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Altoona Mirror

SATURDAY-SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 21-22, 2020

## OUR VIEW

Compliance  
challenging  
work places

Mirror readers gained a broader perspective about COVID-19's impact on school districts by way of reporter Dom Cuzzolina's articles Monday and Tuesday focusing on superintendents and other administrators being pulled from their regular duties because of health risks posed by the pandemic.

Every day there is additional bad news from numerous Pennsylvania locales as well as from communities across the nation about the coronavirus' terrible impact — that is, besides the horrific daily national statistics about new COVID-19 cases and COVID-19-related deaths.

Even with the prospect of having a vaccine available in the not-too-distant future, the situation remains dire, as expressed by Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan on Tuesday as he ordered new restrictions that were effective on Friday.

"We are in a war right now and the virus is winning," he said, while pleading with residents not to let their guard down.

Of course, that plea is no stranger to this state, although, unfortunately, it is clear that many Pennsylvania residents have become careless — and now many are suffering and perhaps dying because of it.

With the holidays nearing, people fear increasingly the pandemic's ultimate effects on their long-beloved retailers. However, there has not been enough attention to — and public acknowledgment of — a potentially crippling concern with which businesses large and small, retail as well as non-retail, could face beyond the obvious immediate health impacts of the current emergency.

Tuesday's Wall Street Journal delved into that concern under the headline "Return to the office brings COVID liability risks."

The Journal summed up the situation in the article's first paragraph, which said that while companies are wary of reopening offices due to the risk of exposing employees to COVID-19, they also are worried about their own legal exposure should staff get sick.

The article, which provided viewpoints from employment lawyers, made the point that "for white-collar workplaces, the pandemic has required compliance with the kind of complex workplace-safety regulations that, until recently, applied more to industrial settings than to offices."

That issue of compliance is not just a major concern for corporate headquarters in cities much bigger than Altoona and Johnstown. Businesses, white-collar and non-white-collar, in all communities of this nation must be cognizant of the potential devastating legal impacts of failing to abide by changing rules amid the health crisis.

The rules and guidelines employers must consult when reopening offices or for keeping offices open vary, including complying with edicts from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as following evolving rules from the state and local levels that respond to specific situations.

For employers, something else from the Journal article warrants contemplation:

"While the bar for proving employer negligence in safety issues has traditionally been high in the U.S., legal experts say given the fast-changing landscape for such regulations, the coronavirus has presented new compliance challenges. Many workplace lawsuits related to the coronavirus have focused on whether employers adhered to state and federal guidelines for reducing the spread of the virus."

America is engaged in a war to eradicate the deadly virus, but for businesses, legal ramifications stemming from it could be crippling or deadly, well after COVID-19 is a defeated enemy.



## This Thanksgiving, let's choose love

Thanksgiving is my favorite day of the year.

It's a holiday with none of the pressures of Christmas. I cook a lot of food and give a lot of hugs. Nothing makes me happier than our house full of the people I love.

This preamble is brought to you by a columnist who wants you and those you love to be here for next year's Thanksgiving.

We have to cancel the family gatherings. That means no one in our houses who doesn't live with us, unless we know — really know — that every person entering our house has not been exposed to COVID-19.

And now, a few words about the people you love:

You can't trust them.

I'm sorry, but it's true.

It's not that they are deliberately misleading you. It's just that so many people want to believe they are the exception to the rules.

The larger the gathering, the greater the risk. A growing number of infected people show no signs of having the virus, which makes them contagious without warning. And false notions of safe quarantines abound.

For example, leaving a bar at 10 p.m. rather than at midnight is not quarantining. This is true no matter when you leave a bar, and why on earth are you in one if you plan to spend Thanksgiving with loved ones?

This pandemic is at unprecedented



Connie Schultz

Creators  
Syndicate

levels in our country, and it's growing. Both California and Texas have now reported 1 million cases of COVID-19. On Wednesday, the U.S. set another record with 142,000 reported cases; 65,368 were hospitalized. Another record broken.

In El Paso, Texas, treatment centers have begun adding mobile morgues to keep up with the dying. As of Tuesday, they housed more than 150 bodies. Forget trying to imagine yourself in there. Think how you'd feel if someone you loved ended up in a refrigerated truck.

The New York Times reported we've now had more than 10.5 million reported cases in the U.S. and more than 241,000 virus-related deaths. We hold the world record.

Since the election, President Donald Trump has been hiding out in the White House, and he has been silent about this crisis. Vice President Mike Pence, the supposed head of the White House coronavirus task force, has yet to answer any reporters' questions since the election. He did cancel his planned vacation to Florida, we're told.

Through all of my years as a columnist, I have tried to find signs of hope. I have never wanted to be that finger-wagging naysayer on the mountaintop, telling other people how

to behave.

This is different.

I'm not telling you. I'm begging you.

Please, we must do all that we can to protect one another. Otherwise, this death toll will spiral further out of control. Someone you know will die of COVID-19. Odds are increasing that someone you love will be among them.

Earlier today, I was listening as my local NPR station aired WBUR's interview with Dr. Emily Landon, who is the executive medical director of infection prevention and control at the University of Chicago Medicine.

Landon said indoor gatherings are one of the primary reasons we're seeing a sudden, dramatic spike in COVID-19 infections and deaths.

She is outraged over the Trump administration's continued silence as the virus spreads.

Back to Thanksgiving.

Laurie Garrett, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author and pandemic expert, warned that this holiday could be a superspreader event.

"The moment you start hugging someone you haven't seen for weeks — yes, it's good for your soul and for your heart, and we all long for it — but that is the moment when you are sharing a risk and a threat that wasn't there before you had that hug."

This is the year to focus on the gratitude part of Thanksgiving. Let's start with the people we love.

## Innovation brings hope to horizon

For centuries, America has been the land of promise, and we have led the way in lifesaving advancement.

In the span of my own medical career alone, I have witnessed remarkable innovation — from groundbreaking discoveries to new therapeutics and even cures for deadly diseases.

In 2020, America's scientists and researchers once again stepped up to meet a new challenge.

As the COVID-19 virus interrupted our lives this spring, our incredible science community already was working on therapeutics and a vaccine.

In just a few short months, we went from having nearly zero information about this virus to finding novel treatments for it.

As our nation continues to combat the coronavirus pandemic, we recognize that a safe and effective vaccine is the key to defeating the virus and getting Americans safely back to work, school and play.

Here's the good news: We are on track to deliver real results in record time.

This week, Pfizer announced that its COVID-19 vaccine is safe and 95 percent effective in late-stage trials. Likewise, Moderna announced its vaccine is nearly 95 percent effective in early analysis.

This cutting-edge innovation is a



Rep. John Joyce

testament to the ingenuity and excellence of America's top scientists and researchers — and it also is a tribute to America's unique ability to drive innovative results.

Thanks to our health care heroes and to the public-private partnership spurred by Operation Warp Speed, our nation is positioned to develop and distribute a safe and effective vaccine more efficiently than any other country in the world.

As part of this historic undertaking, coronavirus vaccines are being developed by private companies with the same safety and efficacy standards as any other vaccine — but under Operation Warp Speed, vaccines are simultaneously being produced so that as soon as a safe and effective option is cleared, it's ready to go.

Thanks to President Donald Trump and Operation Warp Speed, a miracle is coming — but it's not here yet.

As we wait for a safe and effective vaccine to be authorized and distributed, the coronavirus remains an ever-present threat to the American people and to our economy.

During this crisis, Americans have stepped up and done their part to combat this virus.

In the face of this pandemic, I have been awed and motivated by Pennsyl-

vanians' care and commitment to one another and to our community.

As cases of COVID-19 continue to climb in Pennsylvania and around the country, we must stand firm against this invisible enemy.

We must remain vigilant and do our part to stop the spread of this virus and to protect our families and neighbors.

By taking commonsense steps to stop the spread of the virus today, we can secure a more prosperous future for our commonwealth and our nation. This is a shared fight to save lives and livelihoods.

Tyrannical shutdowns are not the answer.

We can mitigate the risks of this pandemic without further harming the economy or killing jobs, and I will keep fighting to support Pennsylvania families, workers and small businesses to ensure that they can weather this storm.

This year, Americans have faced and overcome trials like never before. Together, we will defeat this virus, rebuild our economy and restore our communities.

Thanks to the success and promise of American innovation, there is hope on the horizon.

Rep. John Joyce (R-Blair) represents the 9th U.S. District.

## ALTOONAMIRROR.COM WEB POLL

## LAST WEEK

**How do you think the controversy over the fish in the Lakemont Dam should be handled?**

By letting volunteer groups take the fish to private ponds — 262 (54.9% of 477 votes)  
I think the situation has been overblown — 103 (21.5%)  
I'd hate to see the fish die, but the overall health of the stream has to be considered — 53 (11.1%)  
I'm not familiar with the issue — 42 (8.8%)  
It should be up to the legal authorities — 17 (3.5%)

## THIS WEEK

**When would you take a COVID-19 vaccine?**

- Immediately
- I'll wait to see how it affects other people first.
- Not until the FDA approves it.
- Never. I don't believe in vaccines.

(Vote at [altoonamirror.com](http://altoonamirror.com))

## Search Mirror archives

People researching old stories that appeared in the Altoona Mirror and hundreds of other publications now can search archives online at <http://altoona.newspaperarchive.com>.

The cost is \$9.95 a month. People sign up and pay online. Once signed up, usernames and passwords will be issued.

Adobe Acrobat Reader, a free program, is required to view the newspaper pages.

The Mirror's archives date back to June 1, 1889. Because it takes several months before new editions are added to the archive, articles less than a year old might not be available.