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

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good morning, everyone. Well, yesterday was such an important day for New York City as we reopened 850 public schools all over the city. And it was an exciting day and a day that went very smoothly. And I want to thank all the principals, all the teachers, the school staff, and, of course, our parents and kids – everyone who worked hard to make sure that school reopened well. Very important day for our city and for our families, and a reminder of how important our public schools are to this city today and to our future. And I got another reminder of that yesterday. I had a wonderful conversation with our next Treasury Secretary of the United States, Janet Yellen. And as she is an amazing person, an amazing example of someone who came out of this city, born and bred in Brooklyn, and went to Fort Hamilton High School. In fact, she was the valedictorian of her class at Fort Hamilton high school, now will be the first woman ever in the history of the United States to become our treasury secretary. And what a great example to all the public school kids of New York City about what your futures can bring when you see a product of our public schools go all the way to the high post, the crucial post of treasury secretary for this entire country. It's great to have another New Yorker in such an important position, but she's also going to inspire a whole generation of New Yorkers, particularly young woman, to see their potential. And she is another reminder of how important public education is and what a difference it makes in our society, that we provide for everyone for free the finest education so they can realize their potential.

So, everyone, now let's get to what has allowed us to have safe schools, what's that allowed us to achieve what so many people said couldn't be done. School buildings are, in fact, some of the very safest places to be in all of New York City. Why? Because of testing. We always say testing, testing, testing – it has worked time and again. It's been the difference-maker. And we want to remind people, whether it's in our schools or any place and the city, testing is key. So, Today is Get Tested Tuesday, and we're going to remind all New Yorkers how important it is to get tested. It's free. It's quick. It's easy. And it's crucial for you, for your family, for your whole city.

Now, we are 10 months into this crisis, but, for the first time, we really can see the end in sight. Why? Because the vaccine is coming next week. The vaccine will be here in New York City, because the vaccine is being produced in huge quantities for this city and for this whole country, because we've learned how to fight back against the coronavirus in so many ways, people are doing so much and doing it so well to keep the coronavirus in check. Our hospitals are doing such extraordinary work, learned such important lessons from the spring. So, this is the final phase of the war against the coronavirus. We have one more big battle ahead. We've got to get through January – December and January, into February. Listen, think of it this way – this is the

last big battle before us and then the vaccine will be able to do it to work. So, everyone, when you think about how important it is to get through December, get through January into February, it's a reminder of how important testing is. Testing always has made the difference and it will again.

So, one of the things we are doing is reaching out in every part of the city to make sure people know the testing resources are available. There are more testing sites than ever in New York City. And, again, the test is the easiest it's ever been, it's the quickest it's ever been. We want people to know it's there for them. So, our test and trace teams are out all over the city and particularly focusing this week on Washington Heights, on Harlem and East Harlem, and on Chinatown and the Lower East Side to spread the word. And here to tell you all about it, he's been doing a great job leading the Test and Trace Corps and building it up to the level it is today, Dr. Ted Long.

**Executive Director Ted Long, NYC Test and Trace Corps.:** Thank you, sir. Throughout the COVID crisis, the one thing that has remained constant is that New Yorkers care about keeping our city safe. We recently hit a new record – in a single day, more than 95,000 New Yorkers came out to get tested, to know their status, and to do their part, to stop the spread of the virus. Now, even though we're seeing a rise in the number of new cases every day, our contact tracing system is the strongest it's ever been, and it's powered by each of those new tests that we do every day with those 95,000 New Yorkers that came out to get tested. The real heroes here are our contact tracers. They're New Yorkers that cared deeply about keeping our city safe and protecting our city, and they're reaching over 90 percent of everybody testing positive across New York City and they're completing interviews with 80 percent of everybody testing positive, meaning we're getting all of the information we need in order to perform contact tracing. In addition to that, 98 percent of people that are cases or have tested positive – when we call you every day as part of our – if you're a part of our program, you confirm for us that you're making that sacrifice and that you're staying at home and that you're isolating and that you're doing your part to keep our cities safe.

Today, I want to tell you more about what we are doing to fight back against the coronavirus, as the Mayor said, in our final battle here. What we're doing in the Test and Trace Corps. is we're spreading rapid testing across New York City. In the last month alone, we've opened up more than 10 new rapid testing sites. That has doubled our rapid testing capacity, and we're now in all five boroughs. To walk you through what the experience is, you'll come to one of our rapid testing sites, you'll have your tests done. Within 15 minutes, you'll have your results. And then, if it's positive, we'll pair you up with one of our contact tracers to immediately perform contact tracing, or see who you may have exposed when you were contagious. We then reach out to those people you may have exposed that same day and offer to bring them in for testing immediately. Then, before you leave, we pair you up with one of our resource navigators who will talk to you about services we can offer it to help you get through this, like free food delivery, a free hotel stay, or even, for free, walking your dog if that's what it takes for you to stay home and to keep our cities safe.

You should be proud of the number of New Yorkers that have come out to get tested to keep our city safe. To do your part, you can call 212-COVID-19 to find a testing site near you, or visit

nyc.gov/COVIDtest to find a site near you as well. You can go to our Test and Trace Corps. Website, if you want to look at a detailed list of all of our sites, in addition with a detailed list of the exact wait times for each of the sites.

Now, as the Mayor said, today is Get Tested Tuesday in Manhattan. We're in Washington Heights, we're in Harlem, East Harlem, Chinatown, and we're on the Lower East Side. Today, come out and get tested – it's always fast, easy, and free – and do your part to continue to keep our city safe. Thank you, sir.

**Mayor:** Thank you so much, Ted. And I want to just say, everyone who's part of the Test and Trace Corps. has been doing amazing work. And it's going to be more important than ever in this last push here as we go through the holidays and into the New Year. So, I want to thank you, Ted, for your leadership. We have a Dr. Amanda Johnson with us today, has been doing a great job with her team on the Take Care Initiative to make sure that when people need that help, it is there for them, whether they need to be in a hotel or need support at home, if they need to safely separate. So, all this help is available to New Yorkers when you need it for free. No one should ever feel they're alone and don't have a place to turn. The goal here is to keep everyone safe. When it turns out you need to safely separate, to know there's going to be a lot of support for you when you do that.

All right, now, that's testing – so important, but while we're fighting this important battle against the coronavirus, we have another challenge, and it's absolutely happened also because of the coronavirus, but it even has bigger ramifications, which is the challenge of our blood supply in New York City. This is for all types of medical challenges, and we've got to make sure our blood supplies kept up to protect New Yorkers. The coronavirus has knocked out a lot of the normal blood drives that happen in companies and government offices and colleges. That's not there. So, it's up to you. And last week we talked about this, how New Yorkers need to step up and help out. Now, look, the supply has been running low, so we together the Give Blood NYC campaign and, right away, New Yorkers have started to answer the call. We said we needed 25,000 blood donations this month – already 4,288 donors have stepped forward, which is fantastic. And almost 1,000 of them are new donors. I was very pleased to go to the New York Blood Center with Chirlane and donate blood last week. Everyone there is great. I want to emphasize the folks who work at the Blood Center really take care of you, then make it easy. It's such an important thing to do, and you get your free juice and cookies at the end. But what we need now is about 20,000 more New Yorkers to come forward. This is urgent. This is about directly and immediately saving lives, and you can make such a difference. We need 20,000 more New Yorkers to come forward by the end of this month, and we have some wonderful prizes we've put together to encourage people, and winners have already been selected, including Jessica from Queens, and Sheldon from Brooklyn, and Eileen from Manhattan. And Eileen won the New York City Parks package, which includes the fabulous social distancing towel. This is a big – a big favorite of the coronavirus era. So, look, we want people to help out and we're going to make sure that there's some wonderful prizes as part of it. So, everyone come forward and sign up at [nybc.org/GiveBloodNYC](https://nybc.org/GiveBloodNYC). We really need you and we need you now.

Okay. Let's go to our indicators. Number one, current hospital admissions. So, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19, today's report is 161

patients. And, again, where we want to be is under 200 patients. So, today, a good number. Next, the next new indicator, which is the hospitalization rate per 100,000 people. Today's number is 2.30 per 100,000. Not where we want to be. We want to be under two per 100,000. Okay. Second indicator, current new cases. And now, we are including the probable cases, as we discussed yesterday – the probable cases along in this number. So, today's number, daily new cases, seven-day average – 2,624. Well over the number where we want to be, which is 550. So, we have a lot of work to do there. And the percentage of New York City residents testing positive for COVID-19. Now, this is just the seven-day rolling average here – today's report, 4.94 percent. Where we want to be as under five, so we're just there, but, obviously, this is a high number. We've got a lot of work to do to get that number back down.

I'll say a few words in Spanish –

[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 Dr. Ted Long, by Amanda Johnson, the Director of Take Care at the Test and Trace Corps., and by Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma. The first question today, it goes to Juliet from 1010 WINS.

**Question:** Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor. How are you?

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

**Question:** I'm doing okay. Thank you. You know, I've been hearing from people who are afraid of the vaccine, because they think they're going to get COVID by taking it or that somehow it was rushed into approval, it isn't ready. How do you and your health experts plan to address misconceptions about the vaccine and correct the misinformation that's out there?

**Mayor:** Yeah, Juliet. It's such an important question. Thank you. Look, I'm just going to say as a layman, I think there has been such an intensive worldwide effort to create this vaccine. It's historic. It's amazing how quickly it was done, but there's also been a tremendous amount of scrutiny to make sure things were done right. And our health care leadership at the national, state and local level would not allow a vaccine to move forward if they did not have confidence in it. So, I think people should recognize this has been approved at multiple levels, and it's absolutely necessary to save lives. But let me have our three doctors jump in, so Dr. Varma, Dr. Johnson, Dr. Long in that order – if anything you want to add, go ahead.

**Senior Advisor Jay Varma:** Great. Thank you very much for the question. And we realized this is going to be an absolutely critical issue to make sure that people have the trust in receiving this vaccine, and also the follow-up. I think I'd probably focus on two issues. One is, what is the data showing us? And then, also, trying to help people understand a little bit about how this vaccine works. We're just now seeing the data that's been presented to the FDA, and there's a public hearing this week as well. Everything that I've seen so far from it reaffirms the original press

releases that we saw from Pfizer, and is very much reassuring to us, both, obviously, about the safety of the vaccine, but, even more important, about its effectiveness. And we're certainly going to learn more in the public hearing this week. I think one way for people to think about this, this vaccine, is to think about it like it's a message in a bottle and it's getting injected into your body and yourself, take up that message in a bottle. They remove the message and the message tells yourself, you know, watch out for this intruder that's going to be calming. And there's really nothing in that message in a bottle that is dangerous. You know, it's really just a warning sign to your body's immune system to watch out. So, the more we can help people understand the science, as well as build their trust that we've reviewed the data ourselves, we're hopeful that this will have a big impact.

**Mayor:** Dr. Johnson, do you want to add? You may be on mute.

**Director Amanda Johnson, Take Care New York:** I couldn't agree more. I am here – hello – could not agree more with Dr. Varma. I really appreciate that plain language explanation. And, as I do with all of my patients in counseling them about the power of the vaccination, I'll continue to do my part to ensure that people feel comfortable with this a real game-changer for our city and for the country.

**Mayor:** Excellent. Dr. Long, do you want to add?

**Executive Director Long:** The only thing I would add is, as a primary care doctor, what I tell my patients is, I wouldn't ask you to do anything I wouldn't be willing to do myself. So, you can count on me receiving the vaccine after I've reviewed the evidence.

**Mayor:** Well, there you have it, Juliet. You have testimony from three doctors who are quite convinced. Go ahead.

**Question:** Okay, great. Switching to another topic. John Lennon was shot 40 years ago today. Do you have any recollections or thoughts about that day or what his music and his message means to you?

**Mayor:** Yeah. Thank you, Juliet. I remember so vividly and painfully. Yeah, I was a student at NYU at the time, and I remember it very, very clearly. We were all just shocked, obviously. And I think John Lennon, for a lot of us, was one of the most important cultural figures of our time. He was one of the people who kind of defined the time we grew up in, and it's very hard to lose someone like that. I mean, it just always felt like he was there and, you know, someone, I certainly admired in so many ways. I thought he was a voice of truth. Someone who was willing to take risks for what he believed was right. You know, at my inauguration, we played the song Imagine, which is still one of the greatest, I think, examples of a message to us all of, you know, how we could build a better world for each other. So, it was such a painful moment because he, I think, for so many of us was just, you know, interwoven in our lives so deeply, kind of part of the extended family in a way, and just the way he was lost, you know, just so suddenly out of nowhere, very painful day. I literally, as I'm talking to you, I feel like, you know, it was yesterday. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** The next is Reema from Chalkbeat.

**Question:** Hi, Mr. Mayor, how are you today?

**Mayor:** Okay, Reema, how you doing today?

**Question:** I'm doing okay. Thanks for asking. So, my first question for you as you're, I'm sure familiar in July the Governor set a standard that would close all schools in any region where the positivity rate reached nine percent over seven days. You know, there's been a lot of change in guidance and, you know, lots of things have changed in New York City, but we've heard nothing about this rule recently. And so, I'm – you know, it seems very important. So, I'm wondering, what's your understanding of this rule? Will all of New York City's schools close again if the city reaches a nine percent positivity rate, which I assume would be based on the State numbers?

**Mayor:** Yeah, look, right now, we're obviously in constant discussion with the State over where everything is going. And the Governor laid out his winter plan, which I think had a lot of very important strategic ideas in it that we're all working with. But the goal here, of course, is never to get to that number and to use all the tools possible to protect people and make sure that we fight back the virus. The vaccine, you know, over the weeks ahead, is going to start to be a crucial part of that. But right now, I think the actions the Governor talked about yesterday, you know, the restrictions that seem very likely at this point and any other restrictions, I think everything has to be on the table to make sure we never approach that number. So, it is part of the State approach right now, but our goal is to never have it become part of our reality. Go ahead, Reema.

**Question:** Okay. And I just want to follow up and make sure we're totally clear. So, to your understanding that standard is still in effect. There's been no indication that that's changed, but – is that your understanding?

**Mayor:** That is my understanding, but again, thank God, we have a lot of tools to make sure that we don't get to that point.

**Moderator:** The next is Yoav from The City.

**Question:** Hi, everyone. I wanted to ask, you made a change yesterday to start including rapid testing in the city's count. What were you doing before with rapid test results, whether they were positive or negative? Was there any element of that, that was factored into the city's numbers?

**Mayor:** Yoav, just a reminder, as I turned to Dr. Varma, that as we talked about – Dr. Chokshi talked about this yesterday – there was real concern about the quality and accuracy of the tests until recently where there's been some real improvements. So, we wanted to make sure that both the accuracy levels were there and also, they weren't being used as intensely until recently, and now they've become a much more pertinent piece of the equation. And that's what led us to the decision. But Dr. Varma, you can speak to this question.

**Senior Advisor Varma:** Yeah. Thank you for the question. So, the way we've been managing antigen test results is to consider them both at the level of the individual and then to see how we

use it for our population data. So, at the individual level, our practice has really been the same since the beginning of this, which is that if you have a positive result, you are treated for the purposes of our case and contact investigations as a positive case. So, nothing at all changes. The Health Department gets that data, the Test and Trace Corps acts upon it. Everything is the same. What we do for our public data is the discussion that Dr. Chokshi went to yesterday, is we really needed to figure out how best to incorporate and analyze this data. It's actually a topic of a lot of discussion and debate among state and local health departments, among CDC. And we've chosen the approach the CDC recommends which is to classify them as probable cases, to report them separately. And then also when we report our test positivity data, to really restrict that to just the PCR or the nucleic acid amplification test results.

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

**Question:** Okay, thank you for that. My other question, there was a lawsuit filed on behalf of special education students last week. The concern there is that there are a significant number of students missing out on services that they're entitled to by law. And that currently there is no mechanism – kind of, there's no general mechanism for which they can seek to recoup those services other than going through the impartial hearing system individually, which would you know – and that system is already kind of logged jammed, and it would kind of be overwhelmed by all the people filing complaints. What they're seeking is kind of a broad City policy that would help address all these requests to get services that have been missed. And I'm wondering if you plan to create some kind of system for that, so that people don't – you know, aren't left to file those impartial hearing requests.

**Mayor:** Yeah, Yoav, I appreciate the question a lot, because look, I think parents with kids with special needs go through so much when there isn't a pandemic. They've gone through even more when there is a pandemic. By the same token, the pandemic has really thrown off our ability to provide the services the way we normally do. So, right now, obviously, District 75 schools are opening all over the city on Thursday. That's a really good thing. That's going to help so many parents of kids with special needs. Pre-K, 3-K, K-to-five open now all over the city, including a lot of schools that serve kids with special needs and inclusion programs and other approaches. So, for kids who are not in one of those kinds of schools, we do need to keep seeking additional solutions. We're going to have more to say on that soon. Definitely want to get help to them. It's just something we have to navigate in really complex ways given the challenges of this virus.

**Moderator:** The next is Narmeen from PIX.

**Question:** Good morning, Mayor. Good morning, everyone on the call.

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

**Question:** I'm doing well. Thank you. I want to first ask you about just general city data as we look at our COVID-19 infection rates. Staten Island, clearly with the highest number as a borough. I know you said you're in constant talks with the Governor. Is there any chance at all that we will not see the entire city face a scale back on something like indoor dining because of the actions, really, of one borough bringing down infection rate averages?

**Mayor:** Narmeen, look, it – I want to contest one part of that. We're definitely seeing some distressing numbers in Staten Island, that's for sure, but the problem goes far beyond Staten Island. The statement the Governor made yesterday, I think it makes clear we can expect in a matter of days new restrictions. No one's happy about it. I feel for the small businesses that might be affected and their employees, but this health situation has to be addressed. So, I do think we're going to see restrictions coming, and I think other restrictions have to be on the table so that we're ready to address whatever comes. At the same time, we got to do everything we can to be sensitive to the fact that we want people to have their livelihoods, we want people to have their jobs, obviously, but we've got to stop this new surge that we're facing. Because, again, this is the last big battle. I really believe this. We've got to stop the coronavirus here and get ourselves to the point where the vaccine is being distributed widely. And that's how we close this chapter and move forward to our recovery. So, I do expect restrictions in a matter of days and we'll, from there, see what else we have to do to keep people safe. Go ahead.

**Question:** Understood. Thank you. I want to next ask you, in regard to rapid testing – thank you for the clarification Dr. Varma and also to you, Mayor – but I have some questions. I mean, when it comes to some workplaces that are sending employees to get rapid tests in order to clear them for work, that can sometimes have them encountering other members of the public, I wonder if there's any data being kept in terms of cross-checking numbers, false positives, false negatives. Are we cross-checking them enough with the PCR data? Are people getting both? Can you break down how that information is really going to the person getting the test and we're making sure that the right people are going out to the public with a free and clear negative test? Does that make sense?

**Mayor:** I think so. I appreciate the question. Let me start with Dr. Long and then see if Dr. Varma or Dr. Johnson want to add anything.

**Executive Director Long:** Yeah. And I appreciate that question. So, what we've done at all of our rapid testing sites for the exact reasons that you're referring to, is we've done an exhaustive validation study of the new antigen test that we're using, which I talked about in some of our new sites, it's called the BinaxNOW test. Compared to our traditional gold standard PCR test. And we found good alignment between them. So, that's why if we have a positive result on one of our antigen tests, we treat that as a positive, we perform contact tracing. And it's because, to your point, with that cross-check, we've done that cross check against the PCR. So, we stand behind those tests as positive.

**Mayor:** Dr. Varma, Dr. Johnson want to add anything?

**Senior Advisor Varma:** Nothing else from me.

**Director Johnson:** No. Excellent response. Thank you.

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

**Moderator:** The next is Amanda Eisenberg from Politico.



**Question:** Morning, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

**Mayor:** Good, Amanda, how you been?

**Question:** I'm good. Thanks for asking. I wanted to get your thoughts on a funeral that was held in Brooklyn last night. It's another large funeral in the Satmar community. And so, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about, you know, it seems like there's often these large gatherings with thousands of people. And it seems to be, you know, another place where we're not seeing that public health guidance being followed. Can you talk a little bit more about this event and also, you know, what your administration is able to do to, kind of, stop these – I guess, stop people from not following public health measures?

**Mayor:** I appreciate that, Amanda. Look, first of all, that specific situation is still being investigated. We're still trying to get the full truth of what happened there, but let's go to the bigger picture. There've been some very disappointing moments and there's also been some good moments in that community, particularly when we were facing the challenge in Brooklyn a month or more ago. The Satmar community really led the way in terms of testing, which is what we needed to see a lot more of across Brooklyn and Queens. And they did a really good job with that. So, I don't think it's one thing or another. I agree with you, these large events are a real cause for concern. And we need to either see them be handled very differently with really clear limits and precautions or not happen at all. We're going to have that very clear dialogue with some of the community leadership. And if we don't see that, if we see another confirmed situation in which an inappropriate event is happening in that same building, then we're going to have to move to shut down the building once and for all, which is something no one wants, but that would be the next step if we see non-compliance. Go ahead.

**Question:** Great. And also, I wanted to – I lost my train of thought, I guess that happens occasionally –

**Mayor:** We can come back if you –

**Question:** [Inaudible]

**Mayor:** Do you need to come back? Or are you good?

**Question:** I would appreciate that. Thank you [inaudible] –

**Mayor:** We'll give you a credit.

[Laughter]

**Question:** Thank you.

**Mayor:** We'll get to you in a few minutes. Okay.

**Moderator:** Next, we'll do Emily from NY1.

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

**Mayor:** Hey, Emily.

**Question:** Mayor de Blasio, you said, per your conversations with Governor Cuomo, that there'll be a matter of days before some of these restrictions are put into effect, of closure of indoor dining, closure of nonessential businesses. Public Advocate Jumaane Williams wants these steps taken immediately. That's what he's asking the Governor to do now. What's the right move? What's the right timing? How urgent is this?

**Mayor:** Look, I think it's important based on the indicators that we're looking at, and I know the Governor and the State are watching these indicators all the time. It's important to recognize that we've gone through a really tough stretch here over the last few weeks. And unless there is some evidence that that is going to change rapidly, unfortunately restrictions are needed to protect us all. So, we're constantly talking to the State about this. I think everyone is aligned that we've got to stop this increase we're seeing. We've got to protect everyone in the city and particularly do that by protecting our hospitals. And we got to link up to the vaccine being distributed so that we can really turn the corner once and for all. So, I think there is urgency here and we're talking to the State daily, but I think what's clear is, you know, you're going to see these restrictions in a matter of days. Go ahead, Emily.

**Question:** And may we hear more please about your conversation with Janet Yellen? What she said about any aid or assistance that the incoming Biden administration will bring to New York City?

**Mayor:** It's – we'll keep the conversation private, but only say that I'm quite satisfied by the level of focus of the Biden administration on the need for a major stimulus. And I'm certainly clear that our new treasury secretary understands the importance of stimulus and understands what's going on in New York City and the challenges we face. The question before us right now, Emily is whether the Congress gets it? And every time the Congress starts to address stimulus they then veer away or they can't make up their mind on the most basic things like state and local aid. And if there is not state and local aid in a stimulus, it's not a stimulus. So I just want to be really clear. I have absolute confidence in the Biden administration. My problem is I'm struggling to have confidence in the Senate because I'm not seeing anything coherent. And the fact they're still debating whether there will be state and local aid means they literally could consider a stimulus that would do nothing to put cities and states back on their feet. Which means there won't be a recovery. I mean, I don't want to be dire, but I truly believe it. If cities and states can't provide basic services, there simply won't be a recovery. It's literally the opposite of what history has shown us is necessary to achieve an economic recovery. So that's where my fear is, all in the Senate right now.

**Moderator:** We'll go back to Amanda.

**Mayor:** Amanda?

**Question:** Thank you guys. I appreciate it.

**Mayor:** It's all right.

**Question:** So, I wanted Mr. Mayor, you to weigh in on going back to kind of the Orthodox Jews coming to – some parts of the Orthodox Jews coming together and celebrating or grieving. I went to Borough Park on Election Day to talk to voters. And I spoke to a lot of Trump voters who compared the public health measures that are being put forth by yourself and the Governor, as you know, referenced to 1930s Germany and Kristallnacht. And when I tried to engage with them to kind of specify why they felt that way, I was struggling to have a conversation with them. And I was wondering how you feel like you're able to work with people who don't necessarily agree with what public measures are going into place? Especially in these Orthodox Jewish pockets where we have seen upticks while being culturally sensitive? And if that's something that's been on your radar or you know, how you're able to kind of work with people who might fundamentally disagree with how you're trying to deal with the crisis?

**Mayor:** Wow. I appreciate the question Amanda. I'm really sad that you had that experience. So I just want to start with that. You know, we should all be really, really mindful about when we invoke history of one of the, literally the worst moments in the history of this world, the Holocaust. That is not history that should ever be invoked lightly. And anyone who can compare a public health measure to protect the lives of the community, to protect people's lives with something that was about repression and hatred and violence, it's just absolutely unacceptable. And I do think the point you started with Trump's supporters, I think unfortunately what's happened here is it's not like these ideas never existed before. It's not like people haven't been negative towards public health policies before or had frustration with government before. But this is something different. And I think we saw a real change in the four years that President Trump was part of the firmament here. I have very, very deep relationships in the Orthodox community. I've worked very closely with the community. I have a different political ideology than many of the people I work with, but we all still work together as friends and people who care about the common good of the community. I saw that change at least for some people in the course of these last few years. And it's sad because it's not the way things should be. So, I do think there's an ideological factor that's making things a lot harder. I don't believe that will go away on January 20th. I do believe it will change after January 20th. But really, we've just got to have a different conversation. Because this community was hit very hard by the coronavirus. And when we're out there trying to tell people how important it is to just take basic precautions and how we're trying to save the lives of their elders, that that should be heard as an act of goodwill. And I do think the vast majority of the people in the community do understand that Amanda, I want to be really clear about that. The vast majority of people I think understand we're all trying to save lives together. I think it is a few who are saying things like you heard. Go ahead.

**Moderator:** We have time for two more for today. And the next is Emma from the New York Times.

**Question:** Hi, good morning, Mayor. First the question from my colleague. She says this morning Commissioner Shea was on NY1 and he blamed the continued surge in shootings on people who are arrested for gun possession and released. Just like in the spring and the summer he provided no evidence. Do you agree with him? Is this a debate the city wants to rehash?

**Mayor:** Again, I didn't hear his comments so I want to be careful that I don't comment on something I haven't seen. I would want the whole context, but let's go to the core of your question. What is going on this year? An absolute perfect storm. There was nothing like it in the history of New York City before Emma, let's be really clear. You cannot combine a massive health crisis, tens of thousands of people dying, hospitals overwhelmed, economies shut down, schools shut down, houses of worship shut down, society not having its normal moorings all at once, a social justice crisis. I mean, come on. This is not like anything we've seen in our history and I believe not like anything we will see again in our lifetimes. And in that atmosphere, we saw an uptick in violence. Now that is clearly being addressed because we're regluing the situation together again. So, we are seeing much more connection between police and community through neighborhood policing. We're seeing many more gun arrests. We're going into a new year with a new approach that I think will help us turn the tide more. That's what happened here. And that's where our focus should be. Go ahead, Emma.

**Question:** I think a lot of parents will now be watching this nine percent figure. I'm curious, do you think it makes sense to keep that nine percent sort of a threshold in effect if there are that many cases and are that many people testing positive, is that sort of a scary level in which schools actually should close?

**Mayor:** I think it's a very important question, Emma. I think we have to look at what's happening in the schools. What we have seen is an extraordinarily healthy circumstance. The gold standard of health and safety measures we put together has worked in a way really, even beyond what we expected in the best-case scenario. It is now proven – here's the biggest school system in the country. This is the best proving ground you possibly could have. You know, at one point almost 1,600 schools were open. And what did we see? Because of all these measures, very, very few kids and staff testing positive, literally safest place to be in New York City. We're now going into a new approach with even more testing. Obviously primary focus is on the younger grades. And this is happening while we're seeing an uptick in the cases around us. We're going to be able to learn a lot from this. I think we're going to see once again incredibly safe schools and that's going to teach us what we need to know for how we go ahead. So that State standard is in place now. But I think we're going to have a real conversation with the State and with the public going forward based on the actual facts we learn from 850 schools being open over these coming weeks. I'm very hopeful from what I'm seeing that these extraordinary health and safety measures really now have proven there's a very, very effective way to do this for the duration. And I believe we're going to have our schools open all the way to the point where we link up with a widespread distribution of the vaccine and then can bring back more and more students consistently.

**Moderator:** Last question for today goes to Jake Offenhartz from Gothamist.

**Question:** Hey, good morning, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor:** Hey Jake, how you doing?

**Question:** I'm doing okay. I heard you kind of float the idea of shutting down the Satmar building if things don't improve there. I feel like there has been a lot of conversations at this point, your warnings. Are you saying, if there's another big event, you're going to shut it down? Like, what does that, what does that entail? What's the marker there for you?

**Mayor:** Jake this most recent situation is still under investigation. So, what we need to know in every case was were the State rules violated or not? That's really the essence that we've got to know. If we see a pattern of violation, that's what could lead to a full shutdown. But we've got to have facts. And we're also going to have a serious conversation with community leaders about why this keeps being a question mark instead of it being abundantly clear that things have to be handled very cautiously and carefully for this last phase of fighting the coronavirus? That we can't take chances. We got to have that clear conversation again, and then it's up to them to follow the rules that are quite obvious to all of us. Go ahead, Jake.

**Question:** On another subject, after several years of improvements, the City is now on track to have as many traffic fatalities [inaudible] when you took office and started Vision Zero. What accounts for that spike in deaths? What concrete, specific steps will you take in your final year of office to prevent these deaths? And just as an addendum, DOT is not making outgoing Commissioner Polly Trottenberg available for any interviews. She was your commissioner for nearly seven years. Is there a reason she's not available for interviews? Was that your decision or

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**Mayor:** Okay Jake, lots of stuff you're putting together here. Hold on. It's like a six-part question. Here we go. I don't know anything about the interview situation. I certainly don't have anything to do with that. Really respect Polly Trottenberg, I've talked about that with a lot of energy that she did an amazing job. And I think she has a lot to be proud of, but I think Vision Zero's the things she should be most proud of. And I certainly want her to talk about the work that's been done here. To your core question about this year, again I'm very unhappy with what we saw this year. I do know everything has been thrown off this year. There's obviously been a lot more people traveling by car this year, proportionate to mass transit. There's been a lot of things that have been unusual and really unhelpful. And obviously not consistent with what we want to do with Vision Zero. So, I would say in my last year, we're going to double down on Vision Zero, go right back to everything that was working consistently for years. That means intensive enforcement. That means obviously continuing to implement the speed cameras. It means continuing to build out mass transit options which we have done with select bus service and busways and the NYC Ferry and obviously Citi Bike. It means continuing those redesigns of intersections and streets. All of that work will intensify as we start to recover next year. And then beyond. I believe Jake, that Vision Zero is proven. Every idea has its ups and downs, and this has been a horrible, perfect storm moment. But Vision Zero is proven and it must be part of the future of New York City. And it must be aggressively supported because it actually builds every year. The more you do, the more impact. And I truly believe if we stick to Vision Zero in the years ahead, that we'll be able to drive down fatalities intensely and protect thousands and thousands of New Yorkers.

All right, with that said, everyone, look, just summarizing the point I've made today – and I think it's so important – we've got this last battle ahead. This month, December, next month, January, then you're going into February. By the time you get to February, you're going to start to see vaccine distribution really much more widely across the city, especially for the folks who need it the most. And then it grows from there. We have an opportunity to turn the corner once and for all on the coronavirus. And that's something every one of us has to be a part of. It's also a signal to us that we have to start thinking ahead of how we bring this city back, how we recover and how we go to new places as a city that makes us even stronger. So, this is a critical moment and everyone should feel invested in getting through these weeks ahead and turning the corner and then getting to the business of the recovery of this great city. Thanks, everybody.

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