

Editorials are the institutional voice of The Free Press and independent of the newsroom reporting staff

## OUR VIEW: COVID-19

# Mask wearing makes us team players

They are hot. They mess up hair. They muffle speech. And they may be protecting that store clerk, that nurse or that day care provider from you unintentionally transmitting coronavirus to them.

Even though we may find wearing masks indoors uncomfortable, it's the right thing to do for the greater good, the sake of public health. As Gov. Tim Walz said Thursday, there's a psychological piece behind everyone wearing them that shows we're in this together — a team approach.

### Why it matters:

Wearing a mask is a mark of a team player who is recognizing the risk that others put themselves at to do their jobs.

Confusion arose early on about whether members of the general public should wear masks during the COVID-19 outbreak. There was concern that medical-grade masks, already in short supply for health care workers, would be snapped up by the general population.

Instead, many Americans kicked in their tendency to be industrious, practical and useful. People across the country, including many in southern Minnesota, heeded the call and have been designing, sewing and assembling fabric masks for everyone who needs them.

A statewide initiative April 25 resulted in 1,300 masks donated to Mankato fire stations alone; an estimated 700 fire departments participated in the drive to supply masks to group-care facilities. In this area, Facebook groups, nonprofits, churches and other volunteers for the past month have been getting on board the mask-making train.

Yet, we still have people here and across the country who refuse to wear masks indoors when out and about, despite the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's recommendation to do so.

Even Vice President Mike Pence ignored Mayo Clinic policy and didn't wear one during a visit to Rochester, despite his team being informed in advance. His eye-roll-inducing excuse is that he wanted to look people in the eye. Masks don't cover eyes and his reason doesn't hide his probable intention and that of his non-mask-wearing boss: Wearing masks gives the impression we are in the midst of an ongoing public health crisis, which we are.

Today Costco implements its requirement that customers wear masks, the first major U.S. retailer to do so. The company also says the masks are not a substitute for social distancing. So even though the federal government is no longer urging social distancing, others are rightly stressing the importance of the continued practice.

Masks are another tool the public can adopt to do their part during the pandemic. Every store cashier, every medical professional, every day care worker deserves to be respected for the work they do. A mask is a physical nod of gratitude to those helping society to function as well as it can in this long-term crisis.

So although muffled, your mask is a clear thank-you.

## OTHER VIEW

### Adopt voting by mail

#### The Buffalo News

If the public's bipartisan mind is to be honored, Washington and the states should get busy planning to allow Americans to vote by mail in November's general elections. Refusal invites chaos, contagion and, very possibly, death.

Those were the threats that Wisconsin recklessly inflicted on its primary election voters last month. Voters heroically showed up anyway, despite the risk of contracting Covid-19. But it was unnecessary.

Now, debate is underway about allowing all Americans to vote by mail this November, including in the presidential election. That's what Americans want this year, by a majority of 2-1, according to an NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll.

What is more, 58% of them want to apply the change to all federal elections going forward.

No one knows at this

point where the country will be by November in its fight to subdue Covid-19. Some of it will depend on how well Americans hold to the need for social distancing. Some will depend on how many people instead heed the recklessness of the protesters who are demanding immediate opening of the economies of New York and other states. Some will depend on whether the country suffers a second wave of infections and if it coincides with the next flu season. A second wave could be worse than the first.

Against all those currents of uncertainty, Washington and the states need to act now to protect the sanctity and security of this year's elections. The only way to do that is to allow all Americans to vote by mail.

It wouldn't be an unusual policy. Five states already conduct all of their elections by mail: Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah and Washington.



## YOUR VIEWS

# Trump needs to take crisis seriously

If there was any doubt the GOP has lost its mind, look no further than recent videos of protesters storming state capitols brandishing assault weapons, confederate flags, swastika banners and signs demanding freedom, goaded on by the mad Tweeter-in-Chief.

"LIBERATE MY PEOPLE! They want haircuts! They want to dine out! Stop the oppression!"

Yes, people need to work. Many people are, in fact, working and dying because their employers can't or won't follow safety protocols. If the protesters meant to demonstrate their comprehension of basic precautions necessary to re-open businesses and their ability to act responsibly in the time of corona, they failed miserably.

There was little social distancing and numerous "patriots" couldn't be bothered to wear masks, preferring instead to spew their germs into security guards' faces from three inches away, possibly infecting them in the process.

Do they care about these workers' freedom to stay healthy? Of course not. It's all about them. Their lives, their needs, their comfort.

And the guns? Give me a break, Rambo.

In only three months, over one million people in the United States have gotten the coronavirus. More than 63,000 have died from it.

FEMA has ordered 100,000 more body bags and 200 extra-large refrigerated trailers for stacking and storing the overflowing corpses.

And you want a haircut?

Here's an idea. For the next protest, how about storming the nation's capital and demanding that the disinfectant-prescribing genius there — Mr. We've Got Everything Under Control. It's Like The Flu. We'll Go From 15 Cases To Zero — stop obsessing about his TV ratings and start taking this crisis seriously.

Better yet, liberate him from the White House.

Elly Zaragoza  
Mankato

### Hagedorn's behaving recklessly on COVID conspiracies

COVID-19 is personal for me. I am a primary care physician in Rochester and see the toll it has taken on my patients, colleagues and community.

My husband takes care of COVID-19 patients in the hospital, witnessing firsthand the devastation of this disease. My family members were ill with COVID-19 in New York, and several have died. That is why I am shocked and horrified that our Congressman, Jim Hagedorn, is willing to traffic conspiracy theories

that downplay the pandemic that has impacted our entire community.

Hagedorn represents an area with internationally recognized experts in infectious disease and epidemiology. Instead of sharing the wealth of information from these doctors and experts, he chose to promote dangerous disinformation.

He posted a Facebook video of two California doctors convincing the public that COVID-19 is no worse than the flu (231,000 deaths worldwide suggest otherwise) and that social distancing has no benefit.

These doctors were immediately denounced by their own medical societies for spreading these dangerous theories, yet Hagedorn chose to amplify them at our expense.

The fact that our representative would spread that kind of misinformation is not only wrong, it is dangerous. Minimizing the dangers of COVID-19 and dismissing the tens of thousands who have died will only lead to more (preventable) infections and deaths.

Instead of fighting for our community, Hagedorn's words and actions are hurting people. As a physician on the frontlines of fighting this crisis, I cannot stand silent to his reckless behavior.

Rosalina McCoy  
Rochester

# The pre-virus status quo is not good enough

WASHINGTON — "Going back to what we had before would be cruel and unusual punishment."

May these words from Sen. Michael Bennet, D-Colo., become our national slogan as we deal with the coronavirus crisis. Confining ourselves to short-term damage control means overlooking the wrenching social problems this pandemic has exposed. It could also mean we'll spend a whole lot of money with no long-term payoff.

Yes, Congress has performed better than might have been expected. Republicans who denied the need for robust federal spending after President Obama took office during the Great Recession are suddenly throwing money around as if they had devoured the works of John Maynard Keynes in the interim. It's amazing how holding the White House can lead to intellectual growth. And Democrats used their power in the House and their votes in the Senate to push the relief packages to do more for those most in need.

But thoughtful legislators such as Bennet and Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., argue that the further spending needed to alleviate the immediate economic crisis should also be used to begin building a better post-pandemic country now.

Bennet's 2020 presidential campaign didn't work out, but he did offer the most memorable promise of any of the candidates. It looks better and better to a nation that Trump has driven to clinical burnout.

"If you elect me president," Bennet said, "I promise you won't have to think about me for two weeks at a time."

His modesty and moderate tone often conceal Bennet's sense of outrage over the radical injustices

he says took root long before Trump took office. "I think it's convenient ... to say [of the pandemic], 'Well, this reveals this terrible inequality,'" Bennet told me, "but anybody who spent any time in a classroom in a poor kid's neighborhood in America in the

last 50 years versus a more affluent kid's classroom in America in the last 50 years would know that not only has there been inequality but it's been intense and deeply unfair."

"All this inequality was staring us in the face, and we chose to ignore it," he said.

Bennet argues that the virus crisis should force us both to remodel our health care system and re-examine educational inequality in light of how some school districts have had a far easier time coping with the needs of social distancing than others. And the painful decisions parents — especially those who are health care workers — have had to make during this crisis lead to another question: "Could we finally now all understand that child care is essential?"

Murray, like Bennet, is a practical workhorse with an unaffected passion for social justice. She also placed "child care and support for families," including family leave, at the top of her list of underdiscussed issues as Congress considers a new round of relief, given how many workers are either out sick or caring for family members.

She also called out our indifference to the "invisible workers," those "working at the nursing homes, or the people at the packing plants, or the people at the grocery store, the ones you don't think of every day." This group, she says, also includes those working in domestic violence

shelters, food banks and homeless programs who currently lack the "equipment and support" they need to provide care to vulnerable communities.

For the next round of legislating, Bennet is pushing hard for a 15% increase in food stamps, since food banks "are strained to the breaking point" while farmers and ranchers need confidence that "there's going to be a market for what they are producing." He sees this as part of a larger effort to enact automatic stabilizers that kick in without the need for new legislation "when the economy deteriorates."

"We don't need one more partisan fight the next time we have an economic downturn like this," he says.

It's true, of course, that even short-term thinking is better than President Trump's denial of federal responsibility for the nation he leads. He pushes off the work of dealing with the crisis to governors, and then says if Washington comes to the rescue of states that happen to be Democratic, "we'll have to get something for it." Blue states aren't part of his American "we."

Bennet and Murray would stare down Trump on behalf of states and localities, red and blue alike, whose budgets are collapsing. Bennet sees \$500 billion for states and \$250 billion for county and local governments as essential to avoiding long-term damage to the economy and core public services.

Sometimes an illness allows us to discover an overlooked ailment that desperately needs attention. It should not have taken a pandemic to bring home the shortcomings of our government and our society. But we'd be foolish to ignore them.

E.J. Dionne is on Twitter: @EJDionne.

FOUNDED IN 1887

# The Free Press

1st Amendment: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

STEVE JAMESON, Publisher

#### EDITORIAL MANAGEMENT

JOSEPH SPEAR, Managing Editor  
KATHY VOS, News Editor  
TIM KROHN, Business Editor  
ROBB MURRAY, Features Editor  
PAT CHRISTMAN, Photo Editor  
CHAD COURRIER, Sports Editor

#### BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

JUSTIN NILES, Audience Development Director  
GLEN ASLESON, Facilities & Technology Director  
TODD BROUWER, Press/Post Press Manager  
DEB PETERSON, General Manager - The Land

#### LETTERS POLICY

The Free Press welcomes letters on any issue of general community interest. Please limit your letters to no more than 275 words, type-written or clearly printed. Letters or emails citing facts that are not commonly known should include the source. Letters must contain the author's name, address and phone number for verification. All letters will be edited for clarity, grammar, spelling and space. You may email letters to the editor to editor@mankatofreepress.com