

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 23, 2021, 10:00 AM
CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everyone. We have a lot to talk about today and it's all about how we bring back New York City. It's all about our recovery, but it's about a recovery for all of us. And this is about how to do something very different. Bring the greatest city in the world back, but bring it back with equity, with fairness, with a commitment to changing the status quo that existed before the pandemic. So, a lot to talk about, but let me start with our vaccination effort, which continues to grow stronger. The update today, as of this morning, there've been 3,411,492 vaccinations. So, this effort continues to grow strong. And updates today, of course, from this point on all New Yorkers 50 years old and up will be eligible for vaccination. We're ready to receive folks who are ready to get vaccinated all over the city. We have sites in neighborhoods all across the five boroughs. Good news in the vein of freedom to vaccinate, something that we keep talking about the need for more local control, more local democracy, more freedom to vaccinate – pharmacies now being given a lot more freedom to vaccinate different types of New Yorkers, including folks with underlying conditions. We want to see more of that flexibility going forward. And of course, very good news from Washington on supply. We're expecting a major boost in our vaccine supply starting in the first week of April. So, that's real soon, and that's going to be crucial to really pumping up the vaccinations and getting us to our goal – five million New Yorkers, fully vaccinated by June.

Now I talked about in the State of the City that we in this city, we are ready to come back in so many ways. Our City workforce is going to be coming back. The folks who are not already working in frontline positions, which is the vast majority of our City workers, the folks who work in offices will begin to return on May 3rd. And we're going to have strict safety measures in place. We're going to use all of the tools that we've learned about distancing, about ventilation, the right way to allow workspaces. We're going to make it safe, but we need our City workers back in their offices where they can do the most to help their fellow New Yorkers. And it's also going to send a powerful message about this city moving forward. A lot of work going on in the next few weeks, working with the municipal labor movement, make sure we get things right, and we are devoted to health and safety in all things. But this is an important step for the city and it's another other important step on the way to the full recovery of New York City. And I can feel that coming, you see more and more evidence every day of the decisions people are making. We in the public sector, but also folks in the private sector and individuals making the decision to stay in New York, invest in New York, grow in New York City. This has happening more and more. So, May 3rd is going to be an important step along the way.

Now the epitome, the epitome of a recovery for all of us is addressing the injustices that have plagued our city, not just for years, not just for decades, but for centuries. The epitome of recovery for all of us is looking at the disparities that came out of the COVID crisis that were laid bare. And doing something about them, but doing something very different about them. We

need to do something transformational at this point in our history, something unprecedented. And that's why today I'm naming a Racial Justice Commission. This is unlike any approach you've ever seen in the history of New York City or honestly, in any major city in America, any state in America. We've never had a model for actually addressing structural racism, institutional racism, identifying it, acknowledging it, formally apologizing for it, weeding it out, eradicating it, making the policy changes, changing the laws, doing the things that actually will have a lasting impact. I thought long and hard about this. And I talked to many, many people who care deeply about social justice. What was abundantly clear to me is the everyday work of government, we do a lot of things that do change the historical trajectory. Today, earlier this morning, I spoke about Pre-K for All, something that's in President Biden's upcoming proposal we're hearing on how to bring the country back. That's an example of a structural change with great impact.

You can do lots of great individual actions that are going to change the lives of millions of people. But what we haven't had before – and it's become clear to me is we haven't had a vehicle for getting to the root causes, for really identifying institutional and structural racism, and weeding it out. In the day-to-day work of government, again, many good things can happen, but it takes a group of absolutely, dedicated individuals, not dealing with the day-to-day issues, but looking at the big picture. Folks who have put their entire lifetimes into racial and social justice, it takes a group like that to objectively determine where structural institutional racism exists and what we need to do about it.

And again, some of the changes might be achievable by policy or by actions we take in budgets, but some of them can only be achieved by changes in our laws. In fact, by changes in our city's constitution, our charter. And so, this commission will also be a Charter Revision Commission. It will have the power to examine the fundamental laws of New York City, the very basis of the governance of this city. And determine if those very laws themselves are either exacerbating institutional racism or helping us to cure it. And if changes are needed, if new laws are needed, if our charter requires revision, this commission will have the power to send proposals to the ballot for the people to decide. So, this is an extraordinary effort, never before attempted in this city again, or any major city, any state in the country, as far as I've ever seen.

And it borrows from truly historic and extraordinary efforts in other nations. We all know that nations of the world that have gone through extreme conflict and strife have gone through a history of racism and apartheid. They've turned to vehicles like this. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa is particularly notable for the way it identified the sins of the past, but then determined structural changes needed and how that actually led to the development of the South African constitution. We want to take from those international models, adapt them to the reality here, but approach with the same spirit of a willingness to be bluntly, honest in the spirit of moving forward, recognizing the foundational sin of racism in this country, in this city, looking at it, particularly in our public agencies, but not only in our public agencies. I'm asking the members of this commission to engage all elements of New York City society, to engage the business community, the cultural organizations, the universities of the city, to look across the board at where we are still dealing with the painful legacy of racism, where it's still in this very moment is affecting the way people are governed and treated. And I think a commission like this can receive with, I think, tremendous goodwill, the efforts of private sector partners as well to recognize these mistakes, to apologize for them, to catalog them – but, most importantly, to act on them, to create the changes needed.

This is a step towards something very, very different. I believe in my heart and soul, racism has been with us for 400 years, but it can be obliterated. It can be eradicated. It's going to take tremendous hard work, but it starts with a devoted group of people and a group of people who have proven by their actions that they can make a difference. There's a great quote from Margaret Mead, never doubt that a small, committed group of individuals can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has. This group will change the world. And I think they'll create a model that can be acted on and borrowed and utilized all over this country as part of our healing and our progress forward.

So, the members of this extraordinary commission – the Chair will be Jennifer Jones Austin, the CEO and Executive Director of the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, the Vice Chair is Henry Garrido, Executive Director DC 37 AFSCME. Two leaders, so well-known in this city, who have led the way fighting for racial justice, social justice, fighting for fairness for working people. In addition, Deputy Mayor Phil Thompson, many of you have heard here, has an extraordinary sense of the history of the city and this country, and how to address the problems in real and tangible ways. He will be a member as well. K. Bain, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Community Capacity Development, one of the leaders of the Cure Violence movement and the Crisis Management System, who's helped to gather grassroots people around the city for extraordinary changes at the community level. Ana Bermúdez, our Commissioner for the Department of Probation who has sparked major changes and reforms in that area. Reverend Fred Davie, Executive Vice President of the Union Theological Seminary and Chair of the Civilian Complaint Review Board, who has led the way on major changes, including most recently the discipline matrix. Lurie Daniel Favors, the interim Executive Director of the Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College, one of the premier venues in this city for addressing these issues of justice and examining real solutions. Darrick Hamilton, Director of the Institute on Race and Political Economy at the New School and the Henry Cohen Professor of Economics and Urban Policy, a leading national voice for re-examining the history of structural racism and coming up with new solutions. Christopher Kui, former Executive Director of Asian Americans for Equality, again, someone who's made a national impact, providing actions for social justice and empowerment for Asian-American communities around the country. Yesenia Meta, Executive Director of LA Colmena Staten Island, working with immigrants, serving all people, including those who are undocumented. Yesenia is an extraordinary young leader, also happens to be a member of the U.S. Army Reserve. And Jo-Ann Yoo – who many of you heard from just weeks ago here, Executive Director of the Asian-American Federation – a great leader in this city and someone who has led the way fighting against the horrible incidents we've seen lately of Asian Americans being attacked and subject to bias crimes. Jo-Ann has helped to organize people all over this city to fight against that horrible reality. Acting as Executive Director of the Commission, currently the Chief Service Officer of New York City and someone who also has devoted her life to community empowerment and social change, Anusha Venkataraman will be the executive director of this commission.

So, that's the incredible lineup of people we'll put together. I want you to hear from the Chair. She has made an absolutely extraordinary impact on this city in so many ways and is seen all over the city as one of the leading voices for social change and has the respect of people all over the city. And I thank her for taking on this important new role. My pleasure to introduce Chair Jennifer Jones Austin.

Chair Jennifer Jones Austin, Racial Justice Commission: Good morning, Mayor de Blasio. My heart is racing in this moment. And what I'm appreciating is that it's racing because I am so inspired by your words and more importantly by your commitment to tackling this issue in the most meaningful ways. I want to thank you for leading the city and leading the nation in this unprecedented moment and in this most promising way. My fellow commissioners and I were honored to serve on this critically important commission for reasons we all can appreciate, especially during this time in our nation where the evidence of historical and modern-day racism [inaudible] and inequity persists in every pillar of society.

Our desire to help reconstitute our city's foundation to advance racial equity is heartfelt. Each of our commissioners has their own story, what brings them to this moment. For me, as the daughter of the civil rights leader who served as chair of the New York chapter of Dr. King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference and national chair of its economic justice arm, Operation Breadbasket. I was taught from an early age that the only way to rid our society of racism and its destructive impact on persons and communities of color is to dismantle the systems and the structures that enable it. And for nearly 30 years – nearly 30 years, I've strived to do just that, but never has an opportunity at this magnitude been before me – frankly, before all of us.

Advancing racial equity in this charter – in the City's charter is a rare opportunity. Mayor, you and your administration have established flagship programs and initiatives that are making a real difference. Some, I've been privileged to work on, including full day Universal Pre-Kindergarten for All, living wages for our vital and essential nonprofit workers, childcare parity, ending solitary confinement, and, most recently, policing report. But because systemic racism is embedded in our cities, institutions, and structures, we must do more than graft programs upon the current systems. The only way to uproot racism in our city's government structures is attacking it at the core through charter revision. I look forward to working with and leading the commission, engaging with and listening to New Yorkers, and, in the coming months, putting forward – putting forward to you and to the city our report and recommendations that will do the most to end racism and advanced true and lasting justice and inclusion for all.

So, I want to thank you again. I want to thank First Lady McCray for her vision as well. Just want to thank you on behalf of the commissioners and myself for the opportunity to serve in this most impactful way.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Jennifer. And thank you for taking on yet another mission on behalf of your city. You've been extraordinarily willing to step up time and time again. And this one, I agree with you, it is going to surpass everything else we've done previously in terms of the sweep and the impact that can have for the future of this city and this nation. I want to thank you, Jennifer. I want to thank Anusha, and certainly want to thank Chirlane for the hard work that went into choosing the commission members and determining how to approach this commission in a way that will be truly high-impact. And we do aspire to lasting change in this city, and we do aspire to something that can be a model for cities and states around the country, because we have to have this conversation. We have to identify structural and institutional racism formally, officially, and then we have to delineate the solutions and act on them, right down to our laws, our charters, our constitution. So, this is the way forward. And thank you, again, Jennifer, and all the members of the commission for taking this big step together.

All right, everyone, now, talking about big steps – in the State of the City, I delineated a vision of how we bring this city back. It's going to take a lot of big steps to bring the city back, but it can be done because there's incredible energy out there, there's incredible readiness among New Yorkers to come back, to come back stronger, and to address the underlying issues. I hear it and I see it and I feel it everywhere I go – there is a moment here, a transformational moment, New Yorkers feel it, and they're ready to engage and be part of big changes. So, to bring this city back, we have to change the way we do things at the grassroots. We have to listen to the voices of people and do things differently. One of the best examples of that, which went under-recognized for years, is the work being done by the Cure Violence Movement and the Crisis Management System. This is the epitome of grassroots leadership, of community-based solutions to community problems. This is a very different understanding of how government can work, government actually helping and supporting community members to find their own solutions. What we're seeing more and more as this is also crucial to keeping communities safe, and the safety we'll need to bring the city back strong. So, we've already seen the impact the Cure Violence Movement and the Crisis Management System can have. It's time to keep investing in it, deepening that effort. This is the epitome of what a recovery for all of us looks like.

So, we have set up new sites, new areas of this city where the Cure Violence Movement will now be active, where the Crisis Management System will be fully activated. And this is based on announcements we've made previously that are now coming to life. And then, you will now have the Cure Violence Movement, Crisis Management System active in precincts around the city. The new precincts will be the 49th Precinct – excuse me, 69th, 70th, 71st, and 1-0-3rd Precinct. All of them will now have this extraordinary initiative saving lives, stopping conflict, avoiding retaliation, doing the fundamental community-based things that go far beyond our normal conception of public safety. This is the new way of doing public safety. Obviously, we need all pieces of the equation and we do need always the work of the NYPD, but this is the community-based piece that can be more and more of the solution. We're doubling the Cure Violence workforce. As I announced in the State of the City, we'll be doubling the Cure Violence Workforce by June 1st, across all of the Cure Violence and Crisis Management System providers. And the City Council has really engaged this idea and pushed for it, fought for it, and they have a vision of continuing to expand the Cure Violence Movement and the Crisis Management System. City Council members, I think, have some of the most powerful vision of how to make this work at the community level. Without their leadership, we would not be at this point today. I want you to hear from three of them, starting with a Council Member I've worked with for years and years, representing Southeast Queens, also serving as Co-Chair of the Black, Latino and Asian Caucus in the Council, looked to by all his colleagues as a leader on these issues of both community safety and social justice – Council Member I. Daneek Miller.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you so much, Council Member. And, Council Member, I'm thinking back, as you speak, to when we got together in your district during some really tough times in the fight against COVID and the food drive that you put together with members of the clergy. I remember us talking with some of the young men from the community about what it would look like – remember that? Remember the conversation about –

Council Member I. Daneek Miller: You're absolutely right.

Mayor: A better – a better way to create safety and to work together, and I think the announcement today fits that beautifully. So, thank you for following through with that commitment and helping us to build this.

Council Member Miller: Thank you so very much. We're excited.

Mayor: Thank you very much, Council Member. Now, I'm going to turn to one of the Council Member's colleagues from central Brooklyn. And we too spent time together out in her community during the height of the crisis earlier last spring and summer. And I was very struck by Council Member Farah Louis' deep connection to our community and particular understanding of what young people in the community need. And she is also someone who believes in the power of the Cure Violence Movement and the Crisis Management System, and believes in the importance of expanding it into more areas of the city – Council Member Farah Louis, please give us your thoughts.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you so much, Council Member, very much appreciated. I look forward to continuing to work with you as we expand all these efforts. And now, turning to the Bronx, I was just there a few weeks ago up at Co-Op City with Council Member Kevin Riley, and there we were doing the work of equity by making sure that the vaccination effort was reaching everyone, particularly those hardest hit by COVID. But I know the Council Member also cares deeply about community solutions to gun violence and solutions that reach our young people more positively. So, I want you to hear his reflections on this moment as well – Council Member Kevin Riley.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you, Council Member. Thank you for the good work you're doing. You may be new to the Council, but you're not new to the community, and you're making a big impact. You're making a big impact already. Thank you so much.

Well – and we'll just stay in the Bronx for the next thing I want to talk about, which is it's Election Day in a few districts in the Bronx – and there's a special election today. There's two seats up in the City Council – Districts 11 and 15. So, if you live in District 11 in the Bronx, you can vote today in the special election for City Council. If you live in neighborhoods of Bedford Park, Kingsbridge, Riverdale, Norwood, Van Cortlandt Village, Wakefield, and Woodlawn. And District 15 in the Bronx in the neighborhoods of Fordham, Mount Hope, Bathgate, Belmont, East Tremont, West Farms, Van Nest, Allerton, and Olinville, you too can vote the special election for City Council. If you need to know more about where to go to vote and go to – excuse me, to vote.nyc – vote.nyc for more information. And polls are open until 9:00 PM tonight. So, Bronxites in those two districts, please get out there and vote. We need your voice to be heard.

All right, let's go over indicators for the day. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19 – today's report, 203 patients. Confirmed positivity level 56.28 percent. Hospitalization rate, 3.63 per 100,000. New reported cases on a seven-day average – today's report 3,334 cases. And number three, percentage of people testing positive for COVID-19 – today's report on a seven-day rolling average, 5.91 percent. So, again,

some good news in the reports today, but we want to keep working at every single day until we finally get COVID out of our lives.

All right, a few words in Spanish. We're going to go back to the Racial Justice Commission for this.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

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

Moderator: Hi, all. We'll now begin our Q-and-A. With us today is our Commission Chair Jennifer Jones Austin, Deputy Mayor Phil Thompson, Deputy Mayor Laura Anglin, Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi, CEO of Health and Hospitals Dr. Mitchell Katz, Marcos Soler at the Mayor's Office for Criminal Justice. And, with that, we'll go to Alison from PIX-11.

Question: Good morning to you. Two questions for you this morning. First is, City workers heading back to the office, starting in May. What about the workers where there's vaccine hesitancy? Obviously, you cannot force them to get a vaccine. Some of these workers will be returning to call centers, which are pretty crowded, forward-facing, dealing with clients. How are you handling this? Because there will be people who returned who have not been vaccinated yet. And also, I know Mr. Garrido from DC 37 was on this earlier, if he wants to weigh in too.

Mayor: Yeah. He doesn't happen to be on the call right now, but let me speak to this issue. We're doing this with a health and safety-first perspective. Deputy Mayor Laura Anglin has been leading the way, developing this approach, working with municipal labor and, of course, constantly consulting with our health care leadership. So I would say, yeah, there's going to be a lot of people who are vaccinated coming back to work, and there'll be some who are not, but the approach will be focused on distancing, on ventilation, on all the tools that we know keep people safe and we're going to bring back the workforce, which I think is going to help improve the impact for all New Yorkers, but do it in a way that is safe. There's no question we can do both at once. Go ahead, Alison.

Question: Yes. Also, obviously the Governor announced 50+ now eligible for the vaccine. The State seems to have skipped over some forward-facing frontline workers in 1-C, namely construction workers, journalists, your thoughts on the fact that, you know, workers who can't stay home, must go out and do their jobs have not been included?

Mayor: Allison, such an important issue. Journalists to me are the epitome of workers who should have the right to get vaccinated. You're in constant contact with people, you provide the essential service, people need information, they need the news, it makes no sense. So, look, the fact is we should have the freedom to vaccinate. It should be a local decision. We've got to restore democracy in the State of New York. We got to give back the power to cities, to counties, to decide what makes sense to do to reach our own people. So, the State rules from the very beginning have been uneven and sometimes incoherent. But what I know is there's a lot of folks who constantly out there serving other people, coming in contact, they deserve the right to be vaccinated. We're ready to vaccinate them. I want the freedom to vaccinate them so we can get the job done.

Moderator: As a programming note. We're also joined by Dr. Jay Varma. Next, we'll go to Juan Manuel from NY1.

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

Mayor: Good, Juan. Manuel. How are you?

Question: Very good. Thank you. I listened to you this morning on MSNBC. You spoke about how tourists should be coming to New York this summer. What's the plan? I mean, who do you want to come to the city? From where? And where are they going to stay? We know that many hotels are still part of the COVID-19 effort, either housing homeless New Yorkers, or maybe being used also for the tracing program. How is this going work?

Mayor: No, the vast majority of our hotels are not being used for any of those things, and folks in the hotel industry in fact have been expressing their commitment to New York and they're starting to get more and more travelers coming, more and more tourists and business travelers. Done the right way, that's going to be hugely important for our comeback. So, it has to be with a focus on health and safety first, always. But clearly, there's going to be so much this summer and fall happening in New York City. Okay, we're going to get five million people vaccinated by June. We're going to be a city that gets safer all the time. We've talked about the incredible cultural events we're going to have this summer, particularly outdoors. I think there's going to be a lot that people want to come experience and we can do it safely. Go ahead, Juan Manuel.

Question: And now that you have been vaccinated and your wife, the First Lady, has been vaccinated as well. I'm wondering, how has your behavior changed? Are you doing anything differently or expecting to do anything differently in the coming days? Because that's what all New Yorkers are hoping, right? To get vaccinated so they can just live life a little fuller. I don't know if you have anything to share.

Mayor: I want to actually emphasize how we have to stay vigilant and focused in doing the smart things that will help us fully move past this crisis. But I want to do one additional point to the previous question. Juan Manuel, I think another reason why a lot of people are to come to New York City this summer and this fall is because they will know it's safe. I think you're going to see a lot less international travel. I think there's some parts of the country where people will look at the lack of rules and lack of focus on health and safety and not be comfortable going there. I think we're going to be one of the places that people say, okay, that's a place that's focused on health and safety, there's a lot of great things to do, let's choose New York City this summer. I think you're going to see a lot of that. But to the question you raised. Now, I want to emphasize, everyone, yeah, I got vaccinated, Chirlane got vaccinated. We're still wearing masks. We're going to keep wearing masks. We're going to keep practicing all. I mean, I use hand sanitizer all the time. We're going to do all these things Dr. Chokshi talks about, we're going to stick to those rules, and I've said many times, all New Yorkers should assume until at least June, we should stick with everything we're doing. I do believe we'll get the five million New Yorkers fully vaccinated by June. I think that's going to be a game changer, but we got to stay vigilant. You know, we want to make sure we finish this mission. So, I'm not changing my basic approach, and I urge everyone get vaccinated and then keep to the rules that have worked. Before

you know it, we'll be in the second half of the year and then we'll be in a position to reconsider and see if we can do things a little differently. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next, we'll go to Emma from the New York Times.

Question: Hi, good morning, Mayor. My first question is about the new commission. So, I wanted to get your thoughts. Evanston, Illinois, is moving to become the first city to offer reparations to Black residents. And when I spoke with Jennifer Jones Austin, about the commission, she said that the commission should look at that. So, what do you think of the idea of reparations?

Mayor: I think everything should be on the table. Evanston, I appreciate what they did, and I think they focus that specifically on residents who had experienced housing discrimination. So, I think it was a particular issue they were trying to address, and I admire their effort. But look, what's clear with this commission, Emma, the mandate is to look at all elements of structural racism, institutional racism, and look at all possibilities for addressing it. There is no preconceived notion here. There was no specific policy action that was a litmus test. It was go and look at this issue, come back with a way that we can acknowledge where structural racism has existed, where it still exists, apologize for it formally as an official act, but most importantly, act on the changes we need. And so, the commission is going to look at a whole range of potential solutions, including changing the city's laws and changing the city's fundamental constitution, our charter. Go ahead, Emma.

Question: Thanks, and my next question is about return to work for city employees. So, on a March 18th presentation on return to work from the city's Department of Citywide Administrative Services, that agency leaders should encourage face coverings to be worn at all times. Is there a legal policy or a rationale for using the word encourage instead of requiring masks?

Mayor: I'll turn to Deputy Mayor Laura Anglin, we definitely believe that people should be wearing face coverings in all appropriate times. There are people who work in settings where there's really no one around them, we want to be clear about that, and that is a somewhat different reality, but we're going to be clear with folks that especially are coming into close contact that you need to have a mask on. Deputy Mayor Anglin, you want to speak to that?

Deputy Mayor Laura Anglin: Yeah, no, I agree with that, sir. If an employee cannot socially distance, they will be required to wear a face mask.

Mayor: Great. Thank you.

Moderator: Next is Ariama from Kings County Politics.

Question: Hi, good morning, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hey Ariama, how you doing?

Question: I'm good. So, I wanted to ask really quickly about this Citizen's Union. They're releasing a report about police reform and their recommendation was establishing a Deputy

Mayor for Public Safety. So, what do you think about basically making the NYPD a Mayoral agency?

Mayor: Well, the NYPD like many agencies officially is a Mayoral agency. And I understand the theory that's been used at times over the years, there was a separate deputy mayor focused on public safety. I think the model we've had where the First Deputy Mayor Dean Fuleihan focuses consistently on police issues and brings to bear the full weight of his role has been very effective in terms of fostering a number of the changes we need, and certainly you see that in the sheer extent of what's happened just in the last few months. Really want to urge everyone as they're considering the issues around the continued efforts at police reform, look at the incredible work that was done in the two reports that have come out already, and I want to thank Jennifer Jones Austin, and Wess More, Arva Rice who played a crucial role working with City Hall, working with NYPD. Read those reports and the sheer extent and sweep of reforms that are included in them and read the discipline matrix, and the MoU that goes with it, binding the NYPD to it. It's extraordinary change. I certainly can't remember any parallel moment in previous history. So, I think, you know, Deputy Mayor Dean Fuleihan and his team deserve a lot of credit for fostering those changes and I think that's the right way to go about it. Go ahead, Ariama.

Question: Staying on that topic, you think the Police Commissioner should be subject to the advice and consent of the City Council. Do you think that would have any backlash in terms of how the Commissioner operates?

Mayor: I've said that, you know, we work very closely with the council on so many levels, but I'm thinking as a steward of this city and its future there's, going to be a new mayor sitting here on January 1st and that new mayor needs the right to choose their own commissioner and get the commissioner going to work immediately. So, I think there's a particular crucial importance of that choice. I think the next mayor, next commissioner of course, have to work very closely with the Council and ensure there's a lot of transparency, but I think that's the right way to handle it.

Moderator: Next is Andrea from WCBS.

Question: Hi, good morning, Mr. Mayor. Thank you so much for taking my call. My question, I should say. Forgive me if I missed this in the beginning, but what percentage of the city workforce will be back May 3rd, and will there be exemptions for people who have health concerns or childcare issues?

Mayor: I'll turn to Deputy Mayor Anglin on some of the details, but I'll say Andrea, the – about right now, about 80 percent of the city workforce is at their work sites because the vast majority of what we do in the city of course is frontline work, whether it's health care, public safety, education, you name it. The folks who work in office settings are the ones overwhelmingly coming back beginning on May 3rd, and we're going to work with people, obviously, but we do believe, I believe this strongly, that when folks come back in person, it's going to allow us to achieve more. Certainly, we know that there's a certain amount of teamwork and creativity that comes from people being back together. It's really important for us to continue as we go through this crucial recovery year to get people back. But we will work with folks who have particular needs. Deputy Mayor Anglin, you want to speak to that?

Deputy Mayor Anglin: Yeah, no, I appreciate that, sir. So, we clearly will be working with employees as we bring them back starting May 3rd. We will be doing staggered schedules, you know, making sure that people are in the office sometimes, working remotely sometimes, so that we can ensure that we have enough space to keep our employees safe. And with that flexibility, hopefully employees will be able to deal with remote learning for school and blended learning for school and be able to manage that as well.

Mayor: Great. Thank you. Go ahead, Andrea.

Question: Thank you. And my other question, I know you've advocated for a slower reopening in certain sectors in the state, I'm curious why now you feel like it's good to bring the office workers back, May 3rd, why now?

Mayor: Different realities that I think need to be handled different. It's a great question, Andrea. I – look, I believe we have proven, for example, with our schools we have the gold standard of health and safety, and now we have the CDC saying even further we can bring back more kids to our schools. And in fact, what our health care leaders always say, that's in the interest of health of our children and our families, mental health, physical health, to get them back in school. I think with our public workforce, we need them to come back to their offices. We'll make more impact that way. We'll serve more people that way. I think they'll send a powerful message to the city about our comeback as well, but there are some areas that need to be handled differently. Obviously, our health care team vehemently disagreed with the Governor and the State of New York on reopening fitness classes, which are very different than schools, very different than offices. Why? Because people are in the middle of exertion, physical exertion, they're expending a lot of a breath. They're not, in some cases going to be wearing masks, we all know that, or they're going to have masks that have gotten wet and are not effective. They're in small, enclosed spaces, that did not make sense, and I hope that we'll be reconsidered. Equally, I've said the other day, we've gone far enough on indoor dining. Thank God, you know, one thing I'm very proud of, we have outdoor dining for every restaurant that wants to take advantage of it. We're – there's takeout and delivery and restaurants up to 50 percent. That's enough to keep everyone safe. Again, a setting where people take off their mask because they're eating and drinking, special limits and carrier needs to be taken there, while we see what happens with the next weeks as we deal with some outstanding questions like the variants. So, it really depends on the specific activity and how you can apply the health and safety measures to it. That's my quick overview. I just want to see if Dr. Chokshi wants to add anything?

Commissioner Dave Chokshi, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Sir, nothing to add to what you've said.

Mayor: Okay, great. Thank you. Go ahead.

Moderator: Next up is Michael from the Daily News.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Hey Michael, how are you, been?

Question: I'm good. Thanks for getting me in with the questions this morning. I wanted to ask you a question about the commission, and this is where you and Jennifer Jones Austin. Jennifer talked about the need to dismantle systems that enable racism. So, my question is, you know, in city government, what are the systems that enable racism? What do we need to dismantle here and how do we go doing that?

Mayor: Well, you're asking the giant question, Michael, that in fact is the reason we need this commission. I'll turn to Jennifer for her views, but I'll just start by saying this is historic work, historic because it's never been attempted anywhere in the country on this scale before, but historic also because it requires looking at the big picture in a way that we just don't do in the day-to-day work of government. A piece of this equation you saw recently in the work that Jennifer and her colleagues did working with the NYPD, a very important beginning, and I commend Commissioner Dermot Shea, who, you know, and his speech at the greater Harlem Chamber of Commerce issued a formal apology for the institutional racism that had existed in the NYPD and still needs to be weeded out, and obviously, in the letter that he wrote accompanying the second reform report. This is something that you've never seen before from a police commissioner. I think it was a very important contribution that was accompanied by a whole host of tangible reforms to address issues, not just structural racism, but a host of issues. I think that is an indicator of the shape of things to come. The commission's going to look at everything. So, I said, every city agency, the work of the city, the City Charter itself, but they're also going to invite in the private sector, cultural sector, the academic sector, that they can participate and step forward with their own acknowledgements and their own action plans and work with the commission on that, which I think is another really exciting part of this work. So, I think, you know, hugely important mission that this commission will now shape together and then bring to the people of this city. Jennifer, you want to add?

Chair Austin: Yes, I very much appreciate the question and I very much appreciate your response Mayor. You know, we, we don't yet know all that we need to know, but what we do know is that in this nation, time and time again there have been laws, there have been policies, practices that have been designed and implemented. And while, sometimes at face may not seem to be racist or discriminatory in nature, the impact is all – points to racism at every turn. And so, what we're going to be doing is looking at our laws, our policies, our practices, the systems that hold these laws, policies, and practices up and trying to really get at what is, you know, is it the design that is problematic? Is it the law in itself? How do we need to message it or do things differently so that the outcomes, the impact that results, is not disparate, is not discriminatory? Much work to be done, but we have enough evidence in places and spaces here in New York City and around the nation that tells us this is the work we need to do.

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Michael.

Question: That, and I have a question on the May 3rd reopening. You know, I understand that the commission is tasked with kind of identifying these things, but you know, these systems, I mean, it seems like you do have some sense of what they are, and I'm wondering if, you know, is there a reluctance to kind of talk about them on the front end to get more information or can you just kind of share some sense of where you think you'll be focused on, you know, their particular laws or policies in general you know, that you're looking at kind of taking on, and then I have another.

Mayor: Yeah, no, Michael, this, respectfully, is your second question, so, let's stay there, and we can, you know, the team will follow up with you on other matters. The – look, here's what I'd say, if you look across city agencies, you will see issues have been raised by leaders, by community members for a long time. We all know a lot of work went into changing the composition of the Fire Department. That work needs to deepen. We all know there've been real issues with the Department of Education, ensuring diversity at all ranks of the department, looking at the curriculum. Even something you might not think about at first blush, but it's been in the news a lot lately. How we go about preserving the city's history, the work of our Landmarks Preservation Commission, but ensuring it is focused on everyone's history, you know, the folks who built this city, the communities of color that often were left out of previous official histories. It really is across all areas. So, there's not, again, there's not a litmus test. There's not a preexisting mandate to act on this specific issue. This commission has got a lot to do, but its job is to look across the whole city government to look at the very foundational document of the city, which is our charter. But again, also to invite in non-city actors to join in this effort and to work on their own issues with us as well, and I think a lot of people are going to want to be a part of this, Michael, I think this is historic. It's the right moment in history where people need to come to grips with this, and this is going to be the vehicle to do it. Jennifer, would you like to add?

Chair Austin: I will simply add that we're moving into this and we're doing this work because we know as you just pointed to that, there are examples that can be done here and there that have devastated communities, individuals, families, and so we have enough of what we've experienced to help us appreciate the importance of leaning in, but there is no, there's no report that's yet been written that is not yet being surfaced. That's not what we're doing here, and we are going to remain as open as we possibly can so that we don't miss critical issues.

Mayor: Go ahead.

Moderator: We have time for two more. First, we'll go to Steve from WCBS Radio.

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

Mayor: Good, Steve, how you been?

Question: I'm alright. First on the return to work here. I take it, there's some amount of signaling and messaging here as well to New York's larger business community that it would be okay to bring their workers back as well, that the city is doing it. How amenable or flexible do you think they'll be, given we just saw the Partnership for New York City survey saying half of workers still won't be back by September, still going to be a lot of hybrid working, if you will, going forward. How flexible do you think, and do you hope, New York's broader workforce will be based on what the city is doing here?

Mayor: It's a great question, Steve, first of all, I mean, we saw in the news earlier today about Morgan Stanley bringing back a lot of its workforce. You're seeing more and more of these announcements. I think we should separate the question of, you know, blending and hybrid of in-office and remote work. I think you are going to see every company approach that differently, how much they need their folks full-time in the office, part-time in the office, some days, other days, you know, that every different company is going to work out. Let's put that question aside.

I think the question I would focus on that you raise is, are folks ready to start bringing back the workforce in whatever way makes sense, as quickly as possible? I certainly want to encourage that. We're going to have five million people vaccinated by June. I think for a lot of companies they'll make that decision to act in the next few months. I think a lot of other companies are going to wait until September as the natural inflection point with schools coming back fully, et cetera. But what we do see is this issue is now on the front burner, Steve. Companies are now seeing it's time to come back. It's time to recognize that there's progress happening, and it's going to help companies to do their work, and it's going to help surrounding communities to have those workers back and it's going to help small businesses. So, I think you're going to see a lot more of that in the coming next few months. Go ahead, Steve.

Question: Thanks for that. On the Racial Justice Commission here. This is a concept that I remember you raised almost a year ago now during the protests, and now that it's coming to fruition here, you know, nine months later. So, the process means it'll fall to the next mayor to implement this and inherit this. Is there a reason why there was such a delay here to make this so that it falls to the next mayor to really see the results here?

Mayor: I don't – I appreciate the question, but I wouldn't agree with the way of framing it. So, this Commission, we're going to set it up, that they can continue their work through this year and if they choose to into next year, and I think whoever the next mayor is, is going to value this work, and certainly look at these extraordinary leaders who are part of this Commission. But the Commission plans on by the end of the year, doing a report, and at that point, determining what steps they're recommending initially. They, again, can easily continue that work. There's a lot to do here that could play out over multiple years, but they will have a body of work this year and the ability to send items to the ballot. So, I have no question in my mind, you're going to see a lot of high-impact work, and then I would advise in advance, since we don't know who the next mayor is going to be, I would advise them to take this model and keep running with it because this is work that we need to do until the mission is done, and I wouldn't be surprised if that's worth putting several years of effort in to.

Moderator: Last, we'll go to Henry from Bloomberg.

Question: Mr. Mayor, how are you doing today?

Mayor: Hey, Henry, how you been?

Question: I'm good. I guess my question is very similar to the last question. But I would also frame it differently than either one of you, which is –

Mayor: Yeah, Henry, that is you being yourself right there.

Question: I guess so. In 2013, you ran this campaign that was on this whole insight that economic inequality is one of the central issues with not the issue of our time, and now it's 2021, and we're getting a commission to identify the areas in which economic and racial inequality has kept society's foot on the neck of people of races other than white races. So, I'm just wondering, given the fact that this was central to your reason for running for office, why are we getting this commission at this late date?

Mayor: Henry, you know, we, here's, here's the summation of how I've followed through on the vision of attacking the tale of two cities. We have redistributed now tens of billions of dollars to working people and communities of color. We fundamentally changed education with Pre-K for all, and now 3-K. Fundamentally changed the approach to affordable housing. You go down the list of things, obviously the police reforms, you know, that work followed through on the initial vision that I brought to office, but what has happened in the meantime is a deeper understanding of the fact that institutional and structural racism require not just a set of policy changes or not even individual and profound acts of redistribution, but the entire structure now has to be questioned, and as I said, right down to each agency in the city government, each major institution of our society, and the city charter and the city's laws itself – this is a deepening of the original mission, and as we've done this work, I think I've certainly been satisfied, the impact of each major policy change that really is reaching, you know, hundreds of thousands or millions of people. But I also become more and more convinced that we have to look at the entire structure and identify even more profound changes. So, I think this commission will do it. It's obviously the first in the nation. I think it will be a model for other places in the country, and I also think it'll be really tough work because it's never been done before, but I have faith that this group of people will find a way forward for us. Go ahead, Henry.

Chair Austin: May I just add one thing to that.

Mayor: No, please. I'm sorry, Jennifer. My apologies.

Chair Austin: I just want to add that, I mean, we all know, we all are appreciating more and more that structural and institutional racism in this country has been in, has been in place and has been built upon now for better than 400 years. To even begin to suggest that in seven years we would dismantle it in its entirety – you know, we can't get into that. We can't get into that. We need to center on what needs to be done in this moment to deepen our work, to look at these structural barriers, that even when we put new policies and initiatives in place will not get us where we ultimately need to be, and so this needs to be a time where we are building on the significant work that has been done and not getting too much into well did we not do enough, or did we not do the right thing?

Mayor: Thank you. Go ahead, Henry.

Question: Okay, I mean, I don't want it to really be literate, but a few years ago I was, you know, in front of the Justice Department and the demonstration, and 98 percent of the people who surrounded me weren't aware that it was structural racism that was causing a lot of this country's problems and inability to confront things. Maybe it was 97 percent, I don't know.

But here here's my second question. It has to do with the stubbornness again of these positivity rates and infection rates, and it seems out of whack with this sense of optimism and reopening. We had Scott Gottlieb pointing out that there are all these ZIP codes with over 15 percent positivity in New York City. I counted 30 with 10 percent or more or rounding off 10 percent or more. So, given this state of affairs and the fact that the data is still coming in slow, we're three days behind instead of two, why isn't there a greater sense of concern and worry that the infection rates are not coming down as sharply as you would think they should be?

Mayor: It's a – I know your questions with a full heart Henry, but I do think there's an editorial component. There's plenty of concern, plenty of vigilance, and I don't know anyone who worries more all day long than our health care team. I'm going to turn to them, I'll turn to in order and in just a second, Dr. Varma, Dr. Katz, Dr. Chokshi, but I want you to hear from them the way they're seeing the current situation. We are watching all that data all the time, and we're listening to different voices. Although, as you know, Henry, there's different voices in the medical field and in academia that have different views and you take each one in, but you can't treat anyone as gospel. I think that the three health care leaders that you hear every day from this gathering have led us through this war with extreme ability, and I really appreciate all their efforts and I would summarize it this way: everyone's watching the data constantly. There's a strong sense of vigilance. There's real concern about the variants, but we do see progress unquestionably, and we also are watching the steady pace of vaccination. We know it's about to uptick intensely and we believe that's the most critical factor. So, we're making decisions about what can be moved with all that in mind, but we're also saying some areas where we don't think there should be changes or needs to be a different approach. So, it's really, I think pretty fine-tuned, but let me do in order. Dr. Varma, then Dr. Katz, then Dr. Chokshi on each have their own view of the state of play. Go ahead, Dr. Varma.

Senior Advisor Dr. Jay Varma: Yeah, thank you very much for the question Henry and I think I would just really try to emphasize, I mean, we speak on these press conferences every day, and if there is a one thing that we are absolutely consistent in, is that we are deeply concerned about the fact that the rates of infection have not declined as dramatically as they should be. It's the reason we raise caution about people participating in indoor activities, it's the reason we released, you know, a very extensive guidance on how to die in safely for people that choose indoor dining, and the reason we keep emphasizing how important it is for people to be observing the importance of masks, distancing, hand-washing and frequent testing, and then of course, getting vaccinated as soon as possible.

Now, that is absolutely what we're concerned about right now, and we think that there's a real critical importance for people to maintain that vigilance over the next several weeks and possibly a bit longer. At the same time, we also know the effectiveness of these vaccines. We know the effectiveness from clinical trials. We know the effective this from real world lived experience looking at the UK, looking at Israel, looking at other selected datasets where individual populations have been vaccinated. So, we also know that even though we need to be incredibly persistent right now, there is promise on the horizon, and so it certainly does make sense to plan for a future that will be better while at the same time also recognizing that you need a plan B – if things don't go the way you want, you need to redirect, and so that's the way we're looking at it right now, and I just really do want to emphasize that we want people to get the message that now is not the time to let up. But there will be a time, some point in the future and we have a pathway to get there.

Mayor: Thank you, go ahead, Dr. Katz.

President and CEO Mitchell Katz, NYC Health + Hospitals: Yeah. Dr. Varma has done such a great job. I don't have a lot to add other than to say that there's been unanimity among your health experts. We talk to each other every day, we support each other. We believe in the work we're doing together. I'm very pleased to see decreases in the number of deaths and decreases in the number of patients who are seriously ill and require ventilation, and I believe that is because

of the success of the vaccines. I believe that once we're able to vaccinate the entire population you'll see that the cases themselves begin to decrease more dramatically, but as a physician, of course, the thing I'm most worried about is losing life or people having prolonged hospitalization, and I'm glad that the vaccines are so effective at preventing that, even when there are variants the vaccines still are effective at decreasing the severity of this disease. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Thank you, and now, Dr. Chokshi.

Commissioner Chokshi: Yes, thank you, and thanks for the question Henry which I appreciate you know, what I would just add is that this is not something inexorable that is happening to us. This is something that we as New York City have a lot of agency with respect to how we can continue the fight against COVID-19. All of the things that you've heard us say that we know works with respect to beating back the virus masking distancing, handwashing, getting tested, getting vaccinated when it's your turn. Those are the things that will help us in what is ultimately, you know, a tug of war between nature and New Yorkers, and in that match, I'm going to bet on New Yorkers because we've shown that we can do the things that do work with respect to curbing the spread of COVID-19. Now is the time for us to recommit to do that, to hold on so that we can make that the homestretch of what has been a marathon for the city.

Mayor: The very quotable Dr. Dave Chokshi – tug of war between nature and New Yorkers, we're betting on New Yorkers. Thank you, I agree, Dr. Chokshi, and look, as we conclude today, everyone – I'm betting on New Yorkers too. I'm betting on New Yorkers all the time, and that is a bet that we win regularly. I believe we're in a position now to bring this city back and bring it back better, truly better, but not just in that generic way. People say better, you know, newer, shinier buildings, no. A better approach, a better way of creating justice and fairness. We have a chance to do something in New York City that will lead the nation. We have a chance to address the history of racism in an open and transparent manner and to actually come up with solutions that will be lasting. We have a chance to show that this dialogue is worth having out in the open. Not to be scared of it, not to limit it, but to take it to its farthest reaches because solving this problem – it's not going to be overnight, but solving the problem with structural, institutional racism is our recovery. It is the only pathway to our recovery. We can't be whole, if we don't eradicate the cancer of racism. We just, it won't work. The city won't work, the country won't work, and this is the moment that blessed, transformational moment, we don't get many of these in our lives, but this is that moment. So, right now we are gathering a group of extraordinary New Yorkers to take on this mission and to show us a way forward. I think it's an extraordinarily inspiring moment and opportunity for change, let's grab that opportunity and run with it and make the changes that will make this city better for everyone for a long time to come. Thank you.

###