

Rep. Hutton: Letter regarding safer at home

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Governor Evers,

Evidence is beginning to mount that Wisconsin has been successful at flattening the curve for COVID-19. The current model from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation shows that Wisconsin is at or very near the peak of the COVID-19 epidemic in Wisconsin. Additionally Wisconsin DHS recently showed that our rate of doubling has gone from 3.4 days in early March to approximately every 12 days now.

In spite of the tremendous progress in Wisconsin, you indicated last week that you aren't ready to consider an end date for the safer at home restrictions. And further, just today, you extended the safer at home order to be one of the longest running in the Country. We find this development to be concerning for a number of reasons.

It doesn't come as a surprise that continuing these strict measures for another month will result in unprecedented unemployment rates in Wisconsin. A preliminary analysis by your Department of Workforce Development shows that Wisconsin's unemployment rate could reach nearly 27%. The St. Louis Fed projects that national unemployment could reach a staggering 32.1%. These numbers are almost unprecedented in America's history.

Unfortunately the numbers don't stop there. Scientific studies have shown that increases in unemployment lead to increases in mental health issues including suicides and substance abuse. A study by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that for every 1% increase in the unemployment rate, the opioid death rate increases by 3.6% and

opioid overdose emergency department visits increase by 7%. The International Journal of Drug Policy further found that drug use increases in times of recession because unemployment increases psychological distress which increases drug use.

Health Economist Michael French found in his 2013 study that there is a “significant association between job loss during the past year and average daily ethanol consumption, number of binge drinking days, and the probability of an alcohol abuse and/or dependence diagnosis.”

Unemployment has also been linked to “a substantially increased risk of death among broad segments of the population.”

A study from the Archives of Internal Medicine found that unemployed individuals are 1.4 times more likely to have a heart attack than employed individuals. Additionally the American Heart Association issued a scientific statement that identified unemployment, social isolation, and physical inactivity (all results of the safer at home order) as important risk factors for cardiovascular disease.

While these deaths and illnesses may not get the publicity and headlines of the current crisis, all lives are important and must be considered as we move forward. If decisions are to be based on science then the science of the fallout from skyrocketing unemployment must be an equal consideration.

We must develop a clear path forward with specific benchmarks to get Wisconsinites back to work in a responsible but expeditious manner. All businesses are essential and we should be looking for ways to get more people back to work while continuing to follow social distancing guidelines instead of looking for reasons to shut businesses down.

We stand ready and willing to work together to put Wisconsin on the path to recovery.