



City of Leavenworth

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Community Members,

I am learning something every day, and that is a good thing. And I learned something yesterday that is directly related to what is going to need to happen as we consider opening back up our town. I have been operating under the assumption that our ability to get lots and lots of testing done before we opened up was going to be the foundational key. Once we could get all of our employees and lots of residents tested, we would be ready to start relaxing. Because I kept hearing that the ability to do much more testing than we have been able to do to this point was key. Every conference call I have been on that was dealing with this pandemic was stressing that we were far too short of supplies, and the ability to do much more testing needed to be in place before we could safely open up. And all of that is true. But what finally got through to me yesterday, thanks to the Chelan-Douglas Health District's medical director, Dr. Malcolm Butler, was that I was translating that truth into the need for Leavenworth to do much more testing. And that is where it all broke down.

Now, bear with me as I try to explain. Because I did not understand this right away. Earlier this week, when I floated my concern that Leavenworth needed to test everyone, at least every employee, in order to be ready to open, Dr. Butler gently questioned my rationale. My response probably came across as kind of indignant. "To be safe and to ensure we are being good hosts in welcoming people back to Leavenworth, of course!" I take the need for safety very seriously. Whatever we do, and whenever we do it, it has to have the safety of our residents, our employees, and our guests as the top priority! So, testing, testing, testing. Right? You with me? So, here is what I learned that has changed that.

If you do widespread testing, what are you going to do with that information? Well, of course, you can isolate those who test positive, quarantine them for 14 days. Fair enough. So, let's say you find that you have twenty or thirty or forty positives. You quarantine them. But what about the 200 or 300 who don't test positive? Do you relax? Do you breathe a sigh of relief and feel comfortable opening up with these "clean" workers? But how many of them are not really clean, but just haven't developed to the point they will test positive? You can't test effectively on a daily basis because the test takes time to send to the lab and get results. So, when you do all your testing, you are still only getting a snapshot that will tell you what was true at that moment in time. But this virus is dynamic. You can't freeze time. So, the test would only give you reliable data to move forward only to the extent that you keep everyone in a controlled environment from that time on. And that is not going to happen. So, you have basically wasted all those negative tests. The places where such testing of large groups does make sense is when they are living in close quarters, like nursing homes, or farmworker housing. In these situations, large scale testing can be helpful. But to the population as a whole, it is limited. But, the ability to be able to do as much testing as necessary is still a key. It is necessary to have the capacity to test anyone and everyone who shows any signs of the virus. That is what we have to be ready and able to do quickly and efficiently, and why we are not there yet.

But here is the other half of that equation. My thinking was wrong in wanting to test everyone, but only in part, because it was "going too far". It is also true that it "does not go far enough". (Those who have known me for a while know that many of my favorite "truths" in life are found in paradox – not either / or, but both / and). I wanted to test in order to get some certainty, some security that we are safe. But that security is simply not to be had. There is no way we can move forward with any certainty. So, rather than trying to find those who test positive, the only real way to move forward and to act responsibly is to assume that everyone is positive! Because, in truth, every single person COULD be positive. That is what is behind social distancing. That is why it works to slow the spread. And that is why the increased use of masks when in public is so key. Because you, and everyone else you see, might show no signs or symptoms, but could be positive, and could be spreading the virus. The only "secure" way to act is if this were true. So, when a store like Costco starts to require masks to enter, it is for everyone's security. The question really becomes, why aren't all the stores doing this?

Recently the Wenatchee World reported the incident where 71 farmworkers were tested for the virus. Of those 71, 36 tested positive for the coronavirus. But, (and this is key), only one had any symptoms. What does that tell us? It tells us that, if we truly are going to put safety first, any plan we implement is going to have to be built around the assumption that everyone is positive. And that is going to have to guide us until we have a vaccine. So, social distancing will still need to occur. Face masks are critical, given this new data. And lots of cleaning and sanitizing. Those will all be our new norm for a while, and how well we do in acknowledging this and planning with this in mind, will determine how successful we are at opening up our town. Stay safe! (And wear a mask when out and about, please!)



Carl J. Florea, Mayor

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