



Office of Governor Christopher T. Sununu
Press Conference
Wednesday, September 29, 2021 at 3:00 p.m.

Governor Sununu:

Good afternoon, everybody. Hey, David. How are you? Good to see you. I didn't know we were going to see you here today. So, it's good to see you, buddy. Well, thanks, everyone, for joining us today. Before we get into the Public Health update, and lots of things going on across the State, I did want to briefly talk about what did happen today at this morning's Executive Council meeting.

There was a group of some unruly and very aggressive individuals that interrupted the work of the Council today. We had to postpone the meeting before it even started due to safety concerns for our State Employees. And I just want to be very clear. We will not allow our State Employees to be put in harm's way simply for doing their job. Ensuring the safety of the State Employees is always the number 1 priority.

We had to have State Police escort Department of Health and Human Services Career Employees to their vehicles. Just think about that for a second. State Employees came to work today just intending to go to the Council meeting and do their job. But they had to leave with a Police escort. And that is not what New Hampshire is about, not by any means.

So, we made the decision to postpone the Council meeting, knowing that we can reschedule to a safer venue, ensuring a more orderly process where State Employees won't be threatened. Of course, the public will always be allowed to attend. These are public meetings. But we're just going to ensure that the few individuals that caused the disruption aren't going to be allowed to, again, just interfere with the work of Government and the work of the people.

Make no mistake, threatening any State Employees or individuals involved in the process, many of these individuals who have helped manage this pandemic crisis so successfully over the past 18 months, will not be tolerated. And we are going to continue to get the job done for the State of New Hampshire.

We've got an incredible Team here at the State. And first and foremost, we want everyone to know that that Team is moving forward on a lot of these items. It's not going to slow down our -- whether it's moving forward with the vaccine, moving forward with testing, moving forward with all these different pieces that, to-date, we really have led the country in so many different ways.

I do want to talk a little bit about there were a couple Contracts that were really driving a lot of the concerns that some of these individuals had at this morning's meeting. I want to take a moment and just talk about them a little bit, just dispel some of the misinformation about these Contracts that's really swirling around. A lot of it's on social media and I think people tend to look at social media sometimes and think they're reading facts.

But the Contracts are fully federally funded. There are two Contracts. But, again, there are no State Taxpayer funds being used in either of these Contracts. And they simply continue to help the State ensure that we can successfully manage through the pandemic crisis.

They do things like supporting the Manchester and Nashua Public Health Departments, so First Responders can continue to get their vaccines and their booster shots. They fund our call centers. They pay for vaccine storage and shipment and logistics. They deliver funds to additional Public Health Networks across the State. And of course, they continue to administer the vaccines, including the booster shots, especially for our vulnerable population.

So, these are very important Contracts. These are Federal funds that come in. It's an opportunity that we will continue taking advantage of. As the folks know, a lot of what we do, in terms of spending in our programs around the pandemic and vaccines, and boosters, and testing, a lot of it -- the majority of it, really, comes from the Federal Government in one way or another. So, there's really nothing unprecedented in that respect.

Again, virtually every other State in the nation has accepted these funds. The vote to accept these funds is before every State, and specifically regarding the Vaccine Registry. We were the last State to authorize one. Every State in this country, from Montana to Texas, from Governor Gavin Newsom to Governor Ron DeSantis, they all have and manage Vaccine Registries, every single one of them. And there's virtually no citizen in those States that see this as some sort of infringement on their rights. So, again, we are the last State, the only State that currently doesn't have a Vaccine Registry. Conservative States, liberal States across this country all have and manage them very, very successfully.

A lot of the opposition to the Contracts also surrounds one specific paragraph that came from the Federal Government. And that paragraph has really been mistaken to mean that, by accepting COVID funds, we'd somehow give up our sovereignty as a State. That has never been the case. I would never allow that to be the case. It's unequivocally untrue. And the Executive Councilors have asked for the Attorney General to weigh in to ensure that New Hampshire can still manage these funds and others with minimal Federal interference, as we always have.

Of course, that would be of utmost concern to us. There's a reason why New Hampshire continues to manage this crisis better than most other States. We do it our way. We do it the New Hampshire way, the Granite State way. And we've been very successful in that.

It's important to note that this kind of paragraph, this boilerplate language, is contained in other Contracts that the Council has voted to accept before. It's language that every other State accepts. Again, more liberal States, more conservative States, every State accepts these funds and this language. So there's nothing unprecedented. And even the bipartisan Fiscal Committee previously accepted the State's ARP funds, which had similar language as to these Contracts. So, again, it's nothing unique. It's been approved by some of the same people now questioning the funds, which, again, just kind of enhances the confusion around it.

So, I just wanted to take a few moments and really do everything we can to clarify what this is, our next steps, and make sure that folks have confidence that we can move forward very successfully and within the State. And none of the language prohibits the State from managing the processes in our own way. That's the most important piece, of course.

People have asked about the vaccine -- the, the Federal Vaccine Mandate from the Biden Administration. I've been very clear, as it pertains to this new OSHA loophole that they're going after. I fully and continue to intend to sue the Biden Administration. I think it is an absolute infringement on the individual rights of these businesses.

We've always said the vaccine is a choice. And we're going to keep saying that and promoting that, because it absolutely is, and it needs to be. From the Government's perspective, there should be no Government-driven Vaccine Mandates on adults at this time. It's really -- in terms of that Mandate aspect,

we're still going to go forward with it, because, as I've said for the past few minutes here, making sure that New Hampshire does it New Hampshire's way is how we've been so successful.

Making sure that my Team has all the tools and resources at their disposal to work at a very granular, localized level, that's how we get the success that we've had. Being able to put the hours in; be able to talk to folks one-on-one. Even though there are Federal funds coming in as they always have been for the past 18 months, New Hampshire's going to do it New Hampshire's way. And so, again, we just wanted to take a little time and dispel some of the concerns there.

We fully intend on coming back in the next couple weeks. And again, we will have a venue, like I said, that will be open and available to the public, but make sure that we're ensuring the safety of the State Employees, the Councilors, whatever it is, just so those few individuals that, again, we just had to -- we had the flexibility to be able to take a pause today in just making sure that we do it right and do it within the confines of safety. A couple other things to talk about, but maybe we can turn it over to Dr. Chan for a Public Health update.

Dr. Chan:

Great, good afternoon. I have a numbers update, then I have a few comments about what has transpired the last couple weeks around authorization and recommendation of vaccines for booster doses.

So, first the numbers: we're reporting 444 -- excuse me, 443 new people diagnosed with COVID-19 today. In the last week and in the last few weeks, we have continued to average between 400 to 500 new infections per day. And currently, there are 3,648 people with active infection.

The test-positivity has been slowly declining the last several weeks. Currently, we're averaging around 4.8% of all infections -- of all tests positive for COVID-19. Hospitalizations have also remained elevated. There are 146 people currently hospitalized statewide in our hospitals with COVID-19. And then, unfortunately two new people that we're reporting that have died from COVID-19, bringing the total to 1,479 deaths during this pandemic in New Hampshire. Neither of these two individuals was associated with a long-term care facility. And in fact, the majority of deaths that we are identifying and reporting out on a daily and weekly basis continue to be community-associated deaths from COVID-19.

Some brief remarks here about booster doses, so as I'm sure everybody is aware, last week the FDA authorized the use of the Pfizer BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for use as a booster dose. And then, the ACIP -- that's the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices -- and the CDC recommended use of the Pfizer BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for booster doses in certain at-risk individuals.

I want to emphasize, though, that our goal in Public Health is still focused on vaccinating people who have not yet completed a primary vaccination series to become fully vaccinated. A primary COVID-19 vaccination series -- or vaccine series remains effective. So, putting this another way, a two-dose series of Pfizer, two doses of the Moderna vaccine, or a one-dose J&J Janssen vaccine remains effective at preventing COVID-19, preventing infection, preventing severe illness, hospitalization, and death. In fact, a recent study highlighted the fact that unvaccinated people, people that are not fully vaccinated, are at a 5-fold higher risk of infection, 10-fold higher risk of hospitalization, and 11-fold higher risk of death from COVID-19 compared to people who are fully vaccinated.

So even while boosters become available, it's important for everybody who is not yet fully vaccinated to become fully vaccinated; for people who have not taken the step to get their first shot, to do so; for people that have received only one dose of a two-dose series to complete their vaccination series.

And we continue to recommend that even people who were previously infected with COVID-19 should also become fully vaccinated.

People who have been naturally infected do have some protection, do have some immunity against recurrent infection. But studies have shown that vaccination after natural infection provides higher levels of protection and likely longer duration of protection and immunity. A lot of our focus -- so a lot of our focus continues to be on vaccinating the unvaccinated.

And then, finally, my last comment, we are entering flu season. Flu season is imminent. And I want to also highlight that it continues to be a Public Health recommendation that everybody six months of age-and-older seek out an influenza vaccine this season. People can receive both the COVID-19 vaccine and the influenza vaccine at the same time and during the same visit.

It's important for people that may have been vaccinated against influenza in the past to get an updated flu vaccine this season. There are four different strains of the flu that are protected against. Two of them have been updated in this year's vaccine. The H1N1 strain and the H3N2 strain of the flu virus have been updated. So continue to also recommend that as we enter the flu season, that people also seek out an influenza vaccine. And again, it remains important for everybody who's eligible to get vaccinated with both the COVID-19 vaccine as well as the influenza vaccine. And in fact, both vaccines can be given at the same appointment and during the same visit. Thank you.

Commissioner Shibinette:

Thank you. Just a couple of quick updates from me: an outbreak update. We have six outbreak to close today. Bellamy Field, Carriage Hill, Pleasant View, Ridgewood Center, Rockingham County Nursing and Rehab, and Windham Terrace Assisted living all closed since our last press conference.

We have three new outbreaks to announce today: Cheshire County Department of Corrections; Riverside Rest Home; and Summercrest Senior Living. So that brings our total outbreak -- our current institutional outbreaks to 10 in our State.

Just an update on contact tracing, all along through the pandemic we have done as many case investigations as possible with all of the cases. One of the reasons for doing those case investigations and contact tracing is to learn more about transmission pathways, risks of close contacts, and other features of the virus.

We know most of this information now. So, for the last year and a half, we've tallied that information. So, we really want to hone our contact tracing into what we typically do for infectious disease. So what you're going to see is us prioritizing our contact tracing around outbreaks, specifically, unusual cases, providing support to our partners in the communities, like schools or nursing homes, congregate living settings, anything like that, and then keeping our surveillance and dashboards up-to-date. We're still going to monitor and track demographics, and variants, and breakthrough cases, but really prioritizing our contact tracing in the community for outbreaks in congregate living settings.

One last thing is there's a lot of talk nationally about testing resources and shortage of testing. We are in contract negotiations with a private Vendor to start setting up some testing sites around the State, and really being able to contract and expand, depending on what the volume is and what the need is in the State.

So we will start in the coming weeks, depending on Contract approval through Governor and Council, and those types of things. We will be setting up four sites in the next three to four weeks to do widespread PCR testing, as our volumes continue to increase. That's all I have. Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Great. Thank you, Dr. Chan and Commissioner Shibinette. A few more things, if I could add, and then we will open it up for questions. Just talking a little bit about the data, as we look forward, we want folks to know that New Hampshire remains well-situated in terms of being able to manage the crisis, in terms of our average daily cases, our hospitalizations, the unfortunate death rate.

We continue to track all of this data day-to-day. We look at the trends. We look at not just single points in time. We look at how it's affecting individual communities, how the numbers are moving across the State.

We still rank as having one of the lowest rates of COVID nationally. Even more importantly, though, we currently have the third-lowest daily average rate of hospitalization nationally, the second-lowest daily average rate of death nationally. And we all know that every single death is -- are individuals and their family members, and they're members in our community.

But there's no doubt that our Team here in New Hampshire has -- continues to do a tremendous job in managing the COVID crisis. As I've always said, COVID is going to be with us for years to come, potentially. And these statistics and keeping an eye on them, and those trends, are really the key to our management process to know where we need to allocate funds, where we need to allocate resources to make sure that we have the best impact for the individuals of our State.

As has been in the news in the last few weeks, the Biden Administration has stated that they will be requiring vaccines for Healthcare Workers at facilities that take Medicare and Medicaid. Even though these healthcare facilities are private entities and we -- as a Government, you really don't have a say over the operations of a private entity, whether they're nonprofits or for-profit companies.

My job, as your Governor, is to maintain communication with them, kind of check their pulse, constantly see how things are going, which means we continually do that, especially with the Hospital Association, talking to individuals, CEOs, Association Members, what the response to some of those individual Mandates within those organizations are.

We know that a private entity has the right to mandate those vaccines for their Employees. It's their choice. And as I've always said, no single Government Entity, whether it be the Governor or the President, should really be interfering with that choice for those organizations.

But we have had the conversations to see how they plan to manage potential staffing shortages. That is really the issue across the entire country right now. We're seeing staffing shortages for a variety of reasons, specifically within healthcare.

Now, here, in New Hampshire, it's even a little more exasperated, because our economy is so strong. There's so many other job opportunities out there. So it is a fact that some Nurses are leaving hospitals and healthcare facilities as a result of the Vaccine Mandates across the country. We need to acknowledge that. We need to talk with those organizations, look at the timing and what the real effects are.

Again, while we can't control the individual organizations, my -- one of my primary jobs is to make sure that we are putting every resource we can to maintain the best and highest quality access to healthcare in the State. And we want to make sure that while other States have hit crisis points, and as we've talked about visiting Kentucky and few other States that really have had some real workforce management crises, we always want to stay a couple steps ahead of it and make sure that, while it is a crunch here without a doubt, that we don't hit the crisis point that many other States have seen with their workforce shortages.

Also, to build off what Commissioner Shibinette spoke about a little earlier, I just want to take one last moment and talk about the fact that it is a fact that there is a nationwide shortage of rapid antigen tests and monoclonal antibodies. We've expressed our concerns with the Administration. Just in the last week, I've had calls with the White House and other Governors to express the need to get more of these rapid antigen tests, more access to monoclonal antibodies, which are a terrific treatment when you identify COVID early within an individual, to make sure that it doesn't get more severe.

But the draw on those resources is so severe in the rest of the country. It's very hard to get access to them, not just here in New Hampshire but virtually every State. And so, we've talked to the White House about it. We've talked to the Manufacturers. And we're going to continue to push to provide as much as access as possible. And as the Commissioner highlighted, we're going to be expanding a lot of our potential testing sites specifically around the PCR tests, which we do have decent access to and we're going to keep using those.

They take a little longer. They're not as rapid as the rapid tests. But making sure that folks have access to testing, especially as we hit a potential winter surge, is really, really important. I guess, with that, we can open up for questions, folks.

Q&A Session

Governor, what do you have to say about the fact that a public process was interrupted today by people who opposed something but weren't willing to sit there and listen to the process unfold? Is that troubling to you about the direction of where this is headed?

Governor Sununu:

I wouldn't say it's troubling. Obviously it's very unfortunate. The only good news to the whole situation is we can take a pause. It doesn't bring any Government services to a halt or anything like that. We have the flexibility built into our system that we can kind of take a step back, ensure folks are going to be safe. There was just a few individuals there that were getting very aggressive and had made very open threats. And that's just not going to be tolerated, of course.

So we will have our meeting in a couple weeks. We will do it in a location that we can ensure that safety and security. It's -- you want -- it's an amazing thing that the State of New Hampshire, unlike almost any other State in the country, has such open and accessible public processes.

We're one of the only States that even has an Executive Council. And the fact that folks can come in -- I mean, I've been in the Executive Council seat. I've been in the Governor's seat. I've been there when we have 150 people from the prolife side and 150 people from Planned Parenthood. And it's always respectful, right? They have very differing point of views and they sometimes will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Governor and the Councilors as they're taking their vote. That's an amazing opportunity for people to really be part of the process. But it's always understood that it's done respectfully. It's done, understanding that you can -- you might win the vote. You might lose the vote. But you always have to respect that process.

Today was clearly something that diverged very aggressively from that. It's just not going to be tolerated. And we do have flexibility and means to make sure that we can manage through it. But we are going to go forward, without a doubt. We're going to make sure that not just these Contract but the others, whether they be from the Department of Safety or the Contracts for the Department of Health and

Human Services, this can all go forward in a couple weeks. And we will do it in a safe manner to make sure that, again, nothing is really stopping per se. We've had the flexibility to take a pause and hopefully give folks time to take a breath and realize that while there are passions on both sides of this argument, the place for what we saw -- there's really no place for what we saw today. And hopefully cooler heads will prevail and we can move forward with everything in a couple weeks.

And so, what does not going to be tolerated mean? Do you hope that people calm down and...

Governor Sununu:

Absolutely, yeah. Look, it's -- just because you're being aggressive, you're making threats, whatever it is, the process doesn't stop. There's just the opposite. The process is going to continue. We can still find a way to do it with the public's involvement. They don't have direct input. They don't get up and speak at any of these meetings. But we want them to be involved. We don't want to cut the public out of the process. We would never do that, of course.

But it's not going to have an effect on the vote. I mean, you have five Councilors there. I can't tell you where they're going to vote on these or other Contracts. I think every Governor can tell you that sometimes the Councilors vote you. Sometimes they vote against you. You're never quite sure where it's going to go. You make your case as strong as you possibly can. But everything moves forward. So, yeah, it's not going to slow down or hurt the process at all. It just means that we take a pause and come back in...

So what are you envisioning? What kind of room would you be envisioning the Council meeting in?

Governor Sununu:

Oh, well, we can look at a lot of different options, whether we do the meeting in Concord or we do the meeting -- we're kind of in the process of doing our roadshow where we take a lot of these meetings on the road to different parts. Today, we're at St. A's. That's why today was a little bit different. It was a medium-sized room but very open. Folks could come right up to the stage. And I think that's where it got a little bit aggressive with individuals. And again, we took a pause before the meeting even stopped [sic], because we didn't want anything to get unruly or out-of-hand in the middle of the meeting. And unfortunately, it didn't look like we're going to be able to go forward with many of the Contracts from Health and Human Services, in particular, when folks are making threats. We're just going to say, that's not tolerated. We're not moving forward.

One of the more vehement people this morning was somebody that had been in touch with your office, your Chief of Staff, had a call -- made time to have a call with her. I mean, is that something that you regret or you think you need to rethink how you to reach out to people who have this...

Governor Sununu:

No, I've talked to a lot of people in that room. I've personally had conversations, whether texting conversations or phone conversations, with individuals in that room. And most of the individuals in that room were okay. There were just a few that really crossed a line. And so, we had the flexibility to take a step back.

But, no, I never regret having a conversation with folks about it. We might disagree on issues. We might disagree with the process. I think there's a lot more -- there's a lot of pieces to this, as we discussed, whether it's the language in this last paragraph, the idea that we're giving away our sovereignty, which is just completely untrue. The Attorney General has verified that and will continue to do so with the Executive Council.

Whether it means we have to accept the Mandate or not, of course we don't need to accept the Biden Mandate. I'm suing the Biden Administration on that Mandate, because it is just being done with the swipe of a pen.

So, I think there's just a lot of misinformation up there. And I think it kind of had a little bit of a mob mentality. Folks kind of gathering together and kind of riling each other up, and it just went a little too far. And we got to say we're pulling back.

But this is serious stuff. We take our public access very seriously. Our access to the Governor, access to the Senators, to the Representatives, no place in the country do you have that type of access. But that also comes with the responsibility of the citizens also knowing that there's lines not to be crossed, whether it's with family, whether it's with threats or anything like that. There has to be respect on both sides and there always has been. Definitely crossed a line today, but I think -- I'm certainly very hopeful. This is New Hampshire. Cooler heads will prevail and we can move forward.

But Governor, when the language in the Contract says New Hampshire has to "assist the United States Government in the implementation and enforcement of Federal Orders related to quarantine and isolation", how does that mean, if we take this money, New Hampshire Officials have to enforce any Biden Mandates?

Governor Sununu:

It's incredibly vague. So, again, I'm going to push a little bit off to the Attorney General to explain the hows and whys. But what I'll tell you is it's incredibly vague. There's no specifics that they're asking us to adhere to. And with that vague boilerplate language, we've seen it before. It really doesn't hold water and it doesn't infringe on the sovereignty of the State.

This Council has passed a Contract with that language in it. As I said, the Fiscal Committee has -- when we took all that money from ARP, had similar-type language in it. So this isn't something new. I think maybe some folks have seen it and they're trying to grab onto it to try to slow down the process because they're upset about the Vaccine Registry or whatever it might be.

But, this is something that we've all done before on both sides of the aisle. And so, again, I'm hoping cooler heads prevail. People look at the facts. They can listen to the Attorney General, the legal

opinions, kind of the best and brightest legal minds in the State to say, okay, this doesn't infringe on our right. The Governor's still going to sue the Biden Administration over what I truly believe is an inappropriate Mandate.

Look, I'm very pro-vaccine. People know that. I want everybody to get vaccinated. I think that's the way out of this. But, as the Leader and Head of Government, I also have the responsibility of knowing the limitations of Government, the limitations of overreach.

I think there's where the Biden Administration has gone too far. This concept that the ends justify the means, they don't. I'd like to see everyone vaccinated. But I also understand I can't just wave a magic wand and force people. It has to be their choice.

Maybe it's going slower than we thought. Maybe it's going slower than we anticipated. But that's the individual and freedoms of businesses and individuals across this country. And it does have to be respected. And that's where I vehemently disagree and will challenge the Federal Administration.

Governor, what we saw today is playing out in front of School Board meetings across the State. They don't have the State Police there. They don't have security. They're not used to this. Does that not concern you that we're seeing -- like is there a role for the State to play?

Governor Sununu:

Of course, it does.

People are saying, like, we're not going to be able to recruit people to run for office. It's just not worth it. So, what is your message to those School Boards and other small communities?

Governor Sununu:

Look, we are a local-control State. I know these can be very heated, very difficult discussions. Hopefully, whether it's a School Board or a Selectman's meeting, or whatever it is, for those of us who go to Town Meeting all the time, I'm from a town of 1500. Some folks go to City Council in Manchester. You can get the same passions on both sides on a variety of issues. That, unfortunately, actually, is nothing new.

To your point that we see a lot more of it around some of these things, whether what's happening in schools or what's happening -- but we're a local-control State. And so, we've reached out. We've talked to Members of School Boards. We've talked to Members of Selectmen, in terms of ideas on how to help manage this, in terms of making sure they have an Agenda. They control the timing of the meetings. Make sure everyone has their say in a respectful way. Talk to their local Law Enforcement, if they think things are going to get a little bit out-of-hand. Prepare; don't go in naïve.

But, we have seen heated passion arguments on both sides of a discussion. They're usually very bipartisan in our local towns on a variety of different issues. So it's really nothing new except, I mean, what we saw today was really that line being crossed, right? That was new in what we're seeing. So, we're always willing to work with towns to make sure that things are being done open, fairly, and safely. Yes, sir?

Yeah, one quick thing and then a follow-up, please. You -- when Kevin read out the text that some of the people are concerned about and you said, hey, this is vague. AG thinks it's okay. We've seen it in other Contracts. I don't think we've seen a Presidential Mandate, at least in my lifetime, that orders Employers of 100-or-more people to get vaccinated.

Governor Sununu:

Never.

Or a Mandate where a hospital is told, guess what?

Governor Sununu:

That's right.

You don't get all the money you've always counted on to take care of old and sick, and poor people if you don't get all your Staff vaccinated.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah.

So what makes you trust the Biden Administration now?

Governor Sununu:

Oh, I don't trust them at all.

Okay.

Governor Sununu:

Look, I think they're pushing this kind of what I call that boilerplate, vague messaging, but it doesn't hold water. It would never hold up in court. It would never -- and that's why the sovereignty of the State is secure. That's why New Hampshire is going to keep doing it our way, even after these Contracts pass, as other Contracts.

For example, let me give you an example. When the ARP money came in, one of the stipulations with that same language, one of the stipulations was you can't lower taxes. I'm Chris Sununu. I'm always going to try to lower taxes. And we did. We've lowered a lot of taxes in this State. And we basically, if I may, told the Federal Government to go pound sand. You don't have the right to tell us that.

So we actually have examples. And I hope folks that are passionate on this issue can hear that. We have examples where we've upheld and secured the sovereignty, even though the Federal Government's throwing that language in there to accept and expend these dollars. We do it New Hampshire's way. And that's been upheld in court and all of that, and would continue to be so.

So I feel it's not about trusting the Biden Administration at all. It's about trusting the legal process and knowing our rights as a State, and making sure that we flex those abilities and those rights to the best that we can to keep doing it better than most other States can manage the process.

Both sides of the aisle sent out press releases after the canceled meeting condemning the action of the protestors.

Governor Sununu:

Sure.

It was a little surprising, because one side of the aisle didn't speak out when dozens of protestors that were in your office concerning the budget leading to five people arrested. So, question: are you surprised by that, one? And two, were any of your Employees feared -- or anyone in your office during that incident, did any of them fear for their safety in any way that you recall?

Governor Sununu:

So, two questions there. Did anyone in my office fear for our safety when those individuals were in my office and were arrested a while after?

For the budget thing.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, well, we always take a lot of precautions in the State House. We really do. So, no, I don't think there was a fear of safety other than to say things were -- I think they -- if I remember correctly, I think they had stayed past closing, right? I don't even think anyone was really in my office at the time that those individuals were arrested, because it was after 5:00 p.m.

Again, I go back to what I said. We have an amazing opportunity where you can come into the State House. You can interact with your Senators and your Representatives. And you can come. If you want to leave a message for the Governor or the Governor's Office, whatever it might be, most States you can't even do that. And so, I'm very supportive of that process as long as it's done respectfully and within the rules. I think those individuals had stayed after 5:00. So it was more of a trespassing issue, if I remember correctly. You had another question, though. I apologize.

Well, just, I mean, there were hundreds of protestors outside and dozens of people inside the building.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, oh, in terms of like the size of the -- look, and just to call it what it is, you had Democrats today after Members of our State Team were threatened, they're trying to politicize that, that we're somehow riling up the crowd that's actually threatening me and my Team. That makes no sense at all. And any Democrats that are trying to throw that type of criticism our way, shame on them.

I mean, this is a serious situation which we had here today. And it's one where the rational minds need to get together and say, look, we're just not going to tolerate that. We have an open and accessible process in New Hampshire. But safety is always going to be, do everything we can to ensure and maintain that. And the process will go forward.

We're not going to, again, tolerate the idea that they can somehow stop our process. No. And the vote might be up. The vote might be down. I don't know where the Contracts are going to go. I really don't know what's going to happen with the Contracts.

But there is a process here. It's a fair process. It's good government. It's one of the best Governments you're going to find in the country, frankly. I think Washington should take a page out of book when it comes to our model of government. I think and believe in it that strongly. So, no, any partisan political attacks after what we witnessed this morning, there's absolutely no place for that. Hi.

Hi.

Governor Sununu:

I'm just making my way across.

Can I shift topics to testing sites?

Governor Sununu:

You can do whatever you want.

Okay. Looking for some information about the four testing sites you referenced, Commissioner, in terms of where the funding comes from for those, maybe location on what you're looking at.

Governor Sununu:

Do we have any details on that? I know the details are still, I think, being worked out, but...

Commissioner Shihinette:

So our testing sites would mostly be funded by our FEMA dollars. FEMA dollars covers the testing sites. They would be run by private companies. We would be contracting with private companies. And we would likely be setting those up in some of our more population-dense areas, so some of the cities, or if there is a known gap in testing services in a specific area of the State. So we're still working out the details. But that is the plan.

And Commissioner, is this in response to sort of a lag in people being able to get tests and get responses in a...

Commissioner Shibinette:

I think that different people look for different types of tests and we became very accustomed to having the antigen rapid tests. And when there is a shortage in the rapid tests, people automatically go to the PCR test.

So we want to make sure that if there is a shortage in our State that we have the PCR backup to make sure that everybody has access to testing. So it really is just a failsafe for our testing system to make sure we have volume and capacity for the whole State.

Got it. And can I ask you about the pool testing that was offered to schools?

Commissioner Shibinette:

Um-hmm.

Can you talk a little bit about that? I guess there was a lot of money put towards that. Are schools taking advantage of it? Yes?

Commissioner Shibinette:

Yes, the SAS testing, as we call it, it's the School Surveillance testing. And we offered that program up early in the summer and we had some schools that took us up on the offer probably before school went back in. As we started to see cases tick up in our school system, more have come onboard. I don't have the exact number, but more schools has definitely come onboard with that program in the last several weeks.

And what is that process for a school district if they want to come onboard? They reach out to you and how does that work?

Commissioner Shibinette:

Yeah, and we have Vendors that are doing the school testing for the school districts. And we provide them with the information with -- for the Vendors that they can pick from one of -- I think there's three Vendors that are doing the school testing. They reach out to them directly, set up a schedule, and it's really a very simple process.

But you're not sure how many are kind of...

Commissioner Shibinette:

I don't have a number today.

I understand.

Commissioner Shibinette:

Yeah, we can follow up with that.

There's over 180 schools signed up for that testing.

Oh, thank you.

Schools, specific schools, not districts?

I'd have to -- I'm not sure. I have to clarify that.

Yes, thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Great, yeah, hi.

Hey, so you've been very vocal about the fact that you are against Vaccine Mandates and that you prefer things like education to improve vaccination rates. And I recently spoke with a nursing home who had been trying that strategy, been trying education, been trying incentivization, got about 65% of their Staff vaccinated. Then, within weeks of instituting Vaccine Mandate, that went up to 97%. And I'm just wondering, like, do you think they should have continued with that education and incentivization, when it just wasn't working?

Governor Sununu:

So, the question is really about the private institution and their change to go from more of an education process to mandating the vaccine within that private entity. It is their right to do so. They got their vaccine rate up. That's great. I continue -- let's remember. We continue to have one of the highest vaccine rates in the country. Overall I think we're 10th in the country. With our Healthcare Providers, I think we're number 1 or number 2 in the country for having the highest number of Healthcare Providers vaccinated.

So our efforts have actually worked really, really well compared to most States, in terms of education, promoting it, giving that choice and that flexibility. For various reasons, these -- some of these healthcare organizations, nursing homes, if they take Medicaid and Medicare, they're really being pushed into it in terms of mandating it for their Staff.

The issue I have is, undoubtedly, that could mean that some of their Staff decide to leave. When a Nurse leaves their job -- we have some of the best Nurses in the country. There's just no question about that, some of the best quality of healthcare. That's one of the reasons why our hospitalization rate is so low. You get great care. You can come in. You can get your antibodies, whatever it is. You can move out of the hospital very easily.

But when you lose a Nurse with years of skill and training, you can't just go hire that from a Waitress. You can't say, well, why don't you become a Nurse now, right? When you lose a Nurse to the private sector in other ways, it's really hard to get them back. And it has a real consequence.

So what I talk about with nursing homes, with hospitals is making sure that they understand, while they are private entities, while we respect their decision to do that, they -- there are consequences, if you will, in terms of the potential of losing Staff. And they've all recognized that. There's no one that has come and said, well, if we mandate the vaccine, we're not going to lose anybody. They all know that they could potentially lose staff. And again, we've asked them to provide as much as flexibility as possible for those individuals, as much flexibility on whether it's religious exemptions or whatever it might be. But again, that's their choice. The Government can't be in the business of defining what a religious exemption is, right? The Constitution says the Government can't tell you what religion is or is not. So we're just encouraging them to use as much flexibility as possible. And again, we've been one of the more successful States in the country.

I will say that this nursing home, Merrimack County Nursing Home, actually lost very few Staff as a result of this.

Governor Sununu:

That's great.

I mean, does that change your calculus at all in terms of...

Governor Sununu:

No, I've talked to CEOs of hospital that think they're going to lose 10% of their Staff. That's real. Those are CEOs that are weighing, if they were to go with the vaccine mandate, that they could lose up to 10%. So I talk to individuals. It's not just about one nursing home and one example. That's a great example right there. But there's a lot of examples on the other side of the spectrum, too. So it's very real that we will likely lose some Nurses.

But, again, if the idea's that the Government should intervene and tell a private entity who they could hire and fire, that's -- if I may, I think that's very un-American and incredibly unconstitutional. You can't tell a Government -- a business, I should say, a hospital or even a nursing home. Those are nonprofits, but they are private. And you can't tell them who they can and cannot, and who they should and should not hire and fire.

You hopefully educate them about the pros and cons, and the risks on both sides. And then, hopefully they're making the best decision. They have Boards of Directors and individuals. And they all want their organizations to succeed. They're all in the business of providing quality healthcare, whether it's to the elderly or somebody just coming in with COVID. They know those risks and they know the pros and cons. They want to keep providing services. They don't want to lose Staff. But there are various variables that go into that calculus for each of them. And they each have to make their own decisions about where they go with that.

And you feel comfortable letting them make that choice when it potentially endangers some really vulnerable residents in the homes?

Governor Sununu:

Again, if the Government starts telling private entities -- if I tell Fred at Fred's Flower Shop who he has to hire and fire, or who he has to keep on or not keep on, when the Government opens up that Pandora's Box, then let's just pick another reason why I want you to hire and fire someone. I mean, again, that's a private business. That's a real infringement on their individual rights as a business, as an entity, as folks that manage.

I ran my own business. I had 800 Employees. I would hate it. I mean, it would be unconscionable if the Government came in and started telling me who I had to hire, who I had to fire, why I could do it. We have Protected Classes now, remember, right? You cannot get rid of somebody because of their -- the color of their skin, or their race, or their gender, and things of that nature. And if someone feels like they were unnecessarily or inappropriately let go, we have our Human Rights Commission. We have a checks-and-balance system here. You can bring that to the State. And again, get -- have them review to see if there was an inappropriate termination. We have a process for that if it was inappropriate. And there could be cases like that. And again, we would take those up.

But, again, we have a process to help provide a checks-and-balance. But the Government can't be in the business of telling all private entities who they hire and fire. I mean, that's a very un-American thing to do.

So, jump back to the language Kevin referenced earlier, I mean, are you planning to have the Attorney General issue some sort of written statement to the Council, to the Fiscal Committee?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, the Council has asked the Attorney General to provide a written statement and kind of opine on the legal validity, if you will, of that paragraph in question, and provide any examples contrary to, or whatever it might be. So they've asked the Attorney General to weigh-in. And hopefully he'll do that before the next Council meeting.

Governor, as far as booster shots, is the State tracking the data on how much is given out, like you did with vaccines? And if so, do we have a rough number today as to how many people have received one?

Governor Sununu:

I don't know. I don't think we have a rough number. The process has really just started. Again, mostly with nursing homes, our most vulnerable population, now it'll go to -- and the next step would be First Responders and those that hit the six-month mark, specifically in the Pfizer world. So it's kind of a subset of everybody. A lot of folks early on got Moderna. So, I don't know if we have exact numbers. It's probably a pretty low number right now.

And then, I don't know if this is for Dr. Chan. But if I did receive a Moderna shot, could I also get a Pfizer shot? Do you advise against that?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, right now, that's not recommended. The CDC is recommending that the booster shot is a Pfizer booster. That's all that's been authorized. And it's really only for individuals that received the Pfizer vaccine initially. Dr. Chan, did I get that one right or I'll let you add in? Yeah, please. I hope I'm not too far off on that.

Dr. Chan:

No, that was the right response. I just wanted to add to it that, right, so the authorization and the recommendation for use of the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine, COVID-19 vaccine, as a booster dose is only for people that got the primary series, their first two shots, with the same vaccine, the Pfizer BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine.

What I wanted to add, though, is that Moderna has submitted data to the FDA to also get authorization for the Moderna vaccine to be used as a booster dose. There's not a clear timeline on when that may be authorized and recommended. But I think we're looking roughly potentially in the next several weeks that booster doses may open up to people that received the Moderna vaccine, who got the Moderna vaccine as a primary series, as well. So I think we're going to see a lot of changes over the next four or six weeks.

We've also heard about the J&J or Janssen vaccine also having data available for a two-dose series, or a booster after the one dose. So we're going to be seeing a lot of changes over the next several weeks. On top of that, we also have Pfizer that announced yesterday that they submitted data to the FDA for authorization for their vaccine to be used in 5- to 11-year-olds. So there's going to be probably a rapid change and rollout of vaccines both as boosters and in younger age groups over the coming month-or-two.

If someone went rogue and they were a Moderna person and they wanted to slide in and get a Pfizer booster, is there an upshot from that? Could you be harming yourself?

Dr. Chan:

Yeah, interesting question. We call this -- there's a technical term for this -- heterologous dosing, meaning using different brands, different manufacturers of the vaccine. And there's actually some early data around this coming from other countries, like the UK, where they looked at the Astra-Zeneca vaccine, which isn't available in the US, and the Pfizer vaccine together. And this is actually currently under study with the NIH, looking at different combinations of vaccines and the safety, and the efficacy of using different combinations of vaccines.

Again, not a clear timeframe on when that data's going to come out, but that could also be coming out in the near future. But this is a recognized question and issue that is actively being researched. So the safety -- like there's not a lot of data right now on the safety of using two different vaccines in somebody.

But some of these vaccines are comparable in their composition. Like the Pfizer and the Moderna vaccines are similar in terms of their vaccine technology. So it's not currently recommended that people mix vaccines. But it's an area under study right now.

Governor, with regard to the vaccine delivery system, do you think in the coming weeks or couple months we're going to have to change how we deliver vaccines right now, because of the boosters and perhaps this younger population that may need it?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, so just to clarify your question, are we going to have to change how we deliver boosters and vaccines currently through Healthcare Providers and pharmacies?

Exactly, and given what we're seeing in hospitals right now in terms of capacity and the workforce?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah. No, so great question. The answer is no. We still want to encourage people to go to the pharmacies. We want to encourage people to go to their Primary Healthcare Providers. If you want the booster, you don't show up at the Emergency Room for the booster, just like you wouldn't show up at the Emergency Room for a flu shot, per se, right? You want to use your Primary Healthcare Provider, use the networks that's in place.

There is a lot of vaccine available, obviously. And that's an opportunity. And again, we don't know what the uptake will be. We hope it's very high. Right now, it's just Pfizer. It's just with these kind of select groups. And so, I guess the good news here is, in terms of managing the logistics, it'll slowly roll out over time, right?

It's not like we're going to get a bolus of 500,000 people that are demanding the booster tomorrow. So it'll slowly roll out over time, which gives me, I think -- give us -- gives us a lot of confidence that our current logistics and delivery mechanism can handle the demand. I'm going to -- if I could, can I take a couple on the phone and then I'll come right back to you guys? I promise. I don't -- every question gets answered, so...

Holly Ramer with The Associated Press:

Hi. You said what we saw earlier today with the Executive Council is new, in terms of a line being crossed. But, excuse me. Earlier this month, HHS had to stop a public hearing on rule changes related to the Vaccine Registry because of similar protests. So wasn't that line already crossed? And in terms of today, why not remove the unruly people and continue with the meeting?

Governor Sununu:

Sure; so, yeah, a great point. I know we did have another instance at a -- I think it was at a public hearing, in terms of some issues that HHS was dealing with. I guess I just meant in terms of the Executive Council. I don't know of any time the Executive Council had to, because our process is just so open and public. That's really what I was referring to.

But it is extremely rare. There's no doubt about it. If it wasn't, then the folks would be calling for a change to the process. But it is extremely rare. And again, hopefully cooler heads will prevail and we can move forward.

In terms of the management of the situation, it's a public meeting, so we can't just clear. We couldn't just say, all right, we're going to clear the room, right, because there's individuals there that weren't being unruly. There were only a few individuals that were really pushing the issue.

So we could have started doing those individuals one-by-one. But I think in terms of the whole nature of the situation, it was a concern that if you started doing that, it could even get more out-of-hand. It was a big room, but there was a lot of people in there. And it was kind of close-knit. It was going to be very, very challenging. And I talked to Law Enforcement before we made the decision to cancel the meeting, and we asked local and State Law Enforcement what some of those risks were and how that might be managed. And it was clear that it was going to be a real challenge. And holding off and just doing the meeting in a couple weeks, as we plan to do so, in a safer venue, was just as easy.

So there's no doubt that the decision we made today was the right decision, in terms of ensuring that the safety of individuals was maintained. Unfortunately, again, we had to escort some of our State Employees out of the room already. They had already left. So we weren't even going to be able to get to a whole handful of Contracts.

So it was just the decision. I think it was definitely the right decision. We didn't want to really let the situation escalate beyond just a couple individuals, which there was a risk of that happening. And so, we just made a decision to postpone.

Michael Graham with the New Hampshire Journal:

Well, actually, Holly just kind of asked the question I wanted to ask about why the people weren't removed. So I'll ask this part of it. The scene that people saw, Democracy being brought to a stop, while Police Officers stood aside and did nothing, and while the Executive Council huddled in another room, are you concerned what that says about the willingness of the State Agencies in charge of running our Democracy and protecting citizens, etc., doing their job? And then, the second part about people doing their job in New Hampshire is how much help are you getting from the Delegation regarding trying to stop the Federal Government from imposing the Mandates that you oppose? I know Representative Kuster just said that she supports the Federal Government ordering Mandates on private businesses. What have your conversations with Senators Hassan and Shaheen, and Representative Pappas been like about the issue of New Hampshire's control over these issues?

Governor Sununu:

Sure, so I think if I heard your first question correctly -- it was a little broken-up there -- no, I'm not concerned about the willingness of individuals within our State Agencies to work with not just the Executive Council but to be part of a very important public process. Again, it's very rare what we saw today and I would ask those individuals and a lot of those folks that were there today to really look at the amazing history we have, the access that is always provided, but also the respect that is always given to the Decisionmakers, to the process, to folks within our State Government.

There's really never -- that is a line that was clearly crossed when you're threatening individuals and all of that simply to get what you want. That isn't good Democracy. That's not good government. It's

terrible, frankly. And so, again, we had the opportunity and the flexibility to be able to do it in a safer weeks in a couple weeks.

In terms of assistance from the Delegation to stop the Mandates from the Biden Administration, no, there's been no offer or assistance from any of them. I don't know exactly where they are. And I think they're all for this very unprecedented move by the Biden Administration, again an Administration where both Nancy Pelosi and President Biden, and the folks that speak for the Administration all said the Government cannot and should not be in the business of mandating a vaccine, and then two weeks later completely changed their mind. And just with a swipe of a pen, not even through an open and public process or discussion, just a swipe of a pen decided to make up some OSHA Rules, which we have yet to see, frankly. We don't even know what the Rules are, to find some type of loophole, if you will, to force this on businesses, all businesses with more than 100 Employees.

So, I think it's a process, I think, that is so stark. Do I want everyone vaccinated? Absolutely. But the process that was taken by the Administration after they clearly acknowledged they didn't have the right to do so is what is, I think, most disheartening to a lot of individuals.

Like I said, as the Governor, you want to just be able to kind of do what you want and all that kind of stuff. But, no, there's a responsibility to the limitations of government. And I hold that responsibility more than anyone else. I don't rely on others to tell me where the checks-and-balances, and the limits of government should be. That's my job to know that. And I think we respect that very, very well.

We don't have a State of Emergency right now. Our economy's very strong. We're managing this pandemic incredibly successfully here in New Hampshire. But this is clearly overreach of power, if you will, just to get the ends that they want. But, as I said, the ends do not always justify the means when it comes to the responsibility of public service and government. We have one more? Great.

Kimberley Haas with Seacoast Current:

Good afternoon, everybody. Governor, we are all very, very happy that you're feeling better and you were actually able to fly to California last weekend. My question today is: did you have concerns about flying across country during COVID, especially after recently being admitted to the hospital? And then, my second question is: what was your message to those at the GOP Convention in California? Thank you.

Governor Sununu:

Sure; no, no concerns getting on a plane. Two things: I mean, I had an internal issue that obviously didn't prohibit me from flying at all. I'm still recovering. There's no doubt I'm a little tired every now-and-then. But that's really the only residual issue.

I'm fully vaccinated, which is great. And so, again, we wear the masks on the plane as are required, and we follow all the rules in the FAA. And so, no, there's no really concern getting on a plane, as I don't think anybody, as long as they follow the rules and all that, should be concerned getting on a plane, especially if you're vaccinated. The vaccine works, right? It works. It protects you. The data shows that very, very clearly. And again, I was just asked to go out to speak at a Convention.

I met with a couple businesses while I was out there, as well, some businesses that hopefully might consider expanding into New Hampshire. That was kind of exciting to see some of the opportunities there.

But then I also spoke at a Convention, and it was a political convention, not for me or anything. But it was just about, in California, they'd just come through their recall election. And I just spent some

time talking about the opportunities, right? The opportunities to always, if you want to win an election or have a viable message, or you really want a different change in your State or your community. And that message was quite simple: be genuine. That's one thing I always champion here. You got to just be real with people. You got to not worry about the policy as much as the people. It has to be about individuals, as we do in New Hampshire. And I tried to talk about the model that we have here, the local control, the one-on-one connection we have to our Representatives and how it can be utilized very successfully to win seats that maybe otherwise you wouldn't otherwise expect to win.

But it's got to be about the individual first. And that's a little different in a State where they typically spend tens of millions of dollars on TV ads and all that kind of stuff. I just kind of went out there and talked about how we did it.

We're a very purple State, obviously. You have to be a good candidate first and a good individual first, and a genuine person first. How other States like -- that typically are more Democrat, like Maryland or Vermont, they have Republican Governors. And again, it's because they have good individuals that connect with people and they are going to have an election in 2022. And hopefully they'll find a good candidate that connects with individuals and they can have some success there. But it's just a trip out there for a day-or-two and then came right back. Hi, yeah. I know we -- thank you for being patient.

Sure, I had a question about local control and remote learning.

Governor Sununu:

Sure, okay.

Manchester had some clusters this week, I believe. And so, they used remote learning for those students, those classrooms.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah.

The State Board is considering prohibiting that, except for in emergencies. So unlike masks, which is local control, they would not want that to be local control. So what are your thoughts on that?

Governor Sununu:

Yeah, so one thing I've tried to express to not just the Commissioner but some of the Members of the Board is that when we talk about remote learning, remote learning is an opportunity, but it is not a crutch. It is nothing we should lean on. It fills a gap, but it is clearly not the best way to have education for our kids.

So, in the rare circumstances where classrooms or communities, or schools, whatever, might have to go remote temporarily. It really needs to truly be temporary, if that's what the Board decides to do, and can't be something that districts become overly accustomed to, to lean on, because you're not just -- you're not going to get the best results for those kids. So it's really for emergency situations only and

encourage those communities to use it as sparingly as possible. And I think that that message is fairly understood, and we haven't seen any abuses of it, if you will.

We want kids in the classroom. The kids want to be in the classroom. The Teachers want to be there. But we want to make sure that we have a system that doesn't just say, okay, we're going to just let everybody go remote at their whim. The best education is in the classroom for those kids. And so, at all costs we want to defer to that as much as we can.

And is there different guidance for clusters? Maybe this is a question for the Commissioner. Rather than remote, is there some guidance or some threshold to reach where it's just send the kids home that are infected or...

Governor Sununu:

No, I think each individual community really -- again, we do help them with the contact tracing to-date. And the quarantining to-date typically comes within a family, right? It's not a classroom. Just because one student has COVID doesn't mean you quarantine the whole classroom.

So it would really come under a situation where either many kids actually have COVID or many kids have family members with COVID. So the idea that you're going to have a whole classroom that is potentially quarantined, it can happen. But it's not like it was last year, right? And so, again, there's no specific rules and guidance that say if you hit a certain threshold, then you must quarantine everyone or anything like that. We work with families and individuals that have COVID and those family members that can potentially come in contact with them.

Remember, if you're even in the same household, if you can remain separated, right, you don't have the same quarantine provisions. There's a lot more flexibility when you remain separated in a household. So we're also trying to educate folks on that. It can be hard. There's no doubt it can be very hard on families. I've heard from families where kids are getting quarantined for a long time. I get it. It's really, really challenging on those families. Our goal is to make those situations as few and far between as we can. Yeah.

Yeah, real quick follow-up on the Nurse questions that she brought up real quick. So in the same way that you would not be comfortable forcing a business, or private business, or a nonprofit to enhance the vaccination, you would not be forcing that same organization to not require the vaccinations even if it was -- so we have a Public Health situation in Merrimack County Nursing Home. There was concerns. At Concord Hospital, I've heard as many as 900 Employees are not vaccinated and potentially going to be fired in October.

Governor Sununu:

I'm not sure what that -- but go ahead.

A Doctor corrected me and said, well, it's 80%. And I said, well, that's still 600 to 700 people. I would think that 600 or 700 people being laid off in a large hospital like Concord Hospital would be a Public Health potentially disaster, depending on...

Governor Sununu:

It could potentially be a disaster to that organization and they know that.

Right, and the region. And we know they have our best interest. So you would not be calling that CEO up and saying, hey, you can't fire those people. You've got a medical emergency, right? That's what you're saying?

Governor Sununu:

As soon as a Governor picks up the phone and tells someone that they can't fire someone or let somebody go for the reasons within that organization, again that's a Pandora's Box that can't be shut. Now, any Governor can pick up the phone and start deciding willy-nilly who should be hired and who should be fired. And it's a tough call. I get it. But it's that local control. It's that individual control. And understand there is no Governor in this country that can tell a private business you can't require a vaccine to a private business.

A private business can in every -- all across this country, hospitals, whether they're nonprofit, private businesses, or Fred's -- as I always use Fred's Flower Shop -- every Governor respects that they can do that. There's been discussion in Florida and all that. But, no, there's 75,000 Healthcare Workers or something like that even in Florida are mandated to vaccine. Everybody understands that, because, conservative or liberal, people know that the Government should not and cannot be in the business of dictating who gets hired and fired in a private business.

I might not like the results. The results might be difficult, which is why we're constantly communicating, trying to get their feedback, their decisions. The hope and understanding is that they've run their organizations for years. They know their tolerances. They don't want to stop giving services. And they're making a lot of those calculus [ph] knowing that they don't want to see a single Nurse leave potentially. So, they don't want that to happen.

So, I really feel confident they're going to minimize that as much as they can. But at the end of the day, the decision that they make that has to be respected, and it is being respected by 50 Governors across the State -- across the Country, sorry.

Real quick follow-up without getting into conversations you've had with private -- the CEOs privately and everything, your Administration spent a lot of time, spent a lot of money to get the nursing -- I mean, what was it? \$2 million in nursing to get the nursing careers ramped up, because we have a very old population.

Governor Sununu:

Yeah. We're opening a new Nursing Schools with the funds that I got through the budget a couple years ago over at UNH, which is really exciting. Yeah.

Right, so, without getting into what the private conversations are, do they realize that losing 600 or 700 Employees based on not getting Medicaid and Medicare money is kind of potentially...

Governor Sununu:

Oh, without a doubt. Oh, no.

Okay.

Governor Sununu:

Look, the CEOs and Operators that I've talked to in hospitals and nursing homes, they all realize the implications of what may happen with it. They all know that they're pretty much short on Staff today, never mind what might come down the road with the vaccine. I mean, they've all acknowledged that. They're all trying -- I feel very confident they're all trying to minimize that as much as possible.

We've talked about making sure they have flexibility with religious exemptions or other health exemptions, or whatever it might be, and utilizing those. And they all appreciate that you don't just find a good Nurse walking down the street. Those can be rare. And they do amazing work. They put in amazing hours. And they take care of our loved ones sometimes when no one else can. And that is all very -- I feel confident in saying that is all very much appreciated within our Healthcare Network.

We have one of the best Healthcare Networks in the country, right? That's not by accident. It's because you have good manners and good folks on the frontlines. But, again, at the same time, we try to educate them, and they are. We try to understand their tolerances, their pushes and pulls.

No one really knows how many will walk out. Some organizations might have very minimal impact. Some organizations might be more severely impacted. We're not quite sure. We will kind of see where it goes, because this whole process is just starting.

But, again, the concept that the Government can tell these Healthcare Providers who to hire and fire, no one is doing that in this country. And it wouldn't be right, frankly. As much as we might like the ends, right, as much as the data might go up, the vaccination rate might go up -- that's what I want to see. But how we get to that is really important, especially when it comes to government overreach. Yeah.

Governor, I just wanted to...

Governor Sununu:

Oh, hi, sorry. Yes.

I just want to get a good read on how you actually feel about what happened at the Council meeting this morning.

Governor Sununu:

Disappointed.

Are you not that upset about it?

Governor Sununu:

No, look. I'll say this. It was incredibly disappointing that we saw it come to that. It was disheartening. It was inappropriate. It crossed a line. There's no place for any of that, frankly. But, again, as the -- if you will -- the Political Leader of the State and in charge of maintaining a process, my job is always to have a Plan B. My job is always to make sure we have flexibility in the system to still make sure things go forward.

So, I'm confident in the fact -- and what you're seeing, I guess, is the confidence in the fact that system still goes forward. Services don't get stopped, nothing like that. And they won't be stopped. I can't tell you where the vote's going to turn out. But it was an incredibly disappointing and a bit disarming moment to see a few individuals, to know that your Team is being threatened.

As look, I made it pretty clear, I get very defensive of our Team here. Our Team's incredible. People of the State should be so proud of this Team. I've said it time-and-time again. And they're putting the hours in, whether it's Dr. Chan, Commissioner Shibinette, the Directors, the Frontline Staff, all across the board, the National Guard, we can go on all day. We crush it when it comes to managing the COVID crisis. And I couldn't be more proud of them.

So, anytime someone thinks they're going to get what they want by threatening someone, that's an infringement on Democracy. That's an infringement on the process. But we have a system where we can also flex a little bit to still make sure things are moving forward. We're not going to let that bring us to a grinding halt by any means. We're still going to go forward and we're going to do it in the right way and the safe way in just a couple weeks.

So, yeah, incredibly disheartening, but we got a great Team here. And we just keep doing really well. Maybe the situation would be different if we're one of these other States that were way behind and we're in kind of panic mode, and we're seeing the onslaught of high hospitalization and all that kind of stuff that you're seeing in the rest of the country.

But, we've just done such a great job here. We've set ourselves up for immense success. And so, we don't let these disappointing blips break our process or stop our process. We can still move forward with a lot of confidence. And that's the most important message I hope the folks of the State understand. We're still doing great.

Okay. Anything else? Well, all right, well, thank you, guys. I appreciate it. And again, I'll just kind of end with that message. We got a great Team. We're doing very well. Unfortunate what happened today but not going to slow us down, we will start coming out.

We will see. Our numbers are fairly good, compared to where the rest of the country is now. But we will keep coming out and talking about what's going on with COVID, other aspects of the State, make sure we are accessible. That's one of the most important aspects of what we have, and just making sure that we keep being that gold standard for the rest of the country. Thank you, guys.