

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with local news and commentary for Tuesday, July 21, 2020.

Jefferson County reported one additional case of COVID-19 last week, a woman in her sixties. Testing continues at a rapid rate. Currently As of Wednesday, 4,283 local residents have been tested with 4.178 testing negative. Forty nine people are awaiting results. Sixteen of the 50 cases have not yet recovered from the virus. The gender ratio is 54% female to 46% male.

As for testing, it is becoming a budget issue for Jefferson Healthcare as insurance doesn't always pay for the tests and Jefferson Healthcare won't bill patients directly.

According to the Jefferson County Washington news Facebook page, Jefferson Healthcare in Port Townsend is the primary location for COVID-19 testing in Jefferson County, and has been absorbing the cost of coronavirus testing. Administering a COVID-19 tests costs about \$100, and the monthly cost to operate specialized testing equipment is around \$80,000.

Even though hospital revenues have declined 12%, the budget is sound and patients will not be billed for the tests. Currently the hospital is ready to accommodate regular patients and is encouraging people to make appointments to address issues that were postponed due to the virus.

Earlier this month Jefferson County approved an application for Phase 3 opening, but the action was stymied by the resurgence of COVID-19 cases in the rest of the state. On Monday, John Wiesman, the Washington State Secretary of Health, returned the application and informed the board of county commissioners that no action will be taken, as the request has now expired.

COVID 19 news comes at us so quickly that it's hard to gain perspective about what has happened so far. To help, the official Jefferson Facebook page posted a report titled "Keeping up with the Koronavirus" – that's with a K – maintaining that words just aren't enough to explain the seriousness of a situation. Verbal warnings from our governor, health officials and local government may be getting lost in the cacophony of messages we are exposed to each day.

To express the severity of this Coronavirus pandemic, the county posted a link to a chart that shows the number of local COVID-19 cases from the first confirmed case reported on March 7, which seems so long ago, but is only 19 weeks. The chart indicates some outbreaks in March and April, a few in June and, now in July, a dramatic spike.

The good news – no one in Jefferson County has died from the virus.

Derek Kilmer, Jefferson County's congressional representative, added his voice to tributes for civil rights leader turned congressman John Lewis, who died this past weekend.

Kilmer said he had worked with Lewis for several years, and was proud to call him a friend. And to honor Lewis, Kilmer is asking people to sign an online petition that demands the US Senate address the Voting Rights Advancement Act, which will restore the full protections guaranteed by the original Voting Rights Act in 1965. Quoting Lewis, Kilmer said that justice doesn't happen in one moment. It's an ongoing struggle and a battle worth fighting each and every day.

Kilmer, along with his teenage daughter, accompanied Lewis to a March 2019 commemoration at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Alabama, the site of a violent 1965 civil rights demonstration. Currently there is a move to rename the bridge in honor of Lewis, as Pettus was himself a Confederate General and Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon Monday through Saturday and at 5pm PM Monday through Thursday. You can contact us through news at kptz.org.

This is Charlie Bermant. Thank you for listening.