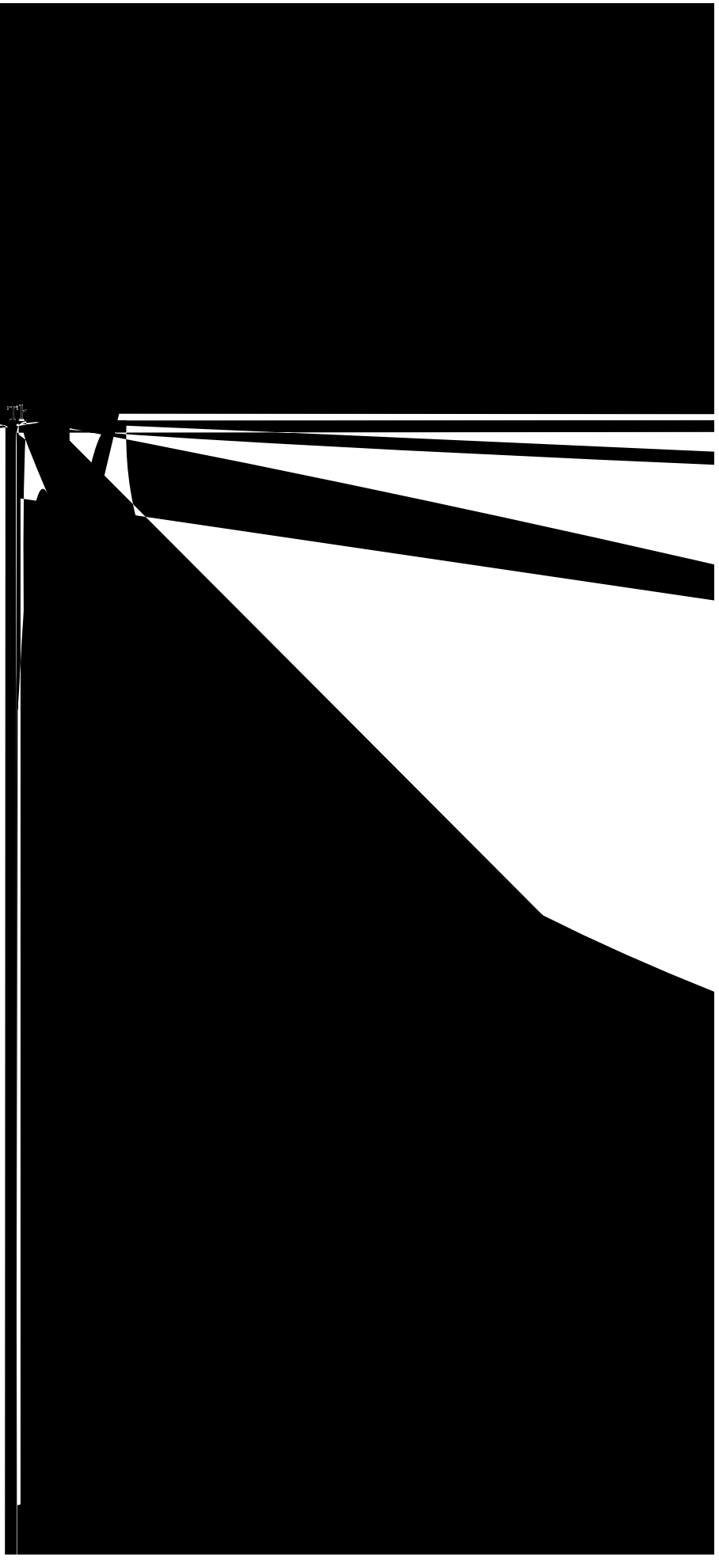
Going through Hell wit

By Carl Golden | June 15, 2020, 9:33 am | i



From public grumbling to petition drives to pockets of open defiance, resentment is growing over the slow pace of lifting restrictions on business activity and over what many feel is the unequal application of prohibitions or limits on public gatherings.

Murphyĉs been largely unmoved, though, and last week embraced a ċDonĉt Tread On MeČ moment when he sought and won a court injunction against the City of Asbury Park (https://www.insidernj.com/judge-grants-murphys-request-asbury-park-case/), striking down a local decision to permit inside dining at restaurants.

It was the most dramatic indication yet that Murphy is not to be trifled with, that when it comes to enforcing his executive orders, heĉll not hesitate to put his muscle where his mouth is.

Push came to shove in the Asbury Park confrontation and it was the governor who did the shoving. It sent an unmistakable message to others around the state ć individuals or businesses ć who were contemplating violating restrictions that they should think twice lest they, too, find themselves caught up in litigation which theyĉd likely lose.

The swift reaction to the Asbury Park government effort to override the state-ordered directives overshadowed Murphyĉs earlier political misjudgment that invited a storm of criticism when he and his wife ć both wearing masks ć joined anti-police brutality protest marches striding shoulder to shoulder with dozens of others while such activities as backyard birthday parties and graduation ceremonies were permitted only if a limited number of attendees stayed six feet apart.

No matter the sincerity of the protest marchersĉ motives, Murphy should have foreseen the reaction violating his own executive orders would attract.

His rationale that lending his support to the protest marches was a moral and deeply held imperative that outweighed the public health protections required of others was a thin attempt at damage control.

That the incident infuriated an already frustrated citizenry chafing under government ordered home confinement, anxious over their employment situation and eager to resume daily routines should have surprised no one.

It was a political gift to Republicans who stepped up their criticisms of the governor as an autocrat who exempted himself from the executive order demands he imposed on the rest of the stateĉs people.

Murphyĉs actions, they said, were hypocrisy writ large, an egregious example of disdain for directives he demanded everyone else obey.

He attempted a day later to recoup the higher ground by exempting similar demonstrations from the ban on large gatherings while urging all involved in them to undergo testing for the infections as soon as possible and to act accordingly in response to the results.

The damage had already been done, though. It was another self-inflicted public relations wound for an Administration which has experienced its share of them and which could have and should have been avoided with a bit more thought.

Since the onset of the pandemic ćĆ the most serious and dangerous public health crisis in a century ć Murphy has, on balance, responded well.