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

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everyone. Yesterday, we all experienced some extraordinarily hot weather. And, as you know, it's continuing today, so we wanted to make sure to give everyone an update on both the actions that New York City government's taking and the precautions that New Yorkers should take through this weather problem we're facing. It's very important that people think first and foremost about their safety and about the safety of those in their life, particularly people with medical conditions and our senior citizens. I want the most important message here to be that we focus on the safety of ourselves, our families, people in our communities.

Yesterday's very hot, very humid conditions will continue through today – forecasted temperatures in the 90s, with the heat index values reaching as high as the high 90s. That's something that should be very sobering to all of us. The good news is, based on the reports of the National Weather Service, we should see relief this evening. Although, we have to obviously see this play out over the coming hours, at this moment we do expect relief as the evening proceeds and we expect cooler temperatures. We will however keep the air quality alert in effect throughout the day and into the evening until 11 pm. So, people with respiratory conditions should be particularly sensitive. And we'll hear from our health commissioner, Mary Bassett, in just a moment.

Suffice it to say, this kind of heat can be dangerous. People have to make smart decisions. People, of course, have to stay hydrated. Don't stay out in the sun any longer than you have to. Be aware of the challenge of this circumstance. Now, for those who need air conditioning, it's important to be in an air conditioned place. So, particularly again for the elderly, for people with health problems, for people who are feeling the effects of this heat, it's important to be in an air conditioned place.

But I also remind you, at the same time – and we're hearing this from Con-Ed as well – we have to be mindful in these very hot temperatures, energy usage goes up, which puts a strain on our electrical system. The last thing we want to see is any failures in our electrical system. So at the same time those people who do need to get to air conditioning should take advantage of it, for everyone there should also be mindfulness about not using any more energy than we have to. So if lights don't need to be on, they shouldn't be on. If any kind of electrical appliance doesn't need to be on, it shouldn't be on. And air conditioning should be set to 78 degrees. You'll be hearing from Commissioner Bassett in a moment. 78 degrees is a setting at which people will be safe, and they will feel cool, certainly compared to the temperatures outside, but it'll reduce some of the impact on our electrical system, and therefore help us maintain our electricity through this crisis.

I'd also like to urge folks who don't feel that they're experiencing any problems to also be mindful about conservation. And a lot of our businesses – and we've all experienced this – set their air conditioning to frigid temperatures. Today, I'm calling on all business owners, whether it's big businesses in Midtown Manhattan or a neighborhood shopkeeper, set your air conditioning to 78 degrees so you can relieve some of the pressure on the electrical grid. And again, your employees, your customers will be perfectly comfortable.

For any one who needs relief from the heat and does not have a place to go, the city will be providing over 500 cooling centers that's in city facilities and working with community-based organizations. There's over 500 locations around the city up and running now. You can call 3-1-1 or go to nyc.gov to get the information on where they will be. We're also announcing that we will keep all city swimming pools open until 8 pm tonight. So we've extended the hours to 8 pm tonight.

Again, stay cool, in a cool location, especially if you're feeling the effects of the heat. Don't expose yourself to the temperatures outside more than you have to.

Drink plenty of water. It's the most fundamental message. Our mothers told us this many times over – it is true in these circumstances. The body needs a lot of water to stay cool. Keep drinking water, even if you don't feel particularly thirsty. Just stay very, very hydrated.

I mentioned some of the folks that may be vulnerable – people with health conditions, seniors; obviously kids may be vulnerable because they may spend a lot of time outside not realizing – and not realize the effect it's having on them. So please – check on your neighbors, particularly our senior citizens. Check on them, make sure they're okay. If they need to get to a cooler place, again, we have the 500 cooling centers ready. Or you may have a neighbor who's a senior who needs to get to a cool place – invite them in, help them out in any way you can.

New Yorkers always do this – look out for each other, look out for the neighbors. This is a moment where we need people to do that.

Again, the cooling centers will be in community organizations, they'll be in libraries, senior centers, park recreation centers – a number of locations in all five boroughs.

I also want to note that the Department of Homeless Services has issued a Code Red alert – a Code Red alert, which recognizes that homeless who are out on the street are obviously at high-risk because of the hot temperatures if they're out in the temperatures for long periods of time. There'll be additional outreach efforts to those homeless individuals and transportation to get them to cooling centers.

Another item – the FDNY will be continuing to distribute spray caps to place on fire hydrants. This will help provide some relief down at the street level, but also will maintain our appropriate water pressure. So again want to remind people – if you want the water from the hydrant to help provide some relief, the way to do that is with one of the spray caps that are provided by the FDNY. Do not be a free agent and try and do it yourself. That can lead to a lot of water being wasted and that can reduce the water pressure that we need if, God forbid, we have to fight a fire at any particular location.

Any adult looking for one of those spray caps can go their local firehouse and get one, and FDNY is very happy to pass those out.

Again, any questions about health and safety in the context of this heat emergency, you can call 3-1-1 or you can go to nyc.gov.

Let me just offer you a few sentences in Spanish, and then we'll turn to Commissioner Esposito, Commissioner Bassett, and our DHS Commissioner Taylor.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, I want to welcome the head of this agency. He's done an extraordinary job in a variety of different crises facing this city, helping to pull the work of so many agencies together, and helping to keep the people informed – OEM Commissioner Joe Esposito.

[...]

Mayor: All right – we’re going to take on-topic questions first, and then we will do some off-topic questions. Let’s start with on-topic questions.

On this topic, anyone? Yes.

Question: Can you tell us what temperature City Hall thermostat is set to?

Mayor: Well, I will check personally, but it should be – again, I’m urging everyone to do 78, and I think that’s the right standard for this occasion. So I will follow up and let you know. Karen Hinton, do you want to say something?

Karen Hinton: Yes, I do. It’s 78.

Mayor: 78. We have confirmed. Thank you, Karen Hinton. That was rapid response.

All right, any other questions on the heat situation? Yes.

Question: Do we have any idea what’s going on with the electricity brown-out in [inaudible]?

Mayor: Well, we know Con Ed has asked customers in a number of neighborhoods to please very conscientiously conserve energy. There’s some areas where Con Ed is concerned and they’re doing extra work to stay ahead of the situation. That includes Richmond Hill, Woodhaven, Ozone Park, South Ozone Park, Kew Gardens, Lindenwood, Howard Beach, and Broad Channel. So in those areas – this has already been made public by Con Ed, I just want to amplify it – asking customers to conserve energy to the maximum extent possible. Again, obviously, safety first, but as we just indicated, there’s a number of situations where people can use either less energy or put the thermostat up to 78 and still be comfortable and be safe. So that’s an area where there’s some special concern right now. Otherwise, so far so good today. Again, our view is, based on what we’ve heard from the National Weather Service, that we need to get through to about 6 o’clock or 7 o’clock and then we should feel some relief thereafter. So if people are – do a good job at conserving throughout the day today, we may have a chance to get through this without any disruptions to our electrical power.

Okay, other questions on the heat situation – going once. Going twice.

All right – off topic. In the back, yeah.

Question: [inaudible] – were there any heat-related incidents that you can remember from yesterday?

Mayor: Heat-related incidents from yesterday? Any of you want to –

Commissioner Joseph Esposito, Office of Emergency Management: No injuries.

Mayor: You want to speak to it? Go ahead.

Commissioner Esposito: A couple of minor power outages, but no heat-related injuries as far our records show.

Mayor: And the outages were – from yesterday – have all been resolved.

Commissioner Esposito: All been resolved, yeah.

Question: Just a follow-up to that – the one on Staten Island, like Tottenville, was that [inaudible]?

Commissioner Esposito: No, it's over Fox Hills we had a power – no, Tottenville was a power outage for three or four hours yesterday. They asked folks in Fox Hills to conserve energy as a bit of a reduction out there.

Question: Okay, but it was related to the heat?

Commissioner Esposito: Yeah, it's – what happens is the lines get overheated, they burn up, and you have a power outage. Out in Staten Island, its overhead lines were affected.

Question: Yeah, Mr. Mayor, I'm just wondering, do you have any update for us on the review of the city's contract with Donald Trump – the Donald Trump contracts? And can you comment generally on the Donald Trump campaign? [inaudible]

Mayor: Well, I should just state the obvious. What Mr. Trump said about Senator McCain was unacceptable. Senator McCain is a war hero by any measure, and he really should apologize for that. And I've said repeatedly, Donald Trump doesn't represent the views of the people of this city – certainly not of the majority. But this is an issue for folks in the other party to work through. I just think what he said in the last few days was reprehensible.

Question: Sorry – that was – [inaudible] – just want to be clear – so there's a – there's a campaign underway in the City Council to cut ties with Donald Trump – [inaudible] –

Mayor: I'm sorry, the beginning of your question – yeah, I don't have a report back yet. My impression is that unless there has been some breaking of a contract or something that gives us a legal opportunity to act, I'm not sure we have a specific course of action, but we'll confirm that back to you. But we're certainly not looking to do any business with him going forward.

Question: On Friday, there was a bit of a panic caused when a photo was released by the police of some individuals holding what looked like they might be assault rifles, which turned out to be paintball guns. And the resulting effort from the police resulted in a lot of traffic on Staten Island. And obviously, I was just wondering if you guys are concerned with the amount of panic that was raised from the picture that was released for several hours? And whether or not you've learned any lessons from what happened on Friday?

Mayor: From what I know of that situation, it was handled properly. We had a report that seemed that it was important to follow-up on. It was obviously a serious report. There were – there was some evidence of something that could potentially be troubling. It made sense to be on high alert and to pursue it until all the facts came in. Once the facts came in, it proved to be something perfectly innocent. But I've got to tell you – I believe in the concept "If you see something, say something" so I want to thank the citizen who called in the report originally, because we needed to know that. And I think better safe than sorry is the way to look at these things. There will certainly be reports that turn out to be false leads. That could be true of a package left on the subway. You know, obviously, we hope and pray every time it is just someone left a package innocently, but we've got to be vigilant. And I think it was handled properly – and I'm glad the result ended up being that there was no problem at all.

Question: Mr. Mayor, today Uber has put out a public call asking for you to participate in a live-stream conversation with Uber executives, so you and they can debate your different points about their service. I was wondering if you could respond to that. Would that be something you could do?

Mayor: I don't debate with private corporations. Let's be clear – Uber is a multibillion dollar corporation, and they're acting like one. They're looking out for their corporate bottom line. They're putting their profits over all

other considerations. What we're talking about here is a temporary reduction in their growth. I think it's very important this gets accurately reported. There are already many more Uber vehicles than there are yellow taxis in New York City, and that's just happened in a few years time. There are a lot of unintended consequences we're starting to see in terms of congestion and pollution. There are real issues in terms of accessibility for folks who are disabled. There's a lot of open questions here that have to be addressed. The logical thing to do in these situations is for government to say, we have to have some rules here, and some regulation. Now, I know there's a lot of people in the private sector who'd like to have no government regulation whatsoever, but that's always proven to be a huge mistake. We've seen that happen over the years – we've seen the devastating negative impact. So, look, a pause on the rate of growth – Uber – all the Uber cars out there will continue, and they will continue to grow, just not as exponentially as they were before. And that will give us a chance to come up with appropriate regulations. But, no, I do not debate with the heads of private companies over their own self-interest.

Question: What – Mr. Mayor, what has your conversations, or how many conversations have you had with the yellow cab industry regarding the legislation at the City Council? And some are saying that this vote could happen as early as this week – are you pushing for that? And is that, perhaps, too soon? It seems like this legislation just came up [inaudible].

Mayor: I have not spoken about this legislation with people from the yellow cab industry. I think the legislation is appropriate, given the exact facts I just referred to. And I think it should be voted on as quickly as possible.

Question: Are you actively lobbying Council members to vote on Thursday?

Mayor: I have not talked to Council members actively. I've come across a couple, but not reaching out proactively.

Question: Mayor, initially this bill [inaudible]. But in some of the things you just said right now, and some of things you said in an op-ed, you made it more inequality, about workers, about them being – you know – a billion dollar corporation that's behaving unethically. Is it really about congestion, or is it more, to you, about sort of this broader agenda, and, sort of, why has that shifted?

Mayor: It starts with congestion, because this is what we saw and we were surprised by – that so many more vehicles – and, again, imagine that a few years ago, no one had ever heard of Uber, and now suddenly it has more vehicles than we have yellow taxis in all of New York City. Obviously, that's had an impact on congestion in the city, particularly in midtown. Therefore, it also has an impact on pollution. It is clear that the growth has been consistent and if it weren't addressed, that congestion problem would just grow and grow. So it made sense to call a pause –but not a pure pause, just a pause in the rate of growth – and to study the situation. But I fundamentally believe those other issues are very real as well. And I think we're going to have come to grips with this in terms of some of the changes in our economy. There's been some very good reporting lately on what's happening now as result of technological change – the rights of consumers are now in doubt, the rights of workers are in doubt. There's all sorts of unintended consequences here. And government regulation hasn't caught up with the reality. So I think it's important that we do so. Marcia?

Question: We're following up on, you know, your concern about the rights of workers. I wonder if you plan to return the contributions that have been made to you by Jean Friedman, who owns a lot of yellow taxi medallions, seeing as he's being sued by the Attorney General for violating the rights of drivers. So, do you think it would be appropriate to return those contributions? Because he's doing the same you're accusing Uber of doing [inaudible].

Mayor: Well, again, I don't know the status of that case, so I'd have to know a lot more about that.

Question: Mr. Mayor, Uber seems to be part of a big, massive traffic congestion problem, for various reasons. Is there any plan on traffic management, or improving traffic management given construction, given more Uber cars, given bicycle lanes? Is there an overall plan?

Mayor: Well, our Department of Transportation works on that all the time. And obviously, it also relates to Vision Zero, where we're trying to slow down – where we need to – traffic where there's been a safety problem. So there's many different pieces happening at once here. Look, I'd be [inaudible] to say one of our goals is to get people out of their cars whenever we can. There's a lot we need to do to improve mass transit. As you know, some relief is on the way. We're going to have a citywide ferry system soon. We're very proud of that fact. We're going to have more buses that are available on rapid routes that will allow people to get places faster, and want to take those buses more. So, bus rapid transit, I think, is going to be a big part of the solution going forward. So that's one piece of the equation. Another piece of the equation is constantly trying to figure out how we can improve the flow of traffic. That has to do with signals and all sorts of other – you know, timing, etcetera, etcetera. But clearly, our goal is to get people out of their cars whenever possible, and part of what we're seeing in this new phenomenon is getting people into cars more and more, and then those cars are not always filled. One thing we can say a lot of the time about traditional yellow cabs is one customer would get out and literally another customer would be standing right there, waiting to get right in. What we're finding with Uber is something a little different – that the cars are not filled a substantial amount of the time, and that's adding just a lot more vehicles for less purpose. So, all of these factors have to be taken into account, and we've got to keep figuring out how to unclog our roads.

Unknown: A few more questions.

Question: Based upon your concerns about Uber's business practices – you mentioned that the study will give you time to kind of address those [inaudible]. Since you already have laid out your concerns with them, why do need additional to address those, and do you have any plans to do so legislatively?

Mayor: Well again, first we have to understand what's happening specifically with the congestion problem. We have some initial indications, but we want to do a very careful, objective study. Second, to figure out solutions to whatever we find does take some time. So, we think one year is an appropriate amount of time. Again, the number of Uber vehicles will continue to grow, it will just grow at a capped rate. So, continued growth – just not unlimited growth. And that will give us time both to study and come up with specific solutions to whatever problems we may find, and then figure out what has to be done legislatively – what has to be done through TLC, etcetera.

Question: There have been a lot of shootings in the last couple of days. Do you have any comment on that?

Mayor: We're going to continue to aggressively approach the problem. And, you know, we've seen with Summer All Out – our deployment of over 300 officers to key precincts – that's already had a very positive impact in some of the areas where we had previously had particular upticks. So we've seen the ability to have a very quick impact, and a very positive impact. We're going to keep making those adjustments as we go along. So, we all know that, sadly, there are going to be upticks – and thank God, there will be times when the numbers continue to go down. Overall, we are absolutely on the right track. And the class that just came out of the academy, obviously, is going to help, and the additional officers that will be coming behind that. So, we're confident the NYPD will deal with this problem.

Thanks, everyone.

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