

A PATH FORWARD

WOMEN LEAD THE WAY AS PANDEMIC FIGHT CONTINUES

BY STEVEN P. DINKIN

There is a longstanding debate over which tribe cares more about keeping up appearances: men or women.

The coronavirus ends that debate. Men care more about appearances. And male elected officials care more than most. Keen to portray confidence and project strength — even as the death toll climbs — they eschew wearing masks and following recommended safety protocols.

On March 3, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson made headlines after visiting coronavirus patients in the hospital. Johnson boasted, “I shook hands with everybody, you will be pleased to know, and I continue to shake hands.” Soon thereafter, he was in intensive care.

South of the border, Mexico President Andrés Manuel López Obrador seems to be willfully ignoring social-distancing recommendations. He declines to wear a mask as he travels the country and refuses offers of hand sanitizer.

Meanwhile, around the globe, female leaders are proving to be quite skilled in battling the pandemic. With Angela Merkel at the helm, Germany has one of the world’s lowest fatality rates and now finds itself on the way to reopening. Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Hong Kong and Taiwan are all coronavirus success stories —

and all run by women. Their success is doubly impressive, when you consider that, of the 193 countries in the United Nations, only about a dozen are woman-led.

Some are eager to determine what traits, if any, many of these female leaders have in common. Often, they are described as empathetic, compassionate, supportive, collaborative and inclusive. They’re hailed for their voices of reason, effective messaging and decisive action amid the chaos.

These women build trust and address fears, head on — even the fears of their youngest constituents. In Norway, early on in the crisis, Prime Minister Erna Solberg held a press conference that was just for children. She told them it was OK to feel scared.

But it’s also true that these leaders are successfully navigating this crisis not just because of who they are but because of what they are not. They’re not ego-driven risk-takers, eager to demonstrate their power, regardless of the consequences.

As New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern put it: “I really rebel against this idea that politics has to be a place full of ego, where you’re constantly focused on scoring hits against each other. Yes, we need a robust democracy, but you can be strong, and you can be kind.”

New Zealand is close to wiping out COVID-19 after Ardern intro-



HAGEN HOPKINS AP New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern addresses a press conference on Thursday on the country’s budget.

duced some of the strictest lockdown measures in the world in late March. At the time, the country had only a small number of cases and no deaths. But Ardern didn’t wait around for the situation to worsen. She acted.

Compare that with what happened in Milan, Italy. Mayor Giuseppe Sala launched a “Milan Doesn’t Stop” campaign encouraging people to visit bars and restaurants after northern Italy was already home to 300 coronavirus cases. The outcome was disastrous, and Sala later apologized. That didn’t stop Brazil’s Jair Bol-

sonaro from adopting a similar campaign. The country’s death toll continues to mount.

Sweden has persevered in a different way, taking a laissez-faire approach to the pandemic. Schools, gyms, salons, bars and restaurants have stayed open as the country gambles on the risky strategy of achieving “herd immunity” to stop transmission through mass infection. Sweden’s death rate from the virus is higher than other (woman-led) Nordic countries and one of the highest in the world. Their economy is expected to suffer, too.

Bluster and bravado have imperiled the citizenry of many male-led countries. Appearances do matter, and, as they forge ahead, it is becoming clear: These risk-taking strongmen do not appear all that strong when it comes to arm wrestling with COVID-19.

They are being outmatched by strong women. Like Gov. Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan, who has endured armed protesters angry about the state’s stay-at-home orders. Even as they recently swarmed Michigan’s Capitol, Whitmer extended the orders to May 28, based on advice from experts. Clearly, the state’s chief executive is not the type to kowtow to bullies — especially at the expense of compromising the safety of Michiganans.

If we are all warriors in this fight, as President Donald Trump says, I want to take the field with a woman in command. They bring to the battle a sense of shared purpose to do what it takes to protect one another. And when it comes to leadership, they are better suited to it.

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TRASH

FROM B1 by restaurants, malls and offices.

Another reason city haulers are collecting more trash is that nearly every house is occupied, because almost no one is taking long vacations or even short getaway trips. When data from private haulers is available, there is expected to be a corresponding drop because most San Diego hotels are either closed or nearly empty.

On green waste, many residents with extra time on their hands are using it to

prune bushes, clear out detritus and otherwise spruce up their yards.

In addition, many others have taken up gardening to replace hobbies or activities not available because of stay-at-home orders during the pandemic.

North Park Nursery — which has remained open during the pandemic because the fruit trees it sells make it an essential business — has seen a significant spike in sales, manager Michael Blatnica said last week.

“Business has picked up anywhere from 30 percent to 50 percent,” he said. “People say it’s an outlet for them to

take care of something.” Blatnica said the biggest sellers during the pandemic have been plants for inside the home, succulents, cactus, decorative pots and soil. In addition, they’ve been selling many lemon trees and lettuce, cucumber and tomato plants.

San Diego provides free trash pickup to single-family homes, an unusual service for a city, because of a law called the People’s Ordinance. It costs the city \$34 million a year, which works out to \$117 a year or just under \$10 a month per residence.

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TEST

FROM B1

The site also asks for insurance information because the insurer will be billed at the Medicare rate, though the person getting the test is not supposed to be charged a copay or any out-of-pocket expense under a government rule.

Filling out the questions took a few minutes, and then things got more frustrating.

After putting in my ZIP code to find the nearest testing site, all of the locations I was given were in Orange County. I was in Oceanside, and Escondido was just 15 miles away, but the website directed me to a location in San Juan Capistrano.

I changed my home location to an El Cajon ZIP code and set the search function to 50 miles, but got a message that there were no locations within that distance, which wasn’t true as there is one at Grossmont College.

After a few experiments like that, the Chula Vista and Escondido sites suddenly popped up, but I couldn’t book an appointment because the entire month of May was grayed out.

One page said the Escondido site had an opening on May 7, but when I selected it, the calendar still was grayed out so I couldn’t make an appointment. I checked again later and the calendar did work, but the opening now was in about 30 minutes, much too soon to make.

By then I had called (888) 634-1123, the number to make an appointment to talk to a person directly. I lost count of how many times I heard the recorded message, “We are experiencing longer than average hold times.”

After 40 minutes on hold, an appointment in Escondido popped up for 2 p.m. the next day. I jumped on it. I learned later that day that all appointment slots had been filled for that week, so maybe openings were sporadically popping up because they were becoming available through cancellations.

Or maybe they were just glitches. I talked to someone at Optum who said they were looking into some issues with the website. In any case, the problems weren’t keeping people away from the testing sites.

I arrived a few minutes early for my appointment, and there were five people ahead of me, all wearing facial coverings and standing on blue Xs taped to the ground 6 feet apart.

A tip for anyone going to their appointment: Have your email on your phone ready to show someone at the door, and write down the ID number you were assigned, because they’re going to ask for it.

The check-in process was smooth, and people were polite. I was invited inside through a side door, not the main lobby, and told to stand on a blue line while someone asked for my ID number. I then was directed to another room where I stood 6 feet from a table and talked to a woman I could barely see sitting at a table behind a sheet of thick plastic.

She double-checked my birthday and address and got other information, then handed me a couple of pieces of paper and a plastic bag with a swab and tube inside. I was asked to go around the corner and stand inside a blue square on the floor to wait my turn.

A woman who introduced herself as Sarah told me to sit in a blue plastic chair, then took the plastic bag and top sheet of paper. I asked her how many tests she had done that day, and she said, “Millions.” She probably was a bit worn out, but still polite and patient.

She told me I was getting a PCR test, which stands for polymerase chain reaction and involves a 6-inch nasopharyngeal swab to collect a sample that will be tested for viral particles.

That’s probably the part you’ve heard about. Sarah told me to drop my bandana to expose my nose but still cover my face, and then she slid the swab into my right nostril. It felt like she got the whole 6 inches in there.

I was relieved I felt no sense of gagging or pressure. What I felt was, well, just weird. It felt like something was expanding deep inside my sinus as the swab rotated.

“Another 10 seconds,” she said. “You’re doing great.”

It felt like another 20 seconds might have passed before she said, “Another five seconds. Doing great.”

She then began extracting the swab, which she ad-

vised might be the uncomfortable part. It never hurt, but it felt like it was about to hurt, and like something — gray matter? — was being pulled out of my head.

And then it was all over. The actual test takes about 15 seconds. I saw the swab. It had not expanded after all and didn’t appear to have brains or anything else stuck to it.

I was directed to follow more blue markings on the floor toward the exit, and I was out about 30 minutes after I arrived. About two hours later I got a text saying my results would be ready in 48 to 72 hours on the LHI Care website.

My test was on a Thursday, and the nurse who administered it said results might not be ready until the following Monday as the weekend was coming up.

I still hadn’t received a text notification late Monday, so I called a number on the LHI website and heard a message to press 2 for results, but got a recording that said, “We are currently unable to answer your call.” I might have called too late.

I called again the next morning, May 12, and got someone on the phone who said my results still were pending, five days after the test, and the delay might have happened because my test was in the afternoon, and the samples might not have been sent to the lab until the next day.

Then around 3:30 p.m. I got a text that the results were ready.

I logged in and downloaded a PDF that said I was...negative! The page also gave instructions for people with a positive or inconclusive result. People who tested positive but don’t have symptoms were advised to stay home unless they need medical care and stay in a specific room as much as possible. People with serious symptoms are told to seek immediate care.

The results gave me some peace of mind, though they were from a test taken five days earlier. I’ll still work from home, wear a facial covering around others, wash my hands frequently and use hand sanitizer when I touch anything outside. And while it was a concern, I have not developed a fear of cotton swabs.

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SERVICE

FROM B1 if a senior were to get it, so I think that empowers us to want to go out into our communities and do these services for people who are at high risk,” Rieder said.

Leave It To Us is doing more than shopping for individual seniors; it has partnered with several larger organizations that help seniors.

Late last month the student group began helping the Los Angeles Chargers, The Rock Church, the City of El Cajon, and ElderHelp distribute \$62,500 in groceries to San Diego and El Cajon seniors.

ElderHelp, a longtime San Diego nonprofit, provides a variety of services so seniors can live independently in their homes. Currently they support about 750 seniors on a daily basis and help hundreds access groceries.

The Leave It To Us volunteers make grocery runs on behalf of ElderHelp, which then delivers it to their clients.

Deb Martin, executive director of ElderHelp, said if there’s a silver lining to this pandemic, it is that people are noticing seniors and becoming more aware of a population that is often invisible.

She said it has been great to see an uptick in interest in volunteering with the group.

“We’ve seen over the last couple of years more and more younger people wanting to contribute, and I think it is an amazing thing,” Martin said. “That intergenera-



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“I didn’t even realize the extent of how much this service was needed,” Abbie Reider said.

tional aspect is really ... important, not only for the seniors’ engagement and quality of connection with our volunteers, but also for the younger generations to have more access and exposure and appreciation for our aging community and the role they play.”

Regardless of the twists and turns the pandemic brings, Rieder said she thinks San Diego’s Leave It To Us will be needed in the months to come.

“One of the things I’ve come to realize is, even once COVID is over, for the majority of us, people who are high risk are still probably going

to be afraid to leave their homes and still would likely benefit from having this service,” said Rieder.

“So we anticipate continuing this service for a long time, and beyond that I would like to keep this group together because it is a special thing to have a group of individuals who are compassionate and want to help the community.”

Seniors and others who are high risk — or people who want to volunteer — can connect with Leave It To Us by emailing sdleaveit-us@gmail.com.

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SMOLENS

FROM B1

The differences among elected officials in Riverside County serve as microcosm of the debate nationally. County Supervisor Jeff Hewitt said he didn’t feel the need to wear a mask, citing conflicting views about the benefits of face coverings, according to the Los Angeles Times. He did say he’d wear one if a business required him to do so.

“This is my personal choice,” he said during the May 8 board meeting in which supervisors voted to relax coronavirus restrictions. “I believe people are smart enough to make (that) decision themselves.”

Some Perris council members suggested the priority should be the greater good, not individual preference.

“The virus is still very active in our region and our community,” Mayor Pro Tem Rita Rogers said on Tuesday before voting in favor of tighter rules, according to the Press-Enterprise. “When you think it’s gone, it comes back.”

Both the supervisors and council members voted unanimously.

Most health experts support wearing masks, especially when people are in close proximity to others. The Riverside supervisors removed all the county’s stay-at-home orders that go beyond what Gov. Gavin Newsom has mandated. Notably, the state only recommends wearing masks in public, which is now the position of Riverside County.

Newsom’s policy allows local governments to enact tougher restrictions. A month ago, Riverside be-

came one of the first California counties to impose stiffer mask requirements, when county Public Health Officer Cameron Kaiser ordered they be worn whenever people ventured from their homes.

Before Riverside lifted restrictions, San Bernardino County relaxed its local social-distancing guidelines.

Others are going in the opposite direction. Last week, the city and county of Los Angeles ordered residents to wear masks whenever they are outside.

There has been little dispute among officials across San Diego County over the local mask mandate and other social-distancing measures, though disagreements exist on how soon certain businesses should be allowed to open. County residents are required to wear masks in public when

in close proximity to others.

Mask mandates have generated controversy and there is a partisan split over whether to wear or not to wear face coverings.

But it’s not absolute. An Ipsos poll at the end of April reported that 55 percent of American adults surveyed said they were voluntarily wearing masks, including two-thirds of Democrats, about half of Republicans and half of independents.

Trump does not wear a mask in public and in some cases is the only person pictured at a gathering not doing so. Democratic members of Congress uniformly wear masks during hearings, while some Republicans also do.

The high-profile protests against stay-at-home orders involve mostly conservative protesters, many of whom are seen not wearing masks or adhering to social-dis-

tancing guidelines.

Yet, the bigger partisan gap concerns whether we’re over the coronavirus hump and how well government has responded to the crisis.

According to a CNN poll released last week, 71 percent of Republicans say the worst is behind us, while in April, 70 percent said the worst is yet to come. In the current poll, 74 percent of Democrats say the worst is still ahead, along with half of independents.

Similarly, 82 percent of Democrats say the federal government is generally doing a poor job responding to the crisis, while 80 percent of Republicans say it’s doing a good one.

One more example to drive home the point: There is a nearly 70-point spread in the response to whether the government is doing enough to try to keep the COVID-19 death toll from reaching

100,000 or higher, with 81 percent of Republicans saying it is and only 13 percent of Democrats in agreement.

It turns out that the public may be less partisan about wearing masks than most other aspects of efforts to combat the coronavirus.

Tweet of the Week

Goes to Christopher Cadelago (@ccadelago) of Politico, excerpting a Politico story about Joe Biden’s presidential campaign.

“The bedwetters are doing their thing because it’s the season for double-guessing,’ said a Democratic consultant advising one of the outside groups backing Biden. ‘But the fact of the matter is: Biden has won precisely because he’s ignored those people.’”

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