

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: October 6th, 2021 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. Sorry to be a minute or two behind. With me to my right is the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli, to her right, the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Service Medical Director, Dr. Ed Lifshitz. Great to have you both. To my left, another guy who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police, Colonel Pat Callahan. We have Chief Counsel Parimal Garg, Alyana Alfero Post is directing, and we have the First Lady of the great state of New Jersey, Tammy Murphy, with us.

I want to first reiterate the executive order I signed yesterday to increase the pay for poll workers to \$300 for election day and a commensurate hourly increase during early voting. The general election is now less than four weeks away, and the in-person early voting is set to open on Saturday, October 23rd, which is just 17 days away. We must ensure that we have the roster of poll workers we will need so every voter is properly, quickly, and accurately checked in and able to cast their vote. This is the unsung work of the women and men who help run our elections at local polling places across our state. To sign up to be a poll worker, simply go to that website, pollworker.nj.gov. You can also directly contact your county board of elections.

Again, I've signed an executive order increasing the pay for our poll workers for both election day and during the nine-day early voting period, and I'm proud to do this because they are an integral part of our democratic process, and I want to specifically thank the boards of election, superintendents of election, and county clerks across the state who have been working tirelessly to ensure the security and continuity of our

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elections. I also want to – in a very explicit example of why this is a bipartisan smart thing to do to increase voter participation, I want to give a shoutout publicly – I've sent them each a note privately – to Jim Beach, Senator Jim Beach, and Assemblyman Kevin Rooney who are championing this in the legislature.

I also want to give a quick update on the early interest we are finding in our Return and Earn Program that we outlined last Monday. As you remember, Return and Earn is geared to pair workers with businesses that need them. Return and Earn will provide newly hired employees a 500-dollar bonus and assist small businesses in covering the cost of training up to \$10,000 per business – up to \$10,000, pardon me, per employee. In the week since we announced Return and Earn, more than 2,100 businesses have taken the first step of registering with the Department of Labor to be a part of it, and by the way, interestingly, 700 of them reached out within the first 24 hours, and even more interestingly, more than half of the businesses who have registered – or which have registered have not previously worked with the state, so that tells us we are expanding our reach within our business community.

I want to congratulate Labor Commissioner Rob Asaro-Angelo and his team on a strong launch, and I look forward to seeing Return and Earn help both our small businesses and workers move forward. Again, this is – I wouldn't call it a pilot because it's a real program that as you can see is going to impact a lot of businesses and even more employees, but if we see that this is working and it's the magic of we believe both cash on the barrel for the employee to come back but also up to \$10,000 for the small business to train and upskill that employee – if it works, we're going to put some more money to work at that.

Now let's get to the numbers. Here's our latest vaccination count as of this morning. You can see that. Here are today's newly reported positive PCR and presumed positive antigen tests. The rate of transmission is continuing its decline, and that is definitely an encouraging sign. While we're on cases, let's do a quick update on the number of outbreaks in our schools which have been determined to have been the result of in-school transmission. Over the week from last Tuesday through this Monday, that's September 27 to October 4, 23 incidences of in-school transmission were reported to the Communicable Disease Service under Ed's leadership the Department of Health. So far since the beginning of the school year, there is a reported total of 69 outbreaks due to in-school activities across 62 districts impacting as you can see 319 students and 60 educators or staff. These numbers have all been updated on our dashboard at covid19.nj.gov.

Additionally, the Department of Health under Judy's leadership is today, I believe, issuing a directive requiring all schools to report data to them on a weekly basis. This reporting will give us a more complete picture of the cases and vaccination rates among students and staff which we can then report all out to you, and Judy will be able to provide a little bit more color on this directive when she gets up to bat in a couple minutes. One last point on schools. As a matter of clarification, I want to make it clear that my executive order requiring all school staff to be either fully vaccinated by October 18th or face regular testing includes all bus drivers as well, regardless of whether they're district employees or independently contracted. We're doing all we can to ensure that the school day is as safe as possible for all of our kids, and that commitment begins at the bus stop.

Now moving back to the numbers, here are last night's reports from our hospitals and healthcare systems. Judy, I know you'll comment on this, but generally softly but trending in the right direction. Not with a big quantum step in the right direction, but generally going in the right direction. Then with the heaviest of hearts, here are today's newly confirmed deaths and losses of our extraordinary New Jersey family. Let's pause as we do regularly to pay our respects to three more who we have lost.

We'll start with a remembrance of Kathleen Nigito. Kathleen was 71 and a resident of Hasbrouck Heights. Kathleen worked as the office manager alongside her husband Giorgio at their family run printing business Presto Print and Copy in Lodi until their retirement, but as much as she loved the business, she enjoyed being the manager of their family even more, and they survive her. Giorgio, who by the way had lost his mom two and half months before he lost his Kathleen, she's also survived by – she's also survived, pardon me, by her son Joseph, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Monday, daughter-in-law Kimberly and her daughter Christina and grandchildren Vincent and Miabella. She also leaves behind her brother August and his family and many nieces and nephews, cousins, and dear friends. I've said it many times in a different context that our small businesses are the backbone of our state, and it takes people like Kathleen to make them a success. May God bless her and watch over her memory and her family that she leaves behind.

Next up, we recall Leon “Leo” Kanach. He lived in the Elberon section of Long Branch in Monmouth County. A veteran of the United States Navy and a semi-retired plumber, Leo was an easily recognized – a recognizable member of the community as a youth sports coach and as an expert gardener who lent a hand to the creation and management of numerous community gardens. He loved being outdoors, and in addition to gardening listed beekeeping among his many hobbies. Leo was 83 years old when he passed leaving his daughter Susan, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Monday, and his sons Thomas, Kenneth, Christopher, and Benjamin, along with their families including 11 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. He’s also survived by his brother Bob and many friends.

I’m not sure it was his business or I believe it was his home, but he was in close proximity to Monmouth University, and he developed a reputation over – across a generation of women at Monmouth University for being the guy that they would go to and ask favors to help them out on the plumbing front. His daughter wanted me to make sure I gave that shoutout, and he was somewhat of a legend in the Monmouth – the broader Monmouth University family. He was predeceased by his wife of 37 years Diane and by his daughter Donna, and they both passed in 2018. We thank Leo for his service to our nation and for a lifetime of service to his community, and may God bless his memory and his family.

Finally, today let’s honor the life of North Brunswick’s Dawn Caccese. She was just 57 years old. Born in Bayonne, she had the great fortune to grow up along the Jersey shore in Point Pleasant, and even though she moved inland, the beach remained her favorite place. A kind and giving person who lived her faith, Dawn was at her happiest when doing things for others, especially for her four sons or her beloved grandchildren. From a Sunday dinner to a Halloween party to a Christmas Eve extravaganza, knowing Dawn meant you’d be taken care of. Dawn left behind her husband of eight years Ernest, her sons Stephen, Daniel, Dustin, and Matthew, her grandchildren Tatum Rose and Denver, and her stepchildren Teresa, John, Taylor, Tiffany and Torilyn.

This is one – the joke is among the Irish – Mr. Callahan, you’ll appreciate this – that the Irish sports pages are the obituaries. I was brought up reading both the actual sports pages and the obituary section. I’ve done that my whole life, and I do every single day, but Dawn jumped out at me. I read this obituary myself in the *Asbury Park Press*, and it jumped out at me because – for two reasons. One is in the first sentence or two, Judy, it said that she died of COVID, and secondly, look at the picture of this woman. Healthy, in the prime of her life, just extraordinary, and it turns out 57 years old, so anybody out there who thinks this can’t hit you, look again. Look at this woman, and listen to what I said about her extraordinary life and how she was the life of the party literally, and she’s gone. God bless her, and may God bless her and look after her memory and look after her family. We honor and remember every New Jerseyan who’s been lost to COVID, and we stand with their families in mourning and remembrance.

A few minutes ago, I mentioned that small businesses are the backbone of our state, so let’s meet another small business who has partnered with the New Jersey Economic Development Authority to keep our communities healthy. The Bucktown Mixed Martial Arts Studio in – I can take it Pat – in Bellville is a non-profit that teaches students of all ages a variety of martial arts disciplines along with meditation to create strong and resilient bodies, minds, and spirits. It’s run by that guy on the left, Jay Isip. Bucktown had entered into a new lease agreement at its location just two days before the pandemic required him to close his doors. Working through the EDA, Jay was able to receive the emergency funding he needed to keep the dreams that he had for Bucktown MMA alive and to reenvision all that his studio could be for his students. Today, his doors are wide open, and his students continue to return to a safe and welcoming studio. I caught up with Jay on Monday, and I thanked him for never giving up, and I hope Bucktown is a part of Bellville’s community for a long time. Check them out, 527 Washington Avenue in Bellville. 527 Washington Avenue, go by and say hi to Jay and sign up, or check them out online, bucktown.org, bucktown.org.

Next I want to acknowledge with a heavy heart the passing of a pioneer and leader within our state’s Latino community, Guillermo “Guillo” Beytagh Maldonado. Born, raised, and educated in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Guillo came stateside to study first at Rutgers University and then going on for his post-graduate studies at Cornell University. Since the 1980s he was a fixture in our state’s Latino community, founding or leading numerous organizations including the Puerto Rico Action Board, the Latino Action Network, the Hispanic Directors of New Jersey, and the NJ Community Corrections Working Summit Impacting Communities of Color. He was also a huge advocate for bilingual and bicultural early childhood centers. He passed away from

health complications in his native Puerto Rico surrounded by his family at the age of just 64. As we celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, we'll take a moment to honor and remember Guillo and all that he did across his career and for New Jersey. He has left a tremendous legacy. It's our job collectively to see it move forward.

Before I turn things over to Judy, I want to quickly congratulate these two professors at Princeton. What a week for Princeton. Suki Manabe on the left and David MacMillan on the right who have each been awarded Nobel Prizes in Physics and chemistry respectively. This week Princeton University, wow. Dr. Manabe is the senior meteorologist at Princeton's – we should probably get him involved in our briefings – Princeton's program in atmospheric and oceanic sciences. His research into how atmospheric carbon dioxide impacts global temperatures has informed and changed how climate models are changed. I have reached out to Dr. Manabe. I have not yet connected with him. Dr. MacMillan's Nobel is for his pioneering work in organocatalysis, which I know Pat, you studied – a new way of building organic molecules that drive chemical reactions, which in turn is making pharmaceutical research, to name one example, greener.

A cool thing, a spoke to Professor MacMillan this morning. Dr. Manabe was born in Japan and immigrated to the US in Jersey. Dr. MacMillan was born in Scotland and immigrated to the US and is now in Jersey. Princeton University in particular, New Jersey in general have long been recognized for excellence in research and innovation, and these awards further cement this already incredibly well-earned distinction. Congratulations to both of them and to Princeton University. On that note, please help me welcome the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli.

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor, and good afternoon. At the start of the school year, the Department announced that 267 million in federal grants were available to assist local educational agencies and non-public schools with implemented COVID-19 screening testing of students and staff in k-12 schools. 758 public school districts and non-public schools have signed up for the screening testing program. This covers 552 public, local education agencies and 206 non-public schools representing a little over 1.4 million students and staff. As schools implement testing, this data will provide insight on the circulation of the virus among school children and school staff. This data, however, is not a reflection of the cases that are linked to in-school transmission, which is captured through the outbreak reports.

In order to gather this information, as the Governor said, the Department will be issuing an executive directive requiring that all school districts report testing data to the Communicable Disease Reporting Surveillance System on a weekly basis starting October 26th. The cases reported to the Department include any testing conducted by the schools, their testing vendors, and cases reported to the schools by parents, students, and staff. The aggregate reporting does not replace the requirement that testing administrators report individual COVID-19 test results to their local public health authorities. Schools will also be reporting aggregate vaccination data on staff and students to the department. The Department will collect the information, analyze it for trends, and when we have complete data, we will share it in an aggregate form on our dashboard. Layered strategies of testing, vaccination for those who are eligible, masking, physical distance, handwashing, and staying home when you're sick are the best tools for keeping our schools and communities safe for in-person activities.

In August, the Governor issued an executive order requiring all personnel in preschool through k-12 to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 by October 18th. Until they are fully vaccinated, they will be subject to COVID-19 testing at a minimum of one to two times per week. As you know, children under 12 cannot be vaccinated yet, so we need strong vaccine coverage in these populations that come into contact with these young individuals in order to protect them. Everyone 12 years of age and older are eligible to get a free COVID-19 vaccination. These vaccines are safe and effective.

Yesterday, the US Department of Health and Human Services released a report that demonstrates the lifesaving power of vaccinations. It found that COVID-19 vaccinations may have helped to prevent hundreds of thousands of new COVID-19 infections and tens of thousands of deaths, particularly among seniors. The report found that vaccinations were linked to a reduction of approximately 265,000 COVID-19 infections, 107,000 hospitalizations, and 39,000 deaths among Medicare beneficiaries between January and May of 2021. Every 10% increase in vaccination rate in a country resulted in an 11 to 12% decrease in weekly hospitalizations and deaths among Medicare beneficiaries. That's a testament to the effectiveness of COVID-

19 vaccination. This report underscores the importance of getting our senior population and those who care for them vaccinated. Vaccination rates have been increasing among long-term care staff. Approximately 80% are now fully vaccinated, and nearly 92% of our residents in long-term care facilities are vaccinated.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 1,034 hospitalizations of COVID-19 positive patients or PUIs. Over the last two weeks, new hospitalizations have decreased by 16%, individuals in ICU have decreased by 8%, individuals on ventilators have decreased by 6%, and the overall census in our hospitals of COVID-19 individuals have decreased by 7%. Fortunately, there are no new reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. There are 133 cumulative cases in the state. None of these children are currently hospitalized. At the state veteran's homes, there are no new cases among residents and no new cases among patients in our psych hospitals. The daily percent positivity as of October 9th in New Jersey is 5.19%. The northern part reports 4.57%, the central part of the state 5.82%, and the southern part of the state 5.63%. That concludes my daily report. Please continue to stay safe and get vaccinated. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you as always pretty sobering statistics on who might've been able to stay healthy and be still alive. We've said this a lot lately. No playbook a year and a half ago, all of us trying to figure out how to make the best decisions based on the data that we had. Now we've got a playbook. We know exactly what works, and the fact that people are willfully not using it or ignoring it has obviously huge consequences. Thank you for that. Pat, we got a fair amount going on on the gun front. The Attorney General has established a crime gun commission. I'm going to be signing an MOU with regional governors tomorrow and sharing data. Welcome. Give us what you got there.

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. Yes, with regard to the gun violence taskforce, the AG is – we're officially announced. I think tomorrow we're having a statewide law enforcement executive call with the US Attorney Rachel Honig, myself, the Attorney General, First Assistant, and we really do think this taskforce is going to make a difference with the – from an info sharing, intel sharing what we're doing with ballistics across the state and as we say collecting those dots so we can connect those dots. It's a phenomenal effort that I'm looking forward to kicking off with the Attorney General.

I'd also just like to announce, although COVID had slowed us down, tonight we kick off our third citizens' academy. It's a phenomenal community engagement effort where we have New Jerseyans from all walks of life throughout the state come and spend nine weeks in a row, one night a week, where we pull back the curtain and basically show them all facets of the New Jersey State Police, basically creating ambassadors for the State Police, from how we recruit, what training is like, officer involved shootings, what that response is like, how we do internal affairs investigations. The last two classes, the feedback's been phenomenal, and I'm looking forward to welcoming those new participants tonight to the Log Cabin as we kick off our third citizens' academy. Thanks, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: That is great. How big a group do you think?

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: It's 21. We try and keep it small, not only just because of COVID but we find the interaction is great, but anywhere from pastors to guidance counselors to business owners, again, a very diverse group, and I'm really looking forward to having them here.

Governor Phil Murphy: Diverse geographically as well.

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: Geographically from Sussex to southern, to Cape May, so very diverse in all aspects.

Governor Phil Murphy: Just a comment on guns. Parimal's here, and he may want to amplify this as well. You've got gun violence, which is a national reality, which is up. We're not immune to that, including with tragic consequences. Having said that, I wouldn't trade our hand with any other American state right now, just the stuff that we've got in place. The big challenge continues to be crime guns that are coming into New Jersey from out of state. If we were an island, if we were a nation unto ourselves, we'd be, I think, quite satisfied relative to any norm, but that reality continues to bite us, and that iron pipeline up the interstate 95 from places like Georgia and South Carolina continues to be a scourge.

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: We had a phenomenal investigation unfold last night, speaking about South Carolina, where our crimes suppression detectives seized nine crime guns all from the state of South Carolina, ammo, high-capacity magazines, and that's almost a daily mission for these –

Governor Phil Murphy: Was it preemptive versus – did you get it before they –

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: Yeah, no, we got it as part of a long-term investigation, and it's just that kind of day-to-day interaction that we're – if we can save one family from having to go through that tragedy, then all of our efforts will be worth it.

Governor Phil Murphy: Again, it's so frustrating. It's overwhelmingly coming in from out of state here. Before we go to Brent who we welcome back, by the way, Brent, two things. One is the First Lady's here. I want to remind everybody New Jersey Pandemic Relief Fund is very much alive and well, and any support you could throw their way would be great, njprf.org, njprf.org. Still doing great work, so thank you for all of that. Secondly, we won't be with you on Monday because of a holiday, but we'll be back a week from today right here at 1 o'clock unless Alajna tells me otherwise, and separately, if we need to get you for any reason between now and then, we will do that.

Q&A Session

With that, Brent, welcome back. We missed you, and fire away. I say we missed you. This will depend on what you ask, of course.

Brent Johnson, NJ.com: Given how successful private companies have been with requiring vaccines for workers or facing termination, would you consider taking the same step with state workers and teachers meaning removing the testing option? When will applications for Return to Earn be rolled out? It's currently just a sign up to show interest. Do you have any update on the outbreak in Lakewood Schools, and are there any other significant outbreaks in schools you're investigating?

Governor Phil Murphy: Rob Angelo almost always watches us, so if he's watching, I'll defer to him on when the actual application is up and ready to go on Return and Earn, but I think that is quite imminent. I think we leave – Judy and Ed, I think on the first question we leave all options on the table. I think we like – and part of the reason why Judy's doing the directive she's doing to make sure we've got the totality of the data that we need to make the decisions that we make, but I think we are – I'll say two things. I think we're generally satisfied with the uptake and the perspective reality of the state workforce coming back in. Uptake as in educators who are already obviously on the job and state workers who are coming in, but we leave all options on the table. I think we just have to do that, and that's the mode we'll be in. I'll come back to you on Return and Earn. I don't have an update on Lakewood or other major, but Judy, why don't you jump in on that?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: No, I don't have an update.

Governor Phil Murphy: We'll come back to you on Lakewood if we can. The updates are the ones that we showed. Again, those are ones, Judy – make sure everybody understands this. Those are in-school outbreaks as adjudicated and decided by the local health authorities and reported up to you, right, so where they have definitive – as definitive as you can get – evidence that it was an in-school transmission as opposed to something in the community that was brought into the school. Again, I'll come back to you on the Return and Earn piece of this. Let's go to Dave who has been displaced again by the First Lady. Dave, good afternoon.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: I will not hold it against anybody, but thank you, Governor. You guys mentioned that the – I think Commissioner, you mentioned that the hospitalizations are dropping. We're seeing the RT slowly going down. Cases seem to be slowly going down. What is in store once we go inside in about a month and the holiday season kicks off? How bad do we think this might get in terms of the COVID metrics? Have any models been put together on this? Is it possible Delta might be starting to fade? Do we have any sense of that? With regard to the school numbers, a total of 319 student cases and 60 staff cases is pretty low. That's very good, I would think. You're very happy with that, but as we also know, many kids are asymptomatic. Do we have a sense about what's really going on here and what the real totals are? Testing, I believe, is still limited in terms of all of the students in a particular school, so why are these numbers staying so low do we think? Finally regarding your comments, Commissioner, on the screening and testing program

that's being kicked off, can you explain how this works? I mean, who's getting tested and when? I'm assuming it's not every student and every teacher and staff members in the schools. How will this work? Is the testing part of the screening process or is it separate? Please explain. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Dave, I'll kick off and Judy, turn it to you and perhaps Ed on this one, as well. I think I'll give you this as a layman as it relates to medical. I think it's unavoidable that once we conduct more of our lives inside that this thing is going to kick up in some form. I don't know how we avoid that. Running against that – and I think these were positive currents that run against that – our continually high vaccination rate, boosters, which by the way we need to, again, work with the federal government to make sure the messaging on that is crystal clear, which I think in fairness from the feds has not been, and also make this as less – as low a bureaucratic process to get boosted as possible and make it as widely available as we feel responsibly. I think it's inevitable.

Again, that's going inside on the one hand versus very high compliance on the other side. How that nets out, I'll defer to the experts. How would you answer the going inside, Judy, and any comments on either of the other two questions? What appears to be – and I would agree with your assessment – well within the range of any acceptable outcome at the moment in schools in terms – we pray for everybody who's sick. More than zero is too much, but that's a reasonable – I agree with your assessment. It's a reasonable place at this point, and any color on the screening or testing, Judy?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: I'm sure. First on the predictive modeling, every two weeks we look at our assumptions around predictive modeling and we do expect – particularly after Thanksgiving, if we compare ourselves today to what happened last year, we do expect an uptick. I can say with the decreasing hospitalizations and steadying of the cases, the predictive modeling we've just done is far different than it was even three weeks ago, and that's why we update it every two weeks. The assumptions are based on the efficacy of the vaccines, the recommendations that are coming out of the CDC on who can get vaccinated and when and the impact of those vaccinations, the current hospitalizations as a source of truth on the data and how that impacts both upward to the cases and also downward to ICU and ventilators.

Right now, we expect an uptick. We expect it to occur after Thanksgiving, between Thanksgiving and Christmas, but we do expect it to be, based on what we know right now, within a range that can be handled – the capacity be handled very well by our hospitals.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, anything on the screening/testing question?

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: The screening – the executive directive will identify the cadence of screening/testing in the schools based on the disease prevalence in their region using, right now, the CALI scores. We're also comparing that to the CDC scores, and that will identify the cadence of the testing, whether it's once a week or twice a week, and that will all be laid out for the schools. I don't think – I don't know, Ed. Do you have any more specificity? We've been working on this for a while.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'd love to add to the question of Ed. How about any observations, if it's okay with Judy, on the question – the other question that Dave raises, which is hey, the school numbers seem good, but we also know that there's a lot of asymptomatic realities out there. How do you square those?

Department of Health Medical Advisor Dr. Ed Lifshitz: Those are good questions, and I'll start by saying yes, I agree that the school numbers are looking good here. One of the things we do pay attention to is trends over time and age of those people testing positive. We're not just looking at what's happening in schools but looking at all zero to five year olds, five to eleven year olds, etc. We're really too early to give any definitive trends now because the school year has just begun and we're just beginning to see some of those numbers start, but overall it's relatively reassuring, meaning that the overall trends are decreasing. While some of the younger population isn't decreasing as much as the older population, that would be expected as they're going back to school and beginning to be exposed more and so forth.

Overall, the trends are certainly reassuring. It was certainly concerning to me as children and college-aged people in particular went back to school, and that's one of the things we saw last year is as college-aged kids went back to school, we began to see increases in that age group. One of the nice things that we've been

seeing again so far – it's very early, particularly in New Jersey. We're not seeing an increase really in the rates in the college-aged kids, probably largely because they're much more vaccinated than the younger kids, of course.

Again, overall – and I'm kind of going around here – the numbers are looking good. It's nice to see everything declining. It's really too early for me to say definitively that we're seeing trends here, but the overall patterns are positive as far as what we're seeing.

Governor Phil Murphy: It's also more than insignificant that the data we showed for schools is through October 4th, so that's basically a month of school, so that – Bret, I'm going to – as I expected, Rob is listening and he said the following. “There isn't an application, per se. They sign up and express interest and then our business services unit connects with them to set up a formal contract on the training and wage replacement.” If you want any more color, we can easily get that for you.

I don't know – back to Judy and Ed for a second before we go to Joey in the back. I've thought of this. I've said this publicly, but I haven't gotten your permission to say – I think this feels like a sign curve that is dropping as it – through the various waves, so the first wave was the first; it went down. It kicked back up; the second wave wasn't nearly as bad. It kicked down; Delta brought it back up but not as bad as the second wave. My gut, seeking permission and blessings here from each of you. My gut tells – if I had to predict, it's going to kick up, but it's going to continue that pattern where it kicks up, but it doesn't impair or come close to impairing our ability to – the healthcare systems to take the capacity. Does that sound fair? Judy's giving me a thumbs up, so I'm good with that. Thank you.

Joey, good afternoon.

Joey Fox, New Jersey Globe: Good afternoon.

Governor Phil Murphy: I see you brought your colleague with you.

Joey Fox, New Jersey Globe: Yeah, since he's here, I'll only ask one thing. Do you have, Governor, a progress report on the nomination of Rachael Wainer Apter to the New Jersey Supreme Court?

Governor Phil Murphy: Do I have what support?

Joey Fox, New Jersey Globe: A progress report, any kind of update on that. If that nomination doesn't work out, if Senator Chiappisi doesn't give senatorial courtesy, have you vetted any potential replacement candidates? Do you have any kind of plan B? Thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: I just – we haven't talked about Rachael in a while, so I'm glad you asked it, which gives me the opportunity, Parimal, with your blessing, to talk about what an outstanding person and professional Rachael Wainer Apter is. We've had very good discussions with our colleagues in the Senate, especially with the Senate President, with Judiciary Chair Nick Scutari, and I continue to be extremely – not only am I a huge fan and bull on her but specifically on the prospect that she will – her process will come to a successful resolution. Anything to add to that or you good? Fantastic.

David, welcome. Good job, again, last night.

David Wildstein, New Jersey Globe: Thank you, Governor. How are you?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm well.

David Wildstein, New Jersey Globe: I just have one question regarding – one set of questions regarding the executive order on election workers. How did you arrive at the \$300 level instead of the 400 that was in the Senate bill? Election officials are telling me they are not yet ready for early voting, that they're not fully staffed. Will you train the National Guard on electronic poll books and if you haven't decided to do that yet, at what point would you say we need to address it, it could be a problem? The statewide voter registration system crashes whenever its overloaded. The Department of State is saying that they expect every county to be able to upload their information each day of early voting. How confident are you that the SVRS will work? Then finally, at what point – will it be in one week, two weeks where if election officials say they don't have staff for early voting would you consider raising that salary again?

Governor Phil Murphy: All good questions. I don't have a magic answer on the \$300 other than I think collectively, the team feels like that's the amount that clears the market, that brings supply/demand in balance. We also, Parimal, in that exact same executive order did something else, which we have talked less about but I think it's worth raising in the context of your questions. Heretofore, it has been a requirement that a poll worker work at a polling place in the county of her or his residence, and that has been lifted, at least for this election. It's those two steps together that have given us the confidence that this is the right package. Would we reconsider, whether it's National Guard, raising the rate, other steps? The answer has to be yes because having a successful election and having democracy as strong as it can be is a core reality and pillar of our state and our nation. The answer is you have to leave the door open for anything to make sure we're properly staffed.

As I mentioned earlier, this is a bipartisan reality. This is good for everybody. I don't, frankly, care who you vote for, but we do care that you vote. We just know – think about the commonsense of – and again, I'm glad you asked this because it allows me to riff on this for a second. If you only have one day to vote versus what we now will have, which is ten days to vote, you take a lot – we were having this conversation earlier, Tammy and I and a group. You take away a lot of risk – snowstorm, your train breaks down, you work Monday through Friday two jobs. There's an enormous amount of flexibility here we're injecting into the system, which should help everybody, Democrats, Republicans, unaffiliated voters.

I'm not a technologist, but the Secretary of State, I believe, is confident that our technology infrastructure is robust enough to handle the daily uploads from each of the 21 counties. I don't want to speak for her, but I believe she has that confidence, and I have that confidence, therefore, as well. Maybe Parimal and you can connect afterwards if there's any more color on any of that. Good to see you and again, good job last night.

Sir? You'll close us out today.

Reporter: Good afternoon, Governor. Question from David Cruz: “Your opponent in November's election and others are calling on you to use some of the federal aid money from American Rescue Plan to replenish the unemployment insurance fund and other state needs. You've said you've been waiting for guidance from the Biden Administration, but the state's economy is hurting now. How long is it reasonable to ask small businesses and individuals to wait when many are hanging on by the slimmest of margins right now?” Question from Leah Mishkin, “New York state and City together have pledged 27 million to assist undocumented immigrants who were impacted by Tropical Storm Ida. Will you make a similar pledge to provide financial assistance? Does the state know how many undocumented residents of New Jersey are in need of help after Ida? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Is that it?

Reporter: That's it.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, on the first one, as part of the debate, which David and two others moderated last evening for the Lieutenant Governor, and I salute Sheila as I always do. Her opponent said something which was ludicrous, that I increased the tax on small businesses beginning last Friday of \$250 million three days after having made a pledge that I wasn't going to raise taxes. That was a bipartisan bill that I signed, by the way, with all due respect. Don't let – let's not let facts get in the way. It was to smooth out a process that otherwise would've been very abrupt for small businesses. We've put at this point about \$775 million into small businesses since the beginning of this pandemic. Only California and New York have put more into the small business community than New Jersey. As you may remember, we're the 11th largest state population-wise, so we're punching way above our weight, and we still have American Rescue Plan money that we want to responsibly and carefully invest in the state over the next now what will be 27 months. We'll do that in a responsible way, unlike some of the way we've spent monies that have come our way in the past and certainly small businesses will be a big part of that.

The Return and Earn program is directly – that's \$10,000 per employee, up to four employees, in the first six months of their employment as long as you train them. That's a lot of money. As you heard earlier, 2100 have – 2100 businesses, rather, have expressed interest.

I don't have an exact number, Pat, do you, on undocumented as it relates to Ida? That is something we've been looking at very carefully with our partners at FEMA. By the way, since we were last together, we did a very – another successful, I think, virtual town hall on Monday. Was it Monday afternoon? It is true; you need a Social Security number in order to get through that process and we're trying to work to get as creative as we can to make sure anybody who was impacted by this gets the help that they rightfully deserve, but I don't have the exact number offhand, do you?

State Police Superintendent Col. Pat Callahan: I don't think we do, but I can certainly ask OEM if we can track that down.

Governor Phil Murphy: We can come back to you if – Alyana, if you could help us keep track of that. It's a good question. That's it. That's all she wrote, Judy. We're getting out early today, unusually. Great to – Judy and Ed, great to have you both, as always, Pat, First Lady, Parimal, Alyana. Sophia had the mic today; thank you for that.

Yeah, I guess my words of wisdom as we close are consistent with some of the back-and-forth we had, Dave, especially with you, and that is – it's October. What is it, 6th? We're lucky if we get a 70 degree day. We're moving much more of our lives inside. We're coming out of, I think, pretty successfully some religious holidays in September, disproportionately in the Jewish community, and I think we came through that in good form. We're in the thick of that big now cold weather holiday season, among other things, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Eve, back to back to back to back. There's certainly one – we do have a magic wand, virtually a magic wand, and that's getting vaccinated. If you're eligible for a booster – and again, very simply and this is very simple. If you got a Pfizer booster, it's six months since you had your second shot, and you are either 65 and older or you work in a retail-oriented occupation, healthcare, police, fire, grocery store, transit, you can – you make that judgment for yourself. Get your booster Moderna has submitted their data. It looks like that's – you mentioned to me earlier, that could be a week from –

Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli: October 14th and 15th, we'll start the process.

Governor Phil Murphy: October 14 and 15, they start that process. That's next week. That's a good sign. J&J has now submitted their data. Get vaccinated and if you're fully vaccinated and you're eligible, get your booster. In the meantime, if you're indoors – I was indoors in a couple of places yesterday, more on the campaign front than official business. If you're – it's common sense. If you're inside and you're with a bunch of people and you're packed in and you have not literally gone person to person to check whether they're vaccinated, put a face mask on. It's pretty clear when you're outside – and we've had enough Jets and Giants games at this point to know when you're outside, even if you're packed in, it's just not remotely as lethal as it is when you're inside.

Get vaccinated. If you're vaccinated and you're eligible, get boosted. Then if you're inside and you just don't know the status of the folks around you, put one of these on. That fair? Thanks, everybody. God bless.

Governor Phil Murphy

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