

Governor Baker shoots down 'shelter in place order' rumor

By SHNS Staff

State House News Service

Gov. Charlie Baker shot down rumors Sunday morning that he is planning to order Massachusetts residents to shelter in place for two weeks, saying he had heard those rumors himself as the pandemic spread of coronavirus continues in Massachusetts and around the world.

"We have no plans to do that," Baker told WCVB's Janet Wu during a live interview Sunday morning. When Wu asked if the rumor was "wild speculation," the governor said, "yes."

Meanwhile, Cambridge and Somerville are at least having conversations about taking more aggressive steps to force social distancing at the local level, according to a state rep who serves both cities.

Baker did say, however, that his administration will be asking the Legislature to give him more authority to address the pandemic, including a plan to file legislation Monday related to unemployment insurance for workers and businesses affected by the outbreak.

The governor said he thinks Boston Mayor Martin Walsh "did the right thing" by closing bars in South Boston early Saturday night and for all of Sunday after people crowded into establishments and congregated in long lines outside despite public health experts urging people to distance themselves from others. Baker said he hopes Walsh shuts bars down on Tuesday, too, which is St. Patrick's Day.

The number of positive cases of COVID-19 in Massachusetts stands at 138 on Sunday morning. Baker said Sunday to expect that number to grow in coming days as the state ramps up its testing capacity.

“I think you’re going to see tons more tested and with tons more testing, yeah, you’ll probably see a significant increase in the number of people” who test positive, he said on “On The Record.”

Walsh is going to address the public and press outside City Hall at 3 p.m. Sunday, and the state Department of Public Health is due to release the latest tally of positive cases by 4 p.m.

The Boston City Council late Friday also announced it is closing its City Hall offices to the public until further notice and there’s increasing pressure on Gov. Charlie Baker and education officials to shut down all public schools.

On Friday, Gov. Baker imposed a ban on many gatherings of 250 people or more, but said his administration is not recommending that local school systems cancel classes and close schools unless there is a threat of exposure.

Baker said Friday that banning most concerts, social events and public gatherings will help the state slow the spread of the coronavirus in order to give the health care system a fighting chance at meeting demand. He said the ban does not apply to most workplaces, airports, bus stations, grocery stores, shopping malls and restaurants.

Other news Coronavirus news:

– “Rep. Lynch Information Session: Congressman Stephen Lynch will broadcast – but not open in-person attendance to the public – a Monday discussion with two area doctors about the coronavirus and ways to limit the spread of COVID-19. Dr. Dennis Teehan Jr. of Steward Dedham Primary Care and Dr.

Gabriela Andujar Vazquez, a Tufts Medical Center epidemiologist specializing in infection control, will participate. Lynch's office will broadcast the 1:30 p.m. event on his Facebook page, where comments from viewers will be addressed." – Chris Lisinski 12:06 PM

– "POTUS Schedule: President Donald Trump – whom the White House said Saturday tested negative for COVID-19 after being photographed with a man who later tested positive for the illness – is scheduled to participate in a conference call Sunday afternoon with grocery executive as consumers around the country contend with store shelves bare of toilet paper and other goods amid a surge of Americans stockpiling food and supplies. The president on Saturday declared Sunday a "National Day of Prayer for All Americans Affected by the Coronavirus Pandemic and for our National Response Efforts." At 5 p.m. Sunday, the president's Coronavirus Task Force is expected to hold an on-camera briefing at the White House." – Colin A. Young

– "Cambridge, Somerville Discussing Shutdowns: While Gov. Baker said Sunday he has no plans to announce a statewide mandatory shutdown, Rep. Mike Connolly said the two cities in his district – Cambridge and Somerville – are at least talking about more stringent local closures to force social distancing. Connolly told the News Service that he has had conversations with city officials about mandatory business and school closures and that "measures along these lines are actively being discussed." The representative also joined in circulating a petition on Twitter calling for Baker to order any school, business or other establishment not necessary for COVID-19 response to close. "Voluntary social distancing is not working," the representative wrote. Connolly on Friday signed a letter with 15 other state lawmakers calling for the administration to close all schools in Massachusetts."

– "Santiago ER Update: Ahead of his second of three consecutive overnight shifts working in the emergency room at

Boston Medical Center, Rep. Jon Santiago described what it was like in the busy ER Friday into Saturday during his first shift since the coronavirus outbreak was declared a state and federal emergency. "I wouldn't say I was particularly concerned or alarmed when I walked into the ER but that it was surreal," he said on his social media pages in what he's said will be semi-frequent updates. "I saw friends and colleagues that I've known for years gowned up, wearing protective gear – this was a bit different. Many of the rooms had doors with signs on it saying, 'don't go in unless you're fully gowned with personal protective gear,' something I've never experienced before." Santiago also gave a rundown on why testing has become such a flashpoint in the national conversation around the outbreak and the strategy for combating it. He said the World Health Organization has a test, but that the United States opted to develop its own test with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. "As a result, we probably lost a couple of weeks in testing," he said. Santiago also praised the many emergency room and hospital workers who are on the front lines of the pandemic. "They do this day in and day out, long before the coronavirus ever existed and they're committed to working and helping the lives of the most vulnerably underserved communities in Boston and in Massachusetts, but it's tricky because things are changing so rapidly," he said." – Colin A. Young

– "Walsh Sunday Presser: Boston Mayor Martin Walsh will hold a coronavirus press conference Sunday afternoon outside City Hall. The mayor's availability comes as bars in South Boston are closed on what is usually one of the busiest days of the year, and after the mayor had already called off the St. Patrick's Day parade that sometimes attracts as many as one million people. The mayor will meet the press at 3 p.m. on City Hall Plaza. The press conference will be streamed live on boston.gov. – Colin A. Young

– "South Boston Bars Closed: There's no parade through South

Boston on Sunday and there will be no bar hopping through the neighborhood either. After photos of long lines and crowds outside bars in South Boston drew scorn and condemnation Saturday, the city closed bars early Saturday night and on Sunday announced that the popular St. Patrick's Day weekend spots will not open Sunday. "SB bars & restaurants will be closed today as part of a voluntary agreement," South Boston City Councilor Ed Flynn tweeted Sunday morning. "Thank you Mayor Walsh, my fellow SB elected officials, neighbors, Licensing Board, license holders in SB for working w/ us & taking these sound proactive measures to protect the public's health." On WCVB on Sunday morning, Gov. Baker said, "I think the city did the right thing. I saw the news on what was going on in South Boston last night, I think the mayor made the right decision." He added, "I hope he shuts it down on Tuesday," which is St. Patrick's Day." – Colin A. Young