

# **Bill Kaplan: Conservatives leave Wisconsin without a plan to address COVID-19**

Posted on Monday, May 18, 2020

*The column below reflects the views of the author, and these opinions are neither endorsed nor supported by WisOpinion.com.*

The COVID-19 pandemic is catastrophic. Almost 1.5 million cases nationally, including over 12,000 in Wisconsin (WI), approaching 100,000 deaths nationally, over 450 in WI. The Trump administration has failed spectacularly to develop comprehensive testing and contact tracing and assure an adequate supply of personal protective equipment (PPE). There are no treatments, and no vaccine available. The collapsed economy will not recover without remedying these stunning failures and more.

As U.S. unemployment soars to 20 – 25 percent, including over 500,000 WI jobless, millions have lost employer-based health insurance. That includes 446,000 Wisconsinites, with 214,000 now eligible for Medicaid, 150,000 eligible for Affordable Care Act (ACA) subsidies, but 82,000 not eligible for Medicaid or ACA subsidies (Kaiser Family Foundation). A fiscal and health disaster! Moreover, the WI GOP-led legislature refuses to expand Medicaid (90 percent federal funding). It gets worse.

The conservative state Supreme Court issued a ruling based on ideology and stupidity. The court, at the urging of GOP legislative leaders, struck down WI Democratic Tony Evers' stay-at-home order. Chief Justice Patience Roggensack, videoconferencing on the case, said: The spread of COVID-19 in WI was “due to the meatpacking, though. That’s where Brown County got the flare. It wasn’t just the regular folks in Brown County.” However, conservative justice Brian Hagedorn dissented: “We are a court of law. ... (T)his court has strayed from its charge ... . To make matters worse, it has failed to provide almost any guidance ... (on) how our state is to govern through this crisis ... .”

**>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

With WI COVID-19 cases increasing, GOP legislative leaders no longer want “a seat at the table,” saying guidelines to control the spread are unnecessary. Local officials will be in charge. The over-crowded bars throughout much of WI point to a dire future. But Trump tweeted about “another win” and a now “bustling” state. People will get sick and die. Magical thinking will not change this.

Nor will wishful thinking mitigate the COVID-19 impact on the state budget. WI tax collections have spiraled downward by \$870 million. Counties are on track to lose \$68 million. At the same time COVID-19 expenses for health coverage, testing and contact tracing, PPE and first responders soar upward. However, 43 GOP state legislators have urged rejection of federal aid to WI and other states. Wiser conservatives such as GOP Senators Robert Cowles, Jerry Petrowski and Luther Olsen did not sign the shoot-in-the-foot letter to Congress.

Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said: “Additional fiscal support could be costly, but worth it if it helps avoid long-term economic damage and leaves us with a stronger recovery.” A sharp departure from Trump’s unwarranted optimism. He said such aid was “dead on arrival.” The Democratic-led House heeded Powell and ignored Trump, passing a massive spending bill Friday to help states and struggling Americans. All WI Democratic representatives voted yes, all WI GOP representatives opposed.

Maryland GOP Governor Larry Hogan said: “(D)elivering urgent state fiscal relief must be a top priority.” Will the GOP-led Senate and Trump listen?

*-Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C., for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 - 2009.*