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TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO WELCOMES USNS COMFORT TO NEW YORK CITY

Mayor Bill de Blasio: So, this morning we all watched something absolutely extraordinary, absolutely inspiring as the USNS Comfort entered New York Harbor, coming here to as save the lives of New Yorkers in our hour of need. We've all been through a lot these last few weeks and we needed this boost, we needed this hope that's being created by our brothers and sisters in the US Navy and the Marine Corps, everyone who is here to help us at this crucial moment. This ship arriving is not just an example of help arriving in a physical form. It's not just about the beds and the doctors and the equipment, it's also about hope, it's also about boosting the morale of New Yorkers who are going through so much. It's about saying to our heroes in those hospitals that help has come. That relief is on the way. I can't tell you how much this means, it is so much more than even we realize at this moment that our nation has heard our plea for help here in New York City and there could not be a better example of all of America pulling for New York City than the arrival of the USNS Comfort, some major, major moment in this long battle that we will be fighting against the coronavirus.

I think there've been times in recent days where a lot of New Yorkers have felt alone. A lot of New Yorkers have felt a sense of not being sure of what's coming next, not being sure of help would come. Well, I want to say to all New Yorkers, we have evidence here you are not alone. We are not alone. Our nation is helping us in our hour of need. There's a lot of people to thank and you're going to hear from two of our real heroes here from the federal government who are doing so much for us. You're going to hear from Rear Admiral John Mustin in a moment and the Regional Administrator for FEMA, Tom Von Essen, who's well known to all of us in New York City. But I want to thank everyone who was a part of this many, many people work together. And look, we've got to remember, this is a wartime atmosphere, we all have to pull together. We may have differences in peacetime, but to the maximum extent possible, we all have to be as one in wartime. I know our colleagues in the military understand that. We all need to understand that now. So, I do want to thank President Trump. I want to thank Secretary Esper. I want to thank Chairman Millie, everyone at the United States Navy, the United States Marine Corps, the United States Coast Guard, all the people at FEMA, so many people at the federal government who came together to make this happen and so much more for New York City. I want to thank Governor Cuomo, and everyone in the State government, who has joined us in pushing from day one for this kind of support. I want to thank from our administration, everyone to work to get the dredging done, working with the military. I want everyone to understand – and Admiral Mustin will affirm this – this ship is here ahead of schedule because the amazing work of the military, it's here ahead of schedule because the dredging was done faster than anyone knew it could be done to allow this ship to dock. I want to thank everyone at the City Economic Development

Corporation, our Emergency Management Team, and also, of course, the State Department, Environmental Conservation, and the Army Corps of Engineers. Everyone pulled together. This was supposed to take two weeks to make it possible for this ship to dock. They did it in eight days and that means help has arrived quicker and we're going to be able to do the lifesaving work right now. I want to also thank from the military, one of the leaders who did the work to make this moment possible – Marine Corps Colonel Brian [inaudible] who's with us. Thank you, Colonel. And from my team, Deputy Mayor Raul Perea-Henze, for Health and Human Services, and Commissioner James Hendon, Department of Veteran Services. Colonel James Hendon, thank you.

So, with this ship comes an extraordinary compliment of talented individuals in service to our nation, 1,200 medical staff and sailors here to help us all. 750 beds will be put into play immediately to relieve the pressure on a hospital system. Let me be clear that this is such a crucial part of the plan we are putting in place, but I want you to understand the sheer magnitude of the plan. We need to triple our hospital bed capacity in New York City by May. The number of beds we had at the beginning of March have to triple by May – it's a daunting task, but we got a big, big boost. The arrival of the Comfort – this is like adding a whole other hospital to New York City. It's like, think of all the big hospitals in New York City – Bellevue and all the other famous hospitals we think of – it's like another one of them just floated right up to help us right now.

And I hope New Yorkers know that this is something we've been fighting for, and we're going to be fighting for a lot more help, because there's just the beginning. My job is always to tell you the truth and I'll tell you when we get the help we need and I'll tell you when we need more help. I'll tell you when we're getting into the thick of the battle and I'll tell you when we're coming out of the battle. Right now, the toughest weeks are still ahead, but we are grateful. We are grateful for every doctor, for every nurse, for every ventilator, for the supplies, for the beds, for everything that's come from the Comfort and everything that has come from all over the country. I have to tell you, it's the federal governments, it's the State government, of course, but it's also the companies that come forward offering help people we've never met, individuals who come forward with supplies, health care workers who have volunteered, it's the United Nations, which came up with a quarter-million surgical masks and got them to us right away. We're seeing amazing offers of help and people are moving fast to get help to New York City and we appreciate it. We need it.

So, let's look forward. Let's pray. There's going to be a lot more days like this when people can see our nation stand by us. And then, I affirmed to you, when the battle is done here, New York City will stand firm for the rest of our nation. New York City will be the first to donate to the rest of our nation. We will send the ventilators, the supplies. We will ask our doctors and nurses to go to the front, wherever it is in this nation, because our country was there for us and we will be there for our country.

A few words in Spanish –

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

With that, I want to turn to a guy who's been a hero before for this city and we need him to be a hero again. And I know he is already rising to the occasion. He helped lead New York City through our darkest hour on 9/11. He was then our Fire Commissioner and he did an outstanding job under the most adverse circumstances our Fire Department had ever known. When he became the Regional Administrator for FEMA, he could never have imagined this day, nor could any of us. But I said to Tom earlier, thank God he is where he is now. I think God had a plan for him because his City needs him again. My great honor to introduce the Regional Administrator for FEMA, Tom Von Essen

Regional Administrator Thomas Von Essen, FEMA: Thank you, Mayor. Yeah, it really seems it's gotten real personal for me this morning. About two weeks ago, we moved our regional response recovery coordination team down to a Naval base in rural New Jersey where we have an operation center and we're able to get people off public transportation. We have all our equipment down there set up there, it's really good set up. It was built during Sandy, had a Naval base, so we have about 30-35 people working there every day, late, late into the night working to try and accommodate everybody we can in New York City, New York State, New Jersey, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin islands – that's what region two is at FEMA. So, I had been down there the last two weeks and I came back for this today, and I was driving on East River Drive and I looked across by 14th Street and I had a flashback to the morning I was driving in and they told me a small plane had crashed into the Trade Center and life changed at that time. And I remember having the Comfort come then, you know, a couple of – I don't remember when, a couple of weeks later or whatever. And we didn't need it for what we needed for today. We didn't need it for people who needed hospital care, it wasn't necessary, but we brought it in. We needed it for crisis counseling for a lot of fire chiefs and police officers who were really, really overcome with the grief and at that that they faced with their friends and people that they worked with and we needed to house federal workers and give them food and everything. And we got it out of here and we started putting them in hotel rooms, but I'll never forget the feeling, I talked about it this morning the names of perfect, the comfort and the mercy and I was told they were here in 1918 for the pandemic we had then not these particular ships, but their predecessors. So, the federal government has always been here, the Army, the Navy, the Marines, that they've always been here for us when we needed them and they here again for you now and for me.

To the flashbacks, I get knowing that the City is under such stress now, it's real personal for me. The Fire Department, I spent 30 years in it. So, when September 11th happened, it was personal. It was friends, it was leaders, people had worked with, everybody was affected by September 11th. And that's what's happening now – everybody you know is affected by the coronavirus in one way or another. A friend, a relative, a loved one that you can't go and see because there are in quarantine or you don't want to— and I stopped to see a 100-year-old lady last week and just, you know, talk to her from six feet away. And I know everybody's doing that and it's important, but this, this is a big-time visible sign of what our government is like when we put it into action. And the Mayor said it and it's really – I'm really proud to be part of it now, I know how tough the people of this city are and I've seen us take on some seemingly— insurmountable challenges. Once again, we need to do it once again we need to be together six feet apart. I saw the Mayor taking pictures with some of the military folks I never noticed it before, taking a picture with someone that was two or three feet away. It's weird. It's really strange what we're all going through, but it's necessary and it is going to make a difference. The more we separate, the more

everybody stays away, the better off we'll be in, the faster we'll get out of this. But thank goodness now help has arrived. It's going to make a big difference. FEMA's working with the City, with the State to supply everything we possibly can, working with HHS to get as many medical people here as we can. People that help us with the forensics and the mortuary problems that we're going to have, because we are going to have an awful lot of folks that aren't going to make it.

But we're doing the best we can. And it's an honor to be back in a middle of such a tough, tough battle that we have in front of us. But September 11th, it seemed like every day we were fixing stuff and it was getting slightly better. The grief, of course, was enormous, but the operation seemed to get slightly better every day with this. It seems to be we're not there yet, it's not going to get better, it might not get better for us here in the City for weeks, maybe a month, I hope not, I don't know. I listened to Dr. Fauci on here about models and worst-case scenario and best-case scenarios. We just don't know. So, we are preparing for the worst case and that's all we can do at this point. And we're doing a good job, and we're here for you.

Thank you.

Mayor: Thank you so much, Tom. Now, such an honor to bring to you the military leader of this effort he comes a family long connected to the US Navy. He is someone we're thinking about right now as one of our saviors, one of the people led the forces who came to help us in our hour of need, but his day job is Vice Commander of US fleet forces. So, he has a big, big job and a lot to think about. But, right now, his mind, his heart, his soul is focused on New York City. And I'm proud to say he is also a resident of Manhattan and has a family here and understands what we are all going through. And I just want to express on behalf of 8.6 million New Yorkers, my gratitude for your leadership and for all the men and women who serve under your command, an honor to present to you Rear Admiral John Mustin.

Rear Admiral John Mustin: Mr. Mayor, Mr. Administrator, Commissioner, thank you for being here today to welcome this great ship to the officers, the crew, the medical professionals of USS Comfort. Thank you for the vital mission that you've undertaken. I'd also like to recognize and thank the many, many contributors who work tirelessly behind the scenes to make this day possible. Each of those who helped to fit out and prepare this ship in record time from the maintenance community to the dock workers, to the ships company, to the doctors, to the dredgers. Thank you, all of you for the agility and professionalism that you have all shown over the past few weeks. That focused collective effort will save American lives. Today, I also want to recognize that not all of our nation's heroes wear military uniforms, especially today we acknowledge that many wear scrubs. Let us not forget, nor fail to recognize that the doctors and nurses across America, those who are treating patients in these unprecedented times, they are all heroes and like those heroes, the unmistakable Whitehall and Red Cross at this great ship had been a welcome site around the world standing at the forefront of our humanitarian missions overseas.

This ship represents all that is good about the American people, all that is generous, all that is ready, responsive and resolute. Like her sister ship the USNS Mercy was recently [inaudible] and is already serving patients in Los Angeles, this great ship will support civil authorities by

increasing medical capacity and collaboration for medical assistance, not treating COVID-19 patients, but by acting as a relief valve for other urgent needs, freeing New York's hospitals and our precious medical professionals to focus on this pandemic. So, now this great ship will serve and support our fellow Americans in this time of need, providing critical search hospital capacity to America's largest City. As a resident, a New Yorker myself, I can attest to the invincible spirit of New York from the ships that she built in World War II to are unflappable determination following 9/11 and hurricane Sandy. I have great confidence that New York will weather today's storm as well.

This time with the support of another great American community; the naval families on-board and supporting the crew of the USNS Comfort. Words are incapable of expressing the depth of my gratitude for those on this mission and for the families that they leave behind. The men and women on-board Comfort are mothers, they're fathers, they're sons, daughters, sisters, and brothers and while our lives may look drastically different today than they did even a month ago, the circumstances for these men and women are no exception. They left their families during this uncertain time in our nation's history, knowing that they can make a difference. That is what the US Navy does and this is an example of Americans helping their fellow men. I know that for our military families, social distancing is not a new concept, but rather a frequent reality and I remain grateful for all that each of them do for our nation and for our communities every single day.

As you've heard from the Administrator, the last time this great hospital ship – all 70,000 tons of her – was in New York, was in the wake of 9/11 where she served as a respite and comfort for first responders working around the clock. Today, like then, we bring a message to all New Yorkers – now, your Navy is returned and we are with you committed in this fight. Mr. Mayor, every sailor, every Marine, and every civilian on this mission stands proudly, stands ready to serve the people of New York City. We have not yet begun to fight and we will not give up this ship.

Thank you.

Mayor: Beautifully said, Admiral. And thank you so much. All right, we're going to take questions now from the media, just please project your voices so I can hear you well. Go ahead. Oh, we have microphones, even better.

Question: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. So, what's your, what's your message to President Trump after the Comfort docked here to help New York City and when it came in here to the pier, what was your emotion and what was your reaction, overall?

Mayor: It's a very emotional moment. I went up on the roof here to watch the Comfort come in and I had this incredible feeling of peace actually – that help was finally coming – that we were not alone and I just have a reverence for the military. I come from a family that had a deep involvement in the military – I have a reverence for the military. Feeling the presence of the United States military here it just gave me a sense that things were going to be okay and just, it's such a moving sight. This ship is so impressive and just looming there in our harbor, you know, it was like a beacon of hope and it really felt that way to me.

My message to the President is thank you and we need more help – and that's not because any of us likes to have to say that, but because it's true that the toughest weeks are ahead. We are bracing ourselves for something we've never seen before in any of our lives and the federal government in many ways is the only force that can help us to reach the level of preparation we need to - to save every life we can save. So I'm going to keep calling the President, I'm going to keep appealing to him, to get us all the help we need for these really tough weeks. And then again, we will turn around and help everyone else in this country right after.

I'll go this side, yes.

Question: Mr. Mayor, as you know, normally this time of year we'd be very busy and focused on the state budget and Albany. I just want to ask, I know it's kind of a secondary issue now, but there is a lot getting crafted up there. Do you have any concerns in terms of what you've been hearing in terms of how the City will be affected?

Mayor: I have real concerns. I have deep concerns because what's being discussed is essentially health care for people who need it. When you, you know, we can talk about the Medicaid budget, but that's I think the wrong way to think about it: what it equals is health care for people who need health care, right now and need it more than ever because of the pandemic. I spoke at length last night with Speaker Carl Heastie and Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins. I let them know that from the perspective of 8.6 million people in New York City, we cannot afford Medicaid cuts or health care cuts at this dire moment. The state must accept the Medicaid funding that was in the third stimulus bill. We need that money to be accepted and we need to make sure that the health care so many people are depending on is not disrupted. So, I understand that the state has a budget challenge; we have a huge budget challenge, I mean, I'm right now in the middle of cutting a huge amount out of this budget for this City right now, but what I will not cut is health care and I said that the other day, we're going to find some really tough cuts we have to make, but it will never be about health care - it will never be about the fight against COVID-19. So, I urge the State – accept the federal money, do not cut Medicaid, do not cut health care for New Yorkers who need it.

Question: Can you [inaudible] tell us what the what kind of services this ship will be providing and who, how will it be decided what patients will be going to this ship and which patients will stay in the hospital?

Mayor: I'm going to start and I'll let the Admiral join in, obviously. What I have to explain to everyone, I think it is such a shock to hear this that people are still kind of adjusting to it. The Intensive Care Units in our hospitals used to be a small part of our hospitals and again, at the beginning of this month, we had about 20,000 working hospital beds in New York City. What we have to do is convert as many as possible, potentially almost all of those traditional hospital beds into ICU beds. We have to make whole hospitals into Intensive Care Units to get through these next weeks. That's how dire, that's how tough this situation is. If we're going to turn a hospital, I mean think of Bellevue, think of NYU Langone and you go by these huge buildings, they're going to be all ICU if we can bring all the pieces together, the staff and the equipment, everything. Well what happens to everyone else who doesn't need intensive care? We have to have hospitals for them too. What happens to people who've been infected with Covid-19, but

are not at the point where they need intensive care - hopefully on the way to recovery? They need a hospital bed in many cases too, but we can't put them in an Intensive Care Unit, which has to be reserved for those we're trying to save. So what the USNS Comfort allows and Javits Center and so many other places being developed right now, is the ability to take all those other patients and give them care and each location will be different, but it will allow us to keep a health care system going while we convert the core hospitals into something we've never done. This is beyond anyone's imagination. I asked the head of our public hospitals, Dr. Mitch Katz, I said, have you ever heard of any place where they had to turn hospitals into all ICU? He said, no, no one's ever come near having to do that in the last hundred years in this country, but because the Comfort is here because of what's happening at Javits Center, we're going to have the ability to do that and save a lot of lives. Admiral you want to join it?

Admiral Mustin: Just in terms of the specifics and the mechanics, we've been working very closely with the local health care officials to determine what that process looks like. So, so frankly we are prepared to receive and we trust the screening process that is in effect at the Javits Center so that we will receive advance notice so that the ship can prepare to receive the patients. But, but in terms of what the health care providers determine are the best patients for us, those are the ones that we would expect to receive.

Question: Question, how can you take us to the mechanics of this transfer of patients? How are you communicating this to the patients? What kind of situations are these patients experiencing and are the families going to be able to visit them on board of the Comfort?

Mayor: Alright, I'm going to start and I'm going to give you the disclaimer right away that all of this is being worked out in real-time. So, I guarantee you we are not going to have all those answers today because we are literally in a wartime situation, building it as we go along. Dr. Raul Perea-Henze, our Deputy Mayor, if any of you want to jump into any of these questions about procedure please do, or Admiral as well. I think the common-sense basic answer is, we are going to work out the protocol between all the players, how to get the right patients to the right locations. Again, reserving the hospitals for ICU to the maximum extent possible. Some places will specialize in convalescent COVID-19 patients, meaning patients on the way to recovery, no longer intensive care. Some places will specialize in all sorts of other medical needs that require hospitalization because remember all the folks with heart disease, all the folks with cancer, there is still so many people that will need hospitalization for other things that are not COVID-19. So, we are working out those protocols right now. As to things like visitation. I think a fair statement would be the normal rules will not apply. Just going to – I'm the non-doctor telling all New Yorkers right now, we are always going to always try respect families, but we have to be clear that the normal rules of going to a hospital, just aren't going to exist in this kind of wartime environment and people should get used to a different set of standards. It will be determined for each location what that is. But there is going to be such urgency, dealing with a huge uptick in cases that we can't do all the things we normally do. Admiral you want to add or Deputy Mayor?

Deputy Mayor Raul Perea-Henze, Health and Human Services: Yes, as the Mayor outlined, we have stood up, Hospital Executive Committee which includes all the public hospitals, the voluntary hospitals, the independent hospitals, and the Command from Comfort and Javits. There's a screening mechanism, very complex, in order to allocate who goes where. As the

Mayor pointed out we are prepared to convert as many as the regular beds in all hospitals in the city into ICU beds. Hopefully we will get the ventilators so the most severe cases end up being taken care of there. The visitation piece will require a screening like we are doing for everyone right now. So, if there is any risk that a patient that has no COVID-19, that is being taken care of here at the Comfort, has a relative that could be potentially infected, of course there will be screening for them not to come in.

Question: You had said that by Saturday you would decide whether or not to close the playgrounds. Why have you left the playgrounds open, when for example, Hoboken has closed its parks and Bergen County has closed its parks. Why do we not have consistency on that guideline for social distancing?

Mayor: This is an issue that obviously we are working with the State on and the states have all been working together and there is not one uniform standard. That's just the truth. We are very cognizant, look, 8.6 million people in a very small space, I don't think taking away parks is a great idea unless we have evidence that people are not following the rules in a really substantial way. I have had this conversation daily with our Police Commissioner. He says overwhelming they are seeing compliance. We know warmer weather is coming, not today but warmer weather is coming. We are going to watch carefully. What I said yesterday is this, right now the police and all of our agencies are authorized to use fines, we have given enough warning, enough, education. Anyone who, if you Andrew, are in the park and an officer said sir, you are not practicing social distancing, I need you to move. And you said I am not going move. They are going to say sir, you are about to be given a fine, this is your last chance. And if you don't move or if you don't follow the instruction you are going to get a fine. If we see any basketball courts where there's games going on and we have warned people to stop. We are going to take down the rims. We are going to take out tennis nets, we are going to take out soccer nets, whatever it takes. On the playgrounds, if we see individual playgrounds where there is noncompliance. We can close the playground. If we see it, broadly, all the playgrounds will be closed. But to date, based on the sheer facts coming back from the Police Department, Parks Department, noncompliance is limited. You will find some instances, I'm sure you will Andrew, but not enough to tell 8.6 million people they cannot have parks. And that's the balance we are trying to strike.

Question: Thank you Mr. Mayor. Yesterday we heard pretty scary numbers from the federal government. Do you have any particular forecast scenario for the city? I mean particularly for New York City?

Mayor: I have been real honest with New Yorkers that at this point we assume at least half of all New Yorkers will contract this disease, again consistently we see for 80 percent that means, thankfully, a fairly mild experience. That they get through okay and recover quickly. But, right now, at least 50 percent, could be substantially more. We see this horrible increase in the number of deaths. And I have been honest. I think the weeks ahead will be tougher. To date, I still fear that the worst is not going to be April, but actually in the beginning of May. But no projection is perfect. I guarantee you and I wish I couldn't. But I guarantee you that April is going to be exceedingly tough. And we have to understand that any projection of things being all okay by Easter, there's just no way that's true for New York City.

Question: This is a question, actually for the former fire commissioner, Von Essen. Hi, Commissioner, can I ask you a question. Over here. Welcome back to New York.

Regional Administrator Von Essen: Oh, thank you. I never left.

Question: Well great to have you here now. I am wondering, you mentioned mortuary logistics. What are working on right now? What's the current city capacity to hold the deceased? And is there any consideration of turning places like MSG, Madison Square Garden into a mortuary facility?

Regional Administrator Von Essen: No. Fortunately, we are not thinking of anything like that. But we are sending refrigeration trucks to New York to help with some of the problem on a temporary basis. I was speaking to Commissioner Criswell this morning, we have sent – the military has sent 42 folks to the Manhattan Medical Examiner's Office to help over there. And we need – you have a desperate, New York City, we in New York City have a desperate need for help over in Queens. And we are working on that as we speak, there's folks trying to put it all together. There's only so many of these teams that military has. We have 50 states and a couple of territories and commonwealths that we are trying to, not hold back resources, but trying to make it, make a plan ready that works for the whole country. So, it's difficult but everybody's trying. And we will get more help here for New York.

Question: Thank you Mayor. Clearly as you have pointed out, this is a very visual representation of the help that has arrived. But can you give us a clearer sense of how much more help is going to be needed? I mean if you will, how many equivalences of the Comfort does New York City need to get through the worst of this, sir?

Mayor: Yeah it's a great, great way of thinking about it. Think of this ship, which is 750 beds to begin, has a capacity, potentially of 1,000 beds. So, here's the way to think of what we are all working on right now. We started with around 20,000 working beds in New York City. We have to get over 60,000 by the beginning of May, according to what we know now – like adding 40 US Comforts, and that's the magnitude of what we are talking about. And the amazing thing is, that we believe with enough people working together that we can get there. As hard as that sounds, you know, here's this extraordinary contribution from the federal government, here's the Javits Center where they are talking about up to 3,000 beds right there. The surge capacity in the hospitals, where every hospital is adding 50 percent more beds, that's on top of that original 20,000. They are all finding additional beds to add in their facilities. You know creating new spaces. Mitch Katz said a long time ago, he can turn a cafeteria into an ICU if he needs to. He can put up a tent in the parking lot and turn it into an ICU. And then the hotels and the other buildings that we'll be moving to. So, it's a herculean task. It's never been attempted in the history of New York City. We believe that's the number – we'd love to find out it's a lesser number – but that's the number we're shooting for and I believe with enough work and enough creativity and enough teamwork, we'll get to it.

Question: Last night your administration made an announcement about all of the supplies and ventilators you have given to the hospitals throughout the city to date. I'm wondering how your

administration is handling supply distribution to private hospitals. A lot of it has been focused on going to the public hospitals, rightfully so. But I'm wondering if any of these supplies and ventilators have gone to the private hospitals on Staten Island. And then I have a second question

Mayor: Absolutely. And I've had this conversation daily with Borough President Oddo to make sure that supplies are getting where they are needed. Yes, the City has provided supplies to RUMC in substantial numbers and we'll continue to do so. The supplies for Staten Island University Hospital come from a combination of sources – State, City, the Northwell Hospital system. But I'm keeping my eye – and my team is – on all of it. We really don't see a separation between public hospitals, voluntaries, independents in this kind of situation. We're all working together.

Remember the other day we got in 400 ventilators from the federal government. We sent 100 to the public hospitals, 300 to the voluntaries and independents. And so that's going to be the pattern – not necessarily that percentage – but that approach. We're all sharing to make sure at any given moment a hospital has what it needs. Go ahead.

Question: How are you guys planning to get COVID patients from the outer boroughs to the Comfort? Places like Staten Island [inaudible] –

Mayor: The idea is to keep folks who need that urgent care, that ICU care in hospitals that will be converted increasingly to ICU care. Folks who do not require ICU care but do need hospitalization for COVID-19, the goal is to keep them as close as possible, of course, to their home and in their home borough. So, we're continuing to build out capacity on Staten Island and we will continue as in every borough.

Question: Can you hear me – with rent due tomorrow for many people, wanted to ask about a proposal from some local officials who want to allow people to apply their security deposits to next month's rent. Do you support that? Are you doing anything to make that a reality?

Mayor: I do support that and I think the – my understanding is that we need some kind of State action to allow that to happen. But I think that's exactly the right approach. Look, everyone's hand to mouth – or so many people, at least, are hand to mouth right now. Their income has just been blown away, federal help is coming but that will take time. People need help right now. Applying the security deposits, it actually – it helps the renter to pay the rent, it actually helps in many cases landlords especially smaller landlords because that money is in escrow right now. And the smaller landlords need money to get by as well, so it frees it up for them. There has to be some process to eventually restore that deposit, you know over time – maybe an installment plan overtime. But immediate relief is needed. I think it's a great idea. We're working with folks at the State level to see how to make that happen. Okay, go ahead.

Question: Mr. Mayor, in terms of – you talked about the ventilators and the hospital beds, where are you at in terms of the PPE for the hospital workers, nurses, doctors – where do we stand on that?

Mayor: So, on personal protective equipment, this week – and I’m always giving you this update week by week. If it ever turns into needing to tell you day by day I will. This week in terms of personal protective equipment for our hospitals, we do have a sufficient supply. We have sent it out and continue to send it out around the city. Hospitals – this is something Dr. Katz said yesterday and everyone has to keep in mind – hospitals are teaching their professionals, their health care workers, a new way of handling this equipment because until there is a truly ample supply like there used to be in peacetime, folks are being trained to handle the supply differently to stretch it out, to re-use it whenever safe.

That’s a whole different way of life and instead of seeing in the supply closet, you know, a month or two of supply, people are seeing less. They are seeing days or a few weeks. And I think it is understandably unnerving to the health care professionals. But we’re all working together to help everyone understand the new reality for this moment in history. The supply today is sufficient. It will take us into next week. The thing I’m worried about right now is ventilators overwhelmingly.

I have asked the president and the White House for 400 more. We will take them from any source. If 400 more come in some other way, that’s great, but we need that to make sure we will get to April 5th okay. As we approach April 5th, which I’ve said is a very – a day I’m really concerned about in terms of equipment and in terms of personnel – I will update New Yorkers as to whether we have enough to get through the next week. But that’s how tight it has been. Number one concern – ventilators, right behind it the need for more doctors, nurses, respiratory therapists to actually handle ICU capacity and give some relief to these health workers who are going through so much. Yeah?

Question: You said \$1.3 billion, you were looking to cut from the budget but that number might need to update –

Mayor: Yeah, it will go up. We will give you an updated number shortly but it’s definitely going to go up.

Question: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. And will patients treated on the Comfort have to pay their medical bills as usual or will this be paid for by the federal government?

Mayor: Well, I don’t know. Admiral – well, I mean, first of all, insurance is insurance so whoever has insurance, I assume that’s the go to. But Admiral or Raul, do you know the answer?

Admiral Mustin: Yes, Sir. When the president declared a national emergency, the implication from the Department of Defense is that we provide this service – and we are not looking to check insurance cards or send any invoices or bills. This is an investment by the government on behalf of the people of America. So, there is no additional cost to the patient.

Mayor: Well done [inaudible]. Admiral, that’s a great plan. We thank you for that.

Question: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. You mentioned that 750 beds are available immediately on the Comfort. Does that mean patients will start to be moved today and if so or if not, how many patients will be moved in what sort of timeframe?

Mayor: So, I want to make sure they are fully docked before any patients go in. They are still securing it. Between the Admiral and Deputy Mayor, who wants to speak about the timelines? You want to start or –

Admiral Mustin: So, as the Mayor mentioned, obviously, we want to take care of all the regular husbanding services required once the ship comes into port. We're prepared to begin receiving patients tomorrow. I won't open the box to say while we may be ready internally to do that sooner, we want to use a very methodical process that's been developed in conjunction with the local health authorities which is predicated on starting tomorrow.

Deputy Mayor Perea-Henze: Just a quick point, we're going to do the assessment that I talked about before with the hospital committee, going through the Javits Center, and as the patients start coming from the hospitals, screening will happen today, probably in the next day or two you will start seeing patients here.

Question: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Did you get any results, any outcomes of the drug test which was started last week?

Mayor: I'm sorry, which one? Clarify –

Question: Last Wednesday you were supposed to tell – to start the drug test of the new kind of medications regarding this problem.

Mayor: Yeah, there are several different approaches that are being tested now certainly in our public health system. But I want to make sure we give you a fully accurate answer so I'm not updated on that, I'll make sure our team from Health + Hospitals get you that answer. Okay, everybody, thank you very much – a good day for New York City.

Thank you, everyone.

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