

2020 – COVID-19 – Dire Impact on Texas

Late April 2020

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There are several varieties of Coronavirus – but – what we consider now to be the newest in humans is COVID-19. You have been made aware of the symptoms and consequence – including possible serious illness -and/or even death. This virus has provided the cause for major concern – in almost every facet of our wonderful lifestyle here in Texas. We Texans are noted for – and value our famous hospitality and sociability. Now we must forget the spontaneity of our social lifestyle. Never before have I seen a time that we could not congregate and celebrate the life of a deceased family member or friend. Our family has even postponed a long-anticipated wedding – because of the meeting size rules in place.

Texas is extremely fortunate to have a very diverse economic base: agriculture – recreation – military presence and a tremendous manufacturing financial presence. However – we have become more and more dependent upon the oil and gas industry. Any sort of bubble in the monetary supply line that can suddenly and drastically reduce the demand for oil and gas – can create a pebble in the pond – circular impact type outcome. When stopping – or severely slowing our mobility – we have suddenly cut consumption of oil to a mere drip. A prime example of this is the amount of fuel that the commercial air transportation industry has normally used. With commercial air transportation cut to the bare bones – we have lost one of our greatest financial boosters.

I hear all manner of speculation – as you also do. Did the COVID-19 originate with activities in a lab in Wuhan China? Does the disease build it's own immunity? Is it probable to have another outbreak this fall? Almost any malady can be blamed on the other political party – or another nation's poor handling of the issue. THE REAL ISSUE TO REMEMBER HERE – IS NOT WHERE IT CAME FROM – OR HOW IT GOT HERE – BUT – WHAT CAN WE DO TO CONTROL COVID-19 AND LIVE AND PERFORM IN THIS NEW DAY AND AGE?

Many serious questions are arising. Can the state legislature function satisfactorily using such techniques as Zoom and other interactive communication methods? This is how we who represent associations are coping with this challenge at the moment. Are these methods of communication constitutionally acceptable? Considering the large numbers of persons involved – can these methods of communication work effectively?

The “stay at home” policy/practice is extremely important in curbing spread of COVID-19. On the other side of the coin – it has wreaked financial havoc here in the number one oil producing state. As each well drilling project is completed – the rigs are being stacked – and the rough necks and roustabouts are creating “U-Haul” convoys leaving the Permian Basin area. Not only does the oil industry generate severance tax – which helps with long term educational financing – but it also generates untold millions of dollars in state sales tax revenue. Not only are we losing untold millions of dollars because of COVID-19 – but at the same time we are adding yet to be determined expenses to the state budget as we provide required medical expenses.

Pressures and demands continue to escalate. Consider the fact that on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January – 2021 – the state legislature will begin their regular legislative session. State leadership is pondering how we will have 181

state legislators housed in the House and Senate Chambers – not to mention the hundreds of staffers that are required to conduct the business of the state. Social distancing seems to be a physical impossibility. How can we continue to provide a constitutional setting where citizens can present their cause at legislative committee hearings and open sessions of the state legislature. How can we insure transparency to our citizens? The major hope is that by that date – the coronavirus plague will have been controlled. Question? How probable is that? Producing an effective prevention vaccine could be a lengthy project. I – along with a number of you - remember the iron lung days of the polio epidemic. We also recall the length of time required before we had what medical authorities considered a fool proof anti-polio vaccine. A vaccine to deal with COPID-19 will probably be similar.

State leadership must be doing some “non-partisan” policy creation. It makes sense that they probably need to give serious thought to drafting both a “Plan A” as well as a “Plan B” methodology of coping with this serious challenge. The challenges that an incoming and new legislative body will be facing as they are sworn in early in 2021 – seem insurmountable. We all know that Texans initiative has brought us through many previous tense times. I am confident that we will overcome the obstacles that this challenge presents.

Let us all remember – we are in this together.