

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: May 21st, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. I'm honored to be joined by the woman to my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. To her right, another familiar face, the State's Epidemiologist, Dr. Christina Tan. Thank you both for being here. To my far left, another familiar face, Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. And to my immediate left, a guy who's been with us a few times and I'm happy to have him back, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Commissioner Rob Asaro-Angelo. We're also joined by Jared Maples from the Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, nice to have you all here.

As we all know that Thursday is the day when the latest labor indicators are released by the US Department of Labor, and Rob is here again to give an update on his department's efforts to ensure that every New Jerseyan who has applied for unemployment benefits is receiving them. And I know that Rob is also going to update us on his team's efforts to ensure the unemployment system and the trust fund that many of us, including all New Jersey employers pay into, isn't a victim of fraud. Let's be perfectly clear. We're going to make sure that every New Jerseyan who needs support at this time gets it. Anyone who is breaking the rules is only hurting everyone else who's playing by them. They're draining resources that deservedly belong to other residents, and they're draining the time of Labor Department staff who need to continue chipping away at the backlog of claims. And we are carefully watching every indicator that can tell us when it's okay for more people to get back to work, and as we hit those marks, we will continue with a responsible and deliberate restart.

To be sure, we continue to see positive signs, as you can see here. The key metrics from our hospitals continue to move in the right direction. We are way down from our peaks and continue to see indicators fall. The progression across the past two weeks has been pretty constant and consistent. Again, green balls are good, red balls are spikes from the day before. We want more green than red and we have a lot more. Each green light again means a day that the numbers we need to see decrease, actually decreased from the previous day. And in some cases, we see a red light meaning an uptick; the following day or a couple of days more than balanced out.

We're seeing this reality across each region of our state. Again, the one that Judy and her team and I look at and monitor carefully is the one in the upper left with new hospitalizations, where we see more red balls than we'd like. Each day brings with it surer signs that we're moving closer to being able to enter phase two of our economic restart. But we also have to balance this reality among our neighbors and among other major states. We still lead in some indicators that we would rather not. This is why, while we're trying to move as quickly as we can, we're moving as safely as we must.

For those still out of work or those whose claim is still in the backlog, know that we are committed, 100% committed, to both getting you the support you need now and to getting you back to work as soon as it is safe. We are all in this together and we're all going to come out of this together. So Rob, I know you and your entire team continue to make tremendous headway against unprecedented headwinds. And sometimes Byzantine, shall I say, to be polite, federal regulations. And I know you're all leaning into a headwind created by the, frankly, the folks who came before us, who cut staffing levels with the Department of Labor roughly 25%. You could see on this graph from our friends at New Jersey Policy Perspective, I want to give them a shout out. This is a workforce that we could use now, more than ever. Everyone on the frontlines at the Department of Labor today has our respect and our thanks. And thank you again, Rob, for joining us today.

With that, let's turn to our overnight numbers. Yesterday we received an additional 1,304 positive test results for a total cumulatively of 151,472. And here is the all-important curve of new cases. We are down significantly from our peak just a few weeks ago. We still have days with uneven spikes and drops, but we do think that that is more because of the nature of the reporting. We know our more informed report is in the daily positivity or spot positivity rate for test dating back to a specific date, and this are now tests that were administered on May 17, and that rate remains at 18%. Judy can give you more color, as well, by region. This is the map that we've been looking at every day. So far, so good.

And as we move to the topic of our long-term care facilities, I do want to make an announcement. I had a very good conversation yesterday, yet again, I might add, with the Secretary of the Department of Veteran Affairs, Robert Wilkie. I want to thank the Secretary for his continued partnership with us as the VA assistance to our veterans homes will continue through to the end of June and an additional 40 VA clinical staff will be coming to New Jersey as part of strike force teams, which will help at more of our long-term care centers. Again, they will be focused, that additional 40, at long-term care facilities outside of our veteran homes. As I said, this is a strong partnership between us on the one hand and our federal partners, and I thank both President Trump and Secretary Wilkie for their continued support of our efforts.

So looking at our long-term care facilities, the rate of new cases continues downward from the peak, total positive tests of 28,876. We continue our all in, all hands on deck 24/7 efforts to push this curve lower with assistance, not just from the VA teams who have joined us, but as well as the National Guard, the nationally recognized firm we hired a few weeks ago, Judy's teams, and heroic healthcare workers who have been going in and out of those facilities in the teeth of this crisis. The number of lab, again we reiterate, lab-confirmed deaths associated with our long-term care facilities is also decreasing from the peak, but having said that, the loss of 4,502 blessed lives.

In our hospitals, the number of patients currently being treated for COVID-19 decreased again by nearly 200 and now stands at 3,208. Our field medical stations reported 46 patients. This is a breakdown of our total hospitalizations across regions. The number of patients reported in either critical or intensive care is now below 900 and sits at 896. And as for as long as we've been reporting this indicator at these briefings, I do not recall, Judy, the last day that we had fewer than 900 residents in the ICUs. It's been many, many weeks. Ventilator use fell by another 50 yesterday to 700. There were 143 new COVID-19 hospitalizations yesterday while exactly twice that number of live patients left our hospitals, 286. And here are those numbers charted across our regions.

So again, we continue to see the right numbers from our hospitals, and this means the overall stresses on our healthcare system are lessening. We know there are some specific hospitals which are still feeling strain, but the statewide trends are indeed very positive. And I can't say this enough. These trends are emerging because of each and every one of you who continues your social distancing, who continues to stay home unless you need to be out, who continue to wear a face mask and face covering when you are out. You continue to practice safe hygiene and continue to be a role model for your family, friends, neighbors and community. It's because of you that we're seeing the progress that we're seeing every day.

However, even with these positive signs, there are still those that we are losing to COVID-19, and today we must also report another 98 blessed residents, brothers and sisters, have left us. And with these, our statewide total now stands at 10,843. Before I want to speak about a few of the loves we've lost, I meant to say yesterday that Carol Lockett, who is the unofficial mayor of Elizabeth, Carol's life was brought to me first and her story by my friend Bill Lavin, so I wanted to give Bill a shout out yesterday and I neglected to. Let's talk about a few more of our incredible residents and brothers and sisters who we have lost.

Let's begin by remembering Lucille Weiss, who had been a longtime resident of both Westfield and Springfield. Lucille spent her career at Springfield's F.M. Gaudineer Middle School, first as a health and physical education educator. She actually was a pioneer and early advocate for sex education, and then she served as a guidance counselor. In both capacities, she not only excelled but was beloved by students and colleagues alike. With her husband, Arthur, she would raise their three children in Springfield, in a home that was always open to friends and family.

Lucille never found time to be bored. She was an avid knitter, a doll maker, a dancer, a writer, a bird watcher, and a tough Scrabble player, among so much else. And part of her legacy is in Acapulco, Mexico at the Salvation Army Children's Home there, where she started a library. She is survived by three children, Danny and Nancy, both of whom I had the honor of speaking with yesterday, and Jerry, and their families who account for Lucille's six grandchildren and two great grandchildren. Lucille was 93 years young. We thank Lucille for her many years of service to the children of Springfield. To her family, may God bless her memory and all she left behind.

I have to say, I heard both from Danny and Nancy an incredibly emotional story. Literally, the day before she died, they were able, the three children, to do a Zoom call with their mom. And Danny is a musician. Danny is a guy who's a Jersey guy, Lucille's daughters no longer live in New Jersey, and Danny played and they all sang a lullaby to Lucille that she used to sing to them when they were little kids. How's that for a story? God bless her.

Next up is Petros Emmanuel Litos. You may not know him, but chances are you probably ate in one of the diners he owned across our state. Petros was born in West Virginia, but his family soon moved to Elizabeth where he would graduate from high school. He started in the diner business early and always dreamed of owning his own slice, not just of the American dream, but of New Jersey lore. Then in 1986, Petros made his dream come true when he and his brother Michael bought the Somerset Diner. Later, they would add Haslett's, Adelphi Diner and the White Rose in Highland Park to their portfolio. At every stop and with every day, he grew a reputation as a dynamic individual, enthusiastic and diligent and always helping the next generation live their dreams as he lived his. He was just 59 years old. Petros leaves behind his brother Michael with whom he achieved his dream, and he also leaves behind his wife, Kaliopi, Daughter Maria, with whom I had the great honor of speaking. She's a teacher, by the way, at the Alexander Hamilton Preparatory Academy in Elizabeth, and his son Emmanuel, and they were also his dream. He's additionally survived by his mother Maria, his sister Effie and an extended Greek family and community. God bless you, Petros, and all that you did and your family you've left behind.

And finally, we remember Englewood Cliffs' Artemis Nazarian. Artemis is on the right, she was 88 years old. Born in Aleppo, Syria, Artemis came to the United States with her family at the age of two in 1934. She attended Boston University on a scholarship, was the first woman to graduate as an accountant from the College of Business Administration. I might add, she graduated cum laude as well. In 1954, she married the guy to her right in that picture., the man who would be her husband for the remainder of her life, a Lebanese immigrant named Nasar, and they settled in Englewood Cliffs. Artemis was a true patron of the arts and a believer in the power of education. She supported numerous scholarships both internationally and at her

alma mater and her name even graces a preschool she supported in Los Angeles. She was also devoted to the Armenian Church and further supported many endeavors around the world, endeavors for which there are many plaques worldwide with her name and face, as a measure of thanks for her generosity.

But throughout, Artemis kept her heart in Englewood Cliffs, helping people in need, or driving someone to a doctor's appointment. She also served for many years as treasurer of the Englewood Women's Club. Artemis leaves behind her beloved Nasar and their children, Sita and Levon, who I had the opportunity and great honor of speaking with yesterday, and an extended family that includes five grandchildren, her brother and sister-in-law, numerous cousins, nieces and nephews. So not only do we want you to keep Artemis' memory in your prayers, but also Nasar, we should note, fought his own battle with COVID-19 and we pray for his continued recovery. May all of them find peace in Artemis' memory and legacy.

As I noted yesterday, we are compelled to remember these names, because no one in this pandemic should ever be seen as just a statistic or a number. These are people. They were our friends and neighbors and they were our family in every sense of the word, our New Jersey family.

Switching gears, a couple of items since we were together yesterday. I want to give Speaker Craig Coughlin a big shout out for coming out so visibly and with conviction in supporting our ability and our need to bond, not something that any of us wake up reflexively looking to say, hey, can we find a way to borrow money? But in this particular case, we need it in a big way to allow us to continue to keep our frontline educators, police, fire, healthcare workers employed at our greatest hour of need. I also had a very good conversation on a similar topic with former Secretary of the Treasury Bob Rubin yesterday and in that case, specifically about getting federal direct cash assistance, which not only New Jersey desperately needs, but states across the country, red and blue alike.

Judy and I were on a call with Christina and other epidemiologists talking about the, as I mentioned yesterday with the communicable disease team, talking about the race and ethnicity realities, and how we can even more get our arms around the impacts, and express that even more vividly, as sad as that reality is to folks, and that's something that is a work in progress. I want to thank Judy and Tina and their teams.

I had a very good conversation with Kevin Johnson, who's the Chief Executive Officer of Starbucks. Again, another shout out to Bill Bradley who connected us. Senator Bradley's done an extraordinary job, mostly quiet and behind the scenes through this entire crisis. Kevin and I had a really good call about a lot of the protocols that Starbucks is taking and they're doing a great job. And then we also had our second full Commission meeting of the Restart and Recovery Commission that we established several weeks ago, a really good discussion. I want to thank again Shirley Tilghman, former President of Princeton, Ken Frazier, CEO of Merck, in particular as co-chairs for a shout out. The subcommittees are chaired by Tony Kosha, who's the Chair of Amtrak and former chair of the Port Authority, Rich Trumka, the President of the AFL CIO, Rich Besser, who we know is serving us in so many respects, at this point, Judy, who runs the Johnson Family Foundation; Lisa Jackson, senior executive at Apple, former EPA Administrator. They're the chairs of the subcommittees. I also want to give Ben Bernanke a big shout out. He gave a very compelling summary of the macroeconomic likely scenario going forward.

A couple of announcements. First today, in partnership with the Restart and Recovery Commission, as I mentioned, and the complementary advisory councils, we are reaching out to literally thousands of businesses and nonprofit organizations in the state, to direct them to a short survey that will better inform our collective efforts as we look to take the next steps along the road back. This is a short survey that will be hosted on our covid19.nj.gov information hub, and while all the feedback will be public, respondents will remain confidential.

We know that the impacts of COVID-19 have been varied across industry sectors, and while these sectors are represented in the panels we have brought together, nothing beats the input from those living this reality. So to all the business owners and nonprofit leaders, please be on the lookout for this email, and I thank you personally in advance for your participation and feedback. Just as we're all in this battle against COVID-19 together, we're all going to be part of our restart and recovery together.

Next I want to give a shout out to the Department of Environmental Protection and Commissioner Catherine McCabe, though we have no Soviet Union jokes today, by the way, on the new Mask Up Campaign they have launched to encourage more residents to wear face coverings while in our parks or on one of our beaches.

This is a social media ready campaign that everyone can participate in. We get it. Wearing a mask or face covering is not required, but it is an important, vitally important, additional measure of protection for you all and others against the spread of COVID-19, and especially in places where social distancing isn't as possible, like in line for a slice of boardwalk pizza, or in a restroom in one of our parks. It's the only thing, in some cases, that's left. And of course, if you think you look silly wearing a face covering, just think how silly you'd look in a hospital gown. So I encourage everyone to take part. Share these images and more importantly, be a model for others and take your face covering with you to the park or to the beach every day, and especially this weekend.

And finally, I want to return to a topic that I've come back to several times already, which is not directly related to COVID-19, but is directly related to how our state will eventually emerge from it, and that is the 2020 census. Since we've begun discussing the census here and urging you to go to 2020census.gov to get counted, we've seen our state's response rate increased by nearly five percentage points. Today, 61.7% of you have taken the time to be counted, and that's good. We thank you for that. But we need to get to 100% and among all states, Washington, DC and Puerto Rico, we continue to rank 21st for responses. We were the third state to ratify the Constitution and the first state to ratify the Bill of Rights. We shouldn't be 21st in anything. A few of our counties are truly showing the way. Among the entire northeast and New England plus Puerto Rico, five New Jersey counties are among the top 12 in response rates. That's great. Hunterdon, Morris and Burlington counties are 1, 2, 3 with Somerset 5 and Gloucester coming in at 11, and that's tremendous work.

But we need to see greater input from places like Hudson, Essex and Atlantic counties, where numbers are still behind. We know that there are teams working hard in every neighborhood to get people to be counted and I encourage them to keep pushing forward, and to everybody I say, be counted. The census is of vital importance to our state and to your communities. It's the way the billions of dollars from the federal government is divided, and we under counted in New Jersey in 2010. We know this as a fact and because of this, we know that New Jersey lost out on literally tens of billions of dollars from the federal government. And if this money isn't coming here, it's going to another state. Let's get it to New Jersey.

As with everything, we are all in this together and I thank in particular Secretary of State Tahesha Way and her team on their latest effort to drive response rates by reaching out to businesses in our communities, working directly with the people that residents trust, to spread the word of what an accurate count really means. So to everyone who has already raised their hand to be counted, I thank you. And to everyone who hasn't yet done so, spend the 5 to 10 minutes literally, that's all it takes, to go to 2020census.gov and get counted. Thank you.

That's it for today's announcements. But before I turn things over to Judy, I want to make sure we're recognizing some more of the everyday New Jerseyans who are doing great things in their communities to help us get through this unprecedented time. Let's go right, without further ado, to Montville in Morris County to meet Colin and Grace Volpe, who are both freshmen at Montville Township High School. So if I've got this right, that's Colin upper center with the baseball cap on backwards, and Grace is third from the left in the black t-shirt. Their aunt is a nurse and had relayed how lonely it can be for hospital patients and long-term care facility residents with the current prohibitions against visitors. So along with their cousins, they formed the Cousin Crew, and began raising money to purchase tablets that they are then donating to hospitals and long-term care facilities so patients and residents can at least see their loved ones across the screen. So far, they've donated 80 tablets to hospitals and homes across North and Central Jersey. So to you Colin and Grace, and every member of the Cousin Crew, New Jersey thanks you and I know the families you help stay close together thank you as well.

And let's end today in Stockton, in Hunterdon County, the man on the left looks very familiar to me. The guy on the right is Rowdy Meys, who used the money he received on his 11th birthday to treat the State Troopers at the nearby Kingwood Barracks to lunch. Rowdy met a few of the troopers last year when he had a bad wreck on his bicycle, and the troopers took care of him. And now, he wanted to make sure that they were being taken care of in return. That looks to me like Colonel Patrick Callahan with Rowdy, as he stopped by the family farm to thank him personally for his generosity and appreciation of our troopers. So to you, Rowdy, thank you. And to all the brave troopers, beginning with the Colonel right through the entire ranks, we thank you and don't know where we'd be without you.

For both of those stories, I think it's safe to say that with the next generation of New Jerseyans, we're going to be in very good, I hope very clean, and very good hands. With that, please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. I'm going to take time today to amplify the critical steps the Department of Health has taken to protect the health and safety of the residents and the staff in our nursing homes and assisted living. To remind all of you, as you know, our first case was identified on March 4. Since that time, 18 guidances have been sent to long-term care facilities. On March 6, the Department of Health issued a memo emphasizing to all long-term care facilities the importance of their infection prevention response plans during this unprecedented epidemic. On March 14, we restricted visitation based on information that community spread was placing their residents at risk. The next day, we were notified of our first outbreak in a long-term care facility. On March 22, in response to concerns from the long-term care industry that they were having staffing problems, we initiated a series of waivers allowing flexibility in their staffing that would allow additional staff to be easily onboarded at their facilities. Two days later, based on a call from a long-term care facility, where staff, administrators and residents were ill and the residents could not be appropriately cared for, we arranged for transfer of 78 residents that Friday evening to safety in another facility, and we temporarily closed that facility.

On March 25, I reached out to the Washington State Department of Health to learn more about their experiences in long-term care. They suggested all of the infection control protocols that we currently had issued. On that same day, Governor Murphy signed an Executive Order, 111, to require all facilities in the state to report on supplies, to prepare and respond to COVID-19 and be prepared to allocate scarce resources. That included long-term care. On the 30th, we sent out another advisory on priority actions for all post-acute care settings. They included restricting persons entering the facility, implementing active symptom screening of patients and residents and employees, creating separate wings, units or floors to accept asymptomatic residents coming to or returning from the hospital. We told them that might mean moving patients or residents within a facility to create a new wing or unit, and limit staff working between wings and units as much as possible. We shared that creating a separate wing, unit or floor to accept COVID-19 positive residents was suggested.

We suggested that they stop all current communal dining and all group activities. We shared the use of telemedicine and alternate means of communication to maintain social distancing, and encourage them and emphasized to inventory all PPE, and develop strategies to obtain emergency supplies with their local health department. We implemented universal masking before the CDC even recommended it. We suggested bundling tasks to optimize their PPE and limit exposures. We asked them to review and develop staff contingency plans to mitigate anticipated shortages.

Also, on March 30th, we immediately pursued and finalized an arrangement with CareOne, an established long-term care owner, to stand up 707 COVID-capable beds for COVID-positive patients admitted from acute care hospitals to provide beds to divert patients away from the already stressed long-term care facilities, and for residents who could not be readmitted to what they knew as their homes. The next day, we sent a memo to all administrators on hospital discharges, that included instruction on the appropriate management of readmitting patients to prevent further transmission. That same day, at 5:00 p.m., I held a call with more than 200 long-term care facilities outlining the requirements for accepting patients back to facilities only if they could maintain adherence to infection prevention requirements.

On April 2, we sent another memo, notifying facilities of the need to report their capacity, their PPE and their staffing needs to the department. Between March 26 and May 19, nearly 24 million pieces of PPE have been distributed to long-term care facilities. That includes FEMA shipments, the Strategic National Stockpile, and state-purchased equipment. In early April, we finalized contracts with Alerus and Genesis to designate an additional 522 COVID-capable beds for nursing home patients being discharged from home hospitals. So in total, an additional 1,229 beds were reserved for discharges from hospitals to divert residents from the already stressed long-term care facilities.

On April 13, we issued an emergency curtailment order to prohibit admissions and readmissions of individuals to facilities if they did not have the ability to appropriately cohort patients and staff, follow the CDC guidance for infection prevention and control, and maintain adequate staffing. You may recall on April 14th and 15th, the next two days, we experienced the predicted surge in our hospitals.

As demonstrated by the actions taken, the department has been providing guidance and support to long-term care facilities throughout this outbreak and we stand ready to support them through this epidemic. Presently, 678 facilities have returned attestations and 24 are delinquent and that has been posted on our website.

For my daily report, last evening our hospitals reported 3,208 hospitalizations, with 896 individuals in critical care. 78% of those critical care patients are on ventilators. Today there's a total of 19 cases of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. There are no deaths reported. The ages of the children affected range from 1 to 18, and 14 of the 19 have tested positive for COVID-19. Six are currently still hospitalized.

The Governor reviewed the new cases and deaths reported today. In terms of deaths, the by race and ethnicity is unchanged from yesterday, White 53.3%, Black 18.5%, Hispanic 19.4%, Asian 5.5%, and other 3.4%. At the state veterans homes, we are reporting one additional death in Menlo Park. Our psychiatric hospitals, with a census of 1,240, are reporting the same statistics as yesterday. The daily percent positivity as of May 17 for New Jersey overall is 18%; 17% in the North, 19% Centrally, and 17% in the South. That concludes my daily statistical report. Stay connected, stay safe, and stay healthy. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you for everything, in particular walking through and reminding folks the steps that you had taken as it relates to long-term care. Am I right in saying that of the inflammatory pulmonary, that's up four cases from yesterday?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah.

Governor Phil Murphy: So we were at 15 yesterday and 19.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: That's right.

Governor Phil Murphy: 14 positive for COVID-19, six of the 19 are in the hospital.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that and thank you for everything. We're going to switch gears mightily, but again, this is the healthcare crisis of all time. It's also the economic and unemployment crisis as a result of all time, and as I welcomed him back earlier, I want to re-welcome him and please help me introduce the Commissioner of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Rob Asaro- Angelo. Rob.

Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro Angelo: Thank you, Governor. I'm embarrassed to say it took a little time but we became one of the 61.7% last night, we filled out our census form. We've been a little distracted, we finally got to it.

We know how important unemployment relief is to the vitality and health of families across our state. This week, we've been busy communicating with hundreds of thousands of workers via email and now text messages, with new information and updates about their benefits. As of this morning, 1.1 million workers have filed new claims for unemployment benefits in New Jersey since March 15. As I mentioned last week, in 2019, our state led the nation in percentage of applicants who received UI payments at around 80%. Even with that crush of applications during this pandemic, that number is nearly the same. Unfortunately, not everyone applying is eligible for benefits, but we're working hard to bring all available assistance to the many who are.

The first comprehensive picture of our economic situation since COVID-19 gripped our state was made public this morning at 11 o'clock. The preliminary estimates from BLS and collected by our great NJ DOL staff shows New Jersey's employment decreased historically in April, dropping by 757,700 jobs. Just 10 months ago, Governor, we reported the lowest unemployment rate since record-keeping began in 1976. Now we're reporting the highest, as we find our state at 15.3% unemployed.

Employment in the Garden State has been reduced to a level not seen since February of 1992. This monthly jobs drop off was not unexpected, due to the current public health emergency. As our state was succeeding at flattening one curve, it was a natural to see a rise in another. While the economic damage has been painful for far too many New Jersey families, public health must always guide economic health. And thanks to the efforts of all of us, we've avoided grisly scenes in our hospitals and unending grieving in our communities.

In order to bolster the economic security of New Jersey's families, more than \$3.4 billion in benefits has reached our workers so far. That includes \$1.4 billion in regular UI payments, and \$2 billion in federal assistance. But we aren't just talking about numbers. We hear the impact reflected in the stories of our claimants, hard-working New Jerseyans using unemployment for the first time, and those who have exhausted their benefits and need a little more help. New Jersey joined all other states in having to design new systems and processes to distribute this new federal assistance for self-employed workers and independent contractors, as well as those who need an extension of benefits. I'm pleased to say we have completed the modifications and can now process applications for those seeking this federal extension. New Jersey is one of the earliest states to get this process started.

This week, our department has begun notifying workers who have exhausted their state unemployment benefits of the 13-week extension they may be eligible for under the federal Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation, or PEUC program. Many of these workers were unemployed before the pandemic began and this situation's obviously made their job search exponentially more difficult. We estimate the exhausted universe to be around 70,000 additional people. The first group of these workers will be notified that they are able to certify this weekend, and the rollout will continue for months, as thousands exhaust their regular benefits each week. Once approved, claimants will be able to certify for any back weeks they're eligible for, after the week that ends March 28, when the CARES Act was signed, and through December 31, 2020. Plus, every qualifying claim will receive the additional \$600 through the federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation, which runs through July 25. This means tens of thousands more of our workers will soon begin receiving extended unemployment benefits. This comes on the heels of last week's action that made nearly 140,000 additional claimants newly eligible for pandemic unemployment assistance, or PUA.

Among those numbers were a significant group of workers who had inadvertently suspended their benefits because of how they responded to the federally mandated weekly certification questions. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, this part is important. It's no secret our offices are all receiving phone calls and emails about those who started receiving unemployment benefits that suddenly stopped.

There are only two reasons this could be happening. Either our claimants no longer qualify for benefits, or far more likely, they are responding adversely to one of the certification questions. You can see on the screen right now. This page that you see appears before you certify for benefits. It is the guide to receiving benefits without interruption. We have the stats. Last week approximately 33,000 customers responded to one or more certification questions in a way that makes their claim ineligible for benefits under federal law. One wrong click is all it takes to see a pause in these much-needed benefits.

With a record number of customers now certifying for benefits, and even more joining their ranks every week, it is imperative that claimants review the helpful guides found at myunemployment.nj.gov before certifying, to avoid payment delays. This doesn't just hurt the claimant, it affects, in one way or another, every other New Jerseyan seeking benefits.

It is now estimated that by mid-June, the department will be processing more than 1 million unemployment certifications per week. With so many people filing for unemployment for the first time, it's important to recognize that systems are in place to protect your personal and banking information. We want all of our workers to be vigilant, as there are bad actors out there exploiting our current economic environment to prey on those seeking unemployment benefits. New Jersey led the country in the percentage of unemployed workers who received benefits last year, as I mentioned, and we also just hit the milestone of getting our improper payment rate under 10% for four quarters in a row. This important US DOL metric is a sign that our payment accuracy and antifraud measures, which certainly have come in handy the past two months, are protecting our public, and we will continue to do all we can to keep you safe and keep you informed.

Last week we learned from our partners at the US Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General about a sophisticated international fraud ring that may have potentially stolen hundreds of millions of dollars intended for the unemployed in Washington, Florida, Massachusetts, North Carolina, and many other states. Luckily, New Jersey does not seem to be impacted by this attack, but we still have to be vigilant, especially considering we have one of the highest weekly benefit amounts in the country, making us a big target. The Office of Inspector General for the US Department of Labor has issued a guide for recognizing and reporting fraud, which may be found on our homepage. So again, please be vigilant. I want to thank my colleagues,

Jared Maples and Superintendent Callahan also for their offices helping us on all these anti-fraud measures. They've been in touch with other states when they're hearing problems there, and forwarding them to us immediately.

In summary, you, our customers, our claimants, our friends and our neighbors, you are our priority. Our goal is to provide the benefits you deserve while protecting your identity, your finances, and the unemployment trust fund that belongs to you and the employers of New Jersey. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we work to get all who are eligible every penny they're owed. Thank you, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Rob, thank you for that. Thank you for coming back, and thank you to you and your teammates for all the energy and efforts and long hours that you're working to chop through this. As you and I have both said many times, if somebody's frustrated out there and they haven't gotten through, we don't begrudge that for one second. We know these are desperate times, but also know that we've got people who could not be working any harder. This is a tsunami unlike anything we've ever seen, and you'll get every single penny that's coming to you. So thank you again, for everything and for being back with us today.

Colonel Callahan, great to have you. Anything on compliance or other matters? Thank you.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. Other than the handful of compliance issues that I'll go through, I just echo the Governor's remarks that the compliance has really been phenomenal in the most densely populated state of 9 million people, for me to just read through five or six on the overnight, I think it speaks to everybody's collective efforts in the personal responsibility that each one of you've been taking, most of you anyway.

On the overnight, in Clinton Township, a subject was cited for being defiant and refusing to wear a mask in a coffee shop, in Clinton that it was. In Hillsborough, a gym owner was cited for the third time for having his gym open. In Burnsville, a store owner was cited for having a nonessential furniture store open. In Irvington, a subject arrested for a temporary restraining order violation, subsequently spit at a police officer at the station. In South Orange, a subject was arrested for shoplifting and he started coughing and spit on three different police officers. In Clementine, a subject was cited for having church services inside a church in excess of 10 people, which was in violation of EO 107. And in Bellmawr, in addition, I know yesterday, I had mentioned yesterday, the owners were cited for a violation, four patrons yesterday were also cited.

Beyond compliance, Governor, I just think it's important to note that Pete Gaynor, the FEMA Administrator, hosted a call with all state directors of emergency management last night, talking about hurricane preparedness and pandemic operations. When you think of how a state emergency operations center now has to operate with social distancing and hygiene in mind, when you think about mass care and sheltering upwards of maybe hundreds of people, when you think about possibly having to do virtual damage assessments, instead of FEMA folks and troopers going out to scenes doing that, with one person with cameras and phones and uploading things. So, I know it's the last thing we want to think of, but we have to be ready and I think it was certainly a valuable call to go through the operational guidance that they've put out and that State of New Jersey shared with all of our 21 County OEM Coordinators.

And lastly, I appreciate you mentioning, Rowdy Meys, an 11-year-old with a lion's heart. I know his first name is Rowdy. He's about as humble and as a young gentleman as you could imagine, and that visit was just this morning. When you think of Garden State farmer family, you think of Rowdy. The youngest of seven, a phenomenal family which I would simply describe as salt of the earth and made me proud to be from the Garden State. Thanks, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Colonel. You don't hear Rowdy, Rowdy Yates, Clint Eastwood from way back. I'm dating myself, but thank you for that. I'm going to knock gently on some wood here. Mother Nature, in the respect of storms, has been very good to us over the past number of months and we just hope that continues. We haven't said it explicitly, Brendon, we're going to start over here. We haven't said it explicitly, but we need folks to, as my late father would say, mind their P's and Q's this weekend. Whether you're in a park or on a beach, we do have, I think Mother Nature appears to be, I'm not wild about saying this because I want the summer to start as much as anybody, but it looks like it's going to be cooler than normal and some rain, so that may keep things at a lower level of activity. Again, I don't take any joy in saying that, but that's just a fact.

And I appreciate all the help and your point on compliance. Folks need to hear that, because it's now months. We've done it unlike any other state in America. And again, we're as guilty as anybody. The folks in this room, including yours truly, end up getting a disproportionate amount of emphasis on what turns out to be a very small minority of the reality. The overwhelming reality is extraordinary in the state.

Just to remind everyone, tomorrow we're going to do this earlier. We're going to be together at 11:00 a.m. I think we've got a reasonably high degree of confidence we'll have all the numbers that we normally have at 1:00, and we'll be joined by Treasurer Liz Muoio to talk about the budget impact that this has having. And she's also, I think, going to do a press follow-up call tomorrow at 1:30, so we'll probably keep it at fairly high level in our gathering tomorrow at 11:00, and then Liz and her team will be available. They're doing an incredible job under incredible circumstances, at 1:30 to do a follow-up call to get into more detail. Did I get that right? Fantastic. Please keep it short, if you could. Brent, good afternoon.

Q&A Session

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Good afternoon. I thought you said there would be more outdoor announcements today. What happened to those? About pools?

Governor Phil Murphy: We're still working them.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Still working on it, okay. So will that come tomorrow?

Governor Phil Murphy: We may have something tomorrow. More likely, we're going to have a lot of stuff on Tuesday, but we may have something tomorrow. I don't want too far out ahead of myself though.

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Okay. Of the 1.1 million people who have filed unemployment claims, how many are still waiting? Of the 139,000 workers who had their unemployment processed last week, did each additional application receive a review from a live agent, or were some approved electronically or automatically? People who are getting benefits say taxes are still not being withheld from the \$600 payment. What can they do?

And then quickly, teenage drivers still can't get their licenses because DMVs remain closed here, even though other states have opened them. Why can't New Jersey reopen these on a limited basis? How can you help those drivers?

The state Republican Party announced today it's suing you for what they say is arbitrarily choosing which businesses are essential. Your reaction?

Governor Phil Murphy: What was the last thing? They sued me?

Brent Johnson, Star-Ledger: Well, I think, I don't know if they sued you directly. I think they're suing the administration saying that you've arbitrarily allowed some businesses to reopen and some not.

Governor Phil Murphy: Okay, as you can tell, I spent a lot of time focused on that suit. Rob, let's go to you. Teen drivers, there's nothing new on motor vehicles. We have not announced the reopening date, Matt, am I right? Yeah, we've got nothing new to add on that. We do not, actively do not like, you don't need a road test to get your license that a couple of states have done. As Sue Fulton, who runs the Motor Vehicles Commission would remind me and remind us, that it's an enormous cause of death among teens, that is road accidents, and we just don't want to go down that road, no pun intended. I've got nothing to add on a suit. We make the decision about what's essential and what's not essential with the input, based on data, science, facts, health, and a big, big input from the women to my right and their colleagues. And so I'm sorry if folks don't like the definitions, but the fact of the matter is, they're quite consistent, by the way, in terms of essential, non-essential that has been designated nationally as well, and we're going to continue to try to open these up. I mean, we've gone for non-essential with curbside pickup. We know that's not a full loaf, but it's a part of the loaf. We're going to continue to try to open things up, assuming the health metrics and indicators continue to warrant that.

Rob, we've got 1.1 filed, how many are still waiting of the 139,000 processed last week, how many had a live interaction versus electronic, and taxes withheld on the federal \$600 piece?

Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro Angelo: Thanks, Brent and Governor. I'll work backwards. The \$600 tax piece, I want to get back to you because I was – I think that people choose individually whether or not they're going to have taxes taken out. It's not something that's automatic. Let me get back to you on that. I know that was one of the reasons, when we first programmed this out, I remember that being a factor we had to worry about there. I want to check on that for you.

The 140,000 from last week, it's hard to get into the semantics here. But one, none of those have shown up in the numbers yet because we report on a Thursday for the week ending the prior Saturday. So all the folks that became eligible last week, they didn't certify, that wouldn't be our numbers until Sunday. But that being said, most of those were already, quote-unquote, processed and they were waiting for the PUA programming to be done, or the other kind of programming we were getting in the system. So they just had to, at that point certified. They got an email from us saying, you've been processed, in the PUA universe, you've been deemed ineligible, but now you're able to certify for benefits. So they've already I mean, for the most part, 92% of our claims come through online, so I would guess that percentage keeps for the 140,000. But they were already processed and then they were getting an email from us saying now that they're ready to be paid, is what happened last week and this week. And those numbers will start showing up in the paid universe on next week's report.

Governor Phil Murphy: Rob, thanks. So you'll follow up on the tax withholding. Dave, good afternoon. How are you?

David Matthau, New Jersey 101.5: I was going to ask you about the lawsuit but I think you probably answered the question. I know that one part of that was, was due process violated? They claim it was.

Governor Phil Murphy: No. I'm told that this was timed to go live while we're here today so I have no insights at all.

David Matthau, New Jersey 101.5: Okay. And then the other question I have is for you and Commissioner Persichilli. There have been reports that some long-term facilities are still having a hard time getting PPE. Is this true? I know you mentioned 24 million pieces in your report, Commissioner, but do they still need anything else? I mean, we've talked about shortages of gowns and so forth. And, you know, the review of the long-term care facility situation kind of sounded like you were trying to defend what's happened with them. Do you think that concerns and questions about the way New Jersey has handled the whole long-term care issue has been fair? Have those questions been fair or unfair? Are they putting you in a position where nobody could have known what was going to happen and it's unfair to be looking back at it the way we are, in some cases, hearing people doing that now?

Governor Phil Murphy: Let me start, Judy, and turn to you. Is that all right? Let me be unequivocal about this, about two things about PPE. We were not, as a state, in the PPE line of business two-and-a-half-months ago. We had never been involved in it. We've now put out 40-something million pieces, if not more, at this point.

Second point, we do not still have enough PPE, as we sit here today in the state of New Jersey. As a nation, we started in a deficit and we have had to cobble this together with band aids, paperclips and with a global assault on getting more PPE. So the answer is, we're still out there. I literally was on this morning with somebody. We are out there, literally, Pat and his team, every single day trying to get more PPE. And again, we were never a party to this two-and-a-half months ago. This was not a line of business that the State of New Jersey was in.

I don't view it defensive at all. I view it as let's make sure everybody knows what the facts are. In fact, I got interviewed this morning by somebody and I took the hook on the premise of a question which was completely wrong. The premise was, what are you going to do about reviewing readmitting COVID-19 positive patients, residents rather, into the – it was, Judy was unequivocal, which is part of the reason why she went through this today. Unequivocal that we could not mingle positive residents in with the general population, and unequivocal about PPE requirements, segregating. Cohorting sounds, it's a big word, it means separating, right? So you've got a group over here that are like situated, you've got another group over here. And in fact, that extended, as I think you probably heard, to staff. You couldn't have staff crossing between populations, and Judy made that point as well.

I think there's one other point that we haven't said lately, but we said a lot back and again, this was at a time when Judy's going through this timeline, and I'm thinking what did Italy look like at that point? With bodies literally, because the people who got sick were going to hospitals, right? So that's where we were trying to save their lives with ventilators and ICU beds. And we've got pictures of Italy staring us in the face at every moment, and where was therefore the right point of attack, etc., etc.

But I think it's important to reiterate something that unwittingly, these heroic workers going in and out of these facilities in those early days, remember, frankly loved ones, other visitors, other folks who were going in and out of these facilities, and probably all asymptomatic, but we're unwittingly starting, kindling the fire that has raged. I was reminded this morning, over 80% of the deaths in Canada are from long-term care facilities. That's the last point I'd make. It isn't just us. We are doing everything we can to figure out what we can do better, God forbid if this ever happens again.

But something I didn't say today that I've said lately, 4,000 and some blessed lives lost, there are still several hundred thousand people associated with long-term care facilities who we are working 24/7 to keep as many of them healthy and alive as we sit here. I went on too long, Judy. Over to you. Any thoughts you want to add?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Well, I don't consider it being defensive. I really do think that it's important to clear up the inconsistencies and the record, because when we do our, I don't like to use the same term as the Governor, the post mortem, although the after action, I think it's important for us to be able to put things in perspective.

This timeline is remarkable when you think that we had our first case on March 4. It's not easy, but you know, some people say, well, we saw it coming, we saw this, we saw that. That's what we have to look at. Because there will be another one. And I want to make sure that the record is clear and that we learn from it and that inconsistencies are cleared up, and that everybody understands the responsibilities that we each had in this, and that we were dealing with something we had never dealt with before.

This is not a time to blame anyone at all. It's a time to say, mm-hmm, we did what we could do at the time and when we do our after action, that's the time for us to learn, and we'll learn from each other and we'll go forward.

Governor Phil Murphy: By the way, it's worth reminding everyone that you hired a nationally recognized firm, with nationally recognized individuals, now several weeks ago, to come in and not only help plus up our LTC efforts, but also explicitly, without any control on our part in terms of where they come out, of exactly these sorts of questions. And so I don't know any other state that's done that, frankly. Maybe they've done it, but I know we've done it. Judy deserves the credit there, because they're going to not just hold up a roadmap for what it needs to look like going forward, they're going to hold up a mirror to all of us, including, it must be said, an extraordinarily uneven performance by operators. Were there good apples? Are there good apples? You bet there are, but are others who just did not get the job done. So with that, let's move on. Do you have any? Thank you.

Ian Elliott, NJTV News: Governor, Executive Order 122 requires essential retail businesses that are still permitted to operate in New Jersey to adopt aggressive social distancing and disinfecting measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. That order did not include New Jersey farms, whose seasonal workers are considered essential. Yesterday, the state issued a set of safety guidelines for those farms but they are merely recommendations and not mandated. Why is that?

The guidelines also allow farmers to return infected, non-symptomatic workers back into the fields as long as they wear masks and to keep six foot distancing. Does that standard apply to other businesses in New Jersey?

And finally, what is your level of concern about the two recent spikes of coronavirus infections in migrant workers in South Jersey? Do you feel it's being contained? And can you explain what steps are being taken to isolate the 125 or so workers?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll have Judy and probably Matt come in here, both on the substance as well as how the Executive Order connects with this. I think we've been quite clear, Judy, you tell me if we missed this, but in our sort of vulnerable populations, migrant seasonal workers are high on that list. So this is something that

we are concerned about, and there are a whole series of steps that Judy, through the Department of Health, have taken and we've seen this. This is not just abstract. I use the Singapore example which I know is a long way from here, but that's in fact, Singapore had this sucker down to zero, and it reignited and it was for this very reason, because of migrant workers who were coming in, closely congregated, not just in their work but in their living realities.

And so it's something we're very focused on. And again, that's why the migrant workers and the seasonal workers are listed high on that list of vulnerable populations. Judy, anything you want to add to that?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We have a group along with the Department of Labor and Agriculture, developed guidance for the growers and the owners. We had a conference call with them the day before yesterday to look at things like isolation and quarantine. We do have bed spaces set aside for seasonal workers who need to quarantine or isolate. We're working with our four FQHCs in the south and they will be testing additional seasonal workers, I think we've done about 600 tests, and the positive individuals are being isolated.

Governor Phil Murphy: And by the way, this is not just a South reality, but it's overwhelmingly a South Jersey reality. There's some up North, but the bulk of this is in the South. And again, back to the long-term care, discussion, the notion of cohorting or segregating folks based on their health characteristics is also a part of the answer here as well. Thank you for that. Sir, do you have anything? You're good? Ma'am.

Reporter: I've got a couple of questions for the Labor Commissioner and then also two for the Governor. At the start, you mentioned you're seeing fraud among unemployment filers. What type of fraud are you seeing? How are you differentiating this between someone making a mistake on the application? How many of the people who had run out of benefits are you contacting this week that can certify for the first time during the pandemic?

And then also to reiterate Brent's question, which I'm not sure we got a clear answer on. How many of the outstanding unemployment applications are there? And then how are you getting through that backlog? And is there anything those people can do in the time, aside from waiting for that?

For the Governor, Governor, you mentioned previously you strongly endorsed a 9/11-style Commission for the federal pandemic relief. In light of some of the questions that are going on about New Jersey's response, and specifically long-term care, would you also support a similar bipartisan state panel with subpoena power to review New Jersey's response?

In addition –

Governor Phil Murphy: This is the last one, please.

Reporter: Sure. You've been saying all along that data determines dates in determining when we can reopen next, but some folks have been frustrated. They haven't seen any recent modeling data. Can you show us any specific model that is informing your decision making, and whether that being opening schools, opening gyms, opening campgrounds, or any specific policy decision that's being informed by that date?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll let Rob handle the labor questions, other than I'll say unequivocally when we say fraud we don't mean mistake. If somebody makes a mistake, we're not talking about that. I think Rob already answered this. He spoke very clearly about work that he and Director Maples and Superintendent Callahan, this is serious international racketeering and crime. This is not somebody who checked box 2 and meant to check box 1. Rob, you can answer that.

I have said, I think two to maybe two-and-a-half months ago that I thought that a commission like the 9/11 Commission, chaired, I might add by one of my mentors, Governor Kean, was not just right for the country but for New Jersey. I've said that, I think at least two months ago, and I've said it on more than one occasion.

The data that we're using to rely on the decisions that we're making are the ones that you see every day. We don't have something behind the curtain, and I can't give you a good answer in terms of yet, and I've said this, I think we've been pretty clear that Judy and Lamont Repollet and I and our teams need to still coalesce around what school looks like in the fall. And we promise that guidance in the next two or three weeks, would be my guess. But you're seeing every day the data that we're seeing. Rob, can you very quickly hit those?

Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro Angelo: Real quick, I got an answer on the \$600, Brent. The taxes are not being taken out of that. And the reason was, we didn't want to wait longer to get that money out, and the program was done that way. The folks who are now eligible for the extended benefits, we think the universe is about 70,000. That doesn't mean folks who've already, who currently have a claim in. These are folks who have exhausted since last July, as per the CARES Act. That's the universe when we look back and contact them, to let them know that they are now eligible for benefits. Some of those clearly already have claimed and been denied over the past couple months, but that's the whole universe, 70,000.

As far as, I don't like using the term backlog, we're at a point now where not everybody who filed a claim in the beginning is still claiming or certifying for benefits anymore over the past two months. So that number is a moving target. Like I said, the 1.1 million claims total, initial claim since March 15. Right now, I think the number is 760,000 are receiving benefits. But again, that is one, not everybody has claimed to certify every week, the numbers do go up and down. And again, that number does not include the 140,000 who became eligible last week to claim, to certify, or the extended benefits being able to certify this week.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thanks, Rob. Elise, how are you?

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Very good, thanks. Yourself?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm hanging in, thank you.

Elise Young, Bloomberg: I have three questions. The first is from Nikita at NJ Globe. Will the state pay for the National Guard to continue deployment if the Trump administration turns down your request to extend the June 24 deadline?

My second question is, are there any concerns about New York residents whose beaches are closed coming to New Jersey beaches this weekend and throughout the summer?

And on tomorrow's financial update, what can we expect in terms of cutbacks, spending adjustments and possible tax increases? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: So on the last one, don't be mad at me, but we'll leave tomorrow until tomorrow. In fact, this has been something we've all been working on. I've got another call with the Treasurer right after this. It's not pretty, I'll just say that. It's not pretty. I'll leave it at that. And that's the reason why we have to borrow money, unfortunately. It's also the reason why we desperately need direct federal cash assistance.

I don't think, I assume you mean the New York City beaches in particular, because there's a break between the non-city and the city beaches. Yes and no. I mean, that's a reality that we accept going into this. I don't think the New York City case, please God, is going to stay static forever. I hope, you know, you'd expect that we're on various, maybe the curves are bending at different times in different geographies, but we're all trying to get back on our feet. And it's not just New York, we've got a lot of folks who come in from Pennsylvania, in particular, to our beaches, so this is something we want to be careful and monitor.

Again, I wish the weather would be, I wish it were 85, low humidity and sunny for the next four days. It's going to be none of that. And so the only reason, the only silver lining with that is, I think we're going to get, Elise, particularly for a long holiday weekend that kicks the summer off, we may have caught a break in terms of the amount of people and the density.

For Nikita, I know I'm going in reverse order here. Listen, we're still hopeful that we'll get that extension. George Helmy was on with the White House, literally this morning, on this explicit topic. But having said that, we're going to have to figure out a way to continue to surge in these facilities. How we pay for it, I'll leave, I'm hoping that the feds will pay. We have not come close to giving up on that. But Judy would be mad at me if I didn't say we're going to need the surge to go on in these facilities, and so, we'll find a way. Sir.

Reporter: I have a few questions here. Were you able to see a video from Beth Gaurav, who's the co-owner of PS2 Baseball in Wayne, New Jersey? She made a passion video to you on behalf of the NJ Baseball Coalition, and wondering as far as reopening baseball. I know they're going to be celebrating tomorrow outdoor batting day, batting cage day, and they're wondering as far as the data goes, how far or how close are we to outdoor baseball and eventually indoor facilities being open?

Governor Phil Murphy: I have not seen the video, so please apologize to her on my behalf. I'm a huge baseball fan. Please don't ask me who I root for. And this is something we're still, is a work in progress. I mean, we're still a work in progress with the National Football League. Matt's been on daily with the Philadelphia 76ers who practice and have their headquarters in Camden, by example. And so it's a work in progress. Believe me, I would love nothing more to get the holy water from Judy and her team to say that it's okay to reengage on team sports. I hope that that's sooner than later, but we're not there yet. And I would just ask folks, both the mom in Wayne, as well as everybody, please keep doing what you're doing. Know that it's something that we want to get to, without question, I hope sooner than later. And we understand why. It's overwhelmingly the rationale to be able to do it, assuming you could do it safely, it's overwhelming. It's mental health, it's physical fitness. It's going out, cheering for our kids. It's all the reasons why we do sports. And listen, I hope we get there sooner than later. Thank you. Please. You're going to take us home here. Hold on one second.

Reporter, Atlantic City Press: I'm with the Atlantic City Press, so I have some casino questions.

Governor Phil Murphy: We know who you are.

Reporter, Atlantic City Press: For the Governor, have you seen the Casino Association of New Jersey plan on reopening that it has developed with the Atlantic Care Regional Health System? What do you think of it? Is there a casino subcommittee on your Restart Commission, and who chairs it? How much time are you giving to the consideration of this huge industry?

And then on unemployment for the Labor Commissioner, the US Labor Department said the number of people actually collecting this week dropped by about 113,000 from over 700 to just over 600. What explains that drop? Is it a simple mistake? There have been mistakes in the past, so this was the Federal Labor Department report.

Can you give us an update on the new call center? How many workers are now handling claims? How many are taking calls? And how many have volunteered to help with unemployment so far from other divisions? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. I'll start on your first series and then Rob, you can either answer these or we may have to come back to you on some of this, so bear with us. Listen, I was on with my friend Harry Hurley this morning and we discussed casinos for a good chunk of the time that I was on the air with him. And it's of overwhelming importance, not just in Atlantic City, certainly in Atlantic City, but it is an overwhelmingly important employer and element of our economy. So you asked me how much time do we spend thinking about it? We spend a lot of time on it.

I don't think we, I've not seen the plan, but I know our team, Matt, I assume that -- I'm not sure where it is, but we're reviewing not just any plan that the industry has put forward, but also our independent plans. I don't believe we've got a subcommittee focused on the casinos among the Councils, but that doesn't mean we're not thinking about it and wargaming this.

I just would stop and if Judy or Christina see this differently, they should weigh in here. Casinos are a tough nut. They've got a number of attributes which are concerning. I'm putting aside the economic impact and the employment impact, which is overwhelmingly positive, right? And by the way, as I mentioned to Harry this morning, he's said, you know, how long term can the damage be? I said literally we just, Atlantic City and the casinos, in particular, have just barely got back on their feet over the past couple of years from a recession that was over 10 years ago. The long-lasting element of this, and Rob knows this, because that is a big, a huge slug of these folks are overwhelmingly, in fact, basically all of them are out of work.

So the attributes that are concerning, and there's a couple that are good things. What's concerning? It's indoors. There's no ventilation. It's close proximity, and it's largely sedentary. Those are bad data points, I think the team to my right would agree with. On the more positive side, they're large, big footprint, and that's a good thing. In fact, we had kept them open a little bit longer, you may recall, when we shut the state down, with Judy's and Christina's and others blessing, because of the scale. The size of the actual footprint of these floors allows you to social distance in a way that a smaller space clearly wouldn't.

We're learning on how to manage capacities. We're learning that with parking spaces at county parks and state parks, we're learning it in different ways for beaches. Even though this is indoors, some of that's going to be applicable as we think this through. We're light years in a different and better place on testing today than we were two months ago, and contact tracing, and will be yet again in a different place, much stronger, weeks and months from now. Those are all positives. So it's incredibly important, but it's one we've got to get right, because of the unfortunate attributes that I started out with. Rob over to you, if you could.

Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development Rob Asaro Angelo: Real quick, the numbers, USDOL data is not easy to deal with. I think what you're talking about sounds like you were comparing last week's number which was the total UI, straight UI of our trust fund claimants, plus our PUA and other claimants, and the number you've talked about today is just our straight UI claimants, not including PUA and everybody else. But I also know that USDOL is adjusting every week, because so many different numbers are coming in from different states. Some states are reporting PUA the right way, some aren't. But we can help you out afterwards. But that's what it sounds like to me what those numbers mean.

As far as folks who are helping out, we have hundreds from within Department of Labor who are moving over to UI to help out. We're processing hundreds from other departments. Some have already started, also helping out with our UI offices. We're all doing different versions of things to help triage the help. We're already starting to process more than 100 new employees to be full-time UI employees from here until, you know, the foreseeable future. So, it's all hands on deck across the government. I want to thank my colleagues in the Cabinet front office for being so ready, willing and able to send staff our way to help us out.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Rob. I'm going to mask up and say to Judy and Tina, thank you so much, as always, for everything you do and for being here. Rob, very good to have you back. Keep up the great work. And folks, if you're still out there and we haven't gotten to you and you're frustrated, we don't blame you. But we will get there and you'll get every penny that's coming to you. Pat and Jared and Matt, thank you for your being here.

I mentioned this yesterday, I think this afternoon, we're meeting for our annual pre-Memorial Day risk assessment that has, in this case, nothing, very little if nothing to do with COVID. This is just to have that assessment as to where we stand before we go into the summer period. Tomorrow, again, we're going to be with you early at 11:00 a.m. Out of acknowledgment that it's Memorial Day weekend and kicking off the summer. Normally I'd be at Jenkinson's tomorrow. I'm not going to be at Jenkinson's tomorrow, but I will be on the Jim Kerr Rock and Roll Show tomorrow morning, as an homage to what I otherwise would have been doing at Jenkinson's.

And again to everybody, please keep doing what you're doing. It's been an extraordinary effort in this state up and down, across. It's just, it takes our breath away how great everybody has been. Your spirit, your compliance, your passion, you get it, that public health creates economic health, and you've lived it. You not just get it, you live it. So just all I can say is keep it up. We're going to continue to take steps as responsibly and as soon as we feel we can. In the meantime, thank you all and God bless you all.

Governor Phil Murphy

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Boards, Commissions & Authorities (/governor/admin/bca/)

Internship Opportunities (/governor/admin/internship.shtml)

Governor's Residence - Drumthwacket (<http://drumthwacket.org/>)

Key Initiatives

Economy & Jobs (/governor/initiatives/#Economy)

Education (/governor/initiatives/#Education)

Environment (/governor/initiatives/#Environment)

Health (/governor/initiatives/#Health)

Law & Justice (/governor/initiatives/#Justice)

Transportation (/governor/initiatives/#Transportation)

News & Events

Press Releases (/governor/news/news/562022/approved/news_archive.shtml)

Photos (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/govmurphy>)

Public Addresses (/governor/news/addresses)

Executive Orders (/infobank/eo/056murphy/approved/eo_archive.html)

Administrative Orders (/governor/news/ao/approved/ao_archive.shtml)

Direct Appointments (/governor/news/appointments)

Advice and Consent Appointments (/governor/news/acappointments)

Statements on Legislation

(/governor/news/statements/approved/statements_archive.shtml)

Administration Reports (/governor/news/adminreports/approved/archive.shtml)

Transition Reports (/governor/news/reports/approved/reports_archive.shtml)

Press Kits (/governor/news/press)

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