

Quotables:

"The Old Order is being swept away, as we all know, but we never expected to see it happen."

- Werner Herzog

"The Republicans realize that all their economic rescue plans are socialism, don't they? Looks like Fox News will take a break from warning us that big government spending programs will turn us into Venezuela and steal our freedom."

[-@MarkJacob16](#)

Pleasure making your acquaintance. This is one of the first days of the rest of our lives. To loosely quote, well, Dan Sinker of Impeachment.Fyi, we'll mark time by what came before and what came after it.

Unfortunately the fear is real, the fight-or-flight response is real, and while (quoting one D. Hanssen) fear is good and can be used. On the other hand, anxiety—a nebulous form of fear that feels like a cloud of fearful unknowns—stops us in our tracks.

Browsing the internet, in the form of social media or whatever, looking for information, is like anxiety. I intend to make this newsletter like a known fear. Scary things you can use. So you don't have to try to read everything to make sense of the new world you're living in.

Shortly you'll see a list of bullet points, each roughly representing another item of key virus news, or more likely, key news about the rest of the world that happens to have been caused by the virus in some way.

And because I have a background as an investigative reporter, I'm endeavoring to also include key questions that can be asked, with citations at the bottom (if you choose to read that) explaining how I'm going about asking them.

But before we get into that, a quick PSA about how best to handle this thing, from [a public health expert](#). Because maybe some of you haven't yet heard this precisely, and it's imperative you do.

What will likely have to happen, considering that there's mounting evidence of pre-symptom transmission, is you'll form an "isolation group," most likely those in your household, but if you still go to work and you work in a small group (and, crucially, don't interface in person with others), it could also include the households of those people.

Those in your isolation group should only be in contact with others in that group for six days, because symptoms likely appear after 5-6 days if they're going to appear at all. It could be that someone in your group has it and is asymptomatic, but it's unlikely that everyone in your group can get it and experience no symptoms.

After 6 days or more with no one in your group experiencing symptoms, you can be reasonably sure that no one in your group/household has it. Only then can you join with other such groups from time to time—and only then if you trust that all of them have been isolated six days or more. Use of public transport, including flights, will reset the isolation clock of your whole group, because of the [danger of](#)

[aerosols](#) created when anyone breathes. (BTW, these can land and survive on most hard surfaces for hours or days, so the importance of wiping down and washing up remains.)

It's unclear whether you should count a trip to the grocery store or pharmacy toward the timeline. If you stay six feet away from everyone, it could be a buffer, but isn't guaranteed. Whether it's counted toward your (and thus your group's) timeline will ultimately be up to those you're proposing meeting; whether they feel comfortable with it.

Now for the bullet points of news.

- **ECONOMY DEATH** - Contestants on the reality TV show Big Brother—the weirdest test case in all this—will walk out of their isolation boxes into a world almost entirely devoid of bars and restaurants, the few that remain slowly dying as they can't cover bills without revenue. Indeed the world has become absent most meaningful social gatherings outside of families, housemates, and videoconferencing. By the time the contestants are released, there might not be air travel as we know it.
- **FIRST MEMBER OF CONGRESS WITH COVID** – The office of House member Mario Diaz-Balart said in [a statement](#) that the member showed symptoms Saturday evening, and that he was on the floor voting (and likely in offices and/or chambers) on Friday. That means he may have exposed other members for days. Indeed, potentially five days of exposure to other members. Trump came into contact with at least two people with the virus, and his office claims he himself was tested, but judge for yourself based on [his answer](#) when asked what the test was like.
- **NO ONE SPARED, POOR HIT HARDEST** Apparently [ONE IN FIVE](#) U.S. residents have lost work due to the virus. It's even more (one in four) for families with incomes under \$50,000/year. Even before the virus hit, Americans were strapped. Collectively the group of our lowest-paid fellow citizens [comprises 44%](#) of U.S. residents and their families make an average of \$18,000 per year.
- **TRUMP INVOKES THE DEFENSE PRODUCTION ACT** – Yes, he's seizing control of production as if this is a time of war. And whether you're a libertarian or not, you better believe your life depends on it. The number of life-support ventilators [the virus will require](#) ranges from 5x our current number to something like 30x. Even healthy people in their 30s and 40s have died without ventilators upon getting COVID. We'll have a more in-depth look at the ventilator market tomorrow, but suffice it to say this was the right move. It should have been done sooner.
- **SAD FOR DA DOGS** - You probably [shouldn't pet other people's dogs](#), one of city life's most important morale-boosting pastimes. If you have to do so, best to carry some 70%+ alcohol hand sanitizer. I've also been washing my face and hands after these walks. Because, you know, #touchingmyface.
- **WHAT'S REALLY NEEDED** - Bernie Sanders has said he thinks every American should get a \$2000 check from the government every month until the economy bounces back. (Kamala Harris, for her part, said \$500 per month. Which often doesn't cover rent in the poorest counties in America; I know, I lived there.) With programs to abate mortgages, rents, and most debt service, \$2000 per month seems like it could ensure no one becomes destitute.

- ACTUAL CHECKS COMING - Trump and other Republican politicians are on board to send out about half Bernie's demand, with a nebulous means test attached. There is apparently bipartisan support to [send \\$1000 checks](#) in short order to every American whose income is "below a certain level," in addition to some help for small businesses. Checks were proposed to be cut April 6 and May 18, but there is talk of speeding up the timeline of the first check, and allowing for direct deposit. But many are in agreement: it's only a decent "first step."
- FREELANCERS, "GIG" WORKERS AT RISK – People working in the so-called "gig economy" might be hit hardest, because some in government may forget the plights of those people when offering stimulus checks. (Gig workers may not technically have "jobs," so they can't prove that they lost one.) It could be a bloodbath for them, especially if this [ends up being an 18-month affair](#): that's the minimum time until a vaccine, should current testing prove successful, would be widely available.
- HOW 'BOUT THOSE PRIMARIES - "Primary elections," in air quotes, were held Tuesday in Illinois, Florida, and Arizona, but not Ohio. Any election after March 15 was in direct contravention of CDC [guidelines](#) urging (though I suppose not requiring) people not to gather in groups of more than 50. (Trump had said 10 should be the limit.) Few political groups lobbied postpone the in-person elections, weirdly—though some ardent readers of science, like yours truly, urged them to cancel last-minute. Ohio's governor took the safest tack, suing to postpone, losing, then [using the state health authority](#) to close all polling locations.
- SHAM ELECTIONS - About two weeks after the primary (so, March 31), we'll have a more official sense of who got the virus that day. While it takes six days for symptoms to show, it generally takes another week for folks to think it's serious enough to test; seek and find a test; get the test, wait for results, and have those publicly logged. But what we DO know is that the primary had [poor in-person turnout](#) in Illinois (160 virus cases as of Wednesday) and Florida (~300 virus cases), though turnout increased in Arizona (26 cases). Polling locations in Chicago were [a shambles](#)., some even lacking materiel, such as ballots, with which to vote. Maybe the biggest reason to have postponed the elections is that it will be known in the [memories](#) of [many](#) as something of a tainted result, particularly because the DNC [threatened states](#) with reducing the delegates allotted to them if they postponed.
- KEEP AN EYE ON TESTING - The question of testing has faded *somewhat* from the news, though it probably shouldn't have. Not having data on a threat is very different, and arguably more dangerous, than having data and potentially botching a response. Other nations have [conducted "surveillance testing"](#) in addition to testing those very likely to have it. So-called surveillance testing is what will ultimately help us come out of our house-boxes: knowing with some certainty whether it's safe to return to work or school. With tests at [below \\$2 each MSRP](#) (less in bulk discount), and some very large number of tests available for purchase since at least the weekend, **who is limiting them? Hospital chains? Or have they been following guidance from CDC, and if so, where did that guidance come from? (1)**
- STIMULUS SO FAR - A [couple](#) "stimulus" [packages](#) arose over the weekend, and both will help marginally, but neither will help much compared to the scope of the problem. For example, centrist Dems joined with some Republicans to pass paid sick leave "requirements" with

loopholes that [provided exemptions](#) to the employers of 80% of workers. That's right – human rights for just 20% of us.

- FREE BOOKS – A standup American publisher of nonfiction in a lefty tradition, Haymarket Books, is doing what they can to ease our collective boredom. They're offering [10 free e-books](#), generally about what is possible in governing (though I'm sure they're more exciting than this sounds) from their catalogue.
- TO LIMIT CORPORATE BAILOUTS - The economy generally—where workers work, not the fake economy of the stock market—keeps getting more bleak by the day. More government infusions will be needed. To that end, NGO-backed economic thinker Matt Stoller has put together a [helpful guide](#) for what conditions should accompany any corporate bailout. That is, if you want it to do something other than grant even more power to the powerful people who've been looting American businesses for decades. Fewer companies would take such bailouts, maybe, but some will have to if they don't want to close. They'd force agreement from a firm to:
 - Never lobby again & limit PR spend
 - Not merge/acquire for 5yrs
 - Never again buy back their own stock
 - Pay no dividends for 5yrs
 - Limit exec pay to X ammt
 - Reset stock value to \$0

What's to come in future newsletters? Questions about ventilators. But they can wait one more day.

Stay safe out there.

-Brandon

Investigative questions:

(1) I filed a FOIA request with CDC and HHS on March 3 regarding testing, particularly the decisions to issue guidance about who can be tested, and to not accept the early test approved by the WHO, which seems to have set back testing in the U.S. My determination on expedited processing is now overdue, and I'm searching for an attorney to represent me in a lawsuit against the federal government. (My longtime attorney is representing BuzzFeed in a similar suit regarding slightly different questions.)