

McBride Says Governors are Providing Critical Leadership in the Fight Against COVID-19

WASHINGTON, DC — With America's Governors stepping forward and providing the American people with critical leadership in the fight against the coronavirus, The Ripon Society hosted a virtual discussion this past Thursday with the Executive Director of an organization that is supporting them in their efforts in this regard.

The organization is the National Governors Association, and their Executive Director is Bill McBride. McBride is a veteran policy and political professional in our nation's capital, having spent the bulk of his career as a Chief of Staff in the U.S. House of Representatives before moving to the State of Michigan's Washington office, where he served as the Governor's top aide and liaison to the White House and Capitol Hill.

He took over as Executive Director of the NGA in July of last year, and kicked off his remarks on Thursday by discussing why the job is so meaningful to him, and how he and the rest of the staff at the NGA are working to support the Governors during this challenging time.

"I'm incredibly proud to be serving our Governors as they lead the effort in their States and territories to protect the public from this terrible disease and restart the economy in a safe and sustainable manner," McBride stated. "Along with our staff at the NGA, we have been working with governors and their staff every day, providing technical assistance and federal advocacy, and by hosting calls and emails with them on a weekly and sometimes daily basis.

"For example, every week we convene a call with the legal counsels of the Governors, something which has never been done before. This week was our 11th call. We average about 35 on the call each week, and what they do is a deep dive into the issues facing their states. They're all writing executive orders dealing with this pandemic, sharing ideas, and trying to learn from and coordinate with each other. We have to remember that there's a lot of interstate commerce that goes on. If you shut down business in one state, it's going to have an effect on neighboring states and across state lines. The legal counsels have really come together as a very effective and powerful tool.

"We also do a weekly call with our Governors. We're

averaging about 45 governors on those calls a week. Yesterday was our 11th call. It is an unprecedented effort. In fact, it is the first time in history that Governors have convened on a weekly basis like this."

In that regard, McBride noted that the NGA was founded in 1908, and that then-President Theodore Roosevelt was a driving force behind its creation. Roosevelt had previously served as Governor of New York, and had seen the need for the Governors to come together in a way and form that allowed them to act collectively. From that inspiration, the National Governors Association was born.

"If you come to our offices," McBride said, "one of our major conference rooms is the Roosevelt conference room. That's something we're very proud of. We're also proud of the fact that we're a bipartisan organization. We represent Governors of both political parties. We currently have 26 Republicans and 24 Democrats. We work with them to advance their bipartisan priorities with Congress and the White House, and share and promote their best practices in such areas as health, public safety, emergency response, energy and environment, education, economic development, and workforce development, just to name a few. And the fact of the matter is that all of these areas have been touched in some way by the coronavirus pandemic."

To that end, McBride noted that the NGA — in conjunction with the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials — recently released a Roadmap To

Recovery for the states.

"It spells out considerations for Governors as they move to reopen sectors of their economies in a thoughtful manner and in a way that preserves public health," McBride explained. "At the same time, we're also working with Governors and our allies to develop and advocate for federal aid to States and local governments. The goal is to alleviate the severe revenue losses and avoid major cuts in areas such as education, health care, and other critical areas."

McBride stated that the Roadmap to Recovery and information about other initiatives related to the coronavirus can be found on the NGA's website at NGA.org. He further noted that traffic for the website, which was recently redesigned, is up by more than 400% over this time last year — a statistic, he added, that shows not just the interest in the efforts of America's Governors in fighting COVID-19, but the importance of those efforts, as well.

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“When the history of this period is written,” McBride concluded, “I believe it will reflect the vital role that Governors played in protecting public health and restarting the economy.

“I want to acknowledge in particular the efforts of our leader, Maryland Governor Larry Hogan, who is our Chair this year, and our Vice Chair, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, who will be our Chair next year. Both of them have really stepped forward and have done a remarkable job in dealing with very difficult situations in their respective states.”

Following his remarks, McBride also took a number of questions, including one about the ongoing pandemic and the devastating impact it is having on state budgets.

“You’ve got to remember where state revenues come from,” McBride said. “It comes from taxes, primarily income taxes and sales taxes. With people out of work and businesses shutting down, that revenue source has really just dried up. And that’s not the only hit the States are going to take. When the federal government moved the income tax payment and filing date from April 15th to July 15th, many of the States did the same thing. In many States, the fiscal year starts on July 1st. So besides losing all this revenue, there’s going to be a gap there of 15 days where they’re going to take a tremendous hit on revenues. And unlike the federal government, states have to have balanced their budgets.

“This could really wreak havoc with a lot of their budgets. Think about the areas that are really going to get cut. Education is a good example because most education is funded at the state level. That is going to take a big hit. Health care is another example. A lot of money that goes for Medicaid and other programs is going to take a hit. Those are two areas that affect people directly. But across the board, States are going to have to make tremendous budget cuts, and that’s really going to have a detrimental

effect.”

That said, McBride did see a potential bright spot in the budget challenges that lie ahead, and that is in the potential to make changes in areas that are long overdue for reform.

One of those areas is education.

“You know, higher education has just gotten slammed on this,” he observed. “But I also think it’s an opportunity for many colleges and universities to go back and really trim and reevaluate what they were really spending their money on. The same is true at the K-12 level. I think parents have a whole new appreciation for what teachers do after spending the spring teaching their kids at home.

“What will the education system look like moving forward? Why are we still working on an agrarian system where schools are only open eight or nine months a year? Why aren’t they open year-round. There are also so many innovative things that can be done with online learning. Out of this terrible situation, I think there are some real opportunities for change and reform that can present themselves.”

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