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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everyone. Let's talk about good news. Let's talk about the stimulus. Let's talk about something that's going to change all of our lives for the better. Stimulus equals recovery. That's the way to think about it, if we did not have the stimulus, we could not have a full recovery, but now it's here. The Senate has acted. The House has acted. Take stock of this moment, everyone, because it's extraordinary. The biggest action by the federal government for the people of this country since the New Deal. The single biggest – an extraordinary action, the single biggest move to bring us forward, to give everyone opportunity, to bring everyone back. You know, my wife, Chirlane, said six or seven months ago, think about three things that are going to determine our future – the election, the vaccine, the stimulus. One by one, we have seen these crucial actions change our lives for the better. The election has given us the kind of leadership that can move us forward. The vaccine is here, it's working. As soon as we get more supply, everything changes, and the stimulus is literally as good as anyone could have imagined in terms of the ability to bring our country back, our state back, our city back.

So, we need to have a moment to appreciate all that has been achieved here, and we have to appreciate how it happened, because it didn't happen on its own. It happened because people did the hard work and I'm going to, in a moment, introduce the man who I think deserves immense praise for many of these pieces coming together. Let's just take stock again in what this stimulus means: almost \$6 billion in direct local aid for New York City, helping us to finally overcome the massive revenue loss and to serve our people, keep our workforce strong, bring our city back. Over \$6 billion to the MTA, so mass transit can recover. \$1,400 checks for people who need them – direct payments to New Yorkers who need to get back on their feet. This is game-changing, and that's just part of what's happened here. There's a huge initiative to cut childhood poverty in half nationwide. There's funding for vaccines, funding for schools, funding to bring our schools back strong in September, funding to help our restaurants survive and thrive, and the wonderful initiative Save our Stages, which I know was a particular labor of love for Senator Schumer, bringing back Broadway, Off-Broadway – so much of the culture that makes New York City great. So, before I introduce him, I'm only going to say one more thing. It takes leaders. We would not have the majority in the US Senate that agreed to the stimulus if it weren't for the leadership of Chuck Schumer. We would not have a stimulus this good, this strong, if it were not for the Majority Leader and what he did served the entire nation, but he always, always remembers where he comes from. He remembers Brooklyn and the whole City of New York. He remembers New York State. He was there for us when we needed it. If he was not there, this would not have happened. I want to be abundantly clear. We are celebrating the kind of stimulus we needed, and it happened because Chuck Schumer was the Majority Leader of the U.S. Senate. So, my honor to introduce New York's own Senator Chuck Schumer.

U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer: Well, thank you Mayor. And thank you for those very kind words. And let me thank you, this was a team effort and the Mayor can tell you every couple of days, I'd call him, and I'd say, do you know a mayor in this state? Can you get them to call his or her senator? Do you know a mayor in even in this Republican state, can you get them to call his or her senator? And the Mayor was always there, working always. So, there's a lot of credit that goes around, but Mayor de Blasio, anytime I'd call him, it could have been around midnight because we thought, "Oh boy, this senator is wavering. Get someone to call them," and we had a grassroots organization of mayors, not just from big cities, like New York, but from little villages and towns across the country. So, Mayor thank you for helping make this happen, and we're so glad it did. What I say to New Yorkers very simply is help is on the way. People will get their \$1,400 checks. Kids, young kids will get more \$3000 and \$3600. That's a great thing. Vaccines – I'm going to talk more about vaccines at the end here in a minute, but there are going to be many more vaccines available, much more quickly. Help is on the way. There's money for the MTA, there's money to open our schools, and there is money for the City of New York, and with the Mayor's help guidance, and a little bit of prodding, we made sure that money doesn't come through Albany. It goes directly to the City, because when Albany gets the money, sometimes the City doesn't see all of it. So, here we are, and the State is getting more than enough money to deal with their problems as well, but the City of New York gets over \$6 billion, and what that means is that our workers who were, through no fault of the cities, but because of the loss in revenues will continue to be working on the job, picking up the garbage, and doing health care, and driving the buses and everything else, money for the MTA, et cetera.

But I have a little announcement, Mayor, on vaccines, which is going to be great, great news for New York. I'm announcing a brand-new vaccine supercharge for New York, that's coming from the federal government. That means more vaccines for New York and many more New York sites to administer. I've been working with the President and with the Mayor on the issue of vaccines because we all want more, and now there's light at the end of the COVID tunnel. And that light is centered on access to a free vaccine for all New Yorkers, no copayments, no – the insurance company telling you, you got to pay them this or that. No deductibles. So, I can tell you right here, there are going to be more vaccines and better access to vaccine sites, and it's on the way via this supercharge effort that will utilize New York's community health centers as federally-funded vaccine sites. They're going to be more than a hundred new vaccine sites set up across New York and a big administration of the shot supply. They will coordinate with the City. The Mayor has been doing a very good job at getting vaccines out, but now there'll be more of them and more sites and more federal help to do it. More access, more shots, a quicker recovery. That's what we want. The CHC sites will be federally funded. There'll be organized by the Department of Health and Human Services in a huge expansion.

Remember, one of the biggest issues with getting people vaccinated has been accessed, especially in underserved and disadvantaged communities, communities of color, and they're going to get special, special attention. You and I have heard numerous stories of people having to travel too long to get a vaccine or being turned away because they didn't have enough vaccines, hampering our ability to recover from the pandemic and return to normal. Well, with this new vaccine announcement of more vaccines and more sites, New York is going to be well on the road to recovery. It's something to celebrate. I thank President Biden for spearheading this effort.

I thank Mayor de Blasio for working so well with the federal government, and this is great news for our city. This is something in addition to the big bill that we passed, that the Mayor was so nice to mention. So, thank you, Mayor de Blasio, we'll continue to work together to get New York healthy and on the road to recovery, and one final point.

Like you, Mr. Mayor, I have no doubt New York will bounce back. I've been involved in helping New York through all of our crises, whether it was 9/11 or the Financial Crisis or Sandy, in each case, the naysayers said New York's finished – we're never finished. People love New York. People want to come and live in New York from around the country and around the globe and New Yorkers – we love New York. I couldn't live anywhere else. A particular preference for Brooklyn, but the other four boroughs are great too.

Mayor: That was beautifully said, Senator, I share your exact sentiment and Senator, thank you because your voice rings true to New Yorkers and to the whole nation. New York is coming back strong. History tells it, the heart and soul of New Yorkers tells it. Thank you for the help with vaccines. Senator, more is more and getting us that help and getting it down to the grassroots is so important. Thank you for everything you're doing, and I look forward to teaming up with you again soon. I know the infrastructure bill is coming. We're all going to work together and we're going to mobilize all those mayors again, at your signal to help get the kind of support we need to keep building this nation.

Leader Schumer: If we get a massive infrastructure bill, it can help build our mass transit, build out our mass transit, build out our highways, and one other thing, and this, we have some money for this already, but Trump, of course, in his infinite nastiness held it back. But Gateway is going to be coming soon too, and that'll create jobs that make sure that you can get under the tunnels from New Jersey to Manhattan, which helps our economy, our New York economy, our New York/New Jersey economy grow. So, thanks for everything, Mayor and on to doing more things, to help New York together.

Mayor: Amen. Thank you, Senator. Good job. Thank you. Everyone, look, I mean, how inspiring is that? The majority leader of the United States Senate, a son of Brooklyn, who loves this city so deeply and is going to bat for us every day – and this amazing stimulus. And now, he's already beginning to work on infrastructure, which we need so deeply – infrastructure investments to bring this city back stronger, the Gateway Tunnel is going to make a huge difference. But remember what he said, he didn't just look out for the State of New York – that's his job, he did that well – but he looked out for the City of New York. He made sure there was direct aid to localities, that it was not interfered with, that we're getting our fair share. I mean, absolutely amazing effort by Senator Schumer. We could not have asked for more. I mean, it's breathtaking. So, it makes a difference who's in charge and we are blessed to have our majority leader, Chuck Schumer, doing this work for us.

Okay. Everybody, I'm thrilled to hear the new announcement that we are going to get even more vaccine, because Lord knows we need it. I've been talking about the fact that we are between 150,000 and 200,000 doses short of what we need right now. We have a lot more capacity to give the vaccine than we're getting. But Senator Schumer's announcement that this new effort focused on communities, focused on community-based health clinics, that's the kind of thing we

need more of – get the vaccine to the grassroots to all communities. That's going to help us a lot. And even with the challenges we have now, another milestone we've reached, we have surpassed 2.5 million doses since the beginning of this effort. So, here's the number today, since the beginning, 2,574,854 vaccinations have been given. And that's an amazing figure, it's growing constantly, and it's going to get supercharged with the effort the Senator talked about and as we get more and more supply. So, things – I mean, it's so inspiring to see so many things moving in the right direction. We're ready to do a whole lot more. It's about supply, supply, supply. So, today's announcement from the Senator, a step in the right direction for sure.

Okay. Now, as we move forward – and you can feel it – go around the city, go around the neighborhoods in the city, you can feel that things are moving. You can feel that it was our opening up [inaudible] already. It's going to be a very exciting spring, even more exciting summer and fall in this city. So much is going to happen. We always look forward as New Yorkers. We always create the next thing, that's who we are. But there's a great lesson from history that we have to always hold close, which is you have to remember where you came from, you have to remember the people got you there, and you have to remember those we lost, because we would not be anything without them. So, all the families out there who lost a loved one to COVID, this whole city stands with you. We have to remember them. We have to remember them as individuals, what they meant to us, the love they gave us, the support, how they nurtured all of us. But we also have to remember what they did for the whole city. So, we're having a COVID Day of Remembrance this Sunday. And this will be of course the one-year anniversary of the first COVID death recorded in New York City, a ceremony to remember, a ceremony to appreciate those who we lost and to support their families – begins this Sunday, live at 7:45 PM. You could watch it nyc.gov/covidmemorial and all our Mayor's Office social channels. And if you want to submit a loved one's name and photo for the ceremony, please go to nyc.gov/covidmemorial. We want to put up images of New Yorkers from all over the five boroughs who we lost so we remember them, so we appreciate them. And again, let's stand in solidarity with their families not just today, but all the way forward.

Okay, let's go over today's indicators. Number-one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report, 202 patients, that's quite striking. Again, there are variations by day, we know that. We need to see much bigger trend lines to affirm something. But, as Dr. Mitch Katz talked about yesterday, and he runs the nation's largest public hospital system, something good is happening for sure. We are almost back down to that threshold that we want to be below, 200 patients a day – so, 202. Confirmed positivity, 63.88 percent. Hospitalization rate – today, 3.78 per 100,000. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average – today's report, 3,108 cases. Number three, percentage of people testing positive citywide for COVID-19 – today's report on a seven-day rolling average, 6.35 percent.

I'll talk in Spanish for just a few moments on the stimulus and how much it means to all of us.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

Moderator: Hi, all. We'll now begin our Q-and-A. With us today is Health + Hospitals CEO Dr. Mitchell Katz and Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. With that, we'll go to Dana from the New York Times.

Question: Hi, Mr. Mayor, I have a question for you about police disciplinary records. I was just curious why the City is continuing to withhold most police disciplinary records, including things like negotiated pleas after the second circuit said the City could release them?

Mayor: Dana, there's going to be further release coming. We want to do an extensive release. There are additional categories that will be coming. We'll get you a schedule on that soon, but there's definitely more coming.

Question: Thanks. Are there any categories that you plan on precluding from release?

Mayor: We're figuring out – you know, I think there's a legitimate question about unsubstantiated cases. So, that's something we're discussing, because, obviously, if they're unsubstantiated that means the process led to that outcome. But we're going to be coming forward with, you know, a list of additional releases soon.

Moderator: Next we're going to Roger from 1010 WINS.

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

Mayor: Good, Roger. How have you been?

Question: I'm good. Thank you. So, today, is actually the official anniversary of when this was declared a pandemic. [Inaudible] walk us back to your thought process at the time. What were you expecting? Did you expect it to be as bad as it was? You know, what contingencies, you know, did you think at that time would be needed? And, you know, what has surprised you from what you thought about at the time to what's happened?

Mayor: Yeah. It's such an important question, Roger. I will tell you, you know, recognizing now that we, New York City, but I have to say cities all over the country, we were not given the most important tool we needed, which was the testing. So, we couldn't see what was happening, because we didn't have the tools, and the only place we could get that was from the federal government. It's like flying a plane without radar. You know, we didn't see, because we couldn't see. And that is so painful to think about now. You know, in those first days, everyone hoped there was a way to contain it. But now, we know, you know, the extent of what was happening that was so deep. And so, yeah, everyone's first impulse was, how can we control this? How can we contain it? How can we save lives right now? But I look back now and realize, you know, we were – there was a tsunami about to hit us and we couldn't even see it because we just didn't have the testing. Go ahead, Roger.

Question: Yeah. Did you ever for a moment consider or think that New York City might become the center of this outbreak?

Mayor: You know, Roger, if you think about it now and you look back on everything that happened, you know, I guess you could say there were some things that would make us particularly vulnerable, clearly. But, at the time, you know, we just didn't even have the most basic information. And that, to me, is what's striking. You know, the whole scientific community – I remember this – you know, trying to understand from so many different voices what was happening, but the constant refrain, even from the most learned folks was we don't know a lot about this disease. And that was, of course, very painful and very challenging. I think what's striking to me is how New Yorkers responded. I think there were missed opportunities, for sure. And, obviously, one of the things that pains me the most is when I called for shelter in place, you know, that's when there should have been shelter in place. And if I had had local control, there would have been shelter in place and I think that would have really helped, I think that would have saved lives, and the State of New York would not agree. But, really, when you think about it, the people did everything we asked of them. When we said shelter in place, people did it. When we said wears masks, people did it, and social distancing, and helping their neighbors, and our health care heroes who did everything and then some. I mean, the big story here is the heroism of New Yorkers, and that even when we went from having no problem to being the epicenter, the way people responded and save lives and brought each other through it – that's the big story here.

Moderator: Next is Katie from the Wall Street Journal.

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

Mayor: You're surprised, Katie? How are you?

Question: I am surprised, I'm out of turn. I just wanted to ask you, do you have any more details on exactly when – especially these federal vaccines will come to us and what we can expect?

Mayor: Well, not enough detail is the truth, Katie. Again, I'm waiting for – what I want from the federal government is a week-by-week specific chart that shows a steady increase. We don't have that yet. We have seen some meaningful improvement, but, you know, as I've talked about – the team about this very topic yesterday and said, when can we get to our full capacity of at least half-a-million vaccinations per week? Right now, we have no indication that will happen in March, and we don't even have a guarantee that will happen in April. So, I want more details on the federal government. I want them to speed up. I'm really happy that, you know, I called for more pharmaceutical companies to be involved, I wish that had been done more aggressively, but at least Merck has now involved, working with Johnson & Johnson. I still want to see the supply increase more intensely. And I want more local control. You know, I want us to get our fair share, which we're still not getting, and the State is still interfering with that. But I can safely say that I don't see the situation improving markedly in March. I'm hoping at some point in April, it does. Go ahead, Katie.

Question: Thanks. And I wanted to ask, I know you had said in your State of the City that you are hoping for May for a City offices to sort – for people to return. I wanted to know if that is still on track? I know some of the unions had expressed some concern, because of the lack of

vaccinations. So, are we still on track? We, collectively, as a city, not me, but is the City still on track for the return to offices around May?

Mayor: Yes. Absolutely. Absolutely, Katie. We are – absolutely. Look, the situation is getting better and better all the time. You can see it in the daily indicators. You can see it with the number of folks being vaccinated. The City's getting safer all the time. Yes, we're going to bring back – and remember, 80 percent of our workforce is on the job right now, because most of them do frontline work, but the 20 percent that work in office settings, in particular, they'll be coming back in May. We'll be working closely with the unions. We'll be focusing on health and safety. But, absolutely, we're going to get that done.

Moderator: Next we'll go to Shant from the Daily News.

Question: Yeah, good morning, Mr. Mayor. I'm hearing that, you know, details are still being worked out regarding Senator Schumer's announcement, but I was wondering if you have a sense of how many of the hundred community health center sites statewide will be specifically in the city?

Mayor: I'll turn to – I don't know if Dr. Varma, Dr. Katz have a specific update. I don't have that Shant, but we'll get you that, what I can safely say is we have a very impressive roster of community-based clinics in this city and if that's the methodology New York City should do very well, and obviously the need is so great here, and the Senator understands that. So, I'm hopeful that's going to be a case of fair share. Let me see if Dr. Varma, Dr. Katz, anything you can add on those numbers?

Senior Advisor Jay Varma: Nothing specifically for me, but I would just sort of echo your comment that, you know, the way we get a vaccine to turned into vaccinations is by people being in, you know, at the community level, people that they trust, particularly trusted providers. So, providing community-based organizations with vaccine is going to be one more further step to building trust, advancing equity, and of course, getting to the opening that we all want to have.

Mayor: Excellent. Thank you, Dr. Katz, anything to add?

President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals: No, I think you guys have covered it very well. Thank you, sir.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Shant.

Question: Yeah, I guess as a follow-up I was wondering if you can put Senator Schumer's announcement in the context of the city's kind of struggle to get vaccines to communities of color. I mean, do you see this development as, I don't know, the secret sauce, the solution to making sure the vaccine distribution is more equitable?

Mayor: Shant, obviously, let me say the first thing, there's not going to be one solution. It's a series of things that will be the solution, but I would also say the situation is changing on the ground before this announcement. What we're seeing is that gap is closing, that we're seeing more and more equity more and more parity in the vaccinations. I was struck when I was at Co-

Op City last Saturday, almost exclusively people of color are being vaccinated there, tremendous energy and enthusiasm, people saying in many cases, they had been hesitant, they were not any longer. And interestingly, particularly because it was the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, it was a brand name they knew and it was one shot only, that was actually very encouraging. A number of people raise that proactively, which was pleasing. But look, we're definitely starting to make some real progress on equity in vaccination. This announcement from Senator Schumer will help us, when he says supercharge, that's exactly the right concept. This will get more and more vaccine where we want it the most in terms of addressing those disparities and reaching people in greatest needs. We'll get you all the details, but unquestionably it will help us move the work of equality. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next, we'll go to Emily from NY1.

Question: Morning, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hey Emily, how you been?

Question: I'm well, thanks. Hope you're well, too. Have you made your own vaccination plan?

Mayor: I don't have a specific plan, but I, as I've said publicly before, I do look forward to being vaccinated specifically with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. I want to show people I have total confidence in it as do our medical leaders, health care leaders, and the new category for public employees or public facing is one that obviously connects with the work I do. So, at some point after that day occurs, I'll get vaccinated. We'll get you the details when we have them. Go ahead, Emily.

Question: Yeah, and maybe we'll be back at City Hall for in-person pressers after you get vaccinated too. Additionally, on Governor Cuomo there are now over 55 state legislators who are calling directly for his resignation. Do you find that you're ready to do the same, a direct call for the resignation?

Mayor: Yeah, Emily, this – the latest report and the fact that we can talk about how many people are bringing forward accusations, that it's not one, it's not two, it's not three, it's not four, it's not five, it's six women who have come forward. It's deeply troubling the specific allegation that the Governor called an employee of his – someone who he had power over – called them to a private place and then sexually assaulted her is absolutely unacceptable. It is disgusting to me and he can no longer serve as Governor. It's as simple as that. I think we've seen so many, so many troubling things that have come out just in a matter of weeks starting with the fact that thousands of people died in the nursing homes, and we still don't have the truth about that, and their families need and deserve the truth, and we know one thing there was a purposeful cover up and that alone is unacceptable and disqualifying, you know, new issues, obviously around the Tappan Zee Bridge. But these six women have come forward which such powerful, painful stories and particularly this most recent report is just as disqualifying. He just can't serve as Governor anymore.

Moderator: Next is Jillian from WBAI.

Question: Hey, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

Mayor: Good Jillian. How have you been?

Question: I'm fine. Thank you. Speaking of vaccine accessibility, you were recently asked a question by someone from the Staten Island Advance about the homebound vaccination program and it was ascertained that it's not exclusive for seniors. So, I contacted some people I know in the disabled community activists, and they didn't know that they were eligible for that program. So, if they don't know and they're on the front line, how can someone less informed know? And then there's the disabled community who are not necessarily homebound, but there are so many obstacles literally and figuratively to getting vaccinations. I mean, think about getting to the Javits Center and how difficult that is if you have a disability. And so, then you think about New York City being extremely inaccessible, one of the most in the city – I mean, sorry, in the country and then were rife with ADA violations. So, have you considered teaming up with groups like the Center for Independence of the Disabled New York, the Brooklyn Center, Disability in Action, give them resources to do outreach? They already have an infrastructure, something similar to the way the city came up with assorted community-based facilities so that they can reach out because the office for [inaudible] is so small. It doesn't have, you know, the ability to do something like this on a big scale, and so reverse it and let the organizations reach out and at least let them know which vaccine sites are accessible, because imagine going to one, right? It's not accessible, and you didn't know –

Mayor: So, Jillian, Jillian, no, I fully get your point and I agree with it. I'm going to speak to our Commissioner for the Office for People with Disabilities, Victor Calise, has done an outstanding job involving and engaging leaders all over the city to reach folks with disabilities. I think you're exactly right. There's more we need to do to let people know that the homebound vaccinations are available. Now, what we know about the homebound vaccinations and I thank everyone at the FDNY and Department for the Aging who's doing this work. It is very labor intensive and painstaking because you have to send a team of people to an individual home or apartment and it takes time, obviously, including the waiting period after the vaccine. So, it means it will take weeks. We – our goal is to get all this done with anyone homebound by through March and into April. So really what we have to make sure is that the folks who need that the most get, that folks who can go to a center to get to a center, and we're setting up centers in places that are really convenient for folks. But I think you're right. We need to do a deeper outreach to all the organizations leaders who represent people with disabilities and listen to them about the best ways to get this done. So, I take that suggestion to heart and I appreciate it, and commissioner Calise will act on that. Go ahead, Jillian.

Question: Thanks. So, several weeks ago, we discussed the taxi medallion debt problem, and I told you that the Taxi Workers Alliance was a little bit concerned about whatever plan you might have – being a little too lender friendly, you're waiting for the stimulus, and so you've announced your Owner-Driver Relief Fund, and I really don't think you are going to be surprised that it's not being well-received. I mean, there was a protest at Gracie on the day that you announced it, right? I don't want to be too hyperbolic here, but I'm going to quote them, they called it a disgraceful betrayal and a gross misuse of stimulus money. I'm just quoting them.

Mayor: It's America, you can quote them. I disagree fundamentally with that characterization but go ahead.

Question: I knew you would, but they're really concerned because they say that it doesn't do anything for drivers, they're left to drown in debt and bankruptcy, would just kind of the whole point of the program in the first place to avoid that. That drivers' homes, assets, and wages remain on the line. The city assumes no risk and that's particularly galling considering the city's role in the inflation of the value of the medallions and that this plan even costs more than the TWA's own plan. Then there's the whole issue of Marblegate Asset Management, which is a company known for buying distressed assets. They hold the largest lot of medallion loans. They have been given a guaranteed cash out with guaranteed payments for six months, and then we can still go after drivers if they go into debt delinquency. So, do you think maybe you could consider going back to the drawing board or discussing this with other stakeholders?

Mayor: Okay –

Question: Again, not to sound too hyperbolic, but it actually said that you have blood on your hands.

Mayor: I disagree. I think that's inappropriate of them. I think the – this crisis started obviously before I even came into office, it's horrible what has happened to drivers. It's wrong and I feel deeply, I've gotten to know a lot of drivers. I feel for them, I understand the horrible challenges that have been put through and what we've tried to find as a solution that would actually work. And, you know, the Taxi Workers Alliance stood with me when we announced the minimum wage for drivers. They can say what they want now, but there's been times when they absolutely saw that everything that we have been trying to do is finding a way to help the drivers. The full kind of perfect bailout could only be achieved by the federal government, said that from the beginning, but this plan is an actual workable plan that will provide relief to drivers and their families. And people can stereotype it, or they can actually analyze it and listen to the facts. If you look at the previous plan that was announced, it put a high premium on the goodwill of the private equity community, when I meaning the Taxi Workers Alliance's own plan, we did not find it to be realistic. We found it to be putting too much faith in people in the private lending community and private equity community. Our plan I think is much more realistic about how you get help to people. It's \$65 million, which is a very substantial investment. It's going to help drivers and their families get back on their feet. And that's our goal. That's what we've been trying to do. We said, if we got stimulus money, we would do it. Now we're doing that. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next. We'll go to Yehudit it from Boro 24 News.

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

Mayor: I'm good. You heard it, but Avery keeps saying the name of your publication wrong. It is Boro Park 24. Isn't it?

Question: Yeah, it's 24.

Mayor: Thanks.

Question: All right. Well, thank you. I apologize about losing the line a few days ago. Thank you so much for taking the question.

Mayor: Of course.

Question: I have a question – yeah, thank you. I have a question from the grassroots of Brooklyn, where Senator Schumer's from. So, last week I spoke to the principal and creator of a beautiful girls' elementary school in Borough Park. And this principal told me that he was receiving many calls from other Brooklyn principals who had just received an email from the New York City Department of Education, which was offering eligibility for funding for 3-K and Pre-K to schools in ZIP codes that were considered, quote those hardest hit by COVID. So, of course, after only Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods were the only in the city to have such serious COVID positivity rates, hospitalizations and deaths that in the fall, they were the only ones to be called red zones with intense restrictions and loss of funding from any schools. The principals of the Orthodox Jewish schools were confused as to why after being previously considered by the City and State, quote so hard hit by COVID, that now several months later, not one of their ZIP codes was included in the New York City's Department of Education list of eligibility for funding that would allow in this rabbi's words, thousands and thousands of Jewish children should be able to go to 3-K and Pre-K who otherwise wouldn't. So, I was just wondering whether you knew anything about this and whether you found the exclusion of Orthodox Jewish ZIP codes to be fair and equitable in a recovery for all of us?

Mayor: Yehudit, first of all, thank you for saying a recovery for all of us. You are accurately connecting with my message to all New Yorkers and it does have to be at recovery for all of us. I'm very proud of the fact that when we created Pre-K and then expanded to 3-K, I said from the very beginning that we needed to include religious schools, community-based organizations, you know, charter schools, everyone. And that is part of why Pre-K and 3-K works so well. And the fact is – you will, I believe you know this history, but I want to say it publicly, that in the beginning, there was a lot of concern in the yeshiva community about whether we could make it work. And a lot of painstaking work was done by City Hall officials, DOE working in listening to the yeshiva community to figure out what would work. And that's why we got to a place where we have a thriving Pre-K and 3-K approach in the yeshiva community. So, I'm 100 percent committed to that. The specific letter you're referring to, I haven't seen, but I want you to know that we want to make sure everyone is included in Pre-K and 3-K as always. And I want you to know that when we talk about the priorities – I don't think it's right to say, look what happened in September, October, and that's how we made all our decisions. No, the priorities were based on the whole year of experience and decades of previous history and fact, and data. So, in fact, the communities where we saw, unfortunately, the most deaths, the most consistently negative health outcomes and the least access to health care are those 33 communities. But that does not stop us from making sure that everyone is included in Pre-K and 3-K. So, I'll have our team follow up with you to get you all the facts about how we intend to involve everyone. But I really don't want people hearing a dissonance and a falsehood here. The fact that we're prioritizing the places where there's the greatest danger and the greatest need does not mean we

don't simultaneously have a plan to reach everyone. Because we intend to vaccinate everyone. And we intend to include everyone in key initiatives like Pre-K and 3-K, and we intend to include everyone in the recovery. Go ahead, Yehudit.

Question: Thank you. And then that is such great news about this supercharge of vaccines. Thank God for that. So, while the mass vaccination centers are amazing and vaccinating so many people, in terms of making things easier for the elderly and people like many in Orthodox neighborhoods, who would maybe just feel more comfortable getting vaccinated in their own neighborhoods, maybe last week or the week before Doctors Chokshi and Katz mentioned the possibility of setting up small vaccination pods in neighborhoods so that people could get their shots in small local settings. And so, I was wondering are the health clinics that Senator Schumer mentioned, or perhaps the houses of worship that Governor Cuomo mentioned the other day that might be available to be set up as vaccination sites? What was meant by vaccination pods? And if you could tell anything more about any further plans in the horizon for these vaccination pods in local neighborhoods?

Mayor: Yeah, look, I'm a believer in getting vaccination down to the grass roots 100 percent. And we've started to more and more, make it more and more local. And that works. What we need is supply. Yehudit, the – not just the mega sites, but sort of the typical Department of Health site or Health + Hospitals site, they're very efficient. They can reach a lot of people quickly. That's obviously the first goal is to get the most people vaccinated. We're over 2.5 million vaccinations. That's goal one, but I agree with you that a lot of people will come forward if it gets more local and it's provided by trusted local providers. So, that's what we want to do more and more, but we again, we got to get more supply to do that. Right now, typical week, we're 150,000 to 200,000 doses short of where we should be, if we were really given our fair share. As we get more, you're going to see more and more localized sites. And I agree with you. I think that's going to give people comfort and get more and more people to come out.

Moderator: With a bruised ego, we'll go on to our last reporter who is [inaudible] from WNYC.

Question: How's it going? How's it going, Mr. Mayor?

Mayor: I'm doing well, [inaudible] I think – I really appreciate Avery Cohen's public acknowledgement of her mistake. And we believe in redemption here at City Hall. So, Avery, you're going to get it right the next time.

Question: So, I wanted to go back to the topic of Governor Cuomo. So, he's just announced that quarantines for domestic travelers visiting New York will no longer be required starting April 1st. Do you and your health officials feel the city is ready for that policy change? Are things potentially moving too fast? And how will you judge that?

Mayor: Well again, thank you for the question. I believe in local control. And here's another case where New York City was not consulted, even though, you know, we're one of the biggest cities in the world and 43 percent of the state's population, we were not consulted. Of course, I have concerns about this. You know, I think the introduction of the virus from outside has been one of the biggest and toughest X-factors in this whole crisis and something we worry about very

much going forward. So, I will analyze it with our health team before I give you a more detailed response. But since we have Dr. Varma and Dr. Katz with us, I welcome their initial thinking on this matter. Dr. Varma?

Senior Advisor Varma: Yeah. Thank you very much for the question. Yeah, we – I think what we really need to remember and focus on are the, you know comments that all of our health leadership have been giving over the past few weeks. Which is that there is tremendous progress being made. We have an incredible tool available to us, which is vaccines. But at the same time, we're still at a very tenuous point. As we discussed during our conference, our press conference yesterday, we now have 51 percent of the cases of the city due to new strains of this virus that are more infectious. So, we do feel really strongly that it's important for us to be as cautious as we possibly can. And we know that one of the ways to help reduce infections is to limit the amount of travel that's going in and out of the city. And also, when people do travel to take extra precautions, like being tested before and being tested after. And we think that that really does, is really an important measure to keep in place until we get to a place where a far greater percentage of our population is vaccinated.

Mayor: Dr. Katz, you want to add?

President Katz: I would just agree that especially with the variants, we want to limit how they move through our country. And that therefore having people be going without any quarantine is worrisome to me. I think maybe looking toward the issue of people who are vaccinated may be a different group of people. And just as the CDC has recently changed guidance if you're fully vaccinated, I think there may be a role here for having different policies based on whether or not people are fully vaccinated. Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead [inaudible].

Question: Yeah. So, my second question is about COVID in schools. And I wanted to salute Dr. Varma and his team for the study that they put out this week. It was pretty good. But Mayor, you've said you would revisit the two-case protocol that shuts down a school building because students have said it makes for a constant, for constant uncertainty and stress. But the teachers union says they won't back away from the two case thresholds. So, what can you tell us about updating that protocol?

Mayor: That we're evaluating it right now. I'm concerned that parents and kids are having a lot of disruption to their education, that we see schools closing more than we, I think, should see them closing. The basic protections are absolutely necessary. The testing, the situation room, the intense use of Test and Trace Corps. And there are certainly situations where schools need that 10-day shutdown, no question. But we have to make sure it is not artificial. And so, we're reevaluating that rule. Of course, we're talking to the union, of course, most importantly, listening to our health care leaders. And we'll have more to say on that. But we got to always strike a balance. And remember it is also referencing the information we continue to get. We keep learning about this disease. We keep learning about how to address it. But one thing we've learned for sure is New York City public schools are extraordinarily safe. And simultaneously

the number of people getting vaccinated citywide is growing intensely every single day. That's exactly the time to reevaluate and that's what we're doing now.

Okay. Everyone we'll conclude today. Simple point, stimulus equals recovery. Thank God, it's here. The stimulus is the green light for a full recovery for New York City. So, I talk about recovery for all of us. The one missing element was a stimulus to get us back on our feet. But thanks to President Biden and Senator Schumer and so many other good people, it's finally here. I cannot wait to see President Biden take out his pen and sign that bill, and it ushers in a whole new and better time for New York City. So, something to celebrate today. Thank you, everyone.

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