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CNN TONIGHT

More States Are Easing Coronavirus Restrictions This Week, Unnerving Experts And Some Local Officials; U.S. Won't Participate In World Health Organization Global COVID-19 Vaccine And Drug Initiative; Coronavirus Outbreaks Causing Meat Plant Closures, Raising Concerns Over National Food Supply, Worker Health; More than 964,000 U.S. Coronavirus Cases, More Than 54,000 Deaths.
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(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[21:00:30]

DON LEMON, CNN HOST: This is CNN TONIGHT. I'm Don Lemon. It is 9:00 p.m. on the East Coast. And we've got the latest on the coronavirus pandemic. There are now more than 964,000 cases of coronavirus in the United States, more than 54,000 deaths worldwide, nearly three million cases and more than 200,000 deaths.

Dr. Deborah Birx, one of the leading medical experts on the White House Coronavirus Task Force saying today that the U.S. needs a breakthrough in testing to help screen large numbers of Americans for the virus. She also said the President was having a dialogue when he mused aloud about the possibility of injecting disinfection into the human body.

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about the economy, the White House Economic Adviser Kevin Hassett, saying the U.S. is losing so many jobs that he expects the unemployment rate to reach levels comparable to the Great Depression.

The Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin saying that, with states beginning to reopen he expects the economy to bounce back by mid to late summer. Let's discuss now. White House correspondent John Harwood is here as well as Dr. Harvey Fineberg. He's the chair of the Standing Committee on Emerging Infectious Diseases and has advised the White House on coronavirus. Gentlemen, hello, thanks for joining us this evening.

John Harwood, we haven't had a White House coronavirus briefing since Friday. They've added one to tomorrow's schedule, but we don't know what the President's role will be. But if his tweets today are any indication the President remains rattled and erratic and he is ranting.

JOHN HARWOOD, CNN WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT: He is and he's focused on himself, which is the same thing he is pretty much always focused on, that is not so jarring when you have a strong economy. And it's the President's sort of a sideshow to a national life, which is proceeding pretty well.

But when you're in a crisis, that he's not managing well, when the economy is suffering, when thousands of people are dying, it is jarring to see him focused on himself and his grievances and his complaints with his enemies in the press and politics.

And so what has happened is, the American people have seen that and because it's so jarring, it finally dawned on the White House as well as others in the political world, that their initial assumption was incorrect. And that assumption was that extended time for the President to talk every day on camera about the situation which somehow allowed him to turn it to his advantage.

It is not turning it to his advantage because most Americans don't like what they see. He's behind significantly in national polls. He's behind in battleground state polls. And as a result, the White House is changing signals right now.

LEMON: This is what "The Washington Post" is analyzed. They've analyzed three weeks of White House briefings, found, John, that the President spent two hours on attacks, 45 minutes praising himself or his team, nine minutes promoting the drug hydroxychloroquine, and just 4.5 minutes offering condolences for victims. What does it say about the President's priorities during this pandemic?

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which is his priority is Donald Trump. One of the most striking things about this President and one of the greatest absences from what we expect to see from presidents and crises is the lack of action empathy.

The President is not able to display empathy. Well, remember he got really angry when he was asked to display empathy a few weeks ago, one of the phone call -- in one of the briefings and went off on the reporter who asked him. This is someone who is not able to focus on the task at hand.

And so he spent this afternoon, which happened to be his wife's 50th birthday, rage tweeting about all the people who he thinks have done them wrong.

LEMON: Interesting. I think you're right about that. I think that people, usually, when they're at work and they're worried about their families and their jobs and they're trying to take care of business, they tune in and out, right? Maybe they catch the evening news, maybe they catch to whatever drop here or there.

But when they're at home and you have a captive audience, the President is out. And with X-ray vision, we get to see what he is like and he is focused on himself and not the business of the country. And I think most people are not liking what they are seeing. And so this assessment about not having them come out, I think it may be the right assessment for the White House. [21:05:12]

Listen, Dr. Fineberg at --

HARWOOD: Well, especially, Don, when he --

LEMON: Go on.

HARWOOD: -- especially when he says ridiculous things like he said about disinfectant last week. That's something that is so striking. Everyone can see that it was ridiculous. And they've been coming up with excuses ever since. But that hurt him significantly.

LEMON: Yes. And there are still a few -- fewer people out there who are making excuses for him than before because there is no way to make an excuse. This was not sarcasm. This was just someone making really dumb, stupid, unintelligent comments. This is not a stable genius. This is not someone alone who can fix this. This is not someone who knows more than the generals. This is someone who made a really dumb statement in front of

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Dr. Fineberg, at least four states are reporting an increase in calls to poison control related to disinfecting overexposure. There's no way to know if this can be attributed to the President's comments, but I mean, it's certainly interesting the comments that he made on Thursday. But are you concerned about it?

DR. HARVEY V. FINEBERG, CHAIR, STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMERGING INFECTIOUS DISEASES

You know, disinfectants are actually a very important part of our ability to control contamination in the environment around stopping coronavirus. Sunlight is a good disinfectant in the environment. So these things actually have their place in the control of the coronavirus. Of course, the idea that anyone should even think of ingesting or injecting these agents is ridiculous.

LEMON: Yes. And it can stop it in a minute. Yes, it'll stop it in a minute, all right, if you try to ingest it. But don't do that, anybody, I would not suggest it there's -- just don't do it.

So John, listen, President Trump is denying tonight that he is considering firing Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar. We, you know, we have seen this move from the President before and doesn't usually end up the same way?

HARWOOD: It does, but so sometimes slower, sometimes faster. We've had tremendous turnover in the administration. And sometimes the President tries to get ahead of a story that he doesn't like, and try to quash it on Twitter, even if it later is borne out to be true.

Clearly, he's pulled Alex Azar back from a front line role in the coronavirus crisis. We know that he's complained about him privately. And when he gets stories that he's considering replacing him that looks like the administration is in disarray. And so he's trying to deny it. But of course, we've known throughout the Trump administration, it is and has been in disarray. LEMON: Dr. Fineberg, several states are beginning to reopen this week, even though we know that no state has enough testing or that contact tracing capabilities. Are you concerned that this could lead to a surge, that that impacts the rest of us, not only their communities but impacting the rest of the country?

FINEBERG: Particularly, Don, it's a concern in the immediate communities that marked a relaxing certain physical distance saying and other sensible procedures during a time that the infection is actually spreading. When you have a circumstance where your current practices are in place, and you're still seeing an increase in the numbers of infections to begin to relax those sensible separations that keep us safer, just doesn't make good sense.

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mean, we are only in April now.

FINEBERG: Well, Don, you know, the number of deaths, the number of infections is in fact going to depend on what we do. If we go too far and relaxing these physical distancing and isolation of cases, quarantine of contacts, contact tracing, once we step away from that we're going to see even more deaths.

Right now, I think a reasonable projection for the next couple of months would have to look at another 10 to 20,000 deaths in the United States, assuming we maintain what we're now doing. And of course, the range of uncertainty around these guesses is very wide, and it's wide because it depends on what we actually do.

LEMON: Thank you, Doctor. Thank you, John. Appreciate it.

I want to get to Natasha Chen now on the state's latest plan for reopening.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

NATASHA CHEN, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): In the state hardest hit by the coronavirus, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo today for the first time, signal that the pause on business at least in some regions might soon be lifted.

GOV. ANDREW CUOMO (D-NY): We need them to be creative and think outside of the box.

(voice-over): Cuomo suggested some regions like Upstate New York could begin a phase one reopening at the end of the state's stay at home order next month.

[21:10:05]

CUOMO: So we get to May 15th, what regions have seen a decline for 14 days?

(voice-over): Fourteen days of a decline in cases is one metric the White House Coronavirus Task Force says should be achieved before any sort of reopening, but some states aren't waiting.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: You're good.

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measures. On Friday, barbershops, gyms, and even bowling alleys were permitted to reopen their doors despite pushback from local officials and even from President Trump. Despite having calls Kemp earlier to tell him he supported the move.

Georgia barber Eric Greeson (ph), reopened Friday, something he didn't necessarily want to do.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Everybody's scared of this basically.

(voice-over): Having yet to see a diamond federal aid, he and other small business owners are driven largely by financial desperation.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Look, we just want to get a business going.

(voice-over): But White House Economic Adviser Kevin Hassett said today getting business going is not going to be easy.

KEVIN HASSETT, CHAIRMAN, COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISERS: During the Great Recession, remember that was a financial crisis around 2008 that we lost 8.7 million jobs in the whole thing. Right now, we're losing that many jobs about every 10 days.

(voice-over): Which is in direct contrast to what the Treasury Secretary told reporters at the same time.

STEVEN MNUCHIN, TREASURY SECRETARY: You're going to see the economy really bounce back in July, August, September.

(voice-over): Getting a head start on bouncing back is the hope of states like Georgia, Tennessee, Oklahoma, and Arkansas, where dining and restaurants can resume this week.

And in Texas Governor Abbott is expected to announce sweeping changes in the coming days.

DONALD TRUMP, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: I see the disinfectant would knock it out in a minute, one minute, and is there a way we can do something like that?

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cleansers should be something to consider.

And as he continues to shift any blame for his administration's response to the virus. Sources tell CNN that Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar may soon be escaped goat.

As so many changes lie ahead, one thing remains constant.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: We're not out of the woods yet.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: We're not out of the woods yet.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: We are not out of the woods.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

CHEN: It was exactly two months ago today, that President Trump said that we were quote only a few days away from seeing zero coronavirus cases in the U.S. Now, of course, we've seen those numbers soar past 960,000 with more than 54,000 Americans who have died. Don?

LEMON: Natasha Chen, thank you so much. We all know this crisis won't really be over until we get vaccinated. So why isn't this country working with world leaders on a vaccine?

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[21:16:54]

LEMON: World leaders are pledging to work together to speed up the production and distribution of coronavirus tests, drugs, and vaccines. But the World Health Organization says, U.S. won't participate in this initiative.

Joining me now is Tom Bollyky. He is the director of a global health program at the Council on Foreign Relations and the author of "Plagues and the Paradox of Progress." Tom, thank you. Appreciate you joining us here.

A vaccine is the only way to end this crisis. The U.S. has more cases than anyone else in the world. So why

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TOM BOLLYKY, DIR., GLOBAL HEALTH PROGRAM AT THE COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS: So, unfortunately, we're in a situation where the Trump administration's desire to find someone else to blame for the current debacle happening with the coronavirus in United States be that be China or U.S. governors or now the World Health Organization is getting in the way of their pursuit of the interests of Americans.

And you can see that most especially with this refusal to participate in a global effort to develop a vaccine.

LEMON: OK. So, then what happens if the vaccine comes from these efforts? I guess we're going to use it and then won't matter.

BOLLYKY: Well, maybe, so the chance is that we have is that the U.S. is not alone in pursuing a vaccine. We may not win this race. The U.S. has an interest in cooperating in a global effort to develop and seek a widespread deployment of a vaccine, both because as you mentioned at the outset, it is the only way this crisis ends.

So we have a vaccine, this virus keeps coming back. It keeps killing people. It keeps making daily life unrecognized. Even patients that get the virus under control have to remain vigilant and change their lives in order to do so. That only stops with the vaccine. So we all have an interest in that.

LEMON: OK. But my question is, what if we end up in the back of the -- could we end up in the back of the line, that's a concern for the vaccine?

BOLLYKY: We can, absolutely. So there are 100 candidates currently in the pipeline for to develop a vaccine. Right now seven or eight clinical trials, only two of those are led by U.S. firms. Of the other seven or the other five rather, three of them are led by Chinese firms, one German firm, one U.K. firm.

Right now when it's not clear which entity is going to get there first, everybody has an interest in cooperating. This is the time to participate in an initiative like this. After it becomes clear who are the winners and the losers and if the U.S. is in the latter category, then we may be at the back at one.

LEMON: OK. So that the former FDA Commissioner, and if you read this, Scott Gottlieb has an opinion piece that's in the "Wall Street Journal." It's about how the coronavirus, about the coronavirus vaccine race.

And he writes and he says, a here's, this is a country will focus on inoculating most of its own population first,

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be first to restore its economy and global influence.

[21:20:12]

So how can we put ourselves in a better position? I mean, if it's a race to a vaccine, we need to be in the best position possible.

BOLLYKY: Because right now, everybody's uncertain whether they can win that race. So everybody wants at least to protect their health workers up front, critical personnel, have deployment happen, according to public health needs.

So there's an interest in everyone making a deal now that makes sure you have distributed manufacturing. So it's not just made in one country, it's made in multiple places, to have scientists and governments working together. Now, is the time where everybody has an incentive to make that deal, once it becomes clear who wins, then there's not that incentive at all.

LEMON: So we've heard a bunch of different timetables, you know, at the beginning it was, you know, could take years, right? And then the President has said they're moving faster than ever to get this done and it can be done in very short period of time. Realistically, how long is it going to take to develop a vaccine?

BOLLYKY: So both of those straight statements end up being true. They are moving faster than ever before and it can take years. The reality is the average vaccine takes 15 years to develop. So looking at a timeframe where people are talking about a year or a year and a half or two years, is actually extraordinarily fast. And that's happening because so many different countries and governments and firms are pursuing the same thing.

Again, we have to harness that to cooperate. But this vaccine fight over vaccines and sport for the degree, it's just the tip of the iceberg unfortunately for this administration, where they've also blocked arrangements on economic cooperation. They blocked the pursuit of nations working together at the G7 and the G20.

Again, all this, trying to blame China for the, quote unquote, Wuhan virus or again here, the World Health Organization and that has to stop if we're going to be able to get past the worst of this pandemic.

LEMON: Tom Bollyky, thank you, Sir. Appreciate your time.

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LEMON: Major meat companies that you'll know from your grocery store like Smithfield and Tyson had been forced to close some of their plants because of coronavirus outbreaks. We're going to dig into why those plants have become such hotspots and what this could mean for you.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[21:27:07]

LEMON: Coronavirus outbreaks hitting meatpacking plants, major meat processors, Tyson Foods, JBS USA, and Smithfield, all closing more plants in the last week. The closures are raising concerns about the national food supply. But why exactly are these plants getting hit so hard and what's being done to protect workers on the frontline?

Let's discuss now, Thomas McGarity is here. Thomas McGarity is a professor at the University of Texas School of Law. Deborah Berkowitz is here as well, a former OSHA chief of staff. Thank you both.

Let's discuss. Debbie, I'm going to start with you. Your work involved overseeing meatpacking plants. Can you explain why so many of these facilities become hotspots?

DEBORAH BERKOWITZ, WORKER HEALTH & SAFETY PROGRAM DIRECTOR: Sure. Thanks Don for having me. I want to make it clear that this outbreak in meatpacking plants is not inevitable, inevitable. It has nothing to do with the actual, the fact that they are, you know, slaughtering beef.

It has everything to do with the fact that these big meat companies Smithfield, JBS, Tyson's, and more, did not implement the CDC guidance in their workplace. They did not put workers six feet apart. They did not give them masks.

And in meatpacking, it's a huge disassembly line with thousands upon thousands of workers in plants on every shift. They work shoulder to shoulder disassembling hogs and cattle and chicken. And they crowd into old break rooms all at the same time. They crowd into locker rooms.

And so they were, you know, we're in an environment where this COVID- 19 would spread. And what happened i

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And one thing I want to make clear is the CDC guidance that you and I are following now at six feet apart, which is why I'm home and not there in the studio, and wear mask when I go out, that employers don't have to follow that in the workplace, that this administration has decided not to enforce the law that gives employers the responsibility to provide a safe workplace.

They gave the meat industry a pass and they said, you can follow these or you don't have to follow these. And the result is a disaster. The industry did not follow the guidelines, which were issued over six weeks ago. And the result is 3,000 workers are sick and 17 had died. And it's spread now into the community.

LEMON: And even in the governors, listen, so the mayors and the local leaders had been imploring the governor of the states to shut these plants down. And some of the governors refused until the very last minute to do it.

[21:29:55]

Thomas, I want to bring you in Thomas McGarity. I want to bring you here. The Department of Agriculture has actually loosen some restrictions in the midst of this crisis, allowing that some of these producers, you know, as you just said to speed up their lines, to make up for lost production. I mean, won't this make the situation more dangerous for these workers?

THOMAS MCGARITY, PROFESSOR OF LAW, UNIV. OF TEXAS SCHOOL OF LAW: Well, absolutely. It's definite going to be more dangerous. The lines are moving incredibly fast as it is. And these workers are having to slice, they're having to debone, they're having to got snatch and if they miss one, they get penalized.

So to speed up the line just makes it that much more intense. The whole idea is slow down the lines, so that the workers can space themselves further apart. That's what a lawsuit has asked the Smithfield company to do, among other things. They've asked for tissues, so people can blow their nose.

LEMON: Well let me read some of it because you're going there.

MCGARITY: Sure.

LEMON: They said the workers there -- and it said that they're talking about their conditions in this lawsuit saying they cannot even take time to cover their mouths while coughing or clean their faces after a sneeze. And

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MCGARITY: Right.

LEMON: How do you think this lawsuit plays out and continue to talk about what you're talking about? Sorry to interrupt, but I wanted to get that in.

MCGARITY: Well, I think it is a novel idea, but it's based on a very traditional notion. Going back to the 17th, 18th century of a nuisance, the prototypical nuisance is the use of your land that allows vermin mosquitoes and things to grow and then escape and harm someone else. So that the rats and the mosquitoes are vectors.

Here, the novel thing is that the idea of the suit is that the people coming out of the plant unknowingly because they -- it can be trans -- you can have it without knowing that you have it, are becoming the vectors to bring this coronavirus into the community. So it's a novel use of a very traditional form of action.

LEMON: I think this is -- I got to get Debbie on but just quickly yes or no. Is this a new cottage industry of lawsuits coming -- this coronavirus lawsuits that are going to be coming aboard, you think?

MCGARITY: We're going to be seeing plenty, OK.

LEMON: Yes.

MCGARITY: We already are seeing lots of coronavirus litigation --

LEMON: Yes.

MCGARITY: -- and it's going to be up and down the line, yes.

LEMON: There you go. That's what I figured. So Debbie, what more needs to be done to protect the workers that keep our food supply running? What needs to happen to these companies? Who should take responsibility for this? What do we need to do here?

BERKOWITZ: I think we need to hold the companies accountable, because they did not implement safe practices that recommended but we also have to hold the White House and the Secretary of Labor, Eugene Scalia and OSHA

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When I was at OSHA, we enforce CDC guidance during the H1N1 pandemic. But this administration has chosen not to enforce the OSHA law and let companies just have a pass and they can implement safe practices or not. And I have to say that if we're going to reopen the economy, the meatpacking workers here are like the canaries in the coal mine. This is an example of what happens when you don't set mandates, when you don't set requirements for industries that never prioritize worker safety.

And so what happened is they didn't prioritize it now because they didn't have to. And it was very short-sighted because had they implemented the safe practices and change the way they do production and then slowed it down and put workers 6 feet apart and kept them safe. Because as Tom said, we know that this disease is spread by often asymptomatic and non-symptomatic people. And so they don't know they're sick, they don't have a fever. And we just need to keep people apart and put people in masks.

But instead --

LEMON: Yes.

BERKOWITZ: -- what's happening now is plants all over the country are shutting down. And that's more -- what's jeopardizing the food supply than if they had put safe practices into place first. And I think this is a lesson for all the governors now that are rushing to open the economy that if they don't mandate safe requirements for workers to protect workers on the job, that to protect public health, you have to protect worker health. And if they don't do that, it will spread into the community and we will have a second wave.

Debbie, Thomas, thank you very much. Appreciate the conversation. Please come back. We'll continue. Thanks.

[21:35:06]

Professional sports have ground to a halt, leaving people everywhere looking for something to fill that time. In South Dakota, Sprint car races are happening this weekend. They were supposed to draw hundreds of people. We're going to tell you what happened instead.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

LEMON: Two South Dakota speedway is going ahead with races this weekend but without fans filling the

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So, let's discuss. CNN's Evan McMorris-Santoro is here. What's up, sir? How are you?

EVAN MCMORRIS-SANTORO, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Hi, Don, how are you? Welcome to my apartment.

LEMON: Very nice, very nice. Congratulations. I like the digs. But, listen, so these events went on without fans but that's after intense pressure from the governor. What happened?

MCMORRIS-SANTORO: That's right. What we're talking about here are two dirt track races at small Speedways in a town called Jefferson, South Dakota, which is right near the Sioux City, Iowa border, the border of Iowa right here in Sioux City.

[21:40:10]

This is not Major League racing we're talking about, this is not NASCAR. These are like small events with -- they're loud, they're fast. But most of the teams are family run teams, and they're not racing very much money.

And at first, the organizers who owned the tracks wanted to have these races like they always do it with fans there and concessions and all the things that you would expect at an event like that. That obviously brought a lot of international scrutiny to the events because obviously, we're all under quarantine, it didn't seem like something that was advisable to a lot of people, including Governor Kristi Noem who weighed in recently and said that she didn't think it was a good idea to have these races with fans, that what she thought would be better would be, you know, not do it, but it sort of broke her agreement to have groups of 10 or more organized and gathered in one place.

So, eventually, the organizers decided to cancel it with the fans but go ahead with the races anyway. So the first one happened last night -- and we have some footage -- I wasn't at the races, I was just sitting here in this apartment, like I watched before -- but we have some footage from these races. And what you see in the footage are people sort of commingling and moving around in ways that seems very shocking to a lot of us who are trying very hard to social distance.

Now, the race organizers told local reporters that the plan was to keep the teams separate, again that these are, you know, family teams, a lot of them and but then -- but the drivers could bring their teams with them and some guests. So that's how you saw at the race, but really empty, grandstands, other things like that. So the first of these two races ran last night, and the winner took home a \$6,000 purse was just to put that into perspective, the guy

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LEMON: Yes, well, it looks fun, but let's talk about why. So one of the organizers joins me now. Thank you very much for that. We appreciate it, Evan.

Dennis Moore is on the phone, race organizer at New Race Park -- New Raceway Park, that Speedway is holding its race tonight. So Dennis, thank you very much. Ten people per car allowed at your raceway. So, how did you settle on that number?

DENNIS MOORE, RACE ORGANIZER (via telephone): Well, because there was going to be no fans in the stands, so we just come up with a number that there would be a maximum per car. And a lot of them only had like two people, but some of them -- there are some that have 10. But for the most part, there is not. And we have like, I'd say 100 cars here, and they're parked in a distance between them. In fact, we're using our fan parking lot to park them so we can get this distancing to keep the teams separate from each other.

And we're -- everyone is wearing face masks and I have one on myself. And we check temperatures, everybody's temperature. We got them all the sign off that their temperature was checked. And if they didn't -- if they went over 100 degrees on their temperature, we made them set off beside for a while and sit in the shade and then we check it again. We did not have one person that the temperature ended up being out of spec. So --

LEMON: Yes.

MOORE (via telephone): -- I think everything went quite well. We've -- where everything is going good. We're just halfway through the night right now.

LEMON: Let me jump in and ask some questions, Dennis.

MOORE (via telephone): OK.

LEMON: So you said 10 people per car, you had 100 cars, and you think everybody showed up. So you had all those people show up, right? About everyone?

MOORE (via telephone): Right.

LEMON: OK.

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LEMON: But you said, and you check the temperature. Now you realize that everybody is a carrier is not symptomatic, like some people won't have a temperature, right? You get that, some people are asymptomatic.

MOORE (via telephone): No all -- yes.

LEMON: OK, OK. And so you said masks, that's good. Was everybody 6 feet apart?

MOORE (via telephone): Yes. Well, here's the thing. We're allowing -- you know, if there's a family group, they're allowed to, if they go into the grandstands, are set with their family group. There has to be a 10-foot between them and the next group, and so forth all the way around them.

So they actually have their own area if they go up there. Most of them are just staying in their trailers, because they don't want to take the chance of getting infected of anyway. We don't want anybody here, we don't want problem here.

So it's -- we need to get this country opened up, though. That was our main goal. We want to get these races going and show them that it could be done and we're doing that. This is a second night and it worked fine the first night. This night is doing the same business. So I think everything is going well here.

[21:45:00]

LEMON: So I just want to -- you said that you need to get this country open up, you just said it. It's safe to say that most Americans are eager for things like sporting events to come back, I mean, we all, you know, because especially on the weekends, people are bored and on and on. And you're taking precautions but --

MOORE (via telephone): That's exactly. It's going to be on its butt (ph).

LEMON: Yes. But --

MOORE (via telephone): It's going to be on its butt (ph) if they don't open it up. If these people back to work.

LEMON: Yes, but you got to -- people have to be healthy. I mean, people need to -- in order to work, you have to be alive. I mean, don't you understand that, Dennis?

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they still could go to work. I mean, Walmart and all in places are open and everybody's going in them all the time. They got a better chance to get this business there than they do at this racetrack and the open air. Now you got agree with that.

LEMON: Well I do agree because Walmart sells food and people need that to live. I mean, you don't need a racetrack to live, but I understand --

MOORE (via telephone): I understand that.

LEMON: -- I guess your point. I got to run though, I'm out of time. Listen, I just appreciate you joining us and sharing your perspective. Dennis, thank you so much. Good luck to you, OK? And be safe.

MOORE (via telephone): Yes. Thank you.

LEMON: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

1,000 cadets are being summoned back to West Point for graduation after the President announced that he'd be their commencement speaker. My next guest is a West Point grad who is also taught there -- has also taught there and says that this ceremony isn't worth the health risk. We'll talk to him.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

[21:50:52]

LEMON: U.S. Military Academy at West Point which switched to remote classes in March amid the coronavirus will be calling back 1,000 cadets to campus for their graduation ceremony this June. Secretary of the Army Ryan McCarthy released a statement saying, "After careful consideration of the steps the Army can take to mitigate risk I made the decision to proceed with the West Point graduation.

We are fully committed to the health and safety of our cadets and believe we can safely conduct the graduation ceremony and associated activities. Over the next couple of days, West Point leadership will communicate the plan. We are putting the appropriate measures in place to respond to the COVID-19 crisis and to protect our force, cadets and families".

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2020 commencement speech, making his first speech at West Point graduation -- at a West Point graduation.

So joining me now is CNN Military Analyst Lieutenant General Mark Hertling, he is not only a former West Point cadet himself, but also taught at the academy for three years. So he's got a lot of knowledge here. Thank you, General. And thank you for your service.

LT. GENERAL MARK HERTLING (RET.), CNN MILITARY ANALYST: And one of our sons is a West Point graduate too as well and our daughter-in-law, so a little bit of connection with the military academy --

LEMON: And some humble bragging there, and --

HERTLING: Exactly.

LEMON: -- well-deserved, well-deserved.

HERTLING: Yes.

LEMON: Listen, I was just going to say that you are both a graduate and a parent of a graduate of West Point but you said it first. So what do you think of this decision?

HERTLING: Well, you know, the President was always scheduled this year to speak at the West Point, the U.S. Military Academy. They rotate every four years between him and the Secretary of Defense, the Vice President and the Chairman of Joint Chiefs. So this was a year to go to West Point.

It's a critically important place to speak. It's inspirational. But that's from the standpoint of the speaker, Don. And I'll be honest with you. The graduation week is much more than just the graduation ceremony where you're throwing the hat in the air and all that. There are a lot of things that go on during that week, and all of those things are not going to go on this year. So the only thing these thousand -- near thousand cadets are going to come back for is the actual graduation ceremony.

Truthfully, I think we should have followed and you'll never hear me say this to give the Naval Academy kudos, but we should have followed the example of the Naval Academy and done a virtual graduation, which they decided about a month ago.

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HERTLING: Right.

LEMON: -- all over the country. One of the hardest hit regions --

HERTLING: Don, I'd say all over the world because you not only have cadets from every one of our 50 states and U.S. territories. There are also foreign cadets, over a dozen foreign cadets from other countries who are matriculating this week as well. So you're talking about people coming in from all over the world for this ceremony.

LEMON: How much of a risk is that putting the cadets and West Point personnel?

HERTLING: Well, that's one of the things. Whenever you're doing military operation, you always do a risk assessment and you attempt to mitigate any risk. The comments by the Secretary of the Army yesterday saying that they have assessed all the risk and taking a look at it and they think they can safely do it is comforting to a degree.

But I'll be honest with you, Don, if I were a parent today of a West Point cadet and we were living in, say, Hawaii or Alaska and they had to do that travel into a New York airport to go up 9W to the Military Academy and spend a couple of weeks there under quarantine, and then do the graduation ceremony, which will be relatively short, I think I would look at a different way of doing that. But I don't want to second guess the Army leadership on this. They decided to do this. So it's their job now to mitigate all those risks.

LEMON: So do you think they can put safety measures in place to handle this?

HERTLING: Well, you know, there's some interesting dynamics involved here. The Army as a whole, in fact, all of the Department of Defense is under travel ban until the 30th of June. So the Secretary of the Army actually has to get a special exception to have cadets start traveling and that will occur not on the 13th of June when the ceremony is but probably the early part of May.

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So you're talking about almost a two month exception of -- these cadets come back. They will go through the four

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in relatively close quarters, eating in the same mess hall, practicing the graduation. So there's the opportunity to extend the virus a little bit. And so I would say they better have a pretty good plan for risk mitigation.

LEMON: Thank you, General, I appreciate it. Thanks so much.

HERTLING: Always a pleasure, Don. Thank you.

LEMON: OK, listen, before we go, there a lot of people out there doing a lot of great things. VOSS Water reached out to me and asked me if I wanted to donate some water to some people. Well, I chose Southampton hospital and they donated 1,000 bottles of water to the emergency folks, people on the front lines at Southampton Hospital. So thank you VOSS Water for helping our frontline workers. You're doing really good work and I'm sure the people there appreciate it.

And thanks for watching everyone. Our coverage continues.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

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