

Governor Phil Murphy

TRANSCRIPT: August 24th, 2020 Coronavirus Briefing Media

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Holding a COVID-19 briefing. WATCH:



Governor Phil Murphy: Good afternoon. I am joined too, to my right an unusual spot for her, by the woman who needs no introduction, the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Judy Persichilli. In the audience, in the front row, is the Department of Health's Communicable Disease Service Medical Director, Dr. Ed Lifshitz, great to have you back. To my far left another guy who needs no introduction, the Superintendent of the State Police Colonel Patrick Callahan. And today we have a special treat. We are joined by the co-chairs of our Restart and Recovery Commission, Princeton University President Emeritus to my left, Dr. Shirley Tilghman, honored to have you with us, Doctor; and to my right, the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Merck. Ken Frazier. Thank you both so much for being with us today.

Shirley and Ken are with us to give more color on the work of the Restart and Recovery Commission that we convened on April 28th, which has spent the past nearly four months helping me and our team better understand the challenges we face and better focus on the opportunities ahead. As all of us in state government have been deeply engaged in fighting COVID-19, we have been keenly aware of the need to take a step back and survey the entire field, whether it be for new opportunities or to see how our ongoing efforts have been impacting our state. The ever-changing nature of this pandemic, however, brought to light the need for us to have a strong -- in our case exemplary group -- of outside voices, experts in their own fields, to make sure we were leaving no stone unturned. Shirley and Ken and their esteemed Commission colleagues, and you can see their names before you, have always been at the ready to provide that fuller picture, to sit and listen to other industry leaders, to learn from their experiences, and to provide their own unique and expert guidance, so we could make sure that every decision we have made was both fully informed and fully

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formed. I'm extremely thankful for their continued leadership and for the leadership of the extraordinary group who comprise the Restart and Recovery Commission, and we will hear from both Shirley and Ken in a few minutes. And again, thank you so much for everything, including being here today.

Next, I'd like to review the numbers we have received from the Department of Education regarding the reopening plans, which have been received from school districts statewide. As we have noted before, we recognize the differences between and within our school districts that make a one-size-fits-all solution impractical. We have provided our school communities the flexibility they needed, and frankly deserved, to be able to make the decision that works best for them. And through Judy's leadership in the Department of Health, we have created regional metrics which we've shown before, for health risks and safety that have further guided our decision-making.

Using a comprehensive set of metrics, the Department of Health has divided the state, again, as we've shown you before, into six regions in accordance with risk level, New Jersey has come a long way in fighting this virus, but we aren't out of the woods yet. But using this health data, our determination is that each region in the state is safe for school reopening with, as we've said many times, the right precautions in place at the individual school level.

So let me go through some numbers. As of today, there have been 745 total plans submitted to the Department of Education. You may wonder, why so many plans? Remember these include not just the public school districts but private and religious schools as well. 251 of these have been deemed completed; another 389 have been reviewed by the Department of Education and returned to districts for necessary revisions; and 105 are awaiting review, and let me be clear on that: such review will be swiftly completed.

So of that amount, a current total of 436 reopening plans envision a hybrid model of both in-person and remote learning; 59 districts plan to reopen to all in-person learning; and a current total of 180 plan to begin their school years in an all-remote fashion, and 11 plans contain some mix of all of the above, generally districts with multiple schools where some facilities may be able to handle in-person instruction, while another may not. We will update these numbers and report them back to you on a regular basis as we approach the start of the academic year.

We are grateful to district leaders, educators, parents and stakeholders for working together in whichever district they live, to come to the right decision for their specific community. This kind of partnership is what has made our state schools among the very best in the entire country, and it's how we're going to state stay there, even in a school year that will open unlike any other before it.

Next, I'd like to acknowledge the new partnership between Union County and Kean University in establishing a COVID-19 program curriculum for students, that will also bring with it further academic and career opportunities. I could congratulate a number of folks, but I want to especially congratulate Union County Freeholder Chairman, our dear friend Alex Mirabella, and Kean University President and another dear friend and former colleague, Dr. Lamont Repollet on this exciting new joint venture. This is a unique opportunity for those in public office and in higher education settings to work together to not only defeat this virus, but to train the next generation of virus fighters.

Now with a heavy, heavy heart, before I get to the overnight numbers, I want to speak of Vernetta McCray, a veteran member of the Department of Children and Families, who died over the weekend from wounds sustained Friday night in a random act of gun violence, as she sat on her front porch of her home in Trenton. Vernetta dedicated her career at the Department of Children and Families to ensuring that our most vulnerable children would not fall through the cracks. She and her colleagues knew, in many cases all too well, the dangers of gun violence in the communities in which many of DCS' clients live. Sadly, such an act took her from us. I thank Vernetta for her career of service to New Jersey's children. I send my prayers to her family. I spoke to her mom on Saturday when she was still clinging to life and you can imagine how devastated she is. I also want to send our condolences and prayers to Commissioner Christine Norbut Beyer and Vernetta's DCF family. May she rest in peace and may God bless and watch over her.

And last night, in Wisconsin, we witnessed another shooting of a black man by a law enforcement officer. It is reported that Jacob Blake, who was shot in the back seven times in front of his children was unarmed. How many times does this nation have to endure this? How many more names do we have to add to the list? We

pray for Mr. Blake's recovery from his wounds. We pray for his family, who themselves are also victims of this shocking and traumatic event, having witnessed his shooting, and we pray for a full reckoning about the systemic and inherent racism in our society and for its elimination, and we pray that justice is done.

Before we turn to the overnight numbers, I just got word a short while ago that sadly, Brigantine Mayor Andy Simpson passed this morning at the age of 62. He had been battling kidney disease for some time, so please keep Andy and his loved ones, family and friends, in your prayers.

Let's turn to the overnight numbers. Today we're reporting an additional 225 positive test results, a cumulative number of 189,719 since March 4th. The daily positivity rate for tests taken from August 20th 1.33%. That is, Judy, the fourth consecutive day and sixth out of the last seven, that are under 2%. That's about as good as any state in America. Our statewide rate of transmission is now currently at 0.85. That is also rewarding. That's the third day in a row under one.

In our hospitals, there were 227 confirmed COVID-19 patients being treated, another 219 persons under investigation awaiting test results for a total of 446. Of these, 66 were in intensive care and 27 ventilators were in use.

Today, with a heavy heart, we're reporting another three deaths that are now confirmed from COVID-19 related complications. The dates of these deaths are, respectively, August 21st, August 17th and August 15th. This brings our statewide total to 14,120 confirmed deaths and the count of probabilities remains at 1,829.

Again, Judy, at the risk that you and I have discussed over the past month or so, at the risk of confusing apples and oranges, in our hospitals yesterday, there were nine reported deaths. However, those are not yet lab confirmed and those are not in the numbers you see before you. As is our practice, let's take a couple of minutes to remember a few of those we have lost.

We're going to begin in Newark, the home of Ismael Lugo, Jr. and his wife Lunisol Guzman. Both of them were lost to this pandemic. By the way, they had only been married for one year. Ismael was known by many as Ish and proud of his Puerto Rican heritage. Ish was a nearly 30-year veteran of the Essex County Prosecutor's Office and our hearts go out to Ted Stevens and their team, and he was slated to retire later this year.

His was a life of service, as he was also a Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force Civil Air Patrol for more than two decades. Ish loved to cook and would often look for any excuse to host a cookout. He was an avid outdoorsman and took any opportunity to fish or play paintball, and Ish was just 48 years old.

Lunisol -- her name, by the way, being a combination of sun and moon in Spanish -- was born in the Dominican Republic and moved to New Jersey in the early 1990s, becoming a United States citizen roughly a decade later. She worked as a shuttle bus driver at Montclair State University, a regular and well-regarded presence to many in the Montclair campus community. She too loved to cook and is remembered for her strength in being a single mother of five who sacrificed to ensure her children were healthy and had every opportunity to succeed. Lunisol had celebrated her 50th birthday only two months before her passing.

When Ish and Lunisol married they brought together a tremendous family. Ish's two children, Nefatina and Giovanni, and Lunisol's five children, Katherine with whom I had the great honor of speaking on Friday, Jennifer, Andy, Xavian and Jasmine. Ish also leaves behind his younger brother and Lunisol leaves behind four siblings. May God bless and watch over them both and may the family that they brought together stay strong together in the wake of such a tragedy.

And today we also remember Clifton's John Eng Pong, a graduate of both Passaic City School and Montclair State, John had a distinguished 27-year career in the human resources department of the Passaic County of Social Services, making sure that Passaic County had the workforce it needs to serve some of its most vulnerable residents. He was also a proud member of CWA Local 1037. His kind and generous nature served him well in his career, but it made him indispensable to his family and friends, with whom he loves spending time telling jokes, or singing, or winning nearly every game he was challenged to, whether it was bowling, pool or table tennis. He was also a huge New York Yankees fan. John leaves his wife of 35 years, Carmela, with

whom I spoke on Friday and she is, as you can imagine, busted up, as is his daughters Rachel and Christina and their spouses, and the special lights in his life his grandson Isaac, 18 months old – that's Rachel's son – and grandson Giovanni, who's Christina's son, who was born after John's passing. What stories he will be told.

He also leaves behind numerous nieces and nephews. We thank John for his commitment to the people of Passaic County in New Jersey, and may God bless and watch over him. Three more members of our wonderful, extraordinary and diverse New Jersey family taken from us by this virus, which does not discriminate. Their lives should be celebrated and their losses should remind us of the need to keep doing all we can to slow the spread of COVID-19. Keep social distances, wear your masks, keep washing your hands regularly, and cooperate with our contact tracers whose job it is to keep our state safe. Together, we can beat, and we will beat, this virus. And as I will outline tomorrow when I put forward my revised budget, we will start a new chapter in our state's long and storied history.

Next for today, I want to give a shout out to Paul and Rich Dottinger, the brothers behind the Morris County-based trade show design and production company, Dottinger Design Incorporated. Through over 40 years of business, Paul and Rich have worked with some of the biggest names across multiple industries, Boeing and General Electric to name just a couple, and local clients ranging from Picatinny Arsenal to Trinitas Medical Center. They built customer experience centers, designed retail facilities and created promotional and tradeshow marketing exhibits and materials. So much of what they do is rooted in tradeshow, meaning that when COVID-19 hit, their business changed literally overnight, with numerous projects put on hold or cancelled. But given their experience and abilities, they knew there were new local opportunities awaiting them.

Paul and Rich turned to the New Jersey Economic Development Authority to secure funds that have allowed them to build out their fabrication and installation capabilities and expand their business offerings, so they could capture more of the business right in their own backyard, including new point of purchase displays for local businesses and hiring new employees. And, they recently registered as a public works contractor and are in the process of renovating an elementary school in Weehawken. Dottinger Design is poised for a strong future, thanks in good measure to the EDA small business support programs. I had the pleasure of checking in with Paul on Friday and I thanked him for all he is doing to keep not only his business open but in helping his clients to do the same in the process, and their website, shameless promotion here, WeAreDDI.com. Check them out, folks.

Finally today, I want to acknowledge the passing of two other great New Jerseyans. First up, James Cotten, a Willingboro resident and a true American hero, one of the few remaining members of the famed Tuskegee Airmen of the 332nd Fighter Group. James was 93 years old when he passed away on August 14. He had a distinguished military career; 21 years in the United States Air Force and another 45 years working at Joint Base McGuire Dix. In fact, James had only retired eight years ago at the ripe age of 86. Talk about running for the tape. For his service, he was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal.

He leaves his wife Otilia. They had been married for 73 years. Together, they had 10 children and their family had only grown to include 15 grandchildren, 21 great-grandchildren, and two great-great-grandchildren. We thank James for his long career of service to our nation. Among our Greatest Generation he stands out, and he will always be a part of our nation's history and our state's history.

And we also acknowledge the passing of Deirdre Davis Butler. Born in Elizabeth, she grew up in Linden. A spinal tumor had impaired her ability to walk since childhood, and she eventually required the use of a wheelchair, but she never let her disability define her, and she challenged the preconceptions of what it means to be an individual living with a physical disability. A graduate of Brandeis College and Howard University Law School, Deirdre was one of the leaders in the fight for the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which was signed 30 years ago this summer.

She had a distinguished career in the federal workforce and headed the White House Office of Presidential Personnel for President Bill Clinton. Hers was a lifetime of advocacy which deserves to be remembered and honored. Deirdre left us on August 7th, and God bless you and watch over you as well, Deirdre.

Before I close, the Democrats had a very successful convention last week. We wish the Republicans a very good week this week. I'm also particularly happy to say that our nominee for the State Supreme Court, Fabiana Pierre-Louis, just came through her committee hearing with the Judiciary Committee and she was

voted in unanimous support, 11 to nothing, which is a great badge of honor and a testament to her extraordinary, both personal and professional, story and skill.

Again, a program note that we'll be coming at you tomorrow at 10:00 a.m. from SHI Stadium at Rutgers University where I will present the revised state budget for the fiscal 2021 year, and we'll be back here, Dan, unless you tell me otherwise, at 1:00 p.m. As usual, I'm also joined today by the Director of the Office of Homeland Security and Personnel Jared Maples, Deputy Chief Counsel Parimal Garg is with us. I introduced them a short while ago but I cannot say enough about my personal thanks, the thanks of our team, and frankly the thanks on behalf of the 9 million of us in this state for the members of our Restart and Recovery Commission. They have been overwhelmingly at the wheel with us, virtually day in and day out, helping us find our way through this recovery and helping guide us into the restart of our state.

With that, we would love to hear from each of them. First up to bat is co-chair, again President Emeritus at Princeton University, one of our crown jewels, Dr. Shirley Tilghman.

Princeton University President Dr. Shirley Tilghman: Thank you, Governor and good afternoon, everyone. First and foremost, I want to say what an honor it has been to serve as one of the co-chairs of the Governor's Commission. The work we do is important, but I want to emphasize two aspects of the work that were given to us by the Governor at our very first meeting that have been absolutely critical to the success of New Jersey overcoming the ravages of this pandemic.

Number one, and I say this as a scientist: this is an administration that is driven by data, driven by science, who understands that you will not have an economic recovery if you do not have a health recovery. That has been critical to everything the Commission has done.

The second is, from the very beginning, the Governor highlighted to all of us the inequities that this pandemic has uncovered in our society. And it in disadvantaged communities, and particularly in communities of color. Not only are the disadvantages of the deaths, the disproportionate deaths that we've seen, particularly in the early phases of the pandemic, but the sequela of the pandemic is now impacting people in those communities far more than in other communities, and that has very much influenced the work we do. So we have an inspirational Governor, a Governor whose values are helping this state overcome this pandemic.

So as the Governor said, it was in mid to late April, that he and his team assembled quite an extraordinary team on this Commission. Their depth of knowledge, the breadth of their expertise has been absolutely critical to the work that they have done. We have individuals on the Commission who come to us from deep government experience, beginning with the Former Chair of the Federal Reserve, Ben Bernanke, the former Secretary of Homeland Security Jay Johnson, the former Administrator of the EPA, and I should say the former Commissioner of Environmental Protection here in New Jersey, Lisa Jackson, and Dr. Richard Besser, who was the Acting Director of the CDC. Their expertise has been absolutely critical to our work.

We also have four individuals on the Commission who come from the business sector, beginning of course with my extraordinary co-chair Ken Frazier, including Charles Lowery, Jennifer Gonzalez and Denise Morrison who bring a very economic perspective to our work. And labor is very well represented by Richard Trumka and Regena Thomas. I'm also proud to say that academia is well-represented on our Commission, beginning with the brand-new President of Rutgers University Jonathan Holloway, who began his term on July 1 – think about that for a moment, what that must be like, as well as Professor of Public Policy Dr. Bill Rodgers.

We also have representation on transportation issues which have been very central to some of our discussions from Tony Coscia, we couldn't have done better. The arts community is being ably represented by Evie Colbert, who's placed a lot of interest in how the arts communities are faring. And finally, deep public policy expertise is coming with Neera Tanden, who is the CEO of the Center for American Progress.

This is an extraordinary group, and it has been an honor to work with all of them. We've been meeting regularly and we have broken our work into basically three subcommittees that meet even more regularly than the full Commission. One of them is focused on health issues, as you can imagine. One of them has been focused on public policy, social policy issues, and the third one has been focused on economic issues, both restarting and the long-term recovery. My colleague on the commission, Ken Frazier, is now going to give you a sense of some of the work that we have been doing, but I want to close my remarks by simply

saying that we are well-served by this Governor and his extraordinary team of members of his Cabinet, members of the administration who are as dedicated as any individuals I have ever seen to getting New Jersey through this stronger and better than ever. Ken.

Merck & Co. CEO Kenneth Frazier: Thank you, Dr. Tilghman, and also I want to express my thanks to you, Governor Murphy, for your principled leadership through a most difficult chapter in the state's history. Like Dr. Tilghman, I've also been honored to serve on this Commission and to lend my voice to the Governor's efforts at restarting our economy in a thoughtful and equitable way.

Merck is proudly headquartered in New Jersey, and we are committed to the state in the many communities that support New Jersey's biopharmaceutical sector. When Governor Murphy asked me to play a role in the Commission, I thought it was important for our company to be involved in this effort from the very start. As Dr. Tilghman went through the resumes of the various members, I was struck again by the fact that though the members of this Commission are nationally recognized and hold positions of heavy responsibility, this Commission has done some heavy lifting to help New Jersey along the road to recovery. This has been a group effort that has included contributions from every single member.

Since our inception, members of the Commission have engaged with LabCorp to expand testing in New Jersey, as a result of the current available capacity and low turnaround times. We've aided in the development, alongside the NJ EDA of a marketplace for personal protective equipment, and we've worked with large employers in the state, with an eye towards expanding local hiring and purchasing. Commission members have also studied our public transportation infrastructure and childcare options, in our efforts to correlate transportation and childcare needs with a staggered return to work schedule.

Among the Commission's core accomplishments are Richard Trumka's advocacy for worker protection legislation, Evie Colbert's formation of the Arts Working Group to ensure that our reopening plans do not forget the arts, and we know that often the arts will be the last to be able to open because of the need for people to come together around issues involving the arts. Dr. Rich Besser's tireless advocacy for an equitable response to COVID-19, and Dr. Ben Bernanke's staunch supporter of more federal aid to states through both his appearance before Congress and his authoring of a New York Times Op-Ed on our efforts to put together an effective reopening strategy.

This Commission has truly shown what can be accomplished when motivated and dedicated people band together with a common goal. As we move forward, the Commission will continue on its current course, advising the Governor and advocating for an equitable and safe recovery. Our plan is to focus our efforts on economic and health planning to prepare us for the fall and winter, including contingency plans should New Jersey face another large-scale increase in SARS-Cov-2 infections, which we hope will not occur.

We also plan to delve into how the state and the business community can provide enhanced technical support for small businesses. For example, to support e-commerce efforts. Once again, I'd like to thank Governor Murphy for his leadership on behalf of the residents of our state. Thank you so much, Governor.

Governor Phil Murphy: Ken, thank you and Shirley, thank you each. It's not like these folks, either the chairs who are with us today or any of the members of the Commission didn't already have enough on their plate. So each of you have added another responsibility and we will be forever thankful and indebted to each of you and your colleagues.

Shirley, I think you've framed it and we're honored. My late mother would say, you're known by the company you keep, and not only are we honored to keep your and Ken's and the rest of the Commission members' company, but also company with your points in terms of principles. Making decisions based on the facts, and equity full frontally as our guiding principles. So to each of you, again, 1,000 thank yous and thank you not only for that, but for being with us today.

With that I'm going to go to my far right. I can't say that very often, to introduce 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. Well, thank you to the leaders of the Governor's Restart and Recovery Commission for joining us today. We are thankful to have such an esteemed group of individuals with expertise across many disciplines to help guide our restart.

As part of the health subcommittee to this group, we are looking at a variety of public health challenges and opportunities to inform New Jersey's response. The mission of the subcommittee is to provide guidance and support to the Department of Health by sharing their insights, their expertise, and most importantly, connections to individuals and institutions to support our statewide pandemic response and resilience.

A major focus of the subcommittee is health equity. We know that longstanding health disparities and inequities have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. We are working to remove barriers to testing for vulnerable populations and ensuring that they are connected to healthcare, social supports, and housing resources. As part of this initiative, the subcommittee has worked with Lieutenant Governor Oliver on scaling up testing, tracing and quarantine resources in Atlantic City. From lessons learned in Atlantic City, we have completed geospatial analysis of all of our counties, identifying testing availability and access, and responding to gaps and opportunities.

The subcommittee has also been examining innovative practices from other states and countries to see how they can be applied in our state. For example, through contacts with scientists at Princeton University, we are looking at how serology data can enhance population-level surveillance. The committee has connected us with thought leaders on exposure notification applications. That has led to the development of a steering committee within the department, and a goal to introduce a digital app in New Jersey to support contact tracing. The subcommittee has also talked with laboratory leaders and CEOs about improving testing turnaround times, so that public health actions can be employed earlier. Members of the larger commission, Dr. Tilghman, Dr. Besser, Neera Tanden have been part of these discussions, and their expertise bring a valuable perspective to these initiatives. We've had several meetings and will continue to gather to study the latest innovations that can benefit New Jersey's effort to contain COVID-19.

Moving on to my daily report, as the Governor shared, our hospitals reported 446 hospitalizations with 66 individuals in critical care, 40% of them are on ventilators. There is one new report of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children. That makes 56 total cases in our state. The children affected have either tested positive for COVID-19 or have antibody tests that have been positive. Fortunately, in New Jersey, there are no deaths reported at this time. The ages of the children affected range from 1 to 18. None of the children are currently hospitalized. The breakdown of race and ethnicity is as follows: White 14%, Black 36%, Hispanic 40%, Asian 6%, other 4%.

The Governor review the new cases and deaths reported today. In terms of deaths, the breakdown is White 54.1%, Black 18.3%, Hispanic 20.2%, Asian 5.5%, other 1.8%. All three deaths we reported today occurred in the month of August. At the state veterans homes and our state psychiatric hospitals, the numbers remain the same.

In New Jersey, the percent positivity is 1.33%. The Northern part of the state reports 1.19, the Central part of the state 1.14, and the Southern part of the state 1.98. So that concludes my daily update. Stay safe and remember, for each other and for us all, please answer the call. Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, thank you for reminding us both in terms of the breakdown of fatalities, but also the inflammatory syndrome, of the enormous racial divide. As we've said many times, COVID-19 didn't create it but it certainly has laid them bare, and you're going to see a heavy dose of that in our budget tomorrow to try to find tangible ways to address it. Can I ask you a question? I think -- is today the first day that spot positivity in all three regions is under two?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: So that's something to cheer about, right?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Yeah.

Governor Phil Murphy: We've had the South in particular has been not high, but it's been above two, so it's nice to have that under our belt. Thank you for everything. Pat Callahan, good afternoon. Compliance, please if you would put on your meteorological hat. I had an exchange with Governor John Bel Edwards overnight in Louisiana. Looks like one of those storms is going to peter out, the other one could be a crushing hit. But anything else you've got? Great to have you as always.

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: Thank you, Governor. Good afternoon. With regards to compliance, Lakeside Diner in Lacey once again was cited for an EO violation and the county and local authorities down there continue to work to effectuate that health closure order. And in Avenel, a subject got onto a New Jersey Transit train and refused to wear a mask and refused to exit which subsequently led to an altercation with the officers.

To your point with regard to the storms, yes, Tropical Storm Marco looks like it's petering out, as the Governor said. Still probably going to cause a lot of rain starting tomorrow afternoon at some point. And according to the National Weather Service, it's expected that Tropical Storm Laura be upgraded and gain strength across the Gulf and become a Category 2 hurricane. We are monitoring both Texas and Louisiana as requests for assistance if we need to step up with Urban Search and Rescue, we'll be watching that for you, Governor, to make sure that if we need to go down there, we'll certainly support our sister states of Texas and Louisiana. That's all I've got, Gov.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you. I had reached out, as I said, to Louisiana and I will do the same to Texas as well, so we'll make that offer. I think, Matt, we're going to start over here. Again, tomorrow we're at 10:00 a.m. for the budget speech at SHI Stadium in Rutgers. We rehearsed it yesterday. Down on that artificial turf it's about 4,000 degrees so if you see me dripping profusely, you'll know that's the reason why. And then we'll be back here, unless you hear otherwise – Dan, where are you? – at 1:00 p.m. on Wednesday. With that, Elise, good afternoon.

Q&A Session

Elise Young, Bloomberg: Good afternoon. A couple of questions on the budget address. Can you discuss right now any proposed tax increases and the amount of expected borrowing? Also, is there a rental cost associated with using the Rutgers Stadium for the budget address? If so, what is it? And also if so, why the stadium as opposed to, say, a state park? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: I have no idea on the rental cost. Do you know, Parimal? We'll come back to you, Elise, on that one. And don't be mad at me, but we'll break the budget news tomorrow. But as we've said, I think all along, we've been pretty consistent. In fact, we've been quite consistent. There are sort of four levers that we're going to overwhelmingly need to pull.

Number one, we're going to have to be tight on our expenses, but at the same time, do what I mentioned a few minutes ago. At the same time, put money where our mouth is on addressing the inequities.

Secondly, raise revenues.

Thirdly, borrow.

And fourthly, so we'll have a lot to say about those first three tomorrow, but we don't have that fourth piece, which is direct federal cash assistance.

And we plead once again, as I will plead tomorrow, we'll do our job but we need Washington to do its job alongside of us. We'll come back to you, Dan, on the rental cost. Thank you for that. Nikita, Good afternoon.

Nikita Biryukov, New Jersey Globe: Good afternoon, Governor. So I have a couple for you. Now I saw over the weekend that you responded to one of the President's tweets. I was wondering if you had plans to further address that tweet.

Secondly, do you plan to allow special school board elections on December 8th? And do you think that it is going to be possible to certify results from the November 3rd elections in time to hold run offs in Patterson on December 8th? And do you think that in-person voting will hold a role in that race?

Governor Phil Murphy: I've got nothing to report on December 8th. I've got to get through tomorrow first, but we'll come back to you on that. And are you asking, Nikita, I want to make sure I get this; will we have enough time to count the ballots in time for any potential runoff? The answer, I'll give you a generic answer, yes. I mean, we're putting a lot of resources into this, including more scanners, more people, as you know, making it much easier to either mail your ballot, drop it in a secure box, hand it to a poll worker or show up and vote in person. So the answer is we've got a high degree of confidence.

Nothing new to add on the weekend Twitter front, but thank you for asking. Dave, we'll come back down to you. Good afternoon.

David Matthau, NJ 101.5: Hi, good afternoon. Governor, for you, the American Camp Association has announced that camps in New Jersey as well as New York were very successful for the seven weeks they ran their programs. A couple of camps in Jersey had a few cases of COVID, but they were quickly contained. What's your reaction to this? What do you think of this? What does it foretell? What does it suggest?

And for the two members of the Restart and Recovery Commission, Dr. Tilghman, you had mentioned specifically that data is so important. And Mr. Frazier, you know, you have great expertise with regard to business. All of our COVID metrics in New Jersey: positivity, RT, deaths, ICUs, ventilator use, all extremely low, if not the lowest in the nation. We have states in our region that have restarted limited capacity dining, as well as gyms. In your opinion, what do you think we need to see specifically to give this a shot? And then if it doesn't work, could we close it down if we looked at it from, you know, a regional approach, perhaps? Thank you.

Governor Phil Murphy: So I'll start with the camps and give one comment, then ask Shirley and Ken to chime in. I had not seen that report, but I'm gratified by it. I mean, that's a good report. That was our sense as well. Judy, I think it's fair to say that we did not see any spikes from, of the things that we've been worrying about this summer, out-of-state travel from hotspots, house parties indoors, would be two at the top of the list. Camps were not on that list. We felt, I think, and Judy and her team put a lot of input into this, that the protocols around camps opening this summer were good, and I'm gratified to hear that,

I'll ask Shirley and Ken to respond. I would just say two quick comments. Number one, I hope sooner than later we'll have some news on getting to some of the indoor stuff. I'm not going to marry myself to a date yet, but the data is unquestionably good of late.

And secondly, the regional thing doesn't really work, at least on things like dining and where you've got a choice. School districts it works, and that's why we keep showing that, those six regions, because that's where you live and overwhelmingly unless you're at a boarding school, you're going to school there. So it does work for education. It doesn't really work for something like indoor dining. But with that, Shirley, please, and then Ken.

Princeton University President Dr. Shirley Tilghman: The only thing I would add is that I don't think there's a single metric that is going to tell us when it is going to be safe to begin to reopen more generally. I think all of us have been watching what is happening not just in the rest of the country but in the rest of the world. An example would be New Zealand, which went 100 days without a single case and are at are now having to revisit some of their restrictions because of, I believe, it ended up being people coming in across the border into New Zealand. So I think all of this is just a reminder to us that the virus is still here. It has not gone away.

The second thing I would worry about and I'm going to let the Commissioner weigh in on this as well because she thinks about this every minute of every day. Frankly, I am a little concerned about the universities and the colleges restarting, those who are trying to start in person. Frankly, it's the wrong demographic. 18 to 22-year-olds, their prefrontal cortex is not fully developed and I think we do have to worry, to a certain extent. And that's happening very, very soon.

Finally, I think we have to anticipate that as we go indoors, if there's one thing I'm most worried about, it is the fact that the weather, believe it or not, given how hard it is today, the weather is going to turn at some point and people are not going to be able to experience the great outdoors the way we can now, and that is a major risk.

So like the Governor, I don't think there is a specific date, nor do I think that there is a single metric, but I do think there are warning signs for us to be paying very, very close attention to.

Governor Phil Murphy: Well said. Ken.

Merck & Co. CEO Kenneth Frazier: Actually, I don't have anything substantial to add to what the governor and Dr. Tilghman have said.

Governor Phil Murphy: Judy, any thoughts?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: No, I agree with Dr. Tilghman about the cerebral cortex because it's something I worry about every day.

Governor Phil Murphy: Ken and I had a chuck on that too.

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: We're still having outbreaks among 18-to-24-year-olds that are hanging out together.

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah. Listen, I do think and Pat, you'll correct me if I'm wrong. The good news, and by the way, from moment one in this crisis, the overwhelming amount of folks in this state, measured in the millions, have done the right things. And even Judy and Pat, on the house party front, we haven't had the noise that we had three or four weeks ago and that's a good sign. Please keep it that way, folks.

And as Shirley points out, it's only a matter of time until the weather turns against us and we're going to be gathering, in some form or fashion, inside. As I said, Dave, at the beginning and we'll move on, is I hope we can break some news sooner than later on at least some steps, baby steps or otherwise, to get indoors. Mary Lou Halverson and I had a very good conversation over the weekend, from the Restaurant Association, a constructive conversation. We're not there yet, but we want to get to yes, but we've got to do it right. And I'm with Shirley and I think we all are. New Zealand, you're seeing it in Germany, Spain, to some extent Italy with returning vacationers. It's still among us. Thank you. Sir.

Reporter, NJTV: Governor a few questions from NJTV. The KIPP Charter Schools launched their online learning today only to have a Zoom crash and ultimately postpone their first day. How will schools proceed if there's similar crashes when hundreds of districts log on at the same time in September?

From Brenda Flanagan, she asked, do you have an update today on when indoor dining will resume?

And from NJ Spotlight, some lawmakers have proposed that a voter should be able to bring his or her unused mail-in ballot to a polling location in November and be allowed to vote on a machine. Is there a reason that this cannot happen?

And how much is it going to cost to send the ballots out through the US Postal Service for New Jersey? That would cost 55 cents or a reduced rate?

And for Colonel Callahan, how is the State Police working with local law enforcement in cities like Trenton and Paterson to address the recent rise in shootings?

Governor Phil Murphy: I've got no comment, I've got no insight on KIPP, rather; we can come back to you, but we lived this in the spring, so you had every school district, every private, every charter, every religious school was doing some form of remote learning and I don't have any specific insight as to why their system crashed, but if we come up with some I'll let you know. But if we could withstand it in the spring, God willing we'll be able to do it with, as you saw the mix, you have a lot of school districts that are going to be either hybrid or in person, so.

Tell Brenda I miss her, by the way. I haven't seen her in ages. Nothing new one indoor dining, but as I say I had a good conversation with the Restaurant Association over the weekend and we're trying to get to yes. We had a really, I'll let Parimal Garg answer either of the questions on why can't you just show up with your unused ballot? Or how much does it cost to mail them? I actually don't have a specific answer, but Parimal might and if not, we'll get back to you. But I would just say we had a really good experience with our primary. People voted in person. If they voted in person, they voted provisionally, it worked. You know, we've made it easier. We're going to put more equipment, more people on the case, both for the vote by mail as well as the in-person piece. I'm not sure I've got a specific reason as to why you couldn't do it, but the system worked, and there's no reason to believe it won't work for general. Parimal, anything on that or on cost?

Deputy Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: The only thing I would add is that the machines that will be at the polling places that are open on Election Day will be reserved for individuals with disabilities.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you for that. Pat, any comments on the last question?

State Police Superintendent Col. Patrick Callahan: There were 14 shootings over the weekend throughout the entire state. Four of them were in Paterson, one which resulted in a homicide. And whether it's Paterson, Newark, Camden, Trenton, we work in partnership with the Prosecutors' Offices, with the US Attorney's Office. Right now there's a meeting going on with the Mayor of Trenton and Director Coley. Regardless, as I said, where, whether that's in a uniformed presence capacity, whether that's in a crime suppression, plainclothes detectives, trying to get those weapons off the street, trying to get violent, recidivist offenders off the street, it is a daily grind for us and our federal, county and local partners.

Governor Phil Murphy: And by the way, we're not alone. Pat, is it fair to say, this is not a phenomenon specific to New Jersey or even our urban communities? This is happening, we can see it around the country. You're good, sir? Behind the camera you good? Do you have any? You're good. How about down front here? You've got one? Okay.

Reporter: Quick questions. Hi, Governor. As you mentioned, the rate of transmission numbers dip below one. How long would that need to hold for you to reopen some of those businesses like restaurants and gyms? In the meantime, what is being done to help those people who are still out of work, no longer getting that federal aid and still have no timeline? And are there any long-term provisions for those employees since this has become a long-term disaster?

Governor Phil Murphy: So I mean, Judy, you'll correct me if I'm wrong and I know, Shirley, given she is a scientist, a sustained period of good data, including rate of transmission in a place that we feel good I think is the key here, right? So this is not just any one day or even any couple of days. You want to see these numbers, whether it's spot positivity, rate of transmission, new hospitalizations in a good place for a sustained period of time. We talk regularly about 14 days of incubation or seven-day rolling averages, so that's sort of the range that we're in. And as I say, I think we'll be able to, I hope soon, begin to show progress on further indoor activities.

Listen, there's nothing new that I know of. The Executive Orders that the President signed has a federal piece and a state piece. The state piece we think would cost us \$1.7 billion in this calendar year alone or in a full year, three-something billion. It's also not a program that's easily set up. The easiest thing to do here would be to extend the federal programs that have now expired, to get back to the table and that's the plea that I would have, that they would go back to what was working.

To be your last question, we're going to be digging out of this for a while. I'm going to talk more about this tomorrow at our budget address, but anybody who thinks you can have 1.4 million people who are unemployed and flip a light switch, essentially, and think that we can get back to normal is not paying attention. But please God, there are obvious bridges over this troubled water that would allow folks to come through this, if not wholly, more wholly and the biggest, most obvious one is to extend what had been a very successful top-up from the federal government. So, I'll leave it at that.

I think we'll go back, Dustin, that's you in the back. We'll go to you. Hello.

Dustin Racioppi, Bergen Record: Hello. There have been multiple issues with testing data and the lab BioReference specifically has most recently contributed to flawed results. How are people supposed to feel confident that the daily numbers you're reporting are not inflated? When you say you want a full accounting of the deaths at veterans homes, are you willing to conduct an investigation similar to what Massachusetts did at its Holyoke Veterans Home?

It's easy right now for people in Bergen County or even here to go across state lines to go to gyms and restaurants, but so far, there have not been any known outbreaks in New York and Pennsylvania linked to those businesses. So what data are you looking at specifically that's caused you to reach a different conclusion than Governor's Cuomo and Wolf? And whatever happened to coordinating with other states in the region on reopenings?

And then finally, for the two leaders of the Restart Commission, how often is the commission meeting and why don't you release any details about the work it's doing that has such a large impact on the residents and businesses of the state? Thanks.

Governor Phil Murphy: I'll start and then throw it to each of you. Maybe we'll go to Ken first this time and then to Shirley, if that's okay. BioReference, I mean, apparently BioReference has got some issues with the NFL, as I understand it. But Judy, we still are trying to get our arms around that, but for the most part, the other labs, the turnaround time I know has come down meaningfully over the past couple of weeks. Any comments you've got on BioReference and the labs generally?

Commissioner of Health Judith Persichilli: Dr. Kern, who is the head of our public health lab, is on a call every week with principals from the labs, and BioReference is one of them. They've brought down their turnaround time substantially. We know they did operation process reimprovement a couple of weeks ago, and it appears that they're having a little bit of difficulty, but we will follow up in our regular discussions with them about the reporting about the NFL, I think it was false positives. We don't have any more color on that.

Governor Phil Murphy: I don't think though, Judy, I mean, we were pretty clear a couple of weeks ago, when we had some serious – and we weren't out alone in New Jersey, America was having both turnaround time and data processing and batching challenges. For the most part though, I don't think we think it's impacting our numbers in any meaningful way now.

I'm not sure what Massachusetts did, Dustin, on the veterans homes, but I promise you there'll be a full accounting and that is a commitment that we have made and will continue to make.

Yeah, there's nothing new really to add on gyms and restaurants other than, you know, sustained data that's good is what we're looking for and we think we're getting into that neighborhood right now. And assuming it stays that way, as I've mentioned several times already, I hope that we'll be able to get to some indoor steps sooner than later.

And we coordinate actively with other states. That still goes on. But we've said from moment one, it is much more in the vein of harmony, as opposed to in lockstep. And by the way, New York state itself has a different protocol on indoor dining in New York City versus other parts of the state. So you have to acknowledge that, you know, we're not in exactly the same place, but harmony is the word that I continue to use to describe our relationship with our neighboring states and that is very much still an active weekly meeting reality among our representatives.

Ken first, and Shirley, any comments on frequency of meetings and details, etc.?

Merck & Co. CEO Kenneth Frazier: Sure. Essentially the Commission has been meeting about once every other week. In between the subcommittees that focus on issues like health, the economy and public services have been meeting on the off weeks. Our role is to provide insights and support to the Governor and his Cabinet in terms of their official decision-making. Our subcommittees are driving towards specific recommendations and when those recommendations are finalized, we will make them public.

Governor Phil Murphy: Thank you, Ken. Shirley, anything to add? You're good on that? Thank you for that. I think we're gonna go to Matt to take us out. Matt.

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: Good afternoon. Governor of the 251 school plans deemed complete, are any of them all remote learning? And if so, how many? You said 180 schools plan to begin all-remote learning? Does that mean that 180 have been approved or is it just their intentions? And what are the specific protocols to be approved for all-remote learning? You know, have the specifications for all-remote learning been made available? Since as of last week they weren't.

And finally, will the Department of Ed release a list of school districts for all the figures that you've announced today? I understand that obviously it's a moving target, it can change day to day, but that's clearly information that they have in terms of just listing the school districts. Is that something that we could be privy to?

Governor Phil Murphy: You mean by name?

Matt Arco, Star-Ledger: Yes.

Governor Phil Murphy: I don't know, can we come back to that? Because I don't know them myself by name, so I'll come back to you. Can we put the slide back up, Dan, is that possible, to put the school slide? And Parimal, you're going to correct me if I misstate myself here, which there's a high probability I will. There you go. So on the top and again, the number of 745 is larger than the amount of districts because of the inclusion of private, religious and boarding schools. The numbers along the top don't fit with the numbers on the bottom. In other words, they're going to add up, but they're not the same categories.

The 251 plans are complete, so I'm not sure what the question on that one was. You mean, which breakdown of remote versus in-person among those? Yeah, I don't have that for you, but we can we can get that for you. And I think that relates to your second question, is the 180 a part of that or is that a work in progress? Let's come back to you as to how that breaks down.

The protocols, Judy, are out there, right? So the protocols in terms of what a district has to achieve are out there, and I will confirm that, but we'll come back to you on that.

And lastly, I've got no issue with releasing the districts by name, but I think we would only do that assuming that the plan was approved. I don't know that it would be beneficial or accurate if it was still in process, but Parimal will correct me on any of the above.

Deputy Chief Counsel Parimal Garg: The only thing I would add is that the plans are supposed to contain the steps the district is taking to make in-person instruction –

Governor Phil Murphy: Yeah, and a date that they felt was a reasonable. That's a very good point. So Matt, to that, I think we've said that here before several times. It couldn't just be we're going to be remote. It had to be, can you walk us through why you're remote and what steps you need to take to remediate whatever deficiency you have? What help do you need from us or the feds? And a date by which you think is a reasonable date to achieve that, and that could be, a simple one could be masks all the way to something more complicated like remediating ventilation in a school building. But assuming that no one disagrees with you, we'll come back to you with at least the breakdown of the approved plans. And again, I have no issue, Dan, on names but I want to make sure the Department of Ed is good with that.

With that, I'm going to mask up, if that's okay. I want to thank Shirley and Ken, most importantly, not just for their being here today, but for everything you are doing to help us through this. And to your fellow commission members who you represent so ably, I thank them in absentia for their efforts as well. Judy and Ed, as always, an honor to be with you, Pat, likewise. Jared, Parimal, Dan, the rest of the team.

Again, we will be on the stadium floor tomorrow morning at 10:00 a.m. with our budget address, which as you can imagine, has a big element and a big dose of the impact of this pandemic on our way forward, including addressing the inequities that have been laid bare. We'll be back here at one o'clock on Wednesday. The numbers are as good as they've been, Judy, right, since the beginning. We keep sustaining this, we're going to get to a lot of the questions that you're asking about, whether it's indoor dining, whether it's gyms, indoor amusements, we will have a much clearer and better and more confident sense of what school is going to look like across our state and our districts, and we would not have gotten here without the help and great personal responsibility of literally millions of you out there, who from moment one, put, let's put the few knuckleheads aside for a minute, from moment one, overwhelmingly, folks, you have done the right thing unlike any American state. You have our deepest, deepest thanks. And all I ask is, please keep it up. We're in a good place. Let's stay there. And with that, we could take even more steps. God bless you all and thank you.

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