

COVID-19, the Government & the Economy

What Were We Thinking?

The better question may be: Were we thinking? As I write this, most of the world is locked down. There are Stay-at-Home orders for all but essential businesses all over the U.S. This is "For our Safety." We need to stop the spread of the Novel Coronavirus. This virus can lead to the disease COVID-19. Some countries are reporting a death rate of almost 10% (9.92% in Spain) of the infected. Others are reporting under 2%. If you are under 50 years old you have less than ½ a percent chance of dying. Below 40...About 0.2%. That is 2 people out of a thousand. People keep saying how terrible this is. I never hear them questioning WHY the reported death rates are so different from city-to-city & country-to-country.

There are some other questions about this death rate. There is no way to tell how many people are really infected unless you test them all. Almost all deaths are reported, but many people are infected that never show symptoms. Others have mild symptoms & don't get treated or even diagnosed. In a recent blood drive 60 people came to donate. All of them thought they were healthy. Of these sixty, 40 tested positive. That's 2/3rds of the people that thought they were not infected actually were.

I am in Ohio. This is day 16, of my forced Stay-at-Home. Or is it? It turns out that I am essential. On day one, I closed on a house. I set up an appointment at the bank to wire funds. Then went to the Title agency to close. Then I picked up food from a local restaurant to eat.

My construction company is also essential. After all, if a tenant breaks something we have to go in, expose both the tenant, and my contractors to each other, so we can fix their home. The real estate brokerage is still open. Sure, we do lock box showings & people drop rent through the mail slot, but they are also essential.

What else is essential? You can transport family members & pets. You can go to the park or go fishing. Basically all healthcare facilities of every kind are open. Food production, but not the dining rooms, are open. Grocery stores are still open. In fact, everyone around goes to the grocery store about once a week. What a GREAT way to make sure that the virus spreads to everyone that goes there. Marijuana & alcohol businesses are open. Just don't drink in a bar. About all restaurants are now doing carry-out alcohol. The media is essential, but church is not. In fact, a preacher was arrested for having mass. Banks & insurance companies are open. Mail and deliveries are still moving. Airlines that put a hundred people in a small tube & take them to another part of the country are still flying. (This has really been cut down, and you are asked to self-quarantine for 14 days after travel.) In public transportation you are required to social distance when you can (not easily done on the subway.) Gas stations, hotels, and funeral services are allowed. If you are not sure if you can work, there are other guidelines. If you support any of these businesses you can also work. That covers most people. We also have millions working from home.

I listed many, but not all of the essential businesses. It seems like there is a lot we can still do. In fact, I am busier than ever. I even hired 2 waitresses to clean for me right after this started. They did not show up on their 1st day of work. I received a letter from unemployment from a contractor that worked for me 2 years ago. Apparently, he wants unemployment even though he was never an employee & has not worked for my company for about 2 years. I want

to hire new contractors, but no one wants to work. And why should they? They can actually make more money staying at home collecting unemployment benefits from both the state & federal governments.

In order to save these poor people who are not “allowed” to work, we (the governments? The tax payers?) are sending them all free money. Is this because about ½ of Americans cannot cover an unexpected \$400 expense. (I notice that most of my tenants that “Can’t” pay rent have a \$5 pack of cigarettes, manicured nails and/or a fresh hairdo.) It will only take about 20 weeks for some of the people to get their money. Tell me how \$1,200, in 5 months will help pay bills this week? All it will do is create more MORAL HAZARD. Why should anyone ever save money, if storing it in “Safe” government bonds guarantees you lose money. Yes, T-bills had a negative interest rate last week. Even if you can earn 1% interest, inflation is 2% or more, especially after this \$2.2trillion to \$6.4 Trillion counterfeiting experiment (AKA Bailout.) How fast is your buying power eroding? The more money printed, the less valuable the money you already have is.

Some good notes on the Pandemic. Gun sales are up 300%. Many are 1st time buyers. Some of them interviewed said that they were against guns, but now they feel that they need them to protect their families. If they are starting to realize that the 2nd amendment is needed, when will everyone start talking about other constitutional rights that are being taken away? In some areas Gun stores are forced to shut down. Other cities & states firearm & ammo stores are declared essential. Guns, like Gold, are usually not needed. In fact you never need a gun...Until you REALLY need one. And like gold, when you need one, it is much harder to get.

The 1st amendment states: Congress shall make no law...prohibiting the free exercise of religion. Also in the 1st Amendment, the right of people to peaceably assemble is protected. Both of these rights are gone, without notice, and without the judicial system. You cannot get a hearing because most courts shut down for a couple months. Once upon a time, the congress was the lawmaking branch. Now the executive branch just issues executive orders. This has been going on for decades from all political parties. No oversight. No voting. No representation. Just orders from the president & governors. That sounds a lot like a dictatorship to me.

How can the government better enforce these orders? In Argentina you need papers to travel. There are road blocks. In Kenya, a 13yo boy was shot as police tried enforcing the new rules. They are also using tear gas & riot batons. All over the US people are being arrested & fined. In the Philippines, police were ordered to “Shoot them dead” during food shortages brought on by COVID-19. In India the police are beating people with sticks. They are spraying bleach on migrant workers. In Nepal they have social distancing pliers. These are devices like you might use to catch a dog that is trying to bite you. All of this is going on and I have not seen a single news clip on the mainstream media. How can we let this happen?

For thousands of years the governments have known that hungry people riot. That is why I am sure they will not shut down places that sell food. They also know better than to completely shut down the press. Right now the government needs the press to constantly tell the people how terrible this pandemic is. If people were not afraid, it is less likely that they would completely give up so many freedoms overnight.

What does the congress do now? They pass 800+ page bills to save us. They argue about how much, or how little, currency we should give to the arts, to immigrants, to...anyone

they want special favors for (CARES). And in up to 4 months from now we may get our free money also. They put **bail-in legislation** in HUGE bills that are meant to save the financial system (Dodd-Frank). You can read my whole paper on that, but basically it shows how the banks can steal their depositors' money to pay investors, bonuses and other expenses. They pass laws that completely fix our healthcare system (Affordable Care Act). When they do this, some even say "We need to pass the bill to find out what is in it." The dedicated civil servant that said this has a net worth of about 16 million. Not bad for government work. Especially since they were voting on bills that they did not even read. They do also pass other laws. Some include voting for their own pay raises and for great pensions for congress. Others include the medical care that they get. No, it is not the same as our affordable care.

While we are on medical care, let's look at one agency in particular. The FDA determines what drugs are approved for treating certain diseases. This is important because government healthcare may not pay, even if it works, for an approved drug that was not approved for this specific disease. It can cost a Billion dollars to get a new drug approved. This is very good for large drug companies (less new competition.) Not so good for people that need the drug before they die. It may take 12-18 months to get a vaccine approved for Coronavirus. This has led some lawmakers to say that this "Stay-at-Home" should continue for 18 months. Others say life should never go back to normal. The DEA still lists marijuana as a Schedule 1 narcotic. This is the same as heroin & LSD. It is worse than meth & cocaine according to this classification. They say it has no medicinal uses.

These are the same doctors and politicians that grossly overestimated the death rates. And in the process gained much more control over the people. Now they are busy arguing over...I don't even know. Just turn on the TV and you will hear about the newest issue that the Democrats & Republicans are fighting about.

The government has brought us the "War on Drugs" ... or at least A War on Some Drugs. We now have a "war" on a virus. Why is this a war? Because they need wartime powers to be able to take all of these rights from us (I'm not even sure that is legal or at least it is not ethical).

Is staying home saving lives? On the surface it appears to be. I like to look at the big picture. To date there have been 14,390 deaths attributed to COVID-19. However the amount of deaths from pneumonia are way down from the same time last year. If I happen to be infected & die in a car crash does that count also? I believe that many of these are deaths of people WITH the disease, but not FROM the disease. In fact, many of the first reported deaths had as many as 3 underlying conditions. What deaths are not counted? A suicide hotline averaged 1,000 calls a day. After millions of people lost their jobs & millions more were locked in at home that number increased to 25,000 a day! Domestic violence is up. So is drug addiction. Will these be reported as COVID-19 deaths? Economic deaths?

Is this a new idea? Is it only in our country? In Rome they had Bread & Circuses. Feed the poor. Entertain them & they will not revolt no matter what other freedoms we take away. In the US we have Guns & Butter. Investopedia states that both of these can be "critically important to a nation's economy." How many wars... wait, we don't declare war anymore. How many conflicts have made your life better? I spent 13 years in the Army. At the time I thought I was doing the right thing. Spreading democracy across the world... Now I see what democracy does. It is time we go back to being a Republic. A nation of laws. Not a nation run by the same 50% majority of mob rule.

In Venezuela, one of the most mineral rich countries in the world, people are starving. There are riots for sugar. The people are broke. Hyperinflation is destroying any wealth that the people had. At least a few of the citizens haven't lost everything. The daughter of ex-president Hugo Chavez had \$4.2 Billion un US dollars in the United States. This is typical of most, if not all nations of the world today. The politicians get rich and make their own rules. They disregard constitutions and laws that do not benefit them. In the US Constitution Article I, Section 1, Line 1, it states: "No State shall... coin Money; emit Bills of Credit; make any Thing but gold and silver Coin a Tender in Payment of Debts..." No the Federal government is not authorized to counterfeit paper money with no basis or backing either. But we have been since August 15th, 1971.

More on the Bill of Rights & the Constitution. I have already talked about the government disregarding the parts of Amendments 1 & 2 that they did not like. Amendment 4 prevents searches & seizures without a warrant from the court. In Canton, OH, as well as many other cities, the government officials have ordinances that say these "Inspectors" can come into my property without a warrant. Even if they have no license or qualifications they can fine us if we do not change everything they want changed. There is no certificate if everything is fine, just bills for extra fines if they believe we missed an inspection. This has been found by a court unconstitutional in multiple municipalities, but we have to fight it out in every one. As for Article 5, I am not sure how helpful that is. We have civil asset forfeiture laws. There is a great clip on YouTube about this. Basically the cops can steal from you without a court order. Then your assets, Not you, has to defend itself. If this seems like it cannot possibly be true, then you read it correctly. How about a speedy trial? (Article 6: speedy trial, and 7: jury trial) All of the courts have quit hearing cases for a couple months. What will the backlog be when they start again? My question is, if there are no courts to resolve issues between people, how will the issues get resolved? I can think of many ways and most of them are not good or civil.

Having a court system to hear cases is one of the few real jobs a government has. This duty of theirs has been suspended, by them. We are expected to keep fixing homes. Yes the inspectors are still generating income for the city, but we cannot legally remove a person that breaks their contract with us. If people don't have to work AND they get free money, why should they get a job? If you can't be evicted, why pay rent? To be clear, over 90% of the people are not only logical, they are even easier to deal with than before this pandemic. We are working together and the vast majority of people are very happy. It is the same 1% that has always caused problems that is causing even more now.

Back to the Bill of Rights. Article 8: Excessive bail... This is not a problem. Many jails are letting people convicted of a variety of crimes out. I had a contractor that was scheduled to go to jail. That's right, he had 3 DUI's that required mandatory jail time. He was such a threat he was required to go to jail. But not enough of a threat to let him stay out of jail for months even before this pandemic started. He could work & pay all of his fines in that time before he went to jail. Then when he finally reported on the day he picked, he told them he had a fever & they sent him home. I do not know if it will help in any way if he actually ever goes to jail. I do believe that he should have either gone the night they arrested him or not at all.

Article 9: This is basically all rights that are not specifically listed in the constitution. I could write hundreds of pages on other rights that have been taken from the people. Finally,

Article 10: all other powers are reserved for the states or the people. Nowhere in there does it say "Until we can find a way to take those rights away."

Has any government every put itself above its own people? A better question is, has there ever been a benevolent government? The 2nd amendment was put in the bill of rights, presumably it was more important than everything except free speech & the right to assemble, to protect us from the government. The number one way "We the People" lose liberty, and even life, is by letting our own government take it from us. In the army we took an oath "that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic..." I did not swear to defend the politicians. I swore to defend the Constitution. Why is this important? Because there have been many great countries in the past. Every empire has fallen because of the same things. There is too much warfare. There is too much welfare. The government then debases the money to pay for the things that the people would never pay taxes to support. (Think Tarp, QE, \$2.2 Trillion CARES act...) Some have faded away. Others have had bloody revolutions.

Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1787 "And what country can preserve it's liberties if their rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms. The remedy is to set them right as to facts, pardon and pacify them. What signify a few lives lost in a century or two? The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants." I hope that this is a peaceful change. There may only be one thing worse than war...Submission. To give away all of your power, property and dignity to someone or something that has never earned or deserved any of them is a terrible thing. Thousands of years we have went through the same cycles. There is no reason to believe that this time will be any different. I believe that technology will just help things progress faster.

Over 800 years ago the Magna Carta was written. In 1215 it was an attempt to make peace between the government & the people. It is said, that the people thought, that some of the King's (insert President's or Governor's) decisions were arbitrary. He ruled by "Force of Will." People on the royal's side thought he was above the law. Liberty is given and taken away many times throughout the centuries. Many nations, including the United States base some of their laws & Constitutions on this document. Many have been powerful documents... until they were not.

Governments do not normally give up powers once they have it. The Patriot Act, Dodd-Frank, control of the healthcare system are just a few things that come to mind. At one time it was illegal to listen to other's phone conversations. Now, it is legal without a warrant if it is on a mobile phone. (How many of you have Landline-to-Landline calls anymore?) Now they are taking more of our rights at an alarming pace. All under the name of our safety. Most people are following these new executive orders out of fear. This fear is based on what they watch on the mainstream media. Why shouldn't they? They get to stay home & still get paid for not working. Is this the new norm? How long can the governments of the world keep printing paper currency before the people refuse to accept it? (Yes, virtually every government on earth is printing paper Dollars, Rupees, Yen, Yuan, Pesos, Bolivars...)

Only the people can stop this overbearing control. It will never be too late, but the longer it lasts, the worse it will be. Americans pay about 10 times as much in taxes as we did the last time we had a revolution. There has never been a time in history that governments,

especially ours, have had more surveillance of us. Every free market idea is thought of as a way to break the laws. (Anti-counterfeiting, money laundering, drug dealing...) I am sure Bitcoin has been used to buy drugs. Some of those drugs are currently and somewhat arbitrarily made illegal by our governments at this time. (Before the Harrison act narcotics were not illegal. There were not nearly as many problems with drug addiction as there are now.) Aspirin is legal. Marijuana is not... Well it is in some places it is. The Feds say they will not enforce the laws against it (still illegal at the federal level). Until they change their minds. I did some research & I found that US Federal Reserve Notes (Cash dollars) have also been used to buy illegal drugs. I have not heard of a push to make dollars illegal, although many politicians want to get rid of cash. That is why they quit making the largest bills. Electronic credit cards and debit cards are much easier to track & confiscate if you are ever accused of a crime. Yes, I said accused, not convicted.

To conclude: What have we given up? That is for you to decide. Is it worth it? For how long? And finally: Exactly what is normal anymore?

I hope this essay made you think. I wonder if the powers that be anticipated that this is what I would be thinking about when they ordered me to Stay-at-Home?