

Pandemics Are the Health of the State

Local, state, and federal governments are using the COVID-2019 coronavirus crisis to assert more and more direct control over the lives of individuals.

The president has “banned” travel to Europe and travel from China, though control over individuals’ movements has never been within the scope of the president’s constitutional power.*

Governments have “declared lockdowns,” effectively forcing people to stay inside their homes (in some cases with criminal penalties), discussions of “shelter-in-place” and other domestic travel restrictions. These in turn will weaken and (given enough time) destroy large parts of the private sector, creating a void into which government programs and government-run industries

The government is planning to send \$1000 to every American, in one swoop making all 330 million US citizens recipients of government welfare for the first time in history.

A quasi-private governmental banker council has arbitrarily set the cost of borrowing money (at the bank level) at near zero, creating hundreds of billions of new dollars out of thin air.

After all the lessons and corruption of 2008, the federal government is again pursuing bailouts for companies that are failing.

States are mobilizing their national guards. The federal government is preparing quarantine centers.

Hardly anyone is batting an eye. Some people are begging for more “strong action” from their governments.

There’s no doubt that COVID-2019 is a serious risk. But it’s kind of hard not to notice that the response in terms of vastly ramped-up government control of society (with more to come) has well outpaced even a moderate Democrat’s idea of the proper role of a state vis-a-vis civil society. And if history shows one thing, governments that gain power for an “emergency” hardly ever give it up when the emergency is over (if, indeed, they ever admit that the emergency over).

We now face an even dangerous risk than this pandemic: that the state grows in this crisis to replace large parts of civil society that will never be allowed to grow back.

Yes, the virus grows exponentially. Yes, social distancing is one of the ways we know to

flatten the curve. But the development of the virus is still quite early, not all of the data is in, and yet still many people seem to be willing to surrender liberties which took centuries to gain and centuries to preserve.

*Even if the constitution granted this power, it would still be unethical for anyone to try to enforce it.

Originally published at JamesWalpole.com.