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Gov. Sisolak Updates Public on State Action and Guidance Regarding COVID-19

Las Vegas, NV — Today, Governor Steve Sisolak held a press conference updating Nevadans on actions and guidance issued by the State of Nevada to prepare for and mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our State, including closing all K-12 schools for the next three weeks.

“My Administration is working hard to protect Nevadans and their families, and to provide as much information as possible in regards to the quick and decisive action that COVID-19 has demanded,” **said Governor Sisolak.** “The State of Nevada, schools and health districts, and our other partners throughout the State will continue to provide information as it becomes available. We’re all in this together, and we all have a shared responsibility in keeping us safe and healthy.”

The Governor’s prepared remarks were as follows:

As you know, the Great State of Nevada is not immune to the global pandemic, COVID-19. No matter how much we hope this will go away, if we wait one more day to take action, it will not.

There are a lot of unknowns right now. But here are a few things I do know:

Despite the incredible work of our local health districts and state labs, like every other state, we have not been provided with a sufficient number of test kits to meet demand for our state. As a result, we don’t know the full extent of what we’re dealing with. But based

on the rapid spread of this virus around the world, and what we've already seen in Nevada, we know must act quickly.

And we know that our health care workers and State and local employees will be on the front lines caring for those who become ill and providing the safety net Nevadans need during this difficult time. They are the heroes. Our police, fire and ambulance workers. The workers and volunteers processing unemployment.

The health care workers reporting every day, with the understanding that their families and their neighbors need them, even with the risk of their own exposure. I ask you to keep them in mind when you make decisions about social distancing, even if you believe you're at lower risk, and avoid continuing the spread of this virus.

I'd now like to talk about the decision I announced earlier this afternoon to close K-12 schools across the state. Here's what this is going to look like:

School employees: you will get specific guidance from your schools, but your takeaway should be that you will continue to work as directed by your district, and you will continue to get paid. Your positions have already been budgeted for this school year.

For those students who rely on free and reduced food and meal programs, please know those services will continue. For several days now, the Nevada Department of Agriculture has been working on a plan to address gaps in meal service due to school closures.

The Department has been in close contact with the Nevada Department of Education, our school districts, charter schools, food bank partners, and community partners to initiate meal availability asap.

Exact times and locations for the meal services will be determined and released by local school districts in partnership with the Department of Agriculture. Rest assured - our children who rely on these programs will NOT go hungry during this closure.

Now I'm going to talk directly to our students- the young people of our state: I grew up in Wisconsin, and the excitement me and my friends would feel when a snow day was called -- it meant we could goof off and have a free day. That's not what this is.

This is not an extended spring break.

We are closing our schools for your safety, and for the safety of your families and neighbors. This needs to be taken seriously. I know many of you have heard that young

people are low risk, but you can still be exposed to this virus and pass it on to others -- to your mom, your dad, your grandparents...those you love.

What you do over the next few weeks will directly affect your family's health. I'm counting on you to step up here and show the rest of Nevada what you're made of.

Next, I'd like to talk about the measures we're putting in place to protect the health and safety of our state workforce and the public. Today I am issuing an emergency regulation to expand the authorization of paid administrative leave for state employees in a state of emergency.

I am also directing executive branch agency leadership to close state offices to the public - as soon as possible. For essential services like unemployment insurance, the DMV, Medicaid, welfare, and others, I am directing agency leadership to wind down in-person public services and transition as much of the work as possible to online and over-the-phone services in the coming days.

We must protect the health and safety of the public and our state workforce while ensuring that the important work of our state government does not grind to a halt.

As I've said before, Nevada is a unique and diverse state--this applies to our state workforce, too. Often, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. With that in mind, I am delegating to executive branch state agency leadership the authority to decide what works best for their offices and employees, whether that means office closures for all non-essential employees, the implementation of teleworking, or a hybrid approach.

These are unprecedented circumstances that call for creative solutions.

Lastly, we are also instituting a hiring freeze and encouraging state agencies to limit spending to essential, emergency purchases.

Underlying all of these actions is an important precautionary measure that has been shown to mitigate the spread of the virus in other states and all around the world: social distancing. Our Nevada Health Response Medical Advisory Team has been working around the clock to provide guidance and recommendations on social distancing and other effective ways to address the spread of COVID-19. I want to thank these medical professionals for their dedication to our State and the safety of our citizens.

The initial guidance they have provided today is as follows:

- *When it comes to gatherings, the risk is not just based on how many people there are, but rather how closely they are gathered and how they are interacting with each other. The risk does not disappear in smaller gatherings. It's the distance and precautions that will make the difference.*

With that in mind, I'm issuing the following directives to the people of Nevada:

- *Any employees who can work from home should do so. While it may not be an ideal situation, it is preferable to having employees unnecessarily spreading disease at work.*
- *Ill employees must absolutely stay home from work*
- *Businesses should take steps to protect employees who must work in person in accordance with social distancing guidance appropriate to the individual workplace*
- *Social distancing is not one-size-fits-all. What works for one community in our state will not work for another. There needs to be great focus in the approaches we take to reduce disease transmission.*
- *Older people, people with underlying health conditions and other high-risk populations should stay at home and avoid unnecessary contact with others.*
- *To our faith leaders, I respectfully request that if you are unable to provide for social distancing protocols, you consider postponing services for your congregations.*
- *And finally, I am asking local governments to enforce a new provision of 50 percent or less capacity of any public gathering space presently allowed by the fire marshals. Fewer people in a room with a larger distance between them is the only way to decrease the risk of spread.*

As new guidance continues to come out from the CDC, the Medical Advisory Team will work with local health districts and top medical professionals to review and provide recommendations. I am grateful for their continued work.

As we all know, gaming is the lifeblood of Nevada's economy, and a source of financial support for so many of our citizens and their families. But to protect the public health and safety of Nevadans and visitors, I strongly support any of our properties that make the difficult decision to close to the public.

I encourage these licensees to do their best to protect the pay and benefits of their workforce during this difficult time, many of whom have school-aged children and other family members they need to provide for. Your workforce is there for you -- day in and day out. Please be there for them during this challenging time.

I want to be very clear: properties that will stay open are expected to comply with the following restrictions:

- There will be no more than three chairs at table games.*
- All gaming machines must be cleaned and sanitized at a minimum of every two hours.*
- Any buffets that remain open must be served by employees instead of by patrons. Employee dining areas can remain open, but again, employees may not serve themselves.*
- And the gaming floor and other public areas are expected to be in compliance with the latest social distancing guidance from Nevada's medical advisory team. Areas outside of the casino floor should also be in compliance with recommended social distancing practices.*

I want to also thank the properties who have committed to donating food to school districts. Specifically here in Clark County, Boyd Gaming, Station Casinos and South Point have agreed to work with us to provide distribution areas for Clark County School District children to pick up food. We will update you on those details in the next few days.

All these measures are part of a larger response, which is why the Nevada Health Response Center operation was created immediately upon signing the emergency declaration to ensure we have leaders addressing each of the impacted areas with their individual expertise. This includes Michael Brown, Executive Director of the Governor's Office of Economic Development.

He has been charged with overseeing response and preparation plans for businesses and employers. He will work with our financial institutions and insurance companies to keep people in their homes and to help Nevada's businesses.

Over the weekend, Director Brown, in conjunction with the Department of Business and Industry, spoke to leaders in the insurance, financial, and mining industries. Additionally,

he is coordinating with local chambers, Regional Development Authorities, and economic leaders to determine the best course of action.

We are proactively ensuring that people have access to essential business services. Starting tomorrow, we will commence daily calls with all of the local Chambers of Commerce, Regional Development Authorities, and other key economic leaders across the state to brief them on situations as they develop. Statewide, we are organizing in conjunction with the Department of Emergency Management and the Small Business Administration to ensure the Governor can petition and formally request small business loan assistance.

Director Brown and I are urging businesses, HOAs, banks, and landlords to be patient and understanding during these unprecedented times. As this state has proved before in times as challenging as these, the business communities in the north, south, and rural areas have banded together to collectively support one another and overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles. We are confident that as Nevada always has, we will bounce back from these challenges and become even stronger, demonstrating our frontier and pioneer spirit.

I want to again emphasize that businesses that are able to do so should embrace and encourage having their employees work from home, especially employees whose children will be out of school for the next three weeks. We are all in this together, and must do what we can to be part of the solution and shared responsibility for each other as Nevadans. Our state's utilities have committed to maintaining all services regardless of a resident's ability to pay. That is exactly the kind of commitment that will help sustain our residents as we weather this crisis.

Through all this, my primary concern has been jobs and the working people of Nevada. And as always, I will continue working with our labor partners throughout the state.

We've already provided guidance for restrictions on visitation at facilities caring for our elderly, including screening visitors for symptoms, and restricting visitation only to essential individuals. These measures are also a challenge, but are critical to the health and wellbeing of the elderly, and those who care for them.

After the tragedy of 1 October, the citizens of this state showed the nation what it meant to stand together, to unite against all odds, and put our neighbors before ourselves. Tonight, I'm asking my fellow Nevadans to do it with more commitment and compassion than ever before. We know what this will mean for our communities.

We will undoubtedly face hardship. There will be a loss of income. Families and individuals will be inconvenienced. I ask every Nevadan to call your neighbors, call and check on the elderly who may be alone and in need.

In the coming days, I will be in consultation with our legislative leaders of both parties and other branches of government to begin to address the financial implications of this crisis. I commit to keeping you informed as this evolves, and as we have more answers to all of the measures I announced today. Until then, take care of each other, and take care of yourselves. Together, we will get through this challenging time.

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