

But Why: A Podcast for Curious Kids

But Why Live: Kid Press Conference With Governor Phil Scott

June 5, 2020

[Jane] This is But Why: A Broadcast For Curious Kids. I'm Jane Lindholm. For seven weeks this spring, we're bringing our podcast to the airwaves for live radio shows in collaboration with Vermont's Agency of Education to offer kids who are out of school a chance for your own call-in radio show. Now, our show starts right after something called a "press conference". You've probably been hearing about this issue all over the world with a sickness that's sometimes referred to as the "novel coronavirus" or "COVID 19". Because it's such a big deal and has affected so many people, from schools being closed to restaurants and shops also closing and more, and a lot of people getting very sick, our governor here in Vermont has been speaking to the public three times a week. So he stands up in front of several microphones every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and he gives an update on things he thinks the public needs to know. Sometimes other people in state government, like the doctor in charge of our Health Department or people who think about what to do when people lose their jobs, also give an update. And then reporters ask questions and try to get more information or answers to things they think are important or maybe they think aren't being answered fully. But as you might guess, the government officials and the reporters are usually all adults in these press conferences. And we thought you might have some questions that you want answers to as well.

So today we're going to have our own press conference right here on But Why. In just a couple of minutes, we're going to be joined by Vermont's governor, Phil Scott. But before we talk to him, let's get a little bit of an education on what the job of a journalist or a reporter is. Peter Hirschfeld is one of our reporters here at Vermont Public Radio where we make this show. He works in Montpelier, Vermont's state capital, and he often attends press conferences and reports on the work of state government. So we thought he'd be a great person to get some tips from about how to do our press conference. And if you have a question about news or journalism or how reporters work, now is the time to send that to us. You can write to questions@butwhykids.org. We only have about six or seven minutes with Pete, so if you have a journalism question, definitely get that in now. Peter Hirschfeld, nice to talk with you.

[Peter] Good to talk with you, Jane. And I have to tell you, I'm so excited to hear what questions the kids are going to have for the governor today.

[Jane] Yeah, me too. I hope he's prepared. Pete, can you explain just first of all, what a reporter is and generally what a reporter does?

[Peter] We have pretty fun jobs, I have to admit, because we get to spend all day learning about things that are happening in our towns, in the state, in the country and even the world sometimes. And then we write stories based on what we've learned so that we can give people information that, in some cases, might be really important to them. In order to do that job, we have to be kind of like collectors of information. And sometimes we collect that information by reading things like government documents, for example. Sometimes we get information by talking to people like legislators or mayors or the governor or people in our communities or sometimes experts who can help us understand different topics that we might not know that much about. Sometimes we get information just by going to places

and watching things like a select board meeting in a local town or going to the state house to watch committees there make big decisions, or maybe going to something like a protest to learn more about what people are upset about. We have what we call a “representative democracy” in the United States. And that means we elect people to serve in our government and they make really important decisions about how our society is going to work. And what reporters try to do is give people all the information they need so that they can decide whether their government is doing a good job. And sometimes, when a reporter learns about things that maybe aren't going so well, it allows the people who read their stories to ask and demand changes and improvements.

[Jane] Can I highlight one word that you said, because I want to just make sure we're clear on this. You said reporters write “stories”. This is not the kind of story that is fiction, that is made up or not true. What a reporter does has to be based on facts so that when you say you write a story, you're writing something that incorporates what you've heard from other people and what you know to be true and what you have found out. You're not making things up and you're not really sharing your opinion. What's the difference between factual reporting and just telling someone what you think about something?

[Peter] Yeah, that's exactly right, Jane. So this isn't the kind of story that you would read in a picture book, for example, or a novel that is fiction. What reporters are doing is discovering facts and information and then just using those facts and that information in the stories that they write. So even though we call them “stories”, they're not the kinds of stories you might find in some of the books you read at school. One way I like to think about it is there's a big difference between what I *think* and what I *know*. And reporters stick to telling people what they know. Our job is to give the public facts and information so that they can make their own opinions about things. I'll give you an example of something that's happening right now. Governor Scott, who you're going to be talking to soon, wants to make some budget cuts next year because Vermont government doesn't have as much money coming in. But a lot of legislators that work in the statehouse don't want to make budget cuts because they say there's going to be a lot of people that have a lot of needs.

[Jane] And a “budget cut” is when you think you have a certain amount of money to spend, but then actually you're only allowed to spend a little less than that.

[Peter] That's right. You just don't have as much money as you thought you were going to have. So the job of the reporter in telling that story isn't to tell people who's right or wrong, the governor or the legislature. The reporter's job is to collect as much information as possible about their proposals, explain to people what those proposals would do and what they would mean, and then explain the potential consequences of those proposals but then leave it up to other people to decide what they think is the right thing to do.

[Jane] So, Pete, what we're going to do next is have the governor on the program and kids can call in and ask questions that they want the governor's answer to. When you are in a press conference, how do you think about what kind of question you might want to ask someone like the governor and even how you phrase that question to get, you know, what kind of answer you might want?

[Peter] You know, this is a really important point, Jane, because sometimes the way you ask the question has a pretty big effect on the quality of the answer that you're going to get. Sometimes you just want a “yes” or “no” answer and in those cases, you can ask a “yes” or “no” question. But sometimes you want to understand why the governor thinks the way he thinks or you want to understand how he came to a certain decision. So what I like

to do sometimes is to ask "why" questions or to ask "how" questions, because it really does help you get a fuller answer and a better understanding of what's going on in the governor's mind and the decision process, the decision-making process, that he uses. And I also want everybody out there to remember [that] sometimes the governor might not answer your question at first. When that happens, remember, it's OK to have the confidence to push back a little bit. Media, and you're all going to be members of the media today, has a right to ask questions of public officials like Phil Scott, and public officials, like the governor, have a duty to answer them. So ask your questions with the confidence that you deserve answers to those questions.

[Jane] Pete, Ollie asks a question of you: Do journalists write about a certain thing or do they just write about the news in general?

[Peter] That's a great question, Ollie. And it depends on what kind of journalist you are. Some reporters, like me for example, write about all different kinds of things. So each and every day I'm exploring a different topic or a different issue and it could be one thing one day and a totally different thing another day. Other reporters, though, become real experts in certain subject areas and they cover and report on the same issues over many, many years and become real experts in those things.

[Jane] Pete, can I ask you one other question? You know, there's a lot of conflict in the world right now and sometimes people say they don't trust the media. Why do you think that is and what can journalists do to make sure that we have the trust of the people who rely on us for information?

[Peter] Well, I think that there are some media outlets that have done some work that isn't maybe the best possible work they could've done and so that sometimes gives all journalism a bad name. What I think reporters need to do is stick to the basic fundamentals of the profession that they got into. Stick with facts. Stick with the information you know is correct and tell it to people in a way where they get to decide for themselves what their opinion is going to be about it. Don't try to write it in a way that encourages them to come to one opinion or another.

[Jane] That's Peter Hirschfeld. Pete is a reporter with Vermont Public Radio. He does a lot of coverage of state government. Pete, thank you so much for talking with us and helping us understand what reporters do.

[Peter] Thank you, Jane. And have fun with the governor.

[Jane] Thanks. And OK, it's almost time for the governor. So if you have a question for him, if you're a kid, grab your adult and help call A Kid Press Conference with Vermont Governor Phil Scott coming right up on But Why: Live. I'm Jane Lindholm and this is But Why: A Broadcast for Curious Kids. Today, we're going to have a kid press conference with Vermont Governor Phil Scott. Phil Scott has been elected governor twice now, so he's in what's called his "second term". Before that, he spent a long time working in state government as the lieutenant governor and in the Vermont Senate. He's also a race car driver in his spare time, and he worked in the construction business before he became Vermont's governor. For the rest of the hour, Governor Scott is going to join us to answer questions from you. So if you want to ask him about the things that are important to you, from climate change to school policies to what's happening with this virus, now is your chance to speak directly to him. This is a press conference only for kids. So I do hope the adults who are listening will tune in, will listen. But I also hope you'll really follow the spirit

of this idea to let kids have unfiltered access to a top elected official, to share what's really on their minds and what they want answers to. So, kids, the way to do this is give us a call. Governor Phil Scott, thank you for doing this and welcome to But Why.

[Governor Scott] Good afternoon, Jane. You know, first of all, I just want to thank you and VPR for doing this. It's been a challenging time for all of us but particularly our kids and, well, parents who are working, trying to help everyone out and their kids. And not everybody has the same access to programs and so forth, so having something like this where everyone can listen is really helpful. And I know Vermont PBS has been doing some TV programming during the pandemic as well. I just want to thank you both for doing that. It's really essential.

[Jane] Well, I'm really glad you're here and I hope you're prepared, because if you think kid journalists are going to be easier on you than any of us adults journalists.....

[Governor Scott chuckles] I'm not assuming that at all. The other press conferences, they're tough enough, and I know this one will probably be tougher.

[Jane] Well, we're going to start you off with an easy one, maybe, as in it's not about breaking news, but it might require you to think. So here's a question from Evie. But one second, we're getting Evie on the line. Hang on. Alright. Well, we don't have Evie but governor, she says, "I'm nine years old. I live in Essex, Vermont. My question is, 'When you were a kid, did you think you wanted to be governor?'" And Soren in Topsham and Enora in Poultney also asked why you wanted to be governor. So did you always want this and why did you decide you wanted it?

[Governor Scott] That's really not as difficult a question as I might have expected in some ways. I never, ever envisioned myself as governor. It wasn't until later in my life when I was in business that I even considered being involved in public service and politics. I had no interest in politics whatsoever. And then, you know, there was things that were happening in my business that the legislature was affecting and passing laws and I just didn't agree with them, and I started complaining about what they were doing. So at that point, I finally looked myself in the mirror and thought, instead of complaining so much, maybe I should do something about it. Maybe I should run for office, not knowing at all what that meant. And I did. I ran for the State Senate in Washington County and because of my name recognition, notoriety, because of racing, and business, I was elected. But it didn't keep me there. And I found, you know, everything to me before that was black and white. And after being elected, I found out, you know, it's anything but. It's a lot of gray, a lot of thinking, a lot of making sure you're making the decisions for the right reasons. So from there, I just, you know, progressed. I ran for the Senate for five terms and was successful and then was Lieutenant Governor for three terms. And then I didn't see myself, even then, as being governor. But I thought that there was a void, there was a lack of focus on the economy and so forth. So I decided to run and see if I can make a difference.

[Jane] You mentioned something right there at the beginning, though. You said because people knew you a little bit from racing and from being a businessman, maybe that helped you get elected. And there are a lot of people out there who might have really good ideas, but it's hard to be noticed or to be taken seriously for those ideas. Kids especially sometimes feel this. So you had a benefit from the start by being somebody who people knew your name and maybe knew a little bit about you?

[Governor Scott] Yeah, it certainly does help for people to know you. And that's the way you build trust as well, because they do know who you are and what you stand for in other walks of life. Because when some people run for political office, they do it for the wrong reasons. They do it for the notoriety. They do it for the power or to satisfy their ego. They just like "the action", so to speak. And I look at it differently. I think it should be about public service. I think we need more politicians that are like our volunteer firefighters and they're public servants, in that respect. And law enforcement they step up because they want to do too good and to help people. And I think the same thing should take priority as a public official politician.

[Jane] Well, let's go to our calls. And again, kids, if you have a question for Governor Scott, you can give us a call. We have some questions for you about school and about coronavirus. But first, let's go to Avi, who's calling in from Essex Junction, Vermont. Hi, Avi. Nice to talk with you.

[Avi] Hi.

[Governor Scott] Hi, Avi.

[Jane] Do you have a question for the governor?

[Avi] Yeah, my question is, "How did you decide to be governor and what is the hardest thing about it?"

[Jane] That's a good question, Avi. So, Governor Scott has told us a little bit about why he decided he wanted to be governor. But, Governor, what is the hardest thing about being governor?

[Governor Scott] Well, certainly being under scrutiny all the time...

[Jane] And "under scrutiny" means people are always watching what you do.

[Governor Scott] Yeah, sorry. It's like you're in a fishbowl and everybody's watching what you're doing. And there are days when, you know, you don't feel like you're doing exactly what everybody wants but you are doing things for the right reasons. And you have to really reflect on that and think about that and be honest and transparent and, again, to try and describe why you're taking the action you're taking. But from, again, from my standpoint, you lose a lot of your private life because there's so much work to do. And I'm not complaining about that. I signed up for it. But there are things like this situation with the coronavirus and the pandemic that we're facing right now and what happened as a result. No one saw that one coming.

And it's when you're in that position, there's a lot of weight on your shoulders. There's a lot of responsibility there. And I don't take it lightly. And so I work very hard at this, as you should. And are many people who say, "Well, it must be fun to be Governor." And my staff always cringes when I answer the question because it's not fun, nor do I think it should be fun. It's rewarding if you can help people and make things better. But at the same time, it's a lot of work and it should be. And you shouldn't be having fun. If you're having too much fun, you're probably doing it for the wrong reasons or not doing your job. One of the two.

[Jane] Let's go to Grace, who's calling in from Alburgh, Vermont. Hi, Grace.

[Grace] Hi.

[Jane] You're on with the governor, what's your question?

[Grace] My name is Grace Prairie and I am nine years old. My question is, "Will we be able to return to school in the fall?" Because I miss my friends and my teachers at Alburgh School.

[Jane] Grace, that's a good question. You're not the only one who's wondering that. A lot of other kids are sending in questions about school, as well. Governor, lots of kids wondering...is school going to start in the fall...including Violet, who's five and lives in Jericho, and Cooper, also. So what's your answer to Grace?

[Governor Scott] Yeah. Grace, Violet, Cooper and everyone else. And all your parents. Everyone's wondering the same thing. You know, our intentions are that we will go back to school. We need to make sure that we're doing it in a safe manner. It may be different when we go back in the fall, but we have every intention of moving in that direction. When this first happened, you know, it hit us a bit by surprise. And I would say there's no real playbook on this. You know, nobody's had to do this in my lifetime. So we had to figure this out as we moved forward and the bottom line for me is public safety, keeping people safe and healthy. So closing the schools was one of the hardest decisions I had to make. But what the data was telling us, what the numbers were telling us was we needed to keep people apart, separated so that we wouldn't transmit and cause undue harm to the vast majority of Vermonters. But, at this time, I'm thinking we're going to be able to go back to school. We're working very hard to come up with a plan to do just that. But again, it may not be quite the same as it was when you left, but you know how important it is to get you back together with your friends because that social interaction is important.

[Jane] Well, Oren wants to know about what's actually going to happen with passing grades. Oren says, "I was wondering what would happen to the kids who pass their grade. Are they going to stay back because of Covid or move up?" So will kids who weren't able to be in class for the last few months going to go into the next grade or not?

[Governor Scott] This is probably a better question [for my Cabinet members]. And what that means is I have a number of people who advise me as part of my team. And one of them would be the Secretary of Education and it might be a better question for him. But I believe I have this right, that you're just going to move to the next grade like you normally would. And then there's going to be a lot of work involved in making sure that everybody is up to speed and gets to the same level. So, at this point in time, that's what I believe is going to happen.

[Jane] Let's go to Aurora who's calling in from Wethersfield, Vermont. Hey, Aurora. What's your question for the governor?

[Aurora] Hi. My question is, "What are you going to do if schools don't open up in the fall?"

[Jane] Good question.

[Governor Scott] Yeah, that is a great question. And there's many people who have said because we don't know what the virus is going to do....it's hard to control it until we have a vaccine or we can make sure that people aren't susceptible to transmitting or receiving the virus...we have to play it by ear, so to speak. So, at this point, if we weren't able to safely

go back to school, we would have to do more distance learning like you been doing and do it better than we've been doing. Obviously, I think everyone did a great job in coming together: you, your parents, your teachers, everyone trying to do whatever they could to make it as normal, as effective as possible, but we can always improve. And we hope that that isn't the case, where we have to determine that the school isn't safe to go to in the fall but, at this point, I'm going to be the eternal optimist and say that I'm hopeful that we're going to be able to get back to normal.

[Jane] Who gets to decide that? You make some decisions but you mentioned the "Cabinet", and that's not something that you put dishes in, it's a bunch of people that you have chosen to help work with you to make important policy decisions. But then do individual schools also get to make their own decisions? How does it work?

[Governor Scott] It's going to be a collective decision based on a lot of input with the Cabinet or my team. Again, we have different areas of expertise, but we're also interconnected in many different ways and trying to work as a team. We have a Commissioner of Health, Dr. Levine, who is in my press conferences almost every every week. We do those three times a week and he's there to answer questions. And he's, again, a doctor so that he wants to do whatever he can to keep people safe. That's his job and he advises me on how to do that. So we have a Secretary of Human Services that as has a lot of input as well. So we have a lot of people who are trying to advise us on this, as well as the Secretary of Education, as well as the individual schools and so forth. So again, when this first happened, we didn't know much about this virus or how contagious it was, how it was going to affect us. So we took steps to make sure that we protect the people as best we could. And I think that we took the right steps at that point. But now that we know a little bit more about it, we have more testing ability, we have a way of tracing. When somebody becomes contagious and gets the virus, then we trace who they come in contact with to make sure that they're not spreading it. We're doing more and more and more of that. We built up our capacity to do that. In fact, we had a situation in Winooski this week, it's happening right now, but we're able to contain it by boxing it in, so to speak, and make sure that it doesn't spread any further. And I'm hopeful that we're going to...until a vaccine comes about that's safe and effective...we're going to be able to, if we have an outbreak, we're going to be able to box it in in a specific area so that it doesn't affect the entire state. Because as we've seen, some areas of the state have not seen any effects from this and other parts have have certainly seen a lot of devastation. And that's the way it's been throughout the United States. Some areas, some states aren't as affected as some, and many, like New York, have been devastating for many. So, hopefully, in the fall we'll be able to take a more strategic approach so we don't have to take and close all schools. If there's an outbreak, we might have to close for a little bit, but then get back to normal as soon as we contain.

[Jane] So we're talking with Governor Phil Scott here in our Kids Press Conference on But Why. And we're talking about school policy right now and particularly what's happening with schools being able to reopen or not reopen in the fall because of the novel coronavirus, Covid 19. We have lots of questions about Covid 19 as well. And Governor Phil Scott is not a doctor. He has a doctor in the Health Department who advises him, but he does know some about it and also directs state policy, what the rules are around the coronavirus and what you can and can't do in the state. So he's a good person to ask those questions of. Governor, just briefly, before we leave the school conversation, Gavin in Cornwall wants to know, "Will we have to wear masks if we go back to school in the fall?"

[Governor Scott] Gavin, I don't have the answer to that either. We know that wearing a mask prevents you from spreading it as easily as without a mask because it comes from some of the droplets. And when we speak, sometimes we have droplets coming out of our mouth and that can transmit, to others, the virus. So we'll just have to play this one by ear. There'll be some guidelines. Again, that's what I was alluding to, that things are going to be different than before. But one never knows. If there's a vaccine before that or we find different strategies to keep us from spreading this, maybe we won't have to. But again, at this point, we're just going to have to wait and see how this progresses.

[Jane] All right. Here's another question that we got before the show from Henry.

[Henry] Hi, Governor Scott. My name is Henry. I'm 10 years old and I'm from Fairfax, Vermont. I have a friend who doesn't have the best internet and it's hard for him to do school work. What can you do to help him?

[Jane] Governor, what can you do for those who don't have good Internet?

[Governor Scott] Yeah, this is one of the areas that really has been highlighted throughout this pandemic, particularly when we had to close the schools and everyone's staying at home. We put that "Stay Home, Stay Safe" order in place. We didn't travel about. So we found... and it was something we knew before...but it really, really emphasized the need for more broadband throughout the state. So in some of the recovery packages that we've talked about where we want to focus on that, I've been advocating for Congress, those in Washington, D.C., to really look at this as an opportunity to build out the capacity in some of our rural parts of America, throughout the United States, that don't have broadband. And Vermont has a fair amount that doesn't.

[Jane] And when you say "broadband", I mean just basically speaking, that means a strong internet connection.

[Governor Scott] Yeah. Like something you can work from an internet connection. And there was a time when, in Vermont and throughout the United States, we didn't have a lot of electricity. Electricity wasn't to every home. So there was this thing called the RDA, the Rural Electrification Act. And that was done by Congress to get electricity to every home and business throughout Vermont and throughout the United States. And I think that that's the type of approach we need to take now. I mean, it's become an essential part of our way of life. So if we can get Congress...because it's very expensive, it costs a lot of money. If it didn't cost a lot of money, we would've done it before now. But we're going to need some help from Washington to do this. And I think this could be a national type of approach as we move forward and we make things better. And that will make things better in the future for distance learning and for remote working and so forth. And we need to attract more people to the state and that might be helpful.

[Jane] So we got a note from Cameron, who's in the third grade at Malletts Bay in Colchester. And Cameron is apparently writing an essay for school on the topic of uniforms. And the question is, "What is Governor Scott's opinion about uniforms in our public schools?"

[Governor Scott] Uniforms are something that has come up from time to time. You know, there's a couple of different thoughts on that. And from my perspective, I think it's up to the schools and the local communities to decide that. Some people think it puts everyone on the same playing field, so to speak. Everyone's the same, then, so that somebody doesn't

have better shoes than someone else or better clothes than someone else. [00:30:50] So it puts everyone on an equal footing and others feel that it just marginalizes and there's lack of expression and so there's been resistance to that in some areas and some schools, private schools, have made it mandatory. So I think, from my perspective, I think that's a local decision made by school boards and supervisory unions and leaders within the community, not something that we would do on a statewide basis.

[Jane] Let's go to Patrick, who is calling in from Westford, Vermont. Hi, Patrick.

[Patrick] Hello, Mr. Governor. My name is Patrick. I'm nine years old and I'm from Westford, Vermont. I know there are a lot of kids in Vermont who play sports every year. My question is, "Will there be little league this year and, if so, what will it look like?"

[Jane] What about Little League? Lots of us want to know.

[Governor Scott] Patrick, thanks very much. And I take it you're probably a player and so you have an interest in this. But stay tuned. We are working on that as we speak because I want to get the kids back to playing and having some fun this summer. So we're working with the Health Department and Dr. Levine and others to see how we can do this safely. And the rule might change again, not drastically, but right now we have allowed for you to get out there and throw the ball around as long as there's no contact and you keep separated. But we're looking at a way to get sports back for kids, back to somewhat normal. So it may not be as many people in the dugout, for instance. You might have to separate yourself there. There might be a few things like that, making sure all the gear is wiped down and so forth. But again, I think that will happen fairly soon. And you shouldn't miss, hopefully won't miss, any of the season as a result.

[Jane] Andrew, who is eleven and lives in Hinesburg, had the same question for you. And Brody, who is actually a high schooler in Cabot, wants to know any information on fall sports coming along and the guidelines for that. Same as what you're talking about.

[Governor Scott] Yeah, it's the same kind of thing. You know, if we can prove ourselves, that's part of the thought process from my standpoint, is if we can do this for Little League and in other summer sports and fall sports, then we can open it up and hopefully have it for the school year as well. So, again, I have high hopes that we'll be able to have sports back in schools.

[Jane] Prudence is seven and lives in Essex and wants to know, "Do you have Secret Service like the President?"

[Governor Scott] Well, they're not so secret, but I do have security that drives me around and tries to protect me if I need protecting. But we're pretty fortunate here in this state. And so, basically, with them driving...which has been very difficult for me, you know...probably if you asked me what's the most difficult part of my job, and part of that is losing the ability to drive because they don't let me drive anywhere. And I love to drive. I mean, I race cars. I used to drive tens of thousands of miles every year. I have all kinds of motorcycles and so forth. But I don't get to utilize them as much. But it does give me an opportunity...when during normal times, when we're driving around the state going to different events...where I can read and I can write and I can do my homework, so to speak, while we're traveling. So it's been beneficial from that perspective. And we're just trying to make sure they get me to places on time and keep me safe.

[Governor Scott] Brady is in fourth grade in Tunbridge and, speaking of driving, says, "Why did you retire being a great race car driver?"

[Governor Scott] Well, I haven't retired, you know, I've limited. I don't race as much as I used to. And certainly this year is going to be different. I don't know if there's going to be a season or not, just like in any other sport. But I did race last year. I won a race last summer. So I haven't lost all my skills. I'm not as good as I once was, but I still enjoy it. And if I have the opportunity again, I hope to race a few more times before I hang up my helmet.

[Jane] So the Secret Service...not Secret Service...but your security detail does allow you to drive your own car if you're racing?

[Governor Scott] They do. It's contained. You know, they're there in the pit area to make sure that you keep safe but once I'm strapped in, they let me go. They wouldn't want to ride with me anyhow.

[Jane] Everett is four and lives in East Montpelier and says, "How much do you get paid?"

[Governor Scott] It's around...I pay attention a lot to that...but it's a lot of money. It's about a \$170,00 every year. The most I've ever made in my life.

[Jane] This is But Why: A Broadcast for Curious Kids. I'm Jane Lindholm. And today we're holding a Kid Press Conference with Vermont Governor Phil Scott. If you're a kid and you have a question for him, give us a call. We're mostly taking calls this hour so we can make sure we prioritize the voices of young people and offer you a chance to speak directly with the top elected official in Vermont. And we're also hoping this gives you a sense of what happens in an adult press conference and the role you might play as a journalist if you want to become a reporter when you grow up. We've got a question from Araya, who's 10, and Frank, who's eight, in Essex Junction. And Governor, they say, "What are your thoughts about having more black police officers so that black people don't feel scared about white people?"

[Governor Scott] Yeah, we could use a more diversity in Vermont. I'm pleased to announce, though, and maybe you've reported this, maybe you've heard, but we have a new police chief here in Montpelier. That's where the Capital is. And he's black. So this is a step in the right direction. I think he's going to be the first chief in the state in history that is black. So I think this is good news. We need more people from different perspectives and we need more people in general. So I think that's a great step in the right direction.

[Jane] What do you do about the fact, though, that, you know, we're talking about this a lot in our country right now. There's lots of questions about this in my household. It's sometimes confusing, sometimes scary, really hard for all kinds of kids to think through and understand and deal with. And some of them are dealing with this directly. They're experiencing racism in their own lives. How should we be addressing that in Vermont more than just hiring a black police chief? What else do we need to be doing?

[Governor Scott] You know, what we should really do is take a step back and realize that we're all people. There shouldn't be any difference in how we treat one person than another. And if we just keep reminding ourselves to treat others the way we want to be treated, with respect and civility, I think it would go a long ways. And I've tried to do that throughout my whole life, regardless of who you are, or where you come from, what your

political beliefs are, how much money you have, what race you are, what political persuasion you are. It doesn't matter. Each and every one of us has a right to be who we want to be. And I believe that we should be treated with respect. And so it's in our hands. We have the ability to change that. If we see something happening that's not right, we should call it out. And we should step up and lead. And I think that we need more people to...whether it's leadership in the political level or in businesses or schools... we just need better role models. We need people. And you kids can be role models for others. You don't have to be older to be a role model. We want to make sure that we're all, our parents, are doing the right things as well. We've learned from you. So step up. Teach us.

[Jane] Timothy is calling in from Fairfax, Vermont. Hi, Timothy. You're next. What's your question for the Governor?

[Timothy] Hi. My question is, "I feel that the Electoral College is not very fair and doesn't give everybody a fair say on who is elected. So how can we make voting more fair?"

[Governor Scott] Yeah, you know, that's a debate that's being had or we have been having for quite some time. It was put in place to really help some of the small states, in some respect, and we're one of the smallest states with not a lot of population. So it prevents...and again, everyone has a different opinion on this...but it prevents like the big states from just having all of the power. And so that's been the debate in this. I don't know if it's better to have a popular vote or not. And I know, even with the Electoral College, we don't we don't have a lot of say. But again, it's a debate that we'll probably continue to have. I'm not sure that's going to change anytime soon. But who knows, if you have an interest in that, you should have the debates in school and then determine, you know, let's change things if they aren't moving in the right direction.

[Jane] Chevonne is calling in from Edison, New Jersey. Chevonne, hi. What's your question for Governor Scott? Chevonne, are you there? Go right ahead.

[Chevonne] Hi, I'm Chevonne. I am seven years old. I live in Edison, New Jersey. And my question is, "How will you deal with the reopening of school right after the pandemic?"

[Jane] Yeah. So we've talked a little bit about school, Governor. But, you know, Chevonne asks a good question. How do you deal with this and how do you sort of think about how to make this work?

[Governor Scott] Yeah. Again, Chevonne, thanks very much for calling in. I think what we have to do is make sure, first of all, prioritize what is it that we need to do. We need to provide a safe atmosphere for everyone to come back in. What is that going to look like? Are we going to have to space ourselves out more? Are we going to have to wear masks? Are we going to continue to disinfect things, the things we touch, and really pay attention to that? If there's one thing that all of you can do, regardless of whether it's now, at home or whether you go out or go back to school, wash your hands all the time. That's one of the most important things to do. Keep separated as best you can. Wash your hands every chance you get. And that eliminates the virus from spreading. [00:42:18] So we're just going to have to really think about doing things differently because it's not going to be the same as it was before. But we can do it and we can do it safely. We just have to be smart about it.

[Jane] Here's a question that we got from Theo.

[Theo] I'm seven years old and I live in Georgia, Vermont and my question for Governor Scott is, "How busy are you?"

[Governor Scott] Well, thanks very much. Pretty... very busy, especially these days. I came from construction, so I worked long days before. I get up early. I get up at four thirty in the morning. I get to work around six thirty. And I typically have always worked until six thirty or so at night. And then I go home and work some more. But in the past, I've had some free time where at different times during the day I might be able to get out on my bicycle or something and get some exercise or on weekends, get to do something more fun. But for the last three months or so or more now, it's been seven days a week. I come into work almost every day, participate in a lot of conference calls, work late into the night, trying to prepare for the next day and making all kinds of decisions; a lot of conference calls, video conferences, and teleconferences and so forth. So it's been a changed world for me, as well. But my days aren't typically too much longer than normal. But there are just a lot more of them. There's not many breaks.

[Jane] Well, along those lines, Juniper, who's nine and lives in Essex, says, "When something really hard happens at your job like a pandemic, do you think, 'Why me?'"

[Governor Scott] No, I think, "Why *us*?" You know, I don't feel sorry for me. I feel sorry for us as a society. And I feel bad for how this has affected everyone in some way, every single one of us and some more than others. It just seems so unfair because they didn't ask for this. You know, some of these business owners who've worked their whole life, their whole life trying to build this business, everything they have is in there. They don't have retirement accounts. They don't have any of that. But they had their business. And to see it evaporate, going away right before their eyes through no fault of their own, it just seems so unfair. And I see this time and time and time again. And I think it's just discouraging, what's happened. But, at the same time, we've seen a lot of creativity. We've seen where we've rallied. We've seen where we've come together. I believe this is a moment in time where we can be inspired. We can do things different. And we can rally and come out of this stronger than before. So there's going to be an upside to this. But right now, it's just very, very difficult when I see how much it's affected people throughout the state.

[Jane] Lots of kids are asking questions as well about, you know, what should they be feeling and thinking about getting together? Stella, who's eleven and in Essex says, "I'm super nervous about Covid 19. Is it safe for me to go to my friend's house, swim in their pool and play inside?" Archer is nine and lives in Brattleboro and says, "Why do we have the opportunity to do more things now, like go play with friends? Is it safer?" And Zander, who's ten in Brownington says, "When will we be able to see our friends and not have to worry about getting the virus?"

[Governor Scott] Yeah. All good questions and I don't have the answers to all of that. But we've learned a lot during this pandemic over the last three or four months about how this spreads and what we can do to prevent it. As long as we take precautions, you can go to your friends', as long as you know your friends, and don't get into groups of a big mass. Mass gatherings are part of the problem where you don't know the people you're interconnecting with. So those are the types of things you have to wonder about. But if you know your friends, you know their family and you know that they've been doing everything right, then there's no reason to think that you can't go visit and you can't have some fun and can't go to their pool and so forth. Just, again, remember: wash your hands. Try to take some precautions as much as you can, but enjoy yourself at the same time. And

[about] getting back. Well, I don't know when we'll get back to normal, but until we have some sort of vaccine to prevent this...because this is just another virus, this is like the flu or anything else, it's just that it's brand new. And we don't have anything, no immunity to this in our bodies. So we have a tough time fighting it off. So until we have a vaccine to help us with that, it's going to be a bit problematic. You know, it'll be with us until then.

[Jane] Yeah. Jack in Essex wanted to know when there will be a vaccine. And that's sort of up to the doctors and researchers and the healthcare professionals who are working really hard.

[Governor Scott] And they're working very hard on that, too, and very quickly, hopefully sometime in the near future. But we have to make sure it's safe, too. You can't just determine to have a vaccine without making sure that you're not doing more harm than good.

[Jane] All right. So last question here. And this is going to put you on the spot and on the record. Amelia is in fifth grade at Rick Marcotte Central School in South Burlington. And her question is, "Where is the best place to get a creemee in Vermont?"

[Governor Scott laughing] Well, there's a lot of good places to get a creemee, depends on where you're from. Some of the best creemees....well, I know there's Burlington Bay there in Burlington down by the lakefront. They have good creemees. There's a place right down here in Montpelier....The Dairy Creme. That is another great place. But I don't think you can have a bad creemee, to be honest with you. I think they're all good.

[Jane] Pete Hirschfeld said, "Kids should have the confidence to say 'You didn't answer my question'...." You didn't pick a best place! You're not going to give us one place as the definitive creemee spot in Vermont?

[Governor Scott] Again, I like them all! So I go to the one here locally. Any one I come across I would go to if I could.

[Jane] Well, that's all the time we have for this hour. Governor Phil Scott, the governor of Vermont, I want to thank you for joining us and answering kids questions today.

[Governor Scott] Again, thank you very much, Jane. I appreciate having the opportunity to talk to them. And kids, be safe out there. Have some fun. This will be over soon. So just keep your heads up.

[Jane] Well, thank you very much, Governor. That's Governor Phil Scott, the governor of Vermont. And thanks to you, our listeners, for all of your great questions today. Be sure to come back next Friday, June 12th. We're going to be learning about trees and how trees communicate with each other and their ecosystem. How cool is that? You can send questions to questions@butwhykids.org and listen live next Friday at 1:00. I'm Jane Lindholm. We want you to stay curious. Keep asking questions. And thank you.