

The Star-Ledger

Christie slams Murphy for N.J. nursing home deaths

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NJ Advance Media for NJ.com and The Star-Ledger

Published Aug. 8, 2020

Former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie recently slammed current Gov. Phil Murphy's handling of the coronavirus and blamed his successor for nursing home deaths around the state.

"Nearly 16,000 people have died in New Jersey now," Christie said Friday on Fox News Radio's "Guy Benson Show." "Nearly 55% of those deaths happened in the nursing homes, who were ordered by Gov. Phil Murphy to take COVID patients."

"It was outrageous, it was a mistake with monumental, monumental results," he said.

An NJ Advance Media investigation found the state did issue an order late March requiring nursing homes to take back non-critically ill residents from hospitals, as long as they'd been discharged and were recovering. Nursing homes were also supposed to separate those residents from others, but not all did.

The rule was an attempt to help hospitals grapple with surging cases, but it made infection-control more difficult within facilities lacking staff and protective equipment.

Murphy spokeswoman Alyana Alfaro pushed back, citing the state's dropping infections and the money Christie's firm has received from hospital chains.

"While Governor Christie cashes in on coronavirus lobbying, Governor Murphy has worked closely with public health experts to protect as many lives as possible during the pandemic," Alfaro wrote in an email. "Governor Murphy will continue working to keep New Jerseyans safe and holding bad actors in our long-term care facilities accountable while Governor Christie sadly uses this crisis to line his pockets."

Christie did appear to overstate the current share of nursing home deaths.

Long term care facilities had reported 6,680 deaths as of Saturday, which is about 42% of all confirmed (14,016) and probable (1,853) coronavirus deaths in New Jersey.

The critique was the latest salvo from the one-time Republican presidential candidate against a Democrat who has generally received public support for his pandemic policies. The two have often locked horns since Murphy took office.

Although Christie acknowledged New Jersey has appeared to flatten the curve of new infections, he said Murphy's economic policies were "ruining" the state. Restrictions on indoor dining and gatherings were unfairly hurting small businesses, Christie said, and he

suggested Murphy was on the hook for new opioid deaths and incidents of domestic violence.

“You cannot tell me this is not connected,” he said, referring to the statewide shutdown. “What we’re seeing here is: There are real effects for these policies well beyond COVID to the long-term mental health of the people in our state, and people are dying from that too — not to mention the, the lives of people that have been ruined because they’ve been closed.”

He also slammed Murphy’s plan to borrow almost \$10 billion, which state Republicans are suing to stop. Murphy has said the borrowing is needed to avert widespread service cuts and public worker layoffs.

NJ Advance Media staff writers Brent Johnson and Susan K. Livio contributed to this report.