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Coronavirus protests against ‘stay at home’ orders raise awareness of people’s suffering

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The lockdown protesters have something important to say, but they need to say it safely. Protesters can speak up, but they should obey social-distancing rules. Take a lesson from gun-rights protesters who brandish weapons: Make your voice heard, but follow the rules.

The lockdown has disrupted all our lives, but some don’t seem to appreciate how our most vulnerable citizens are being pushed to the brink. I rarely had much in the bank when I was a waiter in my early 20s. I don’t know what I’d have done in this situation.

And this goes far beyond the service industry: truck drivers, food production, office cleaning crews, etc. The economic and human devastation is difficult to contemplate, and it’s only getting worse.

Effective protests raise awareness of those who are suffering but don’t have a significant voice in our political system. As the lockdown drags on, that awareness will be crucial. Many will hit a point where the trade-off will be between possibly getting COVID-19 and being able to feed their families. The disease doesn’t look so bad then.

Of course, because of communicability, the costs are higher than just one person getting the disease. But getting out of the lockdown will not happen when some government official tells us it’s “safe.” Rather, the question will be is it “safe enough,” and that will be a personal question as much as a policy one.

At a demonstration outside the Missouri Capitol in Jefferson City on April 21, 2020.

At some point, restaurants and other businesses should be able to reopen provided they take steps to mitigate the harms. Yes, that’s more dangerous than keeping them shut down, but nothing is 100% safe.

Restarting the economy is not just about going to the movies again, it’s about the people. When assessing these questions, we must think about those hit hardest by the shutdown. The protesters help bring a human face to these issues. Just make sure that face is 6 feet away.

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