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March 10, 2021

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One suburban lawmaker described the Wolf administration's vaccine distribution as "inefficient, inadequate, and inequitable," and likened its scheduling approach to [a "scavenger hunt."](#) Four members of Congress urged Gov. Tom Wolf to review his plan and "improve upon its weakness."

The Hill
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AG, alleging

And that's just what Democrats are saying.

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Wolf, a second-term Democrat, is accustomed to battling Republican lawmakers in Harrisburg over COVID-19 restrictions. But a year after the pandemic upended daily life, the governor is facing growing criticism from fellow Democrats who largely supported his coronavirus response. Now serving his seventh year as governor, Wolf is term-limited and can't seek reelection next year. He's not expected to run for another office.

So while the vaccine rollout likely won't have implications for his political future, other Democrats are acutely aware that voters will remember how the state managed the biggest public health crisis in a century. A possible sign of how the public rates Wolf's handling of the pandemic will come in the May primary election, which includes [a ballot referendum asking voters if they want to rein in the governor's emergency powers](#). "This is not a political issue. This is literally a life-and-death issue," said State Rep. Kevin Boyle (D., Phila.). "With that said, how the state conducts the rollout of the vaccines will absolutely be judged by the electorate in Pennsylvania. Considering we have a Democratic governor, I think it is vital that this is done in a very comprehensive and effective way. ... It's fair for the electorate to judge us on that. This is as important as it gets."

Democrats' frustration with [Wolf's management style](#) has been building for some time. During his first run for governor in 2014, he campaigned as a businessman and regular guy from York who drove a Jeep and wasn't beholden to special interests. Wolf has long been uninterested in old-school politicking, the kind of backslapping for which Pennsylvania's last Democratic governor, Ed Rendell, was well-known. Some Democrats say that while that image may appeal to voters, his style hasn't always been conducive to effective communication.

The fissures have occasionally spilled into public view. Last May, about two months after Wolf ordered all businesses not deemed "life-sustaining" to close, [Philadelphia-area Democrats pressed the governor](#) to provide more details about his reopening plan. But for the most part, Wolf's party stood by him as he resisted efforts by the GOP-led legislature to quickly lift pandemic restrictions — though some Democrats think the lockdowns hurt them at the polls last year, particularly in the western part of the state.

The vaccine rollout has been different. "Governing in the best of times in the last two years of a second term for any executive is difficult," said Chris Borick, a political scientist and pollster at Muhlenberg College in Allentown. "Politics is always looking forward, and you're not in the future. So people blow by you. You layer in a crisis of epic portion, and trying to govern in a crisis during a lame-duck period" is even more challenging.

Borick said Democrats face a Catch-22: "How badly do you want to beat him up on this, knowing that there's an election where a Democrat is going to look to replace him?" The public backlash intensified after The Inquirer revealed last week that [the Philadelphia suburbs received fewer doses per capita](#) than other parts of the state. [Local officials have demanded more doses](#), but [a Sunday call with officials from the state Department of Health](#) didn't resolve the dispute. (Unlike the rest of the state, [Philadelphia receives its vaccine supply directly from the federal government](#).)

Montgomery County Commissioner Ken Lawrence Jr. said it's "disturbing" to hear state officials shrug off concerns about a lack of vaccines in his county. Some residents, those officials said, are getting vaccinated by traveling to other counties. "There's a real disparity issue there," Lawrence said. "It does matter where people get vaccinated. If we know we have citizens who went to other places to get vaccinated, we know there are citizens who can't do that."

Lyndsay Kensinger, a Wolf spokesperson, defended the administration's vaccine rollout and said it was limited by "a severe supply problem" that only the federal government can fix. "The reality is shots are getting into arms and the counties with the loudest complaints are vaccinating at a rate at or above the state average," she said in a statement. "Health-care delivery, including

obtaining a vaccine, doesn't follow county borders and vaccine allocation isn't defined by county lines. Some counties' vaccine providers are receiving vaccine from health systems in other counties that are redistributing doses to their county. Bottom line: It's shots in arms, not shots to places."

State Sen. Maria Collett sees Southeastern Pennsylvania as a political powerhouse and as the pandemic's first epicenter in the state. So she finds it frustrating and unfair that state lawmakers and county commissioners from the region are still struggling for vaccine information and access. She noted the unusual move Monday by the Democratic-controlled county commissions in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery Counties to demand more transparency from Wolf. Democrats won control of the governing boards in three of those counties less than two years ago, amid [the broader suburban political realignment](#) that was accelerated by Donald Trump's presidency. "Governor Wolf understands the Southeast delivered for him in 2018 and for Joe Biden in 2020," said Collett, who represents parts of Montgomery and Bucks Counties. "We know the Southeast is a powerhouse when it comes to voting and Democratic representation."

Collett said she doesn't expect the region to receive preferential treatment for that. "But it certainly doesn't mean we should be getting less than what we're entitled to, which is what we're seeing in these numbers," she said. Democrats in the state House shared their concerns directly with Wolf during a Zoom meeting last week, according to lawmakers and others briefed on the call. "There were frustrations expressed to the governor's staff that we have stood by the shutdown measures, and there should have been that system in place to distribute the vaccines," said Boyle, who represents Northeast Philadelphia. "There was plenty of time." "The governor was very responsive and respectful as always," Boyle said. "He pledged his due diligence to correct whatever issues have arisen. I believe that's exactly what he's doing."

State Rep. Jared Solomon spent Monday organizing a vaccination effort for more than 200 people in his Northeast Philadelphia district. "Everyone agrees we could be doing better," the three-term Democrat said, describing constituents as "anxious, scared, and frustrated" about their ability to find and get shots. "I just decided I would take things into my own hands and start delivering for people." Solomon and his staff worked from a list of eligible constituents who had called his office seeking vaccines. He also used a "robo-call" in his district to let people know about the program. Slots filled up quickly.

Solomon avoided directly criticizing Wolf but said he worries Pennsylvania isn't keeping up with other states. "This is something where I think all folks think we need to do better for people," Solomon said. There's plenty of time for Wolf to course-correct. "This governor still has 22 months left in his term. That's a lot of time to remind folks that you are still the chief executive of the state," said Mustafa Rashed, a Democratic lobbyist based in Philadelphia. "There is still an opportunity for the governor, should he want, to reframe this debate" around how to "get Pennsylvania to a better place." — ***Philadelphia Inquirer***

A bipartisan group of U.S. lawmakers led by Senator Amy Klobuchar and Representative David Cicilline will introduce legislation on Wednesday aimed at making it easier for news organizations to negotiate collectively with platforms like Google and Facebook. The bill comes not long after Facebook had a pitched battle with Australia over how much publishers should make from their social media pages. During the fight, Facebook blacked out Australian news pages and only restored them once the government granted concessions. It also promised a \$1 billion investment in the news industry.

Senator John Kennedy and Representative Ken Buck, both Republicans, said they will also sponsor the bills. Klobuchar and Cicilline are both Democrats. The measure would allow print, broadcast or digital news organizations to work together to win better deals from Facebook and Alphabet Inc's Google during a four-year period, when they would not be subject to antitrust laws. The bill

would require the negotiations to aid news publishers generally rather than a small number.

Klobuchar said she was optimistic about the possibility of the measure's becoming law because of the growing concern of lawmakers from both parties about monopolies. "Tech has no mercy," she said, saying the bills would allow negotiations on "everything from advertising revenue to access to information on subscribers." She noted that most people now get their news online through Facebook and Google. Social media companies use news to attract users and have been accused by news publishers of not sharing enough advertising revenue with them. The legislation could boost revenues.

The news industry is undeniably struggling, with employment at U.S. newspapers down by half since 2008 amid tumbling advertising revenue and changing media habits, according to data from Pew Research. "This bill will give hardworking local reporters and publishers the helping hand they need right now, so they can continue to do their important work," Cicilline said in a statement. Smaller publishers using Google's ad sales technology have for years complained about their bigger competitors getting more favorable revenue-sharing deals from the search giant.

The House of Representatives Judiciary antitrust panel, which Cicilline chairs, will hold a hearing on the matter on Friday. In the Senate, Klobuchar introduced a broader bill in February aimed at strengthening antitrust enforcers' ability to stop mergers by lowering the bar for stopping deals and increasing resources for enforcers. Cicilline is expected to introduce a series of antitrust bills in the House. – **Reuters**

Pennsylvania lawmakers are still fighting over daylight saving time, a squabble that has hit plenty of other statehouses as well. Rep. Ryan Mackenzie, R-Lehigh/Berks, is the latest to reintroduce legislation to place the Keystone State permanently on daylight saving time and end the ritual of "springing forward and falling back." House Bill 335 is written to amend the act of April 13, 1887 (P.L.21, No.18), entitled "an act for the establishment of a uniform standard of time throughout the Commonwealth," by observing daylight saving time year-around if authorized by the Congress of the United States."

Mr. Mackenzie said in a memorandum that changing clocks adds unnecessary stress to the lives of Pennsylvanians. "The 1966 Uniform Time Act brought some order to the country's clocks by creating a uniform standard of time and creating several time zones," the memorandum notes. "The Act allows a state to become exempt from DST but does not allow permanent DST unless certain conditions are met. My legislation will allow Pennsylvania to follow permanent DST if the Congress of the United States permits states to do so."

Mr. Mackenzie said his bill is modeled off of a Florida law, but other state lawmakers are also debating whether the change should be made permanent. Legislators in Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, Louisiana and Arkansas have also debated or passed similar legislation. There have been seven previous co-sponsors on Pennsylvania's legislation, and it's not the first time the issue has been addressed in the commonwealth.

During the 2019-2020 regular session, state Rep. Russ Diamond, R-Lebanon, argued there are more negative side effects from changing clocks than benefits. He cited research stating that automobile accidents, workplace injuries, heart attacks, strokes, cluster headaches, miscarriages, depression and suicides all increase in the weeks following clock changes. Some people want the opposite of what these current bills propose and suggest dropping daylight saving time entirely in favor of year-round standard time.

The group Save Standard Time promotes itself as a "nonprofit, nonpartisan, donor-funded, volunteer-run effort to preserve and extend the observation of geographically appropriate standard time." It says a permanent standard time provides the most benefit to health, safety, schoolchildren, the economy, the

environment, and liberty. The U.S. Congress will have the final say if any change to the clocks would be permanent. Daylight saving time 2021 will begin at 2 a.m. on Sunday. It ends at 2 a.m. on Sunday, Nov. 7. – ***Pittsburgh Post-Gazette***



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