

Democrat Rep Paul Berch – Facebook (Westmoreland)

I, along with at least 100 other State Reps, was sworn in today by the Governor in a remote proceeding. In doing this, I supported the guidance from the Governor, the CDC and the Department of Health & Human Services. It is also consistent with advice that I have given others - to be extremely cautious during this time of increased illness and death. I have copied a picture of some Republican State Reps, unmasked, being sworn-in on Wednesday. We send our prayers to the families of the 15 residents of the NH Veteran's Home who have died of COVID in just the past month. State health officials reported nine COVID-related deaths Wednesday, and 566 new infections.

1) Nine Deaths, 566 New Cases, and 162 People Hospitalized Statewide. Community-based transmission continues to occur in New Hampshire and has been identified in all counties. Along with the report of 566 new cases came yet another warning from state health officials that test results for Tuesday “are still being processed and the total number of new positives for that day is not yet complete” —meaning the final total will climb higher than 566.

Also climbing higher was the 7-day average testing positive rate which now stands at 5.7% after Tuesday’s daily rate reached 6.1%. All nine of the new deaths were in residents age 60 or older. 66 of the new cases were in residents age 18 or under. The new cases reside in Rockingham (139), Merrimack (82), Hillsborough County other than Manchester and Nashua (64), Belknap (40), Grafton (36), Strafford (33), Carroll (22), Cheshire (10), Sullivan (3), and Coos (2) counties, and in the cities of Manchester (64) and Nashua (33). (Source: N.H. DHHS) The spike in deaths in N.H. came on the same day the U.S. toll climbed over 2,800 deaths—the highest level of the pandemic. (Source: CNN)

2) Death Toll Rises at Three N.H. Long-Term Care Facilities. The New Hampshire Veteran’s Home in Tilton said 15 residents have died since their COVID-19 outbreak started Nov. 10 and 46 residents and 40 staff members currently have the virus. The veteran’s home said they are receiving help from FEMA. “We have five staff members that showed up on the 21st and then five more on the 28th, they are on what they call a 14-day tour of duties or deployments,” Commandant of the New Hampshire Veteran’s Home Margaret LaBrecque said. In Hampton, Oceanside Center said nine residents have died and 43 residents and 27 staff members have tested positive for COVID-19. Further North in Coos County, Nursing Hospital in West Stewartstown said 11 residents have died within the last month, due to COVID-19. Also, an additional five residents died, that they cannot directly attribute to the virus. The administrator at Nursing Hospital said staffing was an issue, but now quarantined employees are starting to return. (Source: WMUR)

3) 18 staff in COVID-19 quarantine at Elliot Hospital in Manchester. The Chief Medical Officer at Elliot Hospital in Manchester said 18 staff from surgical areas are quarantined due to COVID-19 exposure. The hospital capped their elective admissions for procedures at nine per day. Chief Medical Officer Dr. Kevin Desrosiers said the staff directly related to their ability to care for admission in the surgical environment are in quarantine. “Really, it has to do with the ability to make sure you have the appropriate number of staff on the floors to maintain and take care of the patients when they come out of surgery,” Desrosiers said. Normal operations are expected to resume at the Elliot Hospital by Monday according to Desrosiers. (Source: WMUR)

4) First COVID-19 Vaccinations in N.H. By Christmas: Sununu. Gov. Chris Sununu said New Hampshire’s citizens who are most vulnerable to COVID-19 infection will be able to get the first dose of the vaccine

by Christmas. Once the vaccine arrives, it will be totally up to the state to determine who will receive it in the first round, Sununu said. In New Hampshire, the state Department of Health and Human Services said in a draft policy that the first phase to get the vaccine will include older adults living in residential care settings like nursing homes and assisted living facilities, first responders and high-risk workers in health-care facilities. One week after the Pfizer vaccine of about 10,000 doses is distributed, Sununu said he expects the Moderna vaccine with 20,000 or more doses. "They haven't given us exact numbers but that's the ballpark we are looking at," he said. Both the Moderna and the Pfizer vaccines require two doses, either 21 days or 28 days after the first. Sununu said he vast majority of the population will be able to receive the vaccine in February and March as more vials become available. (Source: InDepthNH)

5) State Health Officials Discuss New CDC Guidance on Quarantine, But Say No Plan in the Works for Testing at Schools. State epidemiologist Dr. Benjamin Chan spoke to school nurses on Wednesday about new information released by the CDC and took questions from school districts. Several nurses asked about availability of the Binax-Now rapid COVID-19 test which can display results in as little as 15 minutes. They said schools need that kind of access to fast results to be able to keep kids in school and not send them home and have them wait for a test. Chan said he has made similar arguments about getting them into schools, but right now, it does not appear there is any plan to do that. As far as the CDC's new guidance reducing the length of quarantine from 14 days to 10 days (or 7 with a negative test), Chan said no decisions have been made locally. "We literally have just read this guidance ourselves and so we will be meeting further and discussing this and trying to figure out how best to adopt the new information that the CDC has put out and how best to apply it to New Hampshire's situation," Chan said. He said now, the guidance for quarantine in New Hampshire remains at 14 days. (Source: WMUR)

6) Major N.H. Addiction Treatment Provider Dealing With COVID-19 Outbreak. One of the largest providers of substance use disorder treatment in New Hampshire is experiencing a COVID-19 outbreak. At least 27 clients and staff of Granite Recovery Centers have tested positive since Saturday, according to a statement from CEO Eric Spofford. Spofford said there are currently 14 positive cases of COVID-19 among staff members, and 13 positive cases among clients. (Source: NHPR)

7) NH Legislature Gets Off to a Chilly Start. The newly elected New Hampshire Legislature, officially now in Republican hands, got off to a chilly start on several fronts on Organization Day at the University of New Hampshire. After what newly elected Speaker Dick Hinch, R-Merrimack, characterized as a "very small number" of House Republicans tested positive for COVID-19 following an in-person caucus at the McIntyre Ski Area in Manchester on Nov. 20, nearly a third of the new House members — most of them Democrats — decided not to show up. While the remaining legislators will be sworn in virtually at 10 a.m. today, they were not allowed to participate in voting for House offices or on rule changes rammed through by Republicans House members that erased a State House gun-carrying ban and mandatory in-person sex harassment training that Democrats had adopted when they took over the House two years ago. The votes on rule changes were an unusual break in tradition for the House. Ordinarily, the House convenes on Organization Day, the first Wednesday of December, to swear in state representatives and senators, and elect party leaders and state officers only. Any rule changes for the new Legislature are usually made on Convening Day, the first week of January, after the House Rules Committee has a chance to meet later in December and make a recommendation. House Democratic Leader Renny Cushing of Hampton, who opted not to attend because of a history of cancer, criticized new House Speaker Dick Hinch for permitting several dozen House Republicans to sit in a separate section on the field while not wearing face coverings. "The blatant disregard for public health is unconscionable, especially as daily case numbers in New Hampshire are the highest they have ever been," Cushing said after the session. "Granite Staters are sick, dying, and struggling to pay bills and provide for their

families this holiday season. While Granite State businesses are working around the clock to adhere to ever-changing safety protocols and stay afloat, House Republicans are unabashedly clinging to their senseless and dangerous anti-science narrative.” Hinch argued that he worked with state health officials to plan the session and said that none of the GOP members who contracted COVID or who were in close contact with them at a GOP event in November—which was held indoors and where attendees went maskless—were present. A proposed rules change by Rep. Andrew Bouldin, D-Manchester, that would have allowed legislators to participate in future sessions remotely was defeated despite the N.H. Supreme Court ruling earlier in the month that legislators who attend sessions virtually are “present” under the N.H. State Constitution. (Sources: Manchester Union Leader, Concord Monitor, and InDepthNH) During Wednesday’s session, House Clerk Paul Smith pointed out that while the Supreme Court’s ruling cleared the way for virtual sessions, no House rules have yet been adopted permitting them. While Rep. Bouldin’s motion was defeated, similar changes can be considered later in the month by the House Rules Committee and voted on when the legislature next meets on Convening Day. But to cast a vote on any changes, legislators would be required to attend the session in-person in the middle of a raging pandemic where maskless legislators are once again likely to be present.

8) Inmate COVID-19 Cases at State Prison Double to 12 in a Week. The number of COVID-19 positive inmates at the New Hampshire State Prison for Men in Concord has doubled in a week and stands at 12 who are currently infected, with most of them housed in the psychiatric units. On Nov. 25, the state Department of Corrections’ website reported six positive tests, also mostly at the Secure Psychiatric and Residential Treatment units at the men’s prison in Concord. There were also 23 active cases among staffers in various state prison facilities.)

9) Trajectory of Positive COVID-19 Cases in 20-29 Age Group Rising. Latest COVID-19 case numbers show that some of the greatest increases are in the young adult demographic between ages 20-29. The number of cases in that group has jumped from 23 cases on Nov. 1 to a seven-day average of nearly 100 new cases a day. “I think they’re probably traveling more, probably out and about a bit more and they’re probably a little bit more risk-takers as far as getting together with colleagues,” said Dr. Thomas Wold, Chief Medical Officer at Portsmouth Regional Hospital. With community spread rampantly now and a general vaccine possibly months away, experts said the numbers indicate we need to double down. “It also points to how resilient the virus is to taking advantage of situations where we do let our guards down,” Wold said. (Source: WMUR)

10) New Hampshire Real Estate Closings Jump 21% in October as Inventory Shrinks. People are continuing to buy more New Hampshire homes for more money amid the pandemic and shrinking inventory, according to statistics released by the New Hampshire Association of Realtors. In October, the number of closings rose 21% from a year ago and median sale price jumped 17.5%, to \$350,000, from compared to last year, when the price was just under \$300,000. In other words, the median homeowner gained \$50,000 in equity in the last year, not a bad little nest egg in a year where unemployment had climbed to record highs. There were only 2,164 single-family homes for sale in October, a number that has been shrinking all year and is now 58.5% of what it was last year. That translates to 1.4 months worth of inventory compared to October 2019, when there were 3.5 months. That’s a 60% decline. With such low inventory, if no homes were to come onto the market, there would be no homes for sale by Christmas. (Source: NH Business Review) (h/T Rep. David Meuse)

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