and requires and depends upon us working closely with our partners at the state and federal level. We have an opportunity to drive transformative and permanent change in this city to fight climate change and drive a recovery for all of us.

To the women and men of the Department of Transformation – Transportation, I look forward to joining the team, our team. And again, Mayor de Blasio, I can't thank you enough for this honor and for this opportunity to help serve the city. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Hank. And I want to tell you there, you had an interesting slip of a phrase and I liked it a lot. You called it the “Department of Transformation.” I think that's a great, great idea.

[Laughter]

It is the Department of Transportation still. I will say that officially, but it's also going to be the “Department of Transformation” because DOT is going to be doing amazing things in the year 2021. And we have extraordinary talent at the DOT. And someone I've had the great pleasure of working with over years is Margaret Forgione. She's a dedicated public servant, that goes without saying, but she's knowledgeable, she's smart, she's always looking for a better way to serve the people of this city. And she's someone who has devoted her whole life to helping people get around the city better and better. So, as of today, our new First Deputy Commissioner for Department of Transportation, Margaret Forgione.

First Deputy Commissioner Margaret Forgione, Department of Transportation: Thank you very much, Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Gutman. I'm so pleased to be here today to join you and to continue serving my city in this new role. Having entered City government in the 1990s, as the DOT analyst in the Mayor's Office of Operations, I've seen the remarkable evolution of DOT's mission to an agency now tasked by this administration with creating a city for the people – safe streets, high-quality public spaces, and an equitable transportation system. It is fair to say that last year was like none before it. We faced extraordinary challenges, but thanks to the Mayor's leadership and the incredible dedication of the New Yorkers who serve the department, we made lasting and transformational improvements to the urban landscape. From biking to riding the bus to dining on the street, New Yorkers are using our roadways in more ways than ever. And we're working tirelessly to deliver on a promise of a fairer and better city. Today's plan to install another 10,000 bike racks across the city sends a powerful message that 2021 will be our best year yet. I know Hank and Jee Mee believe deeply in this agency's mission. I'm excited to welcome them to the team and I can't wait to start working alongside them in the coming days.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Margaret. And thank you for all you have done, all you will do in your new role. And we really believe in the concept of transformation. And if it's going to be both the Department of Transportation and “Department of Transformation” we need great minds. We need great idea-people, innovators, folks who will look at all the possibilities. And that's what this year has to be about. Urgency, innovation, being able to do and willing to do things differently than we've ever done before. And so, we have a new Chief Strategy Officer who will bring a lot of experience and a lot of great ideas to the Department of Transportation for this urgent year 2021. My pleasure to introduce Jee Mee Kim.

Chief Strategy Officer Jee Mee Kim, Department of Transportation: Thank you, Mayor de Blasio for this opportunity. I am delighted to join an amazing team at New York City DOT, working closely with Commissioner Gutman and First Deputy Commissioner Forgione, whom – I've known both for many years. I'm particularly excited about today's announcement. Sufficient bike parking will get more New Yorkers to bike and create a better cycling experience for everyone who chooses it. I came to New York three decades ago with dreams to be an artist, but when I graduated from college, I wanted to make a difference, so I became a community organizer in the city. I then spent 14 years as a transportation planner in New York and nationally working closely with New York City DOT to help transportation issues for cities, big and small. I helped create new bike lanes in Lower Manhattan and Chicago. And I developed a

plan for Barclay Center, when they opened, to move more visitors into transit and not drive to the arena. And I experienced the importance of having transportation choices firsthand as a Rockaways resident in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy. I believe in the power of transportation to uplift neighborhoods and transform our city. I am optimistic about the opportunity we have before us and I can't wait to advance this agency's mission and deliver a recovery for all of us.

Mayor: There you go. Thank you so much, Jee Mee. And love New York stories, someone who comes here seeking a dream and ends up being able to do so much for all of us. So, thank you and welcome.

All right, folks, that is the key point. This DOT, that we depend on so much, is going to do brand new things, exciting things, powerful things in the year 2021 to move us forward with a recovery for all of us. Now let me turn to our indicators and I'm going to say, as we go through them, that I want to keep emphasizing, we are watching really carefully these indicators because of the new X-factors we're dealing with out there. We talked about this yesterday, the new variants we're seeing emerge around the world, causing us a lot of concern. So, again, if we see some improvement indicators, we love that, we want that, but we're also very much aware that there may be additional challenges coming and we're preparing for that every day.

So, number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19, today's report, 230 patients, with a confirmed positivity level of 67.8 percent. Hospitalization rate 5.03 per 100,000. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average, today's report, 4,009 cases. Number three, percentage of the people testing city-wide positive for COVID-19, today's report, seven-day rolling average, 8.09 percent. Few words in Spanish now –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

Moderator: We'll now begin our Q-and-A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Commissioner Gutman, by First Deputy Commissioner Forgione, by Chief Strategy Officer Kim, by Commissioner Criswell, Commissioner Grayson, Dr. Katz, and Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. First question today, it goes to Dave Evans from WABC.

Question: Hey, Mayor. Can you hear me?

Mayor: Yeah, Dave, we haven't heard from you in a while. How are you doing?

Question: I'm doing much better, a little time in the hospital, but I'll tell you later about that.

Mayor: We're glad you're back.

Question: It wasn't COVID, but I thought it was, but anyway. So, I wanted to ask you about our Health Commissioner, not to get into the nitty gritty, that's his business of him testing positive, but of all people, if he can test positive, I mean, he's very, very careful, and I think we're all trying to be very careful, but what can you say to reassure the public that we don't need to be extra worried because if the Health Commissioner can turn positive – test positive, then that doesn't bode well for all of us.

Mayor: It's a really fair question, Dave, and look, I do want to assure, reassure everyone. And I want to tell you, you know, Dr. Chokshi has been doing absolutely amazing work and grueling work protecting all of us. But we're all human beings. There's always the possibility that COVID can reach us. It doesn't change the overall reality. Thank God, the vast majority of New Yorkers, obviously, including Dr. Chokshi, have been doing all the smart things we need to do. It's not a guarantee, but because so many people are doing the right thing, it's allowed us to fight this disease back in so many ways. So, I talked to Dr. Chokshi this morning, he's doing well, his family's doing well. Hopefully he'll be able to join us tomorrow as part of the press conference. But it's a reminder, you know, COVID is everywhere around us, but all of those smart precautions that we take, they do work. They're not perfect, but they work. And obviously the real solution here is to get everyone vaccinated. And as soon as we get that supply, that's exactly what we're going to do. Go ahead, Dave.

Question: Second question, a different topic. The fact that waiters who are going to be able to, you know, sign up now for the vaccine, I think that's great and it's wonderful, but what do you tell the public when they look at this, and they say, okay, someone who is 60, 61, 62, who has a pre-existing condition, they can't get the vaccine, but now a healthy 25-year-old waiter who would recover, we presume fairly well from the virus, can get the vaccine? That doesn't seem wise.

Mayor: I think the reality is, Dave, we need to reach people who are in constant contact with other people, right. Think about it for a moment. We want to vaccinate everyone for their own good to protect them as an individual. We also want to vaccinate everyone to stop the spread of this disease. Indoor dining obviously involves people taking off their masks, eating, drinking, talking, laughing, you know there's vulnerability there. It's been proven time and time again around the world. The folks who serve them are going to come in contact with them constantly. And so, we have to recognize there's a vulnerability there and a potential for more spread of the disease that affects all of us. So, it does make sense for them to be vaccinated if they choose to. I imagine some will not choose to, but those who do choose to, should have that right.

But what we need to address the whole problem is a hell of a lot more supply. And right now, very practically, the best thing that could happen is for the federal government and state government to say right now, hey, New York City can go ahead and use those second doses. Because if we could do that, we could reach a lot more of those senior citizens you're talking about. I fought for their freedom and their right to be vaccinated. We could be vaccinating a lot of seniors right this minute, if only we were given the right to use those second doses.

Moderator: The next is Juan Manuel from NY1.

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

Mayor: Good, Juan Manuel. How are you?

Question: Very good. Thank you. Had Health Commissioner Chokshi been vaccinated and any other members of your administration? And if not, why not given that a lot of New Yorkers are distrustful of the vaccine?

Mayor: It's a great question. I'm going to start, I'll turn to Dr. Varma, who I know has been in touch with Dr. Chokshi today, and he may have the answer on his own vaccination, but I'll tell you what I've been doing. And it certainly seems to me most of the leaders of the administration had been doing is, yes, you make a good point, Juan Manuel, we want to show people that we have confidence in the vaccine. We'd take it ourselves, our families would take it, but there's another crucial factor here, which is respecting the priority process. So, I've said from the beginning, hey, you know, the people in this country got to watch President Biden, Vice President Harris getting their vaccine. They certainly have been given the very best examples of public officials coming forward and being ready, willing, and able to take the vaccine. We have to also show people there will be fairness here in this city. So, I don't qualify right now. And I think it's important to wait until I do qualify. In terms of Dr. Chokshi's reality, which is a – his own reality. I don't know what he has done to date, but Dr. Varma, why don't you jump in if you have that answer or anything else you want to say?

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: Yeah, no, thank you very much for the question. And just to re-emphasize what the Mayor had said, you know, this is a very – this is a disease that we're all extremely concerned about. And the news today obviously hits home about how risky it can be. This is actually exactly what the Mayor said. Dave and I have actually spoken several times about this issue, and we've been sort of choosing to wait our turn in line out of respect for other people while at the same time also trying to balance our risks because we – the two of us have not been in direct patient care responsibilities. So, Dave had been actually choosing to volunteer at vaccine clinics because one of the ways we as City employees become eligible for vaccination is by working a certain number of shifts. So, you know, we're having a lot of, you know, discussions ourselves about this topic right now, but again, we were trying to balance the ethics of us and where the prioritization should be in the line of vaccination.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead.

Question: Mr. Mayor – I don't know if, Dr. Varma, that meant a yes or no for if Dr. Chokshi had been vaccinated or not, but I just wanted to follow up because you want to spend money on campaigns to encourage Black and Latino New Yorkers to get this vaccine. Why wouldn't you lead by example? Don't you think that you and the First Lady getting vaccinated in front of the cameras might ease a lot of New Yorkers fears?

Mayor: It's a very fair question, Juan Manuel. And, again, there's two important considerations here. We want to encourage people, reassure, to show that we have faith in the vaccine, but there's also the question of respecting the priorities. I want to make sure that every dose possible goes to our seniors and to our first responders and all the folks we depend on. They need it. By

our rules, they need it more than I need it. So that's what I'm doing. The First Lady is in a different category than I'm at. So, she literally, according to the priorities laid out by the State, she qualifies differently than I do. But we're all waiting until our turn comes up. We think that the question of equity and fairness people – yeah, you're right, people need to see that folks they know, folks they trust and respect are getting the vaccine. They also need to know that the priorities are being respected and those who need it most are getting it first. So, we're always trying to balance those two factors. Again, I take reassurance from the fact that all New Yorkers, all Americans have seen the most prominent leaders in our country already get vaccinated live on TV. I think that's a lot of reassurance right there.

Moderator: Next is Rich Lamb from WCBS 880.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everybody on the call –

Mayor: How are you doing, Rich?

Question: Well, I'm doing – I'm doing all right. So, in regard to – so we don't have a really, a yes or no on whether Dr. Chokshi was vaccinated, at least not that I could discern there. Is that wise for a doctor who is actually, who has patients, and I thought all the medical personnel sort of were quantified to get the, you know, were entitled to get the vaccination?

Mayor: Let me go back to Dr. Varma. You're absolutely right that folks who are seeing patients or working in vaccination centers are being vaccinated, had been vaccinated. And so, Dr. Varma, could you just clarify whether Dr. Chokshi to the best of your knowledge had been vaccinated or was planning on getting vaccinated, just what's your best understanding.

Senior Advisor Varma: Yeah, no. So, just to clarify, Dave had not yet been vaccinated and he had a plan to get vaccinated after he had done the requisite number of shifts in the vaccine clinics, which is the criteria that we're using for all City employees who want to be vaccinated if they're not already in a priority group.

Mayor: Right. So, again, Rich to amplify the point. This is a choice that we've all made that we think in a world where people need to see there's integrity in the process, it's really important for folks to see that everyone waited their turn and qualified in the appropriate manner. So, that's the choice that Dr Chokshi made. And, again, you know, I don't want to be disrespectful of his privacy or his family's privacy, we'll certainly have him speak for himself, hopefully as early as tomorrow. Go ahead, Rich.

Question: Well, we wish him well, of course. And just wondering, there are questions as to whether or not the City has been adequately testing for corona variants. Do you have any information about that?

Mayor: Let me turn back to Dr. Varma. I mean, this has been something we've been watching very carefully. The Department of Health has extensive capacity to do genomic sequencing, and obviously one of the strengths here in New York City and New York State that we have that capacity on the ground. So, go ahead. Jay, give an update on that.

Senior Advisor Varma: Yeah. So, thank you for the question. And I can't even tell you how excited it makes me feel to hear the Mayor say the words, genomic sequencing. That's actually an area that I've been personally [inaudible] –

Mayor: Jay, whatever, whatever works for you, Jay. I'm glad that makes you happy, but I'd say you need to get out more Jay.

Senior Advisor Varma: Exactly. So, to be very straight forward, we are currently sequencing hundreds of specimens a day. Those specimens are getting sequenced at the City public health lab, the New York State public health lab, and several academic medical centers. In addition to that, we are working on a plan in collaboration with some of these different partners to actually increase that number from hundreds to thousands. And that process is actually beginning this week right now. So, we are going to have a very clear window, I think very soon into the proportion of cases that are due to these variants.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: The next is Juliet from 1010 WINS.

Mayor: Juliet? Usually she comes in really clearly. Can you hear us Juliet?

Moderator: We can go back to Juliet. The next one is Michael Gartland from the Daily News.

Mayor: Michael?

Question: Good morning. How you doing?

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

Question: I'm good. A couple of things I wanted to ask about. One, on Sunday the Governor raised this issue of NYPD monitor oversight. And he seemed to suggest I mean, I think he really pretty much spelled it out that he felt a monitor, the monitor kind of recommended in Tish James's lawsuit would be in charge of the NYPD. I'm not sure that's exactly the way it's spelled out, although I could see how you might make that interpretation. I know you've spoken about this before, but I was wondering if you could respond to what the Governor said about you know, NYPD possibly coming under the control of a monitor at some point, day-to-day running of the NYPD?

Mayor: You know, the way things work best is when the government that's elected by the people ensures that the people's interests are addressed. Here in this city for the last seven years, we've been doing nonstop reform and change of the NYPD. And except for the perfect storm of the pandemic, which dislocated our entire society, we proved that you could do fundamental police reform, greatly improve the relationship between police and community and drive down crime all at once. That's what neighborhood policing proved. And we're going to double down on that in 2021. The number of reforms and changes that we've just announced in the last few weeks

is extraordinary. The discipline matrix, the MOU between the CCRB and the NYPD, absolutely revolutionizing the approach to discipline. We've never seen anything like this before in New York City history, transparent, open police discipline like never before. The fact that we're going to engage the community, involve the community in the choice of precinct commander, something that people have been talking about at the local level, never happened before in the history of New York City or the NYPD. It's happening now. New York City is doing perfectly well making the changes that we need to make. And there's a lot more coming in the next few weeks as we work with the City Council on additional reforms. That's the way to do things right. Go ahead, Michael.

Question: We ran a story today on charter school enrollment and you know, that it's jumped about 10,000 students compared to the last school year. You know, meanwhile enrollment in the city's traditional public schools is down. I was wondering if you could comment on that and give us a sense of why you think that's happening? That kind of trend we've seen over the past year.

Mayor: Michael, I respect the question. I don't actually think it's a trend. I think it is a one-year reality based on a global pandemic and the absolute dislocation of our entire society. I don't think we have anything we can draw from this information yet. We're going to know a lot better over the next few years what happens with New York City in terms of population coming back and jobs coming back. And that's what we're doing in everything we're going to focus on in 2021. When I say recovery for all of us, it means everything. It means getting jobs back, ensuring that the city comes back to life fully. You're going to see I'm quite certain, as things normalize more and more people going back into our public schools. Why? Because our public schools have been doing really well. We just announced a few weeks ago, graduation rate up once again. We're well on our way to meeting and then surpassing the national graduation rate. We've seen consistent progress on test scores. So many things in our public schools have been improving. But the other thing to remember is our public schools have been heroic. Our educators have been heroic during this pandemic, shifting on a dime to remote learning back in the spring. And then bringing back the largest school system in the country when most cities didn't even dare and doing it safely. And now with a global gold standard, you're going to see the model of New York City the way we brought back our schools is being emulated around the country. And it's about to be emulated even more going forward. So. I think that all adds up to a very bright future for the New York City public schools. And we're going to see a lot more people wanting to be a part of it as things come back to more normal.

Moderator: The next is Stacey from FOX-5.

Question: Yes. Hi, Mr. Mayor. Question for Dr. Varma, following up on the question about the variants. Can you talk a little to why the City has been so behind, especially when it comes to other countries in sequencing these variants so far? And a little bit more specifically to what you're going to be doing, what the City's going to be doing to try to get the sequencing [inaudible] so you have better information sooner than later?

Senior Advisor Varma: I thank you for the question. I guess I would first challenge the premise that we're actually behind. You know, in New York City, we actually have a lot more capacity than the rest of the city laboratories and state laboratories around the country do. So in

collaboration with New York State, New York City and New York State have continued to sequence really since sometime at least this summer, if not earlier than that. And so, you can see all that, it is on a publicly available database you can see. Now, is it as much as we would like to be? No, it hasn't. And I'll be very clear about that. The reason is because our single biggest challenge up until fairly recently, up until a few months ago was simply getting testing capacity. And as you know, New York City first prioritized and has been not just a national leader, but a global leader in the ability to have the regular tests, the PCR tests done. Now sequencing is an additional layer on top of that, that is incredibly complex and challenging to do. So, we really couldn't get to the stage of sequencing a large proportion of our specimen until we had all of the PCR capacity. So, I do feel like we are moving at the – in a very aggressive way to make sure both that we have monitored what's been going on up until now, but also can increase the level of monitoring to match the urgency of the threat.

Mayor: Thank you, Doctor. Go ahead, Stacy.

Question: And one last follow up on that. I mean, since the sequencing is at a lower capacity that you would like, not just in the city, but around the country. I mean, how confident are you Dr. Varma that, you know you got the UK variant here, but do you believe that we have lots of cases with the other variants we're hearing about elsewhere in the country, the South African variant, Brazilian variant and so forth?

Senior Advisor Varma: I think the safest thing to do is for us to plan on the assumption that there are a lot more cases of these variants than we know about. I mean, that is always the safest way to do your public health planning. And that's why you hear the Mayor, you hear all of us talking so aggressively, that the importance of all of these measures that we need to take. So, I think first of all, that's the safest assumption. The second is to actually get the exact measurement of that really does require an incredible expansion of sequencing capacity throughout the country. And as you've heard from the White House and from CDC, they're also working on the ability to do that as well. So, I do feel like we're going to have a much better way to pin down exactly which variants, how many there are, how often are they occurring? Very soon, but, but for planning purposes, it's safe for us to assume that this virus mutates. And even if it's not one of the variants that's known, it could be a new variant. And so, we need to act with that urgency to get vaccinated and to prevent infection.

Mayor: Thank you. Okay.

Moderator: We'll go back to Juliet from 1010 WINS.

Mayor: Juliet? Come on. Let's try again. Juliet. Can you hear me? We're having, yeah, try another person. We'll try – three will be the charm. We'll come back to Juliet at the end.

Moderator: Next we will go to Dana from the New York Times.

Mayor: Dana?

Question: Hi, Mr. – Hi. Can you hear me?

Mayor: Yeah, how are you doing today?

Question: I'm okay. How are you doing?

Mayor: Hanging in there. No snow today. I'm happy, Dana.

Question: First regarding Dr. Chokshi. When was the last time you saw him? When was the last time Dr. Varma saw him? I mean, presumably aside from you two, he had a bunch of City government contacts. How many people are in quarantine?

Mayor: So, the – I have not seen him in-person for a while. So best of my understanding, it's not an issue for me, but contact tracing is going on now to ensure there is follow up on anyone he was in contact with. Dr. Katz, do you want to speak to that? Dr. Katz?

President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals: Oh, well so much of, so much of our government now as shown in this presser is done remotely. I mean, I think I've talked to Dave at least twice a day for the last several weeks. I can't remember the last time I was in the same room with him. So, I think, you know, we've been saved by our ability to communicate virtually throughout the city. But as you say, Mr. Mayor, we will do tracing because there were family issues as well, always. And he will be treated like any other contacts or any other positive person. And that would be how he would want it. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you very much. Go ahead, Dana.

Question: Thanks. And then on a separate topic, I was just curious, given your ambitious last year's transportation agenda, why it makes sense to appoint someone who is not a transportation professional to run the transportation department?

Mayor: Yeah. Dana look, very fair question. And I want to give you a very strong, clear answer because I know Hank will get done what I need done. When you work with someone again, this case most of 20 years, and you see the way they make things happen, that to me has always been the most compelling reality, not theory, but practice. I have seen Hank get results. I've seen him deal with very thorny situations and really tough community dynamics and find common ground and move an agenda forward, but always with a sharp equity lens. And we also have these incredible leaders joining Hank in this effort in Margaret and Jimmy who have just extraordinary history. And as a team, I think they'd bring the whole package. But this year 2021, is going to be about urgency at DOT. Again, I'm going to take that play on words and run with it. Department of Transformation – that we need a lot to happen. And when I have someone who I know I trust I've seen in action. That's the kind of leader I can depend on to make things happen very quickly. We're going to use every minute of the next 11 months to get a lot done. And we did lay out, we have very publicly, a very ambitious agenda. We added to it today with the bike racks. And I have absolute faith that Hank will follow this through and make it happen. Go ahead.

Moderator: We have time for two more for today. The next we'll go to Gersh from Streetsblog.

Question: Thank you for taking the question, Mr. Mayor. I appreciate that. I'd like to follow up on Dana's question. I just want to do it in a different way. Was this job offered to Ms. Forgione and she turned it down?

Mayor: She's sitting right here and I'll say that was not her desire to take on this particular job of commissioner. But I very much wanted to see her be the First Deputy Commissioner and she's going to be great at that role. And this is an effort where we brought together three tremendous professionals to achieve what we have to achieve. Go ahead.

Question: Okay. Let me ask that question a different way then? Margaret Forgione, Jee Mee Kim are two prominent women appointees in your administration. Do you worry that a lot of women professionals in your administration will be disappointed by today's move of appointing non-transportation professional and a male in this role?

Mayor: The history of this administration Gersh, I know you focus on transportation issues in particular, if you look across this entire administration than a clear, strong majority women leaders when you put together all the senior elements of this administration, when you look at our deputy mayors, when you look at commissioners and heads of agencies, consistently from day one, clear majority have been women. Very proud of that. And they are women who have served this city with tremendous distinction. I think that message has been received over the last seven years loud and clear. Do we have Juliet?

Moderator: We will try Juliet one more time.

Mayor: One more time.

Question: Okay. I'm here. Does this work?

Mayor: Juliet you have come back to life.

Question: Oh, hey, thank you. I don't know what happened, but thank you for trying again with me. I appreciate it. So my question, Mr. Mayor is how often are you tested given that you are not getting the vaccine at this time?

Mayor: Juliet, I'm now tested every week. I go to an H + H facility every week on a regular basis. Got tested over the weekend, came back negative I'm happy to say. And I'll be continuing to do that. Go ahead.

Question: And do you think that New Yorkers would really be offended if you and your top officials were vaccinated because you are out and about, and obviously your Health Commissioner is out and about and exposed to potential cases? And now that he has it. I get why you're saying you wanted to wait, but what is wrong with top City officials who are really dealing with the public and have to do their jobs for the public, what is the harm in having you all get the vaccine?

Mayor: Very fair question Juliet. Let me say two things. One – I'm absolutely confident about this vaccine. All the Health leadership of our team has said repeatedly. They believe in the vaccines we have. They either have gotten vaccinated or will get vaccinated. Their families will get vaccinated. I absolutely look forward to being vaccinated. All of that is clear. But I want to just tell you an easy story and I say easy because it couldn't be clearer. The story is when I went out to Hillcrest High School in Queens, one of the first sites we had open for vaccination. I talked to seniors, folks in their 70's, folks in their 80s. I talked to Marcia who was 97 years old, lived her whole life in Southeast Queens, talked to me about her family. Talked to me about everything that happened in her life, told me that she lived in fear of this disease and was so excited to get vaccinated because she knew that from the moment she even got the first shot, she would have protection. Imagine 97 years old and willing to go to a vaccination center because it meant so much to her, just to have that reassurance, that she finally had some protection from this horrible scourge that's been with us for a whole year now. I think it is incumbent upon all of us who do not yet meet the criteria to defer to those in greater need. I don't want to get a vaccination when a senior citizen could be getting that vaccination or a first responder could be getting that vaccination. I want to defer to people who do that crucial work for all of us and to the people who are more vulnerable. That's a decision we've made and we're going to stick to that. But the real answer here, Juliet is supply, supply, supply. And I really believe the Biden administration is trying to fix that situation. But, right now, we need the federal government and the State government to give us the freedom to vaccinate. Tell us we can use those second doses so we can reach a lot more of those seniors like Marcia. We can give a lot more people reassurance that they're going to live through this crisis. We can give a lot more of their loved ones hope. That's what we need to focus on right now.

So, with that, everyone, look, I'll conclude by saying today is about the idea that's going to animate the entire year 2021 for this City in this administration, a recovery for all of us. Making sure it's strong and making sure it's fair. And our Department of Transportation is going to help lead the way with absolutely extraordinary and yes, ambitious new initiatives that are going to help make this a better, a more equitable city. And they're going to help to fuel our recovery. And that's a good thing for all of us. Thank you, everyone.

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