

that. We have passed, as the gentleman mentioned earlier, extraordinary legislation through this House over the last 2 months to ensure that the American people got the help they needed and that the economics of our country will undergird it to the extent we could. So, we have done a lot of work.

I want to say this: I think we do a disservice to our Members and to this institution if we go home and pretend that Members somehow aren't working because they are not physically in this room. I don't know, I presume my friend's Members—but I tell you, Madam Speaker, the Members on my side of the aisle are working around the clock and communicating around the clock.

That bill that we passed in a bipartisan way, we took a lot of time, days and days and days and days of hours-and hours- and hours-long conversations to get to a consensus on what ought to be in that bill, and we passed it in a bipartisan way.

So, my presumption is my friend did the same. I don't know; I was not on my friend's phone calls. But you do a disservice, I think—I don't mean you personally. But we do a disservice to allow the President or anybody else—nobody is on vacation. People are working harder now than if we didn't have this coronavirus is my observation.

I am hopeful that we will move on. I am hopeful that we will be back to business as usual and as soon as possible—"possible" is the operative word—with the advice of our Capitol physician, with the advice of the administration, and my own Governor.

My friend talked about States. I have a Republican Governor, Governor Hogan, whose father was one of my predecessors. I know he is still very cautious and urging caution for our citizens.

Madam Speaker, unless the gentleman has something further, I am prepared to yield back the balance of my time.

□ 1545

Mr. SCALISE. Madam Speaker, I would just say that, clearly, we have a disagreement on how business should be conducted on the House floor, specifically as it relates to proxy voting and whether or not we can be here physically doing the job. And, clearly, when we are at home in our districts, we are finding other ways to get work done, to communicate with constituents, to communicate with people all around the Nation. Using technology, it has definitely helped the ability for us to do it, but it is not the same thing as when we are here.

The other side of that, because one piece of it is the ability to be here—and, clearly, we have the ability to be here. There are flights. If somebody is not comfortable flying, they used to take horse and buggy. They didn't have planes, and yet they found a way to get here in tougher times. But then you

look at the message that we are trying to send. And, yes, there are some places that you don't have traffic on the road because their officials have chosen not to open as aggressively as others, using safety protocols.

No one is talking about compromising safety, but there are many States that have shown how to safely reopen on a much wider scale where you can get people back out doing the things that they want to do again, and that is the real issue. You are watching aspects of the private sector, you are even watching other levels of government, large cities, large States that are reopening and doing it successfully, not overrunning their hospitals.

Most of our hospitals are telling us they want more patients. They want the people who normally would be getting their checkups and immunizations and even hip replacements and things that are part of their life cycle, their quality of life, and their ability to live with cancer treatments and things like that that aren't being done. There are people dying right now because they are not being tended to.

In my home parish, I actually talked to my coroner about this. He took a 6-week period—just 2 weeks ago, took a 6-week period and took that exact 6-week period a year ago, and there was a 42 percent increase in non-COVID-related deaths, just in my home parish. This year, more—Madam Speaker, 42 percent increase—because people aren't going out, aren't going to the doctor. If they had chest pains, they weren't going to a doctor because the doctor's office is closed, where they could catch it, and so they were dying in their house.

These are real numbers from the coroner. I mean, there is a problem that is created by not allowing people to go about their lives again in a safe way.

So we ought to be leading the way, leading the way to show people how to do it. And, again, we have had votes here on the House floor before proxy voting in the midst of this pandemic, and it went very smoothly. And if there are better ways we can find to do it, we will do it.

But we followed all the protocols of the Attending Physician. I didn't hear of any Members complaining about that process. Everybody went about it their own way, practicing the social distancing that we all encourage. Yet we are not doing that on a consistent basis, and that doesn't send the right message.

As the gentleman reworks the schedule, and I hope it is done soon, I hope it takes into account the fact that it is important for us to show the rest of the country that we can be here doing our job.

Yes, there are things that we are going to do remotely. There are things we always do remotely. If we are on a 3-week schedule in D.C. and 1 week back home in our districts, it is important that we go back home to stay in touch with the people who actually

elect us, the people who make this country work so that we can come back here and represent them better.

But we do have to come back here and do the work. You can't phone it in sometimes. You can't do that remotely. There are certain parts of our job where we actually have to be here.

In the rough-and-tumble of a legislative process, things change on the fly; and if you are back home or going to some other event somewhere else because you choose not to come here, it is kind of hard to say you gave your proxy to somebody and then things change 2 minutes before a vote. It is going to be hard for that person to know how to change their vote by proxy when they are not here.

So there are flaws in there that don't need to be there because we have proven we can be here. I just hope that that is taken into account when the new schedule is being worked out, and, again, hopefully released as soon as possible so that as other people and industries and groups are starting to show how they are going to come back safely, we can do the same thing—not last. Clearly, we are not going to be first now, but hopefully, as other people are making those decisions, we can be part of that, not at the tail end of it.

Mr. HOYER. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman, and I yield back the balance of my time.

COVID-19, STRATEGIC TESTING FOR WORKERS

(Ms. KAPTUR asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. KAPTUR. Madam Speaker, as of yesterday, the United States death toll from COVID-19 has reached over 100,000 precious lives.

Recent headlines tell the story of COVID-19 risks as workers report to work with no testing. The Toledo Blade reports: "Coronavirus Strikes Fermi 2 Nuclear Plant During Refueling." Reuters reports: "All Three Detroit Automakers Had Workers Test Positive for COVID-19 Since Plants Reopened." And Willamette Week reports: "The Reopening of Vancouver, Washington, Is On Hold as 65 Workers Test Positive for COVID-19 at a Fruit Processing Facility."

Madam Speaker, I include in the RECORD the articles I mentioned.

[From the Blade, Apr. 8, 2020]

CORONAVIRUS STRIKES FERMI 2 NUCLEAR PLANT DURING REFUELING; UTILITY KEEPS WORKING

(By Tom Henry)

NEWPORT, MICH.—An undisclosed number of coronavirus cases have been documented inside Fermi 2 during the nuclear plant's latest refueling outage.

But owner-operator DTE Energy said it believes it has enough precautions in place now to complete the work and get the plant restarted in the coming weeks.

In a statement, DTE spokesman Stephen R. Tait said the company "can confirm that we have had employees test positive, but are

not giving out numbers, locations or names at this time.”

Media reports showed the first worker tested positive about the same time the refueling outage began on March 21. A Detroit television station reported at least two more positive cases were documented within days of that.

DTE won't say for the record when it expects to complete Fermi 2's outage.

But many similar operations—which once took six weeks or longer—have been shortened to about a month in recent years. Utilities lose hundreds of thousands of dollars in potential electricity sales each day nuclear plants sit idle.

Nuclear plants are refueled every 18 to 24 months, depending on the type of uranium used in their reactor cores.

Fermi 2, located along western Lake Erie in northern Monroe County's Frenchtown Township, is one of many nuclear plants across the United States scheduled to be refueled during the spring or fall of 2020, the two seasons when demand for electricity is lowest.

Energy Harbor's Davis-Besse nuclear plant along the Lake Erie shoreline in rural Ottawa County recently completed its latest refueling.

Both plants are about 30 miles from downtown Toledo.

The coronavirus pandemic has, of course, complicated those efforts this year.

To help keep refuelings on schedule, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission last month allowed for an exemption from rules which limit the number of consecutive hours workers are allowed to be inside the plant at a time. The agency said in a March 28 letter to the Washington-based Nuclear Energy Institute that it will consider such requests on a case-by-case basis, and that exemptions will be limited to 60 days.

“We are aware of the NRC's willingness to relax some rules for overtime at plants if there is a need,” Mr. Tait said. “At this time, we have not requested any variances.”

The NRC has “no immediate concerns in this area,” Viktoria Mitlyng, agency spokesman, said. “We are communicating regularly with Fermi staff to discuss current activities and future plans, including staffing, medical screening, reductions in nonessential maintenance work, and other related matters.”

In nearly all refuelings, including at those at Fermi 2 and Davis-Besse, hundreds of specialized, out-of-state contractors augment the regular plant workforces, often resulting in 1,000 or more workers assigned to any given site at a time. Work is usually divided into eight-hour shifts, with activity occurring 24 hours a day.

Officials have noted those contractors move throughout the country from job to job, bringing with them the potential of carrying viruses outside of the sites they last worked.

Monroe-area resident Michael J. Keegan, a longtime activist associated with the activist group Don't Waste Michigan, said he worries the NRC will again allow DTE to postpone some of the work planned for the submerged portion of Fermi 2's pressure suppression chamber, also referred to as the torus.

The utility came to an agreement with the NRC to fix degraded coating there, a situation that has lingered for 31 years. It was first identified in 1989, the NRC has said.

One of the concerns is that loose paint chips in drains could make it difficult for vital reactor coolant pumps to move water in the event of an emergency.

The NRC told DTE it will grant the utility's request to remove only coatings found to be degraded through inspections.

“If degraded coating is found, they will remove it prior to returning the reactor to op-

eration after the spring 2020 outage,” Ms. Mitlyng said.

Fermi 2, one of Michigan's largest employers, is about 30 miles south of Detroit, which is now one of America's hot spots for the coronavirus pandemic.

[From Reuters, May 27, 2020]

ALL THREE DETROIT AUTOMAKERS HAD WORKERS TEST POSITIVE FOR COVID-19 SINCE PLANTS REOPENED

DETROIT.—In the week since U.S. auto factories reopened after coronavirus lockdowns, workers at all three Detroit automakers have tested positive for COVID-19 but only Ford Motor Co has temporarily closed plants.

The U.S. auto industry reopened many plants last week after a two-month shutdown due to the global pandemic. To ensure safety during the outbreak, companies imposed new safety measures, including screening employees, use of face masks and social distancing.

Ford paused production at its Claycomo, Missouri, plant for an hour on Tuesday after a worker tested positive. Work resumed at the plant, which builds the F-150 pickup truck and Transit van, without workers being sent home following a deep cleaning, Ford spokeswoman Kelli Felker said Wednesday.

General Motors Co and Fiat Chrysler Automobiles NV (FCA) said Wednesday they have had workers test positive since the restart, but have not been forced to idle plants. They did not disclose the number of workers affected.

On Wednesday, a union leader at Ford's Kentucky Truck Plant said on Twitter a worker there tested positive, but had not worked since May 21. Felker said the plant never closed.

Last week, Ford closed two assembly plants, due to a positive test at its Dearborn, Michigan, factory and a parts shortage due to a positive test at a supplier that closed the Chicago plant. It had marked the second consecutive day for closures in Chicago following two positive tests.

United Auto Workers Local 600, which represents hourly workers in Dearborn, last week demanded testing for every worker there and that Ford shut down the plant for 24 hours after a positive test. Ford said the safety of its workers is a top priority and cited the safety measures it has developed in conjunction with the UAW.

In Mexico, Ford told workers it was targeting a May 28 restart at its Hermosillo plant. GM and FCA have restarted operations in Mexico.

[From wweek.com, May 25, 2020]

THE REOPENING OF VANCOUVER, WASH., IS ON HOLD AS 65 WORKERS TEST POSITIVE FOR COVID-19 AT A FRUIT PROCESSING FACILITY

(By Tess Riski)

Clark County's application to move into Phase 2 of reopening has been put on pause. The COVID-19 outbreak at a fruit processing plant in Vancouver, Wash., climbed from 38 workers Friday to 65 employees Monday. The Oregonian first reported.

The facility, called Firestone Pacific Foods, halted production May 19. On May 23, Washington state health officials suspended Clark County's request to enter Phase 2 of the state's reopening plan due to the outbreak.

The state health department cited the Firestone outbreak as its reason for suspending Vancouver's reopening.

The county health department said in a press release Saturday that it is identifying and notifying close contacts of all who test-

ed positive and asking them to quarantine for 14 days.

Firestone processes frozen fruit mostly berries. Food processing plants have been epicenters of COVID-19 outbreaks across the U.S., in part because social distancing is difficult on assembly-line floors.

The facility told The Oregonian it's unaware of any workers who have been hospitalized because of the virus.

“While this outbreak is unfortunate, our response demonstrates we have the confidence and capability to respond to situations like this,” Dr. Alan Melnick, the Clark County health officer, said in a press release.

[From the New York Times, May 25, 2020]

‘THIS IS NOT THE HUNGER GAMES’: NATIONAL TESTING STRATEGY DRAWS CONCERNS

(By Apoorva Mandavilli and Catie Edmondson)

The Trump administration's new testing strategy, released Sunday to Congress, holds individual states responsible for planning and carrying out all coronavirus testing, while planning to provide some supplies needed for the tests.

The proposal also says existing testing capacity, if properly targeted, is sufficient to contain the outbreak. But epidemiologists say that amount of testing is orders of magnitude lower than many of them believe the country needs.

The report cements a stance that has frustrated governors in both parties, following the administration's announcement last month that the federal government should be considered “the supplier of last resort” and that states should develop their own testing plans.

“For months, it was a tennis game, it was going back and forth between the feds and the states, and it's now landed with the states,” said Scott Becker, executive director of the Association of Public Health Laboratories.

Mr. Becker noted that the federal government plans to distribute some testing supplies, including swabs and viral transport media, and to store test kits in the strategic national stockpile. “That's actually quite significant,” he said. “That's a positive step.”

The Department of Health and Human Services prepared the strategy, which meets requirements under the Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act, signed into law by President Trump on April 24, that federal agencies come up with a strategic testing plan within 30 days. It was reported earlier by The Washington Post.

Mr. Becker, public health experts and Democratic leaders panned the proposal, saying the strategy runs the risk of states competing with one another and may create deep inequities among them.

The strategy mirrors a divide that has played out in Congress for months. As they negotiated the virus relief bill in March, Democratic lawmakers pushed to require the administration to submit this national testing plan to Congress. Republicans resisted, saying those decisions belonged to each state.

Mr. Becker and others said it's reasonable to expect states to implement some aspects of the testing, such as designating test sites. But acquiring tests involves reliance on national and international supply chains—which are challenging for many states to navigate.

“That's our biggest question, that's our biggest concern, is the robustness of the supply chain, which is critical,” Mr. Becker said. “You can't leave it up to the states to do it for themselves. This is not the Hunger Games.”

In a joint statement on Monday, Speaker Nancy Pelosi; Senator Chuck Schumer, the Democratic leader; Representative Frank Pallone, Democratic chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee; and Senator Patty Murray, the ranking Democrat on the Senate's health committee, said the Trump administration was not taking responsibility for ramping up national testing capacity.

"This disappointing report confirms that President Trump's national testing strategy is to deny the truth that there aren't enough tests and supplies, reject responsibility and dump the burden onto the states," the lawmakers said. "In this document, the Trump administration again attempts to paint a rosy picture about testing while experts continue to warn the country is far short of what we need."

Experts also took issue with the report's assertion that continuing to test only about 300,000 people a day, by targeting only those likely to be positive, would be enough to contain the outbreak.

"On the face of it, the idea that 300,000 tests a day is enough for America is absurd," said Dr. Ashish Jha, director of the Harvard Global Health Institute.

He offered a quick rundown of the numbers to illustrate the estimate's inadequacy. Most hospitals nationwide now test everyone who is admitted for any reason, roughly 100,000 tests each day, fearing that they may be asymptomatic and yet still spreading the virus. Testing the 1.6 million residents of nursing homes—known to be at high risk of coronavirus infection—and workers every two weeks would require 150,000 more tests each day. Add high-risk places like meatpacking plants that need regular testing, and the numbers rapidly build.

"Without having tested a single person for symptoms of Covid, we would quickly exhaust our entire national supply of testing if all we have is 300,000 tests per day," he said.

The H.H.S. report noted that an analysis by the Safra Center at Harvard estimated the need at more than three million tests per day. But the federal report said that estimate was based on faulty assumptions.

The Safra authors who crafted the estimate said that the federal report had cherry-picked one simple example from their analysis without considering other evidence.

"We ran multiple models, all of which pointed to the same order of magnitude," said Danielle Allen, director of the Safra Center. "They've selected one non-primary model in an appendix and selectively adjusted assumptions to generate a different number."

Dr. Allen said millions of daily tests would be required to have 4 percent of people test positive with the coronavirus—the level they say is needed to halt the spread of the virus. The administration's target, 10 percent, would allow only for mitigation.

"There is not a single country that I'm aware of that achieved disease suppression with a positivity rate of 10 percent," she said.

And 300,000 daily tests would be insufficient even for mitigation, Dr. Jha said, estimating that would require at least 900,000 tests per day.

The proposal also leaves it to states to plan for contact tracing and isolation, rapidly identify new clusters of coronavirus infection and adopt new technologies. It says the federal government is "supporting and encouraging" states to rely heavily on guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

However, the C.D.C. has been slow to release guidance for states during this outbreak, Dr. Jha said. And the agency fumbled its role in testing strategy, most recently

with last week's dust-up over the mixing of test results for active infection with serology. "This is not C.D.C.'s shining moment," he said.

Governors have bristled at claims from the administration that the supply of tests was adequate, routinely asking for more federal assistance. Some states have ultimately decided to negotiate directly with suppliers to obtain test kits.

Federal virus relief legislation required states to release their individual testing plans last week, but they requested an extension to later this week. If elements of those state plans prove promising, Mr. Becker said, the federal strategy could be revised or merged with them.

[From CNN, May 21, 2020]

CORONAVIRUS TESTING IS 'A MESS' IN THE US, REPORT SAYS

(By Maggie Fox)

Coronavirus testing in the United States is disorganized and needs coordination at the national level, infectious disease experts said in a new report released Wednesday.

Right now, testing is not accurate enough to use alone to make most decisions, including who should go back to work or to school, the team at the University of Minnesota said.

"It's a mess out there," Mike Osterholm, head of the university's Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy (CIDRAP), which issued the report, told CNN.

"Testing is very, very important, but we're not doing the right testing."

The number of tests that have been completed—numbers widely reported by states and by the White House—show only part of the picture, the report reads.

"The data is really kind of screwed up," Osterholm said. "It's because the public health system is overwhelmed."

The report has some specific recommendations for diagnostic tests that check to see if someone is currently infected with coronavirus.

Testing is most useful for clinical care of patients, for disease surveillance and contact tracing and for monitoring frontline workers such as emergency responders, doctors and nurses who may have been exposed, the report recommends. People with symptoms should also be tested, it says.

But coronavirus testing is not accurate enough yet to use in many other ways, the CIDRAP team said.

It recommends against:

Universal testing in hospital settings

Testing in schools or other low-risk settings

Widespread community-based testing

Antibody tests to decide who goes back to work

Immunity passports

It might be useful to test asymptomatic people in long-term care facilities in some cases because they are likely to have many cases, the report said. "Asymptomatic shedding of the virus may be detected with a molecular test (which looks for the virus itself) or an antigen test (which looks for important pieces of the virus). It is not yet clear where, when and how asymptomatic individuals should be tested."

The report also says that antibody tests should be used only with caution. These tests check the blood for evidence of an immune response to the virus, and indicate that someone has been infected for some days or has even cleared an infection. They are most useful for identifying donors of plasma used to treat patients or for deciding on how to manage patients when standard diagnostic tests are negative, the report says.

It's not clear if antibody tests are useful for testing of health care workers to determine immune status, according to the report.

"We believe that greatly expanding SARS-CoV-2 testing is a critical element in our response to COVID-19," the report reads. "For testing to be maximally effective, coordination across the system and across jurisdictions is necessary. Ideally, this requires federal guidance, leadership and support, with strong jurisdictional buy-in at the state and local levels."

The report calls on the US Department of Health and Human Services to appoint a panel to oversee and organize testing. "The panel should include representatives from public health, clinical laboratory, and medicine; the laboratory testing research and development, marketing, and product support industries; ethicists; legal scholars; and elected officials," it says.

Osterholm noted that some states are combining data from diagnostic tests and antibody tests to make estimates about how many people have been infected. The Food and Drug Administration advises against using tests in this way and so does Osterholm. "You need to do the right test at the right time to get the right result," he said. "Nobody is thinking through that."

Plus, there's not enough coordination to ensure that states have the testing supplies they need. This is a system and if a system breaks down anywhere, it breaks down everywhere," Osterholm said.

"What good are the test results if you can't trust them?"

[From the New York Times, May 25, 2020]

AS MEATPACKING PLANTS REOPEN, DATA ABOUT WORKER ILLNESS REMAINS ELUSIVE

(By Michael Corkery, David Yaffe-Bellany and Derek Kravitz)

The Smithfield Foods plant in Tar Heel, N.C., is one of the world's largest pork processing facilities, employing about 4,500 people and slaughtering roughly 30,000 pigs a day at its peak.

And like more than 100 other meat plants across the United States, the facility has seen a substantial number of coronavirus cases. But the exact number of workers in Tar Heel who have tested positive is anyone's guess.

Smithfield would not provide any data when asked about the number of illnesses at the plant. Neither would state or local health officials.

"There has been a stigma associated with the virus," said Teresa Duncan, the director of the health department in Bladen County, where the plant is located. "So we're trying to protect privacy."

Along with nursing homes and prisons, meatpacking facilities have proven to be places where the virus spreads rapidly. But as dozens of plants that closed because of outbreaks begin reopening, meat companies' reluctance to disclose detailed case counts makes it difficult to tell whether the contagion is contained or new cases are emerging even with new safety measures in place. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said there were nearly 5,000 meatpacking workers infected with the virus as of the end of last month. But the nonprofit group Food & Environment Reporting Network estimated last week that the number has climbed to more than 17,000. There have been 66 meatpacking deaths, the group said.

And the outbreaks may be even more extensive.

For weeks, local officials received conflicting signals from state leaders and meatpacking companies about how much information to release, according to internal

emails from government health agencies obtained through public records requests by Columbia University's Brown Institute for Media Innovation and provided to The New York Times. The mixed messages left many workers and their communities in the dark about the extent of the spread in parts of Iowa, Nebraska and Colorado.

The emails also reveal the deference some county officials have shown toward the giant meatpacking companies and how little power they have in pushing the companies to stem outbreaks.

"Bad news spreads way faster than the truth," said a county health official in Colorado of an outbreak at a Cargill plant, according to notes from a conference call last month. "At this point, we are not doing anything to cast them in a bad light. Will not throw them to the Press."

Questions about the transparency of governments and companies about the coronavirus extend far beyond meatpacking. Chinese officials have been widely criticized for not fully disclosing the extent of the virus's spread within their borders. And in the United States, President Trump has questioned the official death toll from the coronavirus, suggesting that the numbers may be inflated even as public health experts and statisticians say the opposite is more likely true.

The meat companies are not legally required to disclose how many workers are sick. But legal experts say privacy is not a valid reason for keeping the numbers from the public.

"Alerting a community about the number of cases in a particular place is a standard public health response," said Nicole Huberfeld, a public health expert at Boston University. "People need to act appropriately if they are exposed."

The lack of full disclosure also demonstrates the industry's sway as a major employer in the Midwest and the South.

While more than 80 percent of beef and pork workers are unionized, even labor leaders acknowledge it is not as easy to shut down meat plants as other factories because they are essential to the food supply. Auto plants, for example, were shut down relatively early during the pandemic and have only just begun to reopen.

After some slaughterhouses did close, restaurants and stores experienced significant shortages of meat, leading Mr. Trump to issue an executive order designating meat plants "critical infrastructure" that must stay open.

But the order did not address crucial issues like testing, leading many companies to reopen plants or keep them operating without fully assessing whether employees had contracted the virus.

Across the country, many local health departments have encouraged companies to test employees—but stopped short of ordering them to do so.

On April 21, health officials in Dallas County, Iowa, told Tyson Foods that they could provide rapid testing kits for workers at its local plant in Perry, according to the emails. An early draft of that message to Tyson managers underscored the urgency, saying, "At this time, we strongly recommend this option be implemented immediately."

But the county's lawyer asked that the language be revised to read, "At this time, we ask you to consider this be implemented as soon as possible."

In an interview, the county attorney, Chuck Sinnard, said he recommended revising the language because he did not believe the health department had the authority to order Tyson to conduct tests.

"It was in the vein of choosing wording cautiously and conservatively so we didn't

get in a position where we were overstepping our bounds," he said.

On May 5, the state health department, which ultimately worked with Tyson to test employees, said 730 workers, or 58 percent of the plant's work force, had tested positive for the virus. About two weeks ago, Tyson started to disclose the number of coronavirus cases at a handful of its plants around the country where there has been widespread testing.

In North Carolina, workers and community advocates in the Tar Heel area started to raise the alarm in April, as local news outlets reported a string of infections linked to the Smithfield plant.

In neighboring Robeson County, 59 residents who work at the Tar Heel facility have become infected, out of a total of 669 cases in the community, according to Melissa Packer, the county's assistant health director.

But like the rest of the public, Ms. Packer does not know the full extent of the outbreak at the plant.

In conversations with state officials this month, Ms. Packer said, a number of county health directors requested that plantspecific numbers stay private. One of the reasons, she said, was that the local officials wanted to avoid antagonizing the meatpackers while they worked alongside them to curtail the outbreaks.

"A lot of the concerns were around fractured relationships," Ms. Packer said. "Some local health directors from the counties where there are processing plants expressed some concerns about how that may negatively impact the relationship they have built with the management of the companies."

A spokeswoman for North Carolina's health department, Amy Ellis, declined to reveal plant-specific data. She said the state has recorded a total of 1,952 cases across meat plants in 17 counties.

Smithfield said it continued to "report all Covid-19 cases to state and local health officials, as well as the C.D.C." and was working to provide free testing to all its employees.

This month, Gov. Pete Ricketts of Nebraska announced that the state would not disclose the number of coronavirus cases in specific meat plants without the consent of the companies. The state is releasing aggregate case numbers across the meat processing industry, the governor's spokesman said. Some of Nebraska's big meatpackers have also started revealing less about case numbers to their employees.

Eric Reeder, a local union president representing workers in 14 plants around Nebraska, said that the larger the outbreak, the less transparent some of the companies have become about the case numbers.

"When a plant hits several hundred cases, they get more tight-lipped, and that makes it difficult for workers to protect themselves and their families," said Mr. Reeder, president of the United Food & Commercial Workers union local 293.

Those transparency issues were on display last month when Teresa Anderson, the director of the Central District Health Department in Grand Island, Neb., told the meat processor JBS that she planned to conduct coronavirus testing at a park near the company's plant, which employs 3,700 people.

JBS wanted assurances that the test results would not be made public.

"We understand that you will be asking and recording the employer," Nicholas White, a compliance official at JBS, wrote in an email to Ms. Anderson on April 15. "But we would ask that you not disclose that information as part of any public disclosure of the testing results."

Six days later, though, Ms. Anderson announced that more than 200 people connected

to the Grand Island plant were infected. By May 5, at least 328 employees had tested positive, according to the emails from Grand Island, some of which were previously reported by ProPublica.

A spokesman for JBS, Cameron Bruett, said the company did not want to publicize the number of positive cases at the plant because little testing was being conducted in the broader area. Releasing the data, he said, "would distort any one company's role in community spread."

The tussle over whether plants should test workers has stretched for months in some states, creating critical delays in isolating infected workers. Local health authorities concede that asymptomatic employees are still coming to work with the virus, fueling the spread.

As recently as May 14, health officials in Wyandotte County, Kan., warned that the virus was continuing to spread inside a National Beef plant.

"The outbreak has gone on for a month," a county epidemiologist said in an email to her colleagues.

"Should we bust in, show our badges and test everyone?" a colleague suggested. "Ha!"

A National Beef spokesman said the company was following the county's health guidelines.

Even when case numbers are disclosed, many health departments say they have little authority to act at meat plants.

Last month, a worker in a Triumph Foods pork plant in St. Joseph, Mo., emailed the city saying at least two employees were infected and 90 percent of the staff was still working "less than a meter away" from one another.

"Workers are scared," the employee said. "Can the government take action on the matter for the protection of workers and the city?"

A health official wrote back on April 21, saying the city had "limited authority" in closing a business and suggested that the workers cover their noses and mouths and use hand sanitizer.

Since then, Triumph has supplied workers with masks, among other protective measures, according to the company website. But at the time, the plant worker was not comforted by the city's assurances.

"Are you telling me that it doesn't matter that two workers are infected," he wrote. "Because the plant is worth more than the workers' health?"

Ms. KAPTUR. Madam Speaker, testing requires a national strategy, not a 50-State, helter-skelter search for limited supplies. Without rigorous expanded surveillance testing, many more American lives are put on the chopping block because of pure stupidity and callousness.

If the President can find billions to build more nuclear weapons, then surely we can find the money to protect those who build them and all workers who dedicate their talents to moving our Nation to full throttle again.

Mr. President, get a testing regimen in place. It is your duty. No excuses.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Members are reminded to address their remarks to the Chair.

VITAMIN D SUPPLEMENTS TO REDUCE COVID-19 DEATHS

(Mr. GROTHMAN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)