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THE OPINION PAGE

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OUR OPINION

VIEWPOINT

Important that we eat, buy, tip local

Herald editorial board
Want to make an impact during this surreal time in history, when bars and restaurants are closing and residents are retreating into self-quarantine?
Three suggestions: Buy. Eat. Tip. **First, buy.**
Throughout the region, stores are closing in an effort to stop the spread of coronavirus. These brick-and-mortar mainstays are the spine of local commerce, and the community will notice if they disappear.
If recent months are an indicator, some retailers may be hanging by a thread. Grand Forks has lost numerous stores in the past two years, ranging from the big (Macy's, Sears and Kmart) to the small (Amazing Grains and Voxyx).
It's not unlikely that others could become victims to the region's coronavirus response. When this all passes, please consider shopping local to give the region's economy what certainly will be a needed boost.
Second, eat.
Numerous restaurants are temporarily closing or are expecting decreases because of coronavirus concerns. In Minnesota, Gov. Tim Walz has ordered all restaurants to only serve customers via takeout or delivery. There's a chance the same could be coming for North Dakota.
So take advantage of it. Give your supply of ramen noodles a break and order from one of the many restaurants in Greater Grand Forks that could use the help.
People's livelihoods are at stake. In many cases, these are family businesses that have been around for years. And all of them – from the legacy establishments to the fancy new chain restaurants – have employees who are at risk of losing hours, dollars or, perhaps, their job.
In response to the pandemic, many local restaurants are vowing to continue service via takeout and delivery. That's very important as people continue to shelter in place for what could be weeks.
Help them out. Order delivery service. And tell them their efforts are appreciated.
Third, tip.
When a delivery person arrives with that food, don't forget to tip. These folks are providing a necessary service during some frightening times; a few extra dollars won't break most people's budget, but for these workers, it could be a godsend.
We don't blame Gov. Tim Walz for closing bars and restaurants in Minnesota. After all, any place where people congregate must be scrutinized. The number of Minnesota's coronavirus cases has now surpassed 50.
The governor's order also includes theaters, coffee houses, health clubs and other public places of "accommodation and amusement."
And almost at the same time as the governor's announcement came word that a national recession is expected in the second quarter of the year.
But we can help. As we hunker down in our shelters, we still can be eating food from most local restaurants. And when we emerge some weeks down the road, we can resupply at local stores and not through Amazon.
These are choices we all can make, and they are choices that could make a difference for these important businesses – and people – in our community.

Combat downturn, invest in infrastructure

By Kevin Cramer
Under President Trump, the United States economy is roaring. Just look at the February jobs report, with 273,000 new jobs added, job numbers in December and January revised up by 85,000, and average hourly earnings up 3 percent from this time last year.



Cramer

Our rocket-ship economy is strong, but the coronavirus outbreak threatens to derail some of this momentum. Stocks have fallen significantly over the last month, and the profits of industries which rely on tourism and travel – roughly 7 percent of our gross domestic product – are falling.

What our economy needs to weather this storm is not merely a blank check stimulus, but policies that invest in long-term growth. While we work toward that goal, temporary measures to stimulate our economy and assist those most impacted are sure to be necessary.

Instead of cutting federal interest rates or momentary relief, I believe any sort of effort designed to stimulate the economy should be aimed at areas the federal government already oversees

and needs to prioritize. Washington could learn a lesson from North Dakota. We are an energy state that has become accustomed to the boom and bust cycles of the industry. During the bust, North Dakota took that opportunity to invest in our infrastructure so we would be better prepared for the next boom. Our state continues to benefit from that foresight today and Congress could do the same.

Ironically, the nation's largest highway bill in history is awaiting congressional action. Last July, the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works (EPW) unanimously passed S. 2302, America's Transportation Infrastructure Act. In an era of deeply divided government, our committee was able to come together and advance a package that will produce real results for all Americans.

Our bill authorizes \$287 billion over five years, including \$259 billion for programs to maintain and repair America's roads and bridges. It grows

the economy, eliminates burdensome regulation, invests in tribal lands, and maintains the current funding formula that ensures states like North Dakota receive steady funding and flexibility to prioritize its transportation needs. During his State of the Union, President Trump called on Congress to pass this legislation expeditiously.

As EPW Ranking Member Sen. Tom Carper, D-Del., said, "For far too long, our country has leaped from one highway funding crisis to the next and failed to implement forward-looking solutions to the challenges facing our transportation sector. America's Transportation Infrastructure Act will ensure that every community reaps the benefits of strong federal investment, with safer roads, cleaner air, greater mobility and more connectivity."

I agree. We have a highway bill waiting and we are developing water infrastructure legislation. During this temporary coronavirus bust, Congress must work overtime to send an infrastructure package to President Trump. Every American would reap the benefit of passing this bill and it would set us up for

long-term success. Let's get these done!
Beyond infrastructure, Congress has worked with President Trump to rebuild our military. I sit on the Senate Armed Services Committee and last year we passed a bipartisan \$738 billion defense bill. This package makes critical investments in equipment and infrastructure. These dollars are a boon to everyone from manufacturers within our defense industrial base to local contractors who are hired to refurbish and build our bases. The administration ought to look for opportunities to expedite projects to stimulate action that's already been given the green light by Congress.

If we are looking for ways to inject economic benefit into the economy, let's start here. We should avoid the pitfall of believing throwing cash at the problem will solve the problem. Follow the North Dakota model by investing in our nation's infrastructure and national defense. All Americans will see and feel the results and be even more competitive after the virus passes.

Kevin Cramer, a Republican, represents North Dakota in the U.S. Senate.

DOUBLE PLAY



OTHER OPINION

Don't think Covid-19 will stay behind bars

The Washington Post
Like cruise ship passengers and nursing home residents, inmates in jails and prisons are at heightened risk of contracting and rapidly transmitting the coronavirus – with the added peril of violent combustion that is ever present in an incarcerated population. Prisoners at two dozen institutions in Italy rioted this month after the government, seeking to contain the virus, imposed a countrywide lockdown that curtailed prison visits by relatives and others; in the chaos, at least six inmates died and dozens escaped. It is critical that U.S. officials focus right now on how to limit the pandemic's effects in federal and state facilities.

There are no known major outbreaks yet in prisons and jails, though that may reflect the absence of testing, not the absence of covid-19, in

the facilities. Many of them are perfect incubators for the disease, housing packed-in populations more likely than other Americans to have a chronic condition or infectious disease. Social distancing, the most effective means of impeding the spread of the virus, is all but impossible at most prisons and jails. Overcrowding; broken sinks; unreliable soap supplies; a steady influx of new inmates; and, at many institutions, substandard medical care – these are the ingredients that could all too easily fuel the pandemic behind bars.

Some 2.2 million prisoners are in U.S. prisons and jails. They are in danger; so are hundreds of thousands of corrections officers and others who work in such institutions and then circulate in their communities. All of them need timely and complete information on protocols and

best practices for contending with the virus.

Even with full notice, however, intensive mitigation will be required, including shifts in policy designed to thin the ranks of prisoners, especially those most at risk. Prisoner advocate organizations have offered suggestions worth considering. Those include supervised release for nonviolent inmates, especially those who suffer from chronic diseases, and, for some elderly prisoners, expedited parole hearings.

Many state and local institutions that house prisoners are already limiting visits by outsiders, including relatives and lawyers. They would be well advised to compensate by expanding inmates' telephone privileges to the extent practicable, and supplementing them with video links.

In California, the state corrections department

announced that it has begun conducting parole hearings for convicts behind closed doors, barring observers and requiring that any input from prosecutors and victims take place by telephone or video hookup. That's not ideal, as the department acknowledged. But it is the responsible thing to do, and other states are following suit.

The real danger is in doing nothing, on the belief that what takes place in penal institutions is less critical or somehow separate from society – or that the lives of convicts themselves are worth less than those of free men and women. In fact, prisons and jails are porous places; their walls do nothing to impede the spread of disease. The failure to contain the virus on the inside, for whatever reason, will inevitably accelerate its proliferation on the outside.

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