

# FORUM

## The coronavirus has made America hit the pause button



**Dr. James B. Ewers Jr.**  
Guest Columnist

I am in the 4th quarter of my life, like some of you. As a result, I have witnessed a lot of things in my life. Having a man on the moon, the Civil Rights Movement, 9/11, and electing our first African American president are just a few of the milestones.

When you observe these events happening, you realize they are defining moments in your lifetime. We re-live these and other events with our family and friends. Our history books are filled with an unending series of

significant and noteworthy events in our nation's history.

Over time, these historical events have brought cheers, fears and tears. You can probably recall where you were when 9/11 happened. I couldn't believe it, even as I saw it unfolding on television. It was so tragic and painful that we commemorate 9/11 each year.

Some weeks ago, a virus started in a foreign country and is now in our country. Quite honestly, when the coronavirus began in Wuhan, China, I didn't pay much attention to it. I thought, like most of you, that the virus would stay in that region. How could a virus start in one country and literally travel all over the world? This is what this illness has done. It has medical experts in a healthcare frenzy.

According to the latest

reports, there are 148,838 presumptive cases worldwide of the coronavirus. A little over 5,000 people worldwide have passed away from this virus. European countries like Italy are seeing dramatic increases in coronavirus casualties. These numbers are staggering and alarming. Each day the news starts with the coronavirus as its lead story. It seems, at least at this moment, that other news stories have been temporarily put aside.

There isn't a walk of life that hasn't been affected by COVID-19. Everyday essentials such as milk and tissue are being scooped up by the caseload. Stores like Walmart have empty shelves on almost every aisle. Just days ago, they issued a statement saying that effective immediately, their stores will open at 6 a.m.

and close at 11 p.m. Stores under reduced hours will keep those hours. Walmart is the nation's largest retailer, so this announcement tells us the seriousness of this medical emergency.

Sports organizations have succumbed to the coronavirus. Every major sport has either cancelled or suspended their season. March is usually when the NCAA presents "March Madness." Last week, the NCAA announced that all NCAA men's and women's basketball tournaments have been cancelled. So, for basketball fans like me, it was an up-percut, but the right decision. So now fans can give their passionate orations about who would have been crowned the champions.

If you are New Orleans Pelicans fans like us, you won't be seeing

Zion Williamson anytime soon. Adam Silver, NBA Commissioner, says the league might be playing in the summer. We will have to wait and see what happens.

All the states have been affected by COVID-19. In the city of New Orleans, there are presently 53 presumptive cases of the coronavirus. In nearby Mississippi, there are 10 reported cases. Unfortunately, there will be other cases to follow.

Places of worship have also had to either cancel or modify their services. Fred Luter Jr, pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, held an online service. His sermon title was "Trusting God During Difficult Times." He used Isaiah 41, verse 10, as the spiritual foundation for his message. He said to his Internet listeners: God is still in control;

do not allow your faith to be replaced by fear. In his message, he gave illustrations of God's presence, God's power, and God's promise.

Now is the time to be strong together and to stay together. These are tough times and in the short term may get even tougher. However, we must have both the physical resolve and the mental capacity to persevere.

My Bible tells me that this too, shall pass.

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## War, profit and the coronavirus



**ROBERT C. KOEHLER**  
Guest Columnist

If you want expertise, don't bother reading any further here. I know as much about coronavirus as any stunned disbeliever with a sudden, irresistible urge to touch his face.

This is a news story that's spookily personal — far more personal, somehow, than all those other ongoing horror stories out there, about war, refugees, climate change. Those stories are real, yet compared to the coronavirus story, they feel like abstractions. This is about a pandemic — the possibility of hundreds of millions of deaths worldwide — and it's about the need to use hand sanitizer. Right now. And also, don't touch people anymore. And stay home.

Part of me feels positively Donald Trumpian about this: Come on, this isn't real. Indeed, my urge is to defy the warnings and hug my friends, shake strangers' hands, continue living a connected and joyous life. But part of me stops cold, thinks about

the post-World War I influenza pandemic that wound up infecting almost a quarter of the world's population and killed as many as 100 million people. These things really happen. Don't be ignorantly dismissive. But don't panic either.

So, stabbed with "maybe," all I can do is grope for understanding.

We live in a dangerous and paradoxical world. OK, fine. But is our social infrastructure capable of calmly and sanely handling new dangers that emerge — or is it more likely to make them worse?

I begin with this crumb of data from a recent USA Today story:

*According to the (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), the Commerce Clause of the U.S. Constitution grants the federal government isolation and quarantine authority.*

*The Secretary of Health and Human Services can take actions to prevent the spread of communicable disease from foreign countries into the United States and between states.*

The words invoke both a need for top-down, authoritarian control of things and what I call

the Yikes Syndrome: the idea of a viral invasion from a "foreign country," from somewhere out there beyond our borders — beyond what is known and safe. Somehow the assumptions quietly hidden in this sort of wording throw me into a spiral of doubt. Like climate change, a potential pandemic requires global cooperation: people and governments pulling together to survive and transcend the danger. While enforced order and temporarily isolating people is also sometimes necessary, I see in such wording how panic spreads. We're quick to "go to war" against a problem and haven't learned yet, at the highest levels of government, that wars don't end and are never won; they simply set the stage for further war.

In that regard, consider these words from the social-justice and peace organization Code Pink:

*This is bad. Since February 19, when the first coronavirus cases were identified in Iran, at least 6,566 people — about one in every 12,000 Iranians — have been infected. At least 237 people have died. Iran is third, behind China and South Korea, in cases of coronavirus per population. Due to U.S.*

*sanctions, Iran is suffering from a shortage of the medical supplies, products and equipment required for diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of the coronavirus.*

Is this a learning moment? As the Code Pink message goes on to point out, the U.S. Treasury Department has said it will waive some of the sanctions against humanitarian supplies sent to Iran, but this slight give in the rules is probably too late to do any good. It also points out the danger of playing war. The unintended and often shocking consequences of war have not yet fully penetrated humanity's collective awareness. Preparation for war, as well as the declaration of a national enemy du jour, remain assumed and unexamined functions of most national governments.

And one of the costs of this is ... everything else.

For instance, at a recent coronavirus roundtable in Detroit, someone asked Deborah Burger, president of National Nurses United, how the United States, when it develops a COVID-19 vaccine, could afford to make it free for everyone — a stunning question, when you consider the cost, to everyone, of not making the vaccine

universally accessible.

Burger responded: "How insane and cruel is it to suggest that we have to figure out how to pay for it when we can actually go to war and not ask one question, but to prevent this kind of a disease, we have to say, 'How can we pay for it?'"

And Bernie Sanders, who was also at the roundtable, added: "Does anybody in their right mind believe that if you're rich you should be able to afford a vaccine and save your life, but if you're poor you gotta die? Is that really where we're at in the United States of America?"

Guess what? Not everyone agrees with Sanders on this. Fox News (of all places), for instance, quoted Tom Schatz, president of Citizens Against Government Waste, who asked: "Who's going to want to make a new drug if the government is just going to come along and confiscate the profit?"

As I read these words, I quickly reach for the hand sanitizer. If there's an ounce of sanity in this defense of profit, it can only be because the possibility of a coronavirus pandemic is fake news — a profit-feeding scare tactic. But if the possibility of a

global pandemic is real, how could anyone question the urgency of government investment in the development of a vaccine and then making it universally available? Had Fox News been around during good old World War II, my guess is that it wouldn't have tossed snarky challenges at the Manhattan Project or lamented that the military-industrial complex should have been able to patent the atomic bomb. But, oh yeah, we worship war. Waging it is the point of government.

But then there's Jonas Salk, developer of the polio vaccine. In 1955, Edward R. Murrow asked Salk, in a live TV interview, who owned the patent for this vaccine. Speaking from a mountain of higher values, Salk responded:

"Well, the people, I would say. There is no patent. Could you patent the sun?"

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## Equality, equity: Leveling the playing field for black students



**Charity Brown Griffin**  
Guest Columnist

Recently, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools (WSFCS) removed the principals of four underperforming elementary schools — and reassigned six other principals to these schools plus two other struggling elementary schools. According to WSFCS, these six veteran principals were shifted from their former posts because they have a track record of "growing students."

Whether you believe these changes were good, bad or are unsure, one thing is for certain: Change was needed. These shifts in school leadership demand we have a larger discussion about equality and equity, and how acknowledging the distinction between these concepts is important for student success in WSFCS.

So, what's the difference between equality and equity?

When teaching about these concepts in class, I often use a commonly provided practical example: Think for a moment about runners sprinting around an oval track during a competition. The concept of equality would have us treat the runners in exactly the same way, ensuring that they all start at the same place on the track. Though on the surface, this seems fair, we know that runners in the inside lanes have a distinct advantage over runners in the outer lanes because the distance they have to travel is shorter. Therefore, equality, the same starting place, doesn't result in fairness. In contrast, if our behavior is guided by equity, we would stagger the starting positions of the runners in order to offset the disadvantages facing those in the outer lanes. From this example, we can more easily understand how equity recognizes differences and provides tailored treatment in an attempt to counteract unequal individual opportunities.

Educational spaces that center equality treat all students the same way, without giving weight to

individual needs. Though foundational to granting rights and opportunities, ensuring everyone has the same is not the end post we currently need to be seeking. WSFCS, like the majority of school systems around our nation, must first strive for equity. Similar to the example used above, educational spaces that center equity ensure that students are provided the resources they need to have access to the same opportunities.

The science is clear and shows that all students do not experience school in the same way. In my own research over the past several years, I have come to understand that black students, in particular, have unique experiences because they are required to navigate schools that systematically reproduce inequity as a result of racism.

WSFCS is not immune to systemic inequity. Using funding from the Center for the Study of Economic Mobility at Winston-Salem State University, this past summer my undergraduate students and I developed and implemented a research-based summer program we called, Youth-

RISE. Our program sought to empower youth to become community change agents and gain insight into their perceptions of opportunities and barriers to economic mobility — an important topic given that Forsyth County ranks as the third poorest county in the U.S. for upward economic mobility. The program involved 11 black youth in grades 8-12 who were residing in East Winston-Salem. Our research team found that, while these youth perceived education to be critical for improving their economic opportunity, they experienced unfair treatment within the education system, which presented barriers. These students spoke boldly about depleted infrastructure, lack of technology equipment, the high number of long-term substitutes who did not engage them with the curriculum, large class sizes, and teacher perceptions of incompetency due to their race, as key issues in their Title 1 (or low-income) schools. Most notably, these students shared that they fully recognized these as observations from their own school spaces, but that "other high schools"

located on a "different side of town" do not have these same "issues" because they have "more money."

Given the evidence from national and local research, it is clear that centering equity, rather than equality alone, is critical for creating opportunities for students to succeed in WSFCS. Assigning new leadership to these six underperforming schools was a critical step in improving equity, as each school's achievement data clearly indicate that there are unique needs in these buildings that are thwarting student success. Nonetheless, this step is likely insufficient, and more radical changes that intentionally agitate the status quo will be required to redress existing disparities.

Such changes might include widening access to high quality, early childhood education programs; eliminating de facto (i.e., by personal preference) and de jure (i.e., resulting from racially-motivated public policy) racial and economic segregation; allocating resources for increasing the capacity of teachers to deliver evidence-based, gap-closing instructional and learning

strategies; and informing educators on how culture, identity and context interact and building on the cultural assets that black students bring with them to the classroom. Ultimately, WSFCS must work collaboratively with local government, businesses, and community stakeholders, to improve the social and economic conditions of the communities surrounding underperforming schools.

Under the leadership of newly appointed superintendent Angela Pringle, optimistic changes are happening. However, I hope WSFCS will aggressively push forward to disrupt oppressive systems that are breeding inequalities, by prioritizing equity so that all students, and not just those attending certain schools, have an equal opportunity to attain their maximum potential.

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