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Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams Makes an Economic and Health-Related Announcement

March 24, 2022

Mayor Eric Adams: Thank you. Thank you so much. Sandy and Randy, it's good to see you. Let me be clear on something, I'm the mayor of the city, and I'm going to make some tough choices. And people are not going to agree with some of them. They're going to look through their primary lens. They're going to talk about different things, but generals lead from the front. I was not elected to follow. I was not elected to be fearful but to be fearless. I must move this city forward. If it's about ridding our streets of guns, it's about turning around our educational system, it's about dealing with our economy, I know people would like to stay and just pinpoint one issue and one item and make a decision, but I have to take the totality of my city and your city to turn around. And I want to be clear, I am unafraid of making the decisions, just like I was unafraid to put on that uniform and patrol the streets of this city. Tough choices take a tough person to be able to make them.

Mayor Adams: And I know and you know, 8.8 million people in this city, 30 million opinions. I got it. And today, the decision we're making, we're not making it loosely, haphazardly. We're not doing it because there are pressures to do it. We're doing it because the city has to function. We're leading the entire country, for the most part, in unemployment. We're seeing unbelievable vacancies in our business district. Everyday men and women that are standing right here is dependent on our economy turning around so they can provide for their families. Then, we have to have vaccination rules to make sure that we don't close down the city again. You take all of the combinations of what we must do, and you realize you better have a mayor that's willing to make those tough choices and willing to stand up and do what's right, and that is what we're doing today.

Mayor Adams: Today, we are joining and saying that we will continue to take steps for New Yorkers, for visitors to come back to this city, to ensure that union employees are working, to ensure that we open our entertainment venues, our ballparks, our concert stages, to bring people to this city. A multi-billion dollar industry is tied to tourism. That's a real issue for us. And I've always said over and over again, we're going to focus on the science, we're going to do what's right, and we're going to make sure we're healthy. And being healthy is not only physically healthy. It's economically healthy.

Mayor Adams: Unemployment leads to the economic unhealthiness of this city. All of these things are taken into mind. And since we lifted the mask mandate for K through 12 students, cases have remained low. I've stated we were going to peel this back in a smart way one step at a time. And the same goals with our lifting of the patron requirements, another Key to New York City, another layer peeled away. New York City's at a low risk environment, and so today we take another step in the city's economic recovery and support local businesses, entertainers, and performances, and those performance venues across the entire city. And just as any player, some people will boo us, but there are also those who would be employed and would cheer us. That is not only the game of baseball, but that's the game of life, and we have to be on the field in order to win in both the game of life.

Mayor Adams: Today, I sign Emergency Executive Order 62, expanding the performance exemption to private employer mandates. This is about putting New York City-based performers on a level playing field. Day one when I was mayor, I looked at the rule that stated "Hometown players had an unfair disadvantage for those who were coming to visit." And immediately, I felt we needed to look at that, but my medical professionals said, "Eric, we're at a different place. We have to wait until we are at a place where we're at a low area, and we could reexamine some of the mandates." We're here today. Currently, only non-residents are exempt under this executive order. We expanded it to residents of New York City. It's unimaginable. We were treating our performers differently because they lived and played for home teams. It's not acceptable. This exemption has been put in our sports teams at a self-imposed competitive disadvantage, but this new order will help boost our economy.

Mayor Adams: Now, before I go on, let's be clear about this. I've said it, and I will continue to say it, all of us should be vaccinated, even our players. We will continue to promote vaccinations and booster shots. It's imperative that we do. That's how we got here. That's why we have an NBA season because of the vaccination. Over 90 percent of players did so, and I'm hoping that we will reach the 100 percent numbers in both Major League Baseball and in basketball and other professional sports. We will continue to push and hope that they do the vaccination and booster shots. This is about supporting our local vendors, our local stores, and performers. Walking outside of Yankee stadium the other day and hearing those vendors on the ground that benefit from the baseball season saying how important it is. Players attract people to the stadium. And even here, in this area, where what I will continue to say, Shea Stadium, vendors benefit. These union employees who make sure this field is operating benefit from the teams being here.

Mayor Adams: In our nightlife, we're going to keep our nightlife industry thriving, a \$35.1 billion industry. Everything from the cook, the dishwasher, the bartender, the bus boy or girl all feeds into this nightlife industry. And by putting our home teams on equal playing field, we increase their chances of winning. And that has a real impact on our city. This is just not fans in the stands, but it is people in the stores. Every time a championship or a game is played here at Yankee or Met Stadium, it's a boost to \$11 million into our economic impact for New York City during the playoff seasons. These are real dollars, and they play a major role. And I want you to be clear, expanding this exemption, which only applies to a small number of people, is crucial. We are simply making sure the rules apply equally to everyone who is a performer, regardless of where they perform their craft.

Mayor Adams: We're going to continue to ensure that New York City is safe and our economy recover in a real way. We will look for other ways to ease restrictions, which is when it is safe to do so, as I stated, we're going to peel it back and turn around the economy in this city. Tough choice, difficult choice. There are going to be those who will say yay and those who will say nay, but that's what I was elected to do. I was elected to make these tough choices. I think the generals come during war time and peace time. This is a war time. COVID is a battle. Our economy is a battle. Crime is a battle. I'm not a

peace-time general. I'm a war time general, and I'm not going to lead this city from the rear. I'm going to lead this city from the front, and that's what generals do. We need to recover our city from crime, from economic devastation, from uncertainty. This is the city I inherited, and this is not going to be the city that I'm going to leave. New York is back. They're going to be strong, they're going to be resilient, and they're going to show America how to be the resilient city that we all could become. Deputy Mayor.

[Applause]

Deputy Mayor Maria Torres-Springer, Economic and Workforce Development: Thank you, Mayor. Thank you, Mayor Eric Adams. Good morning, everyone. It's fantastic to be here at Citi Field. Thank you for hosting this morning's event. I first want to acknowledge colleagues in government, as well as other guests, in particular, the CEO of Health and Hospitals, Dr. Mitch Katz, the president of the New York City Economic Development Corporation, Andrew Kimball, our small business services commissioner, Kevin Kim, our head of our Office of Nightlife, Ariel Palitz, and of course, all of the venue owners, the performers, small business owners, ballpark workers who have joined us here today.

Deputy Mayor Torres-Springer: Now exactly two weeks ago, the mayor and I stood at the Hunts Point Terminal Market in the Bronx and unveiled the blueprint to accelerate our economic recovery. Central to that vision is getting our city and its major industries back up and running quickly and safely. Today is another milestone in the city's continued reopening and resurgence.

Deputy Mayor Torres-Springer: Now just a little bit of history and background here. At a very different moment in our pandemic, the previous administration enacted an emergency executive order requiring venues and other establishments around the city to require proof of vaccination for both their staff and for patrons. Now there was an exemption added to that requirement, allowing for visiting performing artists and professional athletes who are not vaccinated to still be able to sing at our music venues and play in our stadia. Now that was a deliberate decision, of course, based on a relatively small number of individuals being exempted, which meant a minimal impact to public health, but an enormous impact to our struggling venues and entertainment sector by allowing them to book more performers and fill more seats.

Deputy Mayor Torres-Springer: However, as the mayor mentioned, that original exemption was limited to non-New York City residents, essentially creating a double standard that disadvantaged local artists and athletes, and really did continue to limit our full economic resurgence. The mayor, of course, has been committed to adjusting these types of restrictions, but only in a thoughtful, deliberate manner, always guided by science. And that is exactly what we are doing here today. By expanding the existing exemption to include new city based performers, we are leveling the playing field and we are giving another significant boost to our concert halls, theaters, nightclubs, and the many bars, restaurants, and other small businesses that really depend on the visitors to those venues to drive customers.

Deputy Mayor Torres-Springer: Now this is not just about our professional sports teams, as amazing as they are, but it is also about, of course, our local performers and entertainers, whether you are a jazz musician playing in a club in Flatbush or a comedian taking stage at Comedy Cellar. Today, we are adjusting a policy that left New York City performers on an uneven playing field. And as the health indicators continue to improve, we are certainly looking forward to seeing our nightlife and entertainment industries come back to life.

Deputy Mayor Torres-Springer: Now those sectors, nightlife, entertainment, employ nearly 300,000 New Yorkers and generate, as the mayor mentioned, over \$35 billion annually in economic output. So the stakes here are really high. Over the past two years, there were job losses that hit industries in these

sectors in very intense ways. Our nightlife sector lost close to 300,000 jobs at the peak of the pandemic, one of the starkest impacts of COVID. And it's still down about 80,000 from pre-pandemic levels. But thanks to the work of New Yorkers, including the roughly 90 percent of New Yorkers who got vaccinated, we are in the position of propelling this part of our economy. And we certainly look forward to the creative energy, the artistic expression, and of course the World Series Championships that are to come.

Deputy Mayor Torres-Springer: So thanks to everyone for being here. Now I'd like to invite Randy Levine, the president of the Yankees to say a few words. Thank you.

[Applause]

[...]

[Applause]

Deputy Mayor Torres-Springer: Thank you, Randy. Now we're going to hear from a couple very, very important people in this equation. As the mayor mentioned, this is about businesses, small businesses in our city. It's about sports, but it's also about entertainment. So first, the owner of Patsy's Pizzeria, Adem Brijja. Adem, welcome, and let's hear a few words from you.

[Applause]

[...]

[Applause]

Deputy Mayor Torres-Springer: Thank you, Adem. And now finally, I'd like to invite Chloe Smith, who's the events manager at the amazing King's Theater. Welcome Chloe.

[Applause]

[...]

[Applause]

Deputy Mayor Torres-Springer: Thank you.

[...]

Question: Mayor, when I asked you about whether you were going to roll back this mandate two days ago, you said that baseball and basketball and others were going to have to wait. They only had to wait two days. You also said they're relying on the science. The science hasn't changed in two days. So why did you make these decision now?

Mayor Adams: Well, firstly, I was accurate to say they have to wait. Two days is still wait. I was not going to roll it out when I rolled out the other aspects. We're peeling it back. We had a plan based on my medical team on how we're going to roll it out. And we are at the date that we feel this is the time to roll it out.

Question: So there's been a lot of criticism from both private and public employees who lost their jobs because of the vaccine mandate. I guess the twofold question, the first is what is your response to that? And the second is for, I guess, Sandy Alderson and Randy Levine. Did you fire employees at both Citi

Field and Yankee Stadium for not getting the vaccine? How many and will they get their jobs back [inaudible] or the Mets team [inaudible]?

Mayor Adams: I think to them, let's be clear. We had an urgent emergency pandemic and I still take my hat off to the former mayor. It was some tough decisions he had to make. I know what it was like at the beginning of the pandemic. I know what it was like after the variants return. We made the right decisions. And I stated over and over again, we are going to continue to pivot based on COVID pivoting. We will pivot with it and make the adjustment of both our medical care, our physical health and our financial health. The timing is exactly where we felt we should be and make the tough decision to execute the plan.

Question: So, I'm sorry, Mr. Levine and Mr. Alderson, if you could just comment. Did you fire employees? Also, doesn't that just speak to small business and economic if someone lost their job because they didn't get vaccinated?

[...]

Question: You said 99% are vaccinated, but does that extend to the players?

[...]

Mayor Adams: Before you do that, let's be clear on those numbers, because I don't want you to miss those numbers. Over 90 percent of his employees, over 90 percent of NBA players, over 90 percent of baseball players. Let's not give the impression that the overwhelming number of people in the city participated and understood the urgency of the moment. The overwhelming number of New Yorkers knew we were under a real threat and they participated. As we move forward, we are being extremely careful on how we move forward, because the overwhelming number of New Yorkers don't want to go back to what COVID did to us.

[Crosstalk]

Question: Here's the question. As I know you're well aware, almost every municipal union has come out to criticize you today. Especially because about 14 or 1,500 city employees lost their jobs because they did not want to get vaccinated. I wonder if you're thinking, given the fact that you've lifted this mandate for baseball players, if you would consider rehiring those 14 or 1,500 city workers who lost their jobs because they didn't want to get the vaccine? Or would you do anything for them to compensate for the fact that they did lose their jobs?

Mayor Adams: Not at this time. I want to take my hat off to those countless number of New Yorkers, municipal employees, that understood what we were going through as a city. They stood up and they did the right thing. They understood that, regardless of their opinions and feelings, they were municipal workers. These cases were played out in court, the judge ruled on behalf of the city.

Mayor Adams: I just want to commend those New Yorkers who are city employees, several hundred thousand, that knew we had to protect the city. At this time, we are not reviewing if we're going to bring back a large number. They were hired with the understanding they had to be vaccinated. They understood that and they decided not to do so. So, at this time, we're not entertaining it.

Question: If I could just follow up on that question, because we have a situation where a lot of these unions are saying that they were the heroes during the pandemic. That they should be compensated for it or they should be respected for it. What do you want to say to your vast number of city workers who

are feeling their noses are a little out of joint today? What do you want to say to them? Speak directly to them.

Mayor Adams: I'm saying to them they were heroes. In almost 40,000 New York City employees, 1,400 did not comply. Over 340,000 New York City employees stated, "We want to be heroes for our city." I say to them we cannot thank them enough. Everything from police officers to firefighters, to nurses to doctors, to those who clean schools, delivered food. Those are our heroes and I want to tell them thank you. The 1,400.

Question: Mr. Mayor, I'm wondering, how are these residuals any different from teachers that are required to get vaccinated and then the NYPD? Why does this public health decision appear to be [inaudible]? Are you worried that your decision will not be taken seriously again, given [inaudible] well. Also wondering, for the workers in the [inaudible] how many of your players are unvaccinated right now?

Mayor Adams: I think that this was a carve-out that the previous administration did. I don't think people really understand that. This carve-out already existed. It was unfair to New Yorkers. It stated, "If you come to our city, we're going to treat you differently than what we would treat New Yorkers." We are correcting that and we didn't do it automatically. We waited until we were comfortable enough, based on the medical team, that we would continue to move forward with a very strategic plan of recovering our economy and looking at some of the unfair things that we saw.

Question: Why didn't you get rid of it for all the other employees? Why did you get rid of it for this section?

Mayor Adams: I think the deputy mayor stated it best. We're talking about a small number of people that's having a major impact on our economy. There's a duality to what I must accomplish. I must accomplish keeping the city safe and I must accomplish recovering our economy. That's a duality. It's not a one-size-fit-all. In each area, we're going to focus and make sure we have that combination.

Question: Then for the Mets piece. How many of your players are unvaccinated right now?

[...]

Question: The city fired more than a thousand workers last month. How is this not actually creating a bigger double standard by saying that a handful of unvaccinated athletes are worth more to the city than [inaudible]?

Mayor Adams: Well, first of all, we're not talking about a handful of athletes. I think this is the narrative that is unfortunate on what we are putting out there. I know struggling singers, I know struggling performers. We look at one or two athletes and we are not realizing the entire industry. We are part of a financial ecosystem that includes our nightlife, performers, artists, any entertainer. We created an unfair disadvantage to New York-based performers. I'm correcting that unfair disadvantage and I'm doing it at the appropriate time, when our numbers are low. This is the right thing to do.

[Crosstalk]

Question: In the executive order, is there a distinction between players and performers who live in the city or who are working here? Also, what's the next group that's going to ask you for an extension?

Mayor Adams: Again, I'm going to tell you like I told Andrew, there's going to become a moment when we are going to continue to look at what we can peel back to bring back a level of normality to our city.

That's my goal. I'm going to do it in a slow, methodic way with the health team.

Question: What about the distinction? People, are they required to live in New York City to be eligible for exemption, or is it just working?

Mayor Adams: Performing, working.

Question: I'd ask you, because you style yourself a shepherd of the sheep, a blue-collar mayor. To speak to the janitor or the popcorn vendor who reluctantly got the vaccine, will be here on opening day, who feels a little bent out of shape about this. Can you please speak to that person?

Mayor Adams: I did, they're right behind me. They're right here.

Question: What did you say to them?

Mayor Adams: Thank you. Thank you for helping us get out of COVID. That we are all wearing one jersey, New York City, Team New York. I'm saying thank you, because it's difficult to make decisions that you don't want to do. But, when you look at the totality of your city and say, "You know what? I'm going to lean into my discomfort so that I can make sure my city does not shut down again." I say to them, thank you.

Question: Mr. Mayor, you mentioned the legal challenges that the city has won on. Many critics of this have said it opens a door for legal challenges the city won't be able to withstand. What kind of counsel did you get from city lawyers on moving forward on this? Are you confident you're going to be able to withstand that? I mean, it seems like the lawsuits are going to come pouring in now. How do you respond to that? What kind of counsel did you get from the lawyers?

Mayor Adams: Lawyers do what lawyers do. Doctors should not give advice for legal advice and lawyers should not give medical advice. That is why they both have licenses to do different things. The lawyers, I would not be standing here today if I did not speak to the attorneys and they said that this passes legal muster.

Question: I've got one for Mr. Levine, you talked about how, as an organization, [inaudible] believe in vaccinations. Aaron Judge's comments, his wishy-washy statements on whether he's been vaccinated or not, did the organization talk to him about that? I mean, he's a public figure with broad appeal and he has the ability to influence a lot of people to get vaccinated. Could you speak on that at all?

[...]

[Crosstalk]

Question: I was just wondering, sir, what would you say to somebody who works in the Department of Education or the NYPD or the FDNY who wants to retire or [inaudible].

Mayor Adams: First of all, zero police officers under the last round were removed. And I say to those who are frustrated, who are angry, this was a challenging time for all of us. And I respect their frustration. I respect their anger. COVID brought out frustration and anger in all of us. All of us. It was frustrating to go to the hospital and drop your loved ones off, never to see them again. It was frustrating to see the number of small businesses that closed down. It was frustrating to see children wearing masks and not being able to go to school. We're all frustrated. Now the question becomes "Do we turn our pain into purpose?" That's what it's about right now. Tough decision. And this is not the last one, trust me. You

think this is the last tough decision I'm going to have to make as a mayor? Oh no, it's not. There are going to be many tough decisions that I'm going to have to make as the mayor of the city of New York. And we should be glad that there's a mayor who's willing to make tough decisions to get us through these tough times.

Question: It's actually a question for Dr. Katz. Thinking back to what your workers were going through two years ago, how difficult it was to get a vaccine one year ago. What do you think about someone calling it "courageous" that unvaccinated people now have more ability in this city?

Mitchell Katz, President and Chief Executive Officer of NYC Health + Hospitals: I think as the mayor has said, this is, what he's doing today is writing an unfairness that doesn't make any sense and doesn't follow the science that if you are from out of town, it's okay to play here without a vaccine. And it's okay if you're unvaccinated to play over there without a vaccine. But it's not okay if you're a hometown team to play here. It doesn't, I don't think it makes any sense or follows any particular science. As the mayor has said, my healthcare heroes did an amazing job through something that I hope we'll never again live through. And I think the mayor has been incredible about always listening to his health and science people.

Question: Mr. Mayor, obviously people have been concerned about the sub variant of Omicron that has been gaining prevalence. Would you consider going back on this executive order if that becomes a concern? [inaudible] Are you going to be testing those players who are not vaccinated? And if so, how regularly?

Mayor Adams: Well, first we have to pivot and shift with COVID. It's a formidable opponent. It changes, it pivots and shifts. We are not going to be stringent and rigid. Whatever I need to do to recover the city, protect the city, I'm going to do it. And so if we have to come back to this podium and do whatever needs to be done to make sure that we're safe, we're going to do that.

Question: What about the Mets and the Yankees [inaudible]?

[...]

Question: [inaudible]

[...]

Mayor Adams: Mr. Mayor, could you tell me who lobbied you on this issue? Were you lobbied by Mr. [inaudible] and others, and who in your administration was also contacted by professional lobbyists?

Mayor Adams: I was not lobbied. I was speaking with both the teams in the city, as I do as the mayor all the time on the different issues. I heard all sides, and then I made the final determination. This is not based on lobbying coming in. We've been, people have been speaking to us throughout this entire process. We've made our decisions based on my morning briefings with our team, my medical team. And we made our decisions based on that. Outside noise is not going to interfere or intercede in what we're doing. I mean, it's clear. Look, no distractions. I have a team. That team gives me the advice I need, but the ultimate decision I'm going to make. So this is not about lobbyists, this is about the making the right decision for the city.

Question: The decision just seems slightly abrupt, because it was just a week ago that you told Kyrie Irving that if he wanted to play he'd have to get vaccinated. So it does seem like a very quick evolution for you, very clear that Mr. Irving needed to get vaccinated.

Mayor Adams: Okay. I'm not quite sure if you heard me today. Kyrie, you should get vaccinated. Nothing has changed, get vaccinated. I still feel "get vaccinated". So that has not changed on my feeling that everyone should get vaccinated and boosted. That is where I am.

Question: Mr. Mayor, what's your message overall to the athletes in New York, if they are unvaccinated, did they win here?

[Crosstalk]

Mayor Adams: No, no. We're not looking for winners and losers. We're looking to have our city recover. And so, no, I do not believe that. I will continue to say "get vaccinated", so you don't expose your family, you don't expose your team members, and you don't expose other New Yorkers. So I don't think that there's a "win" here. We're making a smart decision for the city of New York.

Question: Mayor, you say "thank you" to the ones who helped the city to recover, but that doesn't help when you're going to pay mortgage if you lose your job. That's not discrimination? Just because you're not a famous player, or somebody famous in Broadway, or something like that? What would you say to them?

Mayor Adams: Well, again, when you look at New Yorkers, they responded. They responded. And I think that if we ignore the overwhelming number of New Yorkers that sheltered in place when we asked them, that did social distancing, that wore their masks, that understood that they had to get vaccinated and boosted, then we're missing the point. New Yorkers stepped up during the most difficult time that I know in my modern time of life. New Yorkers stepped up. And I say to them, thank you for stepping up. And we have a tough road ahead of us, a tough road. And it's going to call on us to step up even more. And so the message I'm saying today to New York is thank you. And we're now going to continue to evolve, to turn our city around. We have to get our city back.

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