

## CORONAVIRUS REFLECTIONS

Scary! Weird! Strange! Lonely! Tragic! Otherworldly! Unsettling! These are just a few words that neighbors have used to describe what we are all now experiencing. It is safe to say, none of us, unless we are over a hundred-years old, have lived through anything like the Coronavirus Pandemic. In a sense, the whole world has been brought to a halt. Everything we were doing before the middle of March has been put on hold.



For activists this period of time is particularly challenging. Instead of doing something, we are told that the best thing we can do to save lives and to bring COVID-19 under control is to stay home and do nothing. It is requiring us to draw on inner resources that aren't normally needed in our day to day lives. On a positive note, neighbor's that you hardly spoke to in the past are reaching out and asking whether you are coping and in need of supplies.

Then there is the issue of public leadership and government responses. State Governors such as Andrew Cuomo of New York and Mike DeWine of Ohio have been the leaders who have stepped up to the plate to protect their citizens and to provide health services to those threatened by the virus. These Governors led the way in establishing the stay-at-home mandates and other health regulations. Governor Cuomo's daily briefings, which provide factual and sensible updates about the crisis in New York and New York City, offer a positive contrast to the briefings offered by President Trump.

Congress has also taken swift action. Overcoming the current polarized political environment, the House and the Senate negotiated and voted in a bipartisan fashion to enact three laws that provide funding to address the economic crises created by the Pandemic. This legislation allocates financial assistance to individuals, state governments, and small and large businesses. More Congressional action will undoubtedly be needed.

It's a good thing that Congress and state and local officials have by and large been there for their constituents. The response from the Trump Administration not only came far too late, but it has failed to adequately supply the states with essential supplies such as respirators and masks. In terms of guidelines and information about the virus, several health experts such Dr. Anthony Fauci have been strong voices for reason and science within the Administration's Coronavirus Task Force. However, President Trump undercuts the advice of these experts with his adlib-remarks at the daily briefings.

Except for the presentations of Dr. Fauci and other health officials, the daily briefings from the White House take on the unreality of a poor Reality-TV program. The President's stream of consciousness ramblings are full of misinformation and self-congratulations about the "terrific job" his Administration is doing. He refuses to take responsibility for the crises mounting on the front lines in terms of supplies, and he has actually attacked the Governors of Washington and Michigan for not being thankful enough. At these events, he seldom passes up a chance to attack "the fake news" that he declares wrongfully criticizes his "best ever" policies and actions.

Since he sees these briefings as all about him, he communicates little empathy for the health care workers who put their lives on the line each day and for the individuals and families suffering from the impact of COVID-19.

The failed leadership of the President during this Coronavirus Pandemic, when added to his other harmful policies and impeachable offenses, reinforce the importance of November's election. The current crisis has already played havoc with the spring primaries, and Americans need to be assured that a fair and safe process for conducting the fall election will be in place for voters.

One simple way to accomplish this goal is to copy the voting system of the state of Washington. Voting in Washington is now all done by mail. Registered voters automatically receive a ballot by mail, and they simply mark their choices and mail it back to the Board of Elections. Even though Washington was in the midst of the Pandemic when it held its primary, its voting took place easily and efficiently.

Although we may experience a break in the spreading of COVID-19 by late spring or early summer, health experts are warning that we could experience a second round of the virus this fall. Knowing this possibility now gives public officials plenty of time to put in place voting procedures that cannot be disrupted by the threat of the virus and the need for social distancing. Citizens, however, cannot assume that such steps will be taken.

Activists must get behind citizen groups such as Common Cause and the League of Women Voters that are already advocating to insure easily accessible and safe voting procedures that will prevent any interruptions in this November's election cycle. Powerful opposition to their initiatives already exists. Although no evidence or research supports his claim, the President is publicly attacking voting by mail as "a terrible system that leads to widespread voter fraud."

Meanwhile, Republican legislators in a number of states continue to promote legislation that makes it more difficult for people to vote. Thus, major grassroots efforts on voting rights and election protection will have to be mounted in the coming months. Therefore, if the best we can do now is stay home and practice social distancing, we can also stay informed and prepare for needed civic action in the summer and fall.