

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 4, 2020 7:00 PM

CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON CNN WITH WOLF
BLITZER**

Wolf Blitzer: Let's focus right now on New York City – that's the epicenter of the outbreak here in the United States where coronavirus has now killed over 3,500 people in Manhattan, as you just saw. A convention center, the Javits Convention Center, has been converted into a coronavirus hospital and a U.S. Navy hospital ship has been deployed to treat non-coronavirus patients, but days after the ship's arrival, the vast majority of its beds have gone unused. This as the city faces a critical shortage of medical supplies including of course ventilators. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio is joining us right now. Mayor, I know you have a lot going on, we appreciate the time you're going to share with us and our viewers here in the U.S. and around the world. Thanks so much for joining us and let's get right to the questions. You previously told CNN that New York City would run out of these essential resources as early as tomorrow. With Governor Cuomo's announcement that 1,000 ventilators are going to be arriving from China, another 140 from the state of Oregon, is that still the case, Mayor?

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Wolf, it's going to be very tight going into next week. I'm thrilled that Governor Brown in Oregon who I spoke to a short while ago, that was an extraordinarily kind, decent thing. One American state helping another. So that's a step forward. The additional ones from China, that'll get us into next week for sure. How far into the next week? We're still not sure. We think at some point next week, we could have 5,000 people on ventilators, that's a real potential, horrible milestone we might meet. So it's going to be touch and go on the question of ventilators next week. Also, very, very concerned about the fact we need more and more medical personnel, doctors, nurses, every kind of personnel. We've lost a lot to the disease at least for a while. The ones we have of course had been fighting now for this last month. A lot of them are really strained.

I am thrilled to hear we are finally getting some help from the federal government in terms of military medical personnel. We heard that announcement from the President. That's something that I've been asking him to do now for the last week or two. I'm glad that's happening. That's going to help a lot, but Wolf, I think we need to go farther. I think the country has to mobilize fully because New York City's just the tip of the spear. I think we need a national enlistment initiative for health care personnel to be enlisted by the federal government, brought to where the need is greatest around the country. We have over a million doctors, over 3.8 million nurses. So many of them right now are doing good work, but they could be doing even more crucial work saving lives in New York City and then all the other places that will experience this crisis over the next few weeks. We need to mobilize and be on a war footing in this country. We're not right now. That's just a blunt truth. But if we do that quickly and if we get the military involved to

coordinate it, there's a chance to really get the kind of medical personnel that New York City needs and the other places need before this crisis gets much worse.

Wolf: Because as you point out, the President did say he was ordering what? A thousand U S military medical personnel to New York City to help out. But what you're suggesting is that's not enough. And when you say you want to compel, do you want some sort of actual draft, some sort of order telling medical personnel, doctors, nurses, medical technicians from all around the country to come to New York?

Mayor: Yeah, Wolf, here's the reality. I liken it to what we saw after Katrina in New Orleans. Our whole nation watched in shock as so many people lost their lives who didn't need to and who could have been saved. Right now, if we don't get a lot more medical personnel, and I'm grateful to the President, I did make that request, he is fulfilling at least a lot of it, that's great, but if we don't get a lot more, my projection for New York City over the next month or two is we're going to need 45,000 doctors, nurses, respiratory therapists, et cetera, to get through this full crisis. All the cases that are going to surge, all the people going to need to be in the hospital for weeks and weeks. Now this is one place, Wolf. So, we do not have a national mechanism at all right now for ensuring that medical personnel are where they're needed in a time of national crisis. What we're going to go through here is going to happen in Detroit, it's going to happen in New Orleans, it's going to happen in Florida, it's going to happen all over the country in one form or another. So instead of a one place like we had in Katrina, we're going to see many places in crisis simultaneously. This requires a national mobilization.

So, I think there should be a voluntary basis to begin, but it must be coordinated by the federal government. It must be coordinated by the military. People should be compensated, of course. But if there's not enough medical personnel to save thousands of American lives who could have been saved, well then it has to be something stronger than that. It should be. This is a war. Yeah, if it was any other situation Wolf where thousands of American lives were at stake, and I told you these thousands of Americans can be saved if our national government acted. And if we don't, we'll lose them. You would say bring in the military, bring in everything we have, even to save one American life, let alone thousands. So why don't we mobilize this nation as if the lives of so many Americans depended on it, because they actually do, and it will be in state after state, after state. The country's not prepared. But if we act quickly, this nation could actually get ahead of this crisis in time.

Wolf: So, let me just be precise. You're saying you'd need an additional 45,000 medical personnel in addition to all of those who are already there in New York City who are genuine heroes and working around the clock. Is that right?

Mayor: Yeah, and, Wolf, here's the horrible math. Someone who comes in with coronavirus who needs ICU treatment for example, that could be three weeks, four weeks. That bed is taken up for a long time making sure we save that life. We're projected to have a huge growth in the number of cases. I started the month of March with about 20,000 hospital beds in my entire city. We have to add over 60,000 more beds in places like the Javits Center, in makeshift hospitals, we're going to create in hotels, in arenas, you name it, we have to add 60,000 more beds in the course of the next month or so because there's going to be explosion of cases and then people are

going to need treatment for weeks and weeks. Each person will need a lot of treatment and that's going to require a huge amount of medical personnel.

This is going to happen everywhere else after us. So rather than, you know, the country, look away from it and then be shocked when it happens in our own hometowns. We have a chance right now to actually build up a muscular, you know, national effort, again led and coordinated by the military because there's no other organization that could possibly do the logistical command and control tasks that's needed here to actually move these personnel where they're needed in time. We need a national mobilization. If it was wartime, we'd know what to do. If we were dealing with a foreign enemy, a foreign army, this is an invisible enemy, but it is killing thousands of Americans and we know it's going to afflict the whole country. Why don't we mobilize for the kind of war we in now?

You and I have never experienced this before, but it is what our generation is called to do. We heard the stories from our parents and grandparents of World War II and that Greatest Generation fought that battle. We have to fight a very different battle, but we have to mobilize with the same spirit that our forbearers had. They created something great. They created a national mobilization, single-minded, save every American life that could be saved. We have to do that now in our time.

Wolf: Well, the only way that's going to be done, as you well know Mayor, is for the President of the United States to issue a directive, an order, along those lines to declare not just an emergency, but this is a disaster and you're going to need that kind of assistance from the federal government, especially the U.S. military. Have you been in touch with the White House? Are you begging for that kind of action by the President?

Mayor: I've had this discussion with the President. It's been a respectful conversation, but I've made clear to them that I believe we need to go to a much higher level. I've talked to our military leadership at the Pentagon. I've made clear to them that in my view, when you think about our men and women in uniform right now who are at their bases going about their normal work, when there's a war going on, I know they want to serve. They should be called up. The Commander in Chief needs to give the order to mobilize our military, to create an enlistment system for civilian medical personnel. I've made this case to the leadership in Washington. I'm going to keep making the case, but what I hope the President and everyone around him understands is, time is running out so severely, Wolf, to set something like this up. I believe America could do it. I believe we have the finest military in the world and we have millions of people who had come forward to help their fellow Americans. But for it to be organized in time before this virus overtakes and more parts of the country, that order needs to be given right now.

Wolf: And so, you're appealing to the President to do it. He's a New Yorker as you well know, and I assume he might be watching us right now. He's listening very carefully. He did at his news conference just a little while ago, Mayor, accuse various governors of playing politics about getting critical medical supplies. As the Mayor of the country's hardest hit city, do you think your Governor, Governor Cuomo, is playing politics right now?

Mayor: No, of course not. I think Governor Cuomo and governors all over the country are just trying to get action to protect our people. I think, you know, look at Governor Brown of Oregon did as an example of the decency of so many of our leaders who are trying to help people. I mean imagine the beauty, the power of her saying, look, New York is the place that's hurting, we'll come to New York's defense and we know New York will be there for Oregon when their moment comes. I mean that's what we should all be talking about now. You know, I'd see a lot of people just trying to fight for help for the people are suffering, but it's not going to happen if it's left to each state and each city to fend for itself.

I think states right now should start their own enlistment structure for those medical personalities. Every state in the country should start the ball rolling, get a list of all medical personnel willing to come forward and serve where the need is greatest around the country, and then the federal government should make that a system that can move rapidly with the military coordinating. Get – look, if there's a thousand doctors in Missouri right now who could get to a place like New York and help save us and then we'll send our doctors to them when our crisis is over. Well, wouldn't it be a beautiful thing of those doctors who were ready to come forward, if they said I'm ready to serve, and the military was there, there was a staging area, the military knew exactly where to bring them in, you know, rapid fire, get them to the front and then when the front shifts somewhere else, the military is ready to move doctors including the doctors that we would donate to the next place. The ventilators, all the equipment moves to where the crisis is.

Again, think about a hurricane. Think about natural disaster. The whole country can converge on that site, sends our best to help that place in need. But this time, unlike anything we've experienced before, it's going to be 10 places in need simultaneously, 20 places in need. The only way to address that is with the entire nation mobilized in common cause with our military coordinating a full-scale response and yes, the President has to give that order. He has to say this is the equivalent of war. Thousands are dying. We have the power, we have the finest military in the world and we have people, good human beings all over America, millions of medical professionals ready to do the right thing. Let's put it together in one plan and save thousands of American lives.

Wolf: Well, let's hope the President has been watching this interview. He did say it as news conference in New York City is the hottest of hot spots and he also praised you, Mayor, he said Mayor de Blasio has been very nice. He's watching. Hopefully he'll respond and take some of those steps that you are pleading to him to take. Good luck to you, good luck to everyone in New York, Mayor, I know you've got a lot going on. Thanks so much for joining us.

Mayor: Thank you, Wolf.

###