

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 9, 2020, 7:35 AM

CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON NPR'S MORNING
EDITION**

Noel King: It's Morning Edition from NPR News, I'm Noel King.

David Greene: And I'm David Green. We have New York City's Mayor, Bill de Blasio, on the line with us this morning. The stories from the city he leads during this pandemic have been heartbreaking. Medical staff have been describing warlike conditions in hospitals. More than 6,000 people have died throughout New York State, most of them in New York City. And Mayor de Blasio, thank you for taking a few minutes for us, given everything you and your city are going through.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you, David.

Greene: So, 779 people died in the State of New York yesterday, making it the deadliest day in the state so far. I guess I just wonder as we think about the city, what is your most pressing need right now?

Mayor: David, we still have to make sure that our hospitals can hold the line. I mean, this is – you know, our health care workers have been through hell. It has been warlike conditions. When you talk to the doctors and nurses who have been through this, they've never seen anything like it. They never expected in their whole lives to experience this kind of just extraordinary, painful surge, you know, and just people coming in one after another, after another near death. And they're trying to save as many as possible. So, we're not out of the woods at all in terms of protecting our hospitals, making sure they can save every life that can be saved. That's still the number-one issue every day.

Greene: Well, we spoke on our show this morning to a registered nurse from the International Medical Corps. She's leading the response in your city. She said, among the many challenges, and she said too what she is seeing is unimaginable, and she's – her organization has worked in war zones. I mean, she said the big challenge right now is staffing. Too many frontline health workers are falling ill. They need more people. What is your plan to get more medical workers where they're needed right now?

Mayor: Yeah, David, this is a huge issue here and it's going to be an issue even more in other parts of the country, going forward. And I'm sorry to say that. What we've done is, of course, we have recruited every doctor, nurse, respiratory therapist, anywhere we can – everyone we could hire, everyone we could recruit. But there's still – you know, our projection in a worst-case

scenario is we would need 45,000 more clinical personnel by the end of this month. And the only way we would be able to do that is with help from the federal government. And I've spoken to everyone at the federal level – the President, the Defense Secretary, you name it, about the fact that there should be a national system to enlist, even voluntarily, doctors, nurses, all the medical person that personnel we need from around the country. There are places, thank God, that are not experiencing this crisis so badly. Getting folks, getting medical personnel from other parts of the country to the front line, which right now is New York, but is obviously going to be a lot of other places, with the help of our military, and maximizing the use of our military medical personnel. I was in the South Bronx yesterday, Lincoln Hospital, one of the hardest hit public hospitals in the city in this crisis, and it was actually moving. There were dozens and dozens of Air Force doctors and nurses there in their fatigues about to go into the hospital to relieve the doctors and nurses who had gone through so much in the last few weeks. So, the military has a lot of medical personnel, but they still have not been deployed on a nationwide basis to help us through this crisis. And this is – I mean, we haven't, thank God, had a war on our soil in a long, long time –

Greene: But it sounds like it's sure feeling like one.

Mayor: It does feel like one, And, look, how many people have died, that feels like a war too.

Greene: Can I – I want to play you the voice of someone on the front lines. We spoke to him this week. He is an ER doctor on Long Island. I was actually speaking to both him and a doctor from Seattle. The New York doctor's name is Zachary Levy, and he was actually posing a question to his colleague in Seattle.

***Zachary Levy:** You know, I would be interested to know, because, you know, Seattle was, that region seemed to have been hard hit early on and I'm wondering what steps did you take that we maybe should have considered sooner? What did you do to, to put yourself in the position where you are now?*

Greene: I mean, Mayor, the Seattle doctor's response was there was strong leadership and early emphasis on social distancing. Did you wait too long in the City of New York?

Mayor: Look, we focused early on, on educating people to prepare for this crisis. And, in fact, this was one of the first places where, as soon as San Francisco moved to the notion of shelter in place, I called for it for New York, and we did it with the State of New York a few days later. In fact, we did some of the most intense things earlier. We closed the bars and restaurants. A lot of things needed to be done. I think the formula is, shelter in place and social distancing very aggressively and then holding it.

Greene: Well, let me – can I ask you, just how soon it was. I mean, I look back to March 15th, New York City had limited occupancy at restaurants, but that was a time when we were seeing a big increase in a state like Washington. And you said, you know, to New Yorkers, if you love your neighborhood bar go there now. I mean, on reflection, were comments like that a mistake?

Mayor: No, David, I'll tell you why – because I said that literally the day before they were all about to be shut down. And the fact is, what we did here was to convince people and then

continue to convince them that we were going to have to fundamentally change our lives in the place that's, bluntly, the hardest to do it. We're the not only the most populous city in the country, we're the most densely packed and people are used to an entirely different reality than what they're living right now. And the crucial part now is, convincing people to hold, because we're going to have to do this for many, many weeks – continue the social distance and continue the shelter in place and make sure we do not take the foot off the gas, if you will, and break out of it prematurely. I think this is going to be a struggle all over the country to recognize that until we have more testing, for example, which is still the fundamental problem in this whole crisis. We didn't have the tests that we needed at the beginning. The federal government didn't provide it when we pleaded for it for weeks. We still don't have it at the level we want. Until we have it on a much broader scale, we can't do some of the strategies that we need to as part of a turnaround. We've got to hold right now with shelter in place, with social distancing, and prove that those strategies are working. We've seen a little bit of evidence of it lately, but we're going to have to ask people to stick with it for quite a time to get through this.

Greene: Well, what have you learned from this pandemic and how you've managed it in New York?

Mayor: What I've learned throughout this is that it is about the people themselves. The government plays an absolutely crucial role, but it's about the people. And the people of New York actually had been heroic. The way they've actually taken to this guidance, no matter how tough it is, is part of why we see some signs, some small signs of progress. In the end, it's calling the people to the battle, to be leaders themselves, and that's what New Yorkers have done. I'm very, very moved by. I'm very proud of them.

Greene: New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, his city remains the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak in the United States at this point. Mayor, thank you so much.

Thank you, David.

###