

TESTIMONY OF

**The Honorable Jared Polis
Governor
State of Colorado**

HEARING ON

**“On the Front Line: How Governors are Battling the COVID-19 Pandemic.”
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives**

June 2, 2020

Good morning and thank you for the invitation to testify.

Thank you to:

- Subcommittee Chairwoman Representative Diana DeGette
- Subcommittee Ranking Member Representative Brett Guthrie
- Committee Chairman Representative Frank Pallone
- Committee Ranking Member Representative Greg Walden
- Members of the committee
- Governor Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan
- Governor Asa Hutchinson of Arkansas
- And everyone tuning in at home

I want to provide an overview of the steps that we have taken on both the public health side and the economic side, with the hope that some of our successful practices can be an example for other states and for the federal government.

We started by setting realistic goals. We know that given the freedom of movement throughout the United States, it would be impossible to eradicate the virus in Colorado until there is a cure or a vaccine.

So on the public health side, our focus has been on saving as many lives as possible by:

- Limiting the spread of the virus,
- Protecting the most vulnerable - particularly older Coloradans in congregate care
- Supporting our healthcare providers and continuing to ensure people have access to care despite the pandemic

- Doing everything we can to obtain testing equipment and personal protective equipment and being as smart as we could about the uses of these resources, given the constrained supply
- Preserving the ability of our health care system to meet the needs of every critical patient that comes through the door -- with COVID or a non-COVID issue

And on the economic side, we have taken a number of extraordinary measures to help workers and small businesses weather the storm, and we have made strategic decisions about reopening to balance the risk to public health with the economic, societal, and psychological needs of Coloradans.

We confirmed our first case in the beginning of March, and we began to take action to reduce the spread of the virus, which was growing exponentially at the time.

Based on what our modeling was telling us, we needed to severely limit the number of person-to-person interactions by about 75-80%. On the other side of the spectrum, the modeling was showing that this virus would have killed 33,000 Coloradans by now if we took no action.

So on March 25th, we imposed a stay-at-home order which lasted until April 26th.

This was an incredibly difficult decision to make. As a former business owner, I know the effort it takes to keep a business profitable even in the good times. And as Governor of a state with the fastest-growing economy in the nation and an amazing quality of life, it pained me to see businesses shuttered and Coloradans out-of-work and stuck inside.

But this month-long stay-at-home order was absolutely essential for us to:

- Slow the rate of spread of COVID-19
- Build additional hospital capacity including critical care beds and field hospitals
- And acquire more testing supplies and PPE for our health care workforce.

One of the most important things we did is we stood up an Innovation Response Team with some of the best minds from the private sector to work through the issues in the supply chain for testing and PPE.

And during this period, we enacted a number of extraordinary measures to help individuals and businesses weather the economic storm, including:

- Paid sick leave for frontline workers so workers didn't go into work sick and spread coronavirus
- Expanding child care benefits for frontline workers

- Helping small businesses and individuals make ends meet by delaying payment of income, sales, and property taxes.
- A temporary moratorium on evictions and foreclosures -- this was absolutely crucial to keeping people in their homes and small businesses afloat.
- And taking some common-sense steps to lift some regulations -- like a prohibition on take-out or delivery orders of alcohol which helped restaurants stay in business
- Setting up a private relief fund at HelpColoradoNow.org to help nonprofits continue to meet the needs of Coloradans across our state, which has now raised over \$18,000,000 from philanthropic, corporate, and individual donors.
- And convening a Council on Economic Stability and Recovery chaired by Former U.S. Transportation Secretary and Denver Mayor Federico Pena. This bipartisan council of business leaders from across the state put forward recommendations for executive actions, state legislation, and federal consideration. I ask that the letter to the Colorado delegation dated April 9, 2020 from Secretary Pena and myself be placed into the record and considered.

As cases began to level off and even trend downward, on April 27, we ended the “Stay-at-Home” order and replaced it with a policy of “Safer-at-Home.”

Safer-at-Home is designed to allow for a greater degree of economic and social activity while keeping the rate of infection low and preserving the ability of our health care system to meet the demand of a potential surge.

The Safer-at-Home phase has four main components:

- #1 - Scaling up our testing capability. We did this by:
 - Obtaining more testing supplies
 - Working with local public health agencies and private partners to establish dozens of local testing sites throughout the state, including the first-in-the-nation drive-up testing facility
 - Expanding the capacity of our state lab to meet our testing needs.
- #2 - Developing a mask-wearing culture in our state to make person-to-person interactions safer; supporting innovations like the Colorado Mask Project to increase the use of masks.
- #3 - Having Coloradans and those with underlying health conditions continuing to stay at home whenever possible.
- #4 -As much as possible, maintaining social distancing among the greater population

During this period, we have been resuming activities that positively contribute to our economic, societal, and psychological well-being, while maintaining strict precautions and safety measures to protect the public health.

We started with:

- Retail, first curb-side pickup on April 27, then in-store purchases on May 1
- Personal Services like hair cuts and nail salons on May 1
- Real estate showings on May 1
- Some post-secondary education on May 1
- Offices reopening at 50% capacity on May 4

Next came:

- Camping -- in state parks on May 12 and private campsites on May 27.
- Allowing ski resorts to open back up -- an iconic Colorado industry -- on May 27
- Allowing restaurants to operate at 50% inside capacity and greater outside capacity on May 27 with strict precautions to increase ventilation and require mask-wearing
- And allowing summer day camps to reopen starting June 1.

So now in Colorado, we are Safer at Home and to a greater extent, in the vast, great outdoors in our beautiful state.

So far, we have been fairly successful in this new phase. Cases and hospitalizations are dropping. Last week we had our first day in months with zero COVID-19 deaths. We are cautiously optimistic that we will be able to build on this success.

We will continue to monitor the numbers, and if people are doing their part -- wearing masks, keeping their distance, and especially if vulnerable populations are continuing to stay at home -- then we may be able to relax restrictions further.

But I've been straightforward and honest with the people of my state that we will need to endure some level of social distancing and restrictions on our society until there is a cure or a vaccine.

We need to find a sustainable way to live with COVID-19.

The truth is that the public health response and the economic response go hand-in-hand. If residents don't feel safe, they will limit their participation in the economy, and recovery will be sluggish. But if we do a good job suppressing the spread of the virus and bolstering our health care system, there will be more consumer confidence, and the economy will rebound more quickly.

I hope that Colorado can be a model in this regard: willing to do what is necessary to keep people safe, and then gradually removing barriers to economic growth in a smart and strategic way, because unfortunately, we're going to be in this for the long haul.

This is a time where competent governance is of paramount importance, and I'm hopeful that some of our best practices can guide decision-making at the federal, state, and local levels.

So thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to answering your questions.