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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO APPEARS LIVE ON INSIDE CITY HALL

Errol Louis: Good evening, I'm Errol Louis. We continue to lose hundreds of New Yorkers to the coronavirus every day. And as shocking and tragic as those numbers are, they seem to be an improvement over what we've seen in recent days. We may, in fact, be turning the corner. Here now with more information and analysis, we've got the Mayor of the City of New York, Bill de Blasio joins us from the Blue Room inside City Hall. Good evening, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good evening, Errol.

Louis: So, now, what are your officials telling you – your health officials, the president of Health + Hospitals – about what is going on with these numbers and at what point they believe that we'll have actually turned the corner on this virus?

Mayor: So, Errol, I'll tell you, I'm hearing constantly from our health care leadership that they want to be very careful here. This is a ferocious enemy, this disease. And we do know in other parts of the world – you know, we've seen it reassert whenever different places took their guard down or took their foot off the gas. So, there's a real care here, a real caution about getting it right. And the indicators themselves, which we've been putting out publicly now over the last week or more, clearly show we are not out of the woods. Whether we are in some kind of prolonged plateau, which would, bluntly, not be good, it would mean that the disease was still, you know, strong and prevalent for a prolonged period of time. Whether that's the place we're at or whether we're starting a consistent decline of this disease and moving towards lower transmission, we don't know that yet. Our indicators show progress but not sort of fully consolidated progress that we can put a timeline to it or say we're certain we're turning the corner. So, we're going to be really careful about this because the last thing I want to do is tell New Yorkers we've turned the corner and then it turns out to be a lie.

Louis: Got it. For people who are sick, just as a very practical matter, should – if they start to feel sick, they start to exhibit some of the symptoms, do you want them to come to a public clinic or hospital? Should they be trying to deal with it at home at first? What's the right course of action?

Mayor: So, the thing that's been true for a long time is true still now, which is we have got to be careful to protect the places where lives are being saved every single day, and that's our hospitals. They're in better shape than they were a few months ago – or, excuse me, a few weeks ago, I should say. But there's still a tremendous challenge to our hospitals and our health care workers, and that is – meaning we have to think for their ability to save lives of all the people we

love, they need to be able to keep doing the work they're doing. We don't want hospitals overwhelmed. We don't want people going to a hospital for example, because they have, you know, some early symptoms and then being in a situation where they're exposed to other people, for example, in an emergency room setting. The standard we've set for quite a while now is, if you have those initial, sort of, cold and flu-like symptoms stay home, stay away from other people. If it gets worse, absolutely seek medical care. If it gets better, that's great. That's what most people experience and they run through it in a week or two and it's over. But I want to caution that the people who should be quickest to pick up the phone for care, of course, are the folks that now we've confirmed 100 percent are the most vulnerable – older people with preexisting conditions, with those major, serious preexisting conditions. This crisis has a proven beyond a shadow of the doubt those are the people who are the most vulnerable. Tragically, those are the people we're losing – overwhelmingly are in that category. Folks who are, you know, over 60, over 70 with, you know, heart disease, lung disease, cancer, with a serious preexisting condition – anyone in those categories who starting to feel sick, of course stay home. But if it's starting to feel worse, pick up that phone and talk to a doctor. And you can't, if you don't have your own doctor, call 3-1-1 and we'll get a Health + hospitals doctor on the phone with you to assess immediately whether you need to come in and get medical care.

Louis: There's been a lot of talk in recent days, Mr. Mayor, about a contact tracing, which seems to go in a different direction than what we'd heard weeks ago. What we heard back in March was that couple community spread and the rapid dissemination of the virus meant that there wasn't much point to try to trace down who sat next to who or which conference you went to that might've spread the virus, that you have to assume the worst and just move to protect yourselves. Has something changed?

Mayor: Yes. Yes, absolutely, Errol. So, Errol, we're sort of going back – if this works, if all this social distancing, all this shelter in place that New Yorkers have done such an amazing job at, if that continues to work, we actually sort of go back in time to where we were in the beginning of March. Remember, in the beginning of March we were able to say – here's a case, remember the lawyer from Westchester? And then, we were able to say, here's the people he worked with in his law firm; here are the members of his family. And then, you know, his son went to a college and here's his roommate. We were able to do all that for a period of time and actually do the work of containment and then quickly found out very, very sadly that community transmission was already occurring. But what happens later when you beat back this disease is you go back to that kind of tracing. It actually works when the disease is in retreat, because you can identify anyone who needs testing, anyone who needs quarantine. And then, of course, not let people out of quarantine until they test negative consistently. So, the whole idea is, a lot of testing, a lot of contact tracing, some of that with disease detectives, some of that with self-reporting and with the use of technology, but on a vast scale so that anytime there's the possibility someone may have the disease, they're immediately evaluated and if they need to be quarantined. You do that consistently enough it's actually how you effectively eradicate the disease from the city.

Louis: Let me ask you about testing. Right before I sat down with you, the President was having his daily press conference at which they waved around a sheet of, you know, 5,000 different kinds of testing equipment that's out there, some of it is six pounds, some of it is 600 pounds. A lot of it is available. They mapped out in New York the different places that are available for

various forms of coronavirus testing. Is there a testing shortage or is this about getting federal funding to pay for the testing that we need done?

Mayor: There's absolutely a pure testing shortage. And then, of course, when you're talking about testing people, tens of thousands a day, even hundreds of thousands a day, there's a huge funding issue too. The amount of testing that – the last figure I heard for the entire country in a day right now is the amount we might need going forward in a day just for New York City to actually contain this disease and effectively eradicate it. So, right now, you cannot put together – you know, you need the test kits, all the components of the test kits, you need enough personnel and enough PPEs for the folks who administer a test, you need enough lab capacity. That just doesn't exist. Those pieces are not coming together on the private market. There's no way to do it yet to the scale we need. And then, when you finally get to that really big scale, it is a huge cost on top of it. But no, I don't know why the President keeps saying it. I don't know any mayor – I've talked to mayors all around the country, I don't know any governor, I don't know anyone who's saying they're having an easy time finding testing. And we start asking for testing back in January, we haven't had a single day where it was anywhere near the amount that we need.

Louis: We saw some alarming information about the situation in some nursing homes, including some tragedies in Brooklyn and elsewhere around the city. Do you have a special strategy to deal with the prevalence and the high fatality rate at local nursing homes?

Mayor: Yeah, it's really painful what we're seeing. And we're talking right now, the city's talking with the State about whatever new approaches we can bring to this problem. You know, the City doesn't have a direct role in the nursing homes, they're monitored and regulated by the State. But we have been working with the State, we've been providing PPEs to nursing homes now for several weeks at the request of the State. We want to figure out what more we can do to figure out – you know, to figure out a better approach. Clearly, there's a need here that has to be met. My impression is that some of these nursing homes – I mean, a lot – first of all, most of them are for-profit – this is really important for all your viewers to understand – it's a for-profit industry, first and foremost, some are much more sophisticated with what they do than others and I think that's a problem. Some seem to be, you know, much more focused on the health care of residents than others. Our health department is trying to help any nursing home that is willing to accept help on how to improve their medical approach. But we're trying to figure out with the State now, what additional measures we can take, because there's something here that has to be addressed.

Louis: Okay. Stand by, Mr. Mayor. We've got more to talk about. We're going to do that after a short break, then we'll be back with Mayor de Blasio.

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Louis: Welcome back to Monday's with the Mayor, our weekly conversation with Mayor Bill de Blasio who joins us now from inside City Hall. Mr. Mayor, you released your executive budget last week calling it a wartime budget. It sounded like there'd be a lot of pain, but then right behind that there were some reports that, for example, the Department of Education was preparing to re-up with bus companies to the tune of as much as \$700 million even though kids

have not been riding the buses or going to school for four weeks now. Are they getting the message over at DOE?

Mayor: Yeah, that media report was inaccurate. Where there was truth in it is that there's a real question that has to be resolved about what do you do with all these bus contracts and we're working on that right now. What was inaccurate about it was it projected a much longer period of time that any decisions have been made on. The only question before is right now is the bus service from March, which actually about half the month happened and bus service was given to kids and then April, I remember in the beginning of April, we were still not sure if there was going to be a chance of bringing school back or not. So that's going to be resolved in the coming days.

The bigger question is an open question because we are certainly not in a position to spend a large amount of money on service we're not getting, not only with buses, Errol, but with many, many other things and we're going to have to make tough choices in the weeks ahead. There's a number of areas where we're probably going to have to cut back and it's probably going to mean some people unfortunately, not city employees, but folks who work with organizations that work with the city that we can't guarantee them they're going to have a livelihood going forward. And I hate saying that, but that's just the truth. We're going to go into a really tough situation here. We're fighting right now for the federal government to give us the help we deserve to make up for the lost revenue, which I report is already \$7.4 billion. There's no way in hell we can find that kind of money. We're fighting for that to be part of the upcoming stimulus.

A lot of other mayors and governors around the country, Democrat and Republican, are fighting for that. I think we have a real chance of getting relief there and that would certainly help us. But even with that, there's going to be a ton of tough choices ahead. And things that were going to have to do without because we're just at the beginning of this crisis and I'm trying to brace New Yorkers for the fact that it's going to be a long one, obviously, first and foremost about protecting the health and safety of New Yorkers, making sure they had food, making sure they have a roof over their head. But then this budget crisis is coming right on top of that and it's not going to let up anytime soon. So many tough choices ahead.

Louis: That sounds pretty ominous if, you know, for people watching right now who run afterschool programs or who run, you know, summer youth programs, that sort of a thing. Is there a scenario where they get the kind of treatment some other small businesses have received as far as either applying for the federal program, the Paycheck Protection Program, or even a local version of it where there are loans and grants available to tide them over?

Mayor: Well, I can tell you we want to look. I am – I feel a real connection to all of those organizations who help young people and do social services and to do so many things at the community level. I've been deeply involved with them for years and our budgets have been supporting them intensely. But I'm trying to be honest about the fact that going forward, I don't know what we're going to be able to afford. It does not look good. We're certainly not as a city going to be able to offer a paycheck protection approach. We don't have those resources. Only the federal government has those resources. I think you're right. If we ever got to a point of saying, you know, there's folks we can no longer support initiatives that we don't think are

coming back soon, that we can't afford anymore, then I would like to think we can find a way to work with those federal stimulus programs to get support for people in those situations. But, you know, this is what I started saying with the budget presentation last Thursday, we did over \$2 billion in cuts already and that's just the beginning of what's going to be a very tough process.

So, people need to understand, I'm here, you know, I've had – I'm going to protect the basics. We have to think about public health and public safety. That's where the vast majority of our spending has to be focused right now, We're projecting for just COVID related new expenses are going to be about \$3.5 billion this calendar year. That's where our money's going. They have a big food program because so many people – we announced \$170 million for food because there's so many more people are hungry in this city. We have a lot of people struggling to stay in their apartments. We need to help them. So, it's those basics. It's literally coming down to health, safety, food, shelter. That's where we're going to put our investments. A lot of other things we may not be able to get to in this environment.

Louis: Do you have any concerns about the notion of New York needing to compete with or against other cities? When the dust settles from all of this, when we're past the worst part of the crisis, do you have any concerns that, you know, young people, entrepreneurs, others will say, you know what, maybe I'm going to give it a try in San Francisco or some other place where they were able to handle this entire crisis a little bit differently than New York.

Mayor: Look, I think New Yorkers have been – I really mean this – if you talk about handling a crisis, New Yorkers have shown themselves to be the leaders of this whole country, by the way, every day New Yorkers have comported themselves. I mean, it's been absolutely amazing and heroic, and of course the health care workers, the first responders. If the measure is, do you want to be in a place that had, you know, heroic acts and where people did amazing things and everyday people led the effort to fight back this disease? Well, you know, folks who want to be inspired will stay in New York City. Folks who want all the things that New York City has had for generations will stay here. Folks who, you know, want to start businesses and do something that's going to connect with the whole world, they're going to stay here. This is still going to be under any scenario, one of the great economic centers of the Earth, you know, the cultural centers of the Earth, you name it. What we have is irreplaceable. I'm not going to be shocked if some people are feeling worried and decide to go to a different place.

But I don't think that's most people by any stretch and I believe, as we've seen before, by the way, Errol, remember the 60s, remember the 70s, people left, other people came in and you know, there was a time in the history of this city where people said on New York City's days that are behind it. We came back with a vengeance and became like one of the great cities of the world, really. So I think what's going to happen is the vast majority of people are going to be proud of what happened here, are going to be part of fighting back on restarting and rebuilding, and then a new generation of folks will come into who want to be a part of everything that's great about New York City. And I have no doubt about our future. It'll be a rough road at times but we're great for a reason. And I think that's going to win the day.

Louis: You spoke a little earlier about preexisting conditions that make one a not just most vulnerable to the virus, but maybe you should push people to consider getting tested or taking

some aggressive steps, especially if they start to feel some of the symptoms. I mean, if you broaden that lens to include preexisting conditions like diabetes, hypertension, obesity, asthma, the whole cast of characters that afflicts so many communities in New York, you're talking about well over a million people. Is there a plan to sort of go directly at people who are dealing with those issues instead of waiting for them to get sick?

Mayor: Yeah, absolutely, and it's starting now with the community-based testing centers that we've opened in some of the hardest hit communities. They opened on Friday, some others today. Those centers are starting and they're going to build up rapidly. We're also doing an initiative with a Local 1199 SEIU to reach health care workers and nursing home workers and others as well as community residents. So, between those two initiatives, 10 testing centers have been opened just in the last few days and there is a focus, you know, diabetes absolutely is one of those five preexisting conditions. Severe asthma is too, as a lung disease or respiratory disease, moderate asthma does not create the same threat, but severe asthma absolutely does. So this is what we're doing now, as we expand testing, as we really get it to the level we want it to be. We want to be hyper focused on folks who are most vulnerable, particularly if of course if they have symptoms. So, the more testing we get, the more strategic we can be in reaching folks who are most vulnerable. They're unquestionably a lot of people who, I'm very sorry to say fit that description, but remember it very much connects with age, Errol. Someone who has diabetes, who's younger, it's an issue, but if you're older and have diabetes, that's what really makes you vulnerable to the coronavirus and that's who we want to focus on first.

Louis: I know you were with the Borough President of Staten Island earlier today. I spoke with him last week. I know there's a lot of frustration out there on the Island in part because they don't have a public hospital and in part because they said they are not getting the levels of protective equipment that they needed. Were you able to arrive at a strategy for the Island that you can tell us about tonight?

Mayor: Sure. I've been touch with Borough President Oddo regularly over these last weeks and he's been very, very forcefully advocating for Staten Island. He's doing the right thing. The reality is that we have gotten the PPEs to the two Staten Island hospitals consistently, but remember on a crisis standard, which is true of all 56 hospitals that are part of the anti-COVID effort. They're all working on a crisis standard. It's not the level of PPEs that anyone wants to ideally provide. We just have not been able to get them between the federal government, State government, the private market, we've been constantly limited in what we could bring in. Even this week, we're still fighting as we speak for enough surgical gowns to get through the week for all of our hospitals and nursing homes. So, Staten Island has been consistently resupplied, no place, not Staten Island, not any place in the other four boroughs has gotten everything that they ideally want, but they've been constantly resupplied. They will be constantly resupplied and today I said we're going to also be moving additional medical personnel. The personnel that came in, we first focused on the neediest hospitals, which were our public hospitals which have borne the brunt, Elmhurst, Lincoln, Bellevue, these have been the ones that borne the brunt of this struggle. Some of the independent hospitals particularly in some parts of Brooklyn that have borne the brunt, but we're spreading out staffing now to other hospitals including a particularly RUMC on Staten Island. We're going to keep doing that. As more personnel become available, we'll get more to Staten Island. As more PPEs become available, we'll get more to Staten Island.

But very much on my mind and my team's mind to make sure that Staten Island gets what it needs.

Louis: Okay, we're going to leave it there for now. We will speak again next week. We'll see you with the briefing tomorrow. Thanks very much for spending some time with us, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor: Thank you, Errol. Be well.

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