

## Changing America's habits

The latest crisis has shocked us more than any tornado, any hurricane, any flood or any forest fire. It has put the fear of God into even those who don't believe in Him. It's turned believers into super-believers and every one of us into shells of our former selves. It's also going to be a force for profound change in the way we interact with one another and how we look at our lives and of those around us.

On a macro level, the Coronavirus will inevitably change the way we plan for such crises and will radically alter our healthcare delivery system(s). It will also precipitate the establishment of 'rainy day' funds to deal with such emergencies (this goes for our states as well as the Federal government). It will profoundly affect our international relationships, principally with China, but also with certain international organizations like the WHO (World Health Organization). American companies will be more acutely aware of the problems associated with manufacturing their products overseas, especially in China. Our Commerce Department and U.S. Trade Representative's Office along with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and America's labor unions will need to fashion new strategies to deal with the loss of jobs due to the crisis as well as develop new ways to secure our independence from foreign control.

Hopefully, our Congress and Senate will realize that they are playing a dangerous game of legislative 'chicken' that values tactics like partisan steam rolling or stonewalling instead of confronting our most pressing issues. We must never reward those representatives who choose to ignore such challenges and issues with re-election. On a state and community level, we citizens must not let our governors and mayors abuse our Constitutional rights and grab more executive power due to their perceived need to 'protect us from ourselves'.

If necessary, we must amend our state constitutions or enact laws that will protect the individual's right to speak out, honestly, and to gather and interact, responsibly. This had better be done immediately after the crisis has passed. If we don't, I'm afraid we'll settle back into our old ways and move on to other things. Businesses, too, must weigh in, individually and as a group, through their organizations and push for a 'Business Bill of Rights' that guarantees their ability to pursue reasonable commercial operations during a crisis. Church leaders should cross religious boundary lines and form a coalition that will demand their collective rights to hold responsible church services for their congregants and parishioners and push back against attempts to limit any future attempts by the Executive.

One of the principal takeaways from the Coronavirus crisis is that a power vacuum is never left unfilled for long. Someone will always move to take advantage of it. Ideally, it should be the people, but this crisis has seen the executive branches of states do so AND NOT their legislatures. Some governors have been careful to avoid overreaching and unduly disadvantaging their citizenry and businesses, but many have gone in the opposite direction. Michigan's governor has even banned private gatherings of family members! This is a classic example of power-grabbing and must not be tolerated or condoned, post-crisis.

It's probably a fair statement to make that most governors and mayors aren't economists nor do they fully understand how businesses work best. So, it's not unfair to require them to consult with those businesses that operate within their borders. This goes for city councils, too. It's imperative that we all remember that governments are the servants of the people and not the other way around. By focusing on that simple fact, we should be able to develop appropriate strategies for handling future crises in a more cooperative and productive manner.

On an individual level, we will, hopefully, have learned some very important lessons from this crisis, the most important of which is that we need each other.

We will also have learned to forego certain customs like hand-shaking along with adopting keeping a reasonable distance from one another when conversing; covering our mouths when we feel a sneeze or cough coming on; and respecting the health of others by staying home when we're sick. Then there's our larder. We must stock up and have at least a few months' worth of canned goods and non-perishable food and other items on hand. This includes cleaning products and medication. Americans must learn to become more self-sufficient and grow their own vegetables whenever and wherever possible.

We must kick-start our inner-city community garden programs in cooperation with non-profits, coops and with municipal governments. It's necessary for our suburban and ex-urban neighborhoods to get to know each other and stay in regular contact with one another through communication networks. This could also include setting up a neighborhood storehouse of supplies that participants could draw from in an emergency.

The elderly need to feel part of this effort as well. As the virus has shown, they are the ones at greatest risk, so it's no question that they must be given more assistance or regarded as high priority (read: vulnerable) members of any community. Seniors, whether in urban or suburban environments, must pressure their governments to enact action plans that take their special needs into account. We have seen that schooling our children is, indeed, possible through electronic means (Internet-based learning) and this should be a wake-up call to school districts and the parents that comprise them that we must develop practical remote learning opportunities for our children.

This does not mean that we should advocate for the destruction of the present live 'human-based' teaching environment, but now that we've seen that distance learning is possible it should be implemented with qualified teachers staffing the service. At present, nearly 18 million Americans are unemployed. This equates to a more than 10% unemployment rate. Will all of these people be re-hired, post-Coronavirus? I doubt it. We must, therefore, carefully examine the lessons we've learned from this crisis and see how we can develop some post-crisis best practices that can address what emergency procedures are necessary to safeguard not only the health and well-being of our citizens, but also protect our very vulnerable economy and jobs, simultaneously.

Each crisis demands real time management, but each one also deserves a thorough investigative non-partisan search for our vulnerabilities, absent of political finger-pointing. This one is no different. If we ignore it because we feel that the truth might be too painful to handle, we will compound the severity of the next crisis. The only thing we would achieve by rejecting that exercise and sticking our collective head in the sand is... a head full of sand.

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