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

**Wolf Blitzer:** As the coronavirus pandemic clearly worsens, a surprise resignation by the New York City Health Commissioner. Let's talk about that and more. Joining us now, the Mayor of New York City, Bill de Blasio. Mayor de Blasio, thanks very much for joining us. Your Health Commissioner, Dr. Oxiris Barbot, she resigned in protest today. The New York Times says they obtained a copy of her resignation letter in which she wrote this, according to the Times, "I leave my post today with deep disappointment that during the most critical public health crisis of our lifetime, that the Health Department's incomparable disease control expertise was not used to the degree it could have been." So, in the middle of a global pandemic, your Health Commissioner is essentially saying, Mayor, that you sidelined the experts, a very serious charge, how do you respond to that?

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Well, first of all, Wolf, I disagree respectfully with the initial assessment there. It's a resignation. There is a statement in there of her own assessment, but that's not the same thing as a resignation in protest by any stretch. Look, this is something we've talked about for months here in New York City. Using all of our agencies, our public health agency, Health + Hospitals, which runs 11 hospitals and 70 clinics, has tremendous projection capacity out into our communities. It's the operational agency. The Health Department has tremendous expertise. We combined that to create our Test and Trace Corps which is now the largest in the nation and is helping us to keep our infection level down to one percent. That's what I reported to New Yorkers this morning, one percent infection level based on the tens of thousands of tests we're doing every day in New York City. We've had the lowest number of cases per day since the first half of March. A lot is working and having that test and trace capacity is part of what is working. It's been a group effort of all parts of government coming together. And that's what actually works, Wolf.

**Blitzer:** According to the New York Times, Dr. Barbot added this and let me read another quote, what she said, "Our experts are world renowned for their epidemiology surveillance and response work. The City would be well served by having them at the strategic center of the response, not in the background." So, what do you say to that? Because these accusations she's leveling are – she's especially critical, according to the New York Times, of what you didn't do early on that resulted in a large number of deaths in New York City.

**Mayor:** Now, Wolf, what you have there in that letter is something that we've talked about again for weeks and weeks in the city, made very, very clear that we needed to put together a combined effort of multiple agencies to create our test and trace capacity. That's what's referred to in the

letter. Health Department's been an important part of that. Everyone's expertise is being used in a way that allows us to, you know, have an operation that spans the whole city of 8.6 million people. No, I'm quite confident that in this crisis, with the lack of testing we had in the beginning, with limited information we had, and people all over the country lacked, we made decisions to keep people safe. This was one of the first cities – I was one of the first public officials to call for shelter-in-place and we did that in New York City. We moved quickly to get people to wear face coverings. We took a lot of steps well before the rest of the country. And it wasn't perfect by any stretch, but a lot of what we did here worked, and now people all over the country are looking at New York City and we have one of the lowest rates of infection anywhere. And we had been the epicenter. And now thank God, we're one of the safer places in the country. And that's what matters.

**Blitzer:** Students are about to return to school. The city is heading into what experts believe will be a very challenging fall and winter. How do you reassure the people of New York City that you're listening to the advice of your public health experts? It's obviously awkward that she resigns right in the middle of this pandemic.

**Mayor:** Look, we brought in a great new Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi, who was part of the extraordinarily important work in the initial response to the coronavirus, setting up our surge capacity in hospitals all over the city, setting up telemedicine, all of the things that helped us get through, that helped us hold our hospital system and reach tens of thousands of New Yorkers, even if they couldn't get to health care. He's a proven leader. He is an extraordinary person, Rhodes scholar, White House Fellow, extraordinary talent. He'll be able to come in immediately. He also used to work at our Department of Health before, so he'll be able to come in seamlessly, keep that going. But starting schools, Wolf, we are throwing in everything we got. Our schools, look, we're going to have blended learning, kids in class sometimes, out of school other times. Anyone who wants to be at home can be at home. That's an option, but we're going to be cleaning all the time. We're going to have social distancing in every classroom. We're going to have face coverings on every adult and child. We are doing everything you've ever heard of to keep our schools safe. And that again, that's our Department of Education and all of our health professionals working together.

**Blitzer:** The spokesman for New York State's Department of Education, and you know this, said your proposal to reopen schools looked more like an outline and not a plan, saying that other plans were more detailed. Are you going to provide an updated plan with a lot more specifics, Mayor?

**Mayor:** Wolf, we have an extraordinarily clear plan. We've been talking about it for weeks. And one of the things I said is we are not even going to open schools if we're above a three percent infection rate. Or if we go above a three percent infection rate at any point over a seven day period, we'll shut them back down again. We have a very rigorous standard, much more rigorous than even the national standards. And we sent a plan forward that really accounted for what our parents need, our kids need. Most of our parents overwhelmingly, we've surveyed them, they want to be back in school. But I'll tell you something else, Wolf, we have 1,800 schools, 1.1 million kids, biggest by far in the country. And we're sending in a specific plan to the State for

each and every one of those 1,800 schools. So, we're going to be well covered with plans to keep students, adults, educators, parents, everyone safe.

**Blitzer:** Another sensitive issue. Very important issue on your agenda. According to statistics just released by the New York Police Department shooting incidents in New York City in July, were up 177 percent over July of last year. Murders were up by nearly 59 percent, burglaries up 31 percent over July of 2019. Are you failing? What's going on? Are you keeping New York City residents safe right now?

**Mayor:** Look, we have the strongest police department of the whole country, but we are seeing this all over, cities all over the nation. It's been a massive dislocation. People don't have jobs. There isn't school. There aren't – houses of worship until recently weren't open. And you talk about every element of our society, Wolf, this is what's contributing to this massive surge that we're all experiencing. But the NYPD is fighting back. We put a variety of new strategies out there. We're working much more closely with communities to help stop the violence. Look, we need help. Let's be clear. The help we need is to make sure we can keep all of our public services. When you're talking about safety, health, education, they're all on the line, now, if we do not get federal support soon. I'm very worried about these stimulus talks in Washington, Wolf, because they seem to be going nowhere fast. My challenge is where am I going to have the people to do this work? I may have to do as many as layoffs of 22,000 City employees from every department by October 1st, if I don't get federal help. So, I know we can handle all these problems. We've proven we can before, but we can't do it without the skilled personnel, the cops, the firefighters, the health care workers, the teachers. That's the biggest threat right now. What if that federal aid doesn't come and time is a wasting, Wolf.

**Blitzer:** We got to run, but very quickly. So, you're suggesting the pandemic, the economic disaster that has resulted from the pandemic is causing this uptick in violent crime in New York City? Is that what I'm hearing?

**Mayor:** You're hearing it not only in New York City, but all over. Look, you are seeing a situation where people's lives are dislocated. There's tremendous frustration. There's also on top of that, the fact that our full criminal justice system can't function, our court systems have not been functioning normally, trials haven't been happening. Juries haven't been called. The whole system is stuck right now. We need to get everything back to normal, and that means addressing the health care reality so we can bring all the pieces back. That's how we get back to safety.

**Blitzer:** Good luck, Mayor. You've got a lot going on in New York City, as you always do. Mayor Bill de Blasio of New York. Thanks for joining us.

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