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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS ON INSIDE CITY HALL**

**Errol Louis:** Good evening. Welcome to Inside City Hall for Monday, May 18th, 2020. I'm Errol Louis. As we begin a new week and parts of upstate slowly begin to ease restrictions, New York City appears to be weeks away from meeting Governor Cuomo's criteria for reopening. But after a weekend of warm weather, one thing is for certain: city residents are increasingly heading outdoors and that raises concerns about how social distancing will be enforced over the summer. Meanwhile, just a short time ago, the city released extensive new data showing that the hardest hit areas of the five boroughs were outside of Manhattan and the data also show that black and Latino New Yorkers are dying of coronavirus at twice the rate of their white neighbors. Joining me now to talk more about all of this is Mayor de Blasio joining us as he always does from the Blue Room inside City Hall. Good evening, Mr. Mayor.

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** Good evening, Errol.

**Louis:** I wanted to start with some of the data. In fact, one of the questions is, one I've had for a while and I just, I keep thinking somebody is going to bring it up at your daily briefing. One of the indicators of progress that you talk about each day or present an update on each day is the number of patients in the ICU, which I take to mean people overwhelmingly who are on ventilators. And that number coming down is presented as sort of a good sign. But given that the survival rate of those on ventilators is well under 50 percent, don't we need to know the conditions under which people are leaving that ICU? I mean, if they're leaving in body bags, that's not necessarily a good thing.

**Mayor:** Well, Errol look, we're talking about each and every individual, you know, they're fighting for their lives and we're fighting to save them. That's what our doctors and nurses and health workers are doing. So, percentages are one thing, but the human reality is another thing. Each case is unpredictable. We're going to fight to save everyone. But what is abundantly clear is the overall number of people in the ICUs has markedly reduced and that's crucial, which means that we're not seeing a huge flow of people into the ICUs and the fewer people there the better by definition. So I think it is clear, you know, the job here is to get this disease contained so deeply that there's very few people ever go into a hospital, let alone an ICU, but we're still dealing with the aftermath of what was obviously a huge surge in this disease. It's still exceedingly important that the ICU – the total number of people has gone down really substantially in the last few weeks.

**Louis:** A related question I had was about that third indicator that you present, which is the percentage of those tested who are testing positive. In the early weeks, really, in the first month

of this crisis, you couldn't get a test unless you were exhibiting symptoms or otherwise clearly sick or had been obviously in contact with somebody who was clearly sick. So, understandably those numbers would be quite high. Now we have a better pipeline. We have more tests available, more testing available, more people who are able to get the test. And so naturally the number would come down, right?

**Mayor:** To some extent. But the truth is whatever's happening out in our communities, I mean, we still obviously have community spread of this disease. We know of – about 200,000 people have tested positive, but we know there's a lot more who have never been tested but had this disease. So, the fact is that knowing what the current reality is what allows us to understand if it is the right time to reduce restrictions and open up more. That rate, that positive test rate speaks volumes. As we reach more and more people if that rate kept going up and up, and remember it's a percentage. So, it's not, you know – it's based on whether you test a thousand people or ten thousand or a hundred thousand. If the percentage is going up, something's wrong – the disease is spreading. If the percentage is going down that's what helps confirm to us so we can open up more. And it's also just a matter of, you know, more and more believable fact the much more deeply you reach into the community. You and I have both come up in politics, that we were at the beginning sort of doing polling with a very small sample size. That's the reality of what we had for testing. It was far, far inadequate and we never had the federal government as a testing partner really bringing in the amount of testing we needed. Now, of our own volition, we're creating the kind of testing, already today at 20,000 tests per day capacity in New York City and that is climbing constantly, where we're really getting a deep slice of the city. And that means what we're seeing, we believe is, is much more accurate than anything we've seen before.

**Louis:** Okay. And I guess I haven't gone through the full data set, but one of the numbers that's already being talked about is the high percentage, in fact, twice as high for black and Latino New Yorkers compared with their white counterparts. This was touched on some weeks ago. It's a pattern that's repeating itself all over the country and the underlying cause appears to be what are called comorbidities, meaning higher incidences of hypertension, diabetes, obesity, and other things that leave people vulnerable. So, knowing all of that, is there a plan in place to attack those underlying problems, which can in many cases be turned around in a number of weeks if not days, and maybe make people more resilient against the coronavirus?

**Mayor:** Well, I think what we're talking about here is the really painful, really unfair history of race and class in this city and in this country. Because although your right, some conditions can be treated, you know, quickly. A lot of them obviously built up in people over long periods of time. I mean those classic preexisting conditions, diabetes, lung disease, heart disease, compromised immune system, these are things obviously get back again, not just to racial disparity, but to economic disparity to folks who never got the health care they deserve because they didn't have the money they deserved. And this is the blunt reality of health care in New York City and health care in America, it's based on economics. It's based on income, which is madness. It should be a human right.

So we have now for the last year and a half guaranteed health care in New York City and we're building out – this is one of the answers – I think building out a system to ensure that literally every single New Yorker either has health insurance they can afford or has an NYC Care Card

with an assigned primary care doctor in one of our public hospitals or clinics. So, they're literally – my goal is that there's not a single New Yorker who doesn't have a doctor, doesn't have either insurance or the equivalent of it. When you apply that kind of strategy over years, you're going to talk about a much healthier community that's going to be much stronger in facing a disease like the coronavirus. But the disparities, we're seeing these horrible, painful statistics mirror exactly what we knew before the coronavirus. Exact same places are suffering now, have suffered before. The exact same health disparities we saw previously are now playing out with the coronavirus.

**Louis:** Right, but I mean for the – and then the reason I raised it is hopefully we're not going to just do more of the same. If the answer is make it easier for people to show up with a clinic with all of the problems that are not necessarily going to be dealt with, but the symptoms will be dealt with. Right? I mean, you know, you stay unhealthy, you stay obese, you still need insulin for diabetes, we'll just make it easier for you to get the shot that's not even a long term solution and it certainly won't help people in the middle of this health emergency.

**Mayor:** Well, I want to differentiate, you make a really fair point, Errol, that it's more than just health care. I couldn't agree more. But let's be clear a huge percentage of the people we've lost didn't get adequate health care throughout their life and have they had consistent quality health care, it would've made a huge difference in lot of these cases. So, let's be clear, health care unto itself, being available, being a high quality, not being rationed by economics, that would have made a big difference. It will make a big difference going forward that we're going to have guaranteed health care in this city. But I agree with you, some things go well beyond health care. Nutrition obviously, where there's a lot more we need to do and can do, addressing food deserts for example. Wellness, fitness where there's a lot more we can do, whether you're talking about schools and example, we are, you know, ensuring now that every school in New York City will have a gym facility. That wasn't true for generations. Something I announced a couple of years ago that's now being budgeted. Every single school either in the school, next to the school, near the school is going to have a gym facility. You have to add up a variety of those strategies to have the longer-term impact. But I think so many people we lost never had the opportunity even to have the basics of high-quality health care and that underlies this whole crisis.

**Louis:** When you saw the map or some version of that data did any particular neighborhoods stand out for you? Any different part of the city?

**Mayor:** Look, it tracks so consistently with that painful map that you and I both know well of where poverty exists in this city. Health care disparities, everything we've known before from that historic map, and when I say that I'm talking about human beings and families, I'm talking about, you know, people have suffered for a long time and disparities that have been with us for a long time. I didn't see a lot of variation. I thought, we know some things that are true, we know for example, in places around Elmhurst hospital, obviously a place that took a huge hit here. That's where I think we're seeing some of the extra negative impact in immigrant communities of some of the recent policies coming out of Washington over the last three years, four years that have discouraged people from going to get health care, discourage them from getting social services. I think that's had an impact here. I think it kept people from feeling comfortable, reaching out even to get health care and call a doctor because they feared deportation. So, we see

some, you know, important sub-currents that are identifiable. But, overall, it tracks with everything we've ever known about economic and health disparity.

**Louis:** Okay. Standby, Mr. Mayor. We are going to take a short break here. We'll be right back with much more from Mayor de Blasio. Stay with us.

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**Louis:** Welcome back to Inside City Hall where I am talking with Mayor de Blasio. He joins us from inside City Hall. Mr. Mayor, I wanted to ask you about the Health Commissioner. I noticed she was not on the call again today. You were said to be planning to have a – kind of a comprehensive conversation with her over the weekend. You said that that has happened. Can you tell us anything more, I guess, about what went on that led to the reports that popped up just recently and whether or not all of that is now behind us?

**Mayor:** Look, Errol, first of all, I think it was very important that she apologized publicly. I'm glad she did that. She's a good person, I think it was a heartfelt apology. The fact is that what I need in this team at this moment of crisis is everyone working as a single team, whether it's the Health Department and the department of – the Police Department and Health Department working together. Whether it is the Police Department, the Fire Department, Health Department, and Health + Hospitals, everyone needs to work together as one team. That's what New Yorkers really deserve, because that's how we save lives, that's how we protect people. So, that's been the substance of all the conversations – how do we get the maximum teamwork, maximum positive impact to protect the people in New York City in this pandemic? And I think, you know, there's a clear understanding of the things we need to do to move forward. I have to tell you, it's been six-and-a-half years of this administration – overwhelmingly, there has been that a team mentality. I think we've been able to break down a lot of silos. A lot of agencies have found they can naturally work together in new very positive ways. We need that more than ever and I think everyone's devoted to that.

**Louis:** I thought – the most startling thing for me, personally – and I don't think I'm alone in this – is that you've said a couple of times now that when this happened 60 days ago, you didn't know anything about it, although Chief Monahan says that he informed City Hall, which I assume to be to mean a deputy mayor. And, you know, are members of this team hiding information from you? How could you not know something as serious as what was at dispute here?

**Mayor:** Look, 60 days ago we were dealing with the beginning of this horrendous crisis and everyone was focused on saving our hospitals and saving lives. So, I think there's been a very consistent pattern in this administration. I have a lot of faith in the people that I've chosen. I feel they do a good job overwhelmingly of keeping me informed. And I have to make decisions all day long as you know, especially in this time of crisis. But no, look, there's some things I don't hear when I'd like to hear them – that happens sometimes. But the important thing is this has been handled. It's been addressed, so we can move forward.

**Louis:** Okay, let me switch topics. Another television channel had footage this morning of what appeared to be about a hundred students at a Yeshiva in violation of every social distancing

regulation that you and the Governor have talked about. The story – I don't know if this is true, maybe you could give us an update – was that everybody just kind of walked away from it and not even a summons was given to them.

**Mayor:** This is what we've been very clear about, Errol. And we said this on Friday, I went into real detail about what we expect from the NYPD, going forward, because we're asking a lot of the NYPD right now to take the lead in the dressing elements of the coronavirus crisis while fighting crime and doing everything else they do to help people. And we're asking the same of many other agencies, they're taking on a whole lot of new responsibilities. But with the case of the NYPD, it's really important to strike the balance in terms of protecting relationship between police and community at the same time. And what I said is, I don't want to see the NYPD enforcing if someone doesn't have a face covering. I want them to get a face covering for free, I wanted to put it on, we're going to have civilian ambassadors, community groups out there making that clear. PD officer will also say, hey, please put on your face covering and give them one for free. I don't want to see enforcement if, you know, a few people get too close together, I want to spread out. But gatherings, groups, anything larger, anything more systematic – that's where there's going to be enforcement. Now, I've said this repeatedly, if NYPD shows up –

**Louis:** But this is a hundred people holding classes – it's like a big middle finger to all of the policies out of City Hall. I mean, this isn't about only one person to summons.

**Mayor:** No, we've been really clear. This is what I'm saying – if the NYPD shows up and there's a gathering, the gathering needs to immediately disband and not come back. If they do, that's fine. If they don't, the summons is come out, and that's what we've said is for the way we're going to approach each and every situation, each and every community – immediately address the problem or you're getting a summons, period. And that kind of situation, we're now going to watch that location regularly to make sure it never reasserts.

**Louis:** I mean, I have to ask this, just because we had this conversation last week about, sort of, a related issue – do you have some kind of political understanding with leaders of the Orthodox community that there would basically be no enforcement around this?

**Mayor:** Errol, it's been abundantly clear that we're going to enforce against gatherings everywhere. I've had this conversation this conversation explicitly –

**Louis:** But that was whole point of the question though, Mr. Mayor, there was no enforcement in this case. Does that mean – that's just not enforcement.

**Mayor:** Again, you have an opinion, Errol, god bless you, but I'm telling you, as leader of the city, what we're doing. So, if you're interested in the answer here it is – I said, for all communities, the way we're doing it now is when NYPD shows up, people have to disperse immediately. If they don't disperse, they're getting a summons. If they come back, they're getting a summons. I've had this conversation with leaders of a variety of communities. We're going to treat everyone the same, no gatherings, period.

**Louis:** Are you at all concerned that whoever you have said this to doesn't appear to have taken it seriously?

**Mayor:** I think it's abundantly clear in – across the communities of this city people are taking it seriously, because we've seen consistently there haven't been gatherings. They're extremely rare. Where they happen, we're going to stop them. If anyone tries to come back, they're asking for a summons. And if they come back again, they're asking for another summons. It will be dealt with, there's no question about that.

**Louis:** Okay. In our last minute, because a lot of people have been asking, do you plan to relax rules for restaurants and cafes so that they can make better use of the sidewalks, and we saw in a lot of neighborhoods over this last weekend?

**Mayor:** It's a really interesting idea, Errol, and it's a very appealing idea. We're not there yet because, as you know, it's not going to be until June that we even can consider any kind of relaxation. And restaurants and cafes where that's going to fit in the timeline, we're not there yet. That, you know, anytime you're talking about gathering people together, we've got to get it right in terms of health and safety. But I'm very intrigued – the idea of using outdoor space more, we have to find out the formula to do it safely. What we saw this weekend wasn't safe, and, again, NYPD, sheriff, other agencies will show up to any bars where people are congregating. When the authorities show up, you better scatter. If you don't, you're going to get us summons.

**Louis:** Okay. We're going to leave it there for now. Thank you for your time, Mr. Mayor. We will see you at the briefing tomorrow.

**Mayor:** Thank you.

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