



MESSAGE

FROM MAYOR DAN GELBER

This morning, Friday, October 16th, the State Department of Health has reported that COVID-19 cases in Miami-Dade County surpassed 176,100 and more than 3,520 people in our County have succumbed to the virus.

Over the last few weeks there has been a slight but clear increase in the upward trajectory of the disease. The number of County infections has topped 500 for two days, the number requiring hospitalization is also trending upward and the positivity percentage continues to hover around 5% most days. These trendlines reflect similar trendlines throughout the state where there seems to be an uptick as well. Whether that increase becomes a surge similar to the one we felt over the summer is unknown, only time will tell.

But I do have real concerns with the approach our state is taking to addressing the virus. It has become pretty clear that the State of Florida is pursuing herd immunity as its policy for combatting COVID-19. Herd immunity typically is done with a vaccine which gives everyone a level of immunity that prevents the spread of the virus. But recently it is being advocated by a few outliers as an approach to disease management where its proponents argue that the best way to address this virus is by letting infection spread throughout the population and not mandating countermeasures, while urging vulnerable people to protect themselves. To be clear it is not a mainstream approach to addressing this disease and I am unaware of any other state that has pursued this as its policy, but it is clear it is the policy of the State of Florida.

On September 24th the Governor hosted a roundtable with a few handpicked experts. These experts, Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, and Dr. Martin Kulldorff, argued that mask usage wasn't necessary, letting young and healthy people get infected was fine, and that reaching herd immunity was the best way to address the disease.

The next day, on September 25th, Governor DeSantis unexpectedly opened up nearly every part of commerce following their advice. Simultaneously, he issued an order preventing local governments from enforcing mask mandates on individuals, again following their advice. And his administration began pressuring school districts that openings were required upon threat of loss of funds. He even prevented limits on large gatherings and reduced social distancing requirements.

If there was any doubt as to our policy, a few days later three doctors authored a controversial medical statement – they called it the Great Barrington Declaration—where they argued that the best way to deal with this disease was by pursuing herd immunity by letting the virus spread through the community without any mandates including mask requirements. If you think the declaration sounded eerily similar to the orders our Governor implemented, you would be right. Two of the three authors of that Declaration are Dr. Bhattacharya, and Dr. Kulldorff, the same doctors whose advice our Governor is following.

I have tried to make these presentations factual. While I have not always agreed with the actions of other elected leaders, I've mostly avoided direct criticisms because, frankly, I think my statements to you should be about giving you information not placing blame. But, I want to be clear about our new state policy and what it means. Most mainstream physicians and scientists believe it is an outlier, if not fringe, approach.

Dr. Fauci responded yesterday on Yahoo news to the Great Barrington declaration and this approach.

We know this to be true from our own experience in Florida. Even when we were in full lockdown, the virus found its way into all communities. For instance, we locked down nursing homes and still over 6,400 nursing home residents have died in Florida, including 13 at a single facility in South Beach. And so many people over 60 or with high blood pressure or asthma, don't live in nursing homes or on islands. They live with their children or must work in the community or teach at our schools.

We have been listening to Dr. Morris who is the Director of the Emerging Pathogen Institute in Gainesville. He explains the concerns with pursuing herd immunity as a disease management tool.

Our experts have done some math and they believe that in Miami Dade alone if we allowed it to spread to everyone it would conservatively cause the death of 14,000 additional people beyond the 3,500 that have already died. That would mean COVID-19 would cause more deaths in our County this year than cancer, heart disease, diabetes, Alzheimer's, strokes, gun shots, suicides, homicides, and the flu – combined.

Finally, for those who think we need to do this to reopen our economy, I think you're mistaken. Tourism is a prime driver of our economy. But people know when and where it is unsafe to travel. Advertising us as a place where no one needs to wear masks and the virus is allowed to spread unconstrained is not going to attract people to our restaurants, hotels and venues. We must reopen, but demonstrating we are thoughtful, following mainstream science, and exercising caution as we reopen is what we need to do. I hope the governor reconsiders but, in the meantime, wear your masks and follow social distancing guidelines.

Have a good weekend. And as always thanks for your calm, your patience and sacrifice. Stay healthy and mostly at home.