

June 16, 2020

To the People of Texas,

As Mayors of Texas cities, the dramatic difference in the daily lives of Texans is something we feel every day. Local elected officials are the closest government to the people, and while our responsibility hasn't changed, the way we do our jobs sure has. Our mornings now start with reports from local hospitals of ICU bed capacity and the latest positive COVID 19 testing counts. These numbers frame our focus and remind us just how different the world feels now than at the beginning of March.

In March and April, communities across Texas stepped up and battled the virus by flattening the curve and keeping our healthcare system from being overwhelmed. The success story of those months and weeks saved the lives of thousands of Texans. We also understand that because of measures undertaken, our economy has taken a huge hit, which set up a debate between lives and livelihoods. Like you, we want this economy to bounce back as quickly as possible.

After weeks of suspensions and precautions, our state has moved to reopen. It is both predictable and unsurprising that this has caused the spread of the disease we all worked so hard to contain. More than the spread of the infection itself, the idea we are somehow past the threat of coronavirus has taken hold in many Texas communities. Mixed messaging from many hasn't helped either, and today we wanted to be very clear with our constituents:

The virus is here. Infections are rising. Hospital capacity is filling up.

This isn't meant to scare you, but it is meant to be very honest. The virus doesn't leave just because our collective urgency has gone away. We previously saw what it took to beat back these infections. It now seems we are unwilling or unable to take those measures again. We are not asking you to stay home, but we are asking you to mask up and social distance where possible.

You are likely tired of hearing us repeat the now familiar phrase of "social distance" in keeping 6 feet apart. You might feel like a kid again as you hear us repeat, "wash your hands" for 20 seconds in stressing hygiene. You are probably tired of wearing a mask while in public as well.

We get it, that's all understandable. But here's what Texans really need to understand:

If we want the economy to open fully and stay open, if we want to send our kids back to school from pre-k to college, if we want to watch and play sports with people in the stands, if we want to attend cultural arts events like concerts and theatre, if we want banquets and parades in the fall, if we want our lives back as Texans, we need to take this seriously.

Very seriously.

Maybe it is because the things we must do (masking up, social distancing, washing our hands) sound so simple that we simply ignore them. Take it from us Mayors: we cannot afford to ignore the consequences. It has and will continue to affect our way of life.

Our failure to do these things will cost all of us. For 40 million Americans, it has cost their job, and for almost 120,000 it has cost their lives. For the rest of us, it has cost us our sense of normalcy in a way we have not felt before.

We want to leave you with this statistic to show how effective your personal conduct can be in fighting the coronavirus: Hong Kong and Taiwan have a combined population more than the entire State of Texas. Both are closer to Wuhan, China than Beaumont is to El Paso. Combined, their death total from coronavirus is 11. Total. Not a daily total, but their total. In Taiwan, the schools didn't even have to close.

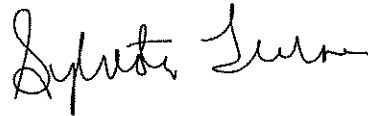
The difference? They resolutely wore masks.

As spring has turned to summer, the things we do right now will determine our lives this fall, from feeling safe eating out to football on Friday nights. The question is whether we are willing to do the simple things. As Mayors, we know the simple things often make the biggest difference. For containing coronavirus, we must all do our part or we will head into an uncertain future that limits our lives.

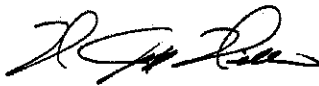
Mask up!



Mayor Pete Saenz
City of Laredo



Mayor Sylvester Turner
City of Houston



Mayor Jeff Williams
City of Arlington



Mayor Ron Jensen
City of Grand Prairie



Mayor Steve Adler
City of Austin



Mayor Ron Nirenberg
City of San Antonio



Mayor Joe Zimmerman
City of Sugar Land



Mayor Dan Pope
City of Lubbock



Mayor Dee Margo
City of El Paso