

## SUMMARY OF CONFERENCE CALL WITH GOVERNOR TATE REEVES

APRIL 15, 2020

10AM

In his opening remarks, the Governor shared that his primary goal in issuing his Stay at Home Order was to slow the spread of the virus as to not overburden the State's health care system. He is becoming more and more confident that the Order is working, and that our health care system will be able to provide the care needed for everyone who gets sick. Currently, there are 110 COVID-19 patients who are on ventilators, and there are 600 ventilators available. He expects to see a peak in the number of cases in the next few days. He does not anticipate having to implement the contingency plans to help our health care system address the number of cases. The state has been successful in getting more PPE. We received a shipment of 80,000 N95 masks yesterday and should be receiving more in the next few days.

- As expected, we are experiencing some of our first responders being quarantined with symptoms. Some are being tested; some do not meet the standards for testing. My concern is that this will continue and we will be left in a situation that could compromise our ability to provide emergency services if we don't put our first responders as a priority for testing so that we can get them back to work, preferably with the type of testing that provides immediate results. Is there any plan to put such practice in to place? **Much work is being done in the area of testing and getting quicker results. Abbott Labs has a machine that can produce results in 15 minutes. The Mississippi Department of Health has 15 of these machines but has only received 120 tests that can be done using the devices. The State is working on getting more tests for these machines. The Abbott testing machines are very similar to machines that are already in doctors' offices across the state that are currently used to test for strep throat or the common flu. The hope is that eventually these same devices can be used to test for COVID-19.**
- What is the plan or is there a plan for the State to aid small towns and tiny towns that have or will have lost most or all of their revenue during these difficult times? Some towns like mine survive on sale tax rebate solely, and with half of our businesses closed and the two largest ones closed, I foresee us being in a financial crunch soon. Unlike some of the middle and larger towns who have a rainy-day fund, tiny towns don't have that luxury. We do good to keep the street lights on all the time. **The Cares Act signed by President Trump a couple of weeks ago will send money to each state to help offset unbudgeted expenses for the State and for local governments as it relates to the impact of COVID-19. The Governor wants to work with the MML and municipalities to find the best ways to utilize the federal funds to help cities and towns. The Governor has assembled a team who will, over the next several weeks, be making recommendations for how to best utilize the funds. The State of Mississippi will see a major impact on state revenue during the last three months of the State's fiscal year.**
- We need clarification on drive-in churches. No one wants to impose restrictions on churches by any means, but there seems to be some pushing the request to the limit and asking our office— has the Governor restricted drive-in church and can we still have it? **The Governor cautioned against shutting down church services who are adhering to social distancing standards. Churches were designated as essential in the Emergency Orders issued by the Governor. Drive-in church services where families stay in their cars with windows rolled up are safe. He urged municipal leaders to use common sense regarding this issue.**
- Could the Governor please elaborate on what defines an essential industry? Specifically, we have a pillow and mattress plant, a manufacturer of fiberglass bath tubs and shower stalls for the mobile home industry, and a manufacturer of recreational vehicles operating in our community. We keep fielding questions from the public about why these facilities are allowed to work when salons, dine-in restaurants, and other small businesses

cannot. Each of the larger manufacturers have 100 or more employees with no practical way for them to practice social distancing and remain productive.

- We sent two people home after being tested for the virus. May we file for reimbursement for this? How do we file for expenses related to COVID-19 preparation?
- Will the statewide shelter in place be extended? **The Governor has not made a decision on extending the shelter in place Order that is set to expire on Monday, April 20<sup>th</sup> at 8am. He will continue to listen to the state health experts in the coming days to decide if an extension is necessary.**
- Does the state have a uniform plan to fairly distribute CARE Act funds to local governments?
- Has there been any discussion about accelerating the percentage of “use tax” fund reimbursements to municipalities, or adding some other categories for which the funds can be used?
- If and when orders are changed or lifted on non-essential businesses, what, if any, of the health behaviors and guidelines enacted for COVID will remain in place? **The Governor stated that he had used a tiered approach in moving forward with Orders at the beginning of the pandemic in our state, and he anticipates using the same approach as we start to move forward in lifting any Orders that have been issued.**
- How will we know the specifications that will be used by the Governor to open Mississippi’s economy? What data set will be used in this decision making and how will we know the data set?
- Will municipalities be ordered to open businesses even when the conditions in their borders are unstable? Meaning cases are continuing to rise at same rate or increasing rate.
- Could the Governor get our Department of Health to publish the numbers of coronavirus survivors? They give three columns: number of cases, deaths, and nursing homes affected. I would appreciate positive numbers such as those that had the virus and recovered as a fourth column. **The Governor will continue to encourage the MS Department of Health to be as transparent as they can be and does agree that sharing the number of patients who have recovered would be encouraging for all to see.**
- What are the Governor's plans for our more rural areas re-opening for business? Shouldn't we anticipate an earlier return to normalcy more so than our more urban areas? I fully understand we will have to continue with the precautions/guidelines in place. But obviously, we're different from a Jackson or Gulfport or Meridian as for as our numbers go; including total population and rate of the outbreak. **The Governor stated that he never intended for the Stay at Home Order to be a long-term directive. As we continue to see improved testing capabilities, and based on recommendations from the MS Department of Health, he plans to open up the economy as soon as it makes sense and it's safe. He will be looking at geographic areas and areas that are high-risk with higher rates of the virus as he makes his decisions.**
- Please address the unemployment issue people are having, being denied - especially the small business owners and their employees. Same for the SBA loans or grants. Also, what is the time frame for businesses to start reopening? **The Governor shared that unemployment claims have gone from 1,000 four weeks ago to a current level of 45,000. He realizes that people are having challenges getting through to the call centers but stated that call centers employees have been increased 5-fold and call center hours are now 7 days per week, 7am-10pm. He also said that the WIN job centers are able to process claims in-person, and that a contract is being negotiated with an outside vendor that will add an additional 100 call center employees. Those negotiations should be finalized in the next 48 hours. He emphasized that benefits will not begin when the person's application gets processed, but will be back-dated to the first day of unemployment. He has also**

**waived the one-week waiting period. Additionally, recipients can receive an additional \$600 per week if their job loss is directly related to the pandemic.**

- Many of us have new police officers that have registered for the police academy in May. Has there been any consideration given to the academic portion of the academy being given online like our universities are doing? Maybe doing the physical part later in the summer when the virus has reduced greatly? Thank you again for your great leadership.
- We've been fielding many calls from small business owners trying to discern if "nonessential" businesses may continue sales through Facebook live sales, telephone orders, online orders, etc. Can we get some clarification from Gov. Reeves on this today during the conference call? **If a business is able to operate and provide services to customers without in-person contact, then they can operate even if they are not deemed "essential".**
- Is there any funding available for small businesses such as hair salons, barbers, and others that do not qualify under the CARES Act?
- Are there any funds available for a week-long testing site?
- Is there any funding for municipalities due to loss of revenue due to COVID-19?
- Are there any plans for state assistance?
- Can the state health department share their data by zipcode as it relates to:
  - a. positive cases
  - b. number of tests
  - c. Who is mandated to report?
  - d. Why are the numbers different based on the agency?
- If you begin to loosen the restriction will it be on a case by case basis for cities that are considered hot spots?
- Right now, evictions will be allowed after the Shelter in Place Order is removed, which is Monday at 8am. If it is not extended, it would be great to know if evictions will be suspended for those still waiting on their unemployment benefits to get approved.