

WNDC



Political Dispatch

June 2020

From Karen Pataky, Chair, Health Policy Task Force

COVID-19: WHO LIVES, WHO DIES, WHO DECIDES, WHO PAYS

"The people in power right now are too comfortable with other people's deaths." —Rev. William Barber

2020 has brought planet Earth another world plague, a coronavirus that causes the disease COVID-19. The precise date of its appearance is unclear. Some suggest its emergence was in China in December 2019. Some infectious disease experts tried to warn our government in early January 2020. But mainstream media in the United States did not begin serious coverage until late February 2020. Tragically, this current American president refused to listen to the CDC (Centers of Disease Control and Prevention) message about the massive and dreadful suffering and death this virus would cause in its attack on human beings. He did, however, recognize that an epidemic might interfere with the numerous rallies he has planned for his reelection attempt.

Preliminary information suggested that deaths would occur mainly in our elderly and in people with chronic health problems such as heart disease, diabetes, or emphysema. Such people are labeled "of low personal value" in medical ethics terminology. But, as dozens of people of all ages filled hospitals in New York City, the speed of contagion and the nature of the deaths moved Governor Andrew Cuomo to "lock down" New York City on March 20, 2020. The rationale of lock down is that in light of the severe shortages of COVID-19 tests, everyone must be presumed to be infectious, so all people must take isolation precautions.

The insufficient number of reliable tests prevents our country from identifying asymptomatic people who are unknowingly contagious and prevents us from hospitalizing patients in an earlier life-saving manner when mild symptoms might be overlooked. Lack of testing also prevents contact tracing, which locates pockets of infection. For Trump, lack of testing also minimizes the numbers of those Americans infected with coronavirus, so as not to distract from Trump's reelection efforts —"No testing, no problem."

On March 30, Mayor Bowser and the DC Council locked down our nation's capital city. What does lock down actually involve? Here is where the racism, sexism, and elitism become evident. A new definition of "haves" vs "have nots" has emerged.

1. Shelter in place at home, maintain social distancing of 6 feet when outside the home, and wear simple face masks. Very difficult for anyone living in a small, crowded space.
2. Stay at home except for urgent trips to medical offices or drug stores. Order-in food and cleaning supplies. But, citizens designated "necessary" MUST go out to work: mail carriers, people employed in the warehouses that fill the boxes that are delivered, grocery clerks, etc. They should be protected with face masks, gloves, and aprons. Many "necessary" workers must also use public transportation, which adds another layer of possible contagion. These are lower-wage workers, many of color and more of them female.
3. Telecommute instead of going into the office. But of course, ALL health care workers (physicians, nurses, respiratory therapists, hospital cleaning crew, EMTs) cannot work from home while caring for patients with COVID-19. They must all have adequate supplies of state-of-the-art PPE (personal protective equipment). We have totally inadequate supplies of masks, gloves, face shields, and hair coverings. In fact, most health care workers must reuse, reuse, and reuse. And there are not enough ventilators. VENTILATORS!

COVID-19 continued

Shortages of all equipment are procurement and supply-chain problems totally laid at the feet of an uninterested and unqualified president and his totally incompetent profiteering surrogate Jared Kushner. States were forced to bid competitively for all PPE and ventilators, which the federal government should have funded outright.

The current rough totals of COVID-19 are 3.3 million worldwide including 235,000 deaths. The United States reports 1.2 million who test positive for coronavirus with over 100,000 deaths. This year alone more Americans have died from COVID-19 than we lost during our 10 years of the Vietnam War. Most experts perceive our death toll to exceed 100,000 because many of the dead have gone untested, especially those in nursing homes.

Another new cauldron of disease and death has emerged, though testing is incomplete, in meat-processing plants in the Midwest. Many of the workers are undocumented and all are low wage. They have been told they must report for work, even if they feel ill, or they will be fired. Most live outside the environs of the respective cities.

We will be following COVID-19 illness and death in all their ramifications, including who are infected, and who are affected, as well as advances in treatments. Stay tuned.

From Elizabeth Spiro Clark, Chair, Human Rights and Democracy Task Force

REPUBLICAN IDEOLOGY FOR BEGINNERS

As almost 100,000 people have lost their lives to COVID-19, Trump's expression of sorrow has been negligible. Moreover, the disease is taking a terrible toll on the people who are working to save lives. The list for this lack of empathy could begin with the Princess Cruise Line ship that Trump wanted to prevent from docking in California because it had coronavirus victims on board and if it docked the number of US COVID-19 cases would increase. This was followed in May by the extraordinary example of Trump's using the Defense Production Act to reopen midwestern meat-packing plants, which had closed because of the virus. But, he refused to use the Act to ensure that the nation had enough testing capability.

To explain these events, we must understand that the current Republican base evinces a belief in a combination of Christian Nationalism (what Christian Evangelicalism has become), unchecked capitalism, and free market absolutism. In this setting government is the enemy because its role is to regulate the free market for the national interest, to guarantee the separation of church and state, and to empower democratic institutions to protect against power-seeking dictators. This belief assumes that anything that impinges on the private sector is an illegitimate enemy.

Katherine Stewart spells out how Christian Nationalism is behind evangelical support for Trump in her book, *The Power Worshipers* (2020, ebook). Christian Nationalism is a political movement that worships masculine power (e.g., social distancing is weak and cowardly, not altruistic and courageous). Christian nationalism is not libertarian or even anti-government, but is driven by the divine right of kings.

In this form, Christian Nationalism marries masculine Christianity with the philosophy of unchecked capitalism espoused by author Ayn Rand. "My philosophy," she said, "in essence is the concept of man as a heroic being with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life." And, this philosophy links perfectly into Trump's emphasis on privatization and explains use of the free market centering on tax cuts for the rich (using the disproved theory that the poor and middle class will benefit from trickle down). It is plausible to explain Trump's actions as Trump's sticking to his 2016 playbook to get reelected, and doing everything to deflect attention from the devastation of coronavirus.

However, the coherent ideology that Trump and his base believe in—Christian Nationalism, the philosophy of novelist Ayn Rand, and free market absolutism—is particularly dangerous because it attacks our institutions. Government is seen as the enemy because its role is to regulate the free market in the national interest and that of individuals, to guarantee the separation of church and state, and to empower democratic institutions to protect against power-seeking dictators. Yet, with Trumpism, democracy and those elected are not accepted as legitimate actors and power-holders. Any sense of community (i.e., the foundation of morality), whether it is nations working together or individuals in communities working together, is presented as harmful and against God's will.

From Ellen McGovern, Chair, Gun Violence Prevention Task Force

COVID-19 AND GUNS IN AMERICA

An effect of COVID-19 has been a surge in gun sales in the country. According to the Brady Center and the FBI's National Crime Information Center, background checks processed on March 16, 2020, increased by 300% over the same day in 2019. This is a reaction to fear and uncertainty about the future. Research shows that more guns in the home are connected with higher incidents of homicide and suicide — impacting domestic partners and unintentional killings of children and teens. Thus, COVID-19 and gun violence are intertwined. Moreover, with the virus attacking communities of color significantly, we also find the impact of gun violence harsher on these same communities. The bottom line is, while summer in America will be different this year, one thing that will not change is the crisis from gun violence. Over the Memorial Day weekend, the Midwest cities of Chicago, St. Louis, and Cincinnati showed spikes in gun violence.

#WEARORANGE WEEKEND STARTS JUNE 5

WNDC is participating with organizations here and throughout the country to draw attention to gun violence. Friday, June 5th is National Gun Violence Awareness Day. We ask WNDC members to join us in wearing orange on June 5th to unite all Americans in our goal to end gun violence. Our building's donkey, Jenny, will also be donned in orange ribbons in a show of solidarity through the first weekend in June. We know that even during the COVID-19 pandemic, gun violence is impacting communities across the nation. And, that is why we, together with Everytown, Moms Demand Action, Students Demand Action, Giffords, Brady, and more, are doing everything we can to make #WearOrange as impactful as possible. To date, Everytown has more than 100 virtual events on their website at: www.everytown.org. Check them out.

2020 ELECTIONS

WNDC's Gun Violence Prevention Task Force continues to work with WNDC's GOTV Task Force and Winning Wednesdays, which went "virtual" given the COVID-19 situation. June has two Winning Wednesdays: June 10 and June 24 from 6 to 8 pm. Let's take back the U.S. Senate like we took back the US House in 2018! We are working to get voters registered and then later on to vote in November. The key WNDC states are: AZ, CO, GA, ME, NC, and TX. If we want hard-earned, bipartisan, Congressional legislation passed in the Senate, we need to take back the Senate now! We only need to gain three or four Democratic Senators. Likewise, we need to hold the House and add some seats. And, of course, this is the year for winning back the Presidency. It all can be done; we just need to work together and bring others along with us this summer and fall. Our Task Force + Elections = success! Check the WNDC website for updates throughout the summer!

FEDERAL LEGISLATION

Majority Leader McConnell must go now! McConnell and his Republican colleagues have NOT brought up any gun safety bills from the US House, including the popular, bipartisan H.R. 8, Background Checks Bill.

Senators Tammy Duckworth, D-IL, and Cory Booker, D-NJ, together with 20 of their Democratic colleagues, are calling on the Senate leadership, to include \$250 million in community-based violence intervention program funding in the next COVID relief package. The funding would allow local governments in the areas hardest hit by gun violence to support and develop lifesaving, community-based programs to combat gun violence. The GVP community strongly supports this effort!

GVP TASK FORCE

The GVP Task Force will hold a meeting and social hour for current members on Thursday, June 11 at 5:30 pm.