

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.)

Mr. GROTHMAN. Madam Speaker, as America opens up and we go over 100,000 deaths attributed to the COVID, it is important that we look at all our options to reduce the number of deaths related to this disease.

I feel the government is leaving too much to the pharmaceutical industry to develop a vaccine. Well, the answer may be a more natural one and one that is a lot cheaper for the American public.

Madam Speaker, I strongly believe that we should be looking more at the benefits of vitamin D. Vitamin D is from the Sun. It is free. I encourage people to ignore the politicians who say you have to spend all day indoors, but get out and grab the Sun.

We have been told since we were children that you get vitamin D from the Sun, and that is the way you stay healthy. If you can't grab the rays, grab some vitamin D pills. That is another way to get your vitamin D.

It is not just me saying it. I encourage folks back home to Google "Northwestern University vitamin D," or "Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland, vitamin D," and you will see there are a lot of experts outside of the CDC who are already pushing it.

Madam Speaker, I encourage people to use that method to keep the number of deaths from COVID down.

COVID-19 ON THE NAVAJO NATION

(Mr. LUJÁN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. LUJÁN. Madam Speaker, since the beginning of this crisis, I have heard from Tribal leaders about the human tragedy of COVID-19 on the Navajo Nation: whole families ravaged by the disease, doctors overwhelmed by the surging cases, and insufficient Federal help.

These leaders are sounding the alarm for a community in crisis, and I have been working to ensure the medical professionals who serve the Navajo Nation have every tool at their disposal to treat patients and protect themselves.

But instead of doing right by the Navajo Nation, this administration, ProPublica found, awarded a \$3 million contract for personal protective equipment to an 11-day-old company headed by a former White House staffer. As a result, the IHS received hundreds of thousands of masks that may be unsuitable for medical use.

This lack of leadership endangers lives. That is why I am working with the New Mexico delegation and our colleagues from Arizona to hold the Trump administration accountable.

The Navajo Nation deserves the full support of the Federal Government during this crisis and not to have this administration turn a blind eye while the Nation loses one more parent, grandparent, son, or daughter. This administration must act as an honest

partner to the Navajo people, and I will fight to ensure that happens.

HISTORIC FLOODING IN MID-MICHIGAN

(Mr. MOOLENAAR asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. MOOLENAAR. Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the first responders, emergency officials, and the people of mid-Michigan for their swift action, heroic work, and incredible compassion in responding to the flooding in our region last week.

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, historic rain, and the failure of two dams, they quickly and safely evacuated more than 11,000 people without a single death or injury and provided shelter for those who were displaced.

I have been on the ground meeting with residents who have been affected, especially in Sanford, which took the hardest hit from this heartbreaking event. Residents have lost businesses, homes, and cherished family possessions.

In the face of these challenges, our community is coming together. We are grateful for the overwhelming support that has come from across the State and from nonprofits and businesses. My colleagues here in Congress have also reached out to me, and I appreciate their kind words and offers of assistance.

Madam Speaker, today, I say thank you to everyone in mid-Michigan and across the country for their support during this challenging time.

IN RECOGNITION OF KENNY BELKNAP

(Mrs. LEE of Nevada asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. LEE of Nevada. Madam Speaker, on behalf of Nevada's Third District, I rise today to recognize Mr. Kenny Belknap, an honors and AP government teacher at Del Sol Academy.

For decades, Clark County schoolteachers have been forced to work with a tight budget. Like Mr. Belknap told me: "We're just trying to keep our head above water."

He is used to parsing materials and assigning two students to one textbook as they fight for space in an overcrowded classroom. And, unfortunately, that was before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The economic fallout of the coronavirus crisis is devastating State and local governments. In my home State of Nevada, the Clark County School District is expecting budget cuts of \$38 million this year alone. It is classes like Mr. Belknap's that will hurt the most from this loss.

Congress can help by prioritizing Federal funding to States, towns, and

communities to relieve budget shortfalls so our education, healthcare, and public services don't suffer.

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to help our States and local communities and give teachers like Mr. Belknap a chance to give his students the opportunities they deserve.

RECOGNIZING AMERICANS LOST TO COVID-19

(Mr. SOTO asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SOTO. Madam Speaker, today we mourn the lives of over 100,000 Americans who lost their lives and pray for the recovery of over 1.75 million Americans infected by COVID-19. This represents an unimaginable pain, but the numbers really don't tell the story. I want to take a moment to describe four central Floridians we lost by this pandemic:

Rob Carlos, Poinciana, a retired Disney cast member known as Pirate Bob; Dr. Neil Powell, Orlando, an Air Force veteran and dentist who made central Florida smile brighter;

Bill Smith of Lake Wales, an electrician who worked on national launchpads and the Magic Kingdom;

And Virgilio Germán of Kissimmee, a retired carpenter, who loved to sing Mexican ballads to his wife, Gigi.

These and other stories throughout central Florida will continue to be in our hearts as we do everything we can to get beyond and survive this pandemic.

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THE NEED FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH

(Mr. SHERMAN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SHERMAN. Madam Speaker, our work now is to negotiate a new relief bill. So far we have spent trillions of dollars bandaging our economic wounds, yet less than one-half of 1 percent has gone to beat the disease through research on therapeutics and prophylaxes.

All hands should be on deck. Every reasonable idea should be tested. But our professional medical researchers are today sitting at home because their non-COVID research has been suspended and our COVID research funding has been modest.

The HEROES Act provides \$5.5 billion to do this medical research. That is the most important one-quarter of 1 percent of that bill, and we need to fight to expand it in negotiations.

Medical research is the best investment we can make for America. It is also the only way we are likely to provide major help for the billions of people who live in poor countries, and it is the best investment that we can make in America's standing in the world.