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Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: October 22nd, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

10/22/2020

Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon, everybody. As you can see and you've already noticed, we're doing things a little bit differently today. I'm coming at you from my house, in fact. Out of an abundance of caution, Tammy and I are observing a self-quarantine period as we were with Deputy Chief of Staff Mike DeLamater who had, after our being with him this past Saturday, tested positive for coronavirus. He got his results back, as now everybody knows, yesterday.

So yesterday, right after hearing that, Tammy and I were both tested and I'm relieved to say we both tested negative. I had already been tested on Monday as part of a regular testing regime, having nothing whatsoever to do with the developments that have come since then and I tested negative then as well.

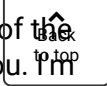
However, given that we know that it can take some time for the virus to show itself, we have voluntarily taken ourselves off the field at least through Sunday, and we will get tested again twice before I resume any even modest engagement with folks. We will be tested again Saturday and again on Monday morning.

At the same time we were testing negative -- literally -- we found out that senior advisor Dan Bryan, who many members of the media know and work with directly, also tested positive. So while I have to thank everybody -- and I know Tammy joins me -- who's reached out to the two of us with well wishes which we deeply appreciate, I also in turn, on behalf of her, send our best wishes to both Mike and Dan that they experience no problems of the coming days and emerge healthy on the other side of this quarantine. As far as I know, so far so good in terms of their own wellbeing. Keep them in your prayers.

I think this is proof, if nothing else, that no one is immune from this virus and that we all must take this pandemic with the utmost seriousness. You know, we did not have what the CDC would call a meaningful direct contact, but out of an abundance of caution -- or close contact rather -- out of an abundance of caution, we're taking ourselves off the field.

We have tremendous protocols in our office and I have to say that everyone is working remote today, but we know that it is -- and we've said this before -- in casual settings where we are most at risk. So simply put, folks, we have to remain vigilant not just some of the time, but all the time especially -- not only but especially -- indoors.

On an unrelated but devastatingly sad note, I want to send my deepest condolences to the family and neighbors of Gustavo and Johnny Perez, two young precious boys who were murdered yesterday in Trenton in an act of senseless gun violence. A passing car apparently fired into their home, hitting them both. Gustavo was 16, Johnny was only 8. We stand in full support of the Trenton Police in their investigation into this despicable and cowardly shooting and encourage anyone with information to step forward. I was back and forth this morning also with Mayor Reed Gusciora. And by the way, we remain focused and must remain focused on ending the scourge of gun violence, not just in Trenton, but in all of our communities.

Let me move on. I normally say the woman to my right who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. She is, on my screen, in fact is to my right. Judy, good to see you.  I'm also joined, he's to my right on the screen at least, the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Service

Medical Director, another familiar face, Dr. Ed Lifshitz. And again, a guy who need no introduction, Superintendent of the State Police Colonel Pat Callahan. I can't see him but I'm sure he's out there, I want to give a shout out to the Director of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Jared Maples.

I'd love to begin with a quick update from the Secretary of State's Office. As of the latest numbers, look at that number, wow. 2,155,011 ballots have now been returned. Tammy just told me that the Monmouth County Clerk has officially received all five of the ballots that the Murphy family submitted. So with still 12 days to go until the November 3rd Election Day, we are already at nearly 55% of the total voter turnout from 2016 and that was just about 3.9 million, which is an extraordinary achievement so far. So if you have not returned your ballot, whether it's by mail or through a secure drop box, which is what we did, or a hand delivery to your county board of elections, I urge you to do so now and join the millions, literally, of your fellow New Jerseyans who have made their voices heard again. I don't care who you're voting for, what party you're in, just vote. That's what we need you to do. I encourage everybody to go to that website you see at the bottom of your screen, vote.nj.gov to track your ballot, just as we tracked ours.

Switching gears, next an announcement from our Treasurer Extraordinaire Liz Muoio that the deadline for senior homeowners to apply for the Senior Freeze Property Tax Relief Program has been extended to December 31st. Given the closures of some local government offices due to the pandemic, we know that it's been a challenge for some residents to get all the documents they may need for their applications, so this extension is just a matter of common sense. Again, for more information on the Senior Freeze, including eligibility requirements, visit that website that you see at the bottom, nj.gov/treasury and again, the application extension is until December 31st, 2020.

Switch gears again. It's Thursday, which means the Department of Labor, both federally as well as in all the states, has released the weekly unemployment figures. In New Jersey, the department continues to work to ensure that everyone who is eligible to receive unemployment benefits gets their full benefits to the penny. This morning, our department announced that last week, an additional 28,669 workers submitted an initial claim for benefits. That's a decrease of about 400 from the prior week, but it is still 28,669 too high. It's another reason, please God, can we get federal stimulus help including extension of unemployment benefits and by the way, money that we can put to work on the street in the state and start creating jobs at a much faster clip than any state can do on its own.

This brings the cumulative total of claimants since March to more than 1.7 million folks in our state alone. It's extraordinary. Of these, nearly 1.5 million, you can see that, workers have been deemed eligible for benefits and more than \$16.7 billion has been released to our working families including, by the way, now the additional benefit of \$300 per week provided under the FEMA Lost Wages Assistance Program which is beginning to flow, I'm happy to say, to an estimated qualified 800,000 New Jersey workers. In fact, I'm told that some workers have reported that their benefits showed up in their bank accounts this morning. We're very happy that we found that money, that we're executing on it and it's being delivered, as I've mentioned many times, in lump sum to make up for the fact that this is more complicated to vet and deliver that money. But again, it is not in lieu of what we still need, which is a big federal stimulus bill which will help everybody, and especially those folks who are unemployed.

I have to say again that meeting this challenge has been a truly Herculean task for the department and its staff and again, I thank Commissioner Robert Asaro Angelo and his team for their continued hard work.

So with that, let's turn to the overnight numbers and I will tell you right now, they are not pretty. Today we're reporting an additional 1,182 cases, bringing our cumulative total, as you can see, to 224,385. A little color on counties. Essex County today is reporting 196 of those cases. Bergen, Hudson and Union Counties are also all reporting more than 100 cases. And by the way, those were four of the big ones where we saw this virus ravage us early on in March, April and May.

The positivity rate for all tests that were recorded on Sunday. October 18th is a is not-pretty 5.28%. The only solace I take is that these were tests that were done on Sunday where there's a little bit usually of a wrinkling of the data.

The statewide rate of transmission is up a hair, but not by much, and it's still in that band, it's 1.17. I'm not sure if folks can see that with our faces on the right. Meaning, to repeat an obvious point, that each new infection is leading to more than one other new infection so the spread is increasing with each new case.

Again, it's been in a band, I want to make sure I'm checking my math here, it's been in a band between 1.15 and 1.18 for the entirety of the past week. We need to get that down below 1.

In our schools, our dashboard has been updated and you can see it's a little less of an eye chart when we're doing this virtually. We are reporting 28 new cases, that's the number on the right, stemming from three newly confirmed instances of in-school transmission. So that gives us on the left 25 instances of in-school transmission, that's spread across 13 counties. In total, cumulatively, since we went back to school, 111 cases of either students, educators, others who were connected to those 25 outbreaks.

By the way, if you add it up, eight counties have not reported any in-school transmissions. So every case is important, we take every one of them deadly seriously but we remain confident that we have the protocols in place to protect the health and safety of our schools and our educational communities. These protocols are ensuring that these cases are caught quickly and that steps are taken immediately to limit further spread. As we've said many times in this forum, we knew going in that there would be cases in our schools, and our job has been to work fast to put a lid on any outbreaks.

I would just say, if you said to me six – now eight weeks ago – how would you feel? Again, we take every one of these cases deadly seriously, but how would you feel about 25 in-school transmissions? By the way, out of over 3,000 school buildings, over which we have some supervision authority, covering 111 individuals? And you'd have eight counties where you had none? I would say that's a so far – again, knocking on wood here, so far, so good as a result.

Now as it relates to travel, we're advising all New Jerseyans, and I think we've been pretty clear about this over the past couple of weeks, frankly, to avoid any unnecessary interstate travel, given the recent increases in numbers both here frankly, and in neighboring states, let alone elsewhere in the country. What we're going through with our numbers is not unique to New Jersey. So if you have to cross state lines, whether you're going to work, you're going to the grocery store, for healthcare or worship, that's one thing. But we urge everyone to otherwise stay in New Jersey so we can focus on getting our numbers back down.

I had a good call a couple of days ago with Governors Cuomo and Lamont on this very point. There's no other way to put this, but the numbers we're getting day to day are sobering. There are constant reminders that not only are we not out of the woods, but we also have to find a way to combat our pandemic fatigue and remain vigilant in our practices. Folks, we can't drop the ball here and that goes especially when we're welcoming people into our homes. So compliance with social distancing in public spaces by the way, the good news has been strong. I know Judy and Pat and Ed join me in thanking you for that. But it's when people are gathering, that's the evidence we've got and Judy can get into this in more detail with Ed, it's when people are gathering in private homes that we're seeing trouble. These are the places where most of our new outbreaks, we believe, are coming from. Small gatherings inside of private homes. Things like a dinner party, a birthday party, getting together to watch a football game.

So please, please follow the CDC guidance and not gather in a private home with anyone outside of your immediate family or the bubble with which you've been living. If you want to get together with your neighbors or broader family members, at least while the weather allows us, please try to do it outside. It's just a different reality. It's not a completely different reality, but it's a very different reality. We know that. Please, please, please continue practicing social distancing, wearing a mask when you're close to others, even when you're outside. We have got to get our numbers down.

And more cases, by the way, you know, this is the hip bone is connected to the thigh bone here. More cases means higher likelihood of more hospitalizations. That is a segue to the fact that that's exactly what we're seeing. So last night, Judy, our hospitals I've got reported 852 total patients. That's broken down 628 who are confirmed COVID positive and 224 considered persons under investigation, and they're pending the receipt of a test result. We haven't had, and Judy will correct me if I'm wrong, back-to-back days of total hospitalizations over 800 in three months.

Of those people, 187 patients were in our Intensive Care Unit, 74 patients were requiring a ventilator. And again, we need to stop the rise of the curve and push these numbers back down. And by the way, that's something we need everybody to do. We don't have a magic wand on this one. We've all got a band together. We know there's fatigue. Who could blame you for having fatigue from this thing? But we're not there yet. We've got to bear down, we've got to double down.

So sadly, with a heavy heart, we're reporting an additional 18 fatalities that are now confirmed to have been from complications of COVID-19, as you can see, bringing our total to 14,474. That's the second day in a row that we've been at 18, the third day in a row double digits. And of the 18 we're announcing today, again with the heaviest of hearts, 15 of those 18 occurred over the past week. There are an additional – and Ed has been overseeing this arduous process – 1,789 deaths currently listed as probable from COVID-19.

Again, at the risk of mixing apples and oranges, just to give you a spot sense as Judy and I try to do every time we are with you, 13 patients passed away in our hospital yesterday. But again, those are not part of those confirmed numbers. But we want to give you that point of attack since. Let's, as we do every day we're together, remember three more of those precious lives we have lost.

First up, we go to a legend, there he is on the lower right in Hamilton in Mercer County, Charles "Chuck" Giambelluca. Chuck was 77 years old. Growing up, Chuck was a three-sport athlete at Steinert High School, captain of the football, basketball and baseball teams. By the way, that doesn't happen anymore, and also a star on the diamond for the Post 31 American Legion Baseball Team. He even got a chance to play professional ball in the Braves farm system. But when a baseball career didn't seem to be in his future, he returned home to pursue his love of the national pastime in another way. He became a manager, and the manager of the Broad Street Park Post 313 American Legion Team and over a 36-year career, compiled more than 700 wins, numerous league and district championships, and the 1975 state championship. Even after he retired, he kept helping out, nearly 50 years of service in all to Mercer County American Legion Baseball.

For a period, Chuck work professionally as the head of photoengraving for the Trenton Times Newspaper but sports was his true love and in the mid-1970s, he opened the Mercer Locker Room Sporting Goods Store. It was in the store's Coach's Corner where some of the hottest discussions of local and high school sports took place. For all he gave, Chuck was an inaugural member of the Steiner High Athletic Hall of Fame.

He leaves behind his wife of 54 years, Gerri, and please keep her in your prayers, she had battled COVID as well. His son Michael, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Monday also was COVID positive, his daughter-in-law Katie and his three grandchildren who you see there, Michael Jr., Nicholas, and Macy. Michael Jr. was also COVID positive. He also leaves his sister and brother-in-law Ginger and Gary, along with so many other family members and dear friends. We thank Chuck for all he did for his community and county. May God bless and watch over him and his loved ones.

Next, we head up to Essex County to remember Bloomfield's Orlando Staton who set the beat as the drummer for the legendary Montclair-based band the Fabulous Flemtones, he did that for 40 years. For the past 34 of those 40 years, on the last Friday of each month, you could find Orlando behind the kit at Tierney's Tavern in Montclair. The band formed when its members were all students at Montclair High School, and they played their last show on Friday night, February 28th of this year.

While he was a giant on the drums, Orlando was a loving friend off the stage. As Flemtones bassist and longtime friend Tim Engle said in a moving eulogy, Orlando was, and I quote Tim, "The most gentle soul I have ever and probably will ever encounter." Several of those who knew that gentle soul the best were the family he left behind. His wife, Donna, with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Monday. By the way, she also had to battle with COVID; his mom Dorothy in North Carolina and her husband, Alonzo; his dad, Marvin, who's in Georgia; and his brother and sister Marvin and Gwendolyn, and he was pre-deceased by his brother Lester. Our hope is that Orlando has found a place where the stage lights are on and the beat is strong. May God bless and watch over him.

And finally today, we recall Francisca Amponsah of Teaneck. She passed away just days before her 50th birthday. Francisca came to New Jersey in 2000 from her native Ghana. She had studied accounting back home and switched to a career as a certified nursing assistant, since working the night shifts meant she could have the daytime to care for her three children. For the past 18 years, in fact, right up until she fell ill, she was a cherished member of the Hackensack University Medical Center family. She was also a fixture of the Teaneck community, leading the local Parent Teacher Association at her kids' school, as well as teaching Sunday school.

Francisca leaves behind her husband Robert and her three children, Grace who is 22-years-old and in George Washington University, Jessie who is 19, and Aaron who's only 15. I had the great honor on Monday of speaking with Robert, Jessie and Aaron. She also leaves behind a community she loved and which loved her

back. She leaves her colleagues at Hackensack University Medical Center and she leaves behind a state that was honored to call her one of our own over the past two decades. May God bless you, Francisca, and watch over you and your family.

So the stories, people ask me sometimes, why do you tell these stories? The answer is simple. While this, at one level, is all about science and facts and data, at another level, these were lives that were lived and lost and families who were crushed, who were left behind and it can never become abstract. Again, they were real lives that were extraordinarily well lived with real impact and real meaning for so many. We remember Chuck and Orlando and Francisca. The best way we can honor their memories is to do the things we need to do to protect our own families and friends from this virus, and turn our numbers back around and going down again.

Please allow me to switch gears if I can again to highlight another of the small businesses who have looked to the New Jersey Economic Development Authority for help to remain strong. Let's meet Connie Carella Dalton, who runs Carella's Chocolates and Gifts in the Mercerville section of Hamilton Township in Mercer County. She runs it alongside her sister Joan, who by the way is the main chocolatier, and sister-in-law Susan. Carella's Chocolates and Gifts has been in operation for the past 48 years, an offshoot, by the way, of another family-owned business, Carella's Shoes. And Carella's Shoes, it should be noted, which was started by Connie's grandfather, has itself been in business for 75 years and is run by her brothers, including a second store in Avon-By-The-Sea.

When COVID-19 required Carella's Chocolates to temporarily close its doors, Connie applied to the EDA for a grant that would allow her and her family to keep the store going in the interim, and she received that grant that allowed her to cover expenses. I had the opportunity to check in with Connie on Monday and she wanted me to say how thankful they are for their loyal customers. I'm happy to report that Carella's Chocolates and Gifts is back open and that she, Joan and Susan are happy to assist you however they can. By the way, she mentioned specifically that the monies they got from the EDA helped them tweak their online presence, which has clearly become more important. Check them out. Their website is carellaschocolates.com, very simple. You can see it at the bottom there.

We know there are plenty more small businesses like the Carella's which need a little help to keep going through this pandemic, and the NJ EDA is about to open phase three of its grants program with \$70 million in Coronavirus relief funds at the ready. So, preregistration for phase three is now open and will remain so until 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, October 27th. That's next Tuesday. Any businesses looking to apply must preregister. For more information and to preregister, by the way, go to that website, CV as in COVID, cv.business.nj.gov.

A couple of things. Applications will be accepted on a first come, first served basis. The application window for restaurants and other food service establishments with up to 50 full-time employees will be open 9:00 a.m. on Thursday, October 29th. Again, for up to 50 full-time employees in the food service and restaurant industry will be open at 9:00 a.m. on Thursday, October 29th. And based on the size of the establishment, these grants will be anywhere from \$10,000 to \$20,000. The window for businesses with between one and five employees to apply for grants of \$5,000 will open that next day, 9:00 a.m. Friday, October 30. And the application window for all other businesses with between 6 and 50 employees, with awards by the way between \$10,000 and \$15,000 will open a week from Monday, November 2nd at 9:00 a.m. Again, applications will be accepted on a rolling first come, first served basis until funding is exhausted. We will use every single penny. The website again for more information and to preregister is that one you see on the screen, cv.business.nj.gov.

Finally, I want to give a richly deserved shout out to the West Orange Schools District which took first place in the New Jersey School Public Relations Association's Communications Awards for their social media campaign, Leaders Wear Masks. With all that is going on around us, this message is especially important. Wearing a mask is not about politics, wearing a mask doesn't show weakness. Wearing a mask is about caring for your community, for your loved ones, for your family, for your neighbors, for your friends, and every time you put your mask on, you show leadership against this virus.

That's it for me for today. I urge everybody to please be extra vigilant, wash your hands frequently with soap and water, keep a social distance, wear your face mask and most importantly, a phrase we haven't used in a while, use your common sense for the common good, and for your own good.

With that, please help me welcome virtually the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health. Judy Persichilli.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Thank you, Governor and good afternoon, everyone. Yesterday - just yesterday -- the CDC announced that they have modified the definition of a close contact after a study revealed that frequent, brief exposures to an individual with COVID-19 might lead to spread of the virus. The new guideline defined close contact as being within six feet of an infected person for a total of 15 minutes over a 24-hour period.

CDC's weekly morbidity and mortality report included information about a correctional facility employee diagnosed with COVID-19 after exposure at the workplace. During an eight-hour shift, the employee was exposed to six incarcerated individuals multiple times for just one minute at a time, and the inmates became infected, or were infected. Although the correctional officer never spent 15 consecutive minutes within six feet with these individuals, numerous brief encounters that cumulatively exceeded 15 minutes did occur. Additionally, during several of these encounters, the incarcerated individuals were not wearing masks, which we know increases the risk of transmission.

Risk of transmission can depend on several factors, such as whether the infected person has symptoms, whether the infected person is likely to generate respiratory droplets or aerosols through coughing and sneezing, environmental factors such as adequacy of ventilation and crowding and distance from the case. What this all emphasizes is just how important case investigation and contact tracing is.

That is why it is vital that residents answer the call from a contact tracer. Case investigation and contact tracing gives the information necessary to determine whether you or another person is at risk. Please provide the information when you get a call on any close contacts you've had, so that these individuals can be reached and told to get tested, and quarantine to break the chain of transmission. Trained contact tracers will provide information on how you can protect those around you from getting sick, such as isolating yourself. More than half of the residents are still consistently refusing to provide information on those they might have had close contact with, which leaves contact tracers unable to reach out to alert those individuals of potential exposures. So for each of us, for us all, please answer the call. Tell the contact tracers about who you've been in contact with and where you've been, and share with them what you need help with.

Additionally, I encourage you to download our digital notification app, COVID Alert NJ, so that you can be alerted to an exposure. We know that the longer duration of time spent with someone with COVID-19 increases risk, and that risk is greater indoors. But this case serves as a reminder to adhere to all of our safeguarding measures. It's all we have. Practice social distancing, wear a face mask, wash hands frequently, interact outdoors whenever possible. Avoid gatherings, specifically indoors and with those outside of your bubble. These are tools available at this time to protect ourselves, so it's up to all of us to take these steps to reduce the transmission of this virus.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 852 hospitalizations of individuals with COVID-19 or persons under investigation. A month ago, hospitalizations were averaging about 400 a day. Today we are tracking over 800 a day.

There are no new reports of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. The total case counts remain at 59.

At the state veterans homes, the numbers remain the same as they do at the psychiatric hospitals.

The daily percent positivity for New Jersey is over 5%, it's 5.28%. The Northern part of the state is reporting 6.15%, the Central part of the state 5.13%, and the Southern part of the state 3.66%. That concludes my daily report. Stay safe. Remember, for each other, for us all, please take the call and download the COVID Alert NJ app. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you for everything and thank you for that. Thank you also for walking through the CDC definition of close contact, which is obviously something that I particularly pay close attention to. The positivity rates by region, we've really seen of the counties that were over 100, it's shifted back to the North. I'm not suggesting Ocean and Monmouth still don't have cases because they do, but those are now meaningfully lower than they were a week or so ago. Is that fair?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Oh, yeah. Ocean alone has a positivity rate of 5.26% as of yesterday, and they were close to 10% just two weeks ago. It just shows the value of mitigation when you have the case investigations, the contact tracers to follow up on the increased testing.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I mean plussing testing and plussing tracing, if my numbers are right in Ocean today we're reporting 66 positives. We take every one of them seriously, but that's out of almost 1,200. If you think back a week or 10 days ago, that was a different reality. I guess that's the good news in the sense that that proves the intense cooperation with the community, plussing up of tracing and testing, that that really works.

The bad news is, it's in every county. My math is you get Cape May, Cumberland, Hunterdon, Salem, Sussex, Warren in single digits, everybody else is double and triple digits. I think we've said this many times now and you've hit it, I've hit it. A lot of this is outside of the so-called public square. It's inside, it's in places that are hard to regulate and even harder to enforce compliance.

I have to say one other thing, this is the first time I've seen you face on without a mask in I don't know how long, so it's good to see you as always. With that, Judy, thank you. With that, let's turn things over to Pat. Any updates you've got, Pat, on compliance, staffing, etc., other matters. Again, thank you for your leadership, as always.

Superintendent of the State Police Col. Pat Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. Since we last met, we do not have any Executive Order compliance issues reported to the ROIC and that's really it. We talked about the forest fire crew getting home safely last week, and that was a good thing to report. First time ever we did that as a state in emergency management to send a forest fire service anywhere, so that was a historical and a good moment for the State of New Jersey. That's all I have. Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: There we you. Is that your office, Pat?

Superintendent of the State Police Col. Pat Callahan: It is. I'm at home too.

Governor Phil Murphy: All right. Good to see you face on without a mask. It's been a few months. Thank you for that. We're in a little bit of an unusual circumstance. Michelle and Mahen, I'll turn things back over to you in a second. I just say today, because of a lot of challenges in our schedules, as you can imagine, it's an unusual period for all of us, we're going to have a hard stop at two o'clock. If you've got something, members of the press that's really pressing that we didn't get to, I promise you we will be, as we always are, diligent about following up. We will be virtual tomorrow unless you hear otherwise. When I say virtual, I don't mean this virtual but we'll be electronic, let me clarify that, as well as Saturday and Sunday. Again, if we think that changes, we will come back to you.

And this is pending, for me at least, seeing how the next several days unfold but pending specifically two more negative tests, which I hope that Tammy and I will both get Saturday and Monday morning respectively. Assuming we can do it responsibly, we'll be back with you in our usual venue at the War Memorial at one o'clock on Monday, but that's all subject to how things evolve over the next few days.

So with that, Mahen and Michelle, I'm going to go to you all. I'm not sure how you want to run this, but we'll send it back to you and we'll take our questions from members of the press.

Q&A Session

Governor Phil Murphy: Hi, Daniel.

Daniel Munoz, NJBIZ: Hey, Governor. With contact tracing, how many individuals in the administration or your office are self-quarantining as a result? I guess in addition to you and the Deputy Chief of Staff?

You had mentioned the phrase like use your common sense. Do you think there was a lapse in judgment on your part, or people around you, by not wearing masks and allowing this virus to potentially spread among you?

I know that you keep saying that people need to be outside and gathering outside where the virus is less lethal, but how does that work with the cold weather being what it is, when it gets to the 20s and 30s for weeks on end and it's dangerous for people to be outside because of potential frostbite and hypothermia,

how does that work out then in December and January and February? Thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Daniel. I don't have a specific number. Let me both address your first -- there's no lapse of judgment here but let me address, in fairness, to your first two questions. Let me be crystal clear on this. If you have had a close contact that's determined either through a contact tracer or otherwise, you've got a quarantine, self-quarantine for 14 days, no exception. I think I mentioned this, our entire front office is working from home. Within that group, and I don't have a specific number for you, but there are several, at least, who have been deemed to have had a close contact as defined by the CDC. And they, in fact, are not just working from home but they're self-quarantining.

I did not have -- Tammy and I did not have a defined close contact. But we, you know, for a number of reasons, including that I had a malignant tumor on my kidney in March, we're not about cutting any corners here, but we've gone above and beyond what the public health guidance otherwise would have been and we're taking ourselves off the field, at least through the weekend. And I say, at least through the weekend, I want to reiterate that, and we're going to continue to isolate at home, self-monitor. As I mentioned, we're going to take at least two more tests, which God willing will be negative before we get back on the field, even in a limited way.

And we're doing this, listen, frankly, we're doing it voluntarily. We're doing it out of an abundance of caution. I will promise you that no one, whether it's for our own personal health, or also the example that we set, nobody takes this stuff more seriously than we do. That's frankly why we acted as quickly and decisively as we did when we learned of that positive result yesterday, I frankly was not happy, but I knew it was the right thing to do. I'm not one for walking off the stage but we had no choice. I had no choice.

There's no lapse of judgment, Daniel. We were outside, having a beer, Tammy and I are trying to get around the state as best we can, to go out responsibly and try to set an example but also specifically to give business to places around the state. I mentioned that we were in Atlantic City a couple of weeks ago, we were up in Hudson County, outside. We wear our masks when we walked in, when we left, even when we're sitting down before our drinks are served. We had them on for a fair amount of time. I think that answers that question.

Yeah, this is a concern. Judy and Pat and the team and I were on the phone earlier today trying to war game, and I know she's still in the process of that with Ed and colleagues. What's it look like in January and February? You know, where's this headed? Especially if we don't break the back of it now. The weather in New Jersey in the 20s and 30s Fahrenheit is a big issue, a big challenge for us. There's no question about it, Daniel.

I would say this: we're going to do everything we can to make an outside experience as responsible and safe as possible including with things like restaurants. But the other, I think bigger point, is we need everybody to smash this thing back to the ground again. You know, Tony Fauci mentioned a month or so ago, that we knew we would have another surge, but New Jersey was going into that surge in really good shape, which is a good thing. Even though we don't like these numbers, and God knows we don't want to lose any more lives, we started the surge in a good spot. We have to get back to that really good place so when that weather comes around, that we know will come inevitably, we go into that period in as strong a position as possible. Thank you for that, Daniel.

Jonathan, are you in Washington?

Jonathan Salant, NJ.com: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: So this is because we're virtual, we have the honor of you having joined us today.

Jonathan Salant, NJ.com: Well, thank you very much. In fact, I have a Washington question for you. Larry Kudlow, the President's Chief Economic Advisor, said the holdup in the new stimulus package is quoting, "We're not here to bail out poorly run states whether they're red, white or blue. We're not out to bail out pensions from the state governments. We can do that another time."

And President Trump yesterday blamed Pelosi and Schumer for their primary focus, "bailing out poorly run and high crime Democrat cities and states."

I know we've had this discussion before, but I want to get your reaction because right now supposedly they're close to having a negotiation and a deal on a stimulus bill.

Governor Phil Murphy: Good question. I think that's really irresponsible by Larry, who's an Englewood product, by the way, he should know better. We've said this before. I got elected for that stronger, fairer New Jersey that we've been working on every day. That includes a responsible New Jersey. A New Jersey that gets its structural deficits back into order and gets its house in order generally, and we've been doing that. We made enormous progress on things like pension payments, three record pension payments in a row at levels that we've never seen in the state, making up for decades of less than stellar behavior on that front on both sides of the aisle, I might add. Reducing our indebtedness, saving big monies on healthcare costs for our public sector employees without making them either take lesser healthcare or pay more for their coverage. That's not what this is about.

This is about continuing to deliver services in our hour of need, and to continue to keep folks like firefighters, police, first responders, EMS, healthcare workers, educators, to keep them employed at the point of attack, when we need them the most, in the worst healthcare crisis in our state's and in our country's history. This isn't about blue states or legacy states. This is about every American state.

I think that's incredibly, not only is it not accurate, it's incredibly irresponsible. I have nothing constructive to say to respond to the President's point other than to say this: I want to give both Speaker Pelosi, who I think continues to do an outstanding job, and Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin, I give them high grades for keeping going in there, even if they're not agreeing they're going back at it, trying to find that common ground. That's the spirit that we need.

I'm not up for election a week from Tuesday. For the life of me, I will never understand why the President or anyone else in the Senate Republican Caucus doesn't look at the facts. A huge federal stimulus bill that's both passed and signed, even now at this late hour, would have a game changing and immediate impact. I don't know for the life of me, regardless of what party you're in, why you don't think that's a good thing.

As I've mentioned many times, I'll leave you with this Jonathan, history will not penalize us, it will not be unkind as a nation if we overshoot here. We will pay, on the other hand, if we undershoot, a devastating price, whether you're unemployed, small business, restaurant, healthcare system, transit, frontline workers, states, counties and municipalities. The impact will be devastating and will last a long time. I just don't get it. Thank you for that. Good to see your smiling face up there. Colleen.

Colleen O'Dea, NJ Spotlight: Governor, thank you for taking my call.

Governor Phil Murphy: My pleasure.

Colleen O'Dea, NJ Spotlight: I want to ask you about the election. You know, we keep getting calls and emails from folks who are having difficulty, either they haven't gotten their vote by mail ballot, they're not showing up in the voter registration system, or they aren't showing up but county officials can't find them. And then when they try to call county election officials, they can't get through because nobody's answering the phone. We know that those folks are busy but I mean, what should people be doing now to try to make sure that they get those ballots and that they can vote?

Governor Phil Murphy: I have to say, Colleen, and one thing Mahen, I hope you're listening. Can you follow up with Colleen? I'm assuming that privacy is not an issue, which we always want to respect. I'd like to follow up specifically with these people, because we're not hearing a whole lot of that. I'm not saying it doesn't exist, but we're not hearing a whole lot of that. I'm not saying it doesn't exist but we're not hearing a big drumbeat on that. The system appears to be overwhelmingly working well.

Having said that, I'm not suggesting that there aren't cases or instances. I would suggest they pound away at their county clerk level, either call or show up in person if they can do that responsibly. The county clerks by the way, up and down the state, both sides of the aisle are doing a terrific job. This is an unprecedented election. I take my hat off to all of them. But I think that's the best place to go. Mahen, maybe you'll put the website back up for us if you could. But the other option, I think I'd go to our state's website and go into there,

you can see vote.nj.gov. But again I'd like to, if it's okay with you Colleen, to have Mahen follow up and get the specific instances. But again, county clerk would be my first port of call. Secondly, go on that website. And then thirdly, I would say go to the Secretary of State's. Thank you for that.

Hi, Katherine.

Katherine Landergan, Politico: Hey, Governor, how are you doing?

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm hanging in, How about you?

Katherine Landergan, Politico: Not too bad? Not too bad. Hopefully everyone recovers soon. Just a few questions on the COVID spread within your office and then a broader question. So one, I believe there was a going away party on Friday for Matt Platkin. I was wondering if Mike was at that party, and do you know how many people were there? Were social distancing guidelines adhered to? And then do you know if Mike was showing any symptoms on or prior to Saturday?

Finally, given where Ocean County is at today versus the rest of the state, do you think the state could have done anything more to bring outbreaks in the Central part under control? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm going to start with Ocean County and when I address the first two questions, I may ask Judy to come in. I don't see Judy on the screen anymore. I assume you're still there, Judy. I think the Ocean County numbers -- and again, we take every single one of these numbers deadly seriously -- if there's a lesson to be learned there, it's the plussing up of contact tracing and testing capacity into hotspots. That's the good news.

The more challenging news is if the upsurge is in overwhelmingly private homes, that's hard to do. I know, by the way, the counties that have had big numbers that we reported today and again, the triple figure counties are Bergen, Essex which is number one today, Hudson, and Union, I know the local county and local health officials are doing an extraordinary job. Sadly, they know how to deal with this because they've lived through hell and back in the spring, they are doing everything they can. But again, we've got to appeal to people. It's hard to get inside of somebody's house. That to me is the two-sided lesson.

There was a going away, drinks on Friday night at Drumthwacket, it was outdoors under a tent that was opened on three-and-a-half sides, as I recall. I can't give you an exact number, but particularly given it was outside, it was well social distanced and within capacities. I don't want to get too much specific into Mike's situation. I would just say anecdotally and I hope I don't offend Mike by saying this, because I'm not asking permission, but there was no evidence of symptoms either on Saturday, but also I'm happy to say that last I checked, he and Dan continue to be in largely good shape. Please God it stays that way. Thank you.

Hey, Nikita.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Hi, Governor. How are you?

Governor Phil Murphy: Good. I meant to say something to you and Matt Arco because I know you schlepped to that yesterday and I feel badly that I had to walk out on you.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: I don't mean this to sound -- don't take this in any sort of way but we weren't lacking for news out of the event.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, I guess right, obviously.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: But I'm wondering, is there a contingency plan in place for If COVID cases spike to the degree that they make in-person voting unsafe, are you ready to say at this point that polls will be open on Election Day no matter what?

Separately, grassroots and good government groups including the League of Women Voters, the NAACP, New Jersey Policy Perspective and some others have urged voters to oppose a ballot question that would delay the state's redistricting process if it doesn't receive census data by February 15th. I'm wondering, how did you vote on that measure? Will you urge voters to back or oppose it?

Governor Phil Murphy: On in-person voting, Nikita, I'm looking at my scribble here, and in-person voting right now is as we have laid out. Importantly, and I know you know this, but for the folks who may be watching who don't have great passion – or not great passion, but have not been read in at the level of detail that you and your colleagues are – each county is required to have at least 50% in-person voting capacity on November 3rd, with at least one location per municipality. Then beyond that, there are very specific that the Secretary of State has put out, very specific guidance on social distancing, face coverings, exactly how that is executed. Based on everything we have right now, we are full speed ahead and I expect that we will be.

I'll tell you, the lesson for me though is less are we going to have in-person voting on November 3rd? Which again, I think we're full speed ahead to do that, but to do it responsibly, I'm just thanking my lucky stars that we did what we did with our election and mailed everybody a ballot. Because I just can't imagine, particularly looking at the turnout, which is historic right now, at least on a pace to be historic, I can't imagine what that would look like if we were all trying to jam into physical voting together.

On the second one, is this the question on redistricting?

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: That's correct. Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: I mean, I haven't given it a tremendous amount of focus. I voted for it but I think it's one of these ones where we let the chips fall where they fall. If that's what the voters decide, then we'll do everything we need to do as a state government. On this one, there's passion, I know, on both sides of it. This is one where I haven't had the level of passion as compared to say the social justice implications of legalizing cannabis for recreational, which I have huge passion for. It is a game changer, particularly for young persons of color. Thank you for that.

Michelle, maybe one or two more. We don't normally shut down but given that we're all over the place, you'll forgive us for that. And again, I promise you we'll follow up with you if we don't get to your question.

Brenda.

Brenda Flanagan, NJTV: Yeah, hi, Governor. I hope you're feeling okay.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'm feeling great. Brenda, I miss you. I don't see you.

Brenda Flanagan, NJTV: Yeah, I get to see a lot of you but usually it's on screen, so.

Governor Phil Murphy: And today's no different.

Brenda Flanagan, NJTV: I want to talk about your decision to quarantine less than two weeks, particularly since it has to do with your definition of the CDC guidelines. Could you talk about how you came to that decision, how close you were to Mike? Were there other staffers at this gathering in Hoboken and have all staffers, your front office staffers, been tested given the situation?

Governor Phil Murphy: I don't know that all front office staffers have been tested but I know that as of tomorrow, anyone who still has not been tested will be tested. The other person on the team who was with us, other than Tammy and Mike, was Mahen and he tested, and tested negative. It's actually pretty simple, Brenda. We're going above and actually beyond what any requirement would be. Again, if you look at the seat and we take this very seriously, among other things, not just because of folks looking to us for guidance as an elected official and as Governor, but also for my own health. I mean, I had a malignant tumor in my kidney in March.

So again, to be crystal clear anybody, and I've mentioned this a couple of minutes ago, but I'll reiterate. Anybody with a close contact, and that's determined through whether it's contact tracing or otherwise and defined by the CDC, they're going to quarantine for 14 days without any exception. I don't have a number for you but we have some of those folks, not from Saturday night, by the way, explicitly, but from other interactions who are doing just that. It's not just they're not in the office today, they're actually self-quarantining for 14 days. By any measure, I did not have what you would consider and define as a close contact.

Having said that, when I heard it and it wasn't terribly fun, because we're in the middle of an important announcement, we're going above and beyond the public health guidance and taking ourselves off the field, at least through the weekend. Tammy is doing the same thing, and we're isolating at home, obviously, and we'll continue to monitor this. Again, we're going to take at least two more tests before we reengage at any level.

And by the way, that'll be four tests in the space of seven days. And again, we're not COVID positive and we have no symptoms. And so the two tests we've taken already are negative and God willing that the next two will be as well. But again, we're doing this voluntarily through an abundance of caution. I will tell you, just largely because – you know, I'm on the phone, by the way, this morning with three members of one family, three siblings who lost their brother. It's living that every day, it's trying to do the best I can as a responsible role model, and it is also that I've lived through this through a health challenge that we know kidney-related stuff makes you more vulnerable. That's why we take this as seriously as we do. It's why we acted. You saw how quickly we reacted, and decisively, when we learned of that positive test on our team yesterday.

Brenda, we're going to continue to monitor this. I have said at least through Sunday, at least two more negative tests, please God. We're monitoring the team as well and we're going to do whatever we need to do to do the right thing here.

With that, on behalf of Judy and Ed, thank you as always. Pat, thank you, I know Parimal Garg, our new Chief Counsel is on. Parimal, to you and Jared Maples, Mahen and others on the team. Again, most importantly, to everybody who's watching, thank you for being patient with us, members of the press, as well as folks by the many thousands who are watching right now.

Please, please, please do the right thing. Do the right thing, especially when you're inside of your own four walls. Please don't let your hair down. Please do the smart stuff that we know. We know someday there'll be therapeutics, we know there'll be a vaccine, please God sooner than later, but we don't have either of those right now. So what we're left with are social distancing, face coverings, wash your hands with soap and water, or take yourself off the field. If you've had a close contact with someone who's a known COVID positive, more than 15 minutes, right up close to them, you've got to self-quarantine for 14 days. If you're in doubt and you think even though you're not positive, even though you don't have symptoms, even if you don't pass that litmus test of the close contact for 15 minutes or more, when in doubt, do the right thing. We're trying to do that. Not fun, I have to tell you, but that's the sort of stuff I think we all need to be doing.

Again, social distancing, face coverings, washing hands with soap and water, do the right thing. Thanks, everybody. God bless you all. We'll see you soon.

Governor Phil Murphy

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