

State House Dome: More in NH getting 'quarantine fatigue'

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State health officials this week reported some people in New Hampshire have exhibited “quarantine fatigue” in their dealings with the state team tracing COVID-19 contacts.

“We have observed people have become more weary with COVID-19 and sometimes more difficult when we ask them to stay at home,” said Dr. **Beth Daly**, chief of the state’s infection disease control bureau, at **Gov. Chris Sununu’s** weekly briefing on the virus last Thursday.

Family members sometimes have difficulty accepting they might have to spend more time in quarantine and out of work than the person who got the disease, said Daly, who oversees the state’s team of more than 120 contact tracers.

“The vast majority are very fully compliant,” Daly said. “Some are pushing back, and they have a tough time accepting that news initially.”

When that happens, a different staffer sometimes does a follow-up call to help calm the situation.

Patricia Tilley, deputy director of the Division of Public Health Services, said part of the uptick in cases over the past few weeks was the result of people who contracted COVID-19 after coming in close contact with someone else found to have had it.

“We are concerned people may be letting their guard down. We know it has been a long time,” Tilley said. She noted that more individual cases are being tied to “informal interaction with friends and family.”

“We put the people we love at risk when as have those informal gatherings where we let our guard down,” Tilley said.

Perhaps the news that President Donald Trump, First Lady Melania Trump and others in the West Wing have gotten the virus will reduce the number of those exhibiting symptoms of COVIDS fatigue.

Grading on curve

The fiscally conservative Cato Institute will recognize Sununu as one of four GOP governors to get an ‘A’ on its Fiscal Report Card on America’s Governors.

The final report comes out Monday.

He is joined at the top by **Kim Reynolds** of Iowa, **Pete Ricketts** of Nebraska and **Mark Gordon** of Wyoming.

“Sununu has defended New Hampshire’s status as a low-tax state and kept general funding spending close to flat in recent years,” the report states.

The group praised Sununu’s veto of the paid family and medical leave bill Democratic nominee **Dan Feltes** has championed and agreed with Sununu the payroll deduction was an “effective income tax.”

Feltes pledged to veto a broad-based income tax, noted the payroll deduction was one option to pay for the benefit and said it’s false to call it an income tax. Vermont GOP Gov. **Phil Scott** got a ‘B.’ All other New England governors, including Massachusetts GOP Gov. **Charlie Baker**, got D’s.

Eight Democratic governors, including New York’s **Andrew Cuomo**, received an ‘F.’

Some hospital aid possible

Sununu seems unlikely to embrace last week’s request by the New Hampshire Hospital Association for broad assistance to hospitals dealing with mounting losses from COVID-19.

NHHA President **Steve Ahnen** said the hospitals have lost a net \$187 million through September and could lose another \$100 million by year’s end.

Sununu noted that 30% of the federal aid to hospitals Congress approved has not been spent, and New Hampshire hospitals could receive some of it.

“Look at that delta right now, they are about 5% in the red. It’s not as bad as many industries to be this short. Some critical access hospitals are actually in the black if you add back in the grants,” Sununu said.

He said two of the hospitals have borne the bulk of the losses.

Although Sununu didn’t name them, House Republican Leader **Dick Hinch** of Merrimack said Catholic Medical Center in Manchester and St. Joseph Hospital in Nashua account for 64% of the red ink.

Ahnen declined to speak about individual hospitals, though he pointed out more than two hospitals are dealing with significant losses.

Sununu suggested he could earmark some unspent CARES Act money for those hospitals most in need.

“The long and short there is a small shortfall and I think it’s manageable, but the state and the feds will still be available to help,” Sununu said. The governor stressed any aid should be grants rather than loans, which could weaken a hospital’s balance sheet.

Upper Valley seeks help

The Legislative Advisory Board on Tuesday will consider more assistance for the Mascoma Community Health Center of Canaan in the Upper Valley.

House Speaker **Stephen Shurtleff**, D-Penacook, said the group, which serves more than 4,500 patients, will have to close its doors Nov. 1 unless it receives more relief.

In a presentation to the panel, officials there said they requested from the Governor's Office of Emergency Relief and Recovery \$300,000 in the latest round of grants for health care providers but received \$6,500. In an earlier round in April, the center got a \$100,000 grant from the state's health care provider fund.

Senate Finance Committee Chairman **Lou D'Allesandro**, D-Manchester, and Senate Republican Leader **Chuck Morse**, R-Salem, are on a subcommittee named to pore over the group's financials.

GOFERR Director **Taylor Caswell** said his agency will review its own analysis, but he defended its review of the group's request.

"From our standpoint, we have had an opportunity to review. We haven't treated Mascoma any differently than any other applicant in this category," Caswell said. "From what was provided to GOFERR, the current award amounts are correct."

Shurtleff originally asked the board to give the center \$100,000 to tide it over, but he agreed to withdraw the request when assured that the matter will come up again Tuesday.

"The fault may not lie with the state of New Hampshire as Mascoma has all volunteers in the Canaan area. My hope is we can act on this quickly," Shurtleff said.

Morse said he hopes this becomes an isolated case of the board getting into the details of a grant application.

"I don't want to become the review committee for everyone," Morse said.

GOP cries foul

The New Hampshire Democratic Party launched mailings against Republican candidates who are challenging Democratic state senators.

One mailing faulted Bedford Republican **Denise Ricciardi** for her opposition to paid family and medical leave. She's trying to unseat first-term Sen. **Jeanne Dietsch**, D-Peterborough.

"Denise Ricciardi OPPOSES efforts to provide New Hampshire families with medical, financial and job security while they care for loved ones," the mailing said, citing votes against paid family leave bills in 2018-20.

The trouble is, as a Bedford town councilor, Ricciardi has no voting record on the issue.

"They'll clearly say anything about anybody to try and smear Republicans. The facts just don't matter," said Sen. **Jeb Bradley**, R-Wolfeboro, who chairs the political action committee supporting Senate Republican candidates.

Dario Scalco, director of the Democratic Senate Caucus, said Ricciardi and other GOP hopefuls answered questionnaires and made public comments about their opposition to paid leave.

State offices reopening

The Sununu administration is reviewing options for residents to more easily get business done at Division of Motor Vehicles substations across the state in the wake of the pandemic.

Currently, citizens are urged to get registration renewals or other services online, by telephone or through drop box services available at the DMV locations in Concord, Dover, Keene, Manchester, Nashua, Newport, Salem and Twin Mountain.

Those whose driver licenses are expiring by Oct. 31 can make in-person appointments to complete that process.

State Rep. **Jeffrey Salloway**, D-Lee, said many constituents have asked him when these and other state offices might reopen.

Sununu met Thursday with DMV Director **Elizabeth Bielecki** and Safety Commissioner **Robert Quinn** about what more can be done to assist residents, Policy Director **D.J. Bettencourt** said.

“It is everybody’s hope there will be some changes made in the very near future. I know that’s a big one for a lot of people,” Bettencourt told the Economic Reopening Task Force.

The governor is planning a meeting with all commissioners next week. On the agenda will be a discussion of whether more state government buildings can more broadly be opened to the public, he said. Also on the table is whether to open DMV and other state agency offices during evening hours to assist those can’t get state business done from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. because of work, family and other obligations.

Dems attack Sununu

For weeks, the New Hampshire Democratic Party has telegraphed that it would try to make Sununu’s family financial ties an issue in the election.

The strategy got taken up a notch Friday with the release of an interactive [map](#) detailing the family’s more than 30 business and political connections in 26 nations.

Sununu’s father, former Gov. and White House chief of staff **John H. Sununu**, has done consulting work with foreign officials over the years, and the map details campaign contributions to Chris Sununu from lobbyists or key business leaders from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Azerbaijan.

Sununu took a non-taxpayer paid trip to Dubai a few years ago to promote New Hampshire business ties.

“Chris Sununu is using his position to benefit himself and his family,” said **Ray Buckley**, chair of the New Hampshire Democratic Party. “This map shows the extensive scope of the Sununu family’s shady investments and political connections around the world and raises serious questions about why Chris Sununu won’t release his tax returns, why he won’t tell us about his family’s finances, and why he is hiding his and his family’s business entanglements from public view.”

Sununu campaign spokesman **Brandon Pratt** said voters will dismiss this attack.

“This is nothing but baseless and ridiculous conspiracy theories that border on the absurd, clearly made up by Democratic operatives working from their dark basements,” Pratt said.