

SOLUTIONS -- Huck Fairman

WHICH WAY WILL WE GO?

Many are wondering if we are at some crossroads, some inflexion point which will lead to lasting changes in our country, and maybe the world. Responding to the coronavirus has called for unprecedented infusions of money and credit to save lives and the economy. But the situation has also called for discipline, from social distancing to less travel and purchasing, to reducing needs and expenditures of energy. For some, it has raised the question: what is it that we really need in our lives? A related revelation, suddenly more widely evident, is that many Americans have little or no financial cushion. Common sense and social responsibility urge that this be addressed, by citizens and their governments.

Is this crisis, then, an opportunity to re-evaluate and possibly reset many of the ways we live? Given the range of long-term problems we face, the answer would seem to be a resounding 'Yes!'

Another change we are witnessing is the worldwide reduction in emissions. Reduced purchasing, manufacturing, and travel have noticeably reduced emissions. Air and water bodies, globally, are suddenly cleaner. Once we get through the worst of the coronavirus crisis, should we not make concerted efforts

to maintain these reduced emissions? How will we avoid simply returning to pre-virus levels?

Here again, the answer should be Yes, we should take the opportunity to change. While globally, and across this country, people and governments are taking steps to go green and preserve environments – Nature and its wildlife and vegetation – to date we have not yet turned the corner. World temperatures this year are already at record levels. Waters along Australia's Great Barrier Reef have also reached record-breaking temperatures. As this warming continues over the next decade, in large part from the heat already in our atmosphere and oceans, a range of problems will only get worse. What the coronavirus crisis warns us is – Don't wait to begin addressing the situation.

Sadly, both of these crises were predicted before their arrival. A number of scientists, such as James Hansen, predicted global warming back in the '70s. Exxon's scientists also did so in those years, until the company quashed their conclusions.

Bill Gates and several fiction writers predicted global outbreaks of disease and warned that we were not ready for them.

We didn't heed or begin to prepare for either of these threats. Will the current crisis motivate enough of our populations to prepare for the next outbreak and respond to the climate crisis? Polls show that a majority of Americans now believe that global warming is real and is caused by man's activities. But our president calls this a hoax.

Fortunately a number of states and their governors have joined efforts to address the climate crisis, but we need both national and international leadership. We have elections coming up. We need leaders at all governmental levels but particularly the top ones who can understand and respond coherently and concertedly to these crises, and to others such as inequality, poverty, education and infrastructure. In the coronavirus and the climate crisis, we have existential challenges facing us. Perhaps we can learn from both that now is the time, now it is essential, to make changes in the ways we live and how we prioritize our lives and societies.

