



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
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RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO THANKS SANITATION WORKERS DURING SHIFT CHANGE, HOLDS Q&A

Mayor Bill de Blasio: So, first of all, I just want to say it is – it is an honor to be with the people who, right now, are making this city safe, are clearing the way for us in advance of this storm. I want to thank all of the sanitation workers for the work they do.

You know, I remind you, their work has just begun. And they have a camaraderie, and a spirit, that is going to be crucial to the city in the next 24 hours, because we're going to depend on them to clear the way so people can be safe. And I want to thank them for the work they do. We're all depending on you, and we know we're in good hands. So, thank you very much to all of you.

I want to thank, of course, Commissioner Kathryn Garcia for her leadership. I want to thank Harry Nespoli, the president of the Uniformed Sanitationmen's Association for his friendship and his leadership. I want to thank Commissioner Esposito, who's been doing a great job all day getting all the agencies on the same page about how we're going to handle the hours ahead, and the days ahead.

And I keep saying to everyone – take caution – take precautions, be careful. A lot ahead of us – this is literally the calm before the storm, and it's about to start in earnest, and when it does, it's going to come in very fast, very hard, and people have to be very, very careful. Stay off the streets, stay off the sidewalks – again, clarifying that starting at 11 o'clock tonight, only authorized vehicles on the streets. At 11 o'clock, only authorized vehicles – we don't want to see anything but authorized vehicles on the streets after 11.

Plan ahead. If you have – if you don't have everything you need, go get it now, and then get inside and stay inside. Again, schools will be closed tomorrow. If anybody needs further information on what's happening around the city and how we're responding to it, you can get that at 3-1-1, or visit NYC.gov. If you see anything you believe is a life-threatening situation, call 9-1-1.

And on a human level, look out for your neighbors, look out for the people in your neighborhood, look out for senior citizens, look out for the disabled, look out for the homeless. You don't know if you might be the one to save someone's life because you took the time to check in on them. Please do that for your fellow New Yorker.

With that, any questions we'd be happy to take.

Question: Mr. Mayor [inaudible] social media, New Yorkers [inaudible] stay off the sidewalks, is there a point at which it becomes dangerous because of [inaudible]?

Mayor: Absolutely, I'll start and Joe Esposito may want to add to this, because he's been talking to National Weather Service throughout. This snow is going to come in very fast – fast accumulation, there'll be drifts, there'll be visibility problems, there'll be high winds – we've heard wind speeds that could easily go into the 30s but could go up 40s, 50s, even 60s – we're not going to be shocked by that at all. That is a dangerous situation. If you're walking out there, you're very exposed. If you slip and fall, it could be a really bad situation. You may not be visible. So, people need to assume it's not a night to be out walking around. And I think that's going to be the case for a lot of tomorrow as well. You want to add?

Commissioner Joseph Esposito, Office of Emergency Management: Yeah, we just – we don't want people to get a false sense of security. If you go outside now, you say – gee, it's not too bad. You may think about going for a walk, going to a restaurant, going to a movie – it's going to drastically change 11, 12 o'clock. Now, I mean, the good news is the bulk of this storm is going to be during the midnight hours, and most people are home in bed anyway. But we've got to press the point – it's not going to be like what it looks like now. It's going to get a lot, lot worse, and it's going to be dangerous, and it's going to be especially dangerous to drive and walk.

Question: Mr. Mayor, can you characterize how much plowing has happened at this point? Has every road seen a plow at least once?

Mayor: Commissioner Garcia.

Commissioner Kathryn Garcia, Department of Sanitation: So, we have not gotten to every single road, but we have gotten to most of them at this point. But, at this point, what I'm telling you is that's not what's going to matter. It's really what's going to happen on the overnight, the folks that are coming on to shifts right now are going to face two to four inches per hour, so even if we've made a pass, you could see another four inches within that next hour. That is an incredibly intense snowstorm. So, we are really happy at the department that folks will be off the roads. The worst thing that happens for us is that we get stuck behind a car that can't move. So we think that this gives us the best chance of staying in front of this storm all through tonight, and through

tomorrow, because it will not be done when you wake up in the morning. It's going to keep going. And so, the sanitation department will continue to plow all through the night and into tomorrow, and we are going to have to make multiple passes across every street in the city.

Mayor: I want to emphasize, two to four inches per hour – that's how severe this is going to be. So, the commissioner said it very straightforward – even when they plow, it's going to accumulate right back up. They're going to have to keep coming at it over and over again. That's why cars need to be off the road. That's why even walking around, you're going to see in a course of hours, it's going to be very, very difficult to walk outside. I don't want anyone outside that doesn't need to be – absolutely – outside.

Question: There's of course going to be some employers that force – like say, if you don't come into work tomorrow, you're fired. What would you say to those employers?

Mayor: I would say to employers that this is an act of nature, and they should be respectful of that, and they should give some leeway to their workers. But I would say to anybody – any employee – safety first. Your life matters the most. And your health and your safety matters most. So, the smart thing is to stay back. Any employer who's treating their employees the wrong way, I'll certainly have something to say about that. This is not a time for employers to be cheapskates.

Question: Mayor, with the subways shut down, and no one allowed to take cabs, the people who are essential personnel, [inaudible] how are they supposed to kind of get around?

Mayor: The – with emergency personnel, obviously a lot of our emergency personnel have city vehicles. Those who are using their private vehicles to get around, it's very important they have their IDs with them, because if they are stopped and checked by the police, they'll need to show a city ID, or some other kind of authorization. And obviously, the vast majority of our people do have those IDs.

Question: Mr. Mayor, is your OEM showing any lessening of the storm than what you earlier predicted?

Commissioner Esposito: Well, at one point earlier today, it was at three feet. Now we're at two feet. So, if that's accurate, we lost 12 inches, which is a good thing, but two feet of snow is still substantial, and we're not 100 percent sure that that's accurate. This is science. It's not an exact science. So, two feet of snow, could be three feet. But again, the winds are still going to be 50 miles an hour, so even if it's two feet, it's still going to be arctic conditions.

Mayor: And let's be clear – two feet of snow would still make it one of the largest snowstorms in the history of this city. And this is a crucial point, we're learning this every single time about the weather – it changes, and it changes quickly. So, you could hear one report, and in a few hours, you could have a much different, much worse situation on your hands – also, the bitter cold, also the wind – a lot of factors at once.

Phil: One or two more, guys?

Question: Mayor, mayor –

Mayor: Yep.

Question: New York is a late city, a lot of people get off work late, some [inaudible] off at 11 o'clock, [inaudible] bartenders [inaudible]?

Mayor: Certainly, that's a concern. But I think the message has now been given for over 24 hours straight. This is not business as usual. So, people have to change the way they normally do things. Employers need to take into account, people need to take into account that they've got to get home earlier at all costs. We know for a lot of our city personnel, a lot of them are going to be staying overnight at their workplaces knowing that they're going to be needed tomorrow, rather than trying to get home, so they don't have to come back in the morning. But for everyday New Yorkers, it's pretty clear – this is not business as usual. Get home. Employers, be flexible, because we've got to get people to safety.

Phil: Last call, guys.

Question: When will everything get back up and running?

Mayor: We've got two [inaudible] go ahead.

Question: Tomorrow, when do you expect people to be able to use the subway, to go out and –

Mayor: Again, with everything that – I appreciate the question, but we're not going to do hypotheticals on something this serious. Safety is the central concern. So, in terms of the ban on non-essential travel, in terms of what the MTA will do, in terms of subways – all that will be determined as we see the storm progress. What Commissioner Garcia said – imagine two to four inches per hour for multiple hours. That's going to have a very, very damaging effect. So, we're not going to lift the ban on non-essential travel until we're sure that the way is clear. I don't have anything set in Spanish right now. I apologize. But we will for the next briefing.

Last call. Thank you, everyone –

Question: I'm sorry, the governor has said that his ban would amount to a \$300 fine for people. Have you guys even thought of that, like what happens if someone gets stopped –

Mayor: You heard – for those of you who were here earlier – Chief O'Neill, the chief of department of the NYPD, made clear that officers will use their discretion in each case whether they need to issue a summons, or whether, in some cases, they even need to undertake an arrest. We hope that will be unnecessary because we're making this so clear to people – if you do not have essential business, if you're not part of addressing this emergency, you should not be on the roads to begin with. Thank you, everyone.

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