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Video & Rough Transcript: Governor Hochul Holds Q&A Following COVID-19 Briefing

MEDIA

CORONAVIRUS

COVID-19 VACCINE

HEALTH

VIDEO KEYWORDS

19

VACCIN

VIDEO of the event is available on YouTube [here \(https://youtu.be/NhBnYsbPU5M\)](https://youtu.be/NhBnYsbPU5M) and in TV quality (h.264, mp4) format [here \(https://protect2.fireeye.com/v1/url?k=a88c8674-f717bf6f-a88e7f41-0cc47a6d17e0-5be34aa2ae1d8eea&q=1&e=67b0a658-bc8c-4a14-b1b3-4b7ae1f0d572&u=https%3A%2F%2Fspaces.hightail.com%2Freceive%2FTa6JUif9eJ\)](https://protect2.fireeye.com/v1/url?k=a88c8674-f717bf6f-a88e7f41-0cc47a6d17e0-5be34aa2ae1d8eea&q=1&e=67b0a658-bc8c-4a14-b1b3-4b7ae1f0d572&u=https%3A%2F%2Fspaces.hightail.com%2Freceive%2FTa6JUif9eJ).

A rough transcript of the Governor's remarks are available below:

Question: [Inaudible] states that are putting aside, that are spending a lot of money, not necessarily [inaudible] putting aside a lot of money. Are you worried that New York [inaudible] missing a lot of money, and what are the biggest barriers that the administration has found that's kept money from going out the doors and what are you doing to reach reluctant landlords?

Governor Hochul: Everything, and I will tell you, we are going at this with an intensity that I don't think the state government has ever seen. When I first took office three weeks ago yesterday, we'd only allocated \$200 million of the possible \$2.4 billion, and I could go into all the reasons but it's a long saga of inefficiencies, but also some additional regulations that have been put in place by the Legislature. But nobody cares about excuses, particularly me.

Since I've been in office, three weeks, we've actually doubled that amount. We've done in the last three weeks what was accomplished in the previous months, so we have over \$400 million out right now and, let me make sure I get the numbers right, we have 399, I don't want to exaggerate, \$399 million is out the door to landlords as of today. So we've wrapped up our on the ground efforts. I hired an additional 100 people. We've been working with local organizations, literally hiring 80 organizations who have boots on the ground going door to door. And I was so laser-focused on this, making sure that people understood that there's money available to them to get to the landlords, to make the landlords whole for this long time that they've had to endure non-payments because people lost their jobs.

And what we did was even after the hurricane, we had people going door to door to see if people were safe and if they needed FEMA money. And I've worked with the city on this, I said, while we're sending people out to talk about FEMA relief in flooded areas, take the forms. A lot of these people are renters. So I'm very targeted on using all the resources at our disposal. Even people going to the door for meals on wheels, take these forms with them. So we have been really aggressive in our approach, working with the city, partnering with the city, what a radical concept, but we're doing it, to make sure that the information gets out, City of New York, but also cities all over the State of New York.

So if there's more money to be had, I'll apply for more. We actually added more money to the pot - when I convened the executive at the extraordinary session with the Legislature, we added an additional \$125 million so we could increase the income threshold a little bit because there are still too many people that were not eligible because their incomes were too high. So that money is starting September 14, yesterday. Applications are now available for that as well. So we're [inaudible], but if there's an opportunity to play for more, I think we're going to need more. I think we're going to continue to need more because all of this is premised on the fact that we will get the money out so we can end the moratorium January 15 as promised. Any other questions? Yes.

Question: Governor, do you think JCOPE should be, with everything yesterday, do you think JCOPE should be replaced by something completely different? And do you think it's possible for an agency to police itself, or Albany to police itself?

Governor Hochul: I said that day one. I said what I'm going to do is turn it upside down and to challenge the premise that an entity that is created by elected officials with their own appointees should be charged with investigating those individuals, should circumstances arise. The whole premise behind it is flawed. And what I had to do most recently as much as I would have preferred not to just I'd rather have had the time to reform it and turn it upside down and start over literally, with input from our elected officials, our good government groups, and everybody else who has an opinion on this, because most New Yorkers question, why you'd have elected officials picking the people charged with investigating or evaluating their work? What happened yesterday was as a result of two resignations, in order for there to be any business going forward, I had to appoint somebody, and that is the circumstance we were in yesterday. I had to find an individual, an individual who is highly recommended, has credentials, but literally is unknown to me. I want to make sure that we are not stacking these bodies with our friends and with our allies as had been the past. Because again, you're not going to restore the trust of the people of New York if you keep playing the same games that are played over and over and over. It's starting here, right now.

Question: Governor, what's your position on the efforts to claw back the \$5.1 million that former Governor Cuomo received as a result of his book deal. And also going back to that JCOPE vote, there was an effort to block that and it failed, and one of the deciding votes against that was by James Dering after you elevated him to be acting chair. So what's your position on that? And also how come there wasn't another commissioner appointed to make the board full, especially as eight votes are needed in order for a motion to pass?

Governor Hochul: We are absolutely going to be doing the proper vetting to find individuals. These resignations occurred, I had to take some time to find individuals who would agree to do this, who would have the objectivity that I'm looking for, and not being connected individuals. We were able to find the individual necessary to allow there to be sufficient individuals to allow the work to continue, and that's what happened yesterday. I'm not going to render opinions because I don't think it's my place to do so. And if anyone's going to question my independence from this, start by the statement I'm offering right now. I will not interfere with that with JCOPE does. I'm not going to comment on their investigation. That's wildly inappropriate for me to do so. Now, if someone's going to infer from that that I'm trying to cut a better deal for the Governor, I think it's well known that we've not been close, and I would, what is my interest in doing so? Someone would have to ask that question. So before people make certain assumptions that are highly erroneous, they are wrong. I'm going to let them know right now, they're wrong. But I'm going to continue to hold myself with the highest levels of integrity, as I will hold everyone in this government, and me interfering in that is inappropriate, and I'm not going to do that, I'm not going to start now, and I'm not going to do it later. That is not, that's not how we should be using what is supposed to be an independent organization, but before I'm all done, it will be an independent organization.

Question: Governor, there's been some, you've talked a lot just now about vaccinations. There's some concern amongst some healthcare providers that vaccine mandates are causing them to lose staff when staff are hard to come by, particularly in nursing homes. So I'm wondering if you could, on the vaccination front, if there are going to be booster shots for the general public, will people requiring their first series of vaccinations still get some kind of priority at state sites? Do you plan on setting up mass sites? Do you plan on a system that will allow for a more sign-ups earlier? Last time there were people going from Long Island to Plattsburgh, and not for the tourism aspect of it. And then, also, you talked about the youths, and their low rates. You mentioned maybe a vaccine mandate? Any updates to your thinking there about what needs to be done to get kids to do it?

Governor Hochul: On kids, many more people did get vaccinated because they're coming back to school. And I would also say we can do better, and I'm still keeping all the options on the table, Jimmy, I really am. I'm going to keep that as an option. I'm watching the numbers to see if the number of children with infection starts increasing in the State of New York. And particularly not just infections, but hospitalizations, because I know this is an area of great sensitivity for parents, and I'm not looking to trample on their rights as parents, but I also need to do more to convince the parents that this is what has to happen for your child to have a healthy, healthy existence while they're in schools, because they are exposed in schools, they're around other people. So I'm keeping that option on the table. It's still on my mind. I've not taken any steps to further that. In terms of whether or not we're going to basically have a capacity problem, like we witnessed last

year, and I saw that, I went to every single site and I saw the anxiety people felt early on of not being able to get that appointment and having to travel great distance. We are in a far, far better place this year. And I'm really proud of that, that the workers who put themselves out there last year, they're signing up again. They're ready to staff the sites. And now that we're not mandating that it was all state-run facilities, and only state-run employees, that we're actually involving the local individuals who were shunted off to the side, there are far more people that are engaged in this. And even in, the EMTs, we'll have 50,000 people, after a very brief training, who will be able to be part of this army. And I also spoke to representatives from Pfizer a few days ago, asking, what is the supply going to be? Am I going to have to worry about rationing this and what's, are we going to end up in the same place? They assured me, and again, this is a spokesperson for Pfizer, but, they assured me that there will not be a supply problem, that they have been ramping up, that they actually have plenty for us to be able to do the booster shots. I'm going to keep tracking that. That's what I'm told now. I want to see if that changes. But I do not want people to deal with that, that specter of what they had to deal with last year. You should be able to go to your doctor's office. You should be able to go to a site. You should be able to go. And we'll have the pop-up sites at churches and senior centers. So I'm not anticipating that to be a problem. But on the other hand, we're preparing as if it is.

Question: [inaudible] to go back, the mandates for healthcare workers begin the 27th. And also I noticed Dr. Zucker is not here. Should we read anything into that? I know firstly, that there are providers who expressed concern to DOH about this mandate. Do you plan, or does he plan, any amendments to what was authorized?

Governor Hochul: I believe the mandates are smart. I still believe that they are one of the reasons we are having an increase in number of people getting vaccinated. I've heard that from hospitals. They're seeing more of their healthcare workers who are on the fence, taking their time, evaluating. And so we are having the effect we want. Yes, there'll be some individuals who will try to defy this. There'll be court decisions that we'll appeal. We're going to continue appealing those and trying to win on the merits. In the case we just had in the Northern District of New York, we'll deal with that in court on September 27th or eighth. It's a smart thing to do. We have to continue the mandates. And if there are staffing shortages, I've already had conversations, we've been alerted that there's a hospital in Lewis County that may not be able to deliver babies. I checked. Every baby that's supposed to be delivered in Lewis County has been properly delivered, and we'll also send resources. And this won't happen for a couple weeks anyhow. This was just anticipatory that the requirement goes into effect in a couple of weeks. We'll be on it. I'm not letting this, I'm not going to let this be a problem for the State of New York. I will make sure that we have the resources. And people are required to have temporary staffing plans anyhow. Hospitals are required to have a game plan if they end up, you know, what if a mass flu hit a whole hospital and they had a staffing issue? They need to prepare for this, but I'll be there to help with the Department of Health. Okay? Yes. Okay. We got a zoom question. Okay.

Question: [inaudible] the court case about the religious exemption for healthcare workers. Do you think that they should be allowed to have a religious exemption not to get vaccinated?

Governor Hochul: We left off that in our regulations intentionally, and we believe that there, this is my personal opinion, because I'm going to, you know, we'll be defending this in court. To the extent that there's leadership of different religious organizations that have spoken, and they have, I'm not aware of a, sanctioned religious exemption from any organized religion. In fact, they're encouraging the opposite. They're encouraging their members, everybody from the Pope on down is encouraging people to get vaccinated.

So people will say what they choose. We are going to make sure that we defend the right of State of New York to ensure that anyone in a healthcare facility can meet a patient, and that patient does not have to worry when they go in there for healthcare, that they're going to contract a virus from one of the people that are supposed to protect their health.

That doesn't make sense. And we're going to continue going to court. I'll take your question. We'll go to online.

Question: I wanted to ask about the negotiations about the Bills stadium. To what extent is the deal with the Bills about the city's emotional attachment to the team versus economics, economical reasons for keeping them. And what do you say to the criticism that your administration is not being fully transparent about the potential cost to taxpayers that could exceed more than a billion dollars once it's set up?

Governor Hochul: No, this is what's happening right now. We're still in the fact-finding phase, where there are experts conducting studies on the cost of a new stadium, still showing us the numbers on a cost of renovations, repairs on the existing ones location.

So that is all the information we've asked for. We've had many conversations still just gathering data. So in terms of transparency, we're asking just questions, so we have a full picture of what we're dealing with and does the price tag, for example, include the removal of the existing stadium, you know, has that number been factored in.

We want the full picture and they're working on that. And there is a strong economic impact to any sports team in a community. I mean, Buffalo Bills. I was, you know, at Citi Field a couple of days ago, you know, with Mets and Yankees and, I know, and I'm a big sports fan, all sports.

I see the economic impact that a community has, which is critical. It helps to find a community. It puts them on the map, but also drives people there for conventions and meetings around these sporting events, but also, yes, I will say right now there's an emotional attachment. But that will not dictate the price tag or any involvement in the State of New York, but it's real, you know, we love our team. We have to do some online calls now too.

Chris Horvathits, WIVB TV: Hi, Governor. I wanted to follow up on Jimmy's question as well. I spoke with a assisted care facility in Chautauqua county yesterday. They're worried about losing a third of their staff over the vaccine mandate. I want to stress, I'm not asking about the validity of the mandate itself, but I want to try to nail down what can or what will the state, what resources will the state be sending facilities to help them with these staffing shortages, that they fear.

Governor Hochul: Again, last year, they were supposed to have a plan that allowed them to increase their capacity by 50%, they still have those plans and they're supposed to have temporary staffing plans available. And maybe it's incumbent upon us right now to make sure that they're actually following what they're supposed to do to be prepared.

That being said, I have actually had conversations with the Department of Health and everyone in healthcare, in the State of New York to figure out how we can send support if necessary. But that is a frightening number to think that, if you go into a hospital in a place like that, that one third of the people taking care of you may not be vaccinated.

I think that people need to start realizing that when you stand up and say, I want to be a public health official in any capacity, we count on you to be healthy yourselves and to make sure that we don't spread the vaccine [I assume she meant virus, but I think we should leave this for factual purposes in case reporters inquire]. So, I'm pleading with them, to understand that this is not intended to be dictatorial. It's intended to save lives and to allow you to do something that you're obviously passionate about, or else you wouldn't be in the healing profession, whether you're a nurse, a doctor, an orderly, or anyone who is in that institution, you know, you care about people and this is how you can demonstrate it in a most beautiful way."

Andrew Siff, WNBC: Thanks for taking my (inaudible)

Governor Hochul: Andrew, you're breaking up; we're catching a half of every other word, so—

Andrew Siff, WNBC: Okay [inaudible]

Governor Hochul: Did you pick up on that? I think we're going to, Andrew? Going once, going twice? I'm trying Andrew, I'm trying.

Andrew Siff, WNBC: Just wondering if you think the date of the mandate will be affected by the court decision.

Governor Hochul: The date, the mandate will be affected by the court decision? The Northern District of New York decision related to religious exemptions, is that what you're referring to?

Andrew Siff, WNBC: Yes, correct.


Governor Hochul: Well, the effective date of the order for the vaccinations is September 27 and I believe we have a court appearance on the 28th. And we're hoping that we will make overwhelmingly persuasive arguments in support of allowing the State of New York to do what is necessary to protect the public health. So that is the timetable that we're looking at. I'll take one from you. Then we got to go.

Question: Governor, it's 50 years since the Attica riots. Families have sought for decades to get the state to apologize. Is that something you're prepared to do or would consider doing?


Governor Hochul: We have had a lot of outreach with everyone affected by this. And it is a sad day for all of us to remember what happened 50 years ago, those of us who are old enough. And I actually, as a teenager, as an intern, went and saw the trials in person, so this is personal to me, and I know that there were a lot of lives just shattered and destroyed, and the memories still linger, whether you were a corrections officer in that desperate situation, or you were a prisoner who was a victim of what occurred there at this time. So I'd like to have private conversations with many of the people affected. I know this is the 50th anniversary week of the trials. They started 50 years ago last week, so, it's something that's very much in my mind and we're dealing with it.

Thank you everybody. Appreciate you coming out.


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