



Office of Governor Christopher T. Sununu
Press Conference
Thursday, September 10, 2020 at 3:00 p.m.

Governor Sununu:

All right. Well, good afternoon, everybody. Thank you for joining us. Not the typically beautiful fall day; we've had a few of those, but a little cloudy today. But that's okay. Everyone's grass needs a little rain now and then.

Well, thank you for joining us. And we hope everyone did have a good Labor Day weekend and a good Primary Day, right? That was a big day for us this week. It was great to see the record turnout numbers all across the State from both Parties. Everyone really came out and kind of took advantage of the opportunity. It's a great opportunity that we have.

A big hat's off and thank you to Secretary of State Gardner and Attorney General Gordon MacDonald. I think they did a great job really structuring a successful day. And if we've seen how some of these primaries have turned out in other parts of the country, I think, once again, we've proven the gold standard of how to do our elections right. So, big hat's off to those folks here in Concord and really everyone in New Hampshire, all the Town Moderators, the Clerks handling all the absentee ballots. They did a phenomenal job.

And I think it gives everyone a lot of confidence going forward into the November election that, once again, there's nothing we can't handle when it comes to elections, doing it right and with integrity. With that, I think we will just start off with a Public Health Update from Commissioner Shibinette.

Commissioner Shibinette:

Thank you. Today in New Hampshire we are announcing 56 new positive cases of COVID-19, for a total of 7,573. No new hospitalizations today, so we remain steady at 719. And we have one new death to report today, a female resident of Hillsborough County over the age of 60. That death is associated with a long-term care facility.

For a long-term care outbreak update, we do not have any updates on the outbreaks. We remain with the ones that we have at Mountain View in Ossipee and the Rockingham County Corrections Department. Although there's no new cases, they're still running out those 14 days before we close those.

Additionally, we're going to talk about long-term care visitation a little bit. A couple weeks ago, maybe more than a couple of weeks now, we announced kind of phased reopening around long-term care visitation and nonessential personnel.

So, every two weeks, we update those prevalence numbers for the counties. Long-term care facilities that operate for two weeks successfully in Phase 2 get to move onto Phase 3, if their counties drop below or maintain below 10 cases per 100,000. So, we updated those prevalence statistics today. And what we're looking at now is, so Belmont County and Coos County will maintain their position in Phase 3 for visitation. Grafton County, who was in Phase 3, unfortunately is going to drop back to Phase 2

this week because of higher community transmission rates. But Sullivan County gets to go into Phase 3 this week.

So, you're going to have Belmont County, Coos County, and Sullivan County. The long-term care facilities in those counties that have not experienced an outbreak in the last 14 days get to go into Phase 3 of our long-term care visitation plan.

In addition to that, many of you heard that yesterday I talked to the long-term care facilities about our long-term care surveillance program, our testing program. We were looking for a lot of triggers to start moving long-term care surveillance testing into almost the self-directed testing. And we've met most of those triggers: so our lower community transmission levels; turnaround times of one or two days; antigen-machine testing within the facility; and then just a closure of a lot of our outbreaks in long-term care. And we've seen that progress over the last couple of weeks. And we are now starting the conversations with the long-term care facilities about what that would look like.

So we're not ready to unveil a plan by any means, but the conversation started yesterday and will continue on for the next week-or-so around what that looks like for each individual facility. How's it going to be funded? There's been a lot of opportunities in the last month-or-so around Federal funding to long-term care. And of course, we have some relief funding here at the State that we also do. So, I think it's a stay tuned for the next week-or-so to see a new testing program coming out of the State that gives more autonomy to the long-term care facilities, so they can self-direct their testing more.

Just a little update on school dashboards; since we launched our school dashboard last week, we've gotten a lot of questions about why the numbers on our dashboard doesn't quite equal what the schools are reporting. And very similar to when we were announcing our institutional outbreaks, there was always a couple-day lag with our numbers compared to what the individual facilities were releasing. We're seeing the same thing that's happening here.

Schools will know right away. Public Health does not add people, or posit covidive [ph] to our numbers until we finish our contact investigation. And that's really, really important, because we want to make sure that everybody that's potentially exposed, and the positive people, have been notified before we release it publicly. And we want to make sure that we're putting that positive COVID case in the right spot.

So, a good example of that is right now on our COVID dashboard, we are counting students that are in school. So if you're 100-percent remote learning and have not been on the campus for outside activities or any type of schooling, and you test positive, we're not going to put that on our dashboard, because it's not affiliated with in-school learning. Some schools may be counting that.

So we're still working out all of those discrepancies. But I think that you will see that there is always going to be that potential to have a day-or-two lag behind what's being released by the school, just because of our contact investigation. And I think that's it. Thank you very much.

Governor Sununu:

Thank you very much, Commissioner. A variety of things that we want to jump into today, we will try and make it fairly quick. And then, we can open it up for questions. One announcement that we have today is today was a pretty significant day in terms of the Lost Wages Assistance Program. That's the Federal Program that provides a \$300 stipend for those folks that are currently part of our unemployment system.

Today, we paid out just over, actually, \$81 million to about 57,000 people. These are individuals that have been collecting regular unemployment benefits since August 1st, but have been without that \$300 Federal enhancement. We've got our system up-and-running.

We're actually the first State in New England to pay out those \$300 enhancements, thanks to the ability of signing an Emergency Order yesterday that allowed the system to really progress where it needed to be. We did want individuals, or families, to have to wait for this additional stipend. We've actually been contacted by some of the other States just to see how we did it so fast.

Unfortunately, it's great that the dollars have gone out, that we're able to operationalize the commitment that the President made with enacting his Orders about a month and a half ago. But because Congress has yet to act, FEMA will not be able to provide payment for any additional weeks after September 5th. And we heard just today that the Senate voted down the plan that would have allowed that additional \$300 to continue on through the rest of the year.

So I guess the message really is an imperative message for Congress to get it done, to do their job. Fine one way or the other and make this opportunity happen, because the bridge, if you will, that the President's Order had put into place, those funds we knew would run out about four or five weeks. And sure enough, they have. So it's really imperative that Congress move forward and actually vote on a plan that allows this \$300 program to continue. Otherwise, it's simply out of money.

Looking at some of the other ongoing economic trends, while we're kind of on the economic topic, New Hampshire's new claims and weekly claims continue to decline here in New Hampshire on the unemployment side: more good news. Weekly claims dropped another 6% to just under 42,000. If you remember, our weekly unemployment claims had maxed out just shy of 120,000 at one point a few months ago. And now, we're back under 42,000, at about 5.5%, 5.6% unemployment, relative to the workforce that we had just prior to the COVID epidemic.

So obviously we're seeing a continued improvement across all the different sectors of our economy, maintaining that balance of low COVID, strong economy and economic opportunity for families. It's kind of the exact formula we've been pushing for. And to-date, we've been very, very successful. So thank you to the citizens of New Hampshire for helping make that happen.

We also have a -- I want to talk a little bit about education, as the school year is opening up. We've provided a lot of flexibility for districts and obviously the vast majority of districts are either fully open or doing some type of hybrid model. I think maybe only eight or nine districts across the State are starting fully remote.

But with regard to New Hampshire's, what we call the Virtual Learning Academy, the VLACs program as a lot of folks know it by, VLACs is essentially a public charter school that provides online virtual instruction to elementary, middle school, high school students. And a lot of those students have been taking the VLACs credits online since 2007. So it's a program that has been around for quite a long time with a lot of different successes.

Given this year, with some districts going to fully remote-learning programs, enrollments requests in VLACs have nearly tripled in just the past couple months, as families see alternatives for their children, when it comes to public education. VLACs currently has a little over 3,000 students in it. But there's literally thousands more on a waitlist.

So as such, today, we are transferring \$7 million of CARES Act funding to meet the needs of the students and the families by supporting VLACs. This will compliment an additional 73 Teachers in VLACs that they've hired for this academic year, and actually fund an additional 30 Teachers, so that they can keep hiring and hopefully fulfill the needs and the demands of the waitlist.

Obviously, there's a lot of demand for families to provide that ultimate path of education. And I've always seen one of our roles here as just opening up those doors of opportunity. So \$7 million going into the VLACs Program to allow the expansion, not just from a governmental level but really for the opportunity for those kids and families.

And while we're kind of on that topic of charter schools, I just want folks to know we're constantly exploring new ways to make investments in our public charter school system. It's an incredibly successful system. Every charter school in New Hampshire is part of our public school system. We know that they, too, are struggling to meet the demand as there's been a lot of request and capacity request to move students into those systems.

One of the issues we have is, if you remember last year, the Federal Government gave us a \$46 million grant to expand charter school capacity. And the Democrat-led Legislature turned that one right down. They actually didn't decide to use the money a different way. They just turned \$46 million back to the Federal Government. And that's frustrating, I think, for a lot of families in this State, because you could imagine the additional capacity that we could have built with those dollars. So, seeing that we don't have that opportunity anymore, we're still kind of challenging ourselves to see what other expanded capacity and opportunities we can push within the public charter school system, given that there are so many families on a waitlist and trying to enter.

And then, on that level, moving a little more to kind of the student support systems that we have in place; so as we open up this year, we talk a lot about students with an IEP, students with special needs, and as part of their school's special education programs, and also students that have English as a Second Language, our ESL students. English as a Second Language students have an additional barrier and a very significant barrier, when you talk about going remote and remote learning. A lot of times, the parents have English as a Second Language challenges, even greater than that of the student. So getting that parental support can be even more challenging when trying to do it remotely, when trying to work with the computer system.

And so, what we've done is really challenge our Department of Education to not just -- we have great supports within the Department of Education, and not just providing that to every single school, which is provided, but making sure there's accountability in that system. Are parents that have ESL challenges with themselves and their students really getting those needs met? Are we closing those barriers down? Are we really providing that opportunity for those families?

So, we're creating a bit of an accountability system, if you will, that will work side-by-side, similar to the special education system, to make sure that we're not just talking about meeting the needs of those students, talking about making sure that those students aren't falling through the gaps, but actually following through and getting some accountability back from the schools to make sure that those in-person assessments are happening; that the needs are truly being met. And there's a variety of different levels.

We've just heard a lot of complaints and concerns. And we want to take those very seriously, both at the Governor's Office and at the Department of Education from families that certain needs aren't being met. There actually is a phone number, if folks are interested. If they have concerns about either special ed or ESL-type programs and the needs of students not being met, they can always call the Department of Education. Bridget Paré runs that Department. And it's 271-3196, 271-3196.

We really do want to hear from families so we can find out what's happening on the frontlines and really provide that one-on-one individualized attention, and hopefully be able to meet those needs within all the different districts, because everyone does it a little different, right? We all know that what

happens in the North Country or out in Cheshire might be very different than Rockingham, Manchester, and Hillsborough. So, knowing that, getting that individualized feedback, we believe, is very, very important.

The last thing we want to talk about, and then we will open it up for question, has to do with some award funding, CARES Act awards, and a lot of money going out from the CARES Act today. Our GAP Fund, this is the fund that came off of Main Street Relief Fund, very successful program for businesses, the Self-Employment Fund, the Nonprofit Fund. Hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars went out to individuals and businesses all across the State in the past couple months.

But because of eligibility requirements, there were certain programs and businesses, or organizations, that simply fell through the gap, right? They fell kind of into the cracks. And the Business Finance Authority picked up the slack and funded them with about \$30 million of opportunity. And today, we're announcing approximately 300 businesses and nonprofits that did [sic] qualify as part of our initial round of Nonprofits, Main Street Relief, or SELF funding are being awarded a total, in aggregate, about \$20 million of assistance, about an average of about \$64,000 to cover COVID expenses, lost revenues, variety of different things.

Grants were focused in a similar way as the original funds, but, again, just trying to expand the eligibility for certain organizations that fell through the cracks. And again, we just think this is a great opportunity to put CARES Act dollars back into our communities, into the economy, help and support a lot of the employment that is necessary for these organizations. And again, my hat's off to them over at the Business Finance Authority. I think they did a very good job putting this program forward.

Also, additional awards in long-term care; for long-term care facilities, we're announcing an additional \$10 million on top of the \$12 million we did a couple months ago to 42 different long-term care facilities across the State, again covering COVID costs or potential lost revenues. And then, finally, our Healthcare Relief Program; we were one of the first States to create a Healthcare Relief Fund. And we're awarding another \$13 million to approximately 300 different Healthcare Providers across the State, so they could be everything from Dentists to General Physicians, whatever it might be, folks that were really impacted from a revenue standpoint during the COVID crisis. We always want to make sure that we're not shutting doors because of COVID, especially around the healthcare needs of our citizens. So, again, another \$13 million going out for those programs.

So, again, we just kind of keep putting the dollars out there, supporting a lot of these businesses and nonprofits that do such a great job supporting us and our communities. And we're going to continue doing so, hopefully through the end of the year. I guess, with that, we can open up for questions.

Q&A Session

How many dollars does that leave in unallocated CARES Act money?

Governor Sununu:

We still have over \$250 million in unallocated funds, \$200 million to \$250 million right now. And primarily, again, we're suspecting the numbers will go up. We may need additional testing, additional PPE.

I think the Department has done a great job building up our stockpile of PPE in the State. FEMA helps us with some of those costs. But a lot of the HHS costs, as well, we still have to pay 25% of those. And again, we're keeping a little bit in reserve.

And as we go through the fall, I think we will get a better sense of where we are and what flexibilities we may or may not have with those dollars. My hope, again, is that Congress provides some flexibility, if they can pass something. I'm losing faith a little bit. I think we all are. But, I mean, they still have three weeks to move the ball down the court and get something done for the American people. So there's still a lot of hope there.

And the talk that you said about the -- oh, I've lost my -- oh, go ahead, Adam.

Governor Sununu:

Oh, okay. So, go ahead, Adam. We will come right back.

Governor, is there any update on when the rapid test machines are going to be going around the State, the Sofia machines, when those might be coming? Obviously, a lot of students back in school now, and the guidance essentially is, even if there's a small sniffle or something like that, it should be a stay home and get tested situation. So, what's the update on when those machines might get here?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, so I think we've ordered 25 Sofia machines.

Commissioner Shibinette:

By the end of October is what we've been told so far.

Governor Sununu:

So in about four, five weeks, we think. So we put the order in a while ago, but there's a little bit of a backlog. But if we can get there by even mid to end of October, maybe even early-November, I'll take any machine, device, and testing capability we can get our hands on at this point.

Oh, sorry. Do either you or Commissioner Shibinette know how many private practices -- how many more machines may be coming in that have been privately acquired? Is there a census on that, or any sense of...

Governor Sununu:

I wouldn't have a number for you today. No. And we can look into that. I mean, about once every month, we kind of go out to primarily the hospitals and the larger Healthcare Providers to see if they've bought their own machines. A lot of them had stuff on order four to six weeks ago. So, I don't think we've done a survey in the past couple weeks. So we can reach out to them, of course, and see what they might have.

With the FEMA expire, and what would we do for the unemployed, if we get to a point where there's none?

Governor Sununu:

So in terms of unemployment, the FEMA dollars that the President has allocated to unemployment have expired as of September 5th, as of this past week. So we've paid through the five or six weeks of the program. That was the \$81 million we put out today. But that program is effectively tapped out already, which is why we were hoping that that vote would happen, that they would have approved that Bill today, because it's necessary.

You can only bring the FEMA fund down so much so that they do have capacity to handle other more traditional FEMA issues. They don't want to draw that down to zero. So they've drawn down as far as their buffer will out. It's gone out the door. We got our \$81 million. That's great. But going forward, we're in a gap. That \$300 isn't there going forward right now, until Congress acts.

How many people do we have on that list?

Governor Sununu:

Well, technically, everybody that would qualify for unemployment in the State would be on that list. So right now, it's about 42,000.

Governor, as you know, the average daily case rate has gone up in New Hampshire since the 5th, 20 to 30 roughly.

Governor Sununu:

Sure.

Could you talk a bit about how much of a concern should that -- what kind of daily rate do you think about pulling back a bit? And also, with regards to higher education, do you consider advising College Administrations that there is a metrics at which they should go to all-remote learning on campus?

Governor Sununu:

Sure, so we've seen our whole and total numbers of cases go up a little bit over the last week, which was expected, given that our testing capacity has gone up so substantially. So, to put it in perspective, a couple weeks ago, we're averaging maybe 2200, 2500 tests per day. There are some days where we're doing 4,000 to 5,000 tests now, which is great. UNH and a couple of the different additional sources are doing testing. So we just have such an increase in capacity. It's a very good thing.

With the testing going on around the university system, we're clearly catching a lot more of the asymptomatic individuals, primarily students or faculty that might be on those campuses. And we're able to identify them and get them quarantined, and on a path to not spread the infection as fast as it might otherwise typically may have happened. So those are, in a way, very positive things.

When it comes to the metrics we're really looking at that would give us pause for concern, the percent positive, right, because as our testing increases, it's just natural to think we're going to catch more of those asymptomatic cases. That's what's happening now. So the percent positive is really what we always want to talk about and look at.

If we got back up to the 4% and 5%, 6% positive, in terms of our caseload, that's when I think we'd start saying, okay, let's really dig deep here and figure out what else we might need to do. But, I mean, right now our percent-positive case rate is still somewhere around the 1% range, or even less. It kind of bounces around day-to-day, a little less, little higher than 1%.

So the other big metric is the hospital capacity, right, making sure that we have the ventilators, the beds, the skilled care need for those with the most serious symptoms. And we have a massive amount of hospital capacity. I think we still have less than 10.

Commissioner Shibinette:

Seven.

Governor Sununu:

Seven individuals today in hospitals, so virtually no one, frankly, is even in a hospital. So, we know the cases will rise. But it's really those most aggressive cases with harsh symptoms that can lead to the fatalities and the mortality that we don't want to see again.

So, as long as we have that hospital capacity, as long as we're not getting back to the 100 or 200 people in a hospital on a daily basis -- and we may -- those are the numbers, I think, when we start getting back to, let's say, the March and April numbers that we saw. We were able to manage at that level previously. We have even more resources available today to manage through with those numbers and those capacity issues.

So we feel very comfortable going forward that, even as cases rise, we have a system in place that can manage. And it's not just about the cases. I guess that's the overall point. It's really about being able to handle the most severe symptoms and making sure that a lot of the more significant outbreaks don't happen.

In terms of the university system, to your third question, constantly working and talking to the Presidents of the universities, most of them have very good plans in place. They are working to those plans. That's the good news. It isn't just a plan that they hope for the best and left it on the desk. They're really managing to those plans, because they've set an expectation for their students and faculty. And I think we can all appreciate that very, very much.

And again, for those students or situations that may violate the rules or the guidance that we've put into place, there are repercussions for that, of course. And each of the universities has to take that under advisement and manage to that, as well.

But, again, I don't think we're near a place to say, well, if we hit a certain number of cases, or a certain this, or a certain that, at that metric you shut everything down. I think because each university's very different, each campus is managed very differently. And whether it's the quarantine provision, their access to healthcare, the severity of symptoms they might be seeing, and the severity of the outbreaks they might be seeing, all of those are variables that really come into play.

And we're a smaller State. And we have great relationships with all, both the public and private university Presidents and Managers. And so, we have the ability to take those on a one-on-one basis to help them make the best decisions with Dr. Chan and his team at Public Health. And again, just making sure we're allowing each of them to manage, and we will be there to support those management decisions as they go.

This is for the Governor or the Commissioner. We're learning that some employees at City Hall in Nashua have tested positive for COVID-19.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah.

What kind of oversight does the State have with a situation like that? And is there any contact tracing that has to be done with people who just went into City Hall, members of the community?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, I'll let the Commissioner talk to the contact-tracing aspect of it. I can tell you that if a Government Entity, per se, whether it be a Police Department, a City Hall, a Board of Selectmen, a Planning Board, whatever it might be, if the COVID infection rate had gotten to the point where there's an inability to function, obviously we will always be talking to them, communicating with them, and support whatever they may need to make sure that their towns and their Departments can keep moving forward.

I mean, we obviously are -- we wish the best for all those who might be infected. We heard there could be a couple people down in Nashua. And we would just be there to support them for whatever their needs may be, as some of those individuals might have to quarantine or take time off of work. So it's just about, again, the ability to take each one on a individualized basis and provide the supports they need as we're there. In terms of the contact tracing, I don't know if there's anything specific the Commissioner might have.

Commissioner Shabinette:

So, Nashua Public Health has a great, robust contact tracing team down there. So I feel very comfortable with what they're able to do with the contact investigation. And if, by chance, that Public Health Team was compromised, let's say one of them tested positive, we have a structured and ongoing relationship with our Division of Public Health. And we would take over for them, if they needed us. If they needed our help in any way, we would take over for them.

But, our contact tracing for Government Officials within a town, a city, or even in State Government is no different than the general public. We have established relationships with the City of Nashua and their Public Health Department, so we can help whenever they need us to.

Commissioner, you're about three weeks out now from the beginning of Motorcycle Week. Any contact tracing reveal cases connected to events surrounding Motorcycle Week?

Commissioner Shibinette:

We have one person that tested positive that said that they did attend it. So, we didn't relate it back to Motorcycle Week. But we confirmed that they had attended Motorcycle Week. So we have one.

And I know we're only two weeks out from the campaign event with President Trump a couple weeks ago. But are there any cases connected to that?

Commissioner Shibinette:

No, we have not identified any that had gone to that rally.

Can you tell us about the Mountain View, give us an update on whether there are any...

Commissioner Shibinette:

Yeah, they have three resident cases and five Staff cases for a total of eight. And their last positive case was on 09/02. So we're just a couple days out from closing out that outbreak. So it's been quite over a week since they've had any positive cases.

Commissioner, with regard to the college students, just so I understand, the numbers UNH puts out and the numbers you have put out are different. So, some of that could be the daily lag. But is some of that also there may be some kids who attend UNH but have never gone to class?

Commissioner Shibinette:

Yeah.

And they're positive. They may be on the campus, but they're not going to class and they're not in the college community, so you don't count them.

Commissioner Shibinette:

Exactly.

Is that right?

Commissioner Shibinette:

Or they may not even be on campus, right? So, there is a little bit of discrepancy there, because when we look at contact investigations and contact tracing, we look for the purposes of really looking for known exposures and chains of transmissions, and things like that. And it really does make a difference on whether someone's living in a dorm, or if someone's living at home with their parents, let's say, and is a daily commuter. That does make a big difference.

Governor Sununu:

Do we have any questions on the phone? I bet we do. And we always do.

Holly Ramer with the Associated Press:

Hi, I have a question for Commissioner Shibinette, sort of a follow-up to Adam's question about Bike Week and the President rally. From the Public Health perspective, do you agree with the Governor's comments, I think, last week, when he was asked about attendees at the Trump rally not wearing masks, he compared it to seeing someone at the grocer store not wearing a mask? Are those scenarios equivalent, like people passing each other in a grocery aisle, versus people sitting shoulder-to-shoulder for several hours at a rally?

Governor Sununu:

You want to take that one? All right.

Commissioner Shibinette:

I think my comment to that question is any time you're within 6 feet of someone and not wearing a mask, you increase your risk for exposure to COVID-19.

Governor Sununu:

And again, I think, just to make sure we're clear, the question was, when looking at the Trump rally occurred had to do in terms of the enforcement aspects, in terms of if someone is required to wear a mask in a grocery store and they're walking down the aisle of a grocery store, they're required to wear the masks at the Trump rally and all the provisions, I think, if the organization were to try to make and encourage everyone to wear masks.

If someone's not wearing their mask in a grocery store or not wearing their mask at the Trump rally, I think those organizations, whether it's a store or the Trump rally, that they're trying their best to make sure that people are adhering to social distancing. They're following the arrows. They're wearing their masks and doing those things. But, again, you could get situations in each of those circumstances, or protests, or any number of circumstances where people are taking their masks off for whatever reason.

Caitlin Andrews with the Bangor Daily News:

Hi, thank you so much. I have two questions for the Governor. My first question is: how have you factored in other States' reopening strategies, specifically Maine, when you've been pursuing your own reopening strategy?

Governor Sununu:

So, well, we kind of -- how do I factor in other States' strategies of reopening when we look at ours? On a 30,000-foot level, I think, at a specific level, we will look at kind of what other States are doing just to always -- if anything, just for some ideas and whether they've been successful with those re-openings, if they've tried something even before we have.

But from a 30,000-foot level, I think the most impact that we can potentially see in terms of reopening is out of Massachusetts, because as they had originally constricted and put a lot of their regulations in place, I used the analogy months ago where it was like squeezing a tube of toothpaste, right? If you constrict everything here, everyone from Massachusetts was going to come up to New Hampshire, in terms of using the beaches or our restaurants, or our bars, or whatever it might be. And so, knowing that that would be a result of what one State might do, that was a factor -- not the only variable -- but a factor and a variable that we took into consideration in determining the timing and how we might implement those types of restrictions.

But our guidelines are really written for the most part with our Working Group, with the Department of Public Health, and the stakeholders, themselves. I think that's why our guidelines have been so successful in New Hampshire is that it's not just the Governor and the Commissioner sitting in the office trying to whip something up. We're really asking the stakeholders their ideas on how to do it; working with the Department of Public Health to making sure the safety provisions can also be put into place; and allowing that to successfully move forward.

So that's mostly how the process takes place. We look at other States a little bit. But it's mostly for ideas and if anything extreme would be happening that might have a net result back into the State of New Hampshire.

Caitlin Andrews with the Bangor Daily News:

Thank you. And my second question is: so based on some of my research, it looks like critics of your reopening strategy and how you've handled the pandemic have mostly focused on how you've been spending CARES Act money, your school reopening strategy, and your handling of nursing home outbreaks. Why do you think those issues have been really the center of the criticisms against you? And what do you think that says about your strategy overall?

Governor Sununu:

So let's be clear. Critics want to criticize how we're spending our CARES Act money? I think we've spent our money better than any State in the country. I mean, we've put more money out faster to more individuals, not just piling it into government, but really supporting the economy, the PPE, the testing needs of the community. We've knocked it out of the park, frankly. And I give our team a lot of credit for that.

Anyone that wanted to attempt to criticize the nursing home issue, we had our outbreaks. At one point, I think we had 20, almost 30 outbreaks in long-term care facilities in New Hampshire. And now, we have one. Now, we have one. So, really working with those long-term care facilities, working with the frontline staff, providing the resources and supports, we've been able to drastically reduce that down to one outbreak and have, again, some of the lowest COVID numbers in the entire country.

In terms of the reopening school strategy, again, I think it's one of the best plans you're going to find, because it provided flexibility at the local level to ensure success. And when you have 70 -- I'll ballpark 75 out of 85 school districts in the State either opening, or opening in some sort of hybrid mode, and less than 10 school districts going to solely a remote-learning option, that's a huge success. And I'd put those numbers up against almost any State around.

We didn't create a system that was so rigid that it would doom itself to failure, right? We allowed Teachers and Principals, and parents all to be part of that stakeholder process. And that's why I think we've had such a reopening success across New Hampshire.

So, I think you brought up three issues that I would proudly say we've become a great standard for a lot of the other States to follow. We've had great success with a lot of that. I understand that the Democrats wanted to sue me over the CARES Act funding and slow it all down, and add a bureaucratic process to it. If that had happened, we wouldn't be bringing in the planeloads of PPE. We wouldn't be able invest in testing as far as we've been able to do. And we wouldn't be investing in our businesses, nonprofits, and even the self-employment opportunities that we've been able to do. No other State's done that.

We've put more money out to businesses, nonprofits, and the self-employed than any State in the country, not per capita, total dollars: more than Florida, more than Texas, more than California, more than New York. Here, in New Hampshire, we've been able to do that, more dollars into our communities than any other State, and very proud of that. And we've been able to maintain some of the lowest COVID numbers. And we have the strongest economy in the northeast. So, you put all those pieces together, I think our team has knocked it out of the part. If that's what they're criticizing, I guess we're doing pretty well, right?

Michael Graham with the New Hampshire Journal:

Thanks so much. I have a couple questions, and one involves math. So I'd like to ask it and then follow up with the other two, if that's okay, because I just want to clarify. Did you say, or did someone say earlier, that we're paying out enhanced unemployment benefits to 57,000 people, but there are 42,000 people unemployed? Or did I hear that wrong? Could I get a clarification on the numbers?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah. No. So those numbers are correct in that remember we're paying back to August 1st. So when you add all of the individuals since August 1st that have been on unemployment that, at one time or another, would have qualified for this \$300, that that's where you get the 57,000. And today, we have about 42,000. But, you have to remember. A lot of people have either come on-and-off the rolls in the previous weeks.

Michael Graham with the New Hampshire Journal:

Right; okay. I just wanted to clarify. So, thanks for that. Speaking of the unemployment numbers, there was a vote in the U.S. Senate today to extend benefits, to add the benefits, to do another layer of COVID benefits. And it failed to pass. Both U.S. Senators from here in New Hampshire voted against moving the money forward, which would have provided both PPP money and unemployment benefits. Your thoughts on that vote? And then, you've talked about your work with the frontline workers throughout COVID. And yet, the New Hampshire Troopers Association has chosen to endorse your opponent, Senator Feltes, in the Governor race, rather than yourself, Governor. They endorsed you two years ago. Wondering if you have any thoughts on that.

Governor Sununu:

Sure; so, look, in terms of what happened in the U.S. Senate today, it's incredibly disappointing. This was a real streamlined Bill. There wasn't as much in it as maybe the Democrats would have liked to have seen.

But my fear is that our Federal Government is waiting for the perfect Bill to come. They're letting good be the enemy of great. And at the end of the day, taking a first step, getting some important, I think, resources to where they need to go, closing these gaps, this would have been a great step to vote on today. And obviously I'm very disappointed, not just that the two Senators from New Hampshire didn't vote for it, but that it didn't pass, because you could pass this Bill and then you could come back and try something else, and try something else. You can always challenge yourself to do a little more.

But let's not wait for the perfect Bill to come, until you get everything exactly as you want. If you do that, nothing would ever happen. And unfortunately, because nothing seems to be happening in Washington, that seems to be the strategy there. And it isn't working for the American people. That's for sure.

So, I think everyone can agree that that's very disappointing. And then, hopefully they take a different tact and a different strategy, try to come together, not just talk about being bipartisan, but actually work in a bipartisan way and get something done.

As for the -- I think you asked about the union stuff. Look, I get it. It's election year politics. I think that particular union's leadership is trying to look to make a political point. It's not words that matter. That's not really what matters. Actions matter, to be sure.

And when it comes to Law Enforcement, I put our results and our actions against anybody's, frankly. I support the death penalty for Cop killers, and Dan Feltes doesn't. In fact, he talked about commuting their sentences. Dan Feltes accepts support from people like Tom Steyer, who's the billionaire funding the Defund the Police Movements all across this country. And obviously that's nowhere that we want to be.

So, I'm very proud to have the support of many Law Enforcement individuals. And Law Enforcement and our Firefighters, our First Responders, those are the folks really on the frontlines in our communities. They do an incredible job. They understand this concept of supporting the individual. I mean, they're the ones kind of running into the fire, right? They're running into that line of fire sometimes. And they do it sometimes without even regard of their own safety. And God bless them for doing it.

And we maintain and continue to be one of the safest States in the country. That's not by accident. That's by design. They do a tremendously good job, the rank-and-file in law enforcement. And we will continue to support them any way we can.

Tat Bellamy-Walker with New Hampshire Public Radio:

Hello, Governor. I'd like to ask. So, the State's dashboard shows 37 active cases at UNH-Durham. And UNH's dashboard lists 80 active cases as of Wednesday, September 9th, for students, faculty, and staff. Could you explain the difference here in reporting active cases?

Governor Sununu:

Okay. Do you want to answer it? A very similar question, I think, to what we answered before, but I'm going to have the Commissioner come up and talk about -- the quick answer -- and I'll let the Commissioner put the finer points on it -- is it's really the difference between students that are active within the campus and the classrooms and students that are simply on the rolls at UNH that may even be off-campus or not currently participating in classes. But I'll let the Commissioner put a finer point on that.

Commissioner Shihinette:

Yeah, this issue, it will really show at UNH, because UNH is doing their own testing. So they have access to their positive cases immediately. So, exactly what the Governor said is that UNH can count everybody, and that includes students that are not on campus. That includes Staff that are not on campus.

And the Department of Public Health -- or the Division of Public Health, when we get our positive cases, it takes a day-or-two to do that full case investigation, contact tracing, all of those things. That is when we put it up. And we put it up for students and Staff that are on campus. So, that's where the discrepancy is coming in.

The State is always going to lag a day-or-two behind, or maybe even three days behind what you're seeing. It's not going to take care of the full discrepancy, because we're counting different things at times. We're only counting students and staff that are on campus and attending classes, or participating in activities on the campus.

Governor Sununu:

Great, that's it for online. Anything else, Adam?

Are you worried at all, Governor, about campuses turning into sort of just COVID generators, I mean, as we go on here?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, I mean, I don't want to sound repetitive. But I think since June we've been really talking about, as schools open up, as campuses open up, as it gets a little colder in the fall, we have a lot of concerns about campuses or other areas that may become super spreader-type events. It could be something as simple as a fraternity party. And I think that both the school and the Department of Public Health has been very good about identifying those type of situations. We've had a couple, but I think they've been able to manage it and not let it become a massive event across the campus. It could be events in the classroom, or on-campus housing, off-campus housing.

So, again, I think the guidelines that a lot of the campuses put forth are really solid and I think they can be managed to very well. So far, we've had a lot of success. And we will just keep supporting those university systems, as they manage, as they do their testing.

I think we knew that initially we're going to see a bit of a bump, right, because we're doing a lot of the initial testing, as students come onto those campuses. So it's natural to see a bit of a bump, because we're pre-identifying a lot of folks. And that's why, again, you got folks that aren't anywhere near the UNH campus that are identified as students that might be on their list.

But, no, I think we feel confident it can all be managed. But we will be there, if you do see these outbreaks. But, yeah, it's definitely an area of concern. I got to be honest. There's not many areas in New Hampshire where I'm not concerned about. I mean, that's kind of the job, unfortunately, at this point, is I always say as good as things are going, my job really is to plan for the worst and hope for the best.

And I think by doing that, we've really hedged our bets. We always have a Plan B. We're working with folks at a very localized, individual level. And regardless of what might come our way, we can manage. We can get it done. Paula, how are you?

Good, how are you?

Governor Sununu:

You're like the bookend, Paula. You start us off and you always got a good one to finish us with. What do you got?

Thank you. I appreciate that. The bubble, the NBA is using this pretty successfully to maintain these cases. Would it be possible for colleges to create a bubble and not infect the communities in which they live?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, so the question is: could we do a bubble-type system that you might see in professional sports around college and universities. The quick answer is no, unfortunately not, primarily because you have Staff. You have administrative-type services. You have the folks that might clean the classroom, or the folks that might do the technology. They're coming-and-going so much from their homes to the community, to the grocery store. So unless everybody you can put in that bubble and, with the university

systems, there's just so many people you're talking about. And there is just a need to interact with the community.

NBA is obviously a little bit different. You have the Coaches and the Players. And really that's it. And they've really cut everybody else off. Each team might have -- I'm guessing -- 20 people on the team might be in the bubble in the NBA. Well, each university would have a couple thousand, maybe.

So, yeah, unfortunately, that type of system probably doesn't work, which is why, again, we've been so aggressive about creating their guidance and helping them create their guidance documents that would be something that they could manage, and understanding their own individual dynamics. And so far, we've done, I think, pretty well. I think the university system has done pretty well. But we're going to keep working with them.

And not to end on a negative, but it is that reminder that even a small dorm party, or a small fraternity party, or whatever it might be can have a domino effect across the campus. We've seen it in other universities in other States where the entire system has to shut down. We don't want to get to that point. I think we don't have to get to that point. It's all manageable.

But we are asking that sacrifice of the students and the Staff to maintain their distance, wear their masks, follow the protocols; make sure they're following the testing protocols, as well. And if they do right by that and can hold out a few months here, I think we could be in good shape, because it is only going to get colder. And I still believe that, as the flu and the cold, and things that transmit in a similar way as COVID, as those potentially increase.

But who knows? Someone asked me today, maybe about everyone washing our hands any more, wearing masks, and maintaining better distancing, maybe we don't have the flu outbreaks that we traditionally have, or we don't have the common cold outbreaks. And it'd be great to know that maybe the COVID won't follow that same type of viral path.

But a virus is mathematics. It kind of works that way in terms of how it spreads, its attack rate, and all of that. That's why Commissioner Shibinette and Dr. Chan have been so fantastic about understanding how this stuff works and incorporating that into those guidance documents. So, yeah, a big part of why we're so successful, so big thank you to them.

Can you provide an example for the GAP Fund, somebody who really just -- I think one of those who fell through the cracks?

Governor Sununu:

Sure, so there were, for example, a small hotel chain. There were some folks that were part of either Best Western or maybe even a Marriott. They might have had two or three hotels here. But technically that's a franchise. But the hotels were really struggling. So by providing some additional financial information, I think the BFA worked with the GAP Fund and provided them some financial opportunity that otherwise knocked them out of the Main Street Relief Fund.

Most of them, I believe, were still small businesses, under \$20 million in revenue. But some, because of the franchise effect, or maybe folks that just didn't apply in time, they missed the application deadline. They thought the company was going to be better off than it was, had a little trouble maybe in July or August. So they applied that way. So sometimes it was just timing for individuals.

And sometimes it was individuals that input the wrong number. Remember if you wrote the wrong revenue expectation or numbers in your original Main Street form, by law we couldn't go back and

allow you to change that, because that would have messed with the whole formula for everybody. So we pushed those folks over to the GAP Fund, and they're providing a lot of that same opportunity. So we've given everyone a second shot at it.

Okay. Well, thank you, guys, very much. We will be back next Thursday with some more updates. And thanks, everyone, for helping keep the COVID numbers low, keep the economy strong. And again, we're in middle of September at this point. We're on a good track, but let's just keep it up. We will get there. Thank you, guys.