

READERS WRITE Words matter. Realistic ones.

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Body

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

These last few weeks, state and federal officials have been telling us what to do to slow the transmission of COVID-19. After reading Star Tribune editorial writer Jill Burcum's excellent interview with Michael Osterholm in the Opinion Exchange section on March 22 ("What's 'normal' now? What's next?"), I realized we also should be focusing on what to say.

Most everything I read or hear on the pandemic contains statements like "until this is over," "we just need to get through this" and "when we get back to normal." We have couched COVID-19 in peekaboo language: Now you see it, now you don't. This wishful thinking - that life will be the same as it once was - is not helping to prepare us for the realities ahead.

One of the few voices I've come to trust on the subject is Osterholm's. Beyond his expertise in infectious disease, he has a bead on human behavior. Our own reactions and choice of words could well keep us from being prepared for a pandemic even more devastating than the one we're currently facing. We don't want to believe the worst and don't want our lives to be disrupted for too long.

Even as we face uncertainty, there is plenty we do know. COVID-19 won't be the last pandemic, and not being prepared is no longer an option.

Hope helps us through the day-to-day. But we also need to speak honestly about the future and how we will need to adapt. As Osterholm reminds us, "hope is not a strategy."

Lenore Franzen, St. Paul

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I highly recommend anyone who missed it to read Burcum's fascinating interview of Osterholm. That said, I was disappointed to hear the erroneous comparison of Singapore and Hong Kong's responses (Hong Kong closed schools, Singapore did not) continue to be perpetuated by experts who should know better.

Hong Kong is a special administrative region with little more than a fence separating it from the fourth-largest city in mainland China. Singapore is an independent island nation more than 1,000 miles from China. One would expect the situation in Hong Kong to be significantly worse than that of Singapore. That the situation is similar in both areas is a sign that Hong Kong's measures were likely more effective than Singapore's.

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Matthew Byrnes, Minneapolis

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I had an interaction recently that broke my heart. I was at Minnesota Nurses Association helping with the collection of N95 masks for nurses who are caring for people with COVID-19. We had a steady stream of people drive up donating masks, which was awesome.

Anyway, a woman drove up and opened her car window to hand me a box of masks. She was crying. She said that she was Chinese-American and wanted to make sure that I knew that she didn't cause the pandemic. She said that people keep blaming her and the people in her community for the virus, and that right now, all they want to do is help. It was such a painful interaction, because it can be so hard sometimes to express what you feel so deeply in your heart. I tried so hard to reassure her that I didn't believe she caused the pandemic, and to express to her how grateful I was to her for making the effort to bring us the precious face masks so nurses could be safe. By the end of the conversation, we were both crying.

COVID-19 is scary - no doubt. But hate is scarier by far.

Kim Lutes, Minneapolis

COMMUNITY

The coronavirus crisis really has brought out the best in many of us

"Enter the heroes" (front page, March 22) was such an incredible read. It shows that even in the toughest of times, some individuals can come together - through video chat to check in and help those most vulnerable at this time to prepare for what is to come next.

In all the mist of the chaos, I am unbelievably happy to hear about all the good deeds individuals are selflessly doing: the University of Minnesota medical students signing up to become babysitters for their staff and front-line health care workers, a Minneapolis man creating chat rooms for those shut in, individuals buying gift cards to pass out to those in need, those sending flowers and deliveries to the elderly, neighborhoods stocking up their Little Free Libraries - turning them into Little Free Pantries full of snacks and toiletry. All of them show how empathic, supportive and empowering our communities can be. At the end of the day, that is all one can wish for - to have a community, especially in the time of need, come together and set aside differences in age, race, gender and income to manage this ongoing pandemic together.

I just want to give a big thank you to all those who are involved and are continuing risking their health to support and protect their communities and neighbors. Finally, this is what it is like to work together as a community in harmony. Let's all continue to stay safe, supportive and humble!

Maikia Moua, Coon Rapids

IMPACT ON DEFICITS

The wolf is always at the door, and we're (necessarily) feeding it more

Concern over our enormous national debt seem to be out of fashion nowadays, especially with COVID-19. As a longtime Keynesian, I agree that deficit spending is the proper role of government during such an economic shock. But unfortunately, the U.S. practices deficit spending at all times - good, bad and everything in between. During President Donald Trump's "greatest economy we've had in the history of our country," the annual deficit mushroomed from \$585 billion to \$1.083 trillion (2016 to 2020). With COVID-19, the annual deficit will likely balloon to more than \$3 trillion.

The American public seems to treat warnings about national debt like the boy who cried "wolf." For decades we've heard warnings, yet we've have had no obvious consequence. We seem to think (to the extent we think about it) we

can forever kick this can down the road. Until we can't. At some point the world will quit lending to us. Interest rates will skyrocket, making debt payments even more unsustainable. And younger generations will revolt or default over the mountains of debt we've saddled on them.

If we're going to spend X, at some point we need to tax X. President Bill Clinton knew that and brought annual deficits to surplus. President Barack Obama knew and gradually brought the \$1.4 trillion deficit he inherited to \$442 billion. Candidate Andrew Yang proposed a mechanism whereby benefits of high tech and automation would be captured as a value-added tax. This innovative idea could help us dig out of our current hole once COVID-19 passes. Or we could just keep digging and hope this wolf never devours us.

Ryan Pulkrabek, Minneapolis

UPPER PENINSULA

Fine article. A few tweaks.

Having lived in the Upper Peninsula for many years, it was great to see an article about Marquette, Mich., serving as a base for a visit there (Travel section, March 22). Especially concerning Kitch-iti-kipi (the Big Springs). Have been there many, many times. The description was almost right-on, but the part the article did not get right was the type of fish you see. There are no carp in the Big Springs. Those are very mature lake trout, hence their size.

I'm quite sure carp could not survive, because they are bottom-feeders.

Also, if you can get from Munising to Palms Book State Park in a half-hour, you better have lights and sirens.

William "Tim" Doyle, Savage

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