

Bill Kaplan: Stupidity vs. stay-at-home

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Nearly a million coronavirus cases nationally, including 5,687 in Wisconsin (WI), over 54,000 U.S. deaths and nearly 300 WI deaths. Dozens of cases linked to in-person voting on April 7 in Milwaukee. And, hundreds of cases confirmed among workers at a JBS meatpacking plant in Green Bay. No zip code is immune.

Meanwhile: “The federal government scrambled Friday to stave off a potential wave of public health emergencies sparked by ... Trump’s dangerous suggestion that injecting bleach or other household disinfectants into the body might cure people of the novel coronavirus” (WP).

Does Trump read his intelligence briefings? Back in January 2019, U.S. intelligence agencies said: “We assess that the United States and the world will remain vulnerable to the next flu pandemic or large-scale outbreak of a contagious disease that could lead to massive rates of death and disability, severely affect the world economy, strain international resources ...” (WP).

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However, Trump is clueless, going from “liberate” (reopen) blue states to publicly criticizing Georgia GOP Governor Brian Kemp for reopening as coronavirus spikes there. The WP reported that Trump is “clear as mud”. Oklahoma GOP Representative Tom Cole has had enough: “You got to have some hope to sell people. But Trump usually sells anger, division and ‘we’re the victim’.” Moreover, Republican governors are showing public health leadership.

Maryland GOP Governor Larry Hogan, head of the bipartisan National Governors

Association, said: “Every governor in America has been pushing and fighting ... to get more (coronavirus) tests, not only from the federal government, but from every private lab in America and from all across the world.” Hogan, helped by his Korean-American wife, purchased testing kits from South Korea. Testing is central to reopening the economy, along with a decline in new cases, more personal protective and medical equipment, adequate hospital capacity and above all, contact tracing.

Massachusetts GOP Governor Charlie Baker has set aside \$44 million to hire 1,000 people to do contact tracing to identify who has been exposed to coronavirus. This is a well-tested public health strategy. “The contact tracers ... will inform the contact of approximately when they were exposed, and then take an inventory of symptoms, talk the contact through quarantine requirements, and help (if needed) arrange assistance with food or housing ...” (NYT).

Wisconsin Democratic Governor Tony Evers is on the same page as both GOP governors. His “Badger Bounce Back Plan” is a public health (nonpartisan) proposal. Evers has tried to negotiate with the WI GOP-led legislature to invest in contact tracing. One idea advanced by the Journal of the American Medical Association has called for incoming medical students to be hired (pay and medical benefits) to do contact tracing. How about asking the UW-Madison School of Medicine and Medical College of Wisconsin to sign on?

Finally, Jay Timmons, head of the conservative National Association of Manufacturers, had a pungent post for extremist protesters demanding immediate reopening without conditions: “IDIOTS”. Is Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce listening? Doctors, nurses and public health leaders are. Stupidity is not an option.

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