Gillibrand visits Saranac Lake lab immersed in COVID research

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SARANAC LAKE, N.Y. (WCAX) - Research continues around the world to look for COVID-19 treatments and a vaccine, and some of that work is taking place in our region.

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand visited the Trudeau Institute in Saranac Lake Wednesday to get an update on some of the research.

The Trudeau Institute is well known for its studies on infectious diseases in the lungs and immune system. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the lab has switched its focus to helping the local hospital and looking for a way to prevent people from getting the virus.
"The connection between science, health care and business has never been more clear, and also I would say government, and that is so important to us," said the institute's president, Atsuo Kuki.

The institute is giving up a portion of its lab for sterilizing the Adirondack Medical Center's PPE and helping with pop-up testing sites when the region needed to meet certain testing requirements.

Kuki says when it comes to vaccines, it's all about team science and that the institute is working with other large groups globally. Their internal research surrounds therapeutics that can block the virus but there is no current timeline when the vaccine could be ready.

"It is something we are turning on very, very quickly and we've already got promising results. In a very short period of time we can start to block the virus in limited settings and we need to scale it up and really test our ideas," Kuki said.

Sen. Gillibrand says the institute is one of the many New York labs working on a vaccine. "I think the diversity of their work is what sets them apart and I think the kind of work they are doing is like a national research lab on a much smaller scale," she said.
Gillibrand says on a global scale there are about 100 vaccines in the works. "In the U.S., at least a dozen are considered to be promising, so the government right now is investing in many of them," she said.

Gillibrand says she hopes that federal dollars will go to labs like the Trudeau Institute, working for a cure and helping their local health care facilities. She says she’s pushing for that funding to come from the next federal COVID relief package. “Our hope is to spend billions of dollars in finding a vaccine and finding therapeutics, so hopefully that money will flow and will come to places like the Trudeau, because they are on the forefront of this research,” Gillibrand said.

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