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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOLDS MEDIA AVAILABILITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everybody. The comeback in New York City continues strong every day. I want to thank all New Yorkers who are part of this extraordinary comeback story. We see signs of recovery all across this city. And one of the things we're focusing on this week and the weeks ahead is bringing back our small businesses, the backbone of New York City, so crucial to the character and energy of our neighborhoods – mom and pop stores, New Yorkers who have built something that really means so much to all of us. We need to be there for them. We need to go and put our money where our mouth is and help our local small businesses. So, a lot of us here at City Hall, for example – a lot of people like to go to Blue Spoon Coffee. And Blue Spoon Coffee is a small business on Chamber Street, opened in 2005. I want to thank the owner and New York City-native Heather Teegarden. This is the epitome of a small local business built from scratch, hires New Yorkers, kept going no matter what in the pandemic, and they make very good coffee.

[Mayor de Blasio drinks coffee]

There, I can tell you – a sample. They make very good coffee. So, we – you know, we appreciate there's lots of different options in this city, but what we're saying with the Shop Your City challenges, instead of going to the big chains – they have a place in the world too, but let's really focus on our local small businesses in the weeks ahead. Let's help them come back strong. Putting your money there makes a big difference and people are going to appreciate it. So, please, check out your local small businesses and let's help them come back strong.

Now, another example of us coming back strong, some of the biggest names in the tech community are coming back strong in New York City. We had great news yesterday, Facebook is bringing back employees to their offices in New York City on July 12th. So, what we're seeing more and more – a lot of companies are making this decision that it's time to start bringing people back, because they know they can have more impact if people are working in-person. We did that with our City workers at the beginning of this month. It's been very successful. It's been safe. It's helped us do more for the people in the city. I know the tech community is seeing things the same way and so many other businesses. They want to be part of this comeback. We need them strong. We need them to fight the unemployment challenge and build jobs in this city. The fact that they are choosing to bring their workers back to the offices is crucial, because it's also going to support all the small businesses in the surrounding communities. So, this is good news as well.

Now, everything of course is framed by our vaccination effort – it continues to grow. And the vaccination effort – I'm going to tell you some new approaches today that I think are very exciting. We're going to be innovating constantly, because each additional New Yorker we get vaccinated is a way from the COVID era and to our future. So, here we are, as of today, from

the very beginning, 8,130,889 doses. Just think about that for a moment. That is an astounding figure. By far, the biggest vaccination effort in the history of New York City, growing every day. Today, one of the things I want to update you on is our effort to reach homebound New Yorkers. This was an area of real concern as we started vaccination. We now have reached the homebound New Yorkers who asked for help in their homes, who could not leave their homes, needed vaccination teams to come to them. In some cases, they took, of course, two shots. But now, we have reached over 9,000 homebound New Yorkers. We've gone through the entire list of folks who qualified and asked for in-home support. We also are able to give over 3,000 family members and caregivers shots at the same time – amazing effort. I want to thank the Fire Department, they led the way, they organize this. Department for the Aging played a crucial role in working out the approach and helping reach the seniors. Amazing team effort between two City agencies that reached literally the most vulnerable New Yorkers in the midst of this crisis and gave their families peace of mind. It was so important. But we learned that this approach can work for a lot of people. And so, we're going to now offer it to more New Yorkers, specifically New Yorkers 75 years old or older, or disabled New Yorkers who would benefit. Folks in those two parts of our community who would appreciate the opportunity to have in-home vaccination, we'll send our teams directly out to you. So, if you're 75 or older and you haven't yet been vaccinated, or you happen to be disabled and you haven't yet been vaccinated, and you'd like the vaccination team to come straight to your home, straight to your apartment, we'll do that now. You can call 877-VAX-4NYC or go to VAX-4NYC.nyc.gov, and sign up for that very personal, very direct support.

We are going to go the extra mile whatever it takes. And we're going to go wherever people are, so you've got to see our vaccine buses out all over New York City the next few days. And with so many amazing attractions coming back, beaches coming back – so you're going to see the vaccine buses at the beaches. Go get vaccinated, hit the beach. Real simple. You're going to see them at Governor's Island. A lot of places where people are going to be this weekend, they're going to have that opportunity fast, easy, safe, free opportunity to get vaccinated. So, everyone take advantage of that.

All right. Now, a recovery for all of us – I talk about all the time, it's what we have to achieve – a truly inclusive recovery. Of course, it means keeping everyone safe, getting everyone vaccinated. Of course, it means bringing back our small businesses in communities all over the city, our immigrant small businesses that are part of the lifeblood of this city. There's so many pieces to a recovery for all of us. Clearly, safety – public safety and people having confidence is crucial to our recovery as well. And that means addressing what has become a painful reality, not just in the city, but all across this country. And I need to be blunt about the reality of hate crimes. We've had hate crimes, unfortunately, for a long time in this city, in this country. But what we've seen in the last few years is different. We saw white supremacy and nationalism aided and abetted directly from the White House during the presidency of Donald Trump. We saw forces of hate unleashed. Let's not kid ourselves, it doesn't matter what your political views are, something changed, and it became to too many people permissible to express hatred and division openly. That has certainly had an impact on what we're dealing with, but it doesn't stop us. It means we need to redouble our efforts to fight hate and we've got to work with outstanding community leaders and organizations to reach deep into the grassroots.

Fighting hatred, we've talked about before. These hate crimes and bias goes against everything we believe as New Yorkers and our whole history, our whole identity as New Yorkers. This is

the great coming-together place in the world. The most diverse place on earth and successful because of it. So, hate to has no place here. We'll educate people. We'll show solidarity. We'll have community-based efforts. We'll have efforts in our schools. And we'll also ensure there are consequences for anyone who commits a hate crime. In fact, we just had, in the last day, the NYPD arresting individuals who are part of the anti-Semitic attacks over this last weekend. I spoke to two of the victims of those attacks. I heard the fear they felt, the pain they felt, the sense of insecurity. We can't let that happen in New York City and the NYPD is going to play a crucial role. As I said, you can't just do it through policing. You need to do it with communities. And we need partners who are going to make a difference on the ground.

So, today, I'm announcing crucial new initiative – Partners Against the Hate – PATH. And the initiative is called PATH Forward, because it's all about where we go from here, how we get this hate out of our lives and move forward together as a city. It's a \$3 million investment in community organizations that do ordinary work and know how to fight the hate. And they do it working with communities, organizing community-based efforts, solidarity between communities. This is crucial. I want to remind you, every time we've seen an uptick in hate against any of our communities, it is the coming together of other communities in solidarity that has helped to fight it back. Today, I'm joined by six – the six anchor organizations, the core organizations that will be part of PATH Forward. And I want to give them each credit and thank them all. From the Asian-American Federation, Jo-Ann Yoo; from the Arab-American Association of New York, Marwa Janini; from the Anti-Violence Project, Beverly Tillery; from the Hispanic Federation, Frankie Miranda; from the Jewish Community Relations Council, Rabbi Bob Kaplan; and from the 67th Precinct Clergy Council, Pastor Gil Monroe. These are all outstanding leaders would do so much every day – perfect New York City rainbow of people coming together in common cause.

So, I want you to see this extraordinary group of people. They're going to join with me now. And they are going to ensure that people in communities see and feel the presence of forces of good of community groups that want to foster understanding and mutual support. This is all about fighting back the hate. Local community patrols, multi-ethnic, multi-community patrols coming together in common cause. Doesn't this look like New York City to you? Doesn't this look like the best of New York City? To see people in common cause who wants to foster a single community for all of us. That's what New York City is at our very best. And that's how we recover. We need to bring out in the open the tough facts. We need to encourage people to report any act of bias so that we can follow up on it and stop it. We need to constantly work to break down negative stereotypes, to push back the hate that has been fueled in recent years, kick it out in New York City altogether. I want you to hear from two of these leaders who are absolutely devoted to creating a unified city and upholding their communities as part of the beauty of all communities together in New York City. First from the Asian-American Federation, Executive Director Jo-Ann Yoo.

[...]

Mayor: Thank you so much, Jo-Ann. I want to just say that again. It is all of us against racism. And this is how we win in New York City, millions and millions of people in good will, standing shoulder to shoulder, standing up to the hatred. It makes such a difference. Another leader I want you to hear from, I've known him a long, long time. And he's kind of legendary for helping to bring people together. And part of that New York story of how we stand together in solidarity, at

all times. That's what makes us great. Rabbi Bob Kaplan, the Jewish Community Relations Council, also Executive Director of the Center for Community Leadership. Rabbi.

[...]

Mayor: Amen, amen. And that is the New York City way. Everyone, path forward again, community-based solutions to the hatred, community-based solutions that create unity and solidarity. This initiative will work directly with our Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes. New York City is clear about the fact that we have to be systematic and strategic in fighting hate crimes. We created, working with the City Council, an office years ago to focus on this effort constantly, to get ahead of it, to build a future without hate. I want to thank the Director of that office, Deborah Lauter and the entire team at the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes. They're doing extraordinary and heartfelt work and we need them now. I look forward to the day when we can say we have gotten hate out of New York City once and for all. Thank you, everyone. Thank you. And my good friends here, I'm really happy to be in your presence. And I appreciate, deeply the work you do.

All right, now, everyone. We are going into a very important weekend, of course, for so many of us, it's the unofficial start of summer. It is also Memorial Day weekend. And I always say to people, Memorial Day weekend should not just be barbecues, Memorial Day weekend should be a time to think about those who served us and those we lost. Because of the holiday we're not going to have a press conference Monday, but I will be at the Intrepid for the Memorial Day ceremony. And it's a time to reflect on people who struggled, who fought, who gave their lives so that we could live in democracy and freedom. Let's every one of us, take a moment on that day to really appreciate those who have served us. And to continue to appreciate those who do serve us now in our Armed Forces.

Okay, let's go to indicators. And this is a good news report for sure, continuing a pattern. All because of vaccination. Number one, daily number of people admitted to New York City hospitals for suspected COVID-19, today's report, 80 patients. Confirmed positivity, 26.25 percent. Hospitalization rate, 0.76 per 100,000. So, very good news on that front. Number two, new reported cases on a seven-day average, today's report going down again, 369 cases. This is absolutely outstanding. Number three, percentage of people testing citywide positive for COVID-19, the countdown continues. We got more work to do. Every single person who goes out there and gets vaccinated is going to help us achieve this next goal. We are at, on a seven-day rolling average, 1.03 percent COVID positivity in New York City. A little more push here, and we're going to get under one percent and then we keep driving downward from there. And we knock COVID out of New York City. So, this is great news today. I'm going to say a few words in Spanish, and I want to talk about the path forward here and the fight against hate crimes.

[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: Will now begin our Q and A. As a reminder, we're joined today by Dr. Chokshi, by Senior Advisor Jay Varma, and by Deborah Lauter, the Executive Director for the Office of the Prevention of Hate Crimes. First question today goes to Andrew Siff from WNBC.

Question: Good morning, Mr. Mayor, and everyone on the call. I'm wondering, Mr. Mayor on the mayor's race, if I can ask. Eric Adams is facing some criticism from some of his rivals that by accepting the support of the PBA, he may be implicitly celebrating the return of stop-and-frisk and other policies that are not celebrated in communities of color. I was wondering if I could get you to respond to that?

Mayor: As you know, Andrew I have not had a lot to say on this mayor's race yet. And at the appropriate time I will. I don't follow that assessment given that Eric Adams has been a strong voice for police reform and against police brutality for decades. So, I certainly don't think that follows, he clearly spoke out against stop-and-frisk at the time. So, I think that says it all. Go ahead, Andrew.

Question: Yes. And yesterday you did say you are going to be ranking five choices and you were going to be trying to come up with a way to really educate New Yorkers about ranked choice voting. To be clear, are you planning to publicly announce your five choices? And if so, will you do that in time for it to influence voters' opinions?

Mayor: Again, Andrew, I'm watching this race closely. I really believe it's still coming together. This is unlike any mayor's race I've ever seen. It is very, very late developing. Because of COVID in particular, the vast majority of New Yorkers are not going to pay attention until the last week or two, even the last few days. So, I'm going to continue to watch. If I think it's important to say something publicly, I will. I'm certainly going to rank five candidates in my own personal ballot. I'm urging every New Yorker to understand this. With ranked choice voting, you got to vote for all five lines. Choose the candidates in order of your preference, fill in all five, because you don't know if that last choice you make now may not have an influence on the election. We've seen a lot of close elections. This is definitely going to be a close election. So, if you don't rank all five places, you could throw your vote away. Your vote could literally be exhausted and not have an impact when it could have had an impact. So, I'm going to do all five. I'm going to urge everyone to do all five. If and when I want to talk about it, I will certainly let you know.

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

Question: Hey, Mr. Mayor. Good morning.

Mayor: Good morning, Michael. How are you doing?

Question: I'm doing all right. I wanted to ask you about a letter that the group Tax Equity Now sent to the Justice Department last week. And they're calling on the Justice Department to look into the City's property tax system. You know, they've got I think a case pending still in court. I think there's an appeal pending. And you know, I wanted to know what you think of this and how you respond to the critics. I know you have a report coming out later in the year toward the end of your term. I'm wondering how you respond to the critics who feel you've kind of passed the buck on this issue and let it kind of sit for you know, most of your time in City Hall?

Mayor: You know, Michael, for decades, there have been very few serious attempts to reform property taxes in New York City. Working with the City Council, we put together a really

extraordinary group of thoughtful leaders to come up with a new vision. They issued a report and then COVID hit. If COVID hadn't hit we would've had final recommendations. I would have expected, they would have been acted on already in Albany. That commission is back. It's active, it's holding hearings. There will be a report in the coming months with very specific plans that Albany can vote on. That could happen this year. That could happen next year. But either way you slice it, we're completing the mission. We're putting a very specific package on the table for Albany to finish. Most mayors haven't done that. We did that and it's going to help bring a lot more fairness and equality. Look, our property tax system is not fair and equal. It needs to be addressed. Here's the way to do it, with the plan we're going to put forward. Okay, Michael. Go ahead.

Question: Thanks, Mr. Mayor. You mentioned the resurgence of tech companies before in the city. And I wanted to ask you, you know, some of these companies and how they operate has had an adverse effect on the newspaper industry. And, you know, I'm curious if you have any thoughts on what should be done about that, if anything, from a government perspective? And if the City has a role in any of that? I mean, I know you've talked about newspaper industry before in some of your emails. I was wondering, just kind of what you think about that? Do you think government has a role? Do you think City government has a role in trying to do something about that?

Mayor: Yeah, I think first of all, Michael, I believe the future will be more and more, I hope, you know, subscriber-based approaches that give the media the ability to be independent and have security and not just be at the whim of the private market I think more and more you will see government-supported approaches with the right way. That's done all over the world, and we know it can work where there's government support for a free and independent media. One of the ways we have done that is through our advertising dollars, really appreciate that I've heard a lot of response, a lot of embrace from community and ethnic media that we have been putting an unprecedented amount of city advertising dollars into those outlets to help keep them alive, representing voices of communities all over the city. We are going to advertise, city government, state government, federal government, we're going to advertise no matter what, we're going to send out all sorts of public messages. Why don't we support community and ethnic media, independent media, use those advertising dollars to help keep me the outlets alive and keep a vibrant public debate going. So, I think there's a lot of different models where public dollars can make a real impact.

Moderator: The next is Nolan from the Post.

Question: Hey, good morning everybody.

Mayor: Good morning, Nolan. How are you today?

Question: I'm all right, Mr. Mayor, how are you?

Mayor: I'm good. Are you highly caffeinated today, Nolan?

Question: Four cups in so far.

Mayor: It's a light day. Okay, go ahead.

Question: Yeah, just the light day, and once again, mourning the loss of [inaudible]. But on questions of transparency when it comes to vaccinations, there were a lot of questions about sort of the, you know, how the shots were distributed and how access is in all the various neighborhoods across the city. We've done a bunch of stories looking at the racial breakdowns, the other demographic breakdowns. We've also done stories looking at sort of the accessibility by neighborhoods – where can people go to actually get their shots? We were told by your administration to file FOILs, when it came to wondering how the shots were actually being distributed across the city. The Health Department responded saying that those records are exempt from the FOIL law. I'm wondering what you make of that - how can we track how the shots moved about the city and how easy it was for people to actually get them if the Health Department won't release that information?

Mayor: Yeah, Nolan, I appreciate you raising it because I certainly have not heard that before, and I want to make sure we are transparent. There may be some very specific things that are areas of confidentiality, and I certainly understand there's times when the FOIL laws are applicable, but you know, we've been putting out information on our vaccination with a lot of breakdown by neighborhood, by ZIP code. I want us to keep doing that. So, please follow up with our team. I'll certainly instruct them to see if we can do more to give you the information you need. Go ahead.

Question: Let me just detail a little more of what we were asking. We were asking for by hospital, by hospital system, by distribution point, how many shots were being requested and how many of those shots were actually being provided. Every week, the various providers around the city file a plan with the Health Department who submits it to the state, and then the state sends back how many doses, and then there's an allocation set up across the city. We were trying to better understand how that works. We weren't asking for personal details, personal information, and yet – any sort of like patient information, personally, identifiable information – and yet the Health Department says that it should not and will not release this information. So, on those broad strokes, do you think this is information that should be released?

Mayor: Again? Nolan, I want to know more, but if you said to me, let me put it in my own words. I think people need to see how this system has been working. I think they need to see how we're addressing the issues of disparity. I think they need to see how we're trying to ensure that the vaccination effort reaches more and more New Yorkers. Those are all things that I think are in the public interest. I don't know all the legal details, but I'm going to certainly push to make sure that we are being a maximally transparent because this is the number one issue of the day. I want to get as much information out as possible.

Moderator: The next is Abu from Bangla Patrika

Mayor: Abu you there. Hello, hello? Are you on mute, Abu? There you go.

Question: Mayor, hi. How are you?

Mayor: Good. How are you doing today?

Question: Good, thank you so much, Mayor. Yesterday, I was in Jackson Heights, and people are talking about – it was very emotional, when it was time during the time of COVID and the way you handled it, especially when you stood up and said, no New Yorker will be hungry, everybody can get the food regardless of their status or immigration or anything, and everybody got the food and no one was hungry. Can you please tell us how much how you managed it and how much money the city spent for providing the food?

Mayor: Abu, such an important question. Thank you. You know, we get a lot of topics, a lot of things that are sort of in the front of people's mind, but the effort to keep people fed, that effort to fight hunger is actually one of the single most important things. It doesn't get a lot of attention, but nothing's more important than stopping hunger in New York City, and I'm proud to say, we said from the beginning, we would not let any New Yorker go hungry. We've put a huge amount of resources in it, and you've heard the reports on hundreds of millions of that have been provided. Abu we will get you today, an update on the number of meals that have been given and how much it has cost. But I can tell you, we continue a hundred percent of the committed, no New Yorker will go hungry. We want to get out of this crisis, make sure everyone gets out of it safely, and we'll continue to provide food in neighborhoods all over New York City. Go ahead, Abu.

Question: People also say when we didn't have anyone at that time, the Mayor stood up and said, no one is going to be hungry, and they feel like their [inaudible]. Anyway, the second question is that students, they are going to the school in September. So, it's been a long time. A lot of students, there were in the home, and they have different kinds of attitudes, different kinds of habits. What is your suggestion to be prepared for the next school year?

Mayor: Yeah, really important, Abu. Look, here's why I'd say – at first of all, we know right away parents of hundreds of thousands of kids who are ready for them to come back to school in September, right this minute, no questions asked. They're just ready. I think a lot of parents are ready for a change. A lot of parents are ready to see their kids get the best possible education, which is in-person. Parents who have first of all, parents who want to get their kids vaccinated. We are ready, right now from 12 years old up, you can go to nyc.gov/vaccine find a location near you that has the vaccine for younger people. You can get vaccinated for free from this point all the way, of course, till September. Second, parents who want to talk to a doctor or a pediatrician, if they don't have their own pediatrician, we will connect them to a clinician to answer any and all concerns. They have third open houses. We're going to start that in June next week start to offer opportunities for parents who have their kids on remote right now to come in and see the schools, get acclimated, ask questions, see all the things have been done to protect health and safety, that gold standard we've been talking about. I think all of those efforts are going to help really answer parents' concerns, and we'll be ready to go in September for all our kids.

Moderator: The last question for today goes to Reuvain from Hamodia.

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

Mayor: Good. How are you doing?

Question: Good, good, nice summer day in New York.

Mayor: There you go. I like your positive attitude.

Question: Yeah. Yeah. You know, I feel like a kid again with the Garden, you know, roaring, booming at a playoff game.

Mayor: It was pretty – now that was amazing last night, this is something where you and I are a hundred percent unified. Wasn't that beautiful last night?

Question: Yeah, you know, I feel like Gersh, I get the last question of the day so we can just schmooze right?

Mayor: There you go.

Question: Yeah. I just wanted to ask the candidates that are leading the mayoral race have generally been the ones that have opposed the call for defunding police a while, the ones who support for the funding at the bottom of the polls. Do you in any way see this as a repudiation of the Defund movement?

Mayor: Look, there's a lot of factors. It's an important question, Reuvain. There's a lot of factors here as to why each candidate is where they are, and polling is only so good as we kept learning in recent elections. But I would say it this way. I think people understand we need to constantly see reform and safety as walking hand in hand. This is what we said from the beginning of this administration. When I said we had to end Stop and Frisk as we knew it, I said, we could do that and still be safe, and we combined a neighborhood policing and precision policing and managed to show that you could move in a reform direction and actually keep driving down crime. We did that for six years until the pandemic. I think voters understand that balance. So, my answer directly to your question is the voters of this city, overwhelming, I'm convinced, want a balance. They want reform. They want non-discriminatory policing. They want respectful policing, but they also believe the NYPD has a crucial role to play in this city protecting all of us. That's the balance I think people are looking for. Go ahead.

Question: So, you've added lots of cops to Jewish neighborhoods now, amid a recent rise in attacks. Now considering that thousands of cops have quit this year, did you have any difficulty finding these extra officers and where did you take them from?

Mayor: No, in fact, look, I understand for a variety of reasons, including just very specific pension issues, some officers chose to leave who had more than 20 years of service, but we have a huge number of people who want to join the NYPD and we had no trouble at all filling our last class that graduated at 850 officers this month. We have another almost 600 coming next month. We just are in the middle of doing a new test. We had outstanding recruitment effort, some of the highest numbers of African American applicants we've ever had, more and more women applying. We're not going to ever have trouble finding high-quality of folks to join the NYPD. It is unquestionably clear. So, now as we've gotten additional officers coming out of the academy, that's been one of the reasons we can make these deployments effectively, and you saw, you know, they really want to credit the NYPD and credit the community leaders that we've been working with, who said, let's have a strong presence to ensure that these anti-Semitic attacks stop immediately. I think the presence is helping a lot. We're going to keep that presence going

through [inaudible] for sure, and then continue to move forward, and look, I'll conclude on this. We have seen before in this city, unfortunately voices of hate come forward, but they never win in New York City. This is really important. I mean, you can go back through decades and decades, and you'll see the same reality. Hatred comes up and tries to dominate our city, and then ultimately is defeated, because this is a city that actually is for everyone. That's who we are, and it's going to happen again here. Our Asian American brothers and sisters have been through so much. Our Jewish brothers and sisters have been through so much. We've got to stop hate, and we're all going to do it together. You saw everyone gathered together here a few minutes ago in common cause to stop hate, we will prevail because that's the New York City way. Thank you, everyone.

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