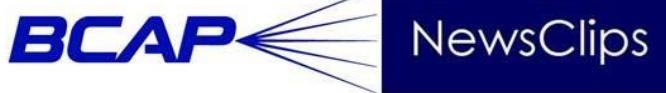


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May 12, 2020

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**New York Times**  
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**Washington Post**  
[Facebook is quietly helping to set up a new pro-tech advocacy group to battle Washington](#)

On Tuesday, May 12, PCN's "Coronavirus Impact" segment will feature a one-on-one interview with special guest Debi, one of Pennsylvania's few Certified Deaf Interpreters. Debi's expertise is currently utilized to interpret PA Secretary of Health Dr. Rachel Levine & Governor Tom Wolf's daily press conferences on the Coronavirus for Pennsylvania's deaf and hard of hearing community. She also offers her assistance for other interpreting jobs that take her into the courtroom. Debi was born into an all-deaf family and has been fluent in sign language her whole life. During the interview, she conveyed the importance of her facial expressions, especially the eyebrows, as an expressive tool to convey words.

**Watch this special segment Tuesday, May 12, at 12 PM and 8 PM.** On cable and streaming FREE on the PCN app. For more information, [visit pcntv.com](http://pcntv.com).

Gov. Tom Wolf pushed back forcefully - and with some apparent success - Monday on a brushfire of opposition in central and eastern Pennsylvania counties to his [ongoing coronavirus pandemic lockdown](#).

In uncharacteristically blunt language, Wolf accused local elected officials proposing to break out of the state's phased reopening plan of "caving in" to the virus, and starkly warned any business owners tempted to open ahead of his schedule that by doing so they are playing with liability issues and their

**Associated Press**  
[Twitter to label disputed coronavirus tweets](#)

**ESPN**  
[Owners approve MLB season proposal, plan for July start as players' union preps to weigh in](#)

**Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**  
[Gov. Tom Wolf denounces Pa. counties reopening without his approval as 'cowardly,' 'selfish'](#)

**Philadelphia Inquirer**  
[Who's exempt? Gov. Wolf's employer list leaves more questions than answers.](#)

**Associated Press**  
[From frames to furniture to food, here's how Pa. lawmakers spent millions of taxpayer dollars](#)

**Allentown Morning Call**  
[Trump will make first visit to Lehigh Valley on Thursday, when he visits an Upper Macungie medical equipment distributor](#)

customers' and employees' lives. "We Pennsylvanians are in a fight for our lives. The enemy is a deadly virus, set on destroying us," Wolf said, adopting a war-like footing as he opened a mid-day briefing with an appeal to all Pennsylvanians to stay on a course that he said has been marked by real progress including 37 counties now starting or scheduled to start to reopen, and a hospital system that was never overwhelmed by COVID-19 cases. "Over this past weekend, some have decided to surrender to this enemy," Wolf said, adding "these folks are choosing to desert in the face of the enemy, in the middle of a war that we Pennsylvanians are winning and that we must win."

The governor - with the momentum of [federal and state court decisions in support of his emergency declarations](#) at his back - also wielded the dual hammers of threatening to withhold federal pandemic funding from counties who stepped out of line, and threatening businesses that opened prematurely with licensing or other health department sanctions. The response was not unanimous.

But PennLive's sampling of county officials that had been [openly threatening to unilaterally move themselves into the state's initial "yellow" stage](#) for reopening found several stepping back from the brink Monday afternoon, and others saying that they are re-evaluating and will make final decisions later in the week. Several commissioners said, after looking at it more carefully, the risk of defiance simply seemed to outweigh the rewards.

Many of those represented counties, like York County, that now meet new case incidence thresholds for consideration to a move to yellow. With a real chance to get there in agreement with Wolf soon, for them this doesn't seem right the right time to fight. In a Facebook Live meeting with constituents Monday, York Commissioners Chair Julie Wheeler commended residents on making considerable progress against COVID-19 cases in the past four weeks and declared York "ready to make the shift to the yellow phase." But when asked by residents to clarify whether the county was moving into yellow or not, Wheeler said the board is just lobbying, not acting.

Others, after consultation with their solicitors, have concluded they don't have the legal standing to do it. "This move, we are advised, has no legal basis, and would not stand up, and could actually endanger the business licenses of those who defy the state of emergency declaration," said Cumberland County Commissioner Gary Eichelberger, who said his board agreed - even before the governor's tirade on Monday - to continue making their best case to Wolf while in compliance with the state regs.

Perry County commissioners discussed the possibility at a meeting Monday morning and decided to stick with Gov. Wolf's phased-in plan, at least for now. In Pennsylvania's scheme, [yellow is not a return to pre-pandemic normalcy, by a long shot](#). Its conditions continue to require the closure of bars and restaurants, except for take-out orders; all entertainment venues like movie theaters, casinos and motor racetracks; and all public gatherings are to be limited to 25 or fewer. Personal services businesses like barbershops, tattoo parlors and nail salons are also to be closed, and organized sports are banned. But it would allow many more retailers, manufacturing companies and commercial offices to re-open, and it is a prerequisite to a full reopening.

Some of the strongest resistance to the state's plan, of course, is coming from counties that have had bigger coronavirus case counts, and may face longer waits to reopen, like Lebanon, Dauphin and Lancaster. Josh Parsons, chairman of the Lancaster County board, said Monday he is still inclined to go forward with a county declaration of reopening for Lancaster, with or without Wolf's approval, by Friday. "Although he started out in the crisis with great reserves of good will," Parsons said of Wolf, "he's squandered it all and I am now overwhelmed with calls and e-mails and other kinds of contact from people demanding that we reopen, and understandably so. He's provided them no hope. He's provided in Lancaster County no course to get out of this."

Lancaster is in a better position than most to act unilaterally - if it in fact does - because it is large enough population-wise that it received its \$95 million in federal pandemic relief directly from the Washington. Other counties will be more reliant on the administration as a pass-through for the funding, and "the reward for desertion cannot be that you're just like everybody else and get the discretionary funding," Wolf said. "Discretionary funding will go to those places that are doing everything they ought to do to keep their citizens safe."

That reality mattered to many. "We know where are the (COVID-19) problems are, and where our problems are the state didn't fix, but we're not going to do a resolution," said a perturbed Alice Gray, chairman of the Juniata County commissioners. "I mean, we're very tiny, and for us to jeopardize the (business) licenses and the insurance for folks... that's all I can say."

In Lebanon County, where this mini-revolution started last week, Commission Chairman Robert Phillips said he's also re-evaluating in the wake of Wolf's threats from Monday. "We have hardships we're trying to remedy and with the number of cases in our county, we thought this (unilateral county action) was justified," Phillips continued, noting store owners are having trouble paying mortgages, and residents can't finalize wills, settle estates or conduct real-estate transactions without some access to county row offices, which are currently closed.

Phillips said his county can't move to "green" status until it gets to yellow and that commissioners wanted to make that move to yellow to give residents some hope. "Saving face or saving the funding, that's where we are," Phillips conceded in an interview with PennLive. "In the big picture, we may be right but if that's the cost, we need to weigh whether that's worth the price." Both the Lebanon and Dauphin boards are scheduled to meet Wednesday. Commissioners in another central Pennsylvania county promoting revolt, Schuylkill, did not return calls for comment.

Many county prosecutors have said they would likely not prosecute citations issued under the business closure orders because of what they considered the constant changes in the rules out of Harrisburg. But as Wolf noted Monday, enforcement has been left more to information and moral suasion than fines thus far. If necessary, however, he noted the state can also use its business licensing and other regulatory hammers.

Liquor licenses, building occupancy permits and the like all "depend upon you doing everything you can to keep your patrons safe," Wolf said, addressing business owners directly, "and by opening before the evidence suggests you should you're taking undue risks with the safety of your customers. That's not only morally wrong. It's also really bad business."

County commissioners, as a whole, are still likely to get some support in the form of a proposed bill scheduled for a vote in the state Senate Wednesday that would specifically write into law their authority to make decisions about reopening their economies and public life on a county-by-county basis during the public health emergency. "They (the Wolf Administration) called it a balancing act, and there's been no balance," Senate Majority Leader Jake Corman, R-Centre County, said after Monday's session. "The governor has not looked at any of the (economic or emotional) carnage that's been created by this shutdown... At some point you have to weigh in the other side that's being created by the cure, and I don't think the governor's done that adequately, and that's what we're hearing from the local communities."

With the battle lines so clearly drawn by Wolf Monday, it seemed hard to find a scenario where the governor would sign that into law. Corman said it's a question he feels Wolf should have to answer because people all across the state need economic help. But on the whole, this seemed to be a day where the governor seemed to preserve some of his authority in largely uncharted territory.

Even where the county commissioners are still threatening action, mayors in their largest cities, like Lancaster and Harrisburg, have said they wouldn't recognize such a county declaration. "The city is still red until the governor declares it otherwise," said Lancaster Mayor Danene Sorace. "And we are doing everything we can to move out of that category as quickly and safely as possible and, definitely, please before June 4. But we will need the county's cooperation to help us do that."

As Cumberland's Eichelberger put it Monday, he and his colleagues will certainly continue to make their best case for launching the reopening as soon as it can be safely done. But, "there is a huge difference between "taking action," and taking effective action. We need to be smart, as well as persistent." – ***Harrisburg Patriot-News; and in the Philadelphia Inquirer: Can Gov. Wolf withhold coronavirus recovery money from counties that defy shutdown orders? Yes, experts say, but expect pushback.***

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Congress is looking to help struggling local newspapers, TV and radio stations qualify for federal coronavirus aid, according to people familiar with the matter. The coming coronavirus legislation expected to be introduced in the House as soon as this week will include a provision to expand newspapers' and broadcasters' eligibility for forgivable small business loans, the people said.

Meanwhile, Sens. Maria Cantwell (D., Wash.) and Amy Klobuchar (D., Minn.) are working to find ways to move the proposal forward in the Republican-controlled Senate. "The Covid-19 crisis has shown us how essential local news and information is to us," Ms. Cantwell said. "Now is not the time to cut newsroom jobs critical to giving the public regional data and news on Covid-19 outbreaks."

Many local news outlets haven't been able to apply for the Small Business Administration's forgivable Paycheck Protection Program loans because of "affiliation rules" that force them to be measured by the size of their parent companies. The new provision to be considered by Congress would waive such rules when it comes to local news outlets. The Wall Street Journal previously reported that newspapers representing more than 80% of the industry by circulation are disqualified from the government's Paycheck Protection Program because of the way their companies are structured, according to data from the Alliance for Audited Media. To make sure that the money doesn't go to businesses that are too large, the legislation would limit eligibility to broadcasters with revenues up to \$41.5 million a year, the current Small Business Administration limit, some of the people said. News publishers with up to 1,000 employees would be eligible.

The pandemic has brought surging web traffic and boosted subscriptions to local news outlets, but it hasn't been enough to overcome the decimation of advertising at the same time. More than 33,000 employees at news publishers have been laid off, furloughed or had pay cut since the start of the crisis, according to a tracker compiled by the NewsGuild-CWA, the largest journalist union.

Newspaper and broadcasting trade groups have lobbied for the changes, and a bipartisan majority of members of both the House and Senate have signed letters pledging support for the local news industry. "I fought hard to get these fixes to this legislation because just like any other small business in New York, access to this federal funding could be a vital lifeline for local news outlets that are losing major advertising revenue and suffering huge financial losses," said Sen. Chuck Schumer (D., N.Y.) in a news release announcing the inclusion of the language in the coming House bill.

Unknown is when the Senate would take up any kind of stimulus legislation from the House. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) has said he

is pausing negotiations with House Democrats on any more coronavirus relief, and has been unenthusiastic about passing the kind of aid to states and cities that make up the bulk of the House Democrats' proposal. – **Wall Street Journal**

# Stay safe



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