

Have The United States Won?

The last several days, Governor Cuomo of New York, along with some of the other badly hit states have been announcing that they've hit the high point in the Coronavirus crisis.

That's good news, and it has come a week sooner than expected. Not only that, but current computer modeling shows that both total cases and total deaths here in the United States are going to be much lower than originally predicted.

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Apparently the drastic action we've taken over the last month has worked. At least, that's what the experts are telling us.

So, is it time to call it a win and get our lives back to normal?

I ask this question seriously, mostly because we, as a country, as a society, can't continue to survive in lockdown mode forever. Every day we remain in lockdown more people are furloughed from their jobs and we get a little bit closer to the Second Great Depression. There are already states where the unemployment rate is higher than the 24.9% they suffered then.

There are some people out there who are posing this question as if it's a difference between saving lives or saving the economy. Mostly, those are people who oppose the current administration and are trying to make it sound like the president is willing to trade lives away in order to save the

economy. In other words, it's a political move to try and make the president look bad like he doesn't care about people's lives.



What those people aren't taking into account is the cost in lives of keeping the nation in lockdown. We currently have nationwide unemployment of over 10%, almost identical with what we had in the 2008/2009 Great Recession. Studies show that a high level of unemployment costs lives. There was a higher rate of heart disease, cancer, and other life-taking diseases, due to the stress people were experiencing as their economic lives shattered.

So restarting the economy isn't a choice between lives and the economy, it's a choice between lives and lives as well.

The big difference is whether we're talking people who die of COVID-19 or whether they die of other medical problems.

What the Lockdown was All About

We've got to understand what we're doing here. There are many people talking today as if the lockdown was initiated to

eliminate COVID-19. It a bit of a “pie in the sky” attitude, that once we come off the lockdown, a vaccine will have been developed and the disease will be defeated. Sadly, that’s just not true.

The recommendations that President Trump put out were never with the intent of defeating the disease. If we ever manage to defeat it, it will be the work of years. In all of history, there has only been one disease that has been fully eradicated worldwide; that was smallpox. It was declared eradicated by the WHO (World Health Organization) in 1979; and even though it has been declared to be eradicated, there are still cases. It’s just not commonplace anymore, with less than 1,000 cases per year, here in the United States.

We need to be clear about this. The lockdown orders that various governors have issued, in response to Trump’s recommendations for social distancing, weren’t ever going to eradicate the disease. Rather, they were intended to flatten the curve, slowing the spread of the disease, so that our medical community across the nation could prepare to receive and provide supportive care to all the serious cases of COVID-19 we were expecting.

In the case of this disease, as with many viral diseases, medical science is limited in what they can do. Antibiotics don’t work on viruses and there are very few antiviral medications around. Those that do exist, are for very specific diseases; they aren’t general like antibiotics are.

All doctors can do for a viral infection like COVID-19 is providing supportive care. In other words, helping keep the

patient's body alive, while their autoimmune system defeats the disease. That's why ventilators are so important with a respiratory infection like this. Since the lungs aren't able to do their job properly, bringing enough oxygen into the body, the ventilators help keep people from dying from lack of oxygen, while their bodies fight the disease.

I am totally in agreement with the lockdown orders that have gone out. My wife and I have been working from home, only going out when necessary, in compliance with those orders. We started masking and wearing gloves before the CDC recommended it. We've been decontaminating everything that comes through our door for weeks now. I've even decontaminated our car when we've gone out. I've done everything I can to make sure that we don't get the disease and that we don't spread it if we happened to contract it.

As far as I'm concerned, what we're doing is being part of the solution; responsible citizens; rather than being part of the problem. But we have never have looked at the lockdown as a "cure" for the disease.

So, has it worked?

From all evidence I can see, the social distancing, people staying at home and other actions that have been taken are all working to do just what they are supposed to do; flatten the curve. In doing so, it has become possible for the nation's doctors and hospitals to treat those who become infected with COVID-19. That's good. That's what we want. That's saving lives.



Unfortunately, some are taking this to mean that the stay at home orders were unnecessary and that the government overreacted. According to that point of view, the models have been wrong all along and the government allowed panicking doctors to lead them around by the nose. That's not surprising actually; I predicted that action weeks ago. But that doesn't make it true. The situation in our country has changed, due to the actions that people have been taking.

It's not even the government that has made the difference; although government actions and proclamations have pushed the population in a pre-determined direction. But if you look at the timing of grocery stores limiting the number of people in the store, restaurants shifting over to curbside service and churches opting to have online virtual services, rather than congregating as normal, all of those actions predated any government orders. We the People, in response to the President's guidelines, have taken those actions on our own, before any of the governors instituted to stay at home orders.

Whether you call this wisdom on the part of

the people who have taken those actions or panic, it has had the desired effect. New cases of the disease have been dropping off in the last few days and the disease peak has been lower than expected.

Even if you don't believe the government's numbers on that, you can't deny the more obvious evidence. The Army field hospital that had been set up in Washington state, the first state affected by the pandemic, has been taken down and closed up, without treating a single case. The Navy's two hospital ships, each capable of treating 1,000 patients, have treated less than 20 COVID-19 cases between them. That's with one of those ships being sent to Los Angeles and the other to New York City, both hotspots for the disease.

So as I said, it looks like we're winning this battle. No, that doesn't mean that we've defeated the SARS-CoV-2 virus forever; nor does it mean that we are all safe from coming down with COVID-19. I honestly don't think we'll ever be able to say that. Rather, I think this disease, like the flu, is here to stay. But at least we're at the point where our medical system can treat those who need it.

So does that mean it's time to return to some sort of "normal" life again?

That's the question that now has to be faced at all government levels, as well as in our own minds and hearts. At some point, we need to start seeing beyond the pandemic and looking at

what sort of life we're going to have afterward. Is now the time?

The Cure Can't be Worse than the Disease

Right now we're in danger of the cure becoming worse than the disease. The massive spending bill that Congress has approved is only a temporary measure. While I will welcome my \$1,200 like anyone else, I recognize that it's not going to solve the problems of people who are out of work. That's not enough for them to live on, even when added to their unemployment.



But the bigger concern, at least in my mind, is all the small businesses that are being hurt by the lockdown. Most of our restaurants are privately owned, even the big chains, which are mostly franchised. On top of that, there are countless small stores, hair salons, and other businesses that are suffering right now, because everyone is staying at home. Many of these businesses are going to be hard-pressed to survive if they can survive at all.

The massive Coronavirus spending bill has several facets to it, including the aforementioned individual payments. It even has money for small businesses... or what is reported to be

money for small businesses. But I'll have to say, with the rules in place, I think the help for small businesses was really done to encourage small business owners to continue paying their employees, and not to help them keep their businesses afloat. There is almost no help for that.

Here's the deal. The money for small businesses is in the form of loans. Considering that most small businesses operate on a slim margin, with the business owner making a middle-class or lower-middle-class income, paying whatever loan they take out will mean them paying that back out of their profits, in other words, out of their pockets. So they'll be taking a 10% or more pay cut for the next several years, on top of the money they're losing right now.

There is a provision in the bill, which allows those small business owners debt forgiveness for that loan, if they keep all their employees on the payroll, making the same amount of money that they normally would. That sounds good; but since the small business owners have to use 75% of the loan to pay their employees, it doesn't do a thing to help them pay the rest of the costs of keeping their business open. So, unless they are able to generate enough earnings to pay those bills, they're facing bankruptcy.

This may not seem like much of a concern to you, but a full half of the jobs in our country as working for small businesses. With almost all of those businesses being at risk right now, it also means that many jobs being at risk. The longer we wait,

the greater that
risk becomes.

That's what we're facing right now. While various medical "experts" are claiming that we need to stay locked down for as long as 18 months, they're also saying that we have to accept tens of thousands of businesses being destroyed and tens of millions of people being out of work, with all the repercussions that means. It's a rather slanted look at the situation we find ourselves in.

Can We Reopen the Economy?

The question then becomes, can we even open the economy back up? Is that even possible at this point or is that tantamount to signing a suicide pact? As with everything else, there are a number of factors that come into play here.

First of all, only 0.04% of the US population has come down with COVID-19. That's about the lowest of any of the top 10 countries, as far as total cases. If you just look at the number of people infected, we're number one in the world; but we're also the third-largest country in the world. India, the second-largest, seems to be doing better than we are, while nobody believes that China is doing as good as they say.

Oh, by the way, before I started writing this today, I read articles telling me that China has set new quarantines for two different cities, with establishing hospitals overnight, due to the resurgence of the disease. And those two cities are in a totally different part of the country than Wuhan. That's just one more piece of evidence showing how the Chinese government hasn't been honest with the world.

So what will happen if we open the United States back up for business? Probably the majority of people will take off their pajamas, put back on their work clothes, and show up for work, just like before. Small business owners will open the doors and call people back to work.

And... the number of cases of COVID-19 will begin to climb.

But you see; that's inevitable. Since we can't kill off the virus, worldwide, there will always be that point in time when we open our nation's doors for business once again, and the disease begins to spread once more. I don't care how long we wait; the SARS-CoV-2 virus can wait longer.

So really what we're talking about is when we bite the bullet and let that happen. Do we wait until our economy is totally destroyed and death rates from other causes increase? Or do we do it now, while people still have jobs to go back to?

Granted, if we wait long enough, it's possible that medical science will come up with a cure, whether that is the hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine that President Trump has been talking about or something else. But how long can we afford to wait for them to do that?

There's no way of predicting how long that will take.

That's the question that we as a nation face. I'm sure glad that it's not up to me to make that decision.



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