



Office of Governor Christopher T. Sununu
Press Conference
Tuesday, August 11, 2020 at 3:00 p.m.

Governor Sununu:

Hey. Well, good afternoon. Good to see everybody here. It seems like we have a packed house. Hello, David. How are you? I think what we will do is we will start with an update from Public Health to kick things off.

Dr. Chan:

Great, good afternoon. Thank you all for being here. So we are at more than 20 million cases of COVID-19 globally, including more than 5.1 million within the United States. In New Hampshire, we are announcing an additional 21 new people confirmed with COVID-19 infection, for a total of 6,861 total people confirmed with COVID-19.

There is one new hospitalization to report, for a total of 705 people that have required hospitalization with COVID-19 at some point during their illness. And thankfully zero new deaths to report today, although still 419 people have lost their lives directly or related to COVID-19 infection.

So, we continue to see the daily numbers fluctuate up-and-down. That's expected. They will continue to go up-and-down for the foreseeable future. We do not believe we're seeing another surge of COVID-19.

The last week, we've averaged probably about 25 to 30 new infections reported per day. However, our percent of PCR tests, that's the virus-specific tests, that are positive has remained low at around 1%. In fact, I think the last couple days, the last three-day averages have been below 1%. So the testing positivity rate remains low.

Our hospitalizations remain low. If you look on any given day at the number of people around our State hospitalized with COVID-19, we're around 20, 23 people hospitalized on any given day with COVID-19. And thankfully the number of people dying from COVID-19 has also decreased, although, as you've heard, we still have a large number who have died related to COVID-19. In fact, I think only in the last week we've only reported one new person who has died from COVID-19. But as always, there are others under investigation. So we can expect other people to have this serious consequence from COVID-19 infection.

We believe COVID-19 continues to circulate in our communities. And so, despite businesses and different functions reopening, we continue to need people to not only protect themselves and their families but also the communities. And we need people to continue.

And it's still recommended that people avoid large gatherings and groups of people to the extent possible. When people are around others in public settings, they should be socially distancing, wearing cloth face coverings, and practicing good, frequent hand cleaning and hand hygiene. So, with that, let me hand things over to the Commissioner. Thank you.

Commissioner Shibinette:

Good afternoon. Just a brief update, we don't have any changes in our long-term care outbreaks, no new to open and no new to close. I'm happy to report our turnaround times, our averages today look really good, our longest being about three days. And that's just with one lab. All the other labs are between one and two days, and even a lab below one day. So that's great news.

And in addition, on Thursday, at our press conference, I do plan to really talk about phasing out some of the restrictions around long-term care. So we will be looking at our numbers geographically around the State, looking at county-to-county, and really looking at how we can match them up with the CMS guidance, so we can start lifting restrictions.

Now, I'm not going to say opening up long-term care visitation, but certainly having the ability to have the community or the loved ones more involved with the long-term care facilities and maybe seeing their residents outside of outdoor visits. It really is going to depend on the numbers in your community, the numbers in your counties. And that's going to fluctuate.

If there is the possibility of maybe increasing the ability to visit in one part of the State, if the numbers change, we may need to scale that back. So I need everybody to be patient with that, as we keep the safety on the forefront of all the decisions we make.

We do understand that there is a psychosocial consequence to social isolation for our elders. So we're working diligently on that. And hopefully on Thursday we will be able to really reveal a good, well-thought out plan for our long-term care facilities. Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Oh, thank you. Thank you, Commissioner. Sorry, I'm trying to put my phone in my back pocket. Something important is going on. It's buzzing me. Okay. A variety of different things to talk about today; so obviously I think we've all had a very good weekend.

What we've really been trying to do is look back a little bit in terms of where we've come. Look at the data. Look at some of the guidance documents that we've put together. Look at some of the best practices we've seen, not just here in this State but in other States.

And as a lot of folks know, back as the summer began, in May, the State put together a comprehensive series of guidance documents to allow for the safe flexibility of both what happens within the workplace, whether it's retail or restaurants, as well as what might happen in different aspects of our recreation venues across the State, as we entered into the tourism season.

And I think everyone can agree, to-date, the documents have worked very, very well, I mean, as is evidenced by, I think, our low COVID numbers that we've seen. We don't want to get too comfortable, because we know a surge could be coming; and in good balance with our opportunity to flex open certain parts of our economy for both the employees and the businesses, themselves.

As we move forward into the fall season now, we're taking the opportunity to update some existing guidance documents based on that data and feedback we've received. So, a couple updates: first, we've updated our universal guidance document. This is a really key document that we've put together that really revolves mostly around employers and just some basic guidances [ph] for folks that might not fall under a specific guidance document. The universal guidance document updates are really designed just to be clear with the employer expectations.

Many of the changes, if you look at it, they're subtle. But they're there. And they're all provisions that I think most employers and employees are already taking. But, again, we just want to encourage folks to go back and review the document. It's really just some technical cleanups in there.

Second, we're issuing an Emergency Order this afternoon. This Emergency Order will help minimize the health and safety concerns around large scheduled gatherings. So, effective immediately, any scheduled gathering of over 100 people in the State of New Hampshire will require attendees to wear masks.

New Hampshire citizens have been diligent. They've been doing a great job in social distancing and mask wearing. And we continue to see very positive numbers, five really good months. We had our surge early on, but we've really come back. And I think folks within our communities, our workplaces, and in a lot of these recreational venues have really taken a lot of the mandates that we've put forth and the recommendations we've put forth very seriously.

But we know a spike could occur at any time. It's something we've been talking about for quite some time. And we know that large events that typically gather over 100 individuals often have folks coming from out-of-state and could be super-spreader events.

Some of our smaller outbreaks have occurred at larger parties, religious gatherings, and other group events that have not adhered to the guidelines to the fullest. We've worked with the Attorney General's Office and the Department of Public Health to put forward these new guidelines. And they will be enforced.

Education is always the first step. We always want to really work with individuals and businesses, and gatherings on a one-to-one basis and make sure they understand what is expected as part of the guidance documents. But we will not hesitate to enforce penalties or fines to event organizers who willfully or dangerously disobey the rules we've put forth.

And of course, while smaller events don't pose as high of a risk, and smaller events being under this 100-individual threshold, we always want to strongly encourage them to make sure they're using masks, encouraging using masks, have them provided to all of their different attendees, especially when they cannot socially distance.

Another announcement today, we will be kicking up our enforcement of restaurants and bars also that fail to follow the State's public health guidance. We have seen in other States a lot of young people especially packing into bars, not maintaining social distancing. I think a lot of us have seen these photos and images online. Thankfully, those instances have been minimal here in New Hampshire to-date. But we want to be proactive, especially as we enter this fall.

The current restaurant and bar guidance in place today is not changing. But it will be enforced in conjunction with our Division of Liquor Enforcement. Our current rules do not allow anyone to be standing in a restaurant, eating, or drinking, or gathering around. You have to be at your table. That is a rule that has been in place for quite some time. You can't be hanging around the bar area, or standing and talking to friends and strangers. There have been super-spreader events tied to that very conduct all across the country.

And so, we're working with the individuals at Liquor Enforcement to increase their presence to ensure all restaurants and bars in the State do follow this guidance; ensuring that capacity limits are met; that no one's crowding around the bars; no large groups at the tables. Remember, this is all for one goal and that is simply to keep our citizens and the patrons safe.

They will be out in force at Bike Week and other high-impact areas to ensure that people are following the rules. And these are just commonsense enforcement measures that will help ensure that

we do not have the large-scale closure of restaurants and bars. And unfortunately that's something that you're seeing in other States, where they've had to really restrict and contract a lot of their previous flexibilities. We don't want to have to go that route.

So we're not, again, adding or changing the restaurant guidance. But we're really making sure that we're reaching out to them on a one-on-one basis, making sure they understand what those rules are and they know that there is an enforcement provision that will be adhered to right behind it.

And again, just a big thanks to a lot of the restaurants and the folks that manage and work in a lot of these facilities for their vigilance. They've been terrific to work with. I think they understand that COVID is very real, that we've been able to flex open some opportunities here that other States maybe haven't. And they're taking a lot of these provisions very seriously. So, again, this isn't so much a punitive measure because we see a vast majority of people breaking the rules. We're really just trying to be proactive and stay ahead of the game, as we enter the fall season.

Another brief note is good news for New Hampshire nonprofits. We talked about this a little bit towards the end of last week. So earlier this week, I guess that would have been yesterday, Monday, and earlier today, nearly 500 nonprofit organizations across New Hampshire received word that they would be receiving a grant from the Nonprofit Relief Fund for a total of approximately \$40 million.

Most recipients received up to 75% of their eligible amount with a cap of \$1 million on any single organization. And as a reminder, these are organizations that are in our communities every day, providing a lot of the frontline services for our State and our localities. And we just want to ensure that they have the necessary resources to be there in our time of greatest need.

Also, back in June, if you remember, we announced \$6 million of CARES Act funds towards substance use disorder services. The opioid epidemic is a fight that the State has been fighting for a long time. And for the past two or three years, we've made great strides in not just putting resources out there, but really restructuring our model in a variety of different ways that was more conducive to kind of that one-on-one level of service, longer cares and longer stints of service, and a greater variety of services for our citizens.

And so, today, we're kind of looking at that \$6 million and we're committing funds into the following areas, just so folks have an understanding of what we were able to find to be CARES Act-related issues. Again, everything has to be COVID-related, if I may.

\$625,000 for equity outreach and harm reduction services across the State; about \$700,000 to operationalize what we call our closed-loop referral system, really making sure that not only are we connecting with individuals, but we're staying in touch with them. When we refer them to an organization, we can follow up with them, and essentially what we call that warm handoff. It's something that the Doorway System here in New Hampshire has become very, very good at. But, again, providing those services to connecting people not just to an organization, but really be able to follow up with them and what we call close that loop of referral is very, very important.

About \$725,000 into an incredibly successful program here in New Hampshire, the Recovery Friendly Workplace Program that we put into place a couple years ago; literally hundreds of organizations and employers across the State being part of our Recovery Friendly Workplace Program, which really, I think, provides opportunity for individuals to either come back into the workplace, to seek recovery services while they're employed, and working directly with their employers, which is such an important aspect of an individual's road to recovery.

Approximately \$750,000 will go to some of the nonprofit-related services that revolved around SUD. \$1.4 million for respite care services and beds, one of the highest needs of the State is more beds

that revolve around respite care. And \$1.8 million in recovery housing programs and services in the State, again one of our highest needs and one of the greatest barriers that individuals have in terms of not just getting treatment and recovery but really bridging back into their communities.

Another announcement today revolves around private colleges, focuses on the CARES Act funds that we appropriated for the nonprofit colleges and universities. Last month, we announced \$10 million for private nonprofit colleges and universities across New Hampshire, as they modify their operations in response to COVID-19.

All eligible institutions that applied did receive funds. And today we're announcing the following grant recipients. Colby-Sawyer College received \$750,000, as you can see on the screen there. Antioch, \$900,000; Revere, Franklin Pierce, New England College, SNHU, and St. Anselm, those last three all receiving approximate \$1.9 million.

Institutions can use these funds for testing, contact tracing, remote-learning expansion, PPE, really any expenses that revolve around COVID and social distancing or remote-learning programs that they may have within their institutions. And so we've obviously done a lot for the community colleges, a lot for our public university system.

But to be able to reach beyond that, I think, and help a lot of our private universities that are creating that bridge and that opportunity for a lot of our young people to get that higher education and really move back into our workforce -- or into our workforce, I should say. We just want to be there for them and make sure that they have the resources to help combat the COVID-19 crisis.

So there's a lot there. We appreciate everyone's time. I always apologize. I go so fast. I'm trying to learn to speak slower, especially for David, because I don't know how you do it, man. I don't. You keep up so well. But, with that, we can open it up for questions.

Q&A Session

Governor, can you just described what played into this new mask mandate for 100-or-more? Did anything you saw at Sturgis, in terms of the because there, play into this?

Governor Sununu:

Absolutely; so the new mandate that we're -- again, it's not a statewide mask mandate. It's really a mandate around large gatherings of 100 people or more. What we saw in Sturgis; what we saw with data coming out of Florida, Texas, or Arizona; what we saw with a lot of the larger gatherings down there; some of the events that we do have coming up, New Hampshire's been, I think, terrific about being able to put on large-scale events, such as the NASCAR race, for example, right? 12,000 individuals, people wearing their masks, maintaining social distancing.

So we have a lot of confidence that when we put the right provisions in place, we can be very successful from the opportunity of the event and balancing that with public health. We have Bike Week coming up. We have some other large events that may be coming up this fall. So we just want to be proactive about it.

But, yes, Sturgis was a real clear warning sign to us. I don't think anyone saw the photos out of Sturgis and said, that looks safe. No. I mean, I think it just brought kind of a second level of awareness to us on all these different matters. And it's something that we can do reasonably, allow the events to go

forward without having to restrict them and cancel them in full, and just make sure that we're managing to the fullest that we can.

What will the fines be? And would they go to the individual or to the institution?

Governor Sununu:

So, the Department of Justice is working with a variety of different folks to create, really, if we're going to go down the route, God forbid we should have to place a fine or a penalty out there, we want to make sure that we have something in place for all the different guidance and provisions. It's not just this one event. So they're working on what those would be, making sure it's fair, making sure it's reasonable.

And I think the idea right now is going after individuals is a tough thing. But these are really selected events. If it were a restaurant, there's someone that owns the restaurant. If it were a scheduled event, there's an organizer. And so, I think, in theory, that's probably where the fines would be directed. But that hasn't been finalized yet. But I think that's probably...

And Governor, what about when there's a religious aspect? Obviously, the New Ipswich group that's meeting there, it's not a business. It doesn't really fall under that same category. How do you...

Governor Sununu:

This is a scheduled event. It would definitely fall under this new category and this new provision.

But in terms of enforcement, I guess, what is there to fine? What's there to...

Governor Sununu:

Well, for example, if any event, whether it's what's happening in New Ipswich or otherwise, if the organizers and those responsible parties of that event are not able to meet the stipulation where everyone is wearing a mask or maintaining the social distancing, as they have to, then they would be subject to a penalty. Yeah.

Who's on this Bike Week Taskforce? And I heard you guys met yesterday. Do you know anything about that meeting?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, so we didn't create a formal Bike Week Taskforce. I think that was frankly misreported by an organization. We've put a team together to simply go out and meet with the town, talk to business leaders. We've had a couple of phone calls. One of them was today, actually. I was on that call, as well.

So, it's everyone from Mayor Hosmer, some of the business leaders there, their Fire Chief, a variety of different folks and organizers of Bike Week to talk about a couple different things: both what we're seeing across the country, what we saw in Sturgis in other places; some of the successes of the events we've held, such as the NASCAR race; the guidance documents, making sure that everyone knows the

guidance documents that have to be adhered to; and working also with, again, Liquor Enforcement, similar to what we talked today, which will go out and meet with all the different restaurants, all the different bars on a one-on-one basis and make sure they know the rules prior-to. And then, making sure that that enforcement aspect is there and present during Bike Week to make sure that everything is really being adhered to.

Again, just making sure that we have a lot of tools, right? The State has a lot of tools. The city has a lot of tools. The Bike Week organizers have a lot of experience. And so, we're just putting all those tools on the table.

It was a great conversation and, again, I think it put everybody in the right path. And I think, coming out of it, we all feel very confident this can be handled and Bike Week can happen in a safe and viable manner.

What do you say to the people who live there and are very, very afraid that this is a super-spread event that's coming down, and then they have nowhere to go?

Governor Sununu:

Well, look. If, during the event, or after the event -- I mean, one of the tools that we have in our toolbox is we can test. If folks are concerned about COVID, they can go get a test. We're right there with them with all these guidance documents. And I've always said we have some of the best guidance provisions in the country.

We have certain guidance for restaurants, certain guidance for retail, certain guidance for large events, whatever it might be. There's 20 or 30 different events that will happen at Bike Week. It's all very nascent.

So it's not like NASCAR, where there's one organizer, single event, single point in time. Everyone's coming in-and-out of the gate. This is really a combination of 30 or 40 different events that happen across the State. A lot of them are in Laconia.

So it isn't that we can go to just one individual group and hold one person responsible. We really need to make sure that we have all the branches out there talking to everyone. So, I think the confidence that folks in that part of the State should have is that we're working with people well-ahead of time. We're not waiting for anything to happen with us or to us.

I think there were a lot of lessons to be learned from the Sturgis event, we saw in other parts of the country. But that was a very different event. They had a whole different approach to health and safety prior to that event. I don't know what the approach was, frankly.

We're right on top of it and working with people and individuals. Our event won't be nearly as big and nearly as crowded. Even the hotel reservations right now for Bike Week are way, way down in that area. So there'll be a crowd. I think it'll be a nice event. But it'll all be very manageable.

In the past, you've said you really don't want New Hampshire to get to a position where people are ratting on other people. Have you changed that view? Would you like to hear from the public, if they have concerns about this event, or that event, and maybe a violation or not?

Governor Sununu:

No, we don't want to encourage. Look. I'm not a big encourager of please drop a dime and snitch on your friends. I don't think that's the right approach. I think what we talked about today was making sure that people know that we are going to have our enforcement teams out there, whether it's Liquor or Public Safety, whatever it might be. We're going to have people in the field and working one-on-one.

So we're not relying on people to send us their snitching Facebook photos. We're going to have a team right on the frontlines working with people in a very proactive way to ensure it's going to be safe before it even starts.

If it does become a problem, would you be willing to consider earlier curfews in bars and restaurants?

Governor Sununu:

For Bike Week? I mean, I guess...

No, just in general in the fall, as...

Governor Sununu:

Yeah. Look, in terms of earlier curfews in bars, I think that would definitely be on the table if that's something that we thought could, again, manage the spread, or manage those types of activities that might lead to a spreading event. Again, as it was discussed earlier, we know that bars, that the social aspect of being in a bar is what has contributed to some very aggressive spreads in other parts of the country. So we have to be cognizant that that could very easily happen here.

So whether it's pulling back with the curfew, pulling back on hours, or really just making sure that people know that we are going to enforce. I think when the restaurant owners know that you're serious about the enforcement aspects of it, through the Liquor Commission, it would be effectively pulling their License potentially if they weren't adhering. That's a very serious thing.

As someone who used to manage and run a lot of restaurants, himself, that's a very serious thing to have that License pulled. And my sense is that restaurant and bar owners will take it very seriously and put the management pieces in place to help ensure that they don't get down that path too negatively.

And Governor, you talked about some smaller outbreaks, like the family parties and gatherings like that. What kind of challenge does that pose to kind of regulate those events that are not organized by a bar or restaurant?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, I don't know if we can. I mean, there's not many barbecues over 100 people, right? So I don't know. We don't want to get into the business of regulating your barbecue, per se. It's really about making sure these larger events are adhered to.

There are smaller events, though, where we've had guidance documents in place. And I think, frankly, we've seen a couple different instances where people think, well, there's only a few of us here. How bad could it be? Obviously, we're not going to get COVID. But you can. COVID doesn't care how many people are in the room.

So, it's easier to manage with those smaller events, right? It's much easier to know everyone in the room if there's 20 or 30 people there. It's easy to control who's wearing a mask and who isn't. And I think that's why we've had more success with those smaller events.

It's the larger ones that are just -- when you get above 100 people, it's harder to control. So, by putting that mask mandate in place for those events, I think it tells those -- and letting those organizers know they're going to be held responsible for that, I think it puts the onus on them to be proactive with their decisions and their messaging prior to the event even beginning.

But, yes, smaller events are tough, of course. And we've seen these small little events here with two or three people here-or-there. That's not a lot. But it's a lot, right? It's one of those one is too many. So, you can't regulate everything and everyone all the time.

It's similar to what we say about schools. We know that students or Teachers may have COVID in schools. It would be unrealistic to think that we can manage zero in schools. But we can manage, right? We can provide those resources and tools so that school can continue. So, I think we've done a good job putting the right stuff in place.

Enforcement's been your big obstacle to statewide mask rules before. And while organizers might be held accountable, it's still individuals who are wearing the mask or not wearing the mask. So what makes enforcement now seem to be in reach when it wasn't before?

Governor Sununu:

So, we're not doing a statewide mask mandate. A statewide mask mandate would be on the individual. A random person walking down the street not wearing their mask, and you're asking folks to enforce that in some way.

By keeping it around these structured and scheduled gatherings, there's an organizer. And we know who that organizer is. You can hold them accountable on the backend but also work with them on the frontend in a proactive way to make sure they don't get in that situation. It's just much, much easier to manage when there's an organizer involved.

Governor, a public-information question: what's going to be the approach with schools if they have an outbreak? Is it something that DHHS will announce or discuss here ala the long-term care facilities? Or will that be handled at the District level?

Governor Sununu:

Great question, so I think on Thursday we're going to talk a lot about different aspects of schools. What you're asking about is really the kind of the communication that's going to come out and that process of communication that Commissioner Shibinette and Public Health have been doing a great job making sure that not only we know our communication protocols at our level. But if you remember our guidance document mandated and ensured that there'd be a communication team and protocols at the local level.

And so, maybe on Thursday we will walk folk through exactly what that will look like. There's a variety of different scenarios: communication around whether there's an outbreak around positive COVID cases, around quarantining. There's a variety of different ways that this could go. And what should be expected from the State, as well as what can be expected from a family at the local level? That may differ a little bit at the local level. But I think we have a pretty good handle on really how that will roll out, especially at the State level, to be sure.

While you've asked about schools, I think we're going to talk a bit more about schools on Thursday, things around special education, making sure that some of the gaps that we saw fall apart in the system a little bit, as we closed out the spring. We know more. We have more resources. We've had more time to plan. And we just want to make sure that whether you're remote or you're in-person learning that those gaps are not falling through. And so, we will be talking a little bit more about that on Thursday, as well, how it relates to schools.

I actually have a question for Commissioner Shibinette. Colleges across the State are starting to implement their testing programs for students pre-arrival. In testing moving forward at schools, will those students be reported as cases in residence of the towns? Or will the towns have access to an accurate number of how many people in the area have tested positive?

Commissioner Shibinette:

So if they're located on our college campus, they will be reported in that town. And yes, we put out a active case map every day that have active cases in those towns. And we have a Memorandum of Understanding with the Police and Police, the local EMS, where they can access who's positive in their town, in case they have to respond to an emergency, so they understand that they have to wear the appropriate PPE.

We've had so many conversations with the individual towns that have these college campuses, so that we make sure that the communication is ongoing. The universities are partnering with the Department so that our contact tracing is seamless. Our communication is seamless. So they will have the ability to have the numbers, for sure. I mean, we publish the numbers every day.

Governor Sununu:

Are there some questions on the phone?

Holly Ramer with the Associated Press:

Hi, thank you. In most cases, if, in a school, a scheduled gathering of more than 100 people, would this apply to schools?

Governor Sununu:

No, not for schools, unless they want to hold like a single assembly or something like that. But school isn't usually classified as a scheduled event, per se. But an assembly potentially would be, yes.

Rick Green with The Laconia Daily Sun:

Yes, Motorcycle Week is known to attract people from around the country. Do you have any confidence that if they self-attest to a 14-day quarantine that that will have any voracity at all?

Governor Sununu:

So, I think it's similar to NASCAR. The vast majority of folk you're going to see this year -- it's not a typical year for Motorcycle Week -- will likely be from New England. Similar to the NASCAR event, 85%, I think, of those attendees were from New England. And again, we don't have the quarantine provisions for those folks. If there are folk coming from outside, then, yes, we expect them to attest.

Michael Graham with the New Hampshire Journal:

Governor, the Granite State Taxpayers are meeting tonight. And one of the big topics is the Massachusetts Policy of treating New Hampshire workers as though they're working inside Massachusetts. You've been talking about it a bit. And several people have raised concerns that your actions haven't been as aggressive as they would like, that they'd like to see you take some action, in particular some legal action. And they're wondering why you haven't gone to court. Also, Democrats said yesterday that when you called moves for income tax hikes garbage that you were talking about paid family medical leave. And I was wondering if you wanted to address that, as well.

Governor Sununu:

Okay. So the first issue has to do around the new rule that Massachusetts put into place a few months ago that basically says for workers that were working in Massachusetts and then had to work remotely back in New Hampshire, Massachusetts put a new rule into place that was going to hit them with their Massachusetts income tax. And we're fighting that.

The Attorney General has put together a Report that we've looked at internally that, I think, addresses the challenge of that rule within Massachusetts on a variety of different issues: first of all, on constitutionality, whether you can tax somebody that isn't within your jurisdiction; consistency; just the fact that if you're an out-of-state worker in Massachusetts temporarily working there now, you're not

subject to that rule. But folk that were working in Massachusetts and that now had to work remotely into New Hampshire have this rule applied to just them.

And then fairness, right? The fact that individuals were forced by the Stay-at-Home Order of that State to work remotely and then essentially penalized for that; so there's a variety of different areas where the Attorney General is looking at it. And based on that, I think they'll figure out the next steps, whether it's in court or whatever it might be. But you can't just rush to court before you know what you're going to challenge it on. And I think they've taken the last few days to really work on that and figure it out.

In terms of income taxes, the Democrats have put two Bills on my desk that were income taxes. And yes, I vetoed them both times. I put a Paid Family Leave Bill before the Legislature that was deemed viable by the Department of Employment Security, viable by the Department of Labor, that had no income taxes attached to it, that was a voluntary program, and that wouldn't go defunct and bankrupt like you've seen other programs. They dismissed that out-of-hand.

In doing that, the Democrats showed that, when given a Paid Family Leave Plan with an income tax and one without, their priority was the income tax. And they showed their hand right there. This was all a gimmick for them to get an income tax.

I have a Paid Family Leave Plan that, after November and we come back in the next year, we will put forth and we will get done without an income tax. It takes some innovation. It takes some thinking outside the box. That's what we do really well here in New Hampshire. And I'm excited to put that forward, because our Paid Family Leave Plan is viable. It's something that everyone can buy into, if they want, without burdening the entire State with an income tax.

Casey McDermott with New Hampshire Public Radio:

Hi, Governor. I have a question actually pivoting a little bit about elections. The New Hampshire Republican Party sent a mailer to a number of voters across the State. And they've acknowledged there was an error in the address on that mailer. However, we've spoken with a number of voters in different communities who report receiving those mailers addressed to either deceased individuals, or people who no longer live at those addresses. I just wanted to get your perspective on the situation broadly, but also whether you're concerned at all that that is going to make people question the sanctity or the integrity of the absentee ballot process more broadly.

Governor Sununu:

No, look. Our absentee ballot process is terrific here in the State, regardless of what Party. I don't know really anything about this mailer that's a Party issue, frankly. I can tell you usually those mailers go out based on whatever is on the voter list and the voter rolls. So if those haven't been updated by a locality, you can get people that have moved away, or God forbid they may be deceased and just not taken off of the voter rolls. That does happen. I've heard of that happening in previous years. But this is a Party issue, whether it's the RNC or the State Party and a bad address, I really don't know anything beyond that. Great.

But it may be a Party issue, but they were ballot applications sent out to voters. And there's other Parties across the State. And even the Secretary of State talked that they can't really control those groups sending out various information to voters across the State that may be faulty or incorrect. So, do you have more growing concern of the ballots?

Governor Sununu:

Is what they sent not allowed? Is that what you're implying? I didn't hear that what they sent was not allowed to be sent. I just heard it was a bad address.

It's allowed but that there's been increased efforts in sending out election information from groups that aren't the Secretary of State's Office because there's such an expectation of absentee voting. And so, that there's an increased chance for error.

Governor Sununu:

Third-party groups getting involved with trying to send these types of applications, I believe that's been happening for years. Look, groups have to be -- again, I don't know anything really about this instance, other than to say, regardless of your Party, regardless of the group, you got to double-check the lists. You got to make sure that what you're putting out is appropriate.

I don't know why this Party put a bad address on it or anything like that. But, yeah, I think any time you're sending, whether you're a candidate, whether you're a Party, whether you're a third party sending this stuff out, I think you got to be careful about how you send it and making sure that you're dotting your Is and crossing your Ts. Yeah. I wish I knew more about it. But it's a Party thing. I don't really get involved in that stuff too much.

Governor, as you know, President...

Governor Sununu:

Capital P Party, sorry.

President signed the Executive Order regarding extended unemployment. Is New Hampshire in a position to pay that additional \$100 a week that he has proposed?

Governor Sununu:

So the question revolves around the new allowance from the Executive Order of the President for the \$300 additional Federal dollars plus what would be required \$100 match out of the State. We had a call with the Department of Labor and FEMA yesterday. I think we have another call actually happening this afternoon with our team to look at how those match dollars may be spent and where they actually have to come from, and how they could be adhered to.

There's other provisions in there, as well, that we have to look at to see whether we -- making sure we meet the eligibility requirements, we meet some other minimum thresholds there. So we're assessing

it now. And again, assuming we can get to a good place, it's something that we're probably going to look at moving forward with.

But we got to figure out where the money could or could not come from, because there is a State match involved which was definitely a Washington curveball to be sure. I don't think anybody was talking about a State match as part of that program.

But you're look at somewhere between \$400 million and \$500 million of benefits that could come to citizens of the State. It isn't the \$600 provision. And frankly, that's probably a good thing. We've heard a lot of concern. I think it's been resoundly [ph] reported across the State and across the country, frankly, that the \$600, especially for a place like New Hampshire, was a lot of money and really a disincentive to get a lot of folks to come back to work. Folks on both sides of the aisle have talked about and I believe agree on that. So this is an attempt to find some type of middle ground.

But our unemployment numbers continue to drop, which is a really good thing. I think at one point we peaked out at about 117,000 people on unemployment. As of yesterday, we had about 60,000. So we're about a half of what we were just a few months ago. And our unemployment numbers are dropping at a rate much faster than the national average. And so, people are going back to work. Those opportunities are there. We tend to be a State with very high wages, on average. And I think that's making it very enticing for folks to come back.

So, I mean, we will see how this provision weighs out. But we really have to know the details, if you will, the nuts and bolts of the guidance around where those dollars can come from, the provisions around eligibility, and the minimum requirements, before we can commit to exactly how it's going to be done.

Didn't the White House back off of that?

Governor Sununu:

I apologize?

Didn't White House back off of that quarter payment from the State?

Governor Sununu:

No, I believe the 25% requirement is still there. I think what we discussed in yesterday's call and probably being further discussed today is how that and where that money can come from. So, originally, I think they said it couldn't come from your unemployment insurance trust fund, which is odd, because this all has to do with unemployment insurance. So they may be looking at changing that provision, which would be good. That'd give us some more flexibility, as well as the minimum requirement provision. So I don't think they've come completely off the 25% requirement, but where that money can come from may be more flexible, which would be a good thing.

Governor, just to clarify and follow up on the mask mandate for gatherings of more than 100, kind of what Holly was saying in terms of does it apply to businesses that have more than 100 people working at them?

Governor Sununu:

No, going to work wouldn't be a scheduled gathering or anything like that, workplace provisions. These are really for events, if you will, a scheduled event. So, yeah. Okay. Well, great. Well, thanks, everyone, for joining us.

Again, Thursday we're going to talk, I think, a lot about education, maybe a little more on the predictive analytics that we've been diving into. We will probably do a little bit of a data presentation and, again, to kind of not just the old data, but the new data that we're looking at.

As Dr. Chan referenced, our percent positive is very low. Our overall numbers are very low. But there are other pieces of data that we're looking at to be predictive about where some of these models may take us. And we will probably get into that a little bit. Great. Well, thank you, guys.