



Letter To The Editor: Comments About Madison County Decision To Open Early In Pandemic

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May 5, 2020 during the third of three special meetings called by County Board Chairperson, Kurt Prenzler, the Madison County Board passed a resolution to put into effect The Guidelines For the Responsible Reopening of Madison County allowing Madison County businesses to engage the public in business activities earlier than the State mandated guidelines allow and stay open even though a business might not meet State mandated guidelines. This action was taken ostensibly on behalf of small businesses and municipalities suffering economic harm due to COVID 19 pandemic. The fact that the Guidelines and resolution, as presented, revealed a primary concern for protecting the authors and signers from any liabilities that might be incurred by anyone acting on the advice offered by the Guidelines and Resolution while making clear that anyone who did act upon the Resolution would not be supported or defended in any way by the County Government belied the Resolution's stated purpose. The Resolution's scant guidelines dealt inadequately with any issue necessary to execute a reopening of the economy during a biological natural disaster despite its claims to the contrary. Consequently, the resolution was criticized by business associations as potentially dangerous to the well-being of businesses, employees, customers, and communities. Most mayors expressed their intention to ignore the resolution as useless advice lacking legal authority.

COVID 19 pandemic is a biological natural disaster with unique characteristics. The root cause of our present circumstances is epidemiological. Law, politics, and economics have jurisdiction over human behavior but no jurisdiction over a virus. We cannot eliminate this serious biological natural disaster by declaring it illegal or passing a resolution because we think we have suffered enough at the hands of some other governmental body. Wrong focus. Policies designed to solve a single catastrophic event will fail. This is a problem that requires prudent management over an extended period. Effective solutions to our economic problems will be crafted, first, as public health

policies rooted in the science of epidemiology. Solutions will require that every citizen diligently participate in proactive behaviors such as self-monitoring, testing , tracing and isolating , while practicing mitigating behaviors, such as masking, washing of hands and surfaces and social distancing with the utmost discipline as we attempt to resume economic behavior. This is all we have. No one will come to save us or our economy. We are it. We must save ourselves with our own behavior. Remember, there is no “other guy” we are all the “other guy”. Refusal to participate in testing, tracing, isolating, and mitigating behaviors is not a defense of liberty but an assault on the health and wellbeing of others and on one’s own health and wellbeing. Science is the proper paradigm to employ not politics. First science then evidence-based policy. Unilateral action during a regional crisis is not a good look. It presents as panic or hubris, neither of which is helpful nor effective not to mention embarrassing. Public poise is something governments cannot afford to lose.

Faith that we will persevere and prevail is essential but not sufficient. We must also have the discipline to confront the harsh conditions of our present situation however scary they may be. Do not dismiss the effectiveness of diligently practiced mitigating behaviors. They save lives while conducting business every day in industry, hospitals, and the military. We are not re-inventing the wheel here; we have models. The Madison County Health Department can provide scientific information on which governmental bodies, municipalities, and institutions, and individuals can responsibly act. The Madison County Health Department’s Dashboard can provide granular information for effective, evidence based continuous monitoring and management. Let us not forget that persons with mental illness issues deserve parity.

If by our actions we feed fear, defiance, and hubris, chaos will follow. If through courage and discipline we practice evidence-based policies and behaviors with grace under pressure, we will get through this and prevail. We have met our enemy and our savior and they are both US.

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