

## **12.13 GOV REMARKS**

### ***\*as prepared for delivery\****

- Good afternoon. Thank you for being here with me for this important update.
- I want to note up front that my remarks today may be a little bit longer than normal – I want to clearly and fully lay out for you the situation our State is facing now. We are at a critical point, and I want all Nevadans to understand why.
- I wanted to start by highlighting some encouraging news on the vaccine front.
- On Friday night, the FDA granted emergency use authorization of the Pfizer vaccine and this morning, the Western States Panel tasked with reviewing the vaccine signed off as well.
- We anticipate receiving the first shipment in the State on Monday, and the State team has worked closely with our partners and plans are in place to distribute the first allocation of the Pfizer vaccine to our frontline health care workers for immediate vaccination, and staff and residents in our skilled nursing facilities as soon as possible.
- I know last week our State team did a “test run” of the distribution process, where the people who will be responsible for transporting the vaccine across the State did a practice run to make sure everything goes smoothly.
- As new developments on the vaccine and the vaccination process unfold, we will work to keep Nevadans posted on any updates and news.

### **CURRENT SITUATION**

- As you all know, Dr. Fauci predicted that Thanksgiving would cause “a surge on top of a surge” and we have every indication that’s where the nation – and where Nevada – is headed at this time. According to state health officials, we are just now beginning to see the effects of the holiday in our data.
- As we expected, what appeared to be a brief decline in new cases over the holiday weekend was related to decreased testing over the holiday. It certainly was not because COVID was magically gone.

- We continue to see an increase in hospitalizations statewide with almost 1,700 Nevadans in the hospital battling COVID as of Friday. While rural and northern Nevada are still experiencing very high levels of COVID hospitalization, declines are beginning to be noticeable. In Southern Nevada, hospitalizations have yet to peak as the area remains in the midst of their third hospitalization wave.
- As you know, helping to protect our healthcare infrastructure has been one of the main goals in our response efforts. I want every Nevadan to have access to care – and our healthcare workers have done everything in their power – including setting up hospitals in parking garages – to make sure they are there for you when you need it, whether you have a heart attack, break an arm or catch the flu.
- There is no doubt our hospitals are feeling an increased strain due to an increase in COVID patients. And our healthcare workers are too. They need your help.
- Most concerning, COVID deaths are on the rise. We have now lost 2,539 Nevadans to this virus.

## **CONTINUATION OF THE PAUSE**

- As you know – almost three weeks ago Nevada entered a statewide “pause” in the face of increasing COVID cases, hospitalizations and deaths.
- This statewide “Pause” implemented incredibly strict mitigation measures in an effort to both protect lives and protect our fragile economy. Under this Pause, capacity is limited to 25% at many businesses, including our restaurants, bars, casinos floors, and gyms.
- Additionally, public gatherings are capped at 50 individuals or 25% capacity, whichever is less – and private, residential gatherings are limited to 10 people max from no more than 2 households.
- I spoke recently about how we must create a bridge between our current situation and between when the COVID-19 vaccines become widely available.
- You all know the tools to get us across the bridge. Avoid gatherings, limit exposure by staying home as much as you can, wash you hands, wear your mask.

- In fact, in a report from IHME, at the University of Washington, they estimated that as of November 30<sup>th</sup>, 74% of Nevadans **always** wore a mask when leaving their home. More importantly, the report noted that if we got that number to 95% -- we could potentially save 1,000 lives by April 1<sup>st</sup>.
- I know the mitigation restrictions in place under the current "Pause" are devastating to many Nevadans who just want to go back to "normal." Who are worried about their jobs, their businesses, keeping their homes, and getting their kids back to school. But as I've said for 9 months now – we must do what we can to protect the health and safety of the public. That remains more important than ever as we experience these record numbers.
- That's why today I am announcing that we will be extending the restrictions in place under the current "Pause" in Nevada for the next month – through January 15<sup>th</sup>.
- As always, we will be monitoring and evaluating our current situation day-by-day and week-by-week. We'll remain under the current restrictions for now, with the goal of getting through the next month, due to reasons I'll outline in a moment.
- But I need to be clear: if officials and experts agree that our trends are going beyond our ability to respond, I will be forced to come in front of all of you again with tougher actions. I believe we can avoid that if we all commit to it.

## **EVICCTIONS MORATORIUM**

- And before I outline the reasons behind this choice, I'd like to announce one more public health mitigation measure -- something that will greatly assist in keeping Nevadans in the safest place they can be -- in their homes. Tomorrow, I will sign a directive that will place a moratorium on most residential evictions in Nevada with an effective date and time of 12:01 a.m. December 15.
- I originally put a residential eviction moratorium in place during early stages of the pandemic in conjunction with the Stay at Home order. Keeping Nevadans in their homes to slow COVID-19 was safer than them making emergency shared housing or shelter arrangements, which increases the risk of spreading COVID-19. That still remains true today.
- We transitioned out of the moratorium as numbers improved and as tenant assistance programs came online.

- However, as we are now in the depths of our most significant and dangerous surge of this health crisis and with an impending deadline to be able to use federal assistance for tenants, I must reinstate a moratorium to ensure Nevadans can stay in their homes during this critical phase of the pandemic.
- When people are evicted, it is impossible to stay home. They are out looking for jobs and housing to desperately save their families. They will spread COVID-19 unintentionally, because they have no options.
- The CDC and state public health officials have expressed concern over families and individuals being evicted. In fact, my COVID-19 Medical Advisory team has formally recommended reinstatement of an eviction moratorium to reduce increased community transmission caused by displacement and homelessness in Nevada. According to our state health officials, when people are evicted, they are at higher risk of getting COVID-19 as families may be forced to share a smaller space or live in crowded shelters.
- Local officials are also concerned with the possibility of our shelters and other congregate housing options being overrun with homeless families.
- This is a reality we cannot afford to risk at this time. During this current surge we are experiencing, it's critical that we do all we can to keep Nevadans in their homes and mitigate the risk of spread and infection.
- As I have been clear from the start: this moratorium DOES NOT relieve renters from their obligations to pay rent to their landlords. The State has already created and provided lease addendums where landlords and tenants can work on repayment solutions together.
- **The moratorium will apply to tenants unable to pay rent and** will extend through March 31<sup>st</sup>. It will not prohibit certain evictions; including for example, lease breaches for things like unlawful activity or nuisance.
- We also have rental assistance programs up and running throughout the state so renters can have some of their outstanding rent for 2020 paid. However, these programs are supported with Federal assistance dollars that currently expire at the end of December and we need to ensure there are protections for tenants going forward.
- I recognize that this extension will be economically hard on some of our landlords. I know I've asked landlords to sacrifice during this pandemic, and I am asking you again to do so for a few

more months as we push through what I hope is the last surge of this virus. I will do everything I can to continue to push for economic assistance for our impacted landlords. This is one of dozens of areas of economic assistance that we are hopeful the Federal government will help provide.

- With the extension of this pause, the evictions moratorium, the cooperation of Nevadans and a vaccine on the horizon, I am hopeful we can continue to stand together in this fight against the virus. We are fighting the virus, we cannot fight one another.

## **BALANCING ACT**

- There isn't a day that goes by when I don't think about the great balancing act that Nevada faces, and how the tightrope we must walk is more pronounced here than in any other state, due to our economic structure.
- I want you to know that I see what you see. On one hand we have record cases and our hospitals are under increased strain due to COVID – on the other hand our families are suffering economically with our unemployment rate remaining in the top 2 highest in the country, and little remaining assistance available.
- Some say we've gone too far – some say we aren't doing enough. I understand both sides. The last 9 months have been full of decisions with no winning options – leaving us to determine which choice would lessen the blow the most. I know that, and you all know that.
- But early last week I received a report from the White House COVID Task Force which included recommendations for mitigating the spread, and it became clear to me that the federal government has yet to grasp what is so evident to all of us about the complexities of our current situation in Nevada.
- One of their recommendations said:
  - *"Despite the severity of this surge and the threat to the hospital systems, many state and local governments are not implementing the same mitigation policies that stemmed the tide...that must happen now"*
- This is a very stark departure from their messages and actions over the last 9 months that contradicted and undermined recommended mitigation measures touted by respected public health officials throughout the country.

- But nonetheless, I agree with them. The problem we have is that the mitigation policy that most successfully “stemmed the tide” in Nevada was our complete shutdown. And for the White House and feds to send that recommendation without including a big check for Nevadans -- a plan for providing our State with funding to give our families a safety net in this time of great tribulation is downright out of touch and offensive.
- A shutdown is unrealistic without additional support. And I realize I owe it to all those Nevadans who may be monitoring our COVID trends right now and wondering why I don’t move in that direction. So let me explain.
- I have said repeatedly that we are trying desperately trying to balance public health and the impacts to our economy – but I want to be clear about what I mean when I say “economy.”
- What I really mean is impacts to our families – their ability to feed themselves and their kids, to keep the lights on, to keep a roof over their heads, to earn a paycheck and keep their benefits that allows them to access health care. And right now - our families and countless Nevadans are teetering on the brink.
- In our first months of the pandemic, Nevada lost 250,000 jobs – reaching an unemployment rate of 30.1% -- the highest level ever reported by any state in modern history. For reference, during the Great Recession, Nevada lost approximately 180,000 jobs over nearly three years.
- Unemployment benefits are established for a full year, and due to the pandemic nearly 142,000 Nevadans have completely exhausted that eligibility, with the vast majority unable to file again until mid-March 2021 or later.
- Let me repeat that: without additional federal assistance, the majority of these 142,000 Nevadans will have no further unemployment benefits available to them from the State or federal government to support their lost income.
- This is a stark difference from the spring when the additional assistance from the federal government helped many of Nevada’s most vulnerable workers displaced by COVID receive unemployment benefits that replaced roughly 100% of their lost income. That reality no longer exists.
- In the spring, at the time Nevada and states across the country were under stay at home orders, many individuals, families and businesses had savings accounts that helped hold them over. The State of Nevada had a savings account – the rainy day fund. And we had also just received robust federal support that provided income replacement to individuals and gave

state and local governments funding to provide a safety net.

- As of today, none of those things exist. Personal savings accounts have been depleted. The State emptied its rainy day fund in the spring to address our massive budget deficit. The funding we received through the federal CARES Act is set to expire at the end of this year – meaning the programs created by state and local governments to assist Nevadans directly will have to stop in a couple of weeks.
- According to one of our state economists, to return to full stay-at-home restrictions without the savings and assistance we had in the spring would put us in a position that would be as bad – or worse – than the Great Depression. That means a return to historic unemployment numbers and a significant demand for public assistance -- with no funds to pay for it.
- If we could write a check to every Nevadan right now to provide them the ability to stay home and stop the spread, I would. But we can't.
- Now, I want to talk bluntly about gaming and hospitality for a minute. I know it's hard for Nevadans to reconcile why some areas of our economy and public life are restricted while the State's casinos are open. I get why it's hard to reconcile that fact, and I want to talk honestly with you.
- The gaming industry are under the same restrictions as many of our small businesses, and in some cases, even tougher restrictions. Restaurants and bars in casinos face the same capacity limits as those in our neighborhoods. Gaming floors have been reduced to 25% as well.
- In fact, under the authority of the Gaming Control Board, the gaming industry is arguably the most regulated industry in the State – they hold privileged licenses. They must follow strict mitigation directives and face tough consequences if they don't.
- **And I think it's important to make this 100 percent clear:** when I think of the gaming industry, I am not losing sleep at night because I'm worried about their stock prices or whether gaming executives are going to make it through the pandemic and be able to keep a roof over their heads.
- I lose sleep at night because when we were under a stay at home order in the spring, we lost a quarter of a million jobs in three months in this State...and that's largely due to casinos being closed for 78 days straight.

- I'm thinking of our blackjack dealers, our cooks, our valet drivers, our housekeepers, and our performers. They are what makes up our amazing hospitality industry, which makes up the one of the largest shares of workers in the state. That's why I worked with our legislature, employers, labor unions and workers to pass the strongest hospitality worker COVID protections in the nation.
- These are the folks we are fighting to protect -- it's the hundreds of thousands of Nevadans who take pride in showing up for work every single day and the ability that gives them provide for their families. If we take that away, the bottom falls out for our entire state. The numbers I walked through a moment ago prove that.
- And here's why else gaming matters to this State and what the White House doesn't seem to understand: if this has to shut down again, the State loses an estimated \$52 million in gaming tax revenue a month. That doesn't include room tax, live entertainment tax, and more.
- And when I say revenue, I mean the money the state has to give direct assistance to Nevadans in the form of schools, public and mental health, food banks, and more. It helps fund the critical services we rely on – the safety net Nevadans need. That's what's been devastated throughout this pandemic.
- I want to remind you all, when I first entered office and put together a budget for the 2019 legislative session, that was the first time in ten years that our state budget reflected a recovery from the Great Recession.
- It took ten years for the State and Nevadans to claw back from that. I am so grateful to our former Governor Brian Sandoval and all the Nevada residents who worked so hard during his time to get us there. And because of that 10 year recovery, I was able to include the largest amount of funding for mental health services in the State's history, among other achievements.
- But it took 10 years. And here we are now, at another inflection point. I certainly don't want to lose another 10 years or more trying to claw back to where we were prior to the pandemic.
- So when I talk to you about what the State is going to do and about revenue and unemployment and our safety, it is not lost of me that the decisions we make today and how we handle this balancing act right now will have generational impacts. The decisions I make and all of you make today and in the coming months will determine how we are going to recover over the next decade or more.
- And this balancing act includes factors that too often get lost in the larger debate, but are just as important to consider. It's other things that we don't always hear about . This week, it was

reported that Nevada has seen a 50% increase in opioid and fentanyl-involved drug overdose deaths from the first to the second quarter of 2020. That's startling, Nevada. And I don't think it's a coincidence it's happening in the middle of this pandemic.

- I could go on and on and I know you could too.
- Prioritizing our economy or our health is a false choice for our State. If you don't have a job, if you can't provide for your family, if you lose your home, if the State has no safety net to help, people will not be healthy. These aren't binary choices. This is incredibly complex, and I think about it every day.
- I never have and never will deny the severity of this virus - this virus has posed a threat unlike anything we have seen before, and for the last 9 months I've consistently explained the risk we are under. I've relied on the science. I've listened to public health officials.
- Like many other Nevadans, I wake up in the morning thinking about COVID-19 and it's the last thing I think about at night. It is constantly on my mind.
- The loss of life is devastating. So many families have been forever changed because of the terrible impacts of this virus.
- The stress on our healthcare workers unbearable - they have continued to show up everyday in these trying situations to help their fellow Nevadans.

## **FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**

- So when I read the White House reports that says state and local governments aren't doing enough, you can imagine how my blood boiled.
- More than nine months ago, the federal government handed the States the responsibility of dealing with this global pandemic. They told the states to deal with it, so we did. We have navigated this pandemic through strong state-to-state partnerships, through shared sacrifice and through the grit and perseverance of our communities.
- You all stepped up – including the Private Sector Task Force, who secured millions of masks, gloves, gowns and tests, using their international relationship and supply chains, because we weren't getting enough life saving resources from Washington.

- For 9 months the state has been on the frontline of this war against COVID – and for 9 months we’ve heard that reinforcements and aircover is on the way...just hang tight. But we don’t see any planes flying overhead.
- Instead, every day I wake up to a new headline about how those in charge in DC aren’t able to compromise on getting desperately needed funding to states because Republicans want business liability and Democrats want direct and flexible funding to state and local governments.
- I don’t understand why there is a general philosophical objection to funding state and local governments. Because again, this money goes out directly to those who are suffering.
- And if Senator McConnell doesn’t think people need assistance, he has an open invitation to Nevada anytime to walk through the halls of our hospital COVID units. Visit a homeless shelter that’s full of families that had a home just months ago.
- When he opposes money for state and local governments, he opposes money for food, for unemployment, for healthcare.
- If DC needs some guidance on how to reach a compromise, look no further than Nevada. Nevada managed to pass business liability and worker safety protections this summer with support of both parties.
- We did it with workers, labor unions, major employers and government officials all coming to the (virtual) table. Both sides knew we might not love everything in here but we all said, “we’re going to do this because we are going to protect Nevada in this moment”.
- It’s not easy, compromise often seems to be the hardest path, but we prove it’s possible if you throw the politics to the side and prioritize people.
- I hope and pray that Congress listens to us and our federal delegation who are fighting for more funding for our State, but if we’ve learned anything over the last 9 months, it’s that we have to figure out how to get through this on our own. If we don’t, then we lead to further restrictions that decimate our economy for generations, or we continue down this path of massive loss in a public health crisis.
- There is some hope on the horizon. As I mentioned earlier, we know the vaccine is on the way and there’s always some hope that we could get additional funding from the federal government, but as of right now, neither of these things exist.

- So in the absence of this leadership and support, I have made the best decision for our state: the continuation of the current restrictions implemented during this pause. I believe that we can all work together to make sure we maximize the benefit of these mitigation measures, and I call upon all of you to join in helping our state make it through this. And, I don't say this as a threat but as a reflection of the precarious position we are in at this time: if we cannot work together to bring these numbers under control over the next month, I will be forced to come before you again with tougher actions.
- So in this moment, amidst a dire economic situation and a surge of the virus, while we all remain on the front lines of this battle tired, worn out, and wanting to throw in the towel, we have a choice. We can look to our neighbors to the left and to the right and say "every man and woman for themselves!" -- or we can look at our fellow Nevadans and say "I'm going to have your back, and I know you'll have mine." We are all we have in this moment.
- If we want to avoid another Great Depression, avoid preventable deaths and stop the overwhelming of our hospitals while our healthcare workers are literally crying for help, then we will rise to this occasion and fight.
- A lot of folks have been talking about the American people – that we don't look out for one another like some other countries do. I am going to wholeheartedly reject that today for the state of Nevada.
- I refuse to believe what they are saying about Americans and about Nevadans
- I refuse to believe that we do not love our neighbors as we love ourselves.
- I refuse to believe that we do not care about the poor among us.
- I refuse to believe that we cannot live in harmony with one another.
- Some Nevadans have been affected more by the virus, and others have faced economic challenges brought on by this pandemic.
- No matter challenges we are facing individually, we face them all together and collectively as Nevadans.

- Nevada will make it through this, and how well we do will be determined by how much we care for one-another and especially for those who are hardest hit.
- We have to keep fighting to get this under control.
- Before we get to the media question and answer, I just wanted to note - according to our latest statistics - a Nevadan is testing positive for COVID every 40 seconds. That's 45 cases in 30 minutes - approximately the timeframe I've been speaking to you. And every hour and 15 minutes, a Nevadan dies from COVID.
- This virus is still prevalent in our communities. Please, protect yourselves and one other by continuing to wear your mask, wash your hands frequently and practice social distancing. Together, we can help stem the tide.
- I think my staff will now help facilitate some Q&A with members of the media on the call. Meghin?

###