

LAS VEGAS **REVIEW-JOURNAL**

EDITORIAL: Red tape hinders rapid response to coronavirus crisis

The Editorial Board

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The reaction to the coronavirus has taken numerous forms, as the nation scrambles to cope with the pandemic. But it's revealing that many of the emergency measures taken by federal and state officials involve suspending regulations that hinder the ability of public health professionals to quickly attack the crisis.

The examples are considerable:

- President Donald Trump announced last week that the government would suspend federal regulations preventing telemedicine. This will give more patients the ability to remotely connect with health care professionals.
- The administration has relaxed federal rules that limit "critical access" hospitals to 25 beds and mandate that patients stay no more than 96 hours.
- The president set aside federal rules that make it more difficult for hospitals to add staff. In addition, he suspended federal restrictions that prevent doctors from practicing across state lines.
- Maryland is making it easier for doctors licensed in other states to practice in the Bay State in order to help contain the virus.
- The Transportation Safety Administration has put on hold regulations limiting the size of liquid containers to allow airline passengers to carry large supplies of hand sanitizer.
- The Food and Drug Administration is cutting red tape and fast-tracking new coronavirus testing kits.
- In order to better facilitate the distribution of vital goods such as food and fuel, the U.S. Department of Transportation has suspended rules limiting how many hours certain truckers may drive each day.

It's also worth noting that any shortage of hospital beds during the coronavirus outbreak may have been exacerbated by protectionist "certificate of need" regulations in 35 states. "There have been artificially imposed restrictions on the number of beds, ventilators and facilities in general that can exist," Jeffrey Singer of the Cato Institute told reason.com. "Some states might find themselves having a real problem."

Such laws hinder rapid response in the face of a pandemic. "After the coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan, China, a new hospital with 1,000 beds was built in less than two weeks," Reason's Erich

Boehm reports. “It would be nearly impossible to duplicate that feat in America ... because regulations routinely prioritize protectionism over health.”

As Reason editor Nick Gillespie correctly notes, all of this raises the obvious point: If it makes sense to suspend a host of federal and state regulations in order to give doctors and public health officials the flexibility to best direct their resources, “maybe they ought to be sidelined during normal times, too.”