

Commentary... The needs of the many?

By Tom Donahue
Guest Columnist

Despite all the news and analysis we hear every evening, there appear to be many tough questions not being asked or answered. We get the mounting death toll and personal tragedy/heart-warming coping stories, but very little in the way of hard facts.

It's difficult not to become depressed, anxious, and hysterical, especially when little else is talked about. But then, facts and rational unbiased reporting don't boost ratings and low ratings don't sell advertising. So let's look at some of the facts.

Following are CDC estimates for total cases and deaths for all types of influenza and for COVID-19 only. Included are the estimates for this flu season, a projected range for any flu season, and the worst year since the CDC began using their current method of estimating the total flu burden in the U.S.

The Cure vs. The Disease

While it can be argued that even one death is too many and that all this social distancing/business shutdown is everyone's moral duty and not too great a price to pay for a few months, what about the 330 million-plus who are imprisoned in their own homes or the many millions who have lost their jobs? Many of whom can't afford to lose their income for even a few weeks? Or the long-term economic impact to companies, individuals, and the government of the U.S. shutdown and subsequent proposed bailout?

Isn't that going to bankrupt the economy for a long time?

There are some practical questions:

- How does this flu season compare with others?
- Once you get over the coronavirus, are you immune from then on? *Unknown, but one of the research projects being touted is the use of*

antibodies from coronavirus survivors.

• Are we going to go through this shutdown every year when a new pandemic rears its ugly head? *I hope not.*

• Would the population *as a whole* be better off letting the virus rage through, taking those it will, then leaving the rest of us healthier and more immune to a new strain of virus? *A real tough question.*

Any politician or business owner who had the gall to suggest that we carry on as "normal" — taking precautions where we can (like frequent hand washing, staying home when we are sick, building temporary hospital tents, ramping up the supply of ventilators and aggressive testing) — and let the virus take its toll, would be roasted alive by the media or sued for every penny they've got.

• But don't we soldier on already with any number of our daily activities? Don't we get in a car every day, knowing that there are over 5,000,000 traffic accidents in

the U.S. per year and around 40,000 deaths? Don't we get on airplanes, knowing that they might crash or be hijacked? Don't we allow our kids to play sports knowing that they may be seriously injured or killed? We don't ban automobiles or air travel or all children's sports. The U.S. has a policy of not bowing to terrorists. Shouldn't we have a policy of not bowing to diseases?

• So I ask the final question: Do the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few? The many in this case are those 330 million-plus individuals who are severely impacted (some permanently and irreparably) by this shutdown and the few being those hundred thousands (maybe even few millions) who may be hospitalized or die.

Fortunately, this writer

doesn't have to make that decision or answer that question.

One thing is certain. If we do get out of this with less-than-expected casualties, the politicians will be falling all over each other patting themselves on the back for taking quick and responsive action.

Opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the writer and are not necessarily shared by the Editor or The Nugget Newspaper.

	Symptomatic Flu Cases	Flu Deaths
Est. Range (2010 - 2019)	9,300,000 - 45,000,000	12,000 - 61,000
Worst Season (2017/18)	39,000,000 - 58,000,000	46,000 - 95,000
This Season (thru 4/4)	39,000,000 - 56,000,000	24,000 - 62,000
COVID-19 Only (thru 4/11)	492,416 (.15 percent Pop.)	18,559 (.01 percent Pop.)

Some qualifying statements:

- The flu is not a reportable disease in the U.S.
- The U.S. Influenza Surveillance System covers roughly 9 percent of the population. A mathematical model is used to arrive at the estimates.
- The numbers for COVID-19 alone may be more accurate, and possibly greater, because of the increased awareness and testing that's been done recently. They are also more current than the CDC's total flu estimate (04/11 vs. 04/04).
- The numbers for 2017/2018 are still preliminary.

If you go by the numbers, COVID-19 is less than 1.5 percent of the total estimated flu burden so far for this flu season, though a greater portion of the estimated total flu deaths (approx. 30 percent to 77 percent, depending upon which estimate number you pick). The affected U.S. population percentages are .15 percent (total cases) and .01% percent (deaths).

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PHOTO BY ROGER DETWEILER

This month's supermoon was a spectacular sight looming above the Cascade skyline for Sisters residents.

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