

# Chatham Journal Newspaper

## Government edicts, lockdowns ignore power of personal responsibility

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This coronavirus isn't going anywhere. It has burrowed deep into our communities, our hospitals, our psyches. It won't magically disappear, despite all the wishing. The hoping and the dreaming.

We're hurting. In the eye of a hurricane it's futile to try to assess the damage. We're sheltering in place — literally, figuratively. Reaching, grasping for something solid to prop us up. Searching for a grip.

The federal government — yes, including the White House — failed in its initial response to COVID-19 and has been less than helpful since. Responsibility was left to the states. Some of them had small successes, but most are flailing. Where North Carolina fits in that wide swath is mostly left to personal interpretation and, sadly, political inclination.

Ineffective leaders have harshly neglected the ideas of personal responsibility and trust, which David Boaz of the Cato Institute explains so well in his 1997 book, *Libertarianism: A Primer*.

Responsible people truly care about one another because it's elemental to our survival. We do what's necessary to keep us safe. To protect others.

But we all pay for others' digressions, too. For those who precipitously gather unmasked, for parties and for protests — although the governor and his health secretary refuse to acknowledge the inherent threats of the latter.

Jim Geraghty, writing Wednesday for *National Review*, referred to a story in the *Los Angeles Times* about cases in California: “Health officials have attributed the rising numbers to a combination of factors: the further reopening of many businesses, mass protests over the death of George Floyd and clusters of cases from private gatherings.”

The governor and health department secretary annoyingly recite the three Ws yet fail to trust us in following them.

A study in Norway this week, cited in *The New York Times*, found people who work out in gyms — with precautions — are at no greater risk of contracting the virus than people who don't.

“Provided good hygiene and social distancing measures, there was no increased COVID-19 spread at training facilities,” the study found.

Norway opened its gyms.

Dr. Mandy Cohen, N.C. health secretary, discounted the study, saying the two-week sample provided too little time for a reliable outcome and that gyms are dangerous because people there

are breathing heavy and possibly spewing infected droplets. Anyway, she said, states that reopened bars and gyms have closed them again as cases of the virus surge.

But, regardless of their rhetoric, it's not because of gyms; Gov. Roy Cooper and Cohen fail to give even the slightest nod to the extraordinary safety precautions fitness centers have already taken to protect their customers.

“Keeping fit is very important to me,” Heide Tjom, a 57-year-old architect who bicycles into Oslo, told *The Times*. “I feel it is important to my existence.”

Cohen and Cooper apparently don't.

Testing and contact tracing — necessary in controlling the virus — have mostly failed, health experts blaming a lack of supplies and a coordinated plan.

A *Washington Post* editorial, citing a study from the [Harvard Global Health Institute](#) and NPR, provides stark analysis.

To reach a goal of mitigation, or keeping the ratio of positive tests below 10%, would require 1.2 million tests a day; the U.S. is performing about 570,000, the *Post* reports. The analysis found 32 states, including North Carolina, aren't doing enough to achieve mitigation. To suppress the virus, and get the positive ratio below 3%, would require 4.3 million tests a day, the *Post* says, citing the analysis.

An initial goal to flatten the proverbial curve is mostly an afterthought. And, as Cohen said, states that have opened more fully are now retreating to the virus. Doors closed, locks turned.

The virus is dangerous, especially to the elderly and people whose health is in some way compromised. COVID-19 isn't going anywhere, at least for the foreseeable future.

Cohen often says as much, that we have to find ways to live with it.

Why not start by allowing people and businesses to take responsibility for themselves and their livelihoods? To give people the freedom to reward those working to do the right things and to eschew those who don't? To stop lecturing and begin trusting?

“If we are going to pursue happiness by entering into agreements with others,” writes Boaz, “it's important that we are able to rely on each other.”

Voluntary and vital, yet wholly unachievable by government suppression, edict, and mandate.