

Public Comment
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COVID-19: Thank You for Your Efforts f/ TERRY KAYES

1 message

Terry Kayes <kayes.gov@gmail.com>

Tue, Aug 18, 2020 at 3:48 PM

To: "Dr. Nancy Williams" <nancy.williams@edcgov.us>

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Greetings Dr. Nancy Williams (El Dorado County Health Officer),

My "Thank you" is below, but first some introductory information:

Many weeks ago, I began learning of various public health officers nationwide -- and a significant number of hospital and government public-health administrators, physicians, nurses, state and federal biomedical research scientists, and other medical professionals -- being fired, harassed, and subjected to every conceivable form of political pressure and insults, verbal abuse, and, implied or actual threats of violence, for doing what professionally they're supposed to do, by expressing their concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic and how best to deal with it, both short-term and long-term.

As a retired land-grant university research scientist and extension specialist, who worked nationally, regionally and locally in over 18 states, in such serious high-conflict areas as water-resources and hazardous-materials toxicology and management, environmental health, and emergency-response procedures for large fires, explosions, floods, hurricanes, and other disasters (with the U.S. EPA, NOAA, CDC, etc.), I was not surprised to learn of this.

Being abusive and making threats is how many people, especially in the U.S., behave when they are told things they do not want to hear, like *"If if you don't stop what you are doing, you will sooner or later be killed, or will very likely die of some form of cancer, or other environmental disease that permanently damages immune function, or causes chronic inflammation and tissue degeneration that will significantly decrease your life expectancy."*

Included below near the end of this message is a "cut-and-paste"

copy of a *New York Times* article that a thoughtful friend of mine who is a PhD-level mental-health professional with high expertise in chronic and acute stress, plus the treatment of PTSD, sent me for my information. Both from that friend's perspective and mine, what that article describes is similar to the serious out-of-control situation that since some days before the Memorial Day weekend has been ongoing in the Lake Tahoe basin, as well as along much of the U.S. Highway 50 corridor.

I'll have more to say about both the likely probability-based long-term adverse economic and human-health consequences of this in the weeks ahead, if they are not fully and effectively planned for, by both the County of El Dorado and State of California.

That said, I am of the opinion that given the circumstances since January, when the COVID-19 pandemic most likely spread to the U.S., and given the likely serious shortage of staff and budgeted funds I suspect you have long had to "make do" with in the past several years, I want to thank you (as well as your modest staff) for your efforts in trying to protect the health of the people of El Dorado County from a "wildfire outbreak" of COVID-19 -- despite the level of overt denialism that is so prevalent in the county.

While a long-building family crisis that I've been dealing with for over 2 years has diverted my attention from paying as much as I might otherwise would have to the pandemic, I've been trying to "catch up" to events as they develop. While trying to do this, I have not been able to "keep track" totally of your activities and your reports to the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors. That said, I have been gratified by the apparent fact that neither you nor (I hope) any member of the Board have said, or engaged in, the kinds of what I consider to be highly questionable and potentially harmful things that have been reported in the news media, regarding a few other counties in the state, which have the odor of political posturing by certain elected county officials.

This favorable impression is based on the tacit assumption that El Dorado County government is working cooperatively with the state to get a firm grip on the irresponsible high-risk conduct of those who openly disregard the (legally-constituted) federal and state guidelines, as they pertain to the COVID-19 pandemic. To do otherwise is to, by default, undermine the authority granted to government by the United States Constitution, as well as risk a very real public-health (as well as economic) crisis. To assume

the county's "good luck" will hold, is a gamble the county can ill afford to make, and is a form of "wishful thinking."

Meanwhile, people need to calm down, and think more carefully about the very real consequences of what they think and do. El Dorado County is specifically not exempt from the mathematics of probability in a universe that runs on the basis of probability, and not on what people believe or want.

Stay well, and do not allow groupthink or sociopathic behaviors to determine the county's approach to health. Professionalism is a matter of ethics, not popularity. But then, you know that, just as you know right from wrong. . . . Thanks again!

(See *New York Times* article below.)

My contact (and general background) information is as follows:

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The New York Times
California Today

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By Robin Estrin



Dr. Gail Newel, health officer for Santa Cruz County, in front of the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk in July. The beach, which had been closed to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, has now reopened. Stephanie Penn

Good morning.

Today, we have another dispatch from the [University of California, Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism](#), written by [Robin Estrin](#).

SANTA CRUZ — On a Sunday in mid-July, Dr. Gail Newel tried to take a “Covid Sabbath.” Dr. Newel, the Santa Cruz County health officer, put away her laptop, ignoring the hundreds of emails piling up. Instead, she meditated, played piano and spent time with her family — including her wife, an OB-GYN, and their adult daughter.

The peace didn’t last. Before dinner, Dr. Newel’s phone buzzed, summoning her to a conference call. She and other county health officers were told that Gov. Gavin Newsom was “dimming the switch” on the state’s long-awaited reopening. All bars and dine-in restaurants would shutter again. Counties on the state’s watch list would have further closures. Two weeks later, when Santa Cruz landed on that list, Dr. Newel would have to explain the whiplash to an increasingly frustrated public.

In the nearly five months since shelter-in-place orders began, Dr. Newel has taken the heat as Santa Cruz went from being one of the safest coastal counties in the state to the site of a recent surge. As the rate of infection has grown, she’s endured a torrent of abuse and threats. More and more, she is questioning her ability to curb the spread of Covid-19 with a state leadership that is sometimes

inconsistent and a population that, she said with exasperation, is increasingly “not willing to be governed.”

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She's not alone. Public health officers, often messengers of bad news, have faced harassment and mistrust while communicating California's alarming downturn to an increasingly polarized public. At least seven health officials in the state have resigned or retired since April. Dr. Newel has stayed the course so far, but her experience provides a window into the difficulty of managing a community's health in a time of unprecedented stress and public unrest.

In May 2019, when Dr. Newel accepted the health officer job, she looked forward to serving the community in which she planned to spend the rest of her life. Dr. Newel, 63, had already retired once, in 2012, from a 14-year private practice as an OB-GYN. She had worked in the past in public health. But nothing could have prepared her to be hurled into the path of a pandemic.

At first, the way seemed clear. Dr. Newel declared a state of emergency on March 4. Two weeks later, she joined Bay Area health officers in rolling out the nation's first shelter-in-place order. By the end of April, she'd closed indoor restaurants, prohibited gatherings and mandated face coverings. Santa Cruz stood as a model of preparedness; only 132 people in the county of a quarter-million had tested positive for Covid-19.

With summer tourism looming, she acted preemptively, signing an order in late April that closed beaches from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. (Surfers were allowed to head directly into the water.) At first, it worked. Law enforcement patrolled the shoreline in A.T.V.s and pickup trucks, issuing few citations, according to Bernie Escalante, the deputy chief of police. “Early on, the mind-set was very different,” he said. “There was a lot more willingness to cooperate.”

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Soon, that changed. In May, Santa Cruzans flooded Dr. Newel's inbox and voice mail. *Control freak*, they called her. *Nazi*. *Power mongerer*. *Freedom trampler*. Dr. Newel read and listened to every message. “Those are voices from the community,” she said. During a public hearing, a man moved toward her so aggressively that the county administrative officer evacuated the room.

After that, the sheriff asked Dr. Newel to stop attending in-person meetings. “He didn’t feel it was possible to ensure my physical safety.”

Then came June. After George Floyd’s death, protesters gathered outside the police station. Others stormed the beaches. On June 6, a man alleged to be an anti-government extremist ambushed and killed a 38-year-old sheriff’s deputy in Boulder Creek, a mountain town to the north. More than a thousand people stood shoulder-to-shoulder at the deputy’s vigil — many without masks. Officers, spread thin, needed to triage. “We no longer had the bandwidth to go enforce an ordinance down on the beach,” Mr. Escalante said.

Dr. Newel began to think differently about what she was asking the police to enforce. What if an officer asked someone to get off the sand, and that person didn’t comply? She imagined a scenario where that officer might physically drag the person to a police car. “The optics of trying to enforce a beach closure became impossible,” she said.

Further complicating matters, on June 12, Mr. Newsom reopened hotels to tourism without lifting the shelter-in-place order. The following weekend, flouting Dr. Newel’s closure order, some 55,000 people filled the three-quarter-mile stretch of sand on Santa Cruz’s main beaches. At a news conference on June 25, she announced a spike in Covid-19 cases so drastic the county redesigned its online epidemiologic graph. “It has become impossible for law enforcement to continue to enforce that closure,” she said. “People are not willing to be governed anymore.”

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The statement reverberated in the blue state. More angry messages ensued, uglier than before. *Murderer*, one wrote. *Our deaths will be on your hands*. Another read: *If any of my family members or friends die, I’m coming for you*.

Dr. Newel is no stranger to crises. She beat cancer in 2010, and lost her eldest son to an opioid overdose in 2016. Weeks ago, her aunt died after catching Covid-19 in an Ohio nursing home. Though she admitted to “feeling weary,” she said, she intends to stick it out. “I feel like I’m the right person in the right place at the right time to do this job,” she said, standing near the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk in late July.

Since then, the situation has grown increasingly dire. Santa Cruz County recently recorded more cases in one week than in all of April and May combined. More than 20 outbreaks are being tracked across the county, including outbreaks in four skilled nursing facilities and a homeless shelter. The county expanded the number of agencies empowered to enforce local and

state health orders — but not in time to keep Santa Cruz off the governor's watch list. On July 28, the county's indoor gyms, hair salons and places of worship were once again forced to close.

This time, though, Dr. Newel didn't announce the closures with a local health order. She defaulted to the state health department. It wasn't that she was afraid of the inevitable backlash, she insisted. She just thought that if she issued the order herself, the outcome would be insignificant.

"I don't think that there's really much that the public will listen to in terms of local health officer orders," she said. "They're just not willing to do more than they're already doing."

[Track [coronavirus cases in California](#) by county.]

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Jill Cowan grew up in Orange County, went to school at U.C. Berkeley and has reported all over the state, including the Bay Area, Bakersfield and Los Angeles — but she always wants to see more. Follow along here or on Twitter, [@jillcowan](#).

California Today is edited by Julie Bloom, who grew up in Los Angeles and graduated from U.C. Berkeley.