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RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO HOSTS PRESS CONFERENCE ON EXTREME HEAT

Mayor Bill de Blasio: I want to give you an update on the weather situation, then we'll take questions on that, and then we'll take other questions thereafter.

Today and tomorrow, Thursday, temperatures will be at potentially dangerous highs – and all New Yorkers need to take this situation seriously.

We have high humidity and the heat index is expected to hit the mid-to-upper 90s today and tomorrow. National Weather Service has issued a heat advisory for New York City until tomorrow, Thursday, at 8 pm. Remember, those situations can evolve, they can change, but at this moment the advisory goes until tomorrow at 8 pm.

There's also an air quality alert that is in effect through tonight at 11 pm. And we will keep updating you on any changes on those statuses.

We want to make sure that all New Yorkers are aware of the measures that the city is taking and also, of course, the measures that each resident can take to protect themselves and their family.

And most importantly, we want to urge all New Yorkers to be cautious. This is very high heat. This is going to be one of the hottest days of the year, and tomorrow as well. We want people to be very careful.

First, stay hydrated. Make sure you're constantly drinking water, even when you don't feel an immediate need. Just make it a point to constantly keep hydrating.

Stay indoors if you can, and out of the sun if you can. And if you have to go out, don't stay in the sun any longer than you have to.

As we've said in other moments of challenge, check on your neighbors. Please check on your neighbors – particularly senior citizens and folks with health challenges. Anybody you know who has a medical condition that might make them vulnerable to the heat, check on them, and if they need help, help them get it.

Anyone who's feeling the effects of the heat and needs relief, I'll state the obvious – get somewhere where there is air conditioning. And as we did a few days ago, we're doing again – we've set up over 500 cooling centers across the five boroughs. They're available to anyone who needs them. That includes libraries, community centers, senior centers, park recreation facilities, etcetera.

Anyone who needs to get to a cooling center can call 3-1-1 for the location nearest them or can go online at nyc.gov/oem and they can find a location that works for them.

We've extended the hours at city swimming pools until 8 pm.

And the Department of Homeless Services – you’ll hear from the commissioner in a moment – has issued a Code Red alert. There’s enhanced outreach to homeless who are on the streets, and we’re providing transportation to get them to cooling centers as well.

Now, the challenge we talked about last time we’re going to talk about again is that we want to make sure everyone stays as cool as they can and we want to make sure that people get to air conditioning who need it, but we also have a problem with the amount of electricity that’s being used because of the heat.

As the temperature goes up, so does energy usage. And that creates the danger of blackouts and brownouts – and we do not want to see that happen in this city on any major scale. So right now, there’s a big strain on our electrical grid.

So I want you to hear both messages loud and clear – if someone needs to get to air conditioning, they should do so, and we have places where they can do it if they don’t have air conditioning themselves, but air conditioning can be set at 78 degrees and achieve everything that people need in terms of their health and safety – and we’ll hear from Dr. Bassett in a moment, who will reaffirm this point. If the air conditioning is set at 78 degrees, people are safe and they will be able to deal with the hot temperatures. And at the same time, we will reduce the energy usage that’s putting a strain on our system.

I also want to remind folks that it’s very important to conserve in every way we can in the next few days. So any appliance that you don’t need, turn off. Any lights you don’t need, turn off. And if air conditioners are set lower, get them up to 78 degrees so we can all together get through this challenge.

Some folks, of course, are going to want to seek relief by opening up fire hydrants. There is a right way to do it and a wrong way to do it. The right way to do it is to get a spray cap from the FDNY. You can go to any firehouse and if you’re 18 years old or older, you will be able to get a spray cap. You can put that on a hydrant – and that’s the right way to achieve some relief from that water. But if you do it the wrong way and you just open it up yourself, you’re actually undermining the FDNY’s ability to protect you, God forbid, there’s a fire. We have to protect our water pressure so the FDNY is in a position to fight fires. So please don’t improvise when it comes to our hydrants.

Anyone who needs health and safety tips can visit nyc.gov. And if there is any emergency – if you or anyone you know is facing a health and safety challenge because of this heat and you feel there is an immediate danger, of course call 9-1-1.

Quickly in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, I want you to hear from the line-up you heard from last time. They’re all working very hard to protect all of our fellow New Yorkers and make sure people are safe and healthy, and make sure that we’re doing all we can to get smoothly through the next 48 hours.

First, I want to bring forward our OEM commissioner, Joe Esposito.

[...]

Mayor: Okay. We welcome your questions, first on the topic of the heat situation – related to the heat first.

Question: [inaudible] comments in Spanish first.

Mayor: I did my comments in Spanish, brother. Go ahead.

Question: Last week, about 19,000 Staten Island homes lost power, and Con Ed and the commissioner said it had a little bit to do with Staten Island's infrastructure for electricity. And I was wondering if you could talk about – in the future, is there any, sort of, like, anything you guys can do to ensure that that doesn't happen again because of the infrastructure in place for the grid on Staten Island? And what's in place today to make sure that Staten Island – Staten Islanders don't lose power again?

Mayor: I don't know the reality in terms of the infrastructure and what different things we could do. We can certainly get back to you on that. And obviously that has a lot to do with our private sector partners in this. But I think Joe can speak to today's situation and maybe have a little bit of an idea on some of the bigger things that need to be done, going forward.

Commissioner Joseph Esposito, Office of Emergency Management: Sure. As you know, and as you said, last week, about 18,000 customers, affecting probably close to 100,000 people who were out in Staten Island. Again, it's overhead [inaudible] – with this type of weather, you're going to get that throughout the city from time to time. What's going to happen is the heat, the overuse or the extended use of electricity makes those wires and feeders get hot – burn up – and it results in a blackout. We responded pretty well last week. We had some generators go out there. We hooked up to an assisted living location. A few hundred senior citizens were there. They got back on within a few hours. The response was pretty good – PD, FD, NYCHA, our agency – we had light towers out there, cooling [inaudible]. So, we're ready. We're leaning forward. Our situation room will be activated later on today. We'll be ready if and when it happens either there or anywhere else throughout the city.

Mayor: On this topic – Jonathan?

Question: Mr. Mayor, have you seen any uptick so far on 9-1-1 calls or medical emergencies? And, related – are there any plans to schedule additional ambulance tours?

Commissioner Esposito: Yeah, we'll be – we have a call right now with the concerned city agencies, and they'll be putting on additional assets. The 3-1-1 and 9-1-1 is up slightly, nothing to be alarmed with yet. But we anticipate that those numbers will go up as the day goes on.

Question: And ambulance tours? Is that going to be a part of the –

Commissioner Esposito: That'll be the FD's call, but they generally put additional units on in weather like this.

Mayor: Okay, on this topic. On this topic – yes?

Question: Mayor, Commissioner Esposito – what assurances, if any, has Con Ed – Con Ed given you that they're fully able, ready, and prepared for the load that will be demanded later today.

Mayor: Before the commissioner speaks, I'll say this. We work very closely with Con Ed, but clearly the conservation issue is on all of our minds. So, we're going to push Con Ed hard to do everything they need to do. But I am a believer in personal responsibility too. Every New Yorker has a responsibility in this situation. The reason you are not in as cool air conditioned comfort as you might like right now is that we've changed the thermostats here to 78 degrees at City Hall. And we'll be doing that at other city buildings as well. Everyone's got to conserve energy. And I can tell you, I make it a habit at Gracie Mansion of going around and turning off lights when I see a light left on that shouldn't be left on. Appliances that aren't needed should be unplugged because they keep using power. If all 8.5 million of us do all we can do, we will avert that problem. So, we're going to hold Con Ed responsible, but every single one of us can do something to help avert any kind of electrical shortages.

Commissioner Esposito: And just to go with that, again, there's a lot of old infrastructure. There's a lot of new stuff – the Con Ed problem in Crown Heights right now, there were three feeders that were out. Two have been repaired. There are 16 in total. Does that mean another two are going to go out in another hour or two? It

depends on the load. And again, as the mayor said, you've got to stress the limited use. And it's tough to do, but at this point, the more demand on the system, and with this weather, the more likely it is you're going to have outages. Again, you have about 1,000 customers city-wide right now.

Mayor: On this topic –

Question: For Commissioner Bassett – [inaudible] this morning about an outbreak of Legionnaires Disease?

Commissioner Mary Bassett, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: I think that's off-topic.

Mayor: Yeah, let's finish the topic. We'll go certainly right to that. That'll be the first thing we do after this. On this topic of the heat –

Question: Are summer schools still in session [inaudible]

Mayor: Summer school's in session, yeah.

Question: [inaudible]

Commissioner Esposito: Whatever has been scheduled is still on. They have not canceled any DOE programs, as far as I know right now.

Mayor: Look, if the kids are in a safe location that we control – obviously, we need to make sure to hydrate, et cetera – we're in a position to do that. So, from what I'm hearing, I don't think we have a particular problem at those locations, but we'll certainly monitor that. Yes?

Question: Just back to the Con Ed situation – how are they coordinating with you, as far as any major outage? Because several years ago, they had ice trucks out there in Astoria, Queens and people on line waiting for their ice. Any particular project or program –

Mayor: Okay, first of all, I'm going to knock some wood and say, thank God, what we've seen this time and you know, a week or so ago, is nothing like we've seen in Astoria, Queens a few years ago. Thank God. And that was a prolonged multi-day crisis that took a lot more response and Con Ed bore a lot of responsibility and had to be a big part of the response. We're not near that yet. We don't want to go near there. That's why we're saying the city is going to take a number of steps to conserve. All of the city buildings – we want every day New Yorkers to do the same thing. But you can speak to –

Commissioner Esposito: Sure. And again, as I said earlier, we have staff members right now at Con Ed facility right here in Manhattan. Their situation – the situation room was open. We're in constant contact. Like I said, we're there with them constantly. We have conference calls. And we're already, I think, much quicker to respond if we do have an outage. Preventing an outage – that goes on the usage and how much less we use and the heat. We're not going to – I don't think we're going to prevent too many power outages from happening, but we can respond much better. If you look at the response in Staten Island, I encourage you, go talk to the elected officials out there. Talk to the folks on the street out there. We really had a quick response out there. And if we hear about something that has the potential, we may stage assets in that area so that we can get there quicker if we do hear about a potential power outage impending. So, we have our plans. We're as ready as we can be.

Mayor: Okay, on the heat – any other questions related to the heat? Going once – yup?

Question: Just to follow up – I'm a little confused. You just said that not using – maybe I misheard. You said, not using as much energy probably won't prevent power outages?

Commissioner Esposito: Well – no, no. It would – yeah, if you use a lot less energy, it's going to reduce the risk of a blackout. But in these type of conditions, with this weather, and the usage that's going to be here,

we're probably going to – we have a thousand outages already. Is that going to get worse? We'll have to see as the day goes on. But people are going to put their air conditioners on. We'll have a big potential – when people go home tonight – as soon as they go home after rush hour, what's the first thing they're going to do? [Inaudible] and crank up that air conditioner. And you'll – you could possibly see, if that happens, you could possibly see power outages right around when people are getting home. It's a critical time that we'll be monitoring throughout the night.

Mayor: So let me say it a different way. It's in people's self-interest not to use too much electricity right now. If everyone goes home, as Joe said, and cranks up the air conditioning, and God forbid we have brownouts or blackouts, everyone will look back and wish they hadn't. So, let's do the smart thing. We need a little teamwork here across the city. Everyone conserve energy for your own self-interest and for all of your fellow New Yorkers. Also, modeling good behavior here, I am hydrating. Everybody, please hydrate frequently throughout the day. There is no harm in overhydrating. No medical challenge, correct?

Commissioner Bassett: No, and you should drink water, even if you're not thirsty.

Mayor: Say it again – say it to the –

Commissioner Bassett: Drink water, even if you're thirsty in weather like this. It's really important to stay hydrated.

Mayor: Doctor, I'm not thirsty but I'm drinking water.

[Laughter]

Mayor: There, we hope that was a valuable role-play exercise for you.

Commissioner Bassett: Thank you.

Mayor: Alright. Okay –

Question: Do you mind repeating your comments in Spanish for the benefit of Univision –

Mayor: Brother, I just did Spanish upfront in my remarks. We'll make sure you have tape of that. Okay, Bob – let me just – last call on heat? Last call, yes? Last call –

Question: You were on your way to Rome when about 100,000 Staten Islanders lost power. So, were you in coordination with folks while you were on the plane or when you got –

Mayor: Yeah, we had – you'll remember we had the press conference at OEM and as you'll hear from the commissioner, there was a lot of confidence that the situation was being handled well and quickly, and in fact, it was. So, as I have learned working with Joe Esposito, he will always tell me if something is not going the way it needs to and is not going to be resolved quickly. But in those instances, Joe is very confident that we are well on our way to recovery. Okay, last call on heat. One, two, three – Bobby?

Mayor: Okay, last call on heat. One, two, three – Bobby?

Question: Yeah, on the Legionnaires Disease, you know, what should people know? Where have these cases been found? And is there any way of tracing them to a particular source [inaudible]?

Mayor: I'll turn to Dr. Bassett with a point up front. Thank God this is a disease that can be treated. And the important thing is early detection. Obviously, what we're seeing here is in a very limited area. And Dr. Bassett will go into the work that DOH is doing right now very intensely to address the issue. But the most important thing to get across to people is this is a treatable disease if people with symptoms get medical care quickly – and

we want to make sure anyone who has those symptoms knows them and gets care – and we’re talking about a very limited part of the city at this point where we have a potential challenge.

Dr. Bassett – let me bring that up for you, since you’ll be up there for a little bit.

Commissioner Bassett: Thank you. We released a press release and also released to the – what we call our Health Alert Network, which is a system of – that reaches out to healthcare providers to alert them to a cluster of Legionnaires Disease that we’ve identified. The first case identified at this moment was on July 10, and since then, we have identified 31 cases. I want to make clear that this is a common pneumonia – one which, as the mayor said, is readily treated – especially important for people to seek care early and especially important for healthcare providers to be aware that we’re seeing these cases. And that’s a key point that we want to get out to both the public and the healthcare delivery system. We know a lot about Legionnaires Disease, and we know a lot about outbreaks – we’ve investigated them over the years. This particular outbreak is still under investigation, so we have an evolving situation, which – in which the numbers may change. It’s located in the South Bronx and so we especially want to get the word out that people in the South Bronx who experience symptoms, like cough, fever, body aches, chills, any difficulty breathing – seek care early. Don’t put it off. Go to your doctor. This is a common and readily treated pneumonia and we want to be sure that people get care and that the healthcare providers are thinking about this diagnosis. Now, we know that it’s related to water, and we are – that means that we have seen outbreaks in the past related to plumbing systems, cooling towers, evaporative water systems, spas, hot tubs – and we have our Disease Detectives out in the field scanning the environment and looking for places to take samples. Samples are already being taken. And when we know more about the – this epidemic, we’ll be able to give you more information. Right now the main message is seek care early and the healthcare delivery system to be aware that we have identified this outbreak.

Mayor: Just, for everyone, repeat the symptoms.

Commissioner Bassett: The symptoms are the ones that we see in pneumonia – fever, cough, difficulty breathing, headache, muscle pains, you can even have chills. These are symptoms that people should seek care for, especially if they are living in the South Bronx. Well, you should seek care for those kind of symptoms any time.

Mayor: Right. But just to finish – let me take over a second here –

Commissioner Bassett: Oh, sure.

Mayor: The – I think the point is, again, that it’s – so, very clearly delineated symptoms. We know the particular area of concern is the South Bronx. We’ll have a lot more information in the next day as the Disease Detectives do their work, but the simple step that anyone can take – if they have those symptoms, get to a doctor or go to an emergency room. Better safe than sorry. And we know that these symptoms can be treated if people get in quickly when they experience them.

Please.

Question: Mayor, the governor today said that you and he had spoken about the situation about the MTA capital plan. So I’m wondering, first, are you any closer to resolving that dispute? Second, he said the two of you are friends. Yet again he said this. You’ve said this. What does friendship mean to you?

Mayor: Well, I appreciate you asking a big philosophical question. Again, I’m – I’m not going to get into personalities. I’m not going to get into, you know, a lot of back-and-forth. What I care about is the substance of the work we’re trying to do. So I’m going to talk about the other part of your question, which is the MTA. I spoke to the governor a few days back, but I am waiting to hear an articulation of what their MTA plan is, because we’ve only heard a very, very broad number. We need to know where is that money coming from, what will it mean for the future of the MTA in general, and then we can weigh the plan. But we can’t do that until the blanks are filled in.

Question: Did you ask him where the \$8 billion dollars was going to come from?

Mayor: Well, that – that proposal came out since I spoke to him last, but our teams are communicating all the time, and we’ve made very clear we need to understand that proposal more.

Marcia.

Question: Mr. Mayor, there are continuing questions about the homeless. I have in my hand a picture of a man who takes a daily bath, with soap, I might add, in the fountains at Columbus Circle. I wonder what you can do about this and will you do something about it? And secondly, the city of San Francisco, to combat public urination, has a – pardon the term – pee-resistant paint that it puts on benches and walls and things like that. And I’m wondering if New York City would consider using it as well to combat the issue of public urination?

Mayor: I don’t know about that paint – we’ll certainly look into it. On the other question – look, we – I think I’ve made very clear and Commissioner Bratton’s made very clear, we’re going to enforce quality-of-life crimes. And I want to remind all of you, over the last year-and-a-half, I have said I am a believer in quality-of-life policing, I’m a believer in the Broken Windows approach to policing, and this is very much consistent with that. When someone breaks the law, we’ll deal with it. The fact is Commissioner Bratton is dedicating a lot of resources right now to the hotspots where we believe we’re having serious quality-of-life issues and you’re going to see the effect of that quickly.

Question: But when you see somebody taking a bath in –

Mayor: Again, I’ve – I’ve answered the question.

Question: Mayor de Blasio, I want to ask your opinion on what’s going on with Tom Brady do you think? Tom Brady, with the Patriots, [inaudible] says he’s innocent. Do you believe him? The NFL is holding up the –

Mayor: Look, we – none of us know the full truth, and I don’t think we’ll ever know the full truth. I think it’s an unfortunate situation. And, you know, I think if anyone has more information, they should come clean so we can all move forward.

Question: Mayor or Commissioner Bassett, can you provide any more specificity on the cluster of legionnaires in the South Bronx? [inaudible] South Bronx in general? Is there one particular street corner, intersection, neighborhood?

Commissioner Bassett: Excuse me. The – this is a dispersed outbreak. We are seeing people coming from a wide area. So I can’t give you any more specificity than the South Bronx. We, as I say, are out there looking at the cases, looking at the environment, and our Disease Detectives will have information back to us soon.

Mayor: Yes.

Question: Commissioner Bratton mentioned today that there’s new training for 10,000 police officers in handling the homeless as part of a larger plan that you’re working on in dealing with the homeless. Can you just tell us a little bit about what your plan is? I guess the goal of sending cops out with mental healthcare professionals, try to get the [inaudible]?

Mayor: Well, there’s a couple different pieces here, and I won’t announce anything before it’s ready to be announced, but I can summarize what we’ve said so far. The fact is the commissioner and the NYPD have been focused on these quality-of-life issues since he was first commissioner in 1994. I’d like to remind people – he’s one of the people who established this concept in how we police, and he’s continuing to. So anytime we see someone breaking the law, we’ll address it. What he’s adding to the equation, I think rightfully, is training to help officers know how to handle folks who are homeless – and in many cases that is people with mental health

problems, obviously. Our street homeless population is largely people who have mental health challenges – and we need to approach that different than we have in the past. One part of that is training the PD, but as I’ve said, you’re going to see some very substantial proposals coming out for how we can address the problem of folks with mental health challenges who are on the streets. And it’s going to be part of our larger reworking of our entire mental health system. So stay tuned for those announcements in the coming days. But look, we just don’t tolerate disorder. We’re going to deal with it. And what we do tolerate, as the commissioner has rightfully said, is those who are exercising their rights as American citizens. You know, there are certain rules under our Constitution where people can be out on the street, and I think, in many cases, in ways that we may not love, but it is their constitutional right. But the minute someone is aggressive, the minute someone is threatening, the minute someone is violent, or the minute they break a law, we’re going to address that very aggressively.

Juliet.

Question: Yeah. What about the people who are almost setting up house on the street. I mean, there are instances where people are sleeping on [inaudible]?

Mayor: Well, again, if you obstruct the ability of people to go by, that’s against the law. So we all know the phenomenon of someone who stands by a store – you know, door to a store – and asks for money and does it peacefully. And again, I don’t love it – I’m sure most New Yorkers don’t love it – but if someone is within their constitutional rights – not threatening anyone, not creating any kind of danger – that’s allowed. And Commissioner Bratton’s affirmed that that’s the understanding of the NYPD. But if someone’s obstructing the ability of people to move on the sidewalk, no one’s allowed to do that, and action will be taken.

Question: Was your administration caught a bit off-guard by the onslaught of attacks from Uber? And do you think there’s any lessons that can be taken from the battle that you guys fought over the past two weeks?

Mayor: I think we’ve spoken to the Uber issues.

Unknown: Two more questions.

Question: Your honor, I wondered if you could characterize the tenor of your recent conversation with the governor? Was it a person and was there any resolution reached on some of the concerns that you raised at the end of last month?

Mayor: It was by phone, and, you know, I think it was an airing of concerns, and I wouldn’t say a resolution was reached, but, you know, this is going to be an ongoing thing. I’ve said very squarely – what we’re trying to get to is tangible work on substantial issues that will benefit the people of this city. And we’re more than ready to do that.

Jillian.

Question: Mayor, there’s been a lot of discussion in the last week about cross-Hudson tunnels and the federal government looking to have a meeting with Governor Christie and Governor Cuomo. I’m wondering what your thoughts are on the situation there and what you think both – both states should do?

Mayor: We need another cross-Hudson tunnel, period. We need it and the city’s going to work very hard to support that. We lost a great opportunity when New Jersey, I think, made a huge mistake and turned away from that tunnel a few years ago. We’ve got to get it back – and I think, very much in the long-term interest of this city. Look, this is a growing city with a growing economy, and our connection to New Jersey is going to deepen. And we need people to be able to get across the Hudson River. We also need redundancy to make sure there’s always a tunnel available to us. So this is going to be a high priority going forward.

Thanks, everyone.

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