

Opinion

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE U.S. CONSTITUTION



Your Turn
Randy Florence
Guest columnist

Coronavirus presents window of opportunity

It's time for important, tough conversations in this valley. While there is NO blessing associated with the Coronavirus and its impacts, there is an opportunity.

I'm rather new to the desert (9 years). But when I tell people where I live, it is with pride that I tell them "The Desert" or "The Coachella Valley." My wife and I have fallen in love with this area and that has driven us to involvement. I am on the Board of Directors of the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership (CVEP) and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Coachella Valley (BGCCV).

Being on these boards presents an interesting picture for me.

On the one hand, BGCCV is in the "business" of serving local families and making sure their children have a safe, stable, nurturing place to visit. This week we made the incredibly difficult decision of closing down those clubs (that serve 6,300-plus kids).

On the other hand, CVEP works to improve valley economic opportunities. How closely tied together could those two nonprofits be? CVEP wants to help industry that will eventually lead to jobs for those children now being helped by BGCCV.

Still, it's time for some very important conversations about this valley; how we now find ourselves attempting to manage through a crisis, not of our making, but of our responsibility to address.

As incredible as this valley is, as incredible as most of our local leadership is, we continue to "do the same things and hope for different results."

In the midst of this crisis, and with the need of a consistent, clear direction, we have nine-plus decision points. Perhaps the cities are talking together? But if they are it would represent one of the first times.

I get why the valley is structured as it is. I get that there are nine different municipalities. I get that there are many duplicate jobs. But in a valley of about 500,000, this smacks of "us vs. them" or "ours, not theirs."

We continue to push education that will eventually force most of our young population to different geographies. It is truly absurd to continue highlighting hospitality and tourism degrees. As has been previously noted (most recently by CVEP's Joe Wallace), these are the exact jobs that are most at risk from Artificial Intelligence. The recent addition of Cybersecurity as a local degree is a huge move. These jobs can keep our kids employed for their lifetimes! How about some billboards talking about this?

So, the window of opportunity is now. The evidence is in front of our face. Whether you live here 3 months a year, or full time, this impacts you. And if we don't make changes now, it will impact us all in a very negative way in the future.

We need:

The new California State University Palm Desert. Call the governor's office and tell him. We are ready for it. We're wired for it. This will have one of the biggest impacts going forward for this valley.

We need city leaders to have serious conversations about the long-term viability of our valley — the way we're structured, our priorities and the fact that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few, or the One (thank you, Mr. Spock).

As I hiked through the desert this week, practicing my nature version of social distancing, I felt such a pull for what this area provides for us. We have an opportunity for our kids, now and in the future. We have the opportunity to set the valley on a path to guarantee its future viability, and not worry about its demise during every emergency.

Email Randy Florence of La Quinta at randy.florence@gmail.com.

SEND YOUR LETTER

Email letters to letters@desertsun.com

■ Letters must include the writer's name, address and telephone number for verification

■ Letters should be fewer than 200 words

■ Letters may be edited for length, clarity and taste
See a complete list of rules online.

FDA chief: Be wary of COVID-19 'cures'

Your Turn

Stephen M. Hahn
Guest columnist

The spread of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has captured the attention of the world.

Understandably, people are concerned about the best ways to protect themselves and their loved ones. Along with the heightened focus surrounding this global outbreak comes the potential for consumers to be lured into buying unproven or fraudulent products or medicines that claim to treat, prevent or cure infections, including COVID-19.

While the Food and Drug Administration is working full speed, in collaboration with public and private sector partners, to help diagnose, treat and prevent this disease, presently there are no FDA-approved products to prevent, treat or cure COVID-19.

We are aware that unscrupulous marketers are hawking products online and in stores that claim to do just that. Consumers should be wary of anyone making these claims and instead talk with a licensed health care professional before taking or using any such product. Taking matters into your own hands by purchasing and using unproven products without consulting your doctor puts you and others at risk for serious health consequences.

Part of the FDA's mission is to protect Americans from health fraud. This includes warning about the dangers of purchasing and using medical products or devices that have not been proven safe and/or effective for the uses they claim. Health fraud scams can cause delays in proper diagnoses and treatment and might even lead to more serious injuries or death, all the while wasting American consumers' hard-earned dollars.

Warning seven companies

The FDA and the Federal Trade Commission have already issued warning letters to seven companies for selling fraudulent COVID-19 products.

The products cited — teas, essential oils, tinctures and colloidal silver — are unapproved drugs that pose significant risks to patient health and violate federal law.

We will continue to use authorities like this for other bogus products claiming to treat, prevent or cure COVID-19. When the FDA takes action in these cases,

it is important to note that numerous unapproved and potentially unsafe products will continue to be sold directly to consumers, in part because in the age of the internet, companies or individuals can simply move their products to another platform once the original site is shut down.

The FDA has dedicated staff closely monitoring for the sale of products making false claims related to COVID-19. The products we are seeing range from herbal products and ayurvedic medicines to protective masks and hand sanitizers. Some are offered for sale in the United States, while others are marketed outside the country to U.S. consumers.

As part of our effort to combat deceptive activity, we are working closely with major retailers who are monitoring their online marketplaces for fraudulent products with novel coronavirus and other pathogen claims.

Reports of nearly 100 products

To date, the FDA has received reports of more than 90 products marketed with unapproved claims to prevent, treat or cure COVID-19. The agency has found 50 products marketed on popular online marketplaces with similar, unproven claims. All of these listings have been removed by their respective marketplaces.

We are also monitoring retail stores, websites that appear to be legitimate pharmacies and social media platforms. The FDA will take action against unscrupulous actors who are marketing unlawful products related to this outbreak. Companies that fail to take corrective action immediately may be subject to federal enforcement action, such as seizure or injunction.

Consumers and health care professionals can help by reporting suspected fraud to the FDA's Health Fraud Program or to the Office of Criminal Investigations. To report adverse reactions or other problems with FDA-regulated products, consumers can contact their state's FDA Consumer Complaint Coordinator.

The FDA, in conjunction with our federal and international partners, will continue to help advance response efforts to combat the COVID-19 outbreak, and that includes warning consumers against becoming victims of health fraud and taking action to stop health scams.

Dr. Stephen M. Hahn is the commissioner for food and drugs at the Food and Drug Administration.

YOUR VOICE

Why are you all hoarding?

Re: "How are you coping as coronavirus jolts life?," March 15 column by Opinion Editor Al Franco
You asked "how was my life affected ... etc."

Actually, I did nothing special, nothing other than maybe wash my hands a little more.

But then I went to Stater Bros. to pick up some items. Well, apparently the rest of the valley has panicked and tried to buy out the store. (My neighbor said the same about Sam's Club).

I was running low on Kleenex and toilet paper. BIG MISTAKE! The shelves were empty.

While I have never had the "flu" in my life, I can't imagine why you would want to store up on TP or Kleenex. I looked up symptoms of the "virus" and diarrhea and runny noses are "rare."

Oh well, I thought, I have enough left at home for another 5-6 days and then went to the next thing on

my list, which was butter. My market has about 10 feet devoted to butter in the dairy section. Many different brands and configurations. The shelves were empty!

Funny, I don't remember my doctor ever saying: "take two aspirins and a pat of butter and call me in the morning."

The hoarding of worthless items is ridiculous. What are people thinking?

Neil Mahony, Cathedral City

Let's embrace good management

I do not wish this letter to be political. I merely want to say that my wife and I are 20-year residents of Rancho Mirage and think it is the best run of all the valley cities.

Good management is not an accident. It takes a lot of hard work and intelligent planning and I think all our City Council members should be applauded for

their efforts.

Bill Yuracko, Rancho Mirage

Mitigating travel risks

We woke Sunday to news and pictures of U.S. passengers arriving at our airports from abroad and being in shoulder-to-shoulder health screening lines for up to seven hours, multiplying their risk of infection.

Why can't a security screening walk-through machine be fitted with a temperature-taking device? Passengers would walk through (in the opposite direction) and those with temperatures exceeding CDC guidelines could be placed in secure areas for questioning and further testing.

Wouldn't this speed up the process?

White House, Homeland Security, CDC, Congress — is anybody listening?

Lainie Wachter, Rancho Mirage