

# PERSPECTIVE



A man wears a face mask while walking on a pier in front of the Golden Gate Bridge during the coronavirus outbreak in San Francisco. JEFF CHIU/AP PHOTO

Do you not know any health care workers? I know lots. They don’t seem like the sneaky lying fiends they’d all have to be to pull off this hoax.

By DAVID WATSON  
RECENTLY I READ A SOCIAL MEDIA account of someone’s experience while waiting in line at a local Home Depot. They were standing next to a man who, according to the writer, was not keeping a safe distance and not wearing a mask. Upon being told he might need a mask to go into Home Depot, the man said he’d been coming all week, never wore a mask, and anyway COVID-19 is a hoax. Home Depot did let him in without a mask.  
That’s okay I guess, since our noble Home Depot patron knows it is all a hoax. But I, one of the gullible masses, could use a little help

understanding this.  
So how does this hoax work?  
Here I am with a son in Brooklyn who has been struggling for seven weeks with what we all thought was COVID-19. He had all the symptoms, short of breath, congestion, cough, loss of smell, weak and tired all the time. We call him every day. But we can’t go see him or help him. Lots of worrying. Now, thanks to the knowledgeable man at Home Depot I’ve learned he can’t have COVID-19. What a relief.  
So how does this hoax work? Is our son being paid by a secret hoax generating orga-  
**SEE MUST BE PAGE B8**

## Hair and now

IF THIS COLUMN CAME WITH an updated photo — no chance of that — you might wonder if Ludwig van Beethoven is today’s guest writer. That’s what my hair looks like: the bust on Schroeder’s piano when Lucy hangs over it.  
On the eve of what was supposed to be the reopening date for the state’s barbers and hairstylists, the man who has been making my mane behave for years called to update me on the frustration he and his colleagues were feeling at the governor’s last-minute switch from a May 20 reopening. For several days he and others had been deep-cleaning the Waterford salon where they work. His chore, among others, was to climb on a ladder and dismantle the ceiling fans, clean the parts and put them back together.  
The salon, like all others in the state, has been shut down for more than two months, so it’s against all logic that a perishable virus might have been hiding on the blades. But if you had seen the regulations that were put forth and amended before finally being shelved for now, you would know that fans, open windows, and air-conditioning were part of the plan for keeping the air flowing. Blow driers, however, were out — until they were in.  
The governor changed his directive at the urging of a newly-organized group of beauticians, many of them from Fairfield County, where the coronavirus pandemic has sickened and killed many times more people than in New London County. They feared they could not keep themselves nor their clients safe for lack of personal protective equipment and refurbishing. Locally, many stylists and barbers invested time and money in meeting the standards — investments that won’t be wasted when they do reopen, of course. But if it had been up to them, they’d be cutting hair around here by now.  
Hair care establishments are the quintessential local small businesses. They are Mom and/or Pop shops, and almost every



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customer lives not far away. They have a close connection with each regular client, know their pets’ names, bake cookies for them at Christmas. Nothing about the personal care they provide lends itself to social distancing. Thus, to many of them the governmentally approved guidelines felt both unrealistic and out of character. They hardly knew where to start.  
The epitome of the dilemma for both barbers and stylists is that so much of their clientele is over 65. The regulations urged them not to welcome the elderly. The reasoning was sound, because of the COVID infection risk, but it underestimated human habits. People in their 80s and beyond keep going for a haircut or a perm when they no longer go too many other places. The visit is their key to presentability, a boost to morale and a social occasion itself.  
The on-again, off-again reopening presents us with an early example of what may occur as retail businesses, museums, houses of worship, and others get phased in. Those with outdoor spaces or enough windows to open wide will have an edge. But they will all still have to figure out what to do when senior citizens show up for a long-overdue haircut or a new pair of shoes. Will Mom and Pop send Grandma and Grandpa away?  
Lisa McGinley is a member of The Day Editorial Board.

## Connecticut is weeks behind on benefits for self-employed

By REP. HOLLY CHEESEMAN  
ON MARCH 27, THE CARES Act was signed into law. This act allocated funding called Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, or PUA, to provide unemployment benefits for the first time to self-employed, contract, gig and other workers not eligible for regular unemployment.  
For this group this financial support was vital. The steps taken to combat the COVID-19 public health crisis resulted in thousands of these individuals seeing their livelihoods and income disappear overnight. However, this new PUA benefit presented a real challenge to state departments of labor. The challenge faced by Connecticut was especially pronounced, as the department’s computer system is over 40 years old. Gov. Lamont had wisely commissioned its modernization, but that process was not yet complete and the state, in an effort to pay out the new benefits, set about recruiting COBOL programmers to make the necessary changes. (For the young among you, COBOL is a 60-year-old programming language.) The Department of Labor indicated it would be some time before the system would be able to pay out these benefits, so desperately needed by the residents of Connecticut.  
On April 7, I read in The Day that Rhode Island was accepting applications for PUA. I immediately contacted the governor’s office, asking if the Connecticut Department of Labor was consulting with their Rhode Island counterparts. I was hearing from my constituents every day how urgently they needed this financial lifeline. My question was referred to the DOL legislative liaison, who offered to ask the unemployment insurance benefits director “to please reach out to his counterpart in that state in order to gather more information about their PUA implementation process.”  
That was six weeks ago. I never heard

I am contacted daily by constituents who still have not received any payment, from the contract cleaner who is down to the last \$300 to the yoga instructor now relying on food banks.  
whether such inquiries were made. Meanwhile the Connecticut labor department repeatedly missed deadlines for completion. Mid-April became April 30 became “now we have the first part of the system ready, but part two won’t be ready for another week.” That was May 6. I am contacted daily by constituents who still have not received any payment, from the contract cleaner who is down to the last \$300 in his checking account to the yoga instructor now relying on food banks.  
How did Rhode Island, our neighboring state, accomplish such a quick turnaround? They created a new cloud-based, secure, scalable website and worked with RIPL, a Rhode Island-based non-profit, to stand up their site in just 10 days, making them the first state in the country to process PUA applications. In fact, there is a full description of how this can be done in one day on the website of US Digital Response. USDR is a volunteer-run, nonpartisan service offering free access to skilled expertise for local governments who need support. I add, I am by no means a computer expert; I was able to use a simple Google search to locate this information.  
Governor Lamont has repeatedly stressed how closely he is working with his neighboring governors to apply best practices and consistent guidelines. Indeed, he  
**SEE STATE PAGE B8**