

A Call With Katie Porter: ‘This Is Not a Partisan Crisis’; California Today

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Body

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Good morning.

On Tuesday evening, Gov. Gavin Newsom told MSNBC that the state would be able to buy 200 million desperately needed masks per month, under deals with a variety of sources. “Enough of the small ball,” he said of efforts to bulk up the state’s supply of personal protective equipment amid a global shortage.

Mayor Eric Garcetti of Los Angeles also announced an order that customers at grocery stores and other essential businesses wear face coverings. The directive, which takes effect on Friday, comes as workers at those businesses express mounting concerns over a lack of protection.

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A conversation with Representative Katie Porter

Last month, Representative Katie Porter, the freshman Democrat elected as part of Orange County’s “blue wave” in 2018, extracted a promise from the head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to make coronavirus testing free for all Americans.

Video of the exchange drew headlines and praise from progressives — and, as The California Sunday Magazine reported in a profile of her, it wasn’t the first time that’s happened.

Still, when I talked to her by phone recently, she was, like millions of other Californians, figuring out how to work from home while also caring for her children. She is a single parent to three.

“What I’ve learned is I don’t have any highlighters, I don’t have any Post-it notes, I don’t have any legal pads,” Ms. Porter told me. “I have a lot of markers.”

At one point during our call, she paused to talk to her daughter, who she said had donned a homemade unicorn mask.

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I asked her about the federal government's response to the pandemic and the upcoming general election to keep her seat.

Here's our conversation, edited and condensed:

Take me back to when you first became aware of the coronavirus as a potentially very serious threat. When was it, and what was going through your mind?

Orange County had the second confirmed case of coronavirus in the country on Jan. 25.

This is a very diverse community, with a lot of international travel, U.C.I., the business community, a large Chinese-American community, so I think our office began immediately to take it very seriously.

I wrote to the C.D.C. and requested a briefing for Orange County Congress members. Right away, we put together a F.A.Q. It was one of the first ones that was rolled out.

A lot of this, for me, has been frustration that Congress and some of our local leaders and the administration have been slow.

What are your top priorities going forward for Californians, in terms of consumer protection or economic stimulus?

The affordability of care is one big priority — the affordability of treatment.

The second is trying to help people, like small business owners, understand, as they wade through all of this, things like, "How do I apply for that? What if I've already let my employees go?"

I'm trying to use some of my skills as a teacher to educate people about what help is available. Unemployment insurance varies state by state.

It's hard to keep your eyes on this \$500 billion treasury fund, but we need to be making sure there's going to be appropriate oversight. Who's getting that money? I would love to serve on that oversight commission.

We're watching where the bailout is going, and whether it's doing what it is intended to do: Keep jobs.

I'd be remiss if I didn't ask you about the November general election. You were leading by a pretty wide margin, with just more than 50 percent of the vote in your primary on Super Tuesday.

This is a painful reminder that elections have real consequences in people's lives.

This is going to be a hard race. I have to be doing my job, first and foremost, helping people as a congressperson.

I'm hopeful we're going to see really high participation. We're fortunate to have widespread voting by mail in Orange County.

This is an opportunity to see how important it is to elect people who are smart, are competent and will put people's interests ahead of special interests, whether it's the presidential race, or senate or local government.

Mine is still a majority Republican district, but this is not a partisan crisis.

[See all the confirmed coronavirus cases in California by county.]

Here's what else to know

We often link to sites that limit access for nonsubscribers. We appreciate your reading Times coverage, but we also encourage you to support local news if you can.

- In some states, black Americans are facing alarmingly high rates of coronavirus infection. [The New York Times]

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- In California, public health officials are still working to compile racial and ethnic data about patients. [Politico]
- The pandemic has sent stocks, including Pacific Gas & Electric's, tumbling. That's complicating the utility's efforts to emerge from bankruptcy. [The New York Times]

In Remembrance ...

As death tolls mount from the coronavirus pandemic, we want to keep sight of the fact that the statistics represents real lives, and real families grieving terrible losses.

The Times's Obituaries desk is putting together a collection of stories about those we've lost to the coronavirus. And starting today, we'll also be publishing short obituaries from time to time in California Today.

If you'd like to share memories of someone you've lost to Covid-19, please email us at CAtoday@nytimes.com.

The first remembrance was written by Janice Hui, managing director of the investigative reporting program at the U.C. Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, through our partnership with the school:

Ken Machado, known as "Cowboy Kenny," embodied resilience. Mr. Machado, a 60-year-old former rodeo competitor, did not let Lyme disease, two heart surgeries and injuries from two car accidents stop him from living a full life.

"My siblings and I had a list and we'd check off his nine lives," said his youngest sister, Diane Machado-Wyant. "He always seemed to spring back."

Mr. Machado died on March 16, three days after seeing a doctor for a skin rash. He developed a 102-degree fever and tightness in his chest. His condition deteriorated so quickly that he died before paramedics could reach him at his ranch in Paicines, a rural community not far from Monterey.

He tested positive for Covid-19 after his death. His sister said it's unclear how he contracted the disease, but he returned from a monthlong trip to Thailand two weeks before he died.

Mr. Machado raised horses with his girlfriend on his 60-acre ranch. For years he was active in the rodeo circuit, riding bulls, team roping and performing as a rodeo clown.

"He was just a good 'ol cowboy," said his brother Glen Machado. "Not many of them left."

Even as a youngster, Mr. Machado "didn't know what the word 'quit' was," recalled his childhood friend, Michael Rodrigues, who said people were naturally drawn to him. "He was the kind of guy who could walk into a room and after a half-hour, he'd be friends with everyone."

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Jill Cowan grew up in Orange County, graduated from U.C. Berkeley and has reported all over the state, including the Bay Area, Bakersfield and Los Angeles — but she always wants to see more. Follow along here or on Twitter, [@jillcowan](https://twitter.com/jillcowan).

California Today is edited by Julie Bloom, who grew up in Los Angeles and graduated from U.C. Berkeley.

PHOTO: Representative Katie Porter at home with her son Paul and daughter Betsy in Irvine in March 2019. (PHOTOGRAPH BY Erin Schaff/The New York Times FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES)

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