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April 23, 2020

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A small contingent of Pennsylvania Republicans have prepared a nuclear option to revoke Gov. Tom Wolf's emergency powers, as lawmakers continue to pressure the Democratic governor to reverse the sweeping actions he's taken to slow the spread of the coronavirus. But while that option might fire up those who want to see the state reopen,

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system, Gov. Tom
Wolf says

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they 'look forward'
to working with Gov.
Wolf on easing his
coronavirus
restrictions

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A key Democratic
group is suing to
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Philadelphia Daily
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had plans. Then
coronavirus turned
their first 100 days
into 'a roller
coaster.'

Pittsburgh Post-
Gazette
Editorial: Reopening
must be empirical

it's practically impossible to pull off. In an unusual plot twist, the normally powerful GOP-led state legislature has been largely sidelined during the coronavirus outbreak, while Wolf has used his new-found power to close businesses and impose restrictions on the lives of 12.8 million people.

Those steps have closely tracked with the recommendations of nearly all state and federal health officials, and those same officials have cautioned against a hurried reopening. On Monday, however, four Republicans spoke on the steps of the Capitol to an angry crowd of hundreds of people protesting Wolf's measures. "Never before in the history of this commonwealth has a governor exercised so much power," Sen. Doug Mastriano (R., Franklin) said. "It's time to roll that back."

The Republican majority in the legislature has already passed legislation to begin to undo the closures, only to be met by Wolf's veto pen. Now, despite the warnings from health officials and polls indicating wide support for the stay-at-home orders, some Republicans want to go further. Mastriano in the Senate and Rep. Russ Diamond (R., Lebanon) in the House have introduced resolutions that would force Wolf to end his emergency declaration. Diamond said it was important to have the resolution "ready just in case." "I think that we're trying to do our due diligence to work with the governor," he said. "But in the end, the same law that authorizes the governor authorizes us to terminate it at any time."

There's just one problem: The legislature needs Wolf's approval to do it. When Wolf signed a disaster declaration March 6 in response to the growing coronavirus threat, he triggered a decades-old law that has been used in the past for hurricane and snowstorm response. The 1978 statute gives the legislature the power to require the governor to end his emergency declaration at any time through a concurrent resolution, which the GOP majorities could pass without any Democrats on board.

But under the state Constitution, the governor is allowed to reject this kind of proposal. Republicans would need at least some Democrats to join the cause to gather the two-thirds majority needed to override Wolf's inevitable veto — a near-impossible scenario. When Spotlight PA reached out to Diamond about Wolf's power to block the resolution, he replied, "The governor can pretty much do what he wants."

A spokesperson for Wolf forwarded a request for comment to the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, which provided details on how the state's emergency declaration is tied to the availability of federal dollars. While under Wolf's emergency declaration, the General Assembly has passed a bill that would reopen businesses and advanced one that would create an intergovernmental task force and give individual counties the power to reopen their own economies, in effect redistributing the power away from Wolf. The governor has vetoed one of the measures and vowed to block the other, citing the harm opening businesses in this manner could have on public health.

With their powers diminished, Republican lawmakers are turning to one area where they still have some muscle: hearings. Two state Senate committees will hold a hearing Thursday to gather more information about the state's response to the coronavirus. Secretary of Health Rachel Levine, as well as the heads of PEMA and the Department of Community and Economic Development, have agreed to testify, according to a spokesperson for Sen. Tom Killion (R., Chester).

The Department of Community and Economic Development will likely be of particular interest to lawmakers, since it was tasked by Wolf with approving or denying waivers to allow businesses to reopen. Those decisions were made in secret and have been criticized as inconsistent and unfair. Some lawmakers say their frustrations stem from the lack of transparency in the waiver process, in part because of claims that it has allowed big-box stores to remain open while forcing small businesses to close. "We do absolutely respect the challenge the governor has had to address," said Mike Straub, a spokesperson for House Majority Leader Bryan Cutler (R., Lancaster). "We don't take issue with the fact that he's had to make decisions very, very quickly outside the legislative process. But as much as possible we'd like to be engaged in the recovery plan."

In an April 15 letter, Mastriano told Wolf he intends to subpoena the administration for documentation on "why you approved businesses for a waiver, and which ones you shut down." "It is the constitutional responsibility of the General Assembly to provide oversight of the Executive Branches and its actions, especially during this emergency crisis," he said.

Members are also frustrated with Wolf's lack of communication before he made sweeping orders, with leaders sometimes finding out what action he's taken through press releases, Straub added. On top of hearings, members have sent letters to the governor, urging him to take action and reopen sectors of the economy that they believe can be safely done using Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines.

Wolf told reporters Tuesday that he talks with Republican leaders "all the time" and is trying to work with them on coronavirus response. Earlier this week, he announced plans to ease restrictions on construction and car sales, two sectors that Republican lawmakers had been advocating for.

– **Spotlight PA**

Comcast Corp's NBCUniversal said on Thursday it aims to help retailers that have been forced to shut down amid the pandemic through new ecommerce tools that will let people buy products directly from NBC's content. The launch of the tools, called NBCUniversal Checkout, comes as many brands have reduced advertising spending while the coronavirus batters the economy.

U.S. TV networks are poised to lose as much as \$12 billion in ad revenue in the first half of this year because of the postponement of major sports events like the Tokyo Olympics and the NCAA basketball tournament, according to research firm eMarketer. The new features will allow consumers to scan a code on their TV screens with their phones, sending the advertiser's product shown in the content to an online shopping cart powered by NBCUniversal Checkout.

Users can also purchase items from a sponsored article on NBCUniversal properties like the Today show or Spanish-language news site Telemundo, without leaving NBC's websites. The moves are aimed at reducing the number of steps needed to buy an item online. NBCUniversal said it accelerated the launch of Checkout as retailers from large companies like Macy's to smaller shops have struggled during the pandemic. "We're getting this in front of advertisers now, so we're able to start integrating them as early as next month," said Josh Feldman, executive vice president of marketing and advertising creative at NBCUniversal.

NBCUniversal will not take a cut of sales made through Checkout for the rest of the year, to help retailers who normally do not have the budget to advertise on TV, Feldman said. He declined to comment on how much the company would earn from sales after this year. – **Reuters**

About a month ago, the internet started to list.

Up to that point, online activity flowed more or less in balance, with work traffic relegated mostly to the business side of the ship. Then social-distancing directives forced much of the serious stuff over to the starboard side. Which is where we watch Netflix. As it happens, the country's internet infrastructure has proven robust enough to handle the wholesale shift. Unfortunately, it's a different story for many homes with older Wi-Fi routers that weren't equipped to handle the onslaught.

If your work videoconference is struggling to keep pace because it's crowded out by your spouse's team meeting and the kids' virtual classes, then take heart. Help is on the way. Thursday, the FCC is expected to approve a new lane for Wi-Fi traffic, something it hasn't done in more than two decades. It spans the 6GHz frequency range, which means it's much faster than both 2.4GHz and 5GHz Wi-Fi. Plus, it's more than twice as wide as both those bands combined. Which means that 6GHz-enabled smartphones and tablets will have plenty of elbow room for all your family's left-boat and right-boat activities.

You can't buy electronics with 6GHz Wi-Fi yet. When devices do become available, they'll be marked with the Wi-Fi 6e designation, which means they support the latest Wi-Fi 6 standard with radios that can communicate on the new band as well as the older, more crowded frequencies. Expect to start seeing 6GHz devices – as well as routers to connect them - in time for what I'll call the back-to-homeschool shopping season this summer.

It's not so much the skyrocketing volume of traffic borne out of social distancing that's stressed older networks so much as the type of traffic. Even before work-from-home directives, Wi-Fi 4 and older-generation routers often had trouble keeping pace in the evening, when family members simultaneously played online games, engaged in social media and streamed videos. Daytime internet traffic during social isolation has proven to be even more challenging, with multiple family members logged into high-bandwidth videoconferencing sites, with real-time activity flowing in both directions. Wi-Fi 6 laptops and smartphones are built for that. They'll perform even better on 6GHz spectrum, where they will be free of interference from smart doorbells, thermostats and older tablets, PCs and phones.

These new network demands that Wi-Fi 6e addresses aren't fleeting. They'll remain in place long after the current stay-at-home directives are lifted. For one thing, health experts predict we're in for more social-distancing initiatives over the next year or two in response to the ebb and flow of COVID-19 infections. But even when we're not trying to flatten the curve, education and productivity are retooling for a future with more homebound activity than before. For one, school boards are expected to incorporate video into classrooms so kids can participate virtually when they're home sick. With younger children, that likely will force at least one parent to stay behind and work from home.

As well, some professions are already rethinking how they approach face-to-face communication. In healthcare, for example, coronavirus is turning the emerging telemedicine industry on its head. Rather than

examine people remotely who aren't sick enough to go to the hospital, clinicians increasingly are tapping the technology to maintain safe distances between them and contagious patients. I also believe that America's culture of showing up to work sick will suffer collateral damage from the coronavirus crisis. We'll still work, contagious or not. But going forward, we'll probably do it from home.

Although it wasn't planned that way, the new 6GHz spectrum couldn't come at a better time. Because while the hull of our internet infrastructure has proven to be sound enough to handle the stress of an all-hands call to the home side of the deck, older home wireless networks have been exposed. The upcoming 6GHz Wi-Fi, or Wi-Fi 6e, has the raw bandwidth, range and networking intelligence to run smoothly what we want to do and what we need to do. You might call it the new Wi-Fi for the new normal. – **USA Today**

On Monday, a few hundred protestors descended on Harrisburg, calling on Gov. Tom Wolf to end stay-at-home orders and business shutdowns. The rally followed a weekend of protests in other states that were orchestrated by far-right pro-gun provocateurs based in Ohio. In some of the protests, "reopeners" came with blatantly anti-Semitic signs — one sign in Ohio that depicted Jews as rats read "The Real Plague." Ironically, other protesters compared governors who are following the advice of health experts to Nazis. In general, the group fell under a collective banner of Trump supporters, gun zealots, and government-and-vaccine averse protestors. Since they assembled in a crowd without masks, it's clear another banner was stupidity.

The out-of-state genesis of the event was not enough to prevent a handful of Republican state legislators from joining the crowd outside of Pennsylvania's state Capitol. In perfect irony, one Republican candidate for state House from Montgomery County, an ER nurse who was involved in planning a back-to-work event, decided last minute not to attend because she feared infection.

Gun-toting protestors with "Don't Tread on Me" flags make for a good photo op. It's much harder to capture the collective power of the vast majority of Pennsylvanians who are participating in social distancing and following the leadership of health experts, not internet trolls. Public opinion polling helps give a fuller image of where Pennsylvania stands. According to a Public Policy Polling poll from the beginning of April, 85% of Pennsylvanians believe that the state's response has been about right or even an underreaction. The results are not partisan — 79% of people who voted for Donald Trump in 2016 agreed. According to a Civiqs poll, 68% of Pennsylvanians are extremely or moderately concerned about coronavirus outbreaks in their local area.

Multiple national polls also support the fact that most people understand that it will take more than a few weeks, or even months, to contain the coronavirus pandemic, and for the economy to go back to normal. What keeps the majority of voters up at night is the fear that restrictions will be eased up too early, not too late. Acknowledging the widespread support for stay-at-home measures, and adherence to science and epidemiology, does not mean dismissing the widespread pain and suffering due to the economic devastation inflicted by the pandemic.

Containing the coronavirus is the best thing for the economy. That will take time — weeks, months, and maybe even years before we return to "normal," if that ever fully happens. Undeterred by the protests, Gov.

Wolf, whose early action to shut down businesses and schools undoubtedly contributed to Pennsylvania's relatively low infection rate compared with nearby states, extended the stay-at-home order to May 8 and vetoed a Republican bill to open businesses. Some restrictions will be eased, such as allowing the curbside sale of liquor and car sales online. When this is over, it will be thanks to Pennsylvanians who were willing to sacrifice — not only for themselves but for their vulnerable neighbors. And in two weeks, if there is a spike of new COVID-19 cases, we will remember this week's protest as part of what extended the pandemic. – **Philadelphia Inquirer editorial**

Stay safe



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