

## **On the Front Lines: Race, the Pandemic, and Recession**

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**00:00:** I wanna thank our three mayors for joining us, two of our mayors obviously on the front lines right now, Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, Mayor Francis Suarez, and former Mayor Mitch Landrieu, no stranger to dealing with crises, obviously serving as a Lieutenant Governor during Katrina and then Mayor in the years after and continues to be so active in his community. So we are going to talk about the multiple crises that we are facing right now as a country at the federal, state and local levels. And Mayor Bottoms, I'd like to start with you, because you had a chance to ask a critical question of the World Health Organization. And I think it really helps to set the tone for this conversation. You asked the World Health Organization what resources are available for helping us accurately track and measure the racial and ethnic disparities of COVID-19. What were your key takeaways from the response that you got, Mayor?

[pause]

**01:09:** And I think, Mayor, you're not unmuted. Okay, there you go.

**01:12:** Now, I'm unmuted.

**01:13:** Now we can hear you.

**01:15:** Thank you. Welcome to COVID. So my key takeaway was really to go outside of the normal ways in which we would think to collect data. Quite frankly, I've been stopped at the fact that the state was not collecting data on the front end, but it had not occurred to me to go to other sources such as our hospitals who may collect the same data and give us the same snapshot. Based on what we do know, the African-American community in Atlanta in particular is being hit in a very big way. And statewide we're seeing it with our black and brown communities. The disparity is alarming. And even when you look at Atlanta with our population, just over 500 thousand and there is a statewide population of over 10 million, we still account for roughly 45% of the positive COVID cases in the city. And based on the data that we do have, the death rate is somewhere close to 80% or more in the African-American community. And so it's startling, it's alarming, but it also highlights the systemic issues that we now are really elevated during this time of COVID.

**02:37:** And race is obviously such a big factor right now in terms of not only battling the COVID crisis, but in terms of what we are seeing nationwide, the protests calling for change. Let's keep the focus for right now on COVID, we are gonna get to all of that. But Mayor Suarez, pick up where Mayor Bottoms leaves off and the fact that you have these communities of color who have been so disproportionately impacted by this virus. How can we better get resources to these communities if we're not accurately counting and assessing how they are being impacted?

**03:16:** In the city of Miami, we're a city that has a tremendous amount of poverty generally. And people see oftentimes the glitz and the glamor of our city, but the City of Miami is a poor city. And it's incredible when we have a situation, and I'm glad that I'm on with my good friend, Keisha, Mayor of Atlanta, because they're slightly above the 500,000 population threshold. I think they're at

506. We're slightly below the 500,000 threshold. We're at 468. So one of the big challenges that we've had is we have not seen a trickle down of CARES Act funding that cities that have a population or counties that have a population of over 500,000 have received. I think Mayor Bottoms may have gotten a direct aid of 88 million dollars. So far, we have zero dollars right now in our community, which would allow us to feed people in our community. It would allow us to provide help to small businesses. It would allow us to help with rent and mortgage relief, which is so desperately needed in our community. Because as was being said by the representative of the World Health Organization, a lot of the problems with the outcomes in COVID is the circumstances that people are in in the current moment, right? If people are not able to take care of themselves, then they are more likely to have some level of pre-existing condition that's exacerbated as they confront COVID, which certainly makes the outcomes much poor and we're seeing that across the board.

**04:50:** And so the fact that we have not gotten any, essentially any real aid from the federal government from a COVID perspective or from a CARES Act perspective, is something that I'm hoping that whatever bill passes, hopefully sooner rather than later. Not only provides more funding for cities and not just for our deficits, but it creates a waterfall effect. So that the 500,000 population, which is wonderful for cities like Atlanta that desperately need it, is something that a city like ours, which is slightly below it, doesn't get a guaranteed funding source. So that is something that hopefully will be fixed in the next round of funding, because we desperately need it.

**05:32:** Well Mayor, just to follow up on that. Why did Miami not get the federal funding that it needed from the first round of CARES? And your message to law makers? We have spent a lot of time here at the White House covering the negotiations back and forth. They've been going on for days now, still no deal in sight. So the urgency that you are feeling right now in Miami to get federal funds to your city.

**05:58:** The urgency is critical. The reason why we didn't get it is because they put an arbitrary threshold of 500,000 for populations of cities, counties, or states. And we have 468,000 according to the 2019 census, so we basically missed it by 32,000. And it would've been \$81 million that would've gone to the city of Miami. And would've allowed us... Like I said, we had meal programs that we were fronting the money for. We had a rent and a mortgage subsidy programs. Of course, people cannot pay their rents, people cannot pay their mortgages because many of them, by the way, have lost their jobs by government mandated shutdowns, which we needed to implement to get the virus under control. So my message to legislators, number one is we need action immediately. We've signed on over 250 mayors and a bipartisan coalition of mayors from the US conference of Mayors have urged the federal government to please pass a relief package immediately and to please fund it as well, not just give flexibility under the first CARES Act. And I think we'd certainly also need the flexibility under the first CARES Act, and we also need a waterfall provision. So that smaller cities are also receiving help and that are not at the mercy of the county that may wanna divvy up the funds for political reasons or for other reasons.

**07:18:** Mayor Landrieu, let me have you jump in on this point. You are no stranger to dealing with crises that disproportionately impact the African-American communities in your city. So how critical were federal dollars to your city in the rebuilding of Katrina and other crises that have impacted your community there?

**07:40:** Well, thank you for the question. And I'm thrilled to be here with Mayor Bottoms and Mayor Suarez. They're both great leaders. They're on the front lines. They're living it everyday. Both of them have personally suffered from COVID and I'm sure they'll talk about that in a minute, so I'll leave the front line details to them. I will say this, after having lived through Katrina, Rita, Ike, Gustoff, the national recession, the BP oil spill, my mind takes me back to the comments from the folks in the World Health Organization panel, where they basically said, "We have the tools to win this fight and they include command and control, coordination, collaboration, communication, and cooperation. And when we have those things, we can win, and when we don't, we're gonna lose." And right now, none of those things are working particularly well. The least of which has to do with the federal government's cooperation with local governments. Mayor Suarez was basically saying that the reason they didn't get the money is 'cause he's a couple of people short.

**08:35:** There are 1400 cities in America with 30,000 people or more in them. And if that money does not flow down to the mayors and to the local governments, they can't pay the front line workers. They can't pay police, they can't pay fire, they can't pay EMS. Those are the folks that are actually touching human beings that are actually being sick. So it's critically important that we change the way we're doing things, not the least of which to get this under control. There's another one coming. And oh, and by the way, Miami just skirted a particular hurricane, which could have pushed us into an electrical outage problem, or food security problem. So it is essential that in the United States of America, the government officials, the private sector, the public sector get our act together, and start doing those basic things that we know are gonna win. That's point one. Point two is this, and Keisha's exactly right about this, this is not something that's new. We saw this during Katrina. The water comes in and it hits everybody the same way, but it effects people in a very different way, depending on where you are, what your station in life is, what kind of institutional wealth, what kind of access to healthcare.

**09:36:** And it is absolutely clear from the data that we know about, let's put an asterisk around that, that it's disproportionately affecting people of color. For all the reason that we know, because institutionally, we are not in a good place. And so what we have to do in order to continue to prove that point is to collect the data. And quite frankly, some states have decided not to collect the data the way we need to. So that when we look back at this moment, we can actually then begin to get better next time, and I think that is critically important. And finally, I would say this. The next big fight that we're gonna have, that we have got to get a handle on, is when we get a vaccine, God willing sooner rather than later, that that vaccine is distributed in an equitable way around the world and in the United States of America. And to my knowledge, there's no protocol that's transparent that we can look at to determine that that's gonna get distributed equitably, and that's critically important going forward.

**10:30:** That's critically important. How do we make sure that happens? Does that responsibility rest with the federal government there? To what extent do mayors need to be on the front lines and reaching out and saying to the White House, "This is what we need in order to make sure once we have a vaccine, it is distributed fairly and equitably."

**10:49:** Well, I think all of the mayors in America are talking about this now. It's an issue that's not... Again, preparation so that something bad doesn't happen is the first order of the day. And since this is coming our way, this is something that we have to get prepared for. That conversation is ripe for

open transparent discussion, and God willing, the President of the United States, whoever he is or she is at any particular point in time, will lead this effort, not only in behalf of the country, but on behalf of the world.

**11:14:** Mayor Bottoms, you hear Mayor Landrieu talk about coordination and cooperation. And it makes me think about the fact that Atlanta, Miami, these are two major hubs for travel, for commerce. To what extent are you all leaning on each other right now and communicating with each other right now as it relates to getting tests out to your communities, as it relates to getting good information out to your communities so that you can fight this virus together?

**11:46:** I think our federal partners could learn a lot from mayors. It was quite some time before I even learned that Mayor Suarez belonged to another political party. That's how well we work together. And it is imperative that we do that on a national level. Just recently, Governor Cuomo, sent some test kits to Atlanta and some other resources to assist us. That's the type of coordination that we have each and every day. I'm constantly texting and calling upon other mayors, former mayors like Mayor Landrieu and others. Because this was something that we didn't plan for. Cities plan for hurricanes. We plan for ice storms. We plan for large-scale events. By and large, we weren't prepared for a pandemic. And so this has created a need for us to call upon one another, but also to step up in a way that I don't think any of us expected to have to do.

**12:54:** And part of it has been even as Mayor Suarez mentioned the federal funding, as those negotiations were going on in Congress, I got a call from Mayor Steve Benjamin in South Carolina and I believe it was Mayor Garcetti in Los Angeles, who said Atlanta is about to be left out. So we went into a mad scramble to get our most updated census numbers included, so we could get over that 500,000 threshold. We're the only city in the state of Georgia that was able to pass that threshold. And given where we are with our disagreements with the governor and with the state, I cringe to think of what would have happened or could have happened had we not received that funding directly. And it's allowed us to do things, to go a step further. Obviously, there's a need to deal with COVID directly. But we're now able to deal with hazard pay for our workers, we're able to expand WiFi, and do so many other things that are these by-products of where we are with COVID, that so many cities, including Miami and I would venture to say, New Orleans, haven't been able to access those funds to do that.

**14:06:** I wanna have Mayor Suarez pick up. Can you very quickly update us on where the lawsuit stands with your governor since you raised the tensions that you have had with Governor Kemp?

**14:16:** Right now, we are in mediation. We are our continuing mediation that the stakes have been elevated a bit as the governor has noticed that he potentially will call a special session of the legislature to come back in to deal with any number of issues, many of which could impact the city of Atlanta. But it's my hope that we can reach an agreement. We are still at a standstill as it relates to the mask mandate. The good thing is we both agree that masks save lives. It's just a question of whether or not we have the authority as cities to mandate that mask be worn and we're still standing firm on that.

**14:57:** Okay. Mayor Suarez, let me have you pick up on this idea of coordination and cooperation, because Mayor Bottoms says she didn't even know you were a Republican. How important is it to

be able to work with the other party, to be able to bring a spirit of bipartisanship to addressing this crisis?

**15:15:** I think it's critical because I don't think this is a partisan crisis. A medical crisis like this, a health, crisis should not have any sort of a partisan approach to dealing with it. I think sometimes I feel naive for saying that. Obviously, we are in a presidential election year. But the truth of the matter is that, as Mayor Lance Bottoms was saying, I speak to as far as all the way in the West Coast, Mayor Garcetti, Mayor Breed, Mayor Johnson from Dallas, Mayor Adler from Austin, and Mayor Walsh from Boston. I'm constantly speaking to all these mayors as we are making major decisions that affect our cities and our economies. We had to cancel large events very early on, one called Ultra and another one, Calle Ocho Festival. And I spoke to Mayor Adler who had South by Southwest, which was a huge event, and he had to make a similar decision. So we were discussing that with each other, the stay at home order. I remember having conversations with Mayor Breed from San Francisco because she was one of the first cities that implemented a stay at home order. And we were struggling with our attorneys, with our legal counsel, that wasn't sure whether we had the authority to implement a stay at home order. And we did implement a stay at home order and we were the first city or second city in Dade County that did that, and we saw our numbers plummet immediately.

**16:34:** This kind of coordination not only was helpful in making decisions, but it actually saved lives in my opinion. And I think that's why it's so important that there be a non-partisan vehicle and a non-partisan conversation when you're talking about crises. And as Mayor Landrieu mentioned as well, we just had a hurricane barely miss us. So on top of all of the issues that we're dealing with in the city, we have to prepare and we are prepared for hurricane season, which begins now in August but doesn't end until later on in the year.

**17:10:** And before we get to our next round of questions, I just wanna remind everyone who's listening that there is going to be an audience Q&A. So if you are listening, if you have questions, which I'm sure there are a lot of them, please raise your hands and I will try to get to as many as possible once I finish my questions. Mayor Bottoms and Mayor Suarez, you both were diagnosed with COVID, this is personal for both of you. You've both witnessed the impact that this virus can have on you personally and on your families. Talk about how that informs your leadership at this moment. And also talk about where we are in this fight. Are you concerned we're taking steps backwards as cases are surging, including in your cities? And Mayor Suarez, why don't you start?

**17:55:** Not only did I get COVID but I was the second person in all of Dade County, in a county that has had over 120,000 cases now, I was case number two. So it definitely set the stage for me because, well, other people were struggling to grapple with what this virus could mean for them and how it could affect their health. I was going through it. And it actually highlighted two issues that may be are issue that people may not realize were issues. The first issue that it highlighted for me was, how would I isolate? I'm the mayor of a city and isolation, which is so critical to containing the virus, wasn't a real issue for me. My wife, I'm married, I have two young children. Was I gonna leave the house? Was she gonna leave the house? Where was she gonna go? Where was I gonna go? I couldn't go to a hotel because everyone knew that I was sick.

**18:45:** So it was very, very difficult. And I realized that if I was having a difficult time isolating,

how would someone who lives in a one-bedroom apartment that's a family of four or a family of six or a two-bedroom apartment, how would they figure out how to isolate? So that's something that I work with the state to sort of overcome. I think the second thing that I realized I was fairly, thankfully fairly asymptomatic. And I also realized the danger in what an early detection, if we don't detect this early and we're not detecting this early enough, I can tell you that right now, because from symptom to diagnosis, it's on average, in the State of Florida of five days. That's way too long to have any sort of effective contact tracing. So one of the things I realized is if you're asymptomatic, you can infect dozens of people who may not even know it, before... And by the way, the outcomes are different, and this is more anecdotal, but as I talk to people I would see in a household some one or two people that were asymptomatic, one person that was critically hospitalized, another person that maybe was hospitalized, but not critical.

**19:48:** So within a household, you could see a variety of different outcomes. And so all of those things informed my decision-making early on and helped me guide the city through this crisis. But we have taken some very, very difficult steps that have obviously had a tremendous impact on our economy with the emphasis of protecting the health and safety of our residents. We're starting to see now some of the good by-products of that. One of the things that we did implement is a mask in public rule and we are enforcing that. And so I sympathize with Mayor Bottoms, because we were allowed to, as a municipality, implement our own rules that were strict or stricter than the county and in the state to be able to get this virus under control.

**20:32:** Mayor Bottoms, and if you would as you answer that question, there were reports overnight that Dr Deborah Birx's in a call with officials in Atlanta and state-wide as well, said that she was quite concerned about a number of different states, Atlanta being one of them, Georgia being one of them. Is that accurate? Did you get that warning from the White House? What can you tell us about that?

**20:57:** Well, it's not surprising to me, and I know that Dr. Birx had visited Georgia and had visited with our Governor, and I would venture to say our numbers would be much higher had we not been as aggressive as we were in Atlanta. And even with as high as our numbers are in the state, we know that there is so much higher, because people simply can't get tested. The interesting thing with Mayor Suarez's diagnosis, we had just been together maybe two weeks before the US Conference of Mayors meeting, and I think that was probably the last time that I traveled. And then he tested positive, and I remember watching him on television, my heart just breaking for him, 'cause I could look in his eyes and tell he didn't feel well thinking, "Oh my God, I hope this never happens to my family," and sure enough, it did. And even this morning, I was talking to my husband who went down for a nap at about 6 o'clock yesterday evening and woke back up this morning. And I asked him if he was okay, and he said, "You know this COVID is real." And he supposedly has recovered, but he still has some fatigue. He's still waking up with migraines every morning.

**22:10:** So for me, it's been this reminder while we think we're dealing with COVID in the moment, and by the grace of God, if you're able to get over it and the worst doesn't happen, it really is not over. And it's a reminder that we have to be vigilant on what these long-term effects will be, and what we know anecdotally and what's been born out with a lot of the data is that men are hit so much harder, it appears, than women, in addition to the ethnic and racial disparities that we're seeing.

**22:45:** And I know that, you talk about testing, that's sort of the crux of it. We know that some governors are actually banding together to try to get a better testing strategy. Mayor Landrieu, is that what needs to happen? There's been this criticism that we don't have a national testing strategy yet.

**23:06:** Yeah. Well, first of all, it's unbelievable that we don't, it's malfeasance. And just to take you back to the issue of cooperation and collaboration. I wasn't just talking about mayors, they do this all the time every day. And we laugh about stealing ideas from each other, because we're the Laboratories of Innovation and Change, and we do that freely across party lines. But it also has to work the other way from the White House to the governor to the mayor. And when those things are not working well, you have a problem. There are two huge holes and examples. One was the acquisition of PPP. When the governors of these states and the mayors were trying to procure PPP on their own and competing with each other, in limited resources driving the price up, and then not having that PPP available, that is just, it's almost unforgivable that we were in that situation. The same thing is happening with the lack of testing. On both Mayor Bottoms and Mayor Suarez, there are stories about their personal struggle while they're trying to run cities is incredible, but it pales in comparison to what citizens are facing every day.

**24:04:** And when you can't get a result of a test, if a test is taken on a Sunday and you don't get a result back till the next Monday, it is just completely ineffective and it doesn't matter. They have other countries that have tests that are quick turnaround. So the fact that we don't have a testing regime, it's something that we have gotta get our hands on. I would like to make a bigger point though, When Mayor Suarez was talking about the hurricane and we were talking about local aid, the same first responders that have to now respond to that hurricane are the same first responders that Mayor Lance Bottoms, and Mayor Suarez are allocating to COVID. Those are human beings, they're exhausted, they're tired. We have hurricanes coming and guess what, there's potentially another round of this coming in years to come. So we have to get this system in place right now for what's coming later. Always, these mayors know that when you're looking down dealing with the tiger that's right in front of you, you always have to look up to think about what's coming next. And that's why we have to learn from our mistakes without recrimination, reorganize ourselves, re-focus, as the folks from the World Health Organization said, and get ourselves ready on a worldwide level, and a national level, and a city level to fight the next fight that's coming our way and to win this one as well.

**25:12:** What a critical point and how important to hear from Mayor Bottoms and Mayor Suarez on the personal battle that you both had. So thank you for sharing that. What's coming next is this discussion about what happens to our young people who are going back to school. And Mayor Bottoms, I know that at this point in time, Atlanta has decided to do 100% online learning. Why is that the right decision? Could we see that change in a few months?

**25:39:** So for all of the reasons that we talked about in terms of the health disparities. And the thing that I think it's important to always re-emphasize, this is not just about our kids, it's about our cafeteria workers, bus drivers, our custodians and our teachers. And even in my household, and I know this is a story with so many households, when my kids get out of school each day, it's my mother who's at home waiting to receive them. And so, I absolutely think it was the right decision,

but again, all of these things surrounding COVID that we have to be thoughtful about. I was speaking with Mayor Lightfoot yesterday. We were talking about the need to still be able to provide a space for kids whose parents have to go back to work with small children, so that's something that we'll have to think through on how we extend something to parents who don't have the benefit of being able to stay home with small kids.

**26:46:** So the short answer, it was the right decision. Atlanta public schools will be doing it for nine weeks and then re-evaluate, but we still have to make sure that our kids have technology, that they have access to internet connection, and these are things that the federal government certainly can assist us with. And again, going back to the need for funding throughout the nation, so that municipalities can get this technology and make these arrangements for their communities, because it is just inexplicable and unacceptable to me that we are here at the beginning of the school year, when last spring, we had every opportunity to get on the other side of COVID and not be faced with these decisions.

**27:32:** Mayor Suarez, it's a difficult decision. The President says it's safe to go back to school though, to actually be in the classrooms. Where are you with this decision in your city?

**27:41:** I agree with Mayor Lance Bottoms, I think it doesn't make sense on a multitude of levels to start in-person learning when they were supposed to, which is supposed to be August 24th, our superintendent moved it back to August 31st. And he just recently announced that there will not be in-person learning until at least October 5th, and I agree with that decision. And the reason why is because for two reasons, the first is obviously our children and our parents, our children being the most vulnerable in our community, a large public school system, I think it's the fourth largest in the nation, we have 350,000 public school children, 40,000 teachers. When you're a city that's trying to contain this virus, if you put 400,000 more people into circulation, it makes it very, very difficult. We are finally plateauing and trying to get on the dissension side of the new case curve, putting 400,000 people more into the system is not something that's gonna help you with that.

**28:43:** And then of course, emotionally, imagine we had a summer camp where two kids got sick in two different summer camps, and comes the consequences, we had to shut down our entire summer camp program. So you just saw what happened... Imagine for a professional baseball team like the Miami Marlins, that almost had their entire season cancelled. That can happen in any school and will likely happen if we don't have a control of this virus before we start. And for us, we've identified as the threshold as 5% positive, but even at 5% positive, which is a very low a threshold, a percent positivity. There's still a possibility that starting school in-person learning could create a super spreader event. And so that's something that we are concerned with, I'm concerned with, and we are working closely with our superintendent to get the right moment to have in-person learning. But I definitely agree with Mayor Lance Bottoms that you can't start a school year with in-person learning right now.

**29:45:** And I apologize if you hear that background noise, that is Marine one, that's the President leaving, he's going to Ohio today. So that's the noise that you hear in the background, if you can hear that. I do wanna talk about the other pandemic, and as Nick Berns laid out at the top, and we are dealing with multiple crisis at the same time in this country. And a lot of people see the other pandemic as African-American men largely, dying at the hands of police. Obviously, this really

reached an inflection point in the wake of George Floyd's death. Mayor Bottoms, you spoke so personally and so passionately about what needed to happen in the wake of that, you talked about conversations you'd have with your own son. And we've seen these protests all across the country, and of course, we know that the late Congressman John Lewis felt so inspired by the protesters he saw, because he said that they came from different cultures, different backgrounds, different ages, races, this is multi-generational. And he really saw that as something that was worth feeling optimistic about. Where are we with that? How much progress has been made and what more needs to be done in your assessment?

**30:58:** We've made a lot of progress in Atlanta, but with every step we take it's really a reminder of how many more steps need to be taken. And we've done some work around our police reform work and gotten the input of our police officers along with our community advocates, which has been extremely important. But I think what's most important is that we not lose this moment while we have the interest and input of the nation and this recognition that there's still a problem with race in this country. I think it's important that in the same way Congressman Lewis and so many others in the Civil Rights Movement, clearly articulated their grievances and what they saw as a satisfactory outcome, it's incumbent upon us to do that. And that's the challenge that I see as a mayor and I see very personally. And my kids age and range 18, 12 and 9-year-old twins.

**32:01:** So, because my son is 18, he's grown up in this age of unrest, so I've seen it go from fear and concern to the other end of anger and frustration. And, unfortunately, at the point that it gets to the anger and frustration, it's very difficult for people to articulate what that point of satisfaction is. And so, this is work in progress, and in the same way, Congressman Lewis never let up, and the Civil Rights Movement was just that, it was a movement, it wasn't a moment. This is a movement that we are watching happen in real time, and in the same way Congressman Lewis dedicated his every waking moment to making sure there was change in America, we had that opportunity before us, what struck me was his parting message to us in his essay that was published. And he said, "If we don't exercise the right to vote, we will lose it." And that is the most important message that we can give to people in 2020. We have to turn out and vote so that this is more than a moment, that this is truly a movement.

**33:13:** Mayor Landrieu, how do we make sure this is more than a moment, as Mayor Bottoms says, and you obviously, part of your legacy is removing Confederate statues. The statue of Robert E. Lee. Putting money into reforming your police department in New Orleans. How does the country make sure this is more than a moment?

**33:34:** Well, I think what Mayor Lance Bottoms just said was very eloquent and poignant. I would add to it, generally, this way. The most American idea that exists, the reason we exist as a country, is based on a simple idea that we all come to the table of democracy as equals. And the fact of the matter is that slavery was this nation's original sin, racism continues to be its Achilles heel. And until we all, as Americans, understand that Black Lives Matter, that we see the full humanity of our African-American brothers and sisters, then we will continue to see the consequences of what it is that we're seeing now. And whether it's the death of George Floyd or the way police departments are working now or the disparate impact that COVID is having on African-Americans or all of the other statistics that reflect, for a whole bunch of reasons, that this country has been divided by design from the beginning, we will continue to see these outcomes, and you'll see it whether it's a

national catastrophe or something else.

**34:33:** And so, as we move through the specific issue of police reform, there are very specific things that this country knows we need to do that are hard: Body cameras, Use of Force policies, re-allocating funding to the front end for mental health services and substance abuse rather than the back end, making sure that communities really understand that everybody is equal and valuable, and then that needs to move into housing, and it needs to move into food, and it needs to move into education. It needs to move into all of the institutions that are designed in a way that have produced this inequitable result. And unless we do the deep dive and learn the lesson, we will continue either to repeat the mistakes of the past or we will get to that better day, that John Lewis, who my God as a Saint, I loved him so much and he was such a clarion call for us, and he's told us where we have to go to. Now, just sometimes people don't wanna do what we know we need to do in order to get to a better place, and we as a country have to really kinda double down, reorganize ourselves, and recommit to get to that more perfect union that we spoke about so often.

**35:32:** Mayor Suarez, it's impossible to talk about John Lewis without talking about voting, as Mayor Bottoms and Mayor Landrieu just alluded to. So as we approach the November election, as you have the President saying he thinks it's going to be a disaster because of mail-in voting, despite the fact that there's no evidence that fraud is connected to mail-in ballots, but how do you make sure people are able to vote and to do it safely and to make sure that their vote counts?

**36:02:** Well, I agree that mail-in voting is just as accessible and should be just as accessible, and it's not fraught with any large degree of fraud or anything of that nature, and I think that we're gonna see a tremendously high turn out of mail-in voting. And we're seeing that now in our August 18th primary, which we're having just in a few days. And so that's something that I think we're gonna see, and I don't agree that it's gonna be a catastrophe. I think that you either understand that this is a phenomenon that people are not gonna feel very comfortable standing in long polling lines because of COVID-19, and that the majority of people should have the right and the access to be able to vote through other means. And I think that's something that... And we're seeing people not only mail in their ballots, but we're also seeing them actually deliver, hand-deliver their ballots, so that they know that it gets there, and also they know that they don't have to be waiting in a line, and in a cumbersome situation where they put themselves at risk.

**37:10:** And I'm gonna open this up to questions in just a minute, but if I don't ask about Vice President Biden's search for a running mate, I'll have to turn in my journalism cards. [chuckle] Mayor Bottoms, we know that you are the among the names on the list of people he was looking at very seriously, so can you update us at all? Do you have any plans to me with the Vice President this week?

**37:30:** I have no updates. I'll watch the evening news to get my updates.

[chuckle]

**37:34:** Good answer, Keisha.

**37:36:** Yeah, a very diplomatic answer. Do you think Vice President Biden would be helped by running with an African-American female running mate?

**37:47:** I think that he needs a strong partner, and given where we are in America, that partner needs to be someone who can speak to the moment. And whether it be where we are with social unrest, criminal justice reform, and just the need to address to the disparities in our communities, I think it's going to be extremely important for him to have that voice alongside him, because those are some of the most pressing issues facing our country right now. But I do know it's a very accomplished list of women and very proud to say that to represent the Mayors on that list is quite an honor.

**38:34:** Alright. Well, we appreciate all of your thoughts and insights. This has been so illuminating at such a critical inflection point for our country. We do have a number of people who have questions. So let me open it up to questions. The first one comes from R. Maxwell Bone. And there's a little delay, so let's just give it a minute.

**39:01:** Hello.

**39:04:** Hi, there. Go ahead with your question.

**39:06:** Yes, thank you very much. So my question's mainly for Mayor Suarez and Mayor Bottoms. Both of you are in states where governors have gained national attention for opposing stay-at-home orders. And with the rising cases in both of your metropolitan areas, I'm curious if you could see a situation where an additional stay-at-home order may be necessary, and what you are looking at, be it hospital capacity, death rates, to determine if that would be needed and how you would go about it, given the situations with your governors? Thank you very much.

**39:46:** So part of the issue that I'm having with our governor right now is the fact that the City of Atlanta has gone back to phase one of our re-opening order. Those are voluntary recommendations, but we had businesses calling upon us to create some guidelines, and our phase one is essentially a stay-at-home order. What I understand in talking with the leaders of some of our largest hospital groups in the city, we are at and beyond capacity in most of our hospitals. And part of the reason is because we're open up as if it's business as usual. So those normal things that send people into ERs, Car accidents, for example, whereas when almost the entire country's at stay-at-home order, we didn't have as many people out and about and on our roadways, etcetera. Now everyone's out and about, so they're going into ERs with those normal everyday things on top of COVID, and it is stretching our hospital capacity beyond its limits right now.

**40:57:** Mayor Suarez, can you see another shutdown for stay-at-home order?

**41:02:** I've said from the very first moment, that shutdown order is not something that you can discard. It's something that always has to be on the table, and it's a tool that you have in your toolbox, and it's very effective tool. We know that it's effective. We have been able to, unlike my colleague, Mayor Lance Bottoms, we have been able to implement a mask-in-public rule. We have been able to enforce it. We have been able to shut down businesses that are not complying with our distancing rules. The county has shut down indoor dining. We have a curfew that is strictly enforced

at 10:00 PM right now. So we have a set of buffet of remediation measures that are actually working. But right now, our hospital system census is down about 25% from its peak.

**41:49:** And even though some of the latest results that we've seen for the last four days are influenced by the fact that we had a hurricane and we had to shut down. The state and the county did shut down testing sites for a number of days. So we have to see what kind of a regression to the mean there will be. But I think for us, what we would be looking at is essentially our hospital's capacity to treat people. And right now, our hospital administrators have told us that they have sufficient capacity. That what we need to do is enforce the rules that we have on the books, and we're doing that, and we're doing it successfully, and we are seeing a successful Delta. If that improvement doesn't continue or doesn't continue fast enough, then certainly a stay-at-home order is something that we can and should consider.

**42:36:** Mayor Bottoms, just to follow up with you. Is that the benchmark you're looking at, whether your hospitals have enough capacity? Would that be what would determine whether stricter steps were needed?

**42:48:** So there were a number of metrics, but that was part of it, also, looking at the 14-day increase or decrease, as long as our ICU bed capacity. And again, because of the governor's state of emergency. He was very clear on what the limitations were as it relates to local municipalities. But thankfully, Atlanta's home to 26, Fortune 500 companies, the metro area. We've had many of those leaders at the table with us as we've made these decisions. So that's made it a bit easier, because many of our large job centers still have not opened up their doors to non-essential employees. So that's made our lift a bit easier in the city.

**43:38:** Okay. And we have our next question from Steven Shapiro, and we'll give him a second to get his video and audio going.

**43:52:** Thank you very much. I'm with the Business Executives for National Security, and some of you may know the organization. We understand that national security begins at home. And with respect to that, we often dig down into the nitty-gritty of structures and processes for effective delivery of national security. And so with the three of you on this Zoom, I can't think of anybody better to ask the question and this follows up on Mayor Landrieu's earlier remarks about cooperation and coordination. About the structures and processes that you have seen in place or that as lesson learned you would envision would be necessary going forward to make effective response at the local level to crises like this. I'd like to start with Mayor Landrieu on this, because I think he could be perhaps nicknamed "Mr. Crisis". I don't think anybody has effectively managed more crises than perhaps some biblical figures, and he's a bit of my hero in this regard.

**44:55:** Thank you.

**44:56:** But the two of you, Mayor Bottoms and Suarez, you're as well effectively dealing with this new crisis. So you understand what we're looking for. We're interested in, you use the Conference of Mayors as your interaction ad hoc, should there be a different organization, a crisis organization, when you can pull the chain and things happen, I put it to you. Thank you.

**45:18:** Well, first of all, thank you for that. We could all be forgiven for wondering when the locusts are coming, but the fact is, bad things had happened, they're gonna keep happening and we need to get ready for them. So being prepared is the most important thing. You not only have to be prepared in a crisis situation, you have to be prepared for the day-to-day stuff. The bigger theme here is that our nation's foreign policy and our domestic policy are two sides of the same coin about nation security. And I am heartened to listening to a lot of foreign policy experts, beginning to understand clearly that unless we get a act together back home, then it's gonna be very hard to protect ourselves abroad because the point is to protect people actually on the homeland. And if you have people that are not healthy and don't have access to healthcare, that don't have a job, that don't have a way to get there and we can't have a great economy, it's gonna be very hard for the United States to project even moral power or military power across the country. That's the big issue.

**46:13:** The second one is whether or not the system design in America actually works. You could have a perfectly well-designed system and have a president that just doesn't wanna listen to the science and cooperate with the mayors. That sounds very familiar right now. Our governors and mayors are at their own different pages. I happen to think that both of these mayors are exactly right, because they're using their decisions based on science and that their respective governors and the President or not. So that design system is right, but the way people are acting within that system does not work. Having said that, I think there clearly needs to be a little bit better of a re-organization of how we all work together, A, in crisis and, B, just in normal day to day operations. We can always be better at that, and I do think there's some system design changes that could make it better and work, but people have to be committed to the notion that working together is better than being separate and being apart.

**47:09:** And that was one of the topics we touched on. It's such a critical one. Mayor Suarez, do you wanna just pick up on that? Are there steps that you want to take or think can be taken so that there's better cooperation?

**47:21:** There are. And I think there has to be more communication. The fact that the coronavirus Task Force has just communicated with Atlanta, it's probably too late. Or I don't even know if they communicated with Atlanta, they may have communicated with the governor. They should be communicating with Atlanta, they should be communicating with us, they did communicate with the city, just about a week ago, but it should have happened earlier, I think. I think the guidance that we should have received, and frankly, I'm not here to criticize a particular organization or set of people. But I think we need to get very clear guidance on when we should open, when we should close based on science. And I think what has happened, and I don't know what Mayor Lance Bottoms' experience is, but mine has been, I've had to cobble together epidemiologists, bio-statisticians, local epidemiologist and bio-statisticians to analyze data that I receive to make decisions, as opposed to getting a more concrete data.

**48:24:** I think, the White House opening strategy was helpful because they did give some sort of a roadmap for opening, but what it didn't contemplate was what if things didn't go according to plan? And we definitely saw that things did not go according to plan. And so, there was no, "Okay, well, if there's a resurgence, then do this." And then now that you're in a resurgence, when is the point at which you implement these other remediation measures? When is the point at which you open up

other sectors of the business? So I think the plan was assuming a continual decrease, right, 14 days of decreasing data, syndromic data, etcetera, etcetera. And you open, you go from phase one to phase two to phase three as if it's just some linear progression. Well, it didn't quite work out that way. And so there wasn't a, "Well, if this happens, then this has to happen." And so I think we were all left with having to figure it all out, and I think that's something that I would... And frankly, and I hate to say this because there's been so much human suffering and so much death with regard to COVID-19, but imagine if this were a virus that took the lives of 20 or 30% of the people that got infected, and if this were that kind of a virus.

**49:33:** We need to get a lot better, as Mayor Landrieu alluded, if the next virus that comes is a virus that takes 20, 30% of the people that it infects, you're gonna be talking about casualties on a scale that this country has never seen. And if we don't get it together, we could see something like that, and by the way, that is a threat to national security. Because if you're a country, another country, an exterior country that is trying to figure out ways to disrupt the United States, the playbook has just been written for them. You introduce some sort of a foreign biological agent that can disrupt the economy, it can disrupt the political system, can disrupt just about every aspect of our society. And so we really, really need to get better quickly. I look at it from a hurricane perspective, when you get hit with a Category One hurricane, which is the lowest in intensity, oftentimes, it's a wake-up call, and you realize that if you don't increase your preparation level when that category five comes, you're gonna be in big trouble.

**50:39:** Really important warning there. Let me just get in one more question. Michael Chekim if we can, and then we're gonna wrap after this.

**51:05:** Oh, thank you very much for taking my question. It's a great honor to be with the Master Nicholas Burns. I'm your junior at state in the service. So great honor, but also be honored to be with all of you and thank you all for your service. And we are in very difficult unforeseen times. I'm really wondering about testing and tracing. So I've gotten the impression that many governments and health facilities have the PCR tests they need, but the real challenge seems to be the supplies, the reagents, the swabs, and then also to process them. I forget if it was Mayor Suarez or if it was mayor Landrieu who mentioned this before.

**51:54:** If the test results come back, even Bill Gates says, if the test results don't come back within 24 hours, it's not a useful result, exactly, 'cause it's only a snapshot in time. So I guess what I'm wondering is, is that what it is? Is it the lab capacity, the fact that we don't have enough lab technicians with the training required, we don't have enough machines to do the test, we don't have the enough reagents and the swabs? And as we are ramping back, will we need even more tests than we have now? Should we be expecting to see a big shortfall? And how do we catch up then to be able to provide testing and results within 24 hours? And on tracing, I guess Virginia just started their tracing program. I've heard that New York, even New York State, even with the help of a Mayor Bloomberg is having challenges. Is it a matter of manpower, hiring enough people? Do we have the IT infrastructure to handle all those calls? Thank you.

**53:05:** Do you want me to take a shot at that?

**53:09:** Yeah.

**53:10:** First of all, the experts, this is what the experts say we need to do in order to help ourselves. One, we have to wear masks, we have to wash our hands, we have to keep socially distance, we have to stay out of big crowds, and we have to test and trace. That's the playbook. All right, in terms of execution, only the office of the presidency has the power to order people to do what needs to be done. Both of these mayors will confirm what I'm about to tell you, that when you're trying to create a strategy, you're only as strong as your weakest link. And if for some reason you say something should be done and you don't really worry about all of the logistics from way up here all the way down to the ground, and there are holes in between, what you say doesn't matter. So, yeah, you can say we're doing a bunch of tests, but if you're only getting results in seven days, you might as well not be testing at all.

**54:00:** And there has to be a federal testing regime that's run out of the White House with a testing czar that gets all of these component parts in place and then has the funding to make that happen. Then the mayors can use their power to execute the application of those things, get them to the labs, get the results. And then if the funding is there, this is really important, if the funding is there and we have enough money for as many contact tracers as we need and the tests turnaround quickly, then you can effectively have a testing regime. That's gotta come directly out of the White House and the federal government in order to have the resources and the regimen to make that happen.

**54:33:** Wonderful.

**54:33:** I'll take a second stab at that it.

**54:34:** Go ahead, Mayor Suarez and Mayor Bottoms, each of you, and then we'll wrap up.

**54:37:** Yeah, I'll take a quick at this. So I would say that, number one, the contact tracing programs in the US have been a colossal failure and disaster. And that's through discussions that I've had with multiple elected officials throughout the United States. I really think part of the issue is we're gonna have to go to some technological product that's gonna help us do it with an opt-in feature. I have really, I've looked at the New York one, I'm looking at the one in Houston. Obviously, you talked about the one in Virginia. We're trying to design our own and make ours better every day, but everything that I've seen has indicated to me that with a call center, it's very, very difficult to do. And so I personally believe that that you're gonna have to go to some sort of an opt-in app that is only... You have to download when you get tested, and then you can only get your test results through there, and a variety of different functions that an app like that can perform to adequately contact trace. In terms of testing, it's a function of a lab time, it's a function of lack of reagent. So it's a variety of factors. We're supposedly getting two search surge teams that are being sent to surge labs that are being sent to Miami to reduce that time.

**55:53:** But I think at the end of the day, what it's gonna require is there's now a 15-minute antigen test, which it needs to be more ubiquitous, and we need to make sure that it's accurate. If it's accurate enough and ubiquitous enough, that could be a huge, huge help to opening up the economy safely. Right now, it's not as ubiquitous as it needs to be. We're using it in some of our testing sites right now. So we'll get a better sense over the next couple of weeks, but I do think that there are

shortages. I don't think the country was prepared. In fairness, it's hard to imagine, envision a situation like this happening, but I think we now have no excuse going forward. Now that we've seen this happen, we have to be prepared going forward. And obviously lab capacity is one big issue.

**56:39:** Mayor Bottoms, final thoughts to you.

**56:41:** Sure, and I'll sort of combine the last two questions. One, just in terms of how we are prepared. The biggest takeaway has been prepare for things that you normally wouldn't be prepared for. In Atlanta, by the grace of God, we have had recently appointed a Chief Health Officer to deal with our HIV and AIDS rates. But the reality is public health then doesn't come under the purview of the city, it comes under the purview of the county. Had we not had our Chief Health Officer in place, I don't know how we would have navigated and made sense of this pandemic. But then the other part, just in terms of supplies, that is a huge problem. And a doctor shared with me just yesterday that they can't run the testing that needs to be run in one of the local hospitals, because they don't have the swabs to run the testing. And in terms of timing of testing and test results, my family is classic textbook of the failure of COVID-19. We were tested, it took eight days to get the results back. The date of that test, I had a child in my house who was asymptomatic, my husband and I were negative. When we tested the next week, because we still hadn't gotten those results back and my husband was very fatigued, at that point, all of us were positive and I was considered a low positive, meaning I was either on the way up or the way down with infection.

**58:10:** We are assuming I was on the way up, which means that my husband and I could have avoided exposure had we gotten those tests results sooner. So, there's so many failures with the national response to COVID-19, but I don't think any of us have the energy to focus on those failures. We have to continue to put our energy towards what we can control. And I think we've been doing a heck of a job across this country in doing that. And I just wanna give a shoutout to Mayor Landrieu who was former President US Conference of Mayors and the leadership that Mayor Barnett has given or gave to us during this pandemic. Weekly calls with mayors across the country, getting real time information and coordination on how to respond.

**59:03:** Well, this has been such a tremendous conversation and, Mayor Bottoms, I hope that your husband does continue to make a full recovery. We appreciate all of you speaking so personally and passionately, and for your leadership at this critical moment, and just for sharing your insights. We are all in this together. And I see Ambassador Burns. Thank you again to Aspen for hosting in this really important conversation.

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