

OUR VIEW

DHS should come clean on COVID-19 data backlogs

Every day since mid-March, officials have been keeping a watchful eye on the state Department of Health Services website as it posts the number of positive coronavirus cases in each county and across Wisconsin.

Those numbers have been an important barometer on the spread of COVID-19 and how it must be addressed.

Do mandating facemasks and social distancing alone help flatten the curve? Is limiting restaurants to half-percent capacity working? Should schools allow in-person learning or only virtual classes this fall? Is it prudent to quarantine travelers coming to our city? The questions are endless and answers, difficult.

So it was with great dismay that we learned Friday that Public Health Madison and Dane County had a backlog of as many as 17,000 negative COVID-19 tests that had not been entered into the

state data system, potentially distorting the daily percentage of positive cases when compared to the total number of tests statewide.

When Dane County finally entered the 17,000 late negative results, according to an analysis by WKOW-27 in Madison, the seven-day coronavirus positivity rate as of July 18 dropped from 13.4 percent to about 4 percent, while the average daily positivity rate went from 6.1 percent to 2.1 percent.

This daily rate is important because cities, counties and states make decisions based on the positive rates over a two-week period. When positive virus rates reach more than 10 percent of the total tested in a day, states like New York put Wisconsin on a no-travel list without quarantining first. And in July, Dane County rolled back restrictions on restaurants, allowing only 25-percent capacity instead of 50 percent that they had been at.

Jefferson County, we are pleased to report, has not had a backlog, as test results are coming back within 24 to 48 hours. But what about the remaining 70 counties? DHS has acknowledged that Dane is not the only county experiencing a backlog, but it has refused to identify them.

State Sen. Steve Nass, R-Whitewater, has been very vocal on this issue, and we join him in calling on the state Department of Health Services to identify local public health agencies that have test results not yet in the state data system.

We are in the middle of one of the worst public health crises in modern history, a time when truthfulness and transparency are paramount. Keeping mum not only makes the data useless, but it also erodes the public's trust in DHS at a time when we need it the most.

Come clean, DHS, so we all can move on... hopefully toward a healthier future.

Dems, GOP far apart in coronavirus aid talks

WASHINGTON (AP) — The differences over the next coronavirus aid package are vast: Democrats propose \$3 trillion in relief and Republicans have a \$1 trillion counteroffer. At stake are millions of Americans' jobless benefits, school reopenings and eviction protections.

As top White House negotiators returned to Capitol Hill on Tuesday, the leverage is apparent. They are meeting in House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's office. Republicans are so deeply divided over the prospect of big government spending that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell is left with a weakened hand.

Striking any agreement between Congress and President Donald Trump by Friday's deadline for expiring aid will be daunting. "We cannot afford to fail," Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said.

The outcome will be a defining one for the president and the parties heading into the November election as an uneasy nation is watching and waiting for Washington to bring some end to the health crisis and devastating economic fallout.

But McConnell acknowledged the limits with Republicans split: "We've done the best we can."

Key to the debate is the \$600 weekly unemployment benefit bump that is expiring for millions of jobless Americans. Republicans want to slash it to \$200 a week as an incentive to push people back to work. Democrats have shown flickers of willingness to curb the federal aid but are refusing to go that low.

Defending cuts to unemployment assistance, Republicans said the federal supplement is too generous, on top of state benefits, and people should not be paid more while they are at home than they would if they were on the job.

"The American people don't call that a controversy," McConnell said. "They call that common sense."

Pelosi dismissed the GOP's approach as "wrong," and Schumer responded by waving a copy of a New York newspaper on the Senate floor with the headline summing up the Republican attitude as "Let them eat cake."

With the virus death toll climbing and 4.2 million infections nationwide, both parties are eager for relief. There is some agreement that more money is needed for virus testing, to help schools prepare to open in the fall and to shore up small businesses.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and White House chief of staff Mark Meadows arrived on Capitol Hill for a second day of talks with Pelosi and Schumer. They also heard an earful during a private GOP lunch.

Half the Republican senators are expected to oppose any bill. Several senators vigorously questioned Mnuchin, Meadows and McConnell behind closed doors. They warned against caving to liberal demands and worried the price tag will balloon past \$1 trillion, said Republicans who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private lunch.

"It's a mess," said Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo. "I don't know what we're trying to accomplish."



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Taking the lead

Editor, Daily Union: The Kennel Club of Fort Atkinson Inc. would like to express congratulations and appreciation to the members of Project LEAD for their noteworthy 2020 project.

Despite the complications of COVID-19, this group successfully selected a project designed to make Fort Atkinson an even more dog-friendly community. A mandated shutdown, masks and social distancing could not deter Project LEAD from the required planning, communication, and fundraising to complete project elements.

The Kennel Club of Fort Atkinson encourages the community to be aware of the contributions the 2020 Project LEAD has made. For example, there are new fountains with dog bowls and water bottle-fill stations for people at J.F. Luther field, Ralph Park and near the Rotary depot shelter. In addition to the fountains, new waste stations were added in Ralph Park, Trailway Park, Jones Park, the J.F. Luther field, Arrowhead Park and Rock River Park.

Each of the waste stations includes an educational sign that provides critical information about dogs — dog body language, the importance of microchipping, the importance of spaying/neutering, the dangers of chip bags, how to approach a dog properly, who to call if you lose your pet, dangerous foods for dogs, do's and don'ts of dog training, the danger of hot asphalt, and "The Yellow Dog Project," an education program that uses yellow collars or leashes to identify dogs needing extra space to feel comfortable and safe.

Congratulations, Project LEAD members, for your creativity, your organization and your tenacity. You have indeed proven yourselves strong leaders of our community. We'd like to give a special shout out to Project LEAD member Heather Traxler, who is also an active member of the Kennel Club of Fort Atkinson. — Sincerely, The Kennel Club of Fort Atkinson Inc.

Just look around

Editor, Daily Union: So do I support looting and destruction of property? Of course not. It's stupid and counter-productive. And unfortunately, stupid people aren't limited to Trump rallies. But let us look at what has brought us to this moment in time.

It's called systemic racism in America, and this systemic racism is not sustainable. It has been with this nation since the first Europeans killed their first Native Americans and the first Blacks were brought to Virginia in 1619. To bury our collective heads in

the sand and deny its existence will only lead to more and more conflict. It doesn't have to be this way. It will stay this way when we deflect and attack the messenger.

I refer to Steve Armin's reference to Black Lives Matter. He stated, "They only mobilize when a Black man is killed by a white cop" or "they dictate what monuments we're allowed to have and what we can or can't say or read." It's all the fault of BLM. Who knew?

Steve writes, "When you look at posts from BLM leaders or their webpage, they are who they say they are: violent and vocal anarchists who hate America." Really? And the names of these "leaders" are? The actual posts that validate what it is you say are? If Steve actually knew anything about BLM, he would know that it is not a top-down hierarchy, but specifically chose to be a collection of local organizations, from the U.S. to Canada, all having an equal voice.

Wisconsin doesn't have an official chapter. Who do you think were protesting in all the cities in Wisconsin? Is there a possibility that these protests would have happened even if BLM never existed? That a movement to "defund" the police never would have been proposed? (BTW, "defund" really isn't what is being proposed.) Perhaps more people don't share Steve's Pollyanna view of racism in America.

Steve opines, "but over the years, Blacks and whites united to evolve us into a nation where race alone no longer dictates one's opportunity for success." Why do I have this uncontrollable urge to sing "Kumbaya"?

Steve writes, "The evidence is out there. Just look around." I did. From the website Axios: "After reading Axios' 10 myths about the racial wealth gap, BET co-founder and entrepreneur Robert L. Johnson is issuing a challenge to politicians, civic leaders and Black organizations across the country: Refute the findings or lay out a set of actionable solutions. What he's saying: And if they can't, they need to have the courage to stand up to Black people and say, 'You are perpetually a second-class economic population in America,'" Johnson said during an hour-long one-on-one interview Sunday.

I challenge the gentle reader to actually "look around" and read the "10 myths about the racial wealth gap" Robert Johnson is one of Steve's "intelligent and accomplished Black businessmen." Also too, it's really hard to be successful when you're dead. — Respectfully, Dave Tuten, Fort Atkinson.

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