

The Delray Democrat

COVID-19 Meets the US National Debt¹

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As the U.S. deals with the COVID-19 crisis, the reality is a medical calamity wherein 150 million Americans may catch the virus with a real possibility of more than 2 million deaths. People may blame the Trump administration for failing to act for months, thus greatly exacerbating the crisis by delays in testing, protective equipment, hospital resourcing, and most importantly public awareness. Calling this a hoax for months has dire consequences. However, there is an extreme economic catastrophe directly stemming from the medical crisis. This, too, could have been significantly mitigated.

Trump's ineptitude, dishonesty, and total inability to lead caused the financial markets to crash much further and faster than would have otherwise occurred. Nevertheless, while not minimizing the awful loss to families who may lose a loved one to the disease, the economic crisis may have more serious impact on more individuals. To try and minimize the spread of the virus, most businesses must close for long periods of time, perhaps through the end of the crisis. We are not so concerned with corporate upper management who have sufficient resources to survive, but rather the millions of employees that will lose their jobs permanently or for extreme periods wherein they will not receive income. Very few working families have the resources to survive the many months of this challenge.

Congress appears poised to pass multiple stimulus plans and there really is no alternative. Experts predict the unemployment rate will exceed 20%! Most restaurants will be forced to close their business, many permanently. Stores are closing for the duration, laying off workers. With travel and entertainment halted, airline, hotel, and cruise industry workers are without jobs. Theater, amusement park, museum, and sports workers are all without work. The government simply must step in and ensure that working families have the basic means to survive throughout this crisis. If not, millions of people will lose their homes and starve. It is that simple. People will obviously need access to medical care including COVID-19 tests and treatment. The effort will be enormous if we are to save the country.

There are two additional obstacles. First, our national debt rapidly approaches 25 trillion dollars and we find ourselves on the precipice of disaster. Some might say if we are at 25, what is the big deal about 27? Senator Rand Paul and 8 Republican Senators, along with 40 Republican House members, callously oppose these measures. They would shamefully rather allow our citizens to suffer and even die. The truth is that we have no choice, we need to just do it. However, Congress must ensure they provide only necessary relief and in the most effective

¹ *The Delray Democrat*, April 2020, p. 3.

manner. There cannot be waste. For example, there must be a provision that mandates that any tax breaks or relief to businesses large and small only be used to maintain operations and employee salaries. They must prevent abuse such as stock buybacks, senior executive compensation, any overseas spending whatsoever, etc. When the crisis ends, there must be immediate austerity measures to address the national debt and that will involve different, but necessary sacrifice. The virus first.

The second obstacle is our failure to maintain critical manufacturing and industry within our own borders. The US, and many other nations, rely heavily on China for prescription drugs and medical equipment. Contrary to some media commentary, there is no actual national stockpile hospitals can use to save us. This is a stark lesson to our nation that we must not only preserve our manufacturing base for these and other essential products, especially those we may need in response to various crises, but also the ability to quickly convert to increased production of such goods. This is a national security issue as well as medically and economically crucial. We can only sustain ourselves in a crisis if we have the means to make what we need here at home. This will also allow us to go back to the days where we can help other nations struggling through a crisis. The US cannot remain so fundamentally reliant on China for so much of what we need.

The response to COVID-19 has been another abject failure by this administration. With so many lives at stake, we must come together at all levels and fix this. As we get through this crisis, we must then also ensure we are better prepared economically, medically, and industrially for future crises. Our country and our lives truly depend on it.