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OUR VIEW: COVID-19

Justification short for restrictions

While Gov. Tim Walz and the Minnesota Department of Health say their shutdown decisions have been driven by data, it's increasingly apparent we don't have enough data to reasonably justify continuing to impose crippling economic restrictions on certain businesses.

Hospitality Minnesota makes a strong argument that bars and restaurants shouldn't face continued closures when the health department data attributes only 2 percent of the spread through documented outbreaks as coming from their business.

In fact, 7-day average positive rates went down slightly after the bars closed on Nov. 20, but spiked by Nov. 25 while the bars were still closed, suggesting the spread was from people who were gathering elsewhere and not at bars.

COVID-19 cases, positive rates and hospitalizations continue to moderate or go down. While deaths remain at

a relatively high level, those also seem to be dropping or moderating also. COVID rates are coming down in all Upper Midwest states that don't have restaurant bans.

Yet Minnesota kept its bar and restaurant restrictions in place for three more weeks.

A number of significant factors have changed since the restaurant-bar shutdowns in the spring and even in November.

Chief among those mitigating factors is the presence of the vaccine. Already thousands of health care workers are getting the protection from the virus they need. Treatment of COVID cases has much improved, according to health experts. Knowledge of how the virus spreads also has improved.

Minnesota Health Commissioner Jan Malcolm argued against the 2 percent spread case made by Hospitality Minnesota, saying that one person getting COVID in a bar could spread it to up to 70 others. If that's the case, that should be shown in the numbers attributed to bars and restaurants. Such undocumented spread would also apply to other settings.

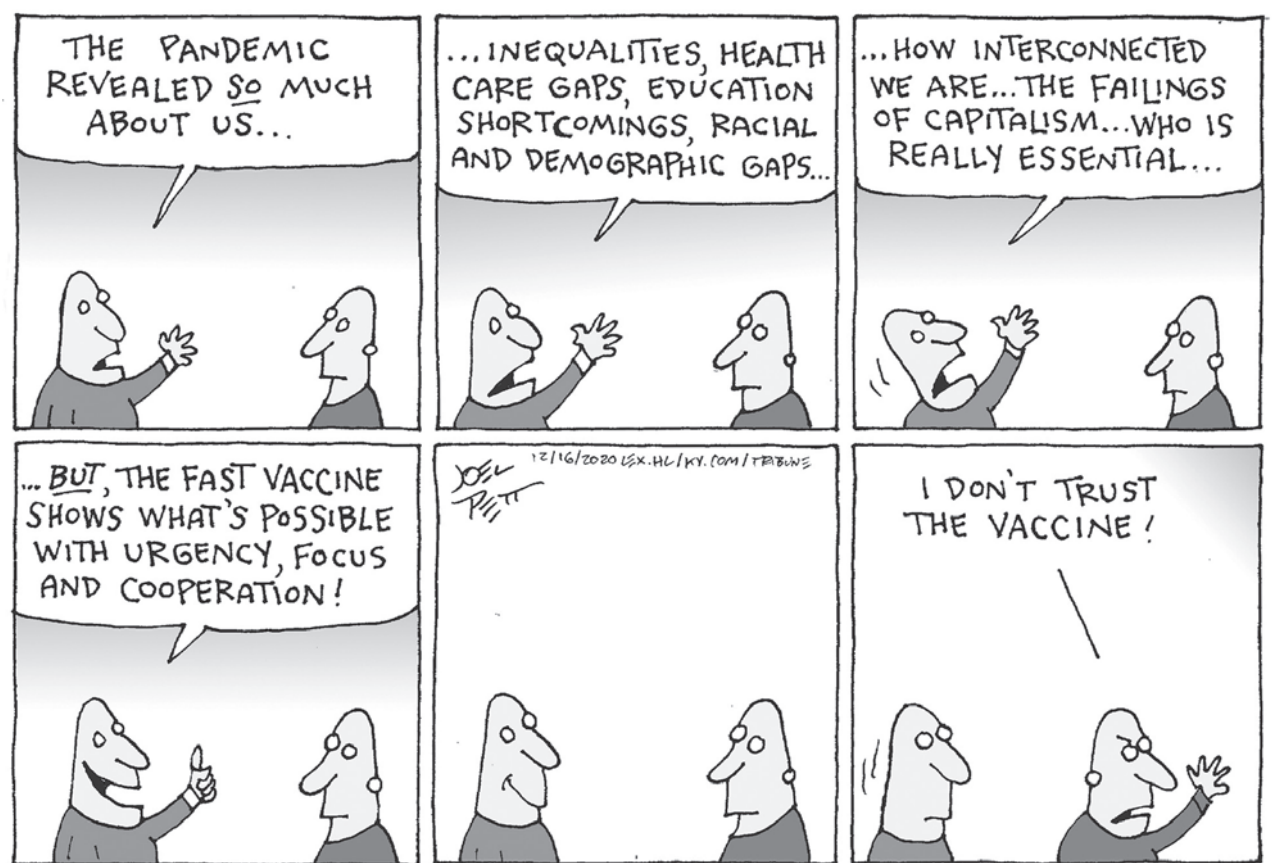
While ICU hospital capacity appears to be at 80% to 90%, hospital data shows additional "surge" beds that could be deployed adding 50 percent to existing capacity.

An analysis by Minnesota Public Radio data expert David Montgomery points to health data that shows bars and restaurants are connected to 3.8 percent of the cases where contact tracing was done, but only about 2 percent if one includes all cases.

Hospitality Minnesota also argues convincingly that alternatives to bars and restaurants may be more risky for spread. Many will likely gather with friends at indoor spots like homes and heated garages. And let's not forget, the law still allows church services of 250 people.

Walz and Malcolm are right: The holidays can be problematic for socializing. But it seems as likely we will have virus spread in unregulated environments like people's homes versus bars and restaurants, where mask requirements are enforced.

The MPR analysis concludes the existing data does not clearly identify bars, restaurants or other gathering places as the biggest spreaders. The data suggests possibilities and likelihoods but few solid statistical correlations. And as the MPR analysis concludes: "We just don't have the data."



YOUR VIEW

Election barely prevented a Napoleon

How close we came.

One thing is clear. If this election had been any closer, clean or not, the Trumpians would have been looking to install their Napoleon, their Caesar, by any means necessary, and that would have been the end of our republic, something Ben Franklin

warned us about at its inception... "if you can keep it."

I've been studying the end of the Roman republic for the last year. I was impressed at how fast after the first aspect of their constitution was breached the rest became dead letter history. The future changes in power

were a matter of military conflict.

We must strengthen our election system, the Achilles tendon of our democracy. Computers are not the way to do it.

Mark Hustad
Mankato

IN RESPONSE

Trump voters had reasons beyond the person

Having read and reread Tom Maertens' article, it is a pompous, condescending article to Trump voters.

Using terms such as pusillanimous — showing lack of courage, invertebrate — having no backbone is an insult to the almost 75 million people that voted for Trump and the 21 GOP senators that you don't know about first hand.

I will not dispute that the president spouts off, however it is no worse than seeing and hearing people like you give your opinion based on how you dislike this president. It is easy for anyone to pick up on people's opinions and try to call them facts.

Myself, I am a graduate of the university of hard knocks, learning to take people for what and who they are and respecting their point of view. I voted for the Trump Administration for some of the following

reasons:

Voting for the First Amendment and freedom of speech.

Voting for the Second Amendment and the right to defend myself and my family and friends.

Voting for Supreme Court justices to protect the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Voting to bring back our troops from conflicts that have gone on for too many years.

Voting for the Electoral College and the republic we live in.

Voting for federal judges who respect the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Voting for the military and the veterans who fought for this country to give Americans freedom.

I am pro-life, voting to save the unborn babies that have a right to live.

Voting for the freedom of religion. Voting for the respect for the

American flag!

I am not voting for one person. I am voting for the future of my country.

I am voting for my children, my grandchildren, and my great-grandchildren to ensure their freedom and their future.

For too long we have let our freedoms be taken away by legislators through laws or edicts that hamper our everyday life, and it has slowed down the progress of the American can-do attitude.

A quote that has been attributed to Thomas Jefferson: A government that can give you everything you want is big enough to take away everything that you have! What have you voted for?

As of today, I for one will accept the electoral collage results!

Fred Lenz
St. James

OTHER VIEW

Congress defies Trump

New York Daily News

Give bipartisan supermajorities in the House and Senate credit for passing a defense spending bill that outright ignores juvenile and divisive demands by President Trump. If only they had dealt this way with his obscene tantrums from the beginning.

Trump promises a veto of the must-pass, nearly trillion-dollar bill. He weirdly says it's pro-China. He also is mad that it doesn't repeal a law vital to safeguarding the free flow of ideas online, Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act. That fit of pique, revenge on

social media companies the president hates, came atop an earlier ultimatum not to rename military bases honoring Confederate war heroes. Which is to say, the commander in chief insisted the U.S. military honor traitors to the Union, defenders of slavery, in perpetuity.

Legislators effectively rolled their eyes. They are also forcing Trump to slow his precipitous withdrawals from Afghanistan and Germany.

Now the president must pick how he wishes to be humiliated: reverse his stance and sign the bill, or veto it and invite an override.

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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.

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Biden may be tougher than GOP expects

WASHINGTON — President-elect Joe Biden's decision to campaign in Georgia for two Democratic Senate candidates facing runoff elections next month is a bigger deal than you might think. Consider what another president-elect chose *not* to do 12 years ago.

In 2008, incumbent Georgia Republican Sen. Saxby Chambliss was forced into a runoff by veteran Democratic state legislator Jim Martin.

In the first round, Chambliss secured 49.8% to Martin's 46.8%. But despite the closeness of the race, the nation's most popular Democrat decided not to journey south on behalf of Martin.

Barack Obama did a radio ad and recorded some robo calls, but that was about it. And when the runoff came, Chambliss swept to victory, 57% to 43%. Between the general election and the runoff, turnout plummeted, from 3.75 million votes to just under 2.14 million.

True, Biden's visit this week on behalf of the Rev. Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff reflected differences in the stakes involved. Democrats already enjoyed a solid majority in the Senate after the election 12 years ago. This year, they need to win both Georgia races to get to 50 seats and control the Senate, thanks to Vice President-elect Kamala Harris' tie-breaking vote.

But by campaigning, Biden is also signaling that however strong his affection might be for an older, less polarized politics, he understands that it's not the 1970s — or 2008 — anymore. The radicalization of the Republican Party is a fact he is coming to accept.

Thus, he pulled no punches in his tough attack Monday on the efforts of President Trump and his GOP allies to discredit this year's election outcome. He called it "an unprec-

edented assault on our democracy" that "refused to respect the will of the people, refused to respect the rule of law, and refused to honor our Constitution."

Biden stayed on this theme during his Tuesday campaign swing, noting the support of incumbent Republican Sens. Kelly Loeffler and David Perdue for Texas' radical and risible lawsuit seeking to invalidate the electoral outcome in four states Biden carried, including Georgia.

The senators, he said, "fully embraced nullifying nearly five million Georgia votes." He added: "Maybe they think they represent Texas. Well, if you want to do the bidding of Texas you should be running in Texas, not in Georgia."

The GOP's election denialism is terrible for the country and for democracy. But the early signs are that it could backfire on Republicans by turning Biden, bipartisanship's best friend, into a tough realist about what he's up against. And the longer Trump's antics keep him in the forefront, the easier it will be for Biden to hold Democrats together. No wonder Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell finally told his party on Tuesday that it's time to move on.

If Obama passed on Georgia 12 years ago, it was in part because the risks to his political standing were higher. Chambliss was the overwhelming favorite and, as the results showed, Democrats had a history of low turnout in runoffs. Warnock and Ossoff, on the other hand, have a real chance to prevail. This is thanks to Democrats' organizational prowess and registration efforts, led by former gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams. "Stacey, if we had 10 of you, we could rule the whole world," Biden said on Tuesday.

Demographic change, particularly

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the increasing diversity of Atlanta's suburban counties, also matters.

Consider: In 2008, Chambliss won 64% of the runoff vote in Cobb County and 62% in Gwinnett County. This year, those two counties were key to Biden's statewide victory. Biden carried Cobb by 14 points and Ossoff won it by 11. In Gwinnett, Biden was up by 18, Ossoff by 16.

In an excellent analysis of the 2020 vote in Georgia for FiveThirtyEight, Perry Bacon Jr. noted that Gwinnett is now only 35% non-Hispanic white, Cobb 51%. They are no longer, Bacon noted, "suburbs in the coded way the political media often invokes them as a synonym for 'areas slightly outside of the city limits of major cities where lots of middle-class white people live.'"

In making two Senate seats competitive, the transformation of Georgia increased the burden on Loeffler and Perdue to deliver more to their state's voters than just blind loyalty to Trump. They'll no doubt tout the \$900 billion economic rescue package taking shape in Congress. But McConnell's opposition to a large package until the pressure for it became irresistible could also underscore how much Biden needs a friendly Senate to continue the rescue operation next year.

In paying close attention to how Trump and McConnell approach politics, Biden seems to have learned something important: Hitting back is the only way to get the current Republican Party's attention. Asking nicely won't cut it in 2021.

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