

Remarks for Governor Lou Leon Guerrero
Guam Medical Association Asia Pacific Health Leadership Forum
Thursday, March 5, 2020 at 6:30 p.m.
Dusit Thani Guam Resort

Good Evening! As we gather here tonight, medical professionals, public health experts, and community leaders around the globe are working to contain, treat, and combat the spread of COVID-19.

And while technology has made our world closer, it has also made us more susceptible to the greatest pandemic of all—fear.

As medical professionals, this is of course a great concern. As a nurse, I share this concern.

Now, that fear finds itself in your waiting rooms and the parking lots of your clinic where sick patients anxiously wait to be cleared of the virus. And, it's likely being felt by each of you and the members of your staff.

Yet, despite the fact that we are all human too—that we share many of the same fears and anxieties, I know that each of you has initiated your pandemic response protocols and continue to follow CDC guidance.

That is how Guam will get through this. We know this because we have done so in the past, and I want to thank you for doing your part. As your Governor, I am doing mine.

That is why I am grateful to GMA, its leadership, and members for inviting me here tonight. This is a great opportunity for you to hear from me directly regarding what we have done to prepare.

First, we acknowledge that we are facing a global challenge that demands high-level national attention.

Early Tuesday morning, I and other Governors throughout the nation spoke to Vice President Pence who will now teleconference with governors on a weekly basis to ensure continued coordination as the threat of the virus evolves.

He reported that the White House was working with Congress on an Emergency Supplemental Budget to address the virus. Today that \$8.3 billion dollar emergency package passed the House with bipartisan support and Senate action is expected soon.

The measure includes \$2.2 billion to help federal state, and territorial public health agencies prepare for a response to coronavirus, including funds for lab testing, infection control, and tracing individuals who might have had contact with infected people. The bill also reimburses state and territorial governments for costs they have already incurred.

The funding will provide resources for the Infectious Diseases Rapid Response Fund as well as \$300 million for global health efforts by the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. About \$1 billion will pay for pharmaceuticals and medical supplies, including masks and protective equipment for workers. The remainder of the package is allocated to research.

During the call, the CDC also assured each jurisdiction that test kits will be received shortly. When they are, Public Health Director Linda Denorcey has assured me that our Tamuning lab is calibrated and ready. In the interim, testing can be done at the Hawaii State Lab.

Unfortunately, working within the confines of federal law does have its challenges.

While some have called for the re-routing of foreign flights or the closure of the Guam International Airport in its entirety, the Airport Authority is an FAA facility, and I am without the legal authority to act beyond President Trump's travel ban.

But, I believe it is always better to light a candle than curse the darkness. For that reason this is what we are doing:

The travel ban is being enforced where applicable.

We have no direct flights to mainland China.

Anyone with recent travel to mainland China will be diverted to a designated airport for quarantine.

Over the weekend, the White House announced they would work with South Korea officials to implement medical screenings for any traveler headed to the United States, including Guam.

Here at home, Guam's Communicable Disease Response Plan and Protocol has been in place since the onset of the threat. If there's a sick passenger onboard, airlines call our tower prior to landing. If the sick passenger meets CDC criteria for a Person Under Investigation (PUI), we activate a public health nurse and a Bureau of Communicable Disease staffer to the airport to conduct both a clinical and epidemiological assessment. Our Airport and Customs officials know and use the protocol. This screening occurs on every incoming flight.

But that's not all.

I also ordered the hiring of Registered Nurses, Licensed Practical Nurses, and Certified Nurse Aides to increase our presence and screening efforts. I have expedited the paperwork and made the resources available. Public Health has worked with the airport to align their schedules with the airport's busiest hours. These RNs, LPNs, and CNAs will work on an on-call basis. I am proud to report they will start as early as next week.

Quarantine facilities have been ready at the airport since the start of the outbreak and while self-quarantine is the recommended method, other contingencies for community quarantine are already in place.

We also recognize that so much of Guam is dependent on our tourism. And that travelers want to know everything that can be done—is being done.

Last month, our Airport announced plans to procure thermal scanners. While we had started procurement, the Guam Power Authority stepped up. Thanks to GPA, we will have as many as 4 scanners at our Airport. This screening tool will be used beyond the threat of the virus, and can alert airport officials of other situations in the facility.

But we are not alone in the challenges we face.

Some of you may have heard that Governor Ige of Hawaii proclaimed a State of Emergency just a few hours ago. The intent of that declaration was to grant him additional budgetary authority over state funds—expediting his ability to prepare for COVID-19 under Hawaii State law. To date, Guam has implemented its response plan with our normal budgetary authority—without any immediate need for the \$250,000 permitted under an emergency declaration.

Second, we must also be willing to make tough calls where we have the legal authority to do so. Just last month, I denied a request to host the Hong Kong Men's National Basketball Team.

I also denied entry of the MS Westerdam, the British-American private cruise vessel carrying over 1,400 guests and over 800 crew members. Though I was criticized by the State Department for doing this, it was later revealed that a passenger -- a U.S. citizen -- had tested positive for coronavirus. I was able to stop this vessel through my authority as Governor, and I am prepared to make more tough calls to protect our people.

Just yesterday, a military vessel reported three sick passengers on board. While none of them met criteria for a Person Under Investigation, working with our military partners, these three individuals have been cleared by medical personnel of any contagious illness early this morning.

This week, we learned of a PUI in Palau. Because the individual transited through Guam, we reached out to Palau's Ministry of Health and CDC's Division of Global Migration and Quarantine. At this point, the CDC has determined that no air contact investigation is warranted.

I want to stress that to date, Guam has NO confirmed cases nor do we have any person under investigation. I want to keep it that way.

That is why our Pandemic Response Plan is so important.

This week, over 200 representatives from the government, private, medical, military, nonprofit, and faith-based communities participated in a working session to improve upon this plan. Earlier

today, to close out this work session, participants engaged in a Table Top Exercise to test their knowledge. These types of exercises only improve our readiness.

Through previous outbreaks like SARS, bird flu, swine flu, MERS, ebola, zika, and most recently dengue -- we've been threatened before, but we've always overcome.

In my experience, fear is trumped only by knowledge. And there is no clearer knowledge than the truth told by numbers:

- 81% of all COVID-19 cases are mild or asymptomatic
- 14% of these cases are moderate and just 5% of these cases are considered critical
- The Mortality rate for SARS which Guam faced years ago was 3x greater than the newly adjusted rate for COVID -19
- And when age is considered, the threat of death is just 0.2% for those under 50

We also acknowledge that every death caused by this virus is tragic. But here is another numerical perspective. On February 10th, one of the worst days so far, 108 People died as a result of COVID-19. But on that same day:

Cancer killed: 26,284 people

Heart disease killed: 24,641 people

And the world lost 27.7x more people to suicide than COVID-19.

This is why I have asked my policy team to focus on the goal of Universal Health coverage as a human right in the next year.

As I said during the State of the Island Address, By some estimates, the Government of Guam currently spends around \$330 million dollars in GMH, Medicaid, Public Health, and the GovGuam health insurance plan.

Yet every day, people teeter on the edge of bankruptcy, praying that one illness doesn't break them or their families. On an island ravaged by diabetes, patients are being forced to ration their insulin because the price of this lifeline on which so many depend has increased by an average of 55 percent since 2014.

I know that it will require study, private sector ingenuity, and community courage, but together we will get it done.

In May, my office will be conducting the 1st Health Summit—calling together providers, public health experts, policy professionals, and economists to tackle the health challenges we face as a community.

I anticipate that we will speak to the models we are considering, and the safeguards we will employ to ensure that doctors and nurses get to care for their patients regardless of income or status in life.

That is my goal—a Guam that is safer, healthier, and more prosperous than when Josh and I came to office. I hope I can count on each of you to help with that goal.