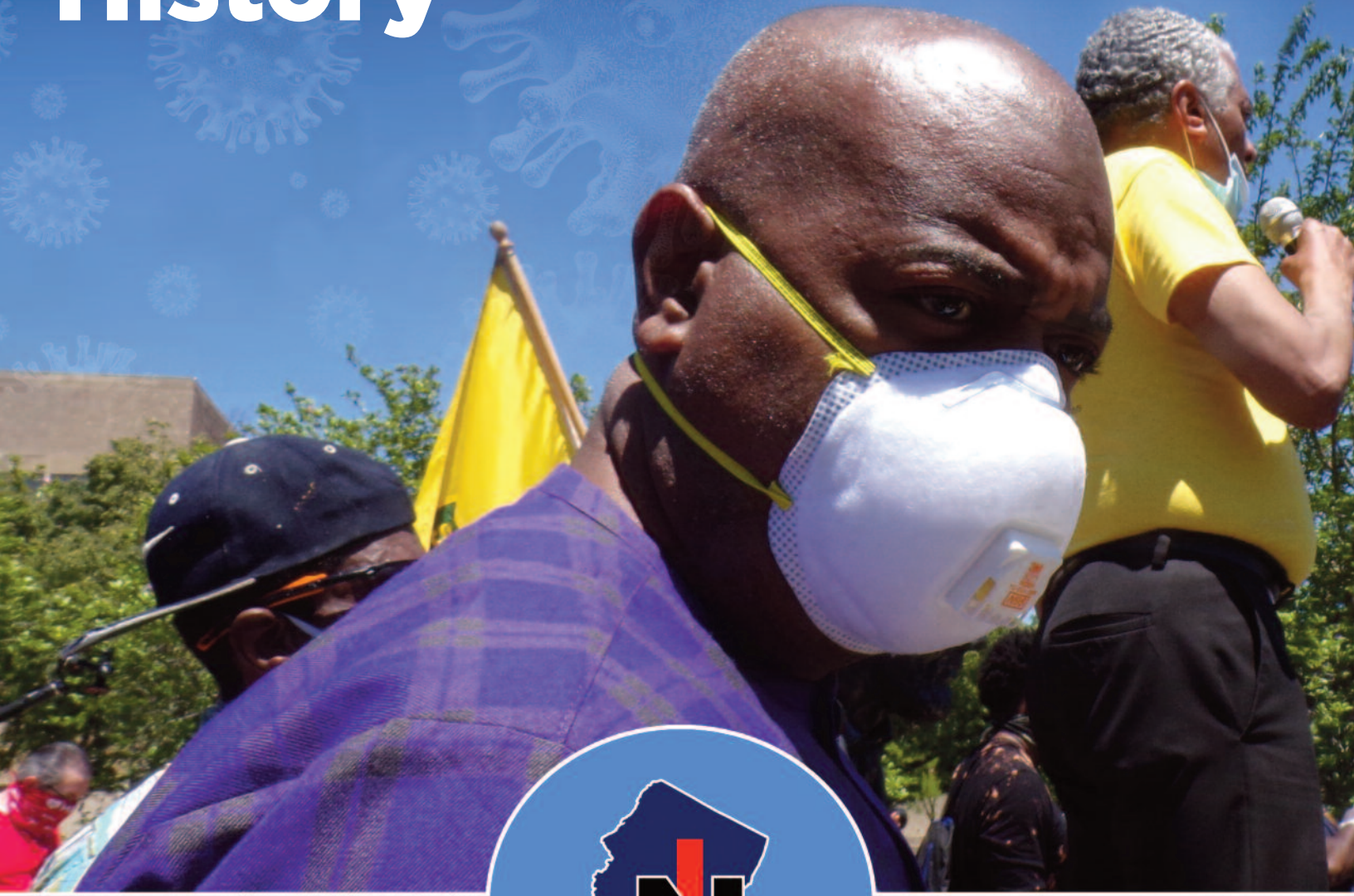


The **COVID-19** Crisis: An InsiderNJ History



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The people of New Jersey will likely never precisely know the level of disengagement by their government in the lead up to COVID-19 exploding in our midst. Suffice to say no one in the upper echelons of the executive and legislative branches was thinking about a virus. They were too busy trying to wreak havoc on their own ranks with a Democratic “war” for the chairmanship of the party by a group of individuals better suited for massage parlors and clubs than combat zones. But COVID wasn’t looking to administer any back rubs. With New Jersey as unprepared as a deep-tanned TV game show presidency for a serious and decisive response to a deadly virus, the state caught the busines end of COVID

with all the ceremony of multiple sudden early casualties.

Coming off a hospital gurney after his own surgery to remove a cancerous growth from his kidney, Governor Phil Murphy exceeded expectations when he finally assumed the command position on the bridge of the Enterprise. What follows in these pages of a special InsiderNJ edition are some of those moments at all levels of New Jersey government – and in the streets – that highlight this suffering and resilient state’s efforts to fight back and survive the worst viral scourge since the pandemic of 1918, as we founder in a gilded age of disparate wealth distribution.

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TRENTON 1936 WASHINGTON DC 2020 DÈJÀ VU

Greed wins as labor loses leverage and scarcity rules the land.



By Bob Hennelly

The week closed out with the U.S. Congress still locked in dysfunction over how best to address the rapid socio-economic deterioration of our national circumstance.

As our Federal government's paralysis continues, our state government borrowed almost \$10 billion to tide it over.

In one of our neighboring states, the Governor resisted calls to close his multi-billion-dollar budget gap by raising taxes on the wealthy for fear they would opt to flee to another state.

Even leading Democrats like Gov. Cuomo, who would describe himself as a progressive, are concerned about the care, feeding and preservation of his wealthiest denizens, worries that higher taxes for them during this existential crisis would prompt them to quickly leave the Empire State.

AMERICAN PYRAMID

For decades now, as the marginal tax rate for the highest end earners dropped from 90 percent during Eisenhower's tenure, great wealth has been on a roll pressing it down to 37 percent. Wealth preservation has become such a national priority that when Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez suggested raising that top rate to 70 percent the establishment howled it was far too radical.

In the years since, with the capture of our politics by the corporations and the country's richest this approach of bending over to serve them has resulted in the amassing of massive government debt loads which generate bonds, which can be purchased and speculated in by the very folks at the top of our pyramid.

It has prompted governments to proliferate gambling as a source of revenue despite the destruction it brings to so many families in the most marginal of circumstances.

Meanwhile, in the midst of this once in a century pandemic, a killer virus is proliferating along our socio-economic fault lines, at the base of this weighty pyramid, exacting the heaviest toll on the poor and the essential workforce.

Here in New Jersey, according to data from the Department of Labor the last week in July saw 28,063 new unemployment claims bringing the total number of workers sidelined by the pandemic to 1.44 million, roughly 25 percent of our state's workforce.

At its worst, during the Great Recession, the state's jobless rate got as high as 9.8 percent.

By comparison, over the arc of the several years of the Great Depression, here in New Jersey joblessness ranged between 25 to 33 percent, with African-American joblessness as high as 50 percent.

RECOVERY STUMBLES

According to the July national job numbers, the rebound that came after the economy's COVID meltdown, has lost steam, as dozens of states reported increased infection and mortality rates.

In June, employers made 4.8 million new hires after having laid off tens of millions earlier in the year. By July, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported only 1.8 million had been added. CNN reported that uptick was fueled disproportionately by lower paying part-time hires.

A few weeks back, the Commerce Department announced that in the second quarter the nation's GDP shrunk at an annualized rate of 32.9 percent, the most severe contraction on record.

Yet, as the bad news piled up whatever sense of urgency we might feel, down here on planet earth where evictions loomed for millions, the U.S. Congress remained deadlocked, incapable of rising to the occasion.

It's understandable.



PLANET PLATINUM

So many of them are insulated by their wealth and privilege from the daily experience of the swelling ranks of Americans struggling day to day amidst a killer pandemic which hits the poorest and people of color the hardest.

Back in 2018, Quartz examined the personal financial disclosure filings for all of the members of Congress and found that “the typical U.S. Congress member” was “12 times richer than the typical American household.”

That same analysis found that “unlike the typical household lawmakers were relatively unscathed by the most recent recession” with the average member of Congress continuing to get richer while “the typical American household saw their wealth decline, dented by the 2008-09 financial decline.”

That eye-opening analysis came right after Congress passed the \$2.0 trillion Trump/McConnell Tax Cut and Jobs Act, which in its first year bestowed 50 percent of the tax cuts on the top five percent income earners, according to a study by the Economic Policy Institute and the Center for Popular Democracy.

And, while the “tax benefits to middle or low-income individuals are modest and will expire in 2025... the enormous tax breaks for corporations are permanent. By 2027, after the individual provisions expire, the top 1 percent of households alone will see 83 percent of the benefits of the TCJA.”

And post pandemic, the ratio between the wealth of Congress and our President is surely even more grotesquely skewed.

21ST CENTURY FEUDALISM

An analysis from the Americans for Tax Fairness (ATF) and the Institute for Policy Studies – Program on Inequality (IPS) documented that in the span of just three months during the pandemic, “the U.S. added 29 more billionaires while 45.5 million filed for unemployment.”

Now, tens of American families hang over the abyss of a pandemic while some Republicans suggested that the \$600 a week pandemic unemployment allotment they let lapse was too generous.

With long lines for food pantries and COVID testing, the nation that fancied itself the planet’s wealthiest is awash in disease and food insecurity. It’s like we are living in a dystopia that is a cross between the Hunger Games and The Apprentice.

This has all been a half-century in the making.

This pandemic caught us at a time of grotesque wealth concentration and income disparity which was the direct consequence of a bi-partisan effort over decades to advance the interests of multinational corporations over that of America’s working families.

Between the hundreds of millions in campaign contributions and the revolving door incentives that reward ‘public service’ with lobbying work the fix was in.

TOUGH ALL OVER

U.S. tax policy has long provided incentives for American based multinationals to shift their operations off-shore and even to shift their profits to tax havens that are always trying to outdo each other to attract capital.

“This is the perfect time to highlight the role of global tax,” said James Henry, an attorney and senior advisor to the Tax Justice Network, which tracks international tax avoidance trends. “We now have public budgets on a worldwide basis under an extreme fiscal stress due to the loss of revenue and with governments at all levels facing cruel decisions of making cuts in the midst of a pandemic.”

In 2005, the Tax Justice Network estimated that \$11.5 trillion was held offshore by the world’s wealthiest individuals. A decade later, the international advocacy group published an estimate that the offshore stash ranged from \$21 to \$32 trillion.

Post WW II, as multinational capital became ‘king of the world’ labor was losing its luster as corporations raced around the planet to play one nation’s workforce off another.



THE GREAT UNCOUPLING

By the 1970s the wages we earned did not keep pace with our productivity, the profits we generated with our labor. Even as women entered the workforce in ever greater numbers, American families kept falling further behind as U.S. corporations became multinational behemoths. Instead of wage growth, Americans took on more and more debt.

As the power of capital consolidated its grip on our political system from the Beltway to State Street, labor unions withered.

Fifty years ago, one out of three workers was in a union. In 1981, President Ronald Reagan’s mass firing of striking air traffic controllers was a body blow to the movement. By 1983, one in five workers was represented.

Today, it is just one in ten and on the decline.

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GREED REDUX

There's a strong historic parallel between our current wealth and income disparities and what happened in the run-up to the Great Depression.

“Where labor is concerned, recent decades strongly resemble the run-up to the Great Depression,” wrote the New Yorker’s Caleb Crain. “Both periods were marked by extreme concentrations of personal wealth and corporate power. In both, the value created by workers decoupled from the pay they received: during the nineteen-twenties, productivity grew forty-three per cent while wages stagnated; between 1973 and 2016, productivity grew six times faster than compensation.”

He continues. “And unions were in decline: between 1920 and 1930, the proportion of union members in the labor force dropped from 12.2 per cent to 7.5 per cent, and, between 1954 and 2018, it fell from thirty-five per cent to 10.5 per cent.”

Out the outset of the pandemic much was made of the “essential workforce” who were all hailed as heroes but as the weeks have churned into months it appears these workers have lost their leverage.

Union supporters in Congress have not been able to get a sufficient number of their colleagues to sign on to the COVID19 hazard pay provisions even though essential workers in industries like meat processing as well as health care providers and first responders are getting sick from the virus and dying, all while putting their families at risk.

Similarly, there's a real resistance from Republicans in Congress to backstop local, county and state governments in fiscal freefall. As a consequence, more than a million public workers have already been laid off in the midst of a once in a century public health crisis.

GRAVITY WINS

Once these kinds of structural dominoes start falling gravity takes over. There's a synergy to it. With the Federal government's refusal to launch a coordinated national public health response compounded by its abdication of its role as fiscal guarantor, the states, counties and local governments will all bear the burden of Washington's neglect.

New Jersey's Great Depression timeline remains instructive.

Just two years after 1929 Stock Market crash, “confronted with sharply reduced revenue, the state government cut its budget from \$34.5 million in 1931 to \$19.7 million in 1933”, according to the New Jersey Almanac.

The collapse of Trenton's tax revenues was accompanied by a precipitous decline in county and local property tax revenues as real estate values collapsed. Some local governments had to issue scrip, promissory notes that committed the municipality to actual cash money payment at some prescribed date in the future.

OCCUPY TRENTON

At one point in 1936, the state was close to running out of money to provide the most basic sustenance for over 100,000 families on relief.

Back then, Trenton, like Washington today, was hopelessly deadlocked on what to do, even as the state's population's situation continued to deteriorate.

According to a digest of *Daily Record* news accounts collected by the Morris County Library, covering the action in Trenton through March in April of 1936, the legislature was stuck. It couldn't decide if it wanted to divert money from highway accounts, levy a "luxury tax" on amusements, soft drinks, cosmetics and cigarettes or just dump the administration of the program on the local governments.

"All day and all night and into the early hours of yesterday morning they sat, flanked by State police, in belief their presence would be pressure enough upon the legislators to bring about relief measures, while Republicans caucused and caucused until worn down to the breaking point. One Assemblyman keyed to the limit of sane endurance broke into song with 'Home, Sweet Home,' another emerged from the caucus room, tears streaming down his cheeks, and sat exhausted in his seat in the assembly chamber. 'My God, do they know they are dealing with human souls?' cried a woman in the gallery. 'Have they ever experienced relief? Do they know what it means to starve?'"

As the political stalemate continued, the AP dispatches carried accounts of thousands of unemployed workers converging on Trenton.

"TRENTON, (AP) – Powell Johnson, secretary of the Workers' Alliance, whose members have held possession of the New Jersey Assembly chamber night and day since Tuesday afternoon, said today the group would surrender the chamber when the lawmakers return to their desks tonight... Several thousand of the unemployed were expected to come to Trenton from various sections of the State to take part in a State House demonstration on behalf of the unemployed."

For going on a week "a hundred members of the Workers' Alliance" spent the "night sleeping in the Assemblymen's swivel chairs" subsisting "on coffee, bread, cold meats and macaroni donated by Trenton merchants and friends of the group."

The Daily Record reported that at a Trenton prayer service in support of the takeover by the unemployed, the Rev. Robert Smith of the Grace Episcopal Church, told the "shabby men and women to 'keep up the fight,' and invoked the deity to 'break down all smugness and self-complacency and lead all men to be more indignant of injustice, more indignant of oppression and deprivation.'"

That same night, as the occupation continued "spectators in white collars and fur coats watched the good-natured jobless poke fun at the Assemblymen in their sixth 'evening session' of a mock legislative meeting. They adopted a resolution appropriating \$1,000 to permit Governor Harold G. Hoffman and Mayor Frank Hague of Jersey City to go to Alaska and survey the Alaska salmon, its life, loves and tax problems, so the New Jersey Legislature will be free to do its duty without outside influence."

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KILLING OUR VETERANS WITH COVID-19



Seven-thousand deaths in New Jersey's long-term care facilities over the course of the COVID-19 crisis to date revealed lack of government oversight, poor wages and benefits for workers, and inadequate response plans within the facilities, said state Senator Joe Vitale (D-19), chair of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee.

Committed to improving health and safety in long-term care facilities, Vitale is taking the lead in the legislature to implement the recommendations of the Mannat Report, commissioned by the Murphy Administration in the awful aftermath of revelations about the impact of COVID-19 on nursing homes.

Among those testifying on August 13th to the joint committee Vitale oversees with Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttle (D-37) were military veterans defying retribution with their outspoken criticism of the maintenance of private longterm care facilities where they reside and where their fellow veterans died in overwhelming numbers.

Marine Corps veteran Glenn Osborne, president of the Menlo Park Veterans Home, said he lost more friends to the coronavirus this year than he did to combat. "I have lost more than half the residents in this facility alone," Osborne told lawmakers. "In mid-March, there were 309 residents [at the veterans home]. Now there are only 167 residents left. Officially there are a recorded 62 COVID deaths. The numbers do not add up. There were simply too many residents who died too fast. Many residents were written off as having died of pneumonia without having been tested. Many of these deaths were absolutely avoidable, in my humble opinion. In March, I asked the CEO whether there was any strategy to combat COVID."

He received word that there was no need to be concerned, even as staff members did not wear PPE (personal protective equipment).

“I saw such hypocrisy at many levels,” Osborne said. “We feel we are neglected here by the administration. I will never waver in my duty to my residents.”

Vitale and his fellow lawmakers were outraged.

“There is no excuse for marginalizing veterans,” Vitale said. “We’re going to fix the leadership at that facility. The problem is going to be addressed, there and also at a facility in Vineland [and in Paramus].”

“We have your back,” the chairman told Osborne.

At the core of the package of bills aimed at eliminating a second act of the coronavirus in New Jersey’s nursing homes are also requirements for facilities to adhere to strict guidance and compliance. Margaret Boyce, a certified nursing assistant at JFK Hartwyck in Edison, urged lawmakers to oversee major professional changes to her industry, where workers labor long hours for poor pay on the frontlines; where, like Boyce and her son, a porter at the same Edison facility, both tested COVID-19 positive.

“We need to get this legislation moved along,” Vitale said. “We need places to be inspected, we need resources for them, for staff to inspect and ensure compliance with the new rules.”

Right now, New Jersey’s long-term care facilities are not ready for a second COVID-19 surge, but the senator said if government expedites the Mannat Report recommendations, the state will be better poised to protect those who protected us, who at this moment continue to be more vulnerable than anyone.



SOME OF THE BIGGEST POLITICAL DECISIONS MADE BY GOVERNOR MURPHY



His cackling critics in the halls of government will never credit him with making (on his own terms) a consequential decision, as they attribute all of Murphy's crisis calls to New York Governor Andrew Cuomo. But Murphy has demonstrated leadership qualities that have connected to a majority of New Jerseyans, who awarded him a 67% job approval rating at the end of July, according to Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind Poll. Residents, too, have routinely backed the governor on his decisions to err on the side of caution through the closing and reopening processes. It's important to remember the tremendously divided political conditions of the country, wherein half the country receives its news information from sources that contradict the other half. President Donald Trump, moreover, spent much of the pandemic downplaying – and that's putting it very gently - its impact. Within that environment, here are some of the decisions Governor Murphy made that carried political consequences.

1. SCHOOLS CLOSED

Governor Murphy closed on-site schools for 1.6 million public and private school children. On May 4th, the governor extended the order through the end of the school year.

2. NONESSENTIAL BUSINESSES CLOSED AND STAY-IN-PLACE ORDER ISSUED

On March 21st, the Governor closed nonessential businesses and ordered New Jerseyans to stay at home to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. He made certain notable exceptions, including food and liquor stores, and restaurants for take-out only. At that time, the state recorded 1,300 confirmed cases and fewer than 20 deaths. Three months later, when Murphy lifted the order on June 9th, New Jersey reported over 164,000 cases and over 12,000 deaths.

3. MURPHY DECIDES TO GO ON TUCKER CARLSON'S SHOW

Murphy appeared on Fox News in an interview with conservative personality Carlson to argue his rationale for a continuing shutdown. "If we had let this go, we think we would have let 3.6 million New Jerseyans to be infected," Murphy told Carlson. The big moment in the interview came when Carlson asked Murphy why he supported law enforcement shutting down a religious service to prevent the spread of COVID-19. "I wasn't thinking of the Bill of Rights when we did this," the governor said. "That's above my pay grade. People have to stay away from each other. That's the best thing we can do to break the back of the curve of this virus." His answer infuriated the right and gave them a rallying cry.

4. MURPHY DEIGNS TO APPEAR IN THE OVAL OFFICE WITH PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP - WITHOUT A MASK

In a rare break from New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, Murphy on April 30th went to Washington, D.C. and appeared mask-less in the Oval Office beside President Donald J. Trump. Murphy's allies explained that the governor showed up for stimulus bill money, an ask that proved almost pointless when Senate Republicans as of this writing proposed insufficient aid to states in a \$1 trillion package. "The governor would say he has a relationship with the president. But I think Trump is manipulating Governor Murphy to his benefit," Jersey City Mayor Steven Fulop told The Daily Beast.

5. MURPHY REOPENS PARKS

On May 2nd, less than two months after the state shutdown, Governor Murphy provided a glimmer of coming quasi-normalcy when he signed an executive order reopening state parks and golf courses. Judging by life in the succeeding months, the emphasis here is on "quasi."

6. THE GOVERNOR PARTICIPATES IN A GEORGE FLOYD RALLY

On the week of June 7th, Murphy masked up and jumped into the ranks of protesters in Union County calling for justice in the aftermath of the police killing of Minnesotan George Floyd. His decision to oppose his own stay-at-home order and violate social distancing constraints in a crowd of people enraged those who perceived a double standard. The governor would shut down church services to prevent the spread of COVID-19 but join a crowd of demonstrators.

7. MURPHY DECIDES NOT TO REOPEN INDOOR DINING

New Jersey's restauranteurs prepared to throw open their doors but on the week of June 29th, Murphy reversed course on a plan to originally green light indoor dining and ordered a continued restaurant shutdown in New Jersey to prevent the spread of COVID-19. He made exceptions for dining outdoors and indoor dining.

8. MURPHY SIGNS AN EXECUTIVE ORDER REQUIRING MASKS OUTDOORS

Trying to stamp on the virus in summertime in the middle of a national debate about masks and reinforcing his own position opposite a president reluctant to speak about the efficacy of face coverings and mostly personally scorning the use of them, the governor ordered people to wear masks outdoors when they could not social distance. "As I've said before, we know this virus is a lot less lethal outdoors than indoors, but that does not mean it is not lethal," said Murphy on July 8th. "The hotspots we're seeing across the nation and certain worrisome transmission trends in New Jersey require us to do more. In the absence of a national strategy on face coverings, we're taking this step to ensure that we can continue on our road back as one New Jersey family."

9. MURPHY BACKS A \$9.9 BILLION BORROWING PLAN

Murphy got behind and on July 16th signed Legislature-approved COVID-19 Emergency Bond Act, which allows the state to bond up to \$2.7 billion through September and another \$7.2 billion between October and June 30th. "While this is by no means a silver bullet, the ability to responsibly borrow is essential to meeting our fiscal needs in the coming year," Murphy said.

10. WHAT WOULD HE DO ABOUT THE COMING SCHOOL YEAR?

On the week of Monday, August 10th, amid rising COVID numbers nationwide (147,000 deaths in the U.S. since the beginning of the scourge) and increasing pressure to close schools for the coming year, Governor Murphy once again faced a decision with the health and welfare of 1.6 million public and private school children in his hands.

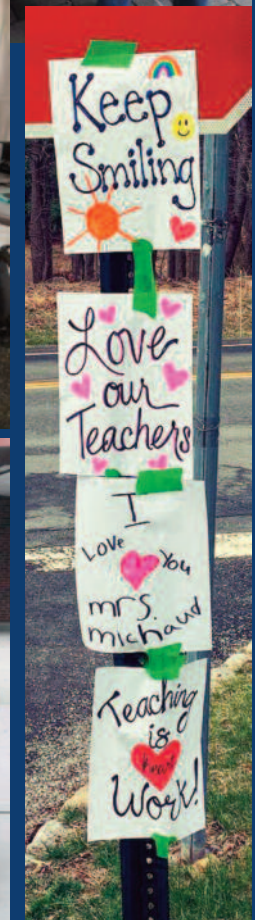


New Jersey Education Association

School buildings closed in March, but schools never did.

And no matter what school looks like in September, NJEA members will be there for New Jersey's students.

We will get through this pandemic TOGETHER!



Pictured l-r: **Sean M. Spiller** (NJEA Vice President), **Marie Blistan** (NJEA President), & **Steve Beatty** (NJEA Secretary-Treasurer)

Not pictured: **Steve Swetsky** (NJEA Executive Director) & **Kevin Kelleher** (NJEA Deputy Executive Director).



THE COVID-19 PLAYERS

The beehive of government seldom allows the public a looksee at some of its busiest behind-the-scenes worker bees, but COVID gave New Jersey a chance to assess some of these bureaucrats in starring roles, courtesy of the virus – and a highly theatrical Murphy.

Cuomo at times appeared not to have been conceived out of a womb but a government warehouse, making his usually spot-on COVID-19 stream-of consciousness closer to the William Carlos Williams poem Paterson than Murphy's very Harvard drama club-like performances, which relied more on the input of other actors and less on a lone Richard Burton-like black box presence.


Here's a list of some of the main players, who for a change took the chairs of power away from the usually spot-lit (and voluble) elected officials:



1. **JUDY PERSICHILLI.** Through the crisis, New Jersey's Department of Health Commissioner became "the woman who needs no introduction."
2. **PAT CALLAHAN.** The New Jersey State Police Colonel provided the daily public safety update, which often consisted of giving the latest newsflash about where and when some dope claimed to be COVID-19 positive while coughing on a cop.
3. **TINA TAN.** Stately, knowledgeable and reserved, the state's epidemiologist provided a boost of gravitas to the daily briefings.
4. **ED LIFSHITZ.** The medical director for communicable diseases at the New Jersey Department of Health, Lifshitz provided a dose of seriousness to proceedings always treading at the edge of unleashing Murphy's inner Harvard dramaturge.
5. **MATT PLATKIN.** Murphy's chief counsel gave the governor a scare when he contracted COVID-19, sat out a couple of weeks and then returned to the job apparently unscathed.
6. **GURBIR GREWAL.** The state's Attorney General provided more fodder to the gossip mill about a potential future statewide gubernatorial bid (especially if Murphy skidoos to a Joe Biden Administration) as he took a lead role on the state's public safety front. He also found himself saddled with a hardboiled detective novel moral crisis when Assemblyman Jay Webber urged him to arrest his own boss or be part of the problem.

7. **JOE FIORDALISO.** The President of the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities brought an elegance and gravitas to his professional pronouncement of New Jersey getting “whacked” by Hurricane Isaias.
8. **LAMONT REPOLLET.** It was difficult to make the case for leadership in the administration on the education front when the commissioner of education was on his way out the door to a new job as the president of Kean University. His very presence was a frustration.
9. **CHRIS NEUWIRTH.** The Judi Persichilli backup at the state Health Department claims Team Murphy cut him loose after he denied a personalized COVID-19 test kit to Murphy Chief-of-Staff George Helmy.
10. **JARED MAPLES.** Just when it looked like a text message claiming a coming national shutdown seemed to channel a larger spirit of good sense, the New Jersey director of Homeland Security was there to tell us that the message was, in fact, a fraud, and merely the devious handiwork of a foreign government.

By contrast, the elected officials who appeared in support of the governor (with the exception of Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver, a natural fit) began to give the should-be sober briefings a dangerously SNL-like gleam, to which someone must have keyed Murphy because these cameos soon ceased.

A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a yellow shirt and a grey backpack, is walking on a paved road. The background is a blurred green landscape under a bright sky. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

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STAND-OUT MOMENTS FOR LEGISLATIVE ELECTED OFFICIALS



- 1. JOHN MCKEON.** Proving the value of a smart veteran sticking around, the Assemblyman from West Orange had a stand-out season in the legislature. He was the driving force behind the \$10 billion borrowing act to float the state through the federally funding-deprived coming winter months. “It [winter] begins in New Jersey on October 1st when we start a 9-month fiscal year with a \$7.2 billion deficit. While additional cuts in government spending will be part of the solution, if we were to literally eliminate all of state government, the corresponding savings would still be several billion dollars short. Additional taxes, especially now, are not an alternative.”
- 2. DICK CODEY.** The 27th District state senator (and former governor) stayed on the emergency funds front alongside district-mate McKeon, urging Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-3) to post the COVID-19 Budget Recovery Bond Act. “New Jersey is facing a financial pandemic. By September, the state’s checks will bounce. Schools’ checks will bounce. Counties’ checks will bounce.” Senator Codey added. “The size of this crisis is second only to the COVID-19 pandemic. But we can avoid the worst of it if we act now. We have to do this, and the sooner the better.”

3. RON RICE. In the aftermath of the police killing of George Floyd, the veteran senator from Newark swung into action (with colleague state Senator Shirley Turner) to advance a package of numerous law enforcement reform bills. For former cop Rice, it was a significant moment. “I’m tired,” he said, referring to his years of trying to obtain justice in a Statehouse generally opposed to the concept.

4. MIKE TESTA. The freshman state senator from Vineland showed early why he will be a valued addition to the Republican team in Trenton, as he undertook a lawyerly argument before the state Supreme Court in opposition to the Democrats’ \$10 billion borrowing plan.



5. JOE PENNACCHIO. The veteran state senator from Parsippany took his job seriously as co-chair, along with Testa, right of the Trump 2020 Campaign, maintaining a Rice-like work rate in opposition to the Murphy Administration.

6. BRITNEE TIMBERLAKE. The Assemblywoman from the 34th District authored S-2340, which would provide protections to certain homeowners, tenants, and landlords during the COVID-19 pandemic emergency period. “We have to vote yes on this bill,” an impassioned Timberlake argued on the floor of the assembly. “It’s about humanity.”

7. JAY WEBBER. Through the pandemic, Webber rose repeatedly in inveterate watchdog mode to provide a check to Democrats’ spending, and, in a moment of inspired legislative theatrics, challenged Attorney General Gurbir Grewal to find and charge Governor Phil Murphy for violating the stay-at-home order when he protested at a Hillside Black Lives Matter movement. Webber was routinely providing a public service, while having some fun, too.

8. TERESA RUIZ. On the strength of her own experience as a Brick City-based lawmaker, the Newark senator made her case for S-685, which would enable a municipality to require cops and firefighters to live in town for five years. Chair of the Senate Education Committee, Ruiz also proved a stern taskmaster when trying to exact information from education experts about distance learning and the coming New Jersey school year.



9/10 LORETTA WEINBERG AND JOE VITALE. The senate majority leader from Teaneck and senator from Woodbridge want to strengthen OPRA to give New Jerseyans crisis-time access to key public information.

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AT THE COVID-19 CROSSROADS OF BUSINESS AND POLITICS ON NEW JERSEY AVENUE AND RIO GRANDE: BRENDAN SCIARRA'S INSIDERNJ INTERVIEW



The Mudhen Brewing Company rises over Rio Grande Avenue in Wildwood like some sublime tribute to the masons and laborers who worked in these parts and craved a beer when the whistle sounded to end a shift at the local cement plant. Brendan Sciarra comes from those people and he owns the Mudhen, named for the train out of Philly that once blew through the scrub and loam of the Pine Barrens to get to the barrier island.

He's also the Cape May Democratic Committee County chair and a candidate for freeholder in a region where U.S. Rep. Jeff Van Drew defected from the Democratic to Republican Party, leaving Sciarra on a ticket with CD-2 candidate Amy Kennedy hoping to topple the incumbent and restore order with a newly constructed party under Sciarra's countywide leadership.

Masked up on a Saturday night at his brewery, Sciarra was a blur of activity in the packed outdoor dining area, and on the Sunday following he considered the terrain, this unique habitation of his both professional and political worlds within an ongoing crisis called COVID-19, which makes Van Drew's defection look like boogie boarding by comparison.

“Every day changes,” said Sciarra, momentarily wearing his mask like a bandana at neck level. “You have to adapt. One thing I’ve learned in this whole emergency is you have to be eager to try new things and persevere. You have to keep going and hopefully at the end of the day it will work out. The employees have really been working hard and trying to keep the customers happy. We have to try to do it in a social distancing way. People are realizing that this has brought an opportunity for people to again experience outside activity and understanding a little better how to work together. There’s always a bright spot.”

In that vein, the timing worked a little to the Mudhen’s advantage, as COVID ravaged the state during off-season hours, abating somewhat in time for summer. The brewery appears to be thriving.

“It’s a seasonal town, seasonally driven, from Labor Day to Memorial Day,” Sciarra acknowledged. “People are coming down on weekends. ...They’re trying to show respect for one another, wash hands, and maintain six feet between people. People want to get out and back to reality and they’re figuring it out. So far, so far good. We have to try to protect lives while we do it.”

Not only does his own business stand near the crossroads of Rio Grande and New Jersey Avenues, but so does Kona Surf Company, his father’s sporting goods store, another indication of deep roots here.

“I love Cape May County, I love Wildwood,” Sciarra said. “The people are great. I wake up every day and I enjoy my job and the community I’m in. I’m thankful. I have a great restaurant here. I work hard. I look for a vision. I enjoy creating things and I enjoy watching people enjoy themselves – family and fun. I enjoy putting stuff together, and so the brewing company has Wildwood history in it with the name, with the migration of people to Wildwood from Philly [on a train actually nicknamed the Mudhen] before they had the highways. I want to give people a little insight into what Wildwood is all about.”

“I enjoy politics and believe good government is good politics,” he added. “I think it’s important if you can offer something back to the people – my work effort – and give it to the taxpayers. I think I could offer a different perspective. I just want to bring some commonsense solutions. I’m running with Liz [Casey]. She’s a great person. She has a law practice in Ocean City. I think we’re going to be a great team, and I’m excited.”

It’s difficult to talk about politics here without the name Van Drew coming up, and Sciarra concedes the challenge.

“I am the Democratic chairman here,” he said. “Jeff was the congressman but I think we’re building. We have 225 committee seats filled. [Democratic Party operative] Justin O’Leary has been a great help working to organize the party. It’s gone to a group effort. It’s not just Jeff. I want to make sure the party is strong with me or without me. Amy [Kennedy] has done a great job with the grassroots effort and involving a lot of different people she has brought together. She has worked very hard and she has a real chance to beat Jeff. Jeff was on the winning team, but politics changes every minute. We’ll see where it goes.”

THE STARK COVID-19 DIVIDING LINE



Our mob was having a conversation on a Friday morning and someone rumbled in a Lee Marvin voice on the other end of the line that this crisis revealed the worst depths of that disparity between the haves and the have nots.

Besides killing people we loved and taking them from us in the most impersonal and awful way, the time of COVID also starkly put on savage display the fragile fugitive condition of so many New Jerseyans, 1.4 million of whom doggedly tried to collect unemployment compensation as they faced the worst combination of hostile forces.

Political street leaders like Larry Hamm and Madelyn Hoffman must have felt a particular sense of either vindication or horror to watch this supposedly Cadillac capitalist system fall down on the job for so many as it relentlessly tried to whip people back to work in the thick of a rising body count.

Here's the reality for most.

You need a job for healthcare (not to mention paying the rent and food) but if you go to work, you might lose your life to COVID. If you go to work, you also leave your kids at home, where they're supposedly distance learning, which, if you've ever experienced it, you'll know is a highly intensive proposition. Your participation in it threatens your own capacity to do your own work. If you lose your job, you lose your healthcare, and probably the apartment you rent. You may get a lung ailment in a shelter somewhere, which makes you more susceptible to the worst of COVID-19. You end up in prison or get the life squeezed out of you on the street, like George Floyd, who was out of work, incidentally, and COVID-19 positive.

That's the gist of the plot here: those who worry about their golf courses getting closed down, missing that steak at the club, and maybe the private helicopter pilot sneezing as he glides you onto your little taxpayer-secured helipad – and those for whom COVID proved and right now proves that they're in an everyday battle on multiple deadly fronts with hair trigger decisions in front of them.

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ELECTION SEASON MOMENTS

- 1. ATLANTIC COUNTY CONVENTION.** The last big political event of consequence in CD2 showed the strength Amy Kennedy had on the ground in the district's most Democratic county as she sought to take on and take out U.S. Rep. Jeff Van Drew (R-2).
- 2. THE MUSTARD SEED EVENT.** On March 14th, numerous North Jersey public officials, including candidates for office in Paterson's coming May 12th elections, packed into a room at the Valley Regency in Clifton for a fundraising dinner for children with disabilities at precisely the time when officials should have been abiding by social distancing rules.
- 3. PATERSON STREET FIGHT.** The 2nd Ward became the frontline for insanity as Mohammed Akhtaruzzaman and Shahin Khalique street forces physically clashed ahead of a too-close-to-call election.
- 4. BELLEVILLE POST OFFICE DRIVES POLITICIANS POSTAL.** Mayor Mike Melham was New Jersey's earliest emphatic critic of the U.S. Post Office, when he identified the hazards of trying to hold an election when some constituents don't even yet have a ballot.
- 5. THE CHALLENGE OF COVID-19 WARZONE TEANECK.** A control election in the COVID-19-clobbered town provided local elected officials a chance to demonstrate their fighting prowess in a crisis. This race featured a fight between outgoing Mayor Mohammed Hameeduddin and Senate Majority Leader Weinberg, which the retiring mayor won.
- 6. LARRY HAMM'S MOMENT.** Running to advance the presidential cause of Bernie Sanders, lifelong street fighter Hamm presided over the state's most massive (and peacefully powerful) George Floyd protest in Newark. As ordinary New Jerseyans sustained a huge hit with COVID and faced the dual cruelty of no jobs and no healthcare, no one else in New Jersey could bring the change message like Hamm.
- 7. KENNEDY CRUSHES NORCROSS.** Heavily signaling their willingness to throw the general election to Van Drew in the name of preserving their Chris Christie business relationship and gaining leverage with Donald Trump amid ongoing investigations into \$11 billion in tax incentives, Norcross cronies tried to smear Kennedy ahead of the July 7th election only to get brutally run over.
- 8. HIRSH SINGH'S GUN VIDEO.** It always helps when confronted by a pandemic to have a genuine tough guy who knows how to point and shoot at the real enemy, as Singh did on that gun range with an assault rifle in the middle of COVID-19 mayhem.



9. REPUBLICANS APPEARING WITHOUT MASKS TO MAKE A POLITICAL POINT. Singh and the gang showed up at a Morris County event with masks studiously unworn, each a case study in Hydroxychloroquine-ready high gloss.

10. CIATTARELLI'S "NOT FROM HERE" CAMPAIGN. It's too bad the intellectually curious former assemblyman from the 16th District feels the need to dumb himself down to get money to run for governor as his emailed missives about "King Phil" and "Murphy's not from here," smacked of dim-witted xenophobic messaging.



11. STEPHANIE SCHMID TRIUMPHS IN CD4. The former state department official trying to land the Democratic nomination to go up against the state's lone Republican congressman dealt back to back blows to Tiffany Kaszuba and James Keady to seal the deal. A third challenger, David Applefield, sadly died a day after the election.

12. MARIE STRUMULO BURKE GUTS AN OLD SCHOOL WIN. Faced with a credible challenger backed by Mayor Melham, the Belleville councilwoman – a door knocking human gizmo – managed to win ugly during COVID and finally knocked out challenger Carmine Mattia, Jr.

13. THE INDICTMENTS OF MENDEZ-JACKSON. Talk about winning ugly. This was winning grotesque, at least according to the state Attorney General, who slapped both Ward 1 Councilman Mike Jackson and Ward 3 challenger Alex Mendez with ballot fraud in the aftermath of their respective May 12th local victories. Both men showed up at the city reorganization meeting exuding a mutual good government glow, as if it was Grewal who f-ed up and the two of them committed to – what else? – the people.

14. TRUMP COMES IN FOR VAN DREW. The actual event occurred in late January, and in retrospect it was sort of the final abnormal spasm of the era of pre-COVID normalcy. It was like the final reenactment of Hannibal's last stand prior to the fall of the Carthaginian Empire.

15. TONY VAUSS PROVES THE ENDURING POTENCY OF TEAM IRVINGTON STRONG.

The big question going into the May 12th race was whether the ultimate local ground game would carry over in an all-VBM election. It did.

16. NEWARK SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS. It was the most dramatic election year in our lifetimes and the one most consequential for our kids, as the so-called "unity ticket" produced zero drama in a low turnout bore snore of a season.

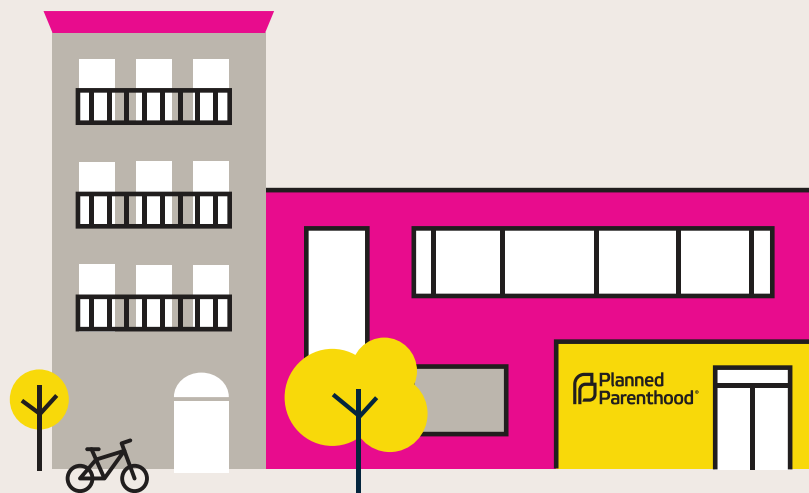




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HEADLINES FROM THE FRONT LINES



- 1. THE UNEMPLOYMENT FIASCO.** From the beginning, New Jersey – and the country – faced the horrible worry of overcorrecting in the fight against COVID-19 to the point of shutting down businesses, destroying people’s livelihoods and turning people out of work. From March to July, nearly 1.4 million New Jerseyans filed unemployment applications. Many did not get filled, many got filled for only specific periods of time, leaving New Jerseyans uncovered for a month or more. Some would return to jobs when Governor Murphy reopened large portions of the state. But for how long?
- 2. THE LONG-TERM CARE FIASCO.** Critics of Governor Murphy say he should have done more to identify and care for those residents of nursing homes. Of 177,600 COVID-19 cases in New Jersey, one in five were in long term care facilities, and half of 13,800 deaths in the state occurred in those facilities.



- 3. THE AFTERMATH OF THE POLICE KILLING OF GEORGE FLOYD.** After a Minneapolis Police Officer crushed the life out of George Floyd on camera on May 25th, multiple peaceful rallies occurred throughout the state of New Jersey, including in Newark, home of the biggest and most powerful show of solidarity with the late George Floyd and black men persecuted by systemic racism.

4. THE POLICE KILLING OF MAURICE GORDON. A New Jersey State Trooper shot six times and killed motorist Gordon after an altercation on the Garden State Parkway on May 23rd.



5. THE DEATH FROM COVID-19 OF PATERSON'S EDDIE COTTON.

From InsiderNJ on April 17th: “He was one of those New Jersey spirits who epitomized pride in local service and community and the vast presence of one well-travelled in life. Humble and with a genteel demeanor, he was that lone force who could separate otherwise immovable objects and command respect, both in the ring and in the fight of life.”



6. THE HEROISM OF FRONTLINE WORKERS.

The recovery of Dr. James Pruden of St. Joseph’s Hospital in Paterson on the week of Palm Sunday from COVID-19 gave a boost to New Jersey’s healthcare worker forces, who in their courageous fight to protect us embodied the best of the state.

7. THE DEATH TOLL OF COVID-19. Day after day through the spring, the mounting deaths in New Jersey seemed to climb without end. On April 21st, the state hit its peak of 379 reported deaths due to complications from the COVID-19 virus.

THE POLITICS OF A PANDEMIC. BY FRED SNOWFLACK



The pandemic has made politics boring.

Sure, there is still a lot of vibrant local and national politics swirling around how officials are handling COVID-19. Moreover, recent months have seen protests on the right (anti-lockdown) and the left (Black Lives Matter).

But what's been missing has been the nuts and bolts of local politics. You know what I mean – the campaign rallies, the fundraisers, going door-to-door and the gossip exchanged over beverages. A lot of that disappeared in mid-March. And it really hasn't come back yet.

In its place we have the computer.

I – like I am sure many others – have watched and listened to multiple electronic events. Some are Zoom press conferences. Others are tele-conferences, Facebook Live events or tele-town halls.

By a rough count, I have seen or heard Senators Bob Menendez and Cory Booker and Reps. Andy Kim, Tom Malinowski, Mikie Sherrill, Frank Pallone and Josh Gottheimer in some type of virtual event. Most of them multiple times. I have also watched events by GOP challengers Tom Kean (CD-7) and Rosemary Becchi (CD-11). Then, there have been public meetings, county committee conventions and virtual debates – think Republicans in CD-3.

All of this over the phone or on the computer.

Like everybody else, politicians are doing their best to communicate with constituents and to keep the public up to date. That's commendable.

At the same time, these events are often dull and uninspiring. The pandemic truly is taking the fun out of politics.

Public debate is what robust politics is about. That's what's being missed.

Think about the congressional town halls before the pandemic. Sure, the host often has a lot of fans in the audience, but not everyone is a sycophant. That's why some who ask provocative questions are booed or even shouted down. Others persistently ask strong follow-ups. Some of this may be impolite, but it brings energy to the room. Our elected officials should be able to handle tough questions and even some unruly members of the audience. Ditto for local governing bodies who of late do not have to deal with the guy or gal who shows up every meeting with a gripe.

So much of the give-and-take of politics is lost when public events are conducted via computer or phone. Follow-up questions and crowd reaction are generally not on the agenda.

Many times of late, our elected officials "appear" with health experts to chat about the virus. The intentions here are good. But the format limits how many questions the public can ask. And these experts often say things that most people already know.

Then, there are the inevitable technical glitches. Many politicians are not all that tech-savvy. I have listened to events over the phone or computer that suddenly stopped – at least for a while.

Still, funny things occasionally happen. Booker held a tele-conference for supporters and donors awhile back and before things truly got underway, the host said the call was off-limits to the press.

Really?

I made believe I hadn't heard that comment and stayed on the line. Trust me, there was nothing discussed that could be remotely considered privileged, outrageous or even all that interesting.

That could be the best description of pandemic politics – even the confidential stuff is boring.



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THE UNWELCOME CONDITIONS OF A POLITICAL PEACE. BY FRED SNOWFLACK



The pandemic has brought peace to Morris County's warring Republican party.

OK. That can be a stretch, but it's undeniable that it's been a peaceful 2020 for Republicans in one of the state's prominent GOP-leaning counties.

Morris Republicans to their credit are very democratic - that's with a small "d." The organization does not have a "party line" in primaries.

With all primary candidates able to rise or fall in line with their abilities, it's been customary for Morris to see spirited, if not nasty, primary battles. That occasionally leads to victories by candidates who likely would not have won in a more traditional political setting. It also leads to hard feelings.

Just ask Chris Christie. He was an unknown in 1994 when he first ran – and won – a freeholder campaign, a race he would have been unlikely to win if there was a party line. His win didn't mean acceptance. He lost reelection three years later. Over the years, there have been other surprise winners - think a very young Hank Lyon – and some establishment figures who lost – think Margaret Nordstrom. That was the same race by the way.

We certainly saw this burst of democracy in 2019 when there was a contested freeholder primary involving, of all things, a “secret” consultant with a Wyoming mailing address. After it ended, one of the winners dragged the losers into court, which generally is opposite the way it usually works. This episode followed an acrimonious battle for party chair the year before. In and around all that, there were also contested primaries and/or conventions for vacant freeholder and legislative seats.



This was great fun for political observers, or more to the point, for anyone who thinks contested elections produce the best candidates.

Now we come to the pandemic. Things changed. No contested primaries this year. In fairness, we must also consider something that happened before COVID-19, a changing political landscape.

Democrats grabbed congressional seats in the two districts (7 and 11) covering Morris County in 2018, a pointed message that Morris has become more competitive than it's been in years – or perhaps ever.

So, party leaders like state Sen. Anthony M. Bucco late last year urged the party to avoid divisive primaries. His thinking was clear. Why beat up on each other when we need to save all that – not to mention campaign dollars – to fight the Democrats?

That may have impacted the thought processes of would-be primary candidates in 2020.

Then again, the pandemic began in early to mid-March, which was just a few weeks before the filing deadline for what was supposed to be the June primary. We now know it was held in July.

It's quite possible that the pandemic made it unrealistic for candidates to do what they need to do in a primary – gather signatures and then travel from town to town talking to Republican voters and officials.

You can't ignore how things turned out. Not only were there no Republican primary contests in Morris this year for freeholder or for two vacant state legislative seats, there was not a contest in July for party chair.

Peace reigned.

But before we make any premature conclusions on the future of Morris County Republicans, let's see how the 2021 primary turns out when the pandemic – hopefully – will be over.

INSIDERNJ EDITORIAL. FACED WITH YET ANOTHER COVID-19 CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS QUESTION... HAVE OUR KIDS REPEAT THE YEAR

In mid-August, the question of whether or not to reopen schools dogged Governor Phil Murphy, who had to be aware of the delicate politics of his coming decision, as he considered the physical and mental health and welfare of the state's students, teachers, and those with whom they would inevitably make contact. Three big obvious factors emerged alongside the towering priority of protecting the children, fed to a version of the crisis frontlines last spring when they and their teachers tried to do the best they could with a mostly ineffectual social distancing plan as everyone fulfilled the stay-at-home order.

Murphy along with the tender needs of those children faced the balancing act of politics, which included the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA), the core of his primary support, including Newark and Newark Mayor Ras Baraka, and the political will of neighboring New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, which for the moment, appeared to somewhat pull in different directions.

For two weeks, the InsiderNJ world hummed with the expectation of Murphy announcing a delay, mostly on the strength of a COVID-19 upsurge and horror stories from other states, among them Georgia, which shut down after nine students tested positive. But Murphy also faced significant NJEA pressure. The powerful labor union didn't want schools to reopen in the fall. At the very least they wanted a delay. Now the teachers were politically important to Murphy, who sided with them in an ongoing war the



labor union waged with a chunk of the political establishment in this state, including Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-3), who assumed the antagonistic dimensions of his cross-the-aisle ally Chris Christie in Christie's aftermath. Never one to stand around and let politics happen here without taking part, Sweeney and his allies reversed one of the worst (and expensive, judging by the amount of money spent in the political war in 2017) relationships in legislative history when he incrementally made friends with the union that had tried to get rid of him. By 2020 – a year removed from his own scheduled reelection cycle, and in time to head off primary challenges to his federal allies, among them U.S. Rep. Donald Norcross (D-1) – Sweeney cut a deal with the NJEA to scrap the dreaded so-called Chapter 78 clause that required members to pay higher healthcare costs. It was a bold move by Sweeney, one that wouldn't just keep the NJEA out of his district in 2021 but that threatened to tread on the NJEA's relationship with Murphy.



Did they really need Murphy, who arrived with a package of pens to sign the work Sweeney and NJEA Prez Marie Blistan hammered over their own anvil? It was an interesting question then, and one with particular resonance now as Murphy sweated a schools reopening plan. Teachers said shut them down. By delaying a decision, would the governor give Sweeney and Blistan yet another theatrical – but also politically profound – moment at a podium?

Then there was Newark Mayor Ras Baraka, a key urban Murphy ally. Baraka had his own obvious COVID-19 gorgon to wrestle with, with the implications of the virus intensified in the tight-squeeze of New Jersey's second most populous city. Baraka also had constituents telling him they couldn't juggle staying employed while having to worry about their children staying at home to meet social distancing orders. Many kids, too, depended on school lunch programs, not to mention sports

programs and socialization, the absence of which last season forced grim circumstances on many a quarantined multi-generational family. But Baraka, himself a former Central Ward High School principal, decided to throw in with the teachers. Shut down the schools.

That left Murphy whittled into a corner with Cuomo, who ahead of President Donald J. Trump's visit had ordered school doors swung wide come autumn. Was it Cuomo's only play left to get the president's support for pandemic funds – acting like he, like the president, wanted schools to reopen? Or was he really committed? It was significant because Cuomo acted as regional commander in that union of area governors, Murphy among them, and appeared to have carved out a position at definite odds with the core of Murphy's political support, with even the politically artful Sweeney gently threatening to yank the teachers away from the New Jersey governor if he stumbled.

There was another problem though, as multiple school districts prepared for a hybrid reopening, with half their student populations scheduled to go in for two days a week in socially distanced circumstances, alternating with the other half of the district's student population. Could New Jersey truly secure distance learning for children of a quality superior to the nobly well-intentioned but woefully uneven and finally awful experience of the spring? We've heard it said many times by those with young people in their lives, short of a uniform virtual teaching environment which duplicates classrooms on zoom and enables teachers and students to interact, in the name of the easiest reference, much the way legislative committees zoom conference, we are staring at another lost year.

As Murphy sized up an enormous challenging problem, we say this. If we have to shut down owing to the jump in cases, the incapacity at the end of it to truly socially distance children in the schools, and can't guarantee the same excellent standards across our have and have-not population divide in this jagged state, we need to prepare ourselves to have our children repeat the school year they lost, between last spring and the coming fall. There is too much they gain from one another and from the social circumstances of school to merely throw away an entire year of precious life because of the mismanaged application of our own supposedly adult society in a crisis.

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REPUBLICANS HOLD OUT FOR A HERO AMID COVID-19 BY JOHN VAN VLIET



Bonnie Tyler’s classic 1984 anthem opens with a plea to the heavens that the New Jersey Republican Party powers-that-be might grudgingly find themselves singing to themselves. “Where have all the good men gone and where are all the gods? Where’s the streetwise Hercules to fight the rising odds? Isn’t there a white knight upon a fiery steed? Late at night I toss and I turn and I dream of what I need.”

Indeed, the de facto champion of the Republican Party is Donald Trump. Whether or not the GOP rank and file accept it, that white knight finds his fiery steed has thrown a shoe trying to get a footing in the Garden State.

Where have all the good men gone?

The Old Guard New Jersey Republicans—the cut of Keans and Frel-inghuysens—civil, refined, and generally considered responsible, can

try to ride the president’s base, which is generally hostile to the “compassionate conservatism” touted by pre-9/11 George W. Bush, to a contentious victory. Alternatively, they can disassociate themselves from the president and the associated qualities, personalities, and policies which have made his brand sour in the Garden State. Doing so, they know, opens them up to attack from both the Republican base as well as Democratic opponents exploiting a party divide.

Then there is the case of Congressman Jeff Van Drew, who won Trump’s favor by switching parties and hosting a South Jersey rally. Van Drew, as a Democrat, defeated Trump-champion Seth Grossman following the retirement of Republican Congressman LoBiondo, turning CD 2 blue. But whether through genuine disappointment with the Democrats or a sense of opportunism, Van Drew traded in his D-card for an R, prompting angry howls from the Democrats and praise from the Republicans who seemingly found a victory even with Grossman’s defeat. Nevertheless, given Van Drew’s background it may come as a small comfort to the traditional New Jersey Right’s looking for a “cradle Republican”.

So the value of party loyalty is impossibly muddled as New Jersey’s

GOP seeks its hero.

Former Governor Christie’s party loyalty was never in question and he has reappeared on the stage, assailing his successor’s performance, waxing on his interactions and relationship with Donald Trump, and glorying in his apparent exoneration in the Bridgegate scandal. The leader who rose to dizzying heights with the cresting surge of Superstorm Sandy left office with record low approval ratings and quite possibly irreparably damaged Lieutenant Governor Kim Guadagno’s chances in the 2016 gubernatorial election, ushering in one of New Jersey’s most liberal governors.

So, where is the streetwise Hercules for New Jersey’s Republicans? Given the current weakness of the GOP on the state level, conservatives looking for a man who can stand for what they are looking for might be the brawny Senate President and Murphy-antagonist Steve Sweeney: a Democrat, but the only figure at the moment with the ability to handicap the champion of the progressives, Governor Murphy. A bitter pill for the party-faithful, perhaps, but a pragmatic one. And Republicans can take some small comfort that in politics, as in life, all situations are temporary.

Enter the coronavirus.

In February, before the pandemic crippled the economy and killed more Americans than the First World War, Trump's approval rating in New Jersey, according to Fairleigh Dickinson University, was hovering at 32% with 60% saying they disapproved of the president. At approximately the same time, Governor Murphy was polling at 42% approving with 36% disapproving. A third of those polled at the time weren't aware of any significant accomplishments by the governor.

A plague unseen on these shores since the Spanish Flu a century prior has thrown the entire country upside down and New Jersey Republicans struggle to find both a Garden State hero and a message that resonates with the larger public. The challenge has been to find credibility as well as breathing room during the pandemic in a space dominated by Democrats both captaining the ship formerly at Woodrow Wilson's desk, as well as in the Democrat-dominated Senate and Assembly.

Former assemblyman and gubernatorial candidate Jack Ciattarelli has long been a critic of the Murphy Administration, using his credentials as a businessman and his extolling of what he markets as a fiscally responsible economic plan to combat the other great plague of New Jersey: high taxation. And in the economy Ciattarelli may find the gap in Murphy's armor.

The Republican who slammed then-candidate Trump in the lead-up to the 2016 election may be the best

hope for the "mad as hell" elements of New Jersey who have suffered during the shutdown imposed to protect the lives and public health of residents. While lockdowns have been gradually easing, at times with reverses as coronavirus cases spike again, many businesses were unable to obtain the government loans and payroll funding needed to stay afloat. The unemployment system, blasted as slow, archaic, and ineffectual, left thousands of New Jerseyans unable to get the money they were entitled to for weeks, and in some cases months, as doors were shuttered across the state.

Even though a late-June FDU survey of New Jerseyans showed that two-thirds supported keeping the current restrictions in place until a vaccine or effective treatment is available, the impacts on business have been devastating. More than most other parts of the country, perhaps due to the Garden State's early experience with the coronavirus, New Jerseyans have been fighting to "crush the curve" but the governor faces growing pressure and withering criticism over the handling of New Jersey's elder care and nursing homes who represented a large portion of the virus deaths suffered in the state.

As the pandemic continues, Republicans have found themselves in a strange position. The governor has, by all accounts, succeeded so far in keeping New Jersey from the fate of California, Florida, Arizona, and other states where new cases mount daily. With the absence of federal leadership—or the presence, at times,

of federal antagonism towards Blue States—New Jersey has joined with a regional partnership of neighboring states to hold the line as the rest of the country descends into what the north-east had experienced first.

Much of the north-east's criticism from Republican governors like Florida's Ron DeSantis was a product of timing and, perhaps, simple callousness. The north-east was struck hard and fast while the larger part of the nation had yet to detect their viral spikes. On March 16, Governor Murphy issued Executive Order 104 which imposed social distancing and two days later, the schools were shut down. Some municipalities believed this would be short-term, but school districts began rapidly moving teaching to online-only formats. By March 28, New Jersey was reporting a total of almost 9,000 cases.

DeSantis is sure to earn a place of note when the histories of the COVID-19 pandemic are written. Speaking to journalists in May, DeSantis took a swipe at reporters. "You've got a lot of people in your profession who waxed poetically for weeks and weeks, about how Florida was going to be just like New York. 'Wait two weeks, Florida's going to be next;' 'Just like Italy, wait two weeks.' Well hell, we're eight weeks away from that, and it hasn't happened."



Disneyworld reopened on Saturday, July 11.

As of this writing, the state of New Jersey has recorded 182,029 cases across the state with 13,955 confirmed deaths. Meanwhile, Johns Hopkins University reports that Broward County, Florida, has 55,411 confirmed cases and Miami-Dade has 118,462, the second-highest number of cases per county only to Los Angeles. Two Floridian counties are approximately equal to the whole state of New Jersey, with over 9,000 new cases a day as this is being written. Each day, Florida adds to its case list the entirety of what New Jersey sustained a week and a half after Governor Murphy took swift and understandably unpopular action in March.

Where has this left the New Jersey GOP? The party has to walk the balance of maintaining a credible alternative voice, while also not being so reckless as to imperil public health—a charge that has presented itself as the biggest challenge to the president’s re-election prospects.

Following the money trail is always a safe bet. Since the Republican Party brands itself as the party of fiscal responsibility, fresh meat is laid before them as Governor Murphy contends with the funding crisis that has accompanied the pandemic. The governor has pleaded for direct federal cash assistance and bonding as one of the only ways to keep the state from drowning. Assembly Leader Craig Coughlin has suggested that raising taxes might be necessary and the governor has not ruled out that option. The governor has since sought to borrow \$9.9 billion, prompting a lawsuit by the state Republican Party and key GOP lawmakers on constitutional grounds. But even if the Republicans are successful and the court rules in their favor, what option is

left to prevent raising taxes? If Murphy is forced to do so, the Republicans can assault him as adding to the financial pain placed on residents, but would also be directly complicit in causing that situation. Either way, the money has to come from somewhere.

On a matter of policy, the Republicans have a valid angle of attack. The governor has issued countless executive orders, which are not in and of themselves law. The executive order is a prerogative but it is not a substitute for legislation. The continual use of these executive orders has led the Republicans charging that Murphy is ruling the state by edict and that he has cultivated fear as a means of ensuring compliance with those orders. Whether or not that is true is a matter of debate but the reality is that the New Jersey governor is one of the most institutionally powerful in the country and has tremendous ability to use, or abuse, those powers if unchecked.

The very name “Republican” is anti-monarchist by definition, and if the GOP is looking for its white knight to mount his fiery steed, they can find footing with the perception of one-man-rule. Whoever this knight is, indeed, if he is ever found, will have to charge through a rocky battlefield of public health, a divisive president, a politically weakened state party, a fast-crumbling economy, institutional distrust, a dangerous amalgam of racial tension and culture war, and face a governor handling a crisis while in a non-election year.

THINGS COVID SNATCHED AWAY. BY JAY LASSITER



We were headed out to the Stone Pony for an Amy Winehouse tribute when someone grabbed their camera and dared us to say cheese.

That's me in the turtleneck posing alongside Joe Grillo and Reggie Bledsoe on Thanksgiving. Stoned on tryptophan and champagne, we were bundling up before heading out into the late November chill.

That night we shared Ubers and hugs and cocktails and gossip and cigarettes and then a lot more gossip. We screamed and sang for hours, blissfully ignorant that something called COVID-19 would dominate all our lives shortly after this photo.

The other day I updated my Facebook cover with the photo and judging from the feedback, it plucked a few heartstrings.

"I miss being able to hug to humans," someone replied, a lament that was echoed several times on the thread. This image represents much of what coronavirus has snatched away from us all: mask-free, carefree gestures of affection, socializing with friends, going out to large gatherings.

The image captured the casual fondness between people who choose to spend holidays together.



And for some, it represents a time when he had a job.

Basically it's all the things I've pretty much always taken for granted.

TABLE FOR 2 ON THE PATIO

NJ has been on lockdown since mid-March. None of us has eaten in a restaurant in 14 long weeks. So when limited outdoor dining options began this week in NJ, many of us were eager to snap that long, sad streak.

My breaking point came early Wednesday morning when I texted my friend Maryellen.

"Lunch today? Just say yes!"

She replied almost immediately.

"Ok boo, let me hop in the shower!" I texted back for confirmation.

"OMG is this real!?" It *was* real. At long last.

My excited-ness was mildly tempered by how scruffy I'd become on lockdown. A quick glance at my extremely non-pedicured toes ruled out a trip to the boardwalk. Instead we found a table for 2 on Cookman Ave, Asbury Park's main strip for drinking and dining.

I noticed Maryellen's shock of platinum hair from the parking space.

Normally I might sneak up behind

her, put my hands over her eyes and play the "guess who?" game. But the sight of everyone all masked up reminds me that these *aren't* normal times.

Hugging breaches social distance protocol but reflexively Maryellen and I did it anyway. You'll wanna guard against those instincts as we emerge from lockdown. NJ flattened the curve on COVID-transmission rates because most of us are smart enough to stand a meter apart and wear a mask.

The hug felt really good but we should've fist-bumped instead. And then promptly washed our hands.

LONELY PEOPLE

If you're lucky enough to have someone to accidentally hug, count your blessings. Maryellen and I did a lot of that over lunch. Between squirts of Purell, we pondered all those people for whom being alone also means being lonely: single people, surviving partners, the geographically isolated.

Or anyone in a nursing home.

Why did it take a little temporary isolation to prompt me to contemplate what it's like for someone who's lonely all the time? And why, at 48 years of age, do I still take my blessings for granted so freely?

I don't know the answer to either of those uncomfortable questions just yet. But thanks to COVID-19, there's plenty of time to reflect and to figure it out.

RUSHING TO WARD OFF PHANTOM LOOTERS. BY BOB HENNELLY



Last month, an entire world ended when Roy Den Hollander shot and killed Federal Judge Esther Salas's 20-year-old son Daniel at the judge's North Brunswick home.

In the days since, there's been a lot written about how for years the ardent Trump supporter used the internet to heap misogynist scorn on Judge Salas, the first Latina appointed to the Federal bench in New Jersey.

The number of threats made against Federal judges has spiked over 400 percent over the last four years to 4,500 last year, yet fewer than 10 percent were investigated, according to the U.S. Marshal Service.

The tone of Hollander's racist white male grievance rants mirrored the unprecedented epic cyber bullying of Federal judges by President Trump, which US District Court Judge Paul Friedman warned in 2019 were taking our nation into "uncharted territory" and risked undermining the "faith in the rule of law itself."

"This obviously is a trend we're seeing throughout public life, but I would suggest, the stakes in attacking the judiciary have graver implications," Judge Friedman said, according to the Washington Post's reporting. "And regrettably, the current President of the United States is feeding right into this destructive narrative."

He continued. “We are witnessing a chief executive who criticizes virtually every judicial decision that doesn’t go his way and denigrates judges who rule against him, sometimes in very personal terms. He seems to view the courts and the justice system as obstacles to be attacked and undermined, not as a co-equal branch to be respected even when he disagrees with its decisions.”

There’s a cruel irony that Hollander’s murderous act killed a young man who would have been in his fifties in a nation that will be majority minority, something that 46 percent of whites believe will “weaken American customs and values”, according to the Pew Research Center poll published in March of 2019.

That same survey, taken a full year before COVID rocked our world, found that a majority of all races that Pew surveyed predicted that 30 years from now “the economy will be weaker, health care will be less affordable, the condition of the environment will be worse and older Americans will have a harder time making ends meet than they do now.”

The last few months in the deadly jaws of COVID19 have acted as a kind of cruel accelerant, a cosmic fast forward to a dystopia where fear, anger and scarcity have hijacked our collective consciousness.

Exhibit A would be Sunday’s edition of the Asbury Park Press’s front-page proclaiming “Gun applications triple in Jersey; 26 lifeguards at LBI test

positive for COVID-19 and Thousands of jobless are still waiting for check.”

New Jersey is not an outlier.

Just as millions of Americans have taken to the street in peaceful protests in the aftermath of the death of George Floyd in police custody, millions of their fellow Americans have become first time gun buyers, according to the National Shooting Sports Foundation.

“The early part of 2020 has been unlike any other year for firearm purchases—particularly by first-time buyers—as new NSSF® research reveals millions of people chose to purchase their first gun during the COVID-19 pandemic,” according to the National Shooting Sports Foundation website.

“Thanks in large part to the work done by NSSF’s legislative team, the firearms industry was deemed essential in most states, and firearm retailers were allowed to stay open to conduct business,” NSSF boasted. “And conduct business they did, with NSSF-adjusted NICS figures showing year-over-year increases of 80 percent in March and 69 percent in April 2020. These strong increases led to more than 6.5 million NSSF-adjusted background checks in the first four months of 2020, up 48 percent from 4.4 million during the same period in 2019.”

So, what’s driving this rush to arm? What’s sparked this creeping sense that our nation is unraveling and

that our civil society is no longer capable of rising to the challenges we face whether it be systemic racism or global warming?

Could it be a heavily armed Federal government that’s failed to institute an effective national public health response to a once in a century pandemic that is likely to kill 200,000 Americans by Election Day and has isolated us as a disease infected global pariah?

Perhaps, it’s the realization that for all of our national hubris, our winner-take-all economy was all based on a very fragile model that made a tiny percent of people extremely rich while tens of millions of Americans struggled week to week for the basics.

We did not get here overnight. It wasn’t just Donald Trump’s divide and conquer motus operandi that has us on the precipice of imploding. I heard the tearing of our national fabric in the Congressional debate several years ago over providing relief for the states hit hardest by Sandy when other regions resisted helping.

This alienation between so-called red and blue states is clearly manifest in the refusal of Republican governed states like Georgia, Florida and Texas to learn from New Jersey and New York’s COVID-19 experience, as if there was something innately inferior about state’s governed by Democrats.

And now, as the nation sinks deeper into disease and economic disloca-

tion, our politics are increasingly fueled by a cynical fracking of these fissures that produces more hot gas to obscure reality.

There's no doubt that part of what's feeding our collective angst is the way the corporate news media is representing our deteriorating sad national circumstance.

We are being pickled in a heavy rotation of video images of Federal law enforcement officers launching tear gas rounds and beating protestors in Portland, Oregon.

On Fox, these images are used as propaganda that cast Trump as the guarantor of law and order. In fact, in an effort to stabilize his freefall among suburban female voters, the President's campaign is warning that without such a robust response dis-

order will spread from America's 'liberal' cities and overwhelm the tranquility of Main Street, Everywhere Else.

On MSNBC, the same footage is used to set up segments predicting that Trump will break the over 220-year-old tradition of a peaceful transition of Presidential power by not accepting the results of the election. This of course ratchets up the sense of dread which some strategists hope will gin up turnout for Vice-President Biden as it sucks more and more Americans into a vortex of anxiety and fear.

What too many journalists fail to do in setting up these clips is what MSNBC host Ari Melber did when he prefaced them with a contextual map of the limited area where the events were playing out.

Of course, this footage depicts what's actually happening in and around one neighborhood in one city, and yet it serves as effective click bait, and in the process distorts our situational awareness about street conditions throughout the country at a time when many are cutoff from friends, family and the larger world.

I recently heard the consequences of living in this virtual reality in the voice of a healthcare worker who is also a young mother from Ocean County. She told me that the arc of current events as depicted on Fox News had convinced her she needed to get a handgun for personal protection.

When I asked her to tell me who she thought was threatening her family, she said "the looters, just like we saw with Sandy."



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**COVID-19 COAST TO COAST: FEDS ARE MIA
AS VIRUS SPREADS. BY BOB HENNELLY**

Here in New Jersey and neighboring New York, where COVID-19 has been under control, there's a deep sense of foreboding that the failure of so many other states to learn from our painful experience, and the MIA status of the Federal government, will lead to another mass casualty event here.

As Governor Andrew Cuomo has observed from the beginning, we have been behind the curve of this scourge in purely a reactive mode. We are like a person on fire running to escape the flames.

Governor Murphy has already sounded the alarm that our state is seeing a significant uptick in new cases with Friday's report of 699, up dramatically from 261 the day before.

Experts now project we could have 250,000 dead Americans by Election Day.

But these publicized numbers, which are supposed to act as our collective 'dashboard' and define our risk threat matrix, don't really capture what's actually going on and the role the Trump administration is playing in undermining our ability to combat this virus.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

According to research published by the CDC and the journal *Jama Internal Medicine* the nation's COVID-19 infection rate is likely ten times higher than what is being reported. The findings are based on tests that flagged the presence of COVID-19 antibodies in 19,000 routine blood tests that include individuals that likely were neither tested for the virus nor displayed symptoms.

Yet, even if we extrapolate this data and assume that 20 million Americans are now infected, that means the vast majority of Americans are still vulnerable to the deadly virus.

The wider prevalence of the virus comes as research is still inconclusive on whether the presence of the antibodies provides the carrier with an immunity, and if it does, for how long.

Dr. Fiona Havers, a member of the CDC seroprevalence task force, told NBC News “We don't know if antibodies represent protection from the virus. And there may be some suggestion that antibodies are waning over time, so we don't know if herd immunity is achievable.”

And that's not the worst of it in terms of the widening gap between reality and our popular understanding of the collective threat we all face which is vulnerable to manipulation by economic and political forces with their own self-serving agenda.

RIDING THE HERD

To this very day it is the presumption of the existence of herd immunity that has informed the Trump administration's cynical ploy of pitting the 50 states against one another while simultaneously promoting the spread of the virus by forcing schools to open and the nation's meat plants to stay open no matter how high the body count.

And just as the Trump administration's lack of a national response to the virus accelerates its spread, the failure of the GOP Senate to extend the \$600 a week supplemental unemployment benefit puts tens of millions of Americans at risk for eviction just when they need to shelter in place.

We face a multi-faceted crisis which requires an economic strategy that reinforces the essential national public health response.

In New Jersey more than 1.3 million people, out of a workforce of 4.3 million, have filed for unemployment since the start of the COVID-19 crisis. And that statistic does not include the impact of the pandemic on the hundreds of thousands of workers who work off the books or are self-employed.

On Thursday, the Commerce Department announced that in the second quarter the nation's Gross Domestic Product shrunk by an annualized 32.9 percent, the most severe contraction on record.

SENATE MIA AS FAMILIES STRUGGLE

Yet, Washington continued to dither about what if anything it should do to backstop the local, county and state governments drowning in red ink as they face unanticipated pandemic costs and a dramatic drop off of tax revenues as the nation sinks deeper into the clutches of the virus.

“We don’t have a Federal government—it’s in collapse,” said Hetty Rosenstein, CWA NJ State Director. “You can’t leave people in this circumstance. No responsible government would do that. This Federal government is creating this crisis by not offering an effective integrated public health response.”

For hundreds of thousands of New Jersey families the CARES Act’s \$600 in additional unemployment helped them make ends meet in a state notorious for some of the highest housing costs in the nation.

“I hear every day from our constituents whose very lives depend on the \$600 unemployment insurance benefits passed by the House,” wrote Rep. Bill Pascrell Jr. (D-NJ-09). “Their backgrounds are diverse, their stories are compelling, and their needs are heart-wrenching.... I want to share the stories of my constituents who are just some of the people devastated by Republicans’ cruel dereliction.”

One of those constituents was Joe from Teaneck who had worked at a Broadway theatre.

“My industry has been drastically affected, with the unfortunate news that we will not be returning to live theatre on Broadway until the earliest in January 2021,” Joe wrote. “The stimulus and unemployment add up to a percentage of what was my weekly income, hence to say if the stimulus were to end, it most definitely would have a drastic impact on my financial realities.

Joe is also an active member of my hometown Ambulance Corps, which was at the heart of the initial outbreak in Bergen County.

“Our hospital and our Township were ground zero in the early days of the pandemic,” he wrote. “It is with great pride, honor and respect for my fellow members, the men and women of our organization that answered the calls during that most difficult period and served our community.”

HURTING BEFORE COVID-19

It is impossible to grasp just how precarious our national circumstance is if you don’t have the context of understanding just how many American families were struggling before the pandemic.

For decades demographers and economists have documented how inadequate a gauge the U.S. poverty rate was in terms of capturing the lived experience of vast swaths of our country where wages had failed to keep pace with escalating shelter and cost of living costs.

Over a decade ago, the United Way of Northern New Jersey was perplexed by the volume of calls they got from families struggling economically who lived in zip codes with some of the lowest official poverty rates in the nation.

In 2009, working with researchers from Rutgers, they developed a way to track the actual local costs of living and wages and in the process discovered a cohort of families that were not living below the official poverty line, but still struggled week to week despite being employed.

That same project has been replicated with state surveys across the country.

“40% of US households were ALICE – Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed – struggling paycheck to paycheck BEFORE the pandemic,” wrote Dr. Stephanie Hoopes, National Director, United For ALICE ALICE – Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed.

“Closed and partially open businesses have meant lost income for these families – reduced hours or unemployment. For these households, even one unemployed person can push the family over the edge. Without outside help, many will be forced to choose between their home, their car, their parent’s medication, or their child’s next meal.

Hoopes continued. “While consumer spending has improved since Covid19 restrictions have eased, low wage workers hours and earning have not rebounded the same way. What little savings ALICE families had has been used up. They have no cushion to absorb gaps in benefits. Unless these families get relief quickly, there will be a huge uptick in evictions and foreclosures, utility cutoffs, lapses in car and student loan payments, and increases in medical debt; and lines at food banks will continue to grow.”

Before the pandemic, according to the Federal Reserve, 40 percent of American households would have to resort to borrowing to cover something like an unanticipated \$400 car repair or medical bill.

The [Princeton School of Public and International Affairs](#) celebrates all front line and essential workers.

Thank you!

We are proud to celebrate two of our community members for their dedication to serving NJ during COVID-19.



[Heather Howard](#), director of the State Health and Value Strategies Program and lecturer in public affairs at Princeton, is the former NJ Commissioner of Health and Senior Services and serves on Governor Murphy’s Restart and Recovery Advisory Council.



[Henri Hammond-Paul MPA '19](#) is putting his Princeton education to use at the NJ Department of Health, where he has partnered with the CDC to provide wrap-around services for high-risk travelers and other critical resources for the health care sector in NJ.

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ON THE EDGE OF COVID ABYSS

In addition to letting the \$600 unemployment supplemental payment lapse, Congress failed to renew the Federal moratorium on evictions which covers over 12 million tenant households, roughly 30 percent of those renting. At the same time state and local moratoriums are expiring.

“Frightening does not adequately describe what’s coming ahead,” said Larry Hamm, long time Newark civil rights activist and former state coordinator for Senator Bernie Sanders. “I know people whose Federal subsidized unemployment runs out today and they don’t know what they are going to do. They are going to be homeless.”

He continued. “Remember that the eviction moratorium Murphy put in place was not forgiveness of the rent but simply a suspension of eviction. I don’t know what made people think that if folks were behind in the rent before, that now they can come up with three or four months.”

The importance of keeping people in their homes, particularly in communities of color where we know COVID is taking the heaviest toll, can’t be overstated.

THE NEXT CRISIS

In typical mass media reductionism informed by our limited binary thinking, we frame COVID as either something that kills you outright or that you can survive it with an immunity that will protect you.

The grim reality that should be informing our actions, both individually, as a state and nation, is that you can survive COVID but with disabling consequences that could take years to fully manifest.

We have to study and become conversant with the underlying science ourselves. If this virus doesn’t outright kill you, it can do serious damage to your respiratory, coronary and central nervous systems.

Studies have flagged that COVID creates scarring on the lungs for those that survived a bout with the virus but also on the lungs of individuals who were asymptomatic.

“One thing we didn’t anticipate was that the virus seems to accelerate a great deal of scarring in the lungs,” wrote Dr. John Swartzberg, from UC Berkeley-UCSF Joint Medical Program. “And if lung tissue is replaced with scar tissue, it is no longer functional as regular pulmonary tissue, which translates to poor gas exchange.”

He continues. “What we really fear is long-term shortness of breath that could extend anywhere from being very mild to severely limiting. There is also a disturbing report looking at computerized tomography (CT) scans of asymptomatic people that found they were left with some scar tissue. So, this could even be happening on a subclinical level.”

In the same analysis Dr. Swartzberg notes “the virus can directly attack heart muscle cells, and there’s also evidence that the cytokine storm that the virus triggers in the body not only damages the lungs but can damage the heart. We don’t know what the long-term effects of that may be, but it could be that we will have a population of people who survive COVID-19 only to go on and have chronic cardiac problems.”

And that’s not all.

“The third organ system that we’re now pretty clear about is the central nervous system,” writes Dr. Swartzberg. “There is evidence of direct involvement of the virus with neurons, and also the cytokine storm and inflammatory mediators can cause damage to the central nervous system.”

He warns that in addition to “neurologic clinical findings” attending physicians are “seeing patients post-discharge struggling with psychological challenges, almost like PTSD. And, we’re also seeing some cognitive defects in some people that are very disturbing.”

And as previously reported, COVID-19 infections can cause “abnormal clotting of the blood in some people. This has led to pulmonary emboli, which are blood clots that travel to and damage the lungs, and strokes, which are blood clots in the vascular system of the brain. Both pulmonary emboli and strokes may have long-term consequences for these two organs.”

Yeah, just like the flu.

STILL NOT GETTING IT

Our more enlightened policy makers who are still in their flattening the curve phase, need to also prepare for addressing these long-term health consequences from COVID-19.

Yet, as Hamm points out, the response from some in Congress has been to use the cover of the pandemic to sneak in \$1.75 billion for a new FBI building and \$686 million for the F-35.

“All of what is happening now is just a logical extrapolation of what has been going on for decades,” Hamm said. “The bad situation may come quickly but it is the consequence of myriad of actions that we have taken before.”

For a generation, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11, we spent hundreds of billions of dollars of borrowed money on the military so we could project force anywhere in the world.

At the same time, we defunded public health, closed hospitals in inner cities and in rural America and for three years in a row America’s life expectancy declined, fueled by a spike in opioid addiction and suicides.

As President Trump and his partisans press to open schools in the fall, the reality is the existing health infrastructure in our schools has long been inadequate with thousands of them lacking something as basic as a school nurse.

DOOR TO DOOR HEALING

Donna Mazyck, the executive director of the National Association of School Nurses recently told NPR, one-in-four U.S. schools have no nurse, while 40 percent only have “a nurse only part of the day – a nurse who’s shared among several schools.”

The only way to successfully combat COVID is in the community where it is spreading. All too often, by the time people get to the hospital it’s too late and in the process, they infect their co-workers, friends and family.

In Cuba, where they have 8.19 physicians per 1,000 people, the government sent its thousands of doctors and health professionals to canvas every home for COVID-19 cases. So far, the island of 11.3 million, has recorded 2,608 cases with 87 deaths.

“There’s no other country in the hemisphere that does anything approaching this,” William Leogrande, professor of government at American University in Washington DC told the Guardian. “The whole organization of their healthcare system is to be in close touch with the population, identify health problems as they emerge, and deal with them immediately.”

He continued. “We know scientifically that quick identification of cases, contact tracing and quarantine are the only way to contain the virus in the absence of a vaccine – and because it begins with prevention, the Cuban health system is perfectly suited to carry out that containment strategy.”

We need emergency universal health care coverage now. For too long greed and scarcity have throttled our health care system that has only 2.59 physicians per 1,000 people.

Our politics and our imaginations are failing us.

We are underestimating the scale of the problems we face and the long-term consequences of failing to effectively address them. Our current system of rationing of healthcare based on the ability to pay leaves too much of the population exposed to a deadly and disabling virus we can all catch.

We need to think bigger, much bigger.



TEN MOMENTS IN THE LOCAL LIFE OF A STATE RAVAGED BY COVID-19. NEWARK

It was telling early (March 15th) that none of this had sunk in with sufficient force when Essex elected officials, including Newark Mayor Ras Baraka, did a press conference in the basement of City Hall without masks and oblivious to the six-foot social distancing rule. At that point, the city had one confirmed COVID-19 case of an individual that Baraka knew was in Newark, and a second confirmed case of an individual whose specimen was harvested in Newark who may be in the city. “Two people tested,” said Baraka. “We don’t know if the second case is in fact in Newark. We are investigating to determine if that second person is in fact a Newark resident.” It’s possible that more than a couple people on that very stage were spreading it around as the mayor delivered that news. That number would balloon by August 9th to 8,164 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 655 deaths.

TEANECK

On March 24th, Dr. Suraj Sagar, chief of infectious disease at Holy Name Medical Center, said the hospital looked like “a warzone.” Filling with COVID-19 patients at the early epicenter of the crisis, the hospital pled with the public for donations of personal protective equipment (PPE). More than 267 would die at the hospital due to COVID-19 complications.

FREEHOLD

On the week of March 24th, George Falcone became the first recorded person charged during the pandemic after coughing on someone, in this case a Wegman’s employee who had asked him to step back so she could cover food, while claiming to have the coronavirus.

JERSEY CITY

On April 6th, beloved Jersey City Councilman Michael Yun perished from COVID-19.

PATERSON

Paterson Mayor Andre Sayegh tested COVID-19 positive on the week of April 7th and proceeded to bunker into his basement with a daily rundown on his health and exhortation to his fellow Patersonians to take heed. The mayor would make what appeared to be a full recovery.

JERSEY CITY

On April 10th, former Jersey City Councilwoman Viola Richardson died from COVID-19 complications.

ANDOVER

The Andover Subacute and Rehabilitation Center I and II proved one of the most deadly long term care centers for the virus, recording 26 casualties, including two nurses, in reports surfacing the week of April 16th.

PATERSON

On April 17th, legendary boxing referee Eddie Cotton died from COVID-19 complications. His death shocked Silk City.

WOODBIDGE

In a telling sign of where the virus would concentrate and kill, the Woodbridge Vista Care Community on the week of May 31st sent 18 residents, most presumed to have COVID-19, to hospital for more urgent care. Since the beginning of the crisis, 6,680 COVID-19 deaths, or 42%, occurred in long term care facilities.

JERSEY CITY

On May 26th, the media reported the death the previous week of the 95-year old grandmother of Jersey City Mayor Steven Fulop from COVID-19 complications.

BELLMAWR

Through the COVID-19 crisis, the Atilis Gym became a focal point for owners suffering the economic consequences of having to keep their business closed to fulfill the governor's executive order. At one point, they broke into their own business in violation of the order.



VOTING BY MAIL, A TRUMPIAN FIASCO. BY GEORGE BALL



“[T]he evidence . . . [is] that voting by mail is rarely subject to fraud, does not give an advantage to one political party over another and can in fact inspire public confidence in the voting process, if done properly.”

<https://www.nextgov.com/ideas/2020/07/research-voting-mail-says-its-safe-fraud-and-disease/166990/>

One reason may be the anti-fraud protections built into the voting by mail process, which (by state) typically include requiring people requesting absentee ballots to be registered voters, mailing ballots to the official address listed on voter registration rolls, requiring voter signatures on the external envelope, and having election authorities make sure the ballot came from the address of an actual voter. If a ballot appears questionable, some states use a signature matching technique to verify the signature of the voter.

<https://www.brookings.edu/policy2020/votervital/how-does-vote-by-mail-work-and-does-it-increase-election-fraud/>

Indeed, voting by mail appears to be more secure than in person voting. It bears mention here that according to the Heritage Foundation, the numbers of fraudulent votes are infinitesimal (totaling 1,200 allegations of fraud and 1,000 convictions over the last twenty years). In 2016, approximately twenty-five percent of U.S. votes (33 million) were cast by either universal mail or absentee ballots.

<https://www.brookings.edu/policy2020/votervital/how-does-vote-by-mail-work-and-does-it-increase-election-fraud/>

Yet since 2001, sixteen percent of all voter fraud allegations and ten percent of all voter fraud convictions involve voting by mail.

<https://www.nextgov.com/ideas/2020/07/research-voting-mail-says-its-safe-fraud-and-disease/166990/>

Voting by mail also saves states substantial amounts of money as compared to in person voting.

<http://web.mit.edu/supportthevoter/www/files/2013/11/Vote-by-Mail-Reform-Memo.pdf>

It is therefore unsurprising that 34 states (plus the District of Columbia) allow any voter to cast an absentee ballot by mail without providing any reason, and five of those states also allow universal voting by mail.

<https://www.nextgov.com/ideas/2020/07/research-voting-mail-says-its-safe-fraud-and-disease/166990/>

Among those 34 states are Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Idaho, South Dakota, North Dakota, Utah, Wyoming, and Montana – hardly bastions of the Progressive Left.

Rejecting the considered judgments of these perennially Republican leaning states, President Trump has stated that: ‘I think mail-in voting is going to rig the election, I really do,’ Trump said in an interview with Fox News Sunday . . . [as well as] ‘I think it’s subject to tremendous fraud.’ ‘With mail-in ballots, people can forge ’em” and ‘Mail-in voting... will lead to the most corrupt election in USA history.’

<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-trumps-false-rhetoric-vote-mail-resonating/story?id=71887848>.

Just days ago, Trump tweeted:

With Universal Mail-In Voting (not Absentee Voting, which is good), 2020 will be the most INACCURATE & FRAUDULENT Election in history. It will be a great embarrassment to the USA. Delay the Election until people can properly, securely and safely vote???

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) July 30, 2020

Contrary to the President’s claim, we have already seen that there is no difference from a security perspective between absentee ballots and “universal” mail in voting. And if the President actually believes that waiting to cast in person votes at polling stations is so unsafe that our national election should be delayed, it seems incongruent for him to also insist that school buildings are so safe that millions of children can congregate in confined classrooms for six hours a day before returning to multi-generational homes.

Faced with these obvious disconnects, Team Trump has tried to reshape the President’s public statements. Mark Meadows (Trump’s fourth Chief-of Staff in three and half years) has suggested that the problem with mail in voting is that it delays the result, which could take weeks to tabulate.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/08/02/white-house-steps-back-trump-suggestion-about-delaying-election/>

In an arguably more nuanced reformulation, a well-known newspaper columnist characterized Trump's objection to mail in voting as "guarantee[ing] mayhem and cast[ing] doubts on the November results."

<https://nypost.com/2020/08/01/a-national-mail-in-ballot-election-would-be-a-disaster-goodwin/>

Which covers everything, and therefore says nothing.

There are at least two problems with this repackaging. One is that it does not resemble what Trump has repeatedly stated, repeatedly says he believes, and presumably wants us to believe; that mail in voting is "corrupt" and a "tremendous fraud." The other is that while counting mail in votes may delay reporting the results, any such delay can be substantially mitigated without much effort. Since most states permit early voting, mail in voters can be encouraged to vote early, as the federal government itself suggested as recently as June 11, 2020.

<https://www.usa.gov/absentee-voting>

The United States Postal Service has also issued detailed recommendations to address this potential problem (including the simple step of voters postmarking their votes one week earlier than their respective state's voter cut-off date).

<https://about.usps.com/newsroom/national-releases/2020/2020-05-29-marshall-to-election-officials-re-election-mail.pdf>

And even if there was a delay, that does not speak to the integrity of the vote count. We have been through delays before – in 2000, Al Gore did not concede the results until some six weeks after the election – and American democracy was fine.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2000_United_States_presidential_election_recount_in_Florida

Why, then, is the President doing this? I'm not a mind reader, so I can't confidently tell you why Trump is determined to fabricate chaos about the integrity of our electoral process.

In 1970 Roman Hruska, a Senator from Nebraska, famously argued in support of a proposed Supreme Court nominee widely reputed to be a mediocre judge that:

"Even if he were mediocre, there are a lot of mediocre judges and people and lawyers. They are entitled to a little representation, aren't they, and a little chance?"

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Hruska

That nominee was not confirmed.

Everyone has moments of mediocrity. All of us are, at times, simply wrong.

But it is one thing for a nation to live through profound policy disagreements or decisions that, in the event, are wrong. It is quite another to groan under the strain of what has become an endless series of Trump's ad hominem attacks on our Intelligence Services, the FBI, multiple Inspectors General, huge swaths of the Department of Justice and Department of State, the Pentagon (including its system of military justice), all national polling services, the National Weather Service, any elected official (Republican or Democrat) who questions his decisions, the NIH, the CDC, the growing legion of his own former Cabinet members, and the Media – including at times Fox News– to name but a few. Capped off – now – by a relentless effort to undermine the public's belief in our own elections.

Every week – and in some weeks most days – the President reveals more and more of what he is. And isn't.

In doing so, President Trump has shown us many things. He may simply be profoundly mediocre. Which is bad for the country. Or these jigsaw puzzle pieces may be part of a purposeful design. Which is even worse.

Every election is, fundamentally, a referendum on the person. Each of us has the ability to decide for ourselves how to best understand what kind of person Trump is. This election season, our most basic responsibility as individual voters is to do so.

To get an absentee ballot, a registered voter must request one through their state government. Election officials mail the voter an absentee ballot, which they complete and sign, and return by mail or, under certain circumstances, fax. Officials can reject absentee ballots if they are improperly filled out, and voters face steep penalties if they falsify any information.

<https://www.dictionary.com/e/absentee-ballot-vs-mail-in-ballot/>

A mail in ballot refers to a “process that's often referred to as all-mail voting. Registered voters in these states automatically receive a *mail ballot*, which is sent to their address before Election Day and mailed back by the voter or deposited at a voting location or secure drop box by a certain time on Election Day.”

<https://www.dictionary.com/e/absentee-ballot-vs-mail-in-ballot/>



SOCIAL DISTANCING IN A CRISIS BY MARY GATTA (REPRINTED FROM MARCH 21ST)



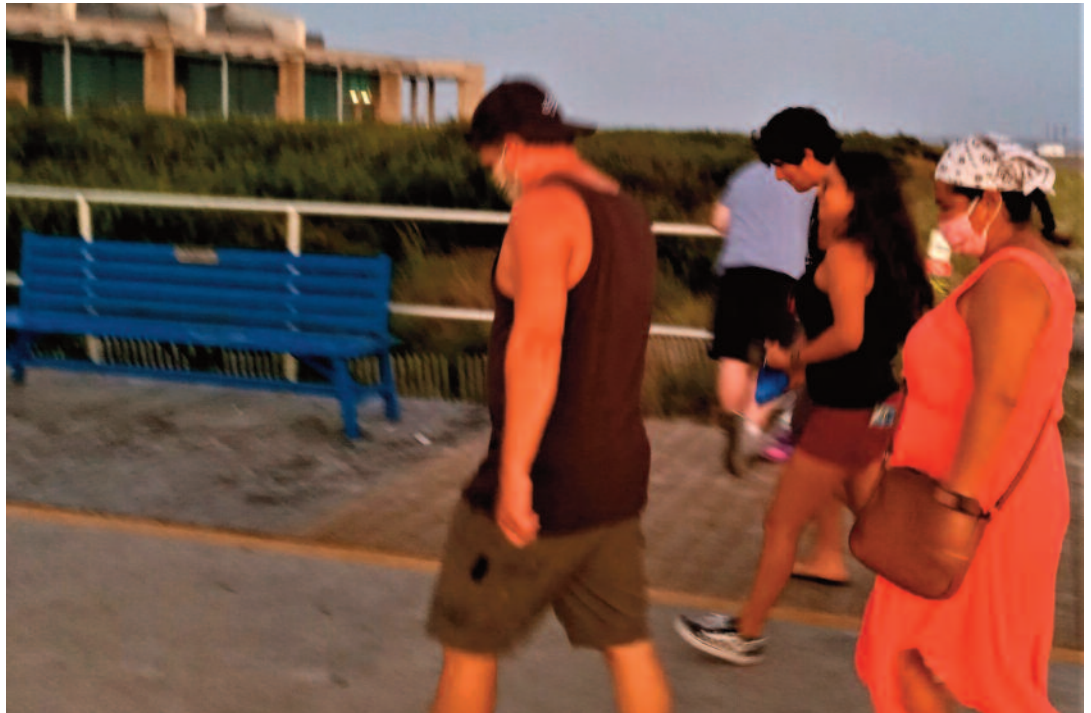
In New Jersey, among other things, Governor Murphy has (to this point) banned events larger than 50 people, schools are closing for weeks, and people need to reduce time in public settings. Bars will close tonight at 8 p.m. for eat-in services. These measures are hard to do. We are social beings and accustomed to going to restaurants, shopping and work at will. This will have to change over the next weeks.

On the same day the state health commissioner noted that a Covid-19 death occurred in the aftermath of a transmission at a *family gathering*, Governor Phil Murphy specifically lingered on social distancing on Sunday's press briefing call.

“Not enough is being done,” said the governor. “There is too much business as usual. This is something no one can be cavalier about.”

“Even if you’re young, we need everybody to take [social distancing] to heart,” he added. “Obviously losing schools is a big step in that direction. Working at home is a big step in that direction.”

On Monday the governor was set to announce extensive social distancing measures to mitigate further spread of Covid-19.



New Jerseyans need to take these concerns seriously. It is more than just protecting your own health. Practicing social distancing is indeed your responsibility as a citizen in the state. As Assemblywoman Joanne Downey shared “The idea is simple: If low-risk people don’t socially distance, then the entire containment process is not effective. are fewer high-risk individuals — the sick and the elderly — and they don’t tend to move around as much as lower-risk individuals. Therefore, it’s more likely that a low-risk individual will expose a high-risk individual to the virus.” So even if you feel your risk is low, your probability of infecting others is quite high.

However this weekend crowds at Asbury Park restaurants and bars remained large, despite clear instructions for social distancing practices. Garrett Giberson, Asbury’s Office of Emergency Management noted that this was: “Shocking, considering what’s going on globally, it boggles my mind people don’t have common sense what officials on all levels of government have said about social distancing. It’s not a joke it’s a serious matter.”

As a result, this afternoon, Asbury Park’s governing body has declared a state of emergency in the city. Effective immediately city facilities are closed to the public; all restaurants and bars with liquor license must close by 10pm; and all nonliquor establishments that hold 75 or more people must also close by 10pm. And shortly after the announcement, the owner of the Watermark bar posted on Facebook that the Watermark will be closed until it is safe for customers and staff to be in close proximity to each other.

Social distancing is our responsibility to ourselves, our families, and our fellow New Jerseyans. So stay home as much as you can in the next weeks. Don’t take your children to the mall or playgrounds, don’t host dinner parties at your house, don’t meet friends out for drinks, and don’t go out to group events. But do skype/video chat with family and friends, take walks outside (staying 6 feet apart from others), and stay connected to others in a virtual space. And purchase gift cards online now to our Jersey hotels, restaurants and retail shops. If we follow these measures conscientiously and faithfully, then hopefully we can all use those gift certificates come this summer.

DISTANCE LEARNING: A BUST.

BY CARINA PIZARRO

Distance learning was one of the hardest things I had to go through in my life. In the beginning before the pandemic I had just made the lacrosse team after weeks of hard work. I had good grades and everything was great.

It was a Friday and our English teacher said to us that she thought we weren't going back to school after that weekend. None of us thought it was true, though. And, of course, we did not go back.

At that time, we did not realize how badly this would affect our lives. The first week was not too bad considering we were “going back” in a couple of weeks. After another week went by, I got very ill and I could hardly breathe. I thought I was going to die, it was so bad. I was never so sick.



I was recovering as the first COVID deaths hit Bridgewater after we left school. We were all on high alert while this was going on. We all knew we were in a crisis. The stores were packed with people. All the masks and hand sanitizers were gone. People were treating this like it was the apocalypse.

I did not learn anything from supposed distance learning, but I did learn not to take the privileges you have like school for granted.

BEST QUOTES

“As always, stay connected, stay safe and stay healthy. Thank you.” –Department of Health Commissioner Judith Persichilli.

“The national situation compounded by instances of knucklehead behavior here at home are requiring us to hit pause on the restart of indoor dining for the foreseeable future.” –Governor Phil Murphy.

“New Jersey got literally whacked.” – New Jersey Board of Public Utilities President Joe Fiordaliso, on 1.4 million New Jerseyans losing power as a consequence of Hurricane Isaisas.

“This is a judgment day bill. The people of this state are watching and judging.” – Assemblywoman Britnee Timberlake (D-34), urging her fellow lawmakers to back her tenant relief bill.

“Winter is coming.” –Assemblyman John McKeon (D-27), urging his fellow lawmakers to back the \$9.9 billion COVID-19 Recovery Act.

“A man coughed [in the direction of law enforcement] while claiming to be COVID-19 positive.” –Superintendent of State Police Colonel Pat Callahan.

“Will Governor be held accountable & cited for his violations of his own Executive Order?” – Assemblyman Jay Webber (R-26), in a tweet to Attorney General Gurbir Grewal after Governor Murphy dove head-first into a Hillside George Floyd rally.

“I never thought I’d be living under a king.” –Assemblyman Hal Wirths (R-24), in reference to Governor Murphy.

“I’m very worried about mail-in voting because I think it’s subject to tremendous fraud and being rigged. You see that Paterson, New Jersey, where I believe it was 20% of the vote was fraudulent. You’ll have tremendous fraud if you do these mail-in ballots.” – President Donald J. Trump.

“The governor doesn’t want to listen to us. He doesn’t care about our protocol. He’s just on a power trip.” –Frank Trumbetti, owner of Atilis Gym in Bellmawr.



“This is not just about Floyd. This is about hundreds of years of lynching, abuse, of segregation of purposeful and deliberate systemic abuse, denial of housing. This arbitrary violence is outraging. Newark has been here before. Newark has been here before. I stood in protest with Larry Hamm as a boy, as a college student. I stood out in the rain with Larry Hamm. I fought for a civilian complaint review board. In 1967, Newark went up in flames for four days. Dozens of people died. The city was destroyed and we still are trying to recover from that today.” –Newark Mayor Ras Baraka.

“Needless to say, the police don’t want civilian oversight. The police are so powerful in America. That’s why you saw the arrogance in that officer who killed George Floyd, posing on that man like a white guy on Safari in Africa. Because they operate with impunity. We must have national oversight in every town and village of this country. We need it, as a guardrail against total fascism. The National Fraternal Order of Police backed [Donald] Trump, and in return for their support he made Jeff Sessions attorney general.” –U.S. senate candidate Larry Hamm.

“Last week, I said we were done with warnings and would take strong law enforcement action against anyone who failed to heed the Governor’s COVID-19 related emergency orders. This crackdown will continue until everyone gets the message that they need to stop these violations.” –Attorney General Gurbir Grewal, on Saturday, April 4th.

“I’m tired.” – State Senator Ronald L. Rice (D-28), urging support for law enforcement reform.



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WORD OF THE YEAR

KNUCKLEHEAD

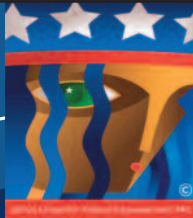
[nuhk-uhl-hed]

/'nəkəl,hed/

noun INFORMAL

A stupid, bumbling, inept person.

Example: A person exhibiting aggressive or willfully bad behavior that undermines public health is a knucklehead.



Latinas United for Political Empowerment PAC

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COVID-19: ONE MORE BARRIER IN A WORLD OF BARRIERS

IT WORKED OUT. SORT OF.

Atlantic County Freeholder Ashley Bennett wanted to take her frontline experience as an emergency room healthcare worker to Congress but ended up back on the frontline with a vengeance, as the incoming artillery of COVID-19 encumbered her usual duties.

“I don’t know how I would have been able to maintain a campaign on top of my usual schedule at the hospital,” Bennett – a psychiatric emergency screener – told InsiderNJ. “I’m been leaving later and coming in earlier and coming in more and more.”

“I’m handling it as best I can,” she said. “Health, social workers and counselors have seen an increase in those seeking mental health help. People are experiencing greater social isolation in this crisis. You’re alone with your own thoughts and there’s increased fear of the unknown.”

She does love her job, she admitted, but Bennett can’t help but lament the lack of sustained help and healthcare for those in need. She weathers the COVID-19 crisis with an acute sense of urgency for those issues she broke into politics with three years ago, which propelled her to an unsuccessful run for Congress. Those issues she advocated for on the trail are not something she reads about on Google. She lives them every day.

“COVID-19 highlighted income equality as nothing else we have seen,” said the freeholder, who opted against seeking a second countywide term this year. “We hear about people being able to sustain themselves through this by staying connected to the Internet, but there are people who do not have access to the Internet or even know how to gain access. COVID highlights all these other issues, and what it has done is increase those in need of mental health help. In this environment, we see Rutgers, for example, looking to cut mental health workers, and mixed messages about the virus, which simply adds to the anxiety. You have the president, for example, and others not wanting to wear masks, or people failing to social distance. It’s so frustrating. Let’s not politicize public health, regardless of which side of the aisle you fall on.”

She prioritizes her own physical and mental health and strives to follow the basic guidelines, she said, even as she worries about her own family, returning home after each shift in a virus-besieged emergency room. Daily, it’s the same story: the story that drove her to want to go to Congress to make right. “It’s about those people who are living paycheck to paycheck, whose housing is in jeopardy, whose poor healthcare is highlighted by COVID-19,” Bennett said.

“It’s one more barrier, for people whose lives are filled with barriers,” she added. “I’ve seen such an increase in services, and it’s definitely wearing on people.”

So it worked out, in a way. Without Bennett out there it would be tougher for real people, and tougher for her to juggle an election with her day job, but the problem should not be what it is, she said, in a so-called civilized society: an intense and ongoing period of mayhem – for far too many.



A \$2.1 MILLION REVENUE COVID-19 HIT IN BRIDGEWATER HINTS AT ONGOING LOCAL BUDGETING CHALLENGES

Bridgewater Mayor Matt Moench was trying to work in his office when Hurricane Isaias knocked out the power, which knocked out the air conditioner, throwing a chokehold on top of an already COVID-19-dampened environment. But he gutted through it. That's just 2020 on Planet Earth, the year Moench first assumed the oath of office to serve as mayor and found himself, along with everyone else, keying into a mid-March sports shutdown that signaled the coming crisis.

COVID hit Bridgewater early. "Our fatality rate was higher than other towns, and we now know it's because we have a lot of nursing homes," Moench said. "We have 11 nursing homes in Bridgewater." Still, deaths of younger people also rocked the suburban Somerset burgh, including that of a 41-year old woman on the mayor's block, and a young father.



"Dealing with the early stages of COVID was the most stressful, and overtime, the hardest challenge to navigate has been the budget and trying to figure out what we do with this lost revenue," said the mayor, whose town cut its budget by \$1.6 million and raised taxes 1.9%. "It makes next year's budget very challenging."

Moench estimates that Bridgewater lost \$2.1 million in revenue this year toward what ended up being about a \$42 million budget, including \$1 million from a hotel occupancy tax the town depends on annually, a rent sharing agreement with the Bridgewater Commons Mall, and municipal court fees and fines, in addition to about \$200,000 in overtime and other possibly FEMA-reimbursable expenses. The ultimate impact of the shutdown on the local economy and the town's financial health is unknown, but at this point, the Republican mayor said he believes the state's leadership needs to go in another direction.

"From a starting standpoint, the governor can and should be given leeway for decisions he made early on," said Moench. "I don't think anyone would say the decisions he made in March were wrong. We were in a real emergency and things were unfolding quickly. The state took steps to protect people. We didn't know what else to do, and closing down the state was prudent at the time.

"I don't understand how we allowed the nursing homes to be so neglected for so long," he added. "After March and April, I have been publicly critical of the re-opening plan. I don't think the fact that we're not fully open at this point can be justified it at the end of the day. At this point, almost everything should be reopened with reasonable restrictions. People have to work. There is no sustainable way to not have the economy moving. Business are suffering significant damages. People who are at risk should make their own decisions about not going back to the gym. As it is now, some of these businesses will be irrevocably hurt."

Moench and his wife have three young children, two of them in the school system, and the town this week readied its own hybrid schooling plan while awaiting Governor Phil Murphy's announcement about extending a statewide schools' shutdown. "I think school districts are trying to figure out what to do to protect students, appease the parents, and educate, but I think Murphy will ultimately shut down the schools," the mayor said, as he ended another day on the strange unforeseen terrain called Year 2020.

'WE'RE STILL IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FIRE': PROUD OF HOMETOWN TEANECK, HAMMEEDUDDIN CAUTIONS AGAINST COVID COMPLACENCY

Teaneck became the epicenter of COVID-19 in New Jersey at the outset, Holy Name Hospital submitted to warzone conditions and the population tested as the casualties mounted. In the lead-up to the surge in his hometown, Mayor Mohammed Hameeduddin watched what was happening in Italy and then saw it happening in his own midst, as the case counts here jumped from one to four to eight to fourteen. He said leaders responded from all levels of government and from the hospital to implement virus-smothering initiatives. But it was difficult early to absorb the severity of the crisis.

"We were the first ones to shut everything down, and I remember when we canceled school on that Friday, it was a matter of also letting people know that this wasn't a snow day. This doesn't mean you can go play basketball. This is serious. I know a lot of people then disagreed with the shutdown, and I'm sorry I was right.

"If it comes down to saving a life or a business, you have to save a life," said Hameeduddin. "The word 'unprecedented' is not overused in this pandemic. We need to come together as a state and as a country. When I hear 'this is overblown,' I don't know what to say. Look, we had to bring in trucks because the morgues were full. We luckily got through this in New Jersey, but if we're not careful, it could get worse. We have to exercise caution. Big Ten football was just cancelled football. What does that tell you?"

New Jersey needs to continue to err on the side of caution, insisted the mayor, who finished his last term in office this year. He registered his children in soccer but he's ready to pull them if the state experiences a flare-up. As for comments made by former Governor Chris Christie about Governor Phil Murphy's supposed mismanagement of the crisis, Hameeduddin said, "Chris Christie is always running for president. His history is of leaving New Jersey in a worse fiscal shape than he found it. He could have fixed a lot, and he didn't. Anybody can sit in the cheap seats and criticize."

At the beginning of the COVID strike in Teaneck, Holy Name lacked personal protective equipment (PPE). Now, "we're still in the middle of trying to put out the fire," said the former mayor. "PPE is stabilized, and we're very lucky to have a county executive [Jim Tedesco] working to supply first responders, hospitals, EMTs and firefighters. They rationed hospitals. They fixed their supply chain. As long as we continue to be overprepared, we'll be in good shape. We lost a lot of people working there at Holy Name. Support staff. Nurses' aides. It's very important that the PPE situation is addressed and I am comfortable with it now.

"In Teaneck, everybody came together, people who understood the disease very differently came together as a community, and I am proud of the way people reacted to this pandemic," Hameeduddin added. "Police, fire, volunteer EMA, hospital staff were all stretched to the limit. Every day was a battle. It was very scary."

The mayor himself was exposed to the virus, quarantined for 14 days and never exhibited any symptoms. This year, the town lost about a million dollars from its local hotel tax. He left office in May at the end of his term. "It's funny," he said. "I thought I would march in the July 4th parade, and that would be my send-off, but there was no parade this year."



COVID INFORMATION CENTER

IN MEMORIAM

That sensation of sitting in a bar trying to pretend there's no threat reminds you of the degree we go to try to have a good time, maybe just to relieve the pressure a little to again face the hard circumstances. The singer mentions social distancing, makes a "party on" comment, and you wonder which is more dreadful: the band or the possibility of someone sneezing suddenly and showering the place with COVID-19. You grew up watching Cagney movies where they used to spray a room with Tommy guns. Now you're one whiff of eau-de-cologne away from doom, or so the masks – and the deaths – suggest.

It hit me hard early when a guy from my hometown went down. He left behind his entire family with the virus and on respirators in the local hospital. This was a young man with a young family, and active in the community – that friendly face you see at a band concert or on the sideline of a ballgame. You didn't forget it then and now you never will.

Then the faces kept coming, and the only thing I could liken it to a little was that horrible feeling of walking around New York City after 911 and seeing the faces of people lost in those towers. Those pictures, as everyone knows, contained that same uniform and desperate question: "Has anyone seen...?" and the name of the slain. It was similar because we could not spend time with our family members who died, each of us, as the poet W.H. Auden once said, "In the cell of himself." It felt like prison being separated from those people as they perished. Even at our best in mid-summer, the numbers continue to trickle in and the death toll mounts.

A long time ago I can remember sitting in the crowd of some prize fights in Atlantic City, among them Lennox Lewis versus Shannon Briggs and Hasim Rahman versus James Toney (no one could fight like Toney), and before those fights sometimes they'd toll a bell for some fallen figure in the boxing fraternity, and I can picture that bell suspended in half darkness from the ceiling of Boardwalk Hall, tolling over 14,000 times, for the people we lost, and God willing we've learned enough to this point to minimize the coming loss. In the meantime, listen to that bell over a ragged ring called New Jersey, where the souls still standing can do aught but internalize those metallic chords and deal havoc, with both hands, to the dreaded scourge.

Wherever you are, we wish you good health today, and in the days ahead. We walk a longer stretch of beach than usual. We linger in that conversation or on that hand clutch we might have some other time forsaken. We do not relinquish this summer gift to the tide without the toughened deepening of days accumulated for the sake of one pure and oceanic day. We thank the men and women who labor in the healthcare field. We work for the common good to break this awful scourge, for the health and sustenance of our beloved state.

We remember the dead. We seek greater understanding and smarter, wiser implementation of strategy to contain and defeat and live.