



The Corona war is evolving as the challenge of our century that requires grit and realism to get through multiple treacherous waves. Our politicians should respect views of both scientists and business leaders, implement public health priorities, and collaborate with governors to develop an honest, gradual recovery strategy.

1. Our politicians should first communicate the facts.

There is good news and there is bad news:

+ Corona is not Ebola. Death rates are 1% rather than 50%. But poor policies can cause death rates to soar to 10% as in Italy.

+ Corona can be contained as shown in Wuhan. Korea and Taiwan have been largely successful. But they have draconian isolation and superior testing.

+ Corona can be eliminated through a vaccine that is globally developed. But clinical trials cannot be completed this year.

-- Corona is spreading much more rapidly than the flu with R naught of two. It can grow exponentially and remain undetected through asymptomatic carriers. It likely comes in multiple waves and can persist in warm climate.

-- Corona testing is critical to contain the virus and to mitigate damage. Blunders by politicians and the CDC have been costly. Comprehensive testing will take months.

-- Corona hot spots will overwhelm any health system with horrendous calamity. Temporary regional shut-downs will be necessary but cause major economic pain.

2. Our politicians should listen both to scientists and to business leaders and then chart a pragmatic course. They should acknowledge views from both sides:

Scientists best case: Corona is just a bad flu and medicine will soon be found to alleviate it or it will disappear over the summer. No evidence, just wishful thinking.

Scientists worst case: US deaths rising to 2.2 million this year as illustrated by [Imperial College](#). Risk mitigation as modeled in [four CDC scenarios](#) still project over one million deaths in the US over the next year. But uncertainty is very large.

Businesses best case: [Temporary snowstorm](#) or [car accident analogies](#) with recovery this summer. Annual deaths from flu and car accidents combined are about 70,000 but that may be a “[false equivalency](#)”.

Business worst case: [Year-long depression](#) with 20% unemployment and \$4,000 bn economic losses, likely aggravated by credit defaults and restructurings.

3. Our politicians should present an honest pandemic forecast:

[The US has 100,000 cases](#) on 27. March 2020 of which 26,000 are in New York City. At current growth rates for the next 16 days, infections would surge **24-fold by Easter**, exceeding 2.4 million US cases and 600,000 infections in NYC alone. New York would only have 25% of the required ICU beds at that point, which would cause death beyond Italian proportions. The [next hotspots](#) could be Boston, Detroit, New Orleans, Philadelphia and Miami, which are barely two weeks behind NYC. Florida is especially precarious (19% seniors vs. 15% US average) given its delayed policy response. NIH is expecting this first wave's apex in May but also expects a [second wave](#). There is no exact data, regional developments are fluid, testing is still lagging, and daily policy adjustments may be required, but the big picture has been crystallizing.

4. Our leaders should act on common-sense public health priorities:

- > Seniors are most vulnerable and should be protected by comprehensive distancing and dedicated medical facilities to limit the spread.
- > Testing should be scaled up quickly with private industry incentives. Korea's per capita testing is three times higher than in the US today.
- > Vaccine research and testing should focus with global collaboration. Prior pandemic vaccine programs had taken years and were abandoned.
- > Ventilator and PPE production should be accelerated, retired medical personnel mobilized, ICU capacity expanded, and help from the military activated.

5. Our leaders should collaborate with governors on an economic plan:

Our President has declared a national emergency, but our states have control over their health and education systems as well as their public health and safety policies. Scientists have urged state governors to flatten the curve through social distancing and say that “[history would judge it an error of epic proportions](#)” to return to work by Easter. Business leaders point to the [Swedish example](#) and fear depression and social breakdowns. Politicians should take both perspectives on board and then develop a strategy to manage the many treacherous waves of this pandemic. Restrictions and business operations may require a dynamic week-by-week approach, state-by-state, in order to reduce fatalities while gradually getting back to business. Anything else would be [social Darwinism](#) where the most vulnerable people die so that others can fire up the economy and the stock market.

Our politicians should acknowledge that we cannot achieve [herd immunity](#) given our existing political, social, and health-care framework and that we will need to manage waves of this pandemic until a vaccine has been developed, tested, and produced. Everyone should be compassionate and contribute to the maximum extent in this war. Industries should also have realistic expectations: while the health sector will be stretched to the limit for the foreseeable future, it is inconceivable that airline and tourism industries get back to normal this year. Just as the US canceled flights from China earlier this year, it is now China that does not welcome US flights or tourists. However, telework might work well in technology and financial services, which can expect less direct impact unless consumer demand craters.

6. Our leaders should rebuild confidence through honesty:

Sadly, our politicians have rarely been straight with the American people during wars. False hope and fake optimism have been peddled during the [Vietnam war](#) and the recent [trade war](#). Our President created false expectations in February 2019 when he planned a [US-China presidential summit at Mar-a-Lago](#) to resolve the trade war. Eleven months later, the limited phase-one deal had turned out quite differently, but he claimed that “[our relationship with China is the best it’s ever been](#)”. On February 28, our President [described the corona virus as a “hoax”](#) but he [declared a national emergency](#) just two weeks later. Eleven days after that, the President now stated that he wanted to get America (not just parts) [back to work by Easter](#) (April 12). His team told him that doing so would be irresponsible and impossible, yet the President insisted to give false hope to his citizens and to the markets. Rather than building confidence, this created partisan rancor and [criticism from scientists and governors](#). We need honest leadership to rise to this enormous challenge ahead.

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