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Fourth Option: COVID-19

This epidemic is one like humans have not experienced for over 100 years. A new and highly infectious disease has been on the radar of governments and concerned individuals and organizations for years; people have been expecting a pandemic such as COVID-19 for some time now but no one was prepared for it. I remember as a child hearing about the swine flu and seeing it on the news and my mom was extremely concerned for the safety of us three kids as we were going to school where the disease was a real threat. I remember not being able to drink from the drinking fountains as they were closed off to help prevent the spread of germs, however, despite all of the media buzz around it, the swine flu had very little impact on my family and me. No one I knew got sick, no one was forced to stay home, businesses and schools stayed open for operation, and soon everyone forgot about it. This experience I had when I was 12, however, is nothing compared to the one the world is dealing with now. COVID-19 has caused an unprecedented amount of panic, disruption of operations, economic calamity, and a huge number of real deaths.

Thinking back to when I first heard the news about a new virus spreading from the town Wuhan in China, I did not realize it at the time but I had a very similar reaction to this news as I had when I had heard about the swine flu. I honestly did not pay much attention to it, I didn't think it was anything serious, especially in the current news climate, I am used to the media over exaggerating every piece of news I hear. I think my reaction was pretty similar to that of many

Americans, who are all used to receiving news stories that are severely blown out of proportion as everything seems to be “breaking news” all aimed to drive views and ratings. Despite seeing the number of deaths tally in China and the news their country was shutting due to the number of infected people, America was still relatively unconcerned. It wasn't until the virus reached Europe that we started to see a real panic and concern coming from our government and from Americans everywhere. Over the course of a couple of months, from when I first heard about COVID-19 in December, the virus had transitioned from just a crazy news story to something that was actually causing very real damage across Asia and Europe. The amount of deaths seemed shocking, but many, including my own family still believed that COVID-19 was no worse than the flu which in my dad's opinion “kills even more people per year than this new virus has.” While my dad's opinion is based on the factual evidence that the flu does cause tens of thousands of deaths per year, he, as well as many American's have failed to see why this is such a different and special case. COVID-19, unlike the flu, has no vaccine which means that every single person no matter what demographic is susceptible to contracting the virus. If the argument is that the flu is just as bad systematically and the fatality rates are similar, this should demonstrate the magnitude at which COVID-19 can affect the population. A majority of Americans receive the flu shot every year which greatly lessens the chance of contracting the flu virus, which means that a small number of people are catching the flu and even a smaller number die from it. If you take these same ratios but multiply it by the entire population whom all are susceptible, then the casualty rates could be astronomical. Medical professionals and experts have been able to understand this threat that COVID-19 poses to America and the world and that

is why the government and society have taken such drastic actions in order to prevent the spread of disease.

The introduction to an entirely new strain of virus to the world, with no immunity whatsoever, could spread just as quickly as smallpox did when it was introduced to the Americas. While during the eastern hemisphere had undergone centuries of exposure to smallpox, and while it still infected many in the early modern period, society had built up immunity to disease. The true deadliness of smallpox was realized when the Europeans traveled to the Americas and the diseases they were carrying were brought to a whole new world in which every indigenous person was susceptible, just as our world is to the coronavirus. Once the indigenous peoples of the Americas were exposed to smallpox, it spread like wildfire across the continent and had a huge fatality rate. While in the 21st-century society practices much better hygiene than back in the early modern period, the coronavirus was able to spread even faster with modern transposition and infect the population just as quickly. COVID-19 and smallpox are in that way similar; an illness with no immunity and no vaccine can wreak havoc on a population, and that is why the world has gone to such extreme measures to prevent the spread of this virus. While an understanding of the deadliness and the dangers of COVID-19 will aid in the virus's containment, it can also strike fear in all of society.

On one side of the spectrum, people believe that the deadliness of COVID-19 has been overhyped like my father, for example, the other extreme are those who have gone into a complete panic over the outbreak of this disease. Upon news that the disease had spread into the United States, of which Washington and New York were some of the first states to have confirmed cases, people all over went into a complete panic. It was in March when the US

government started to seriously address the pandemic and the different control and safety measures were being proposed. It seemed like within the time span of a week, the attitude towards the outbreak of COVID-19 completely changed as panicked Americans staying stock piling food, household supplies, and medical supplies. While panic was taking over in Los Angeles where I live, I was busy focusing on my final exams at UCLA; it was also at this time that I started to feel ill. It was during this same week that UCLA announced it was going to transition to a virtual environment immediately, and all finals would be conducted online. At this point, I wasn't super concerned as I had faith that the government would take care of everything, and believed this would probably be over in just a couple weeks. However, as my symptoms started to get worse I began to see the real effects of this epidemic.

I had a very deep cough and what I suspected a high fever, so as soon as I could I went to the pharmacy so that I could get cough medicine and a thermometer, however, the panic buying that week had left the stores all sold of medicine. I have been in a position where the medicine and attention that I needed was unavailable, as this is almost never a reality in the privileged country of America. It was alarming to realize at this moment that US and the stores did not have enough supplies for everyone, and those that really needed medicine could not get any. Not only were medical supplies running out but also medical services began to be impacted; as my symptoms were getting worse I finally decided to get checked at the doctor. I suspected I might have bronchitis or some other respiratory infection, but when I got to the doctor I realized how extreme there were rationing supplies and services already. The medical personnel were trying to filter through the people using the least amount of equipment and resources, and I was quickly sorted into the low priority group and sent home without any diagnosis or medicine. Trusting the

medical staff I figured I would most likely get better soon, I had already been sick for 5 days so I should get better. I never did get better, however, as each day I got worse until I woke up not being able to breathe, I went straight to the hospital as my symptoms seemed to exceed that of the normal flu. Being turned away before, I was definitely nervous about going back sure that I would be sent home again, but to my surprise, I was treated so professionally and rapidly. Once the doctors had seen that my symptoms so closely resembled that of COVID-19, I was given an IV, oxygen, and a chest x-ray within an hour of getting there. A flu test and a Coronavirus test was administered, and although those results take a while to get back, I was immediately diagnosed with pneumonia and told I would be admitted to the ICU to be treated and monitored.

While I ultimately did test negative for both the flu and the coronavirus, the experience in the hospital gave me an interesting insight into the world of the medical community during this crisis. The amount of care and attention given to me and all of the other patients was truly amazing, and I realized that the rationing of equipment and resources was truly being saved for those that needed it as I was able to get the care I needed. However, it was clear to me that there was a genuine fear of not having enough medical supplies, as the doctors and nurses had to cover up every time there came into my room, they had to wear covers over their scrubs, and any extra face mask over the paper masks and gloves, and when they left they had to discard all of it to avoid cross-contamination. As medical personnel continued to enter and leave the room I saw how many materials they really had to go through, and I realized the fear of shortages was justified and a lack of this safety equipment would be detrimental. The nation was soon to realize that there was not enough personal protective equipment for both the medical staff and the civilians who were now required to wear face masks to be in public. The government was forced

to confront this issue of shortages by forcing the manufacturing of PPE from manufactures like Ford and 3M under a government mandate that hadn't been used since WWII. As much as the US government attempts to prepare for emergencies and crises such as this one, it is easy to see that our government is mostly a reactive agency, not a proactive one. The government will only spend money and resources to correct situations rather than try to prevent them and the steps they have taken to account for the coronavirus is extraordinary. The government has not has such an intervention on the economy, businesses, and people since the world was at war. I would expect that this amount of control and manipulation over our otherwise capitalistic government could have ling lasting impacts on the way our country is run; with a rise in popularity in socialism and socialist politicians this crisis could aid in even more support of these policies.

The world will definitely be a different one when the world emerges out of this crisis; the government will most likely have an even stronger say on the operation of the free market and economy. The way people live their lives will most likely be altered as they go are conducting even more business and tasks online tan ever. Companies and corporations and will be conducting their businesses entirely differently as they operate with a much smaller workforce. The world, although it will recover from the virus, as vaccines and medicines are produced and functional, but the world will never be as it did before.