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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON CNN WITH POPPY HARLOW

Poppy Harlow: New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio says at least 239 children are being taken care of at one of those facilities in Harlem. More could be throughout the city. He toured that Harlem center yesterday, was appalled at what he found out and what he saw, and he joins me now from the U.S.-Mexico border. Mr. Mayor, thank you for being here.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: You're very welcome, Poppy.

Harlow: We'll get, in a moment, to why you're at the border and what you're going to do there today but just tell me what you saw in this Harlem facility.

Mayor: Poppy, it was shocking. Here's a social service facility in the middle of New York City. We had gotten no notification from the U.S. government that children were being sent there from 2,000 miles away, separated from their parents, sent to some place they didn't know, no connection to.

I went in there yesterday to inspect the situation. The folks who work there, the social service workers, are trying to help these kids. They told me there were 239 kids, right that moment, in that center in New York City. No one had any inkling of the scale of this.

And I went to visit a classroom – about 30 or 40 young children from Guatemala separated from their mothers or parents, trying their best to make sense of the situation. It's appalling and we have no idea how many kids we're talking about when they're going to see their parents again.

Harlow: What is the condition? I mean just to be clear, are all 239 of those children, children separated at the border because of this policy?

Mayor: Yes, this was all –

Harlow: Okay.

Mayor: All of these kids were taken from their parents because of this new family separation policy of the Trump administration. And they're all from the southern border. So, they were all sent 2,000 miles. There's a young boy, nine-year-old boy from Honduras named Eddie. He was at – taken from his mom at Eagle Pass, Texas, put on a bus with a federal escort to go 2,000 miles to New York City, has no idea when he's going to see his mom again. I mean think about the trauma –

Harlow: And the conditions?

Mayor: – of what's happening to these kids.

Harlow: The conditions. I mean, what did you see in terms of their physical well-being, their mental state?

Mayor: The folks who work there were trying their best to help these kids and I admire – kids are so strong and resilient but here's the problem, they're experiencing mental health challenges and trauma because of the separation. There's also physical health challenges. The health workers there were telling us these kids, because they were held in group facilities when they came across the border, some have lice, some have bed bugs, chickenpox, all sorts of contagious situations.

And you know, just think of the chaos of all this, both what the kids are going through emotionally and mentally but also you know kids who unfortunately contracted some kind of disease and they're being sent to where a whole bunch of other kids are. There's no rhyme or reason to it.

Harlow: So, tell me why – I mean you travelled from New York down to Texas, down to the border today for a specific reason. Why and what are you trying to see?

Mayor: Poppy, this has to stop and a group of mayors have gathered here from all over the country – and I want to emphasize, a bipartisan group, Republicans and Democrats, small cities, big cities – who all are saying in unison this policy has to stop, the executive order is not enough. We have to end the separation of families and we have to reunify all these families who have been torn apart. And we have to go back to actually respecting people seeking asylum.

It is an American tradition for literally 200-plus years of people who come here fleeing oppression. We have to restore some real decency in the asylum process and of course we need an actual comprehensive immigration reform.

This is becoming a bipartisan consensus on the ground all over this country. We are going to as Mayors fight together to actually be acted on in Washington. People have gathered here at the point of contact to say this is no longer acceptable to the American people, what's happening here.

Harlow: So, as you know, the administration would push back on that – and DHS – and say, look, the asylum seekers who do it the right, legal way don't get separated, right, and they go through that process. These are people that tried to legally – to cross over.

Are you trying to get into some of these centers down there, Mr. Mayor, that are holding these children and if so, have you been permitted access because Democratic Senator Bill Nelson just told me that he tried to get in the Florida center and they said no.

Mayor: You know, up at the center in New York, the folks who work there, it's a non-profit organization, they were welcoming, they were transparent, they were open.

We're going to see in a few moments when all the mayors gather here whether we're given that same respect and that same transparency. Look, when our government is holding people particularly children and won't allow public officials to see, something is wrong right there. There is no accountability here. It's a dangerous situation. So, we're going to go in – a group of us mayors – and demand access.

I agree with you. Senators and Congress-people have been turned away and that should bother all Americans.

Harlow: It sounds like, according to Senator Nelson, they were told you need to give us two weeks' notice before we'll let you in. So, it's not that they're not being let in, it's two weeks' notice. You're shaking your head. I understand you want to see it right away, understandably there's also privacy issues. But do let us know if you get in.

Let me just talk about compromise. That is the operative word but it's the word that is missing on Capitol Hill because even if this compromise – Republican bill makes it through the House, no one way it's going to make it through the Senate and it doesn't look like it has any Democratic votes. What do you think – and you don't have a vote in this, you're not in Congress – but what do you think your fellow Democrats in Congress, Mr. Mayor, should give on? Should they fund the wall, for example, to protect DREAMers and to end the family separation?

Mayor: Look, I think the big answer is to go for comprehensive immigration reform and we all understand there's going to be compromises in that process. But here's what's interesting Poppy, and this is why mayors are gathering because the grassroots have to really be felt here, the current reality in Congress is they prefer not to act for a variety of reasons.

The American people, it's pretty clear, they want comprehensive immigration reform, they want the DREAMers to be able to stay, they want these families reunified. That's the framework right there [inaudible] –

Harlow: But should Democrats fund the wall to get that?

Mayor: Of course, there's going to be compromise. I understand that –

Harlow: Should it include money for the wall?

Mayor: It needs to be a comprehensive immigration reform. Here's the bottom line, it needs to be a comprehensive immigration reform. The notion of trading one small piece for another and not solving the problem, misunderstands what's going on with this crisis. We're having a moral crisis right and actually most people in this country [inaudible] fundamental moral crisis addressed in a comprehensive manner.

They can deal with compromise. We can all deal with compromise but we don't want to nickel and dime it. Let's actually solve this challenge and come up with a comprehensive immigration reform.

Harlow: I think everyone who makes these decisions should think, "If those were my kids, what would I be doing?" Mayor Bill de Blasio, thank you. Please let you know, will you, if you get into the center.

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