

Bill Kaplan: COVID-19, the haves and have-nots

Posted on Monday, May 4, 2020

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

The U.S. is a nation of haves and have-nots. On March 6 Trump said: “Anybody that needs a (coronavirus) test can have a test.” A lie. The Washington Post (WP) reported: “Trump’s projection of normalcy relies on special testing. ... Trump, Vice-President Pence ... are tested regularly, and all who enter the White House campus to meet with them are required to undergo on-site rapid tests ... which provide results within 15 minutes.” The optics were so bad that Trump offered Congress access to the same tests. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell jointly said no, asking that the tests be given to “front-line facilities.”

Because Trump lives in a protected bubble he can’t see the coronavirus carnage. Over 1.1 million cases nationally, including nearly 8,000 cases in Wisconsin (WI), over 66,000 U.S. deaths and about 350 WI deaths. Governors, including WI Democratic Governor Tony Evers, are on their own. Evers put together a “public-private partnership” to increase testing. However, WI is still hamstrung by Trump’s failure to provide necessary chemicals and swabs. And, while Trump orders workers back to JBS meatpacking in Green Bay, they lack protective gear and rapid testing.

Trump is betting his reelection on delusion. He projects an unwarranted optimism, but “days of denial, delays and dysfunction” (WP) can’t hide the economy’s free fall. 30 million nationally, including hundreds of thousands in WI, are unemployed. The NYT reports that the job losses are far worse as many are having trouble applying for unemployment benefits. It took weeks (computer issue) for thousands of WI unemployed to apply and receive emergency federal jobless benefits. Other WI workers, e.g., UW-System, face wage cuts and furloughs.

>> 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.](#)

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic the economy had deep fault lines. Soaring income inequality, wealth concentration, endangered pensions, skyrocketing personal debt and a horrific farm crisis. Trump's trade wars, compounded by expenses overwhelming farmers' revenue, led to over 2,000 failed dairy farms. Coronavirus is delivering a knockout blow to America's Dairyland.

So expectations for congressional relief legislation were high. However, the Trump administration has stumbled badly. First, Trump removed the watchdog of the panel overseeing how coronavirus relief was administered, with predictable results. Less oversight means the haves do just fine while the have-nots are left out. The loan program for small businesses turned into a fiasco. The NYT reported: "Banks gave richest clients 'concierge treatment' for pandemic aid". In contrast, typical small business owners came up empty-handed.

Meanwhile, years of GOP cuts to the IRS budget and antiquated computer systems meant relief payment delays. Millions are still waiting. Some payments won't be received until 2021! But Trump's self-promoting signature is on mailed checks. Worse, the relief legislation included a tax break for pass-through income. "82 percent of the benefits ... go to about 43,000 taxpayers who earn more than \$1 million annually" (WP). What did WI GOP Senator Ron Johnson, champion of reducing pass-through income tax liability, know? The haves are still doing well at the expense of the have-nots.

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