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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: Earlier tonight, Mayor de Blasio called on city agencies to make mandatory budget cuts as the fiscal impact of the coronavirus pandemic worsens. The Mayor said the number of confirmed cases in our city now accounts for 35 percent of all cases across the United States. And Mayor de Blasio joins me now from inside City Hall to talk about this some more. Good evening, Mr. Mayor. Good to see you.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Hey, Errol.

Louis: Well, you were doing your press conference, the President was doing his. One of the things he said at that press conference was that 73 pallets of personal protective equipment were on their way to New York City. I wanted to verify whether or not that is true as far as you're concerned.

Mayor: I hope it's true. I have not gotten that specific report confirmed. Look, Errol, for weeks we did not get very clear focus certainly from the White House and I've been pleading for the Defense Production Act to be activated fully, for the military to be sent in, for real supplies to be sent in real quantities in New York City. I will say last night when I spoke to President Trump, Vice President Pence, I thought it was a good conversation. I thought it was a hopeful conversation and very detailed, did start to see some movement today. But again, I want to make sure we really see the deliveries and it's consistent because we're going to be needing them not just today, but for weeks and weeks ahead, months ahead. So, I'm heartened to hear what you just said, but I have not heard that confirmed yet. And – or when the delivery will be.

Louis: Among the other things that we did here, maybe this is the case of this squeaky wheel getting the grease, the Army Corps of Engineers is a turning Javits into a gigantic hospital. We know that FEMA is on the ground here in New York. The National Guard has got not completely federalized, but there's going to be federal reimbursement for the cost of it, which is important as well. Is that a good start to a better federal relationship?

Mayor: Absolutely. Absolutely. Look, Errol, I think I've made my concerns clear. I've made my critique clear. I've been very blunt with the people in this city about what we have not seen from the White House previously. But I also want to be fair, if we start to see focus and results that really improve the lives of New Yorkers and protect our health, I will be the first to praise it and say thank you. I had good conversations today with Peter Navarro, who the president last night designated to follow up on specific supplies. I saw some actual movement come from that today. So, I'm very happy about that. I want to see a whole lot more to protect the people of my city.

But if – you know, if I was able and others able where we're able to sound the alarm and get results, well that's what we're here for. That's good. And then we'll give all the praise in the world to everyone who helps us.

Louis: What one of the things that the president said, I imagine after the time you spoke with him, I think the tweet came in around midnight was that things could be a – people could be sent back to work in as little time as a week. One of his advisers said two weeks. Both of those sounded rather optimistic. Are you worried about them giving sort of the all clear signal prematurely?

Mayor: Oh, absolutely, Errol. This is – I've been very blunt with New Yorkers. You know, this is only the beginning of a much bigger crisis. I take no joy in saying that, but April will be much worse than March, and I fear that May will be worse than April. We are just beginning on a very difficult road. And I think if the president – look, I don't blame any leader who wants to see the economy restart. I mean, that's natural and the president's thinking about all 50 states. So maybe in other places it's more conceivable, but at a place like this that's, you know, the epicenter of this crisis nationally and just beginning, it's inconceivable that our economy will rebound anytime soon, and I'm sorry to say that, but it's literally inconceivable.

Louis: Yeah, I mean, you figure it took a month to shut the city down. It's going to take more than a couple of weeks to get it restarted. You mentioned in your press conference, Mr. Mayor, that multiple agencies will be in the parks and playgrounds trying to enforce some kind of social distance regulation as well as preventing people from congregating in ways that are unsafe. You ticked off a whole range, I think about a half dozen agencies, not just parks, not just NYPD, I think you mentioned the Sheriff's Department, Special Enforcement Units and so forth. Are they going to have uniform guidelines that people can sort of dependably know what it is they are or are not supposed to be doing?

Mayor: It's a very straightforward equation, Errol, social distancing keeps six feet apart. No crowds, you know, no just hanging around for long periods of time. It fits a huge, you know, massive amount of public education that's been going on the last few days through the media, let alone through the efforts of government. I don't think it's particularly mysterious and nor does the Police Commissioner. You're going to have folks, clearly city officials wearing either uniforms or city jackets, identifying their agency. They're going around reminding people to distance. You know, if people are not doing it, they're going to intervene and say, hey, you know, these are the rules now. And I think in the vast majority of cases, given the legitimate fears people have about this disease, they'll follow what they're told, and if anything requires deeper enforcement, of course, we can call in the NYPD. But I don't think you can imagine, I mean you know your history of this city, I don't think there's ever been another time when people had gotten a message so clearly for weeks on end nonstop as to be very concerned about the coronavirus and to understand that a social distancing is one of the ways we stop it from growing.

Louis: Okay. There's a question from one of our viewers, Joe Bello from MetroVets asked on Twitter, the VA Secretary of Veterans Administration, Secretary said over the weekend that the

VA has deployed medical teams into the five boroughs. Does the Mayor know about this and where are they going? Are local VA hospitals testing for coronavirus?

Mayor: I spoke to the Veterans Affairs Secretary, Secretary Wilkie, just a couple of days ago. And we talked about maximizing the VA's capacity here in New York, the hospitals and the personnel and the supplies to help address coronavirus, and he was receptive, but he said it all was under the direction of FEMA now since the president's emergency – state of emergency order. So, FEMA is drawing upon many agencies and all sorts of different personnel and what I think he's referring to is that FEMA is deploying those teams as needed.

Louis: Got it. The, the Governor called for hospitals to increase their bed capacity by about 50 percent. Is that possible in the city? Did it apply to the city's hospitals, the 11 units of the Health + Hospitals or are they exempt from that or have they already done it?

Mayor: One, we're expanding capacity everywhere we can. That's what we want to do right now. I spoke to Dr. Katz, the CEO of Health + Hospitals and he started telling me about all the different ways, different hospitals, where right now in our public health system expanding capacity. So we're all committed to that goal. I don't know the chapter and verse of each hospital and I don't know the fine tuning of the Governor's order in terms of the difference between public hospitals and private hospitals. But I do know our public hospital system is rapidly going through expansion, both in our hospital buildings and surrounding areas around those buildings., but also beyond, I was at Coler Hospital in Roosevelt Island which is a facility that now we'll be adding 240 beds. It's an H + H facility that we're working on right now. Some this week, some next week, 240 new beds to help us address this crisis. Dr. Katz talked about, you know, taking any part of a hospital that wasn't being fully utilized and making it available to address coronavirus, turning parts of hospitals into ICU units that weren't previously ICU. All of that's happening very, very extensively.

Louis: Okay. I got a request from a viewer, Mr. Mayor, about you give the numbers every day about where there are new cases and you give it – you break it down by borough. There was a request from at least one viewer that perhaps you break it down by neighborhoods? That people have a better sense of where these things are happening, is that possible?

Mayor: I'm not sure it is right now. It's a very, very dynamic situation. We're obviously talking about unlike again, Errol, you'll appreciate this, the first thing I say is these statistics are about human beings and families, not just numbers, but they're moving so intensely. I really don't know if we can accurately portray the neighborhood breakout in real time with everything that people are trying to do with the Health Department right now. But more importantly, this question has been asked of Commissioner Barbot many times, and she said it's really quite pervasive across the – across the city, I'm sorry. We don't see a huge amount of difference right now around the different neighborhoods of the city. So, I think what was incumbent upon us is to tell people if there is something that's really distinct happening in one part of the city, they need to know that we would do that. But right now, I think we see a really a clear pattern of consistency, unfortunately, across all five boroughs.

Louis: Okay. Stand by, Mr. Mayor. We are going to take a short break here. I've got more to talk about with Mayor de Blasio. We'll do that after a short break. Stay with us.

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Louis: I'm joined once again by Mayor de Blasio. He's in the Blue Room inside City Hall. And Mr. Mayor, I wanted to ask you – one of my viewers, this is Andrea from Brooklyn: “ask him why the Governor keeps saying we should have more testing and lots of testing while the Mayor and the New York City Health Department are saying to limit testing. The mixed messages are confusing.”

Mayor: Errol, the fact is you can only have testing if you actually have the testing capacity. So first of all, until a few days ago, it was so severely limited in this city, that right there we had an immediate problem that the folks who are most desperately in need there wasn't testing for. The supply of testing is starting to improve. But the central concern our health officials have and the folks who run a frontline health care system here in the biggest city in the country is, one, for those who have the most serious need, whose health is most compromised and two, to try and relieve the pressure on emergency rooms where all sorts of people are showing up and they're trying to and make sure that anyone who legitimately should be tested does not stay in emergency rooms but gets sent separately to a testing center. That's the strategy we're using.

Now, at some point, we have a massive supply of testing, we can think about a different strategy, but unfortunately, you know, that would have been incredibly helpful a weeks ago when it could have been a really strategic element in our plan. Right now, we know we've got community spread. We know a whole lot of people are going to get sick. Testing plays a different role now than it would have earlier. But if we get a really substantial supply, then we can figure out how to use it differently.

Louis: Got it. Here's a question from Red Hook Dave, sounds like Brooklyn. “Why are non-essential construction sites still open?”

Mayor: It's a good question. It's come up before. Right now, and I've got to check this again about the state order about essential and non-essential employment. But I know the state of New York, in the state of California, were very similar in their assumption. The state of California certainly has allowed construction to continue, if I understand correctly, out of the assumption that one way you know, employment that can continue obviously as the virtue of people still having a livelihood and the economy still functioning in some way, but construction is outdoors. I mean, this is really the bottom line. Construction is outdoors, it does not pose the same a health threat given the nature of this disease as something indoors. But I understand the concern. It really is a fair one that, you know, some construction is much more vital than others. So, we're looking at that right now. We'll be talking to the state to see if there's going to be further clarification on that.

Louis: Okay. As always, the question comes up, will alternate side – will the suspension continue beyond tomorrow?

Mayor: Well, we're going to decide tomorrow. Tomorrow is the last day of this phase. I need to get a report from the Sanitation Commissioner and see if she feels that we can continue to suspend. I'd love to continue to suspend. Look, any New Yorker doesn't want to suspend alternate side parking has never had to participate in an alternate side parking. But the – I've spent many a-days circling the block [inaudible] but if we can keep the city clean, especially during a health crisis. So, I'll talk to Commissioner Garcia and if she thinks we can extend it we'll do it for another period of time. We'll announce that tomorrow.

Louis: Okay. Now finally, you mentioned a program to eliminate the gap and that OMB will be I guess sending requirements to different agencies about how much they'll have to reduce their budgets. What I didn't hear, maybe you could clear this up for me. Is there a number that you were shooting from either in a total gross savings or a percentage that most agencies will have to shoot for?

Mayor: Yeah, we're shooting for \$1.3 billion.

Louis: But you know the gap's going to be bigger than that though, right?

Mayor: Well this is the amount – this is – look it's March, Errol. For a budget process that concludes in June, this is what we're doing now. We have to get a better take on where things are going and what's viable. And also, we have to, we have to separate any expenses related to fighting coronavirus. We're obviously not going to cut those, and a lot of those are increasing. We're not going to cut money for food against the backdrop of more and more New Yorkers not having income to pay for food with. That's why we named Kathryn Garcia also as our food czar. So, no, this is a tricky process, but what it says is \$1.3 billion for starters, that's a big cut. And then we have, you know, almost a month till the executive budget and we have to see what happens with Albany. We have to see what happens with Washington.

Louis: Okay. I guess we'll get the rest of the bad news then. Thanks so much, Mr. Mayor. Hey, where and how are you working out these days? I ask because of your mental health, sir.

Mayor: Well, thank you for asking. Not really is the answer. There really hasn't been an opportunity, but wherever I can get a walk in, I'm trying to do it that, but it's not real consistent.

Louis: Right. Well, I feel the same way. Thanks very much. We'll talk again soon.

Mayor: Thank you, Errol.

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