

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners
July 28, 2020, PM

Continued from 7/28/2020 AM session

Summary: *BOCC responds to comments by two citizens asking what can BOCC do, as elected county officials and members of the Board of Health, to address the rapidly increasing Covid-19 case count in Okanogan County, particularly in the Brewster area; Branch explains Covid-19 data from Central Washington Hospital to Hover & DeTro regarding hospitalizations, deaths, people on ventilators; Branch discusses his conversation with state official Salvador Salazar; Need for enforcement briefly addressed; Branch suggests BOCC should make videos for public between Board of Health meetings, addressing frequently answered questions, giving Board of Health recommendations, and emphasizing that recommendations need to be followed in order to keep businesses open.*

1:30: Public Comment Period - Note: *first part of the session starting at 1:30 was not recorded but is summarized below, with notes following. Time stamps for recording start in red below, at 00:00, during Jerry Brannon's comment.*

Commenting: Isabelle Spohn, Twisp; Jerry Brannon, Chiliwist

SUMMARY of Spohn introductory comments: Says she's very concerned about the rising number of Covid-19 cases in the county. Wonders what the situation is in Brewster - it appears to be an outbreak, from the various websites she monitors. Concerned about the community down there, where she used to teach, and wonders whether this is community transmission or confined to farmworkers. The rate of transmission per 100,000 is very high. We are hearing information from national news things about our own situation in this county that we are not hearing locally: for example, an investigation of Gebbers Farms regarding a death there. Asks repeatedly throughout the conversation what the commissioners, as our elected representatives and members of the Board of Health, can do about the situation and emphasizes that we are counting on them as our elected officials to protect the public health and welfare.

Commissioner response - summaries/quotations:

BOCC: When is the next Board of Health meeting? August 11th.

AH - I would imagine we'll get an update then. They are posting on the website from day to day. I don't know how accurate they are.

JD - I had a personal experience an hour ago - at Los Gatos, in Omak. Board of Health came in, shut the restaurant down. Told the bartender he had to go be tested for Covid. There was a couple that tested positive for Covid on the 18th - 10 days ago - who had been at the bar/restaurant. The bartender said he was in Spokane then - asks why he should go in for testing. He was told if he refused, they'd shut the restaurant down permanently. A lady came up and said she wanted me to know something. Her daughter works for Walmart. There were more than 10 people there who had tested positive - why aren't they doing something about those big box stores?

AH - Should we have Lauri (*Jones, Health Director*) come in next week? We can go over hospitalization counts, etc. I personally know someone who had it and lost nothing except taste and smell.

RECORDING STARTS HERE:

00:00 Jerry Brannon - I'm starting to feel like a guy who's trying to report on a wildfire. We are tracking all the different data - location, perimeter, acreage, etc. But we have no firefighters out there. Not doing anything to stop it. We need some enforcement. Many cities have fines, people enforcing. We have no one. I was recently in a Safeway store, and a person walked by me with no mask and started coughing. It was in the early AM when only seniors are supposed to be there. I track 7 different websites a day (*re Covid.*)

Spohn - That's not too unusual. I have friends who track 5 websites every day. Everyone is kind of scratching their heads.

CB - I talked with Salvador Salazar (*At the state level, works on the Covid issue*) So have conversations going about strategies - they are talking with L&I - trying to assess the situation. Trying to assess the situation and what they might do. That conversation does probably speak to law enforcement.

JD - My experience today at noon: It just seemed to be heavy-handed and overzealous. They have a customer who tested positive 10 days ago. Then we have this gal - says my daughter works at Walmart. So many people got tested positive. If I had my voice to do something about it, I'd say be more civil. They do nothing about the big box stores. But they pick on little businesses.

00:03:01 - Spohn - Jim, you are on the Board of Health for our county, and we count on you guys to do something. Why can't you do something about it?

JD - Well, if I had my choice to do something about it, I'd say they need to be a little more civil to those poor business owners that they are bankrupting.

Spohn - Well, then maybe the Board of Health needs to meet or something. We have the Wednesday meetings for Covid, and you know, not much happens - Who do we have if we don't have our elected officials to stick up for us?

00:03:40 - JD - Well, here's the problem, Isabelle - it seems to me that it's not equitable across the board. They go after, from the top down, they go after the little businesses and shut them down, from the governor on down. Won't do anything to the big businesses. If I was going to do anything on the Board of Health, I'd say if you are going to shut down these little businesses, you need to march up to Walmart and do the same thing.

Spohn - Maybe you should call a meeting of the Board of Health or something, if you feel that way. However, if you have to choose sides, I'm on thethe concern of these rising, alarming numbers over the past week. If you go to any of those websites, they will show Okanogan's rising numbers over the past week. I think it was over 800 per 100,000. They have data for the last week and the last 2 weeks. I certainly hope you are monitoring that, and I don't see why you

would think it's not alarming, but there should be something that can be done - I mean, New York brought down their cases. Why can't we do something?

00:05:02 - JD - Well, I agree with Cmr. Hover also, that when we look at that, and we look at those numbers, I like to have the information myself - OK, how many hospitalizations do we have?

IS - It's on there! It's on there! (*speaking of data on websites.*)

Silence.

CB - It's 26, I think.

AH - Is that 26 from day 1, or is that.....

JD/AH - (*talking over Branch and over each other. Confusion.*)

JD - See? There's ambiguity. They can't tell us....if a guy comes off, if....

AH - How many tests per 100,000 individuals is New York getting?

BRANCH EXPLAINS COVID-19 DATA ON COUNTY COVID WEBSITE TO DETRO AND HOVER

00:05:37 - CB - My understanding is, if they are hospitalized, they are hospitaliized. So the data was provided July 27th, 7 of individuals who are hospitalized from Ok county are in Central Wa hospital. (JD/AH talking over themselves)

AH - So there are 7 people from Okanogan County in Central Washington?

CB /JD - Central Washington Hospital.

CB - TOTAL HOSPITALIZED is 26. (*Reading from the Central Washington Hospital data*) -

Spohn - For along time, Okanogan County had the highest numbers which was 7. Just recently, a couple of other counties have caught up.

Branch: 6 are on ventilators.

AH - 6 of the people from our county are on ventilators?

IS - It doesn't say which county.

CB - 6 from Central Washington, I think, are on ventilators. 6 are in ICU. 6 are on ventilators.

JD - Is that from all the counties in Eastern Wa or just Okanogan?

CB - That one is the total.

Spohn - North Central Washington. Oh, the other website is Wenatchee World, NCW and that's what the data is from at N. Central Hospital (*should be Central WA Hospital.*)

Long, long silence. '

JD - Well.....

Voice whispering: *"They don't even know there's a problem."*

CB Regarding conversations I've been having and with Salvador yesterday, I told him I thought he was calling to say we were going to have to go backwards out of Phase 2. He said no, but there is a lot of conversation about that kind of stuff.

00:07:42 Branch repeats question as to what could/should be done, gives perspective of history on "opening" and rising cases:

CB - So, as the numbers rise, the question then that comes about for me is.....when do WE do something?

AH -Well, OK.

CB - No - it's not an argument.

AH - That's a good question.

AH - What do...Ok. There are a lot of this happening from people getting it and then going out of their house. ... so....are we going to institute martial law?

CB - I didn't say that. You ask yourself that, and then you tell me.

AH (Speaking over CB)

AH - No, that's not an argument, Chris. That is a rhetorical question about thinking because you get frustrated.

AH - Ok- What do you do, right? ? You are trying to get people to wear masks. When they are in tightly confined spaces, In all these stores. What are the other things, though, that you do?

CB - These are just observations. I don't have the answers. It's my first pandemic.....

AH - I know, it's my first rodeo too....

CB - But my observation is that we argued for opening businesses, and one of the bases was, from my personal standpoint, the disparity between big and large businesses. Regardless, we argued to that, and I argued that our businesses are committed to making sure to keep levels low by masks and social distancing, all those things. As things moved on.....I saw that these things were only partially true. Those things happen, and harvest came along, obviously, and the numbers started to rise dramatically -and all over the nation, as a result of the same thing - opening up. Since then, the numbers have increased. And we can talk about they have in-

creased the testing, and that's the reason for that and all those things.....an observation of a virus is that in 1918, it was the same thing. And a lot of people get sick And now another issue is - how does it affect those that had it, that actually beat it.....as far as their overall health....There are other side effects and conditions showing up now. Those are questions we don't have the answers to , but there are a lot of discoveries being made in that area, but it is risky business. It's an experiment.

AH questions government statement:

AH - The thing that I look at is that this virus is not going to be... so I heard, or I read something that I forget who it was , they were high up in the government though - who said If everybody wore masks for 4-8 weeks, the virus would be gone. I don't think so. Such a ...these are pretty bold statements.

CB - I don't either. And I don't know who high up in the government is....but that's an argument.

AH - I don't know who it was...I can go back and find it...but I just found it was such a ..you know, those are pretty bold statements.....

So did you hear about what I just said?

CB - We all do that. We all ask where the info comes from..... I always say, if it's someone high up in the Government, it makes ...cause that would be like saying Andy Hover is a commissioner, so he knows all about that (Or Chris Branch, for that matter.)

Returning to what can be done:

00:12:20 - Spohn - So it's sounding as if the Commissioners, at least Cmr. Hover and DeTro are thinking there is not much you can do about it?

AH - No. That's not what we said.

JD - No, not at all.

Spohn - Maybe I need you to repeat what you think you could do about it.

AH - Well, I think that people wearing masks helps. It's not a cure. *(Returns to subject of governmental statement on masks and who said it):* Here it is . *(Finds the name of the person at CDC)* The head of the US CDC said the virus would be under control with 4-8 weeks. Dir. Robert Redfield... said, on Tuesday, July 14th, If all Americans would just wear masks the virus would be gone in about 4-8 weeks.

00:13:17 Branch: I have a couple of questions for (?) The numbers on hospitalized people expressed on website, is that people that are hospitalized currently?

Spohn - That's my understanding.

CB - OK - there's 26 listed. And I'm assuming the same thing, so we want to make sure we get that figured out. Because that's what gets asked....

Spohn - Yeah, it's gradually gone up, and for several days at least Okanogan County was at 7, and that hasn't changed, but now other counties now are equal to us ...or some are behind.

CB - That is total hospitalized. Ok. It says dated last July 27th. 26 hospitalized. We need to make sure we put in there that that's overall.....

AH or JD - There. See? See? There you go.

CB - OK. And those on ventilators, those are how many have been on ventilators. That's ...hm. There is some uncertainty there . We can talk at health.... It's what's being reported on, so people, we, are relying on that info. (Seems to be on phone?) "No, just a couple of people....."

Spohn - I guess I'm still not hearing what people think you can do about it, as elected officials?

Many voices.one says Branch is on phone trying to get some of these answers.

Enforcement suggestion by Brannon and response:

00:16:42 Jerry Brannon... May I speak? Isabelle was asking what we think we might do about this. I think we are ignoring what the gov's office is coming out with, when he first said we were going to wear masks and limit businesses....there was a statement made that if people did not adhere to it, that they ...I'm trying to do this from memory - that you could be subjected to a \$1,000 fine and/ or 60 days in county jail. That was an actual statement, (*someone interrupts*) That's extreme, but we need some enforcement.

CB - (*to speakers*): We appreciate your comments. We spent some time on this, and we will need to talk with health about several of the things you brought up. We appreciate your observations. Both of you.....

00:16:49 - Jerry Brannon - One final statement: If you look at over all cases for 100,000 population, we have 1,486 if you add up all the cases, not just the last 14 days - 1,486 is higher than the number of cases per 100,000 in 38 states plus Puerto Rico. There are only 12 states that are better than we - as far as population goes.

JD/CB - We saw that in your e-mail. Thank you.

16:42 -Public comment over .

Break for brief Prosecutor discussion, recorded here - Notes not taken.
Consent Agenda approved.

Return to Covid-19 discussion:

27:35 - AH You can pass "those" to me all the time. Thought it was very good. You didn't come up and give me a lashing, you said, here. But you can't just say I heard this without saying "someone high up in government. " But Isn't it odd that someone from CDC said that if everyone wore a mask for 4-8 weeks, the virus would be gone?

CB - you have to balance it with some other things.

JD - Other people say that distancing is more important.

CB - I agree with what you're saying, but at least he's trying to make a case for wearing masks.

JD - CDC will even prioritize and say that social distancing is above masks.

Branch: Perspective on the simple points we agree on.

00:28:32 - Branch - There are 2 things that come to rest in my mind - We know the numbers are going up across the country, as long as we use the same standard, and that social distancing etc. are the things that keep it down. As simple as that. We all know that mandating can work in certain places, but here in Okanogan County right here - I am concerned that it will drive those who don't believe it to then disobey. Because more people are wearing the mask....

AH - Went into Home Depot and one person was not wearing mask. And no one was standing around them.

CB - Eventually, people are saying we'd better do it....

29:36 - AH - I saw where Walmart came out and said we are no longer mandating masks because of physical altercations. The employees got into with people, and they don't want to deal with it. I say, why did the person get into a confrontation? Should have called law enforcement, Sheriff, because it's trespassing. It's a private business. You don't have a right to just go into a private business....

LJ - They have security at the door over the weekend at Walmart.

JD - But early in the AM they don't. Lots of people go then - very few people there don't require mask if population is way down. At some point, the security guy comes on, and then....I try to avoid all stores and businesses.

00:30:52 LJ - If people don't want to wear masks in the store, why don't they just get curbside? The appearance of people walking around with no masks makes it appear like...well, all right, I'll take mine off, I don't have to....

JD - I ask if I can come in. I say I have a medical condition - can I come in? They usually say ok, if you can social distance. Like this morning, I think I told one business I needed to go in. The gal went like this, I went like that ...I went to tell her and she didn't want to know the condition. She thought it was a HIPA violation even if I volunteered to tell her.

00:31:40 CB - Something that we should be doing, though, about what can be done: Remember the videos we made for emergency management ...we didn't make anymore. Maybe we should do videos more often. That appeal to authority thing can work more than one way - - if you have 3 BOCC that say we are really concerned about what's been happening about opening businesses, we don't want to close businesses, and make these points.... that get out to

the public that we truly believe we can lower the rate if we did these things - I think that could help. That could get 25 more people to say the BOCC are concerned and want to tell us that these are good things that we've been doing are good things to be doing, and.....

00:32:40 JD - I stated in a public meeting about my conditions - I want people to know about my condition. But I also say I'm not going into these businesses. I don't want them to be embarrassed, I don't want them to be upset.....I don't want a confrontation unless it's absolutely necessary

AH - The thing that is bothersome to me....you have like a newspaper article like came out in the Seattle Times When our public health official is frustrated with that article - obviously there was a lack of communication between our public health dept and someone writing an article for sensationalism, or whatever. So that is where people look to that....just like what Isabelle said about going to the NY Times. Where is the NT Times getting their information from?

00:33:49 CB - Here's something that , again, I'm going to boil it down to a couple of things. I don't care if people get their information from somewhere. I don't care. I see the numbers going on across the country. And so the NY Times says that, and so there's some truth to that. My observation is it's because we backed away from it (by opening up.) We went ok, we think we have a handle on it.

One thing we can do - a small thing - we didn't make any more of those videos, make the videos and tell people we are concerned - we backed away from mandating these things, but we really need to do them and we should make that message known so that they we are thinking about it. It's not a threat as far as closing businesses., but if we want to keep businesses open, we have to keep doing these things.

AH - It's not just about businesses. That's what people keep thinking. I look at....

CB - No, it's not. I'm just saying that it's part of the conversation.

00:35:05 - AH - Only 2 cases in Carlton, despite crowds from the West side:

AH - But I look at the Methow, OK? From day 1 we said everyone was going to be infected because of all these people coming over. And A LOT of people came over from west side.

CB - I went over there.

AH - So you saw all the people along the river, all of these things - But yet, we've only had ,, what was it? 2 cases in Carlton. So somehow, something is going on....are we getting a higher rate than we know - are we not testing people over there? Or what I don't know. Data gaps like that bug me. Obviously down here a lot of migrant farmworkers and they are just tight togetherGebbers have done an excellent job all the way from Feb until now, working with Public Health, keeping those people in quarantine and then moving them out as the need to etc.

CB - Suggestion: Make more videos for public between Board of Health meetings.

CB - I am going to ask that we do that on a more regular basis.

AH - Yeah, yeah.

CB So we are telling the community what we are looking at. It's a long time between Board of Health meetings (*they are one month apart*)- and things happen so fast, that's the thing.

AH - Get the Health people and ask: What is the recommendation as to what we do?

CB - Plus those questions that are frequently asked. And don't minimize it. But just know what the data is saying. It may be the best you can "collect."

Change of Subject

CB Where are we here? Vouchers.....

All vouchers Ok'd. Approves the remainder.

CH - Wonder if the CHI group (County Health Improvement) would be doing that type of public info? I will check.

AH - Did you get the invitation from Elana about the meeting on Thursday? (*Meeting of County Health Improvement.*)

CB - I did.

Anything else? Just minutes, then we are done.

BOCC Adjourned about 2:40