

## "We Are All In This Together" Some More Than Others

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Having origins in Wuhan, China, the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), caused by the virus SARS-CoV-2, first appeared in late 2019 and quickly spread worldwide in the early months of 2020. The family of Coronaviruses that causes respiratory illness would infect more than fifteen million people and cost the lives of three-quarters of a million people globally prior to August 1st. Nearly all of the governments of the world (sans countries like Taiwan which had prepared for this since the 2003 SARS pandemic) were not prepared for the microbes associated with COVID-19. The lack of leadership in a number of countries (especially the United States, Brazil and Great Britain) would contribute to the spread of the disease and high fatality rates.

Consider for example, that in early-April, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson denied the seriousness of COVID-19 even while deaths from the pandemic were continuing to rise. Pubs remained open and people went about their business pretty much as normal. Johnson's attitude would change, however, when he contracted the disease in early April and found himself in an intensive care unit (ICU) and in real danger of "taking one for the team," as his father Stanley reported to *The Guardian*. The initial shut-down of the UK would prove fruitful but relaxed attitudes threatened a second shut-down in July. In Brazil, a nation led by Jair Bolsonaro, known uncomplimentarily as "Brazil's Trump," completely discounted warnings from medical experts and continued to mingle with the people sans face mask and shaking hands with his followers at his

Trump-like political rallies. By mid-July, Brazil had over 80,000 COVID-19 related confirmed deaths and Brazilian medical personnel reported that the death toll was likely ten times that which was reported.

In the United States, meanwhile, by early-March, 2020, it became apparent to many U.S. state governors, especially in those states that were recording high numbers of COVID-19 hospitalization and deaths that they would have to take charge if there were to be any hope of containing the virus. Most states: enacted state-at-home or shelter-in-place orders which required schools and colleges to end face-to-face classroom meetings and caused most businesses to have their employees work from home; banned large gatherings (e.g., at beaches and places of worship); required people to wear protective masks in public (some people wore surgical gloves as well); mandated physical distancing of six feet in public areas; and, closed all but essential businesses (e.g., grocery stores, pharmacies, and liquor stores). These drastic measures were deemed necessary in order to "flatten the curve." All of this was done on behalf of the health of citizens. The motto of "We're all in this together" came into vogue.

Initially, most people went along with all these flatten-the-curve requirements. It was a little easier for many people, especially professionals, as they were able to perform their work duties at home and as a result, continued to receive their paychecks. The people who were deemed "essential"—medical personnel, fire and police, homecare aides, grocery and liquor store workers and so forth—had to interact with the public to perform their duties. Many of these folks contracted the COVID-19 virus and some of them died. Meanwhile, a number of other people, stuck somewhere in the middle between being labeled essential and professional, were growing increasingly impatient

with restrictions being placed on their livelihoods. Many small business owners went bankrupt, and large chain stores were also closing down. In late-March, lawmakers reached a deal on the first \$2-trillion coronavirus stimulus bill—the largest, by far, in U.S. history. The stimulus package was designed to combat the economic fallout from the pandemic, including direct payments to most Americans, business loans and an expansion on employment benefits. While large in scope from a macro perspective, the stimulus package did not placate everyone. People were hurting financially. Some could not make rent payments. Others could not afford food and had to wait in line for hours for handouts at food banks. The stock market collapse cost many people a great portion of their retirement portfolios. In one way or another, everyone was in this together.

Throughout the summer, many protestors went out in public without protective masks and proper social distancing and demanded that states "reopen." The idea of protesting and reopening states for business led to a political divide where suddenly many Republicans refused to wear masks and seemingly, Democrats still wore masks. In many states with Republican governors we saw businesses open up earlier than in states with Democratic-governors and such a move would backfire as the number of COVID cases would increase dramatically throughout the summer in states that opened too soon. It was not just Republican-run states that saw a huge increase in the number of people with the disease as California would surpass New York State as the leading state with confirmed COVID cases by the end of July. President Donald Trump helped to create this divide between economics and the overall health of citizens by refusing to wear a mask and by encouraging protestors to put pressure on the states that did not open fast enough. (Note: Trump did wear a mask in public once in July.) In late-May Trump demanded that all

places of worship should open, deeming them essential; but most did not. In late July, Trump demanded that all kids should go back to school for the fall semester; and yet, while the number of infected surged in the United States throughout the summer he still had not mandated that everyone in the U.S. wear a mask while in public. Medical experts, including Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAD), and White House coronavirus advisor, explained that if everyone wore a mask and practiced social distancing for a minimum of twenty days, the disease would be mostly under control. The idea that it would be "mostly" under control is a reference to Fauci's dire warning (July, 2020) that COVID-19 would likely never be completely eradicated.

Where do we go from here? As of this writing, the divide between economic needs and the overall health of citizens is still at a crossroads. In the heat of summer, many people were already stressing about a predicted "second wave" of the COVID-19 virus that would hit at the end of the calendar year and were wondering too about Trump's April prediction that the hot summer months would kill the coronavirus germs. Trump's complete lack of medical and scientific knowledge has let the country down in our fight against this disease. We need real leadership in the White House as we surely do not have it now. This predicted second wave would also coincide with the annual winter flu that spreads across the nation and would likely put nearly everyone's health in jeopardy. Scientists are busy working on a vaccine but will that be enough to stem the tide of an unknown novel disease? And can we trust a president with no leadership skills to save us? Perhaps our best hope is a new president, one that believes in science, following the November presidential election.

We better all be in it together if a second wave occurs or a collapsing economy will be just one of our major problems.