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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON CNN'S THE SITUATION ROOM WITH WOLF BLITZER

Wolf Blitzer: Joining us now, the Mayor of New York City Bill de Blasio. Mayor de Blasio, thank you so much for joining us. I know you've got a lot going on right now as well. You've just announced I take it that you're canceling all large events in New York City through the end of September. So, what went into this important decision?

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Wolf, it's all about health and safety first. And this is obviously the thing that President Trump doesn't understand, we don't just decree that we want things to happen regardless of the human impact. We actually look at the science. We look at the data. The data is telling us it is not time for large gatherings. Just like we said we would not have indoor dining in New York City, because we saw the really painful reality and Texas and Florida and other places. You've got to be smart. And what Dr. Fauci keeps telling us is, pay attention to the facts, and the facts lead you to the safe solution. So, no, we don't need big events any time soon. We've had a lot of success making New York City healthier. We've got to really stick to that plan.

Blitzer: So, describe large events for us. What does that mean?

Mayor: It means like street fairs. It means, you know, big outdoor concerts, and it means things like parades, you know, things that here in this city can mean not just thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of people. It's just not time for that now.

Blitzer: What about protests? If people want to march down Fifth Avenue, are they going to be allowed to do so?

Mayor: Look, Wolf, this is always an area of real sensitivity. If you're just talking about health, we would always say, hey, folks, you know, stay home if you can. But we understand that this moment in history people are talking about the need for historic changes. I mean, today, in New York City, you know, recognizing the power and the meaning of the message Black Lives Matter, which we did in front of Trump Tower today – this is a historic moment of change. We have to respect that, but also say to people the kinds of gatherings we're used to, the parades, the fairs, we just can't have that while we're focusing on health right now.

Blitzer: What about the U.S. Open? I'm curious – I love going to the U.S. Open, I love tennis. What's happening with that?

Mayor: Wolf, look, this is one of a number of events where there's going to be sports activities that we all love, but without the audience so that people will be able to watch on TV and we'll

keep the tradition going. But the same with the Yankees, the Mets, we're not going to have crowds in the stands. But, you know, baseball will be coming back, tennis will be coming back.

Blitzer: So, we'll just have to watch it on TV, or watch all those sports on TV. After overcoming the worst of this crisis in New York City, Mayor de Blasio, what goes through your mind right now, seeing this horrible surge of coronavirus cases in various new hotspots all across the country – Florida, Arizona, Texas, California, for example.

Mayor: Wolf, it's painful. These are our fellow Americans going through so much. And we know, we went through hell. But we learned, respect the unfortunate power of this disease. Pay attention to the science and the data – take things slow and carefully. Look, we've been coming back to these very deliberate stages and the message has been we're not going to take the next step until we're sure. Like, right now, thank God, this morning, every morning I go over the daily indicators with the people in New York City where we stand health-wise. This morning, of the tens of thousands who got tested recently, only two percent tested positive, and our hospitals have space, and we've proven that a prudent approach actually allows you to get people healthy and bring back your economy. But you also have to know when to call a time out, and that's what we did with the bars and restaurants. We said it was not time for indoor dining. It's not time for those outdoor big events. Take one step at a time and make sure to always do it according to the data.

Blitzer: What do you think what Dr. Fauci just said just a few moments ago, that the country is not in very good shape right now, this is a really horrible situation that we're all going through?

Mayor: Dr. Fauci has been a voice of truth. We're not only not in great shape, it's getting worse all the time. And I think the message to people all over the country is, let's put health and safety first. Even folks who are obsessed with starting the economy again – and I am too, I want people to get their jobs, their livelihoods back, but, you know what, actually the best way to restart the economy is to address the health care situation first. If we don't arrest the coronavirus, if we don't put it back in its place, you're not going to have a restart of the economy. There's two big fallacies, and they both surround Donald Trump and the coronavirus – one, that you can restart the economy while ignoring the health care reality; two, that you can restart the economy without the federal government investing in a stimulus. So far, the President has actually steered us so profoundly in the wrong direction, because he won't deal with these realities. And what Dr. Fauci is saying, we're seeing it before our eyes, a bunch of States are going to have to start going backwards if they don't deal with this situation differently. And we still don't even have the testing we need to do everything that we should to fight this disease.

Blitzer: Hospitals, as you know, in Florida, Arizona, Texas, elsewhere, they're becoming overwhelmed right now with patients. Do you feel that the warnings from New York's first responders – and you went through this a month, two months ago – those warnings were ignored?

Mayor: Unquestionably, Wolf. I mean, look, our hospitals were on the brink of being overwhelmed. I mean, we were days away from running out of ventilators, running out of personal protective equipment. Anyone who watched what happened in New York City would have to be really sober about saying we're not going to risk lives and ignore the science. But unfortunately, a lot of politicians decided it was more important to do what Donald Trump said

or to play to the people we're talking about "liberate," and they did some very shortsighted things and now lives are being lost because of it. So, I say from painful experience here in New York City, you not mess around with this disease. The way to deal with it is to really put things at the level in your city, in your state, where you can fight back the disease, don't reopen so quickly that you can't handle it, actually contain it, and then go through the small, careful steps to really gain back to full strength. Otherwise, you're going to have a setback that'll put you back a lot longer than anything we've experienced so far.

Blitzer: Let's talk about the critical issue of schools reopening. You're proposing, I understand, correct me if I'm wrong, a mix of in-person and remote learning where most students will only be in the classroom, let's say, two or three days a week. First of all, is Governor Cuomo on board with this? And are you working with parents? Are they on board with this?

Mayor: Wolf, I'll tell you something amazing. Our Department of Education surveyed parents, we got 400,000 responses and three-quarters of parents said, please reopen schools, we want schools again for our kids. But the answer is, again, health and safety first for our kids. It's for our families, for our educators. We're not going to do anything unless we think it's safe. So, you're right – most kids will only be in school two or three times a week. A lot of social distancing, face coverings, hand washing stations, constant cleaning, full remote learning for families that are not comfortable sending their kids back. One step at a time, and if at any point we think it's not safe, we pull back.

Blitzer: So, is the Governor okay with all this?

Mayor: I think the Governor recognizes that parents really want to see their kids back in school if we can do it safely. And we're working closely with the Governor and the State to find the way to do that.

Blitzer: The CDC director is backtracking on issuing a what are called revised school reopening guidelines after President Trump publicly criticized the safety standards put forward by the CDC. Do leaders and parents who plan on going back to school amid all this confusion know precisely what's going on as far as the CDC guidelines are concerned?

Mayor: You know, Wolf, you're making me nostalgic for President Obama. We went through the Ebola crisis here in New York City, and we could always look to the President and the CDC for clear, smart guidance, and unified guidance. Now, we have a President of the United States fighting with his own CDC. In fact, the CDC was right to say only reopen school with a whole host of precautions. They were right and they should stick to their guns. And we believe their guidance is the right guidance. And parents want those precautions, the vast majority in our city who wants to send their kids back they want to do it based on knowing there's careful safety and health preparation. So, I wish the President would just stand back and let the professionals at the CDC do their work and, of course, listen to Dr. Fauci. But he seems – it seems like an impossibility for this president to ever just shut up and listen to the doctors.

Blitzer: Amidst all of this, Mayor de Blasio, New York City has seen a horrible, devastating spike in crime – 64 people, as you well know better than anyone, were shot over the course of the last weekend alone on the streets of New York. So, what is it happening that needs to happen right now to protect the people of New York City?

Mayor: Two things, Wolf. What we're going to do immediately, the NYPD is shifting deployments, moving officers where the need is greatest, working with communities – and this is always the crucial part. You can't just do it with police, you need community leaders, clergy, community organizations, to come together. We are having a particular issue in Harlem and we've gathered community leaders from all over Harlem who in common cause this weekend are going to be out there with the police, shoulder-to-shoulder, saying, we're not going to allow this violence in our community. The second piece is to get our court system up and running. It's been at a very low speed. The criminal justice system in this state is not fully functioning and that's creating a lot of problems. Even when police arrest someone, the consequences aren't there. So, we've got to get that back up and running. And that's absolutely been a victim of the coronavirus, that we were missing one of the most important pieces of the equation.

Blitzer: Finally, before I let you go, Mayor de Blasio, you were on Fifth Avenue, you were painting on the street, right in front of Trump Tower, Black Lives Matter – big, big sign. Tell us why you decided to do that right in front of Trump Tower of all places.

Mayor: Wolf, it was such an important message. The people of the city believe Black lives matter and we wanted to send that message to our whole city, but to our whole nation. And in fact, here was an opportunity for the President of United States to show respect for the fact that that's what we value here. And what did he do? He literally tweeted that writing Black lives matter on Fifth Avenue would “denigrate the luxury of that avenue.” That is pure racism. That is acting like an acknowledgement of the value of Black people is somehow belittling, when, in fact, what we're trying to do is lift up people who have built this city and built America and haven't been given their respect. And it can't just be words, Wolf, it has to be actions. So, we're taking resources from our police department and putting it into youth programs. We're acknowledging institutional racism and coming up with specific plans to tear it down. We need to take this transcendent moment and get the most out of it. But the President, rather than having a chance to acknowledge America's original sin, he literally made it worse by suggesting that, you know, honoring Black people on fifth Avenue would somehow make it less valuable or luxurious. I've got to tell you, people are outraged by that, but, more importantly, they're speaking out and folks today felt jubilant and triumphant. We were not denigrating Fifth Avenue. We were liberating Fifth Avenue by putting those crucial words right there in front of President Trump's building.

Blitzer: Mayor de Blasio, thanks so much for joining us. Good luck to everyone in New York City. Appreciate your being with us.

Mayor: Thank you, Wolf.

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