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Editorial & Opinions

ENOUGH

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Kentucky's next plague



JENNIFER MOONSONG
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Since the onset of the pandemic, Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear has been applauded for his media-friendly approach, reasserting tone and proactive handling of the Coronavirus crisis.

It cannot be denied, he's done an outstanding job of relating to Kentuckians in a calm and comforting way in times of panic.

However, I will not join in on applauding one of his recent decisions.

Last week Beshear made plans to release nearly a thousand inmates from prison described as "non-violent", in response to the pandemic.

Beshear also signed an executive order to commute the sentences of 186 felons after screening them for COVID-19.

According to the secretary of the governor's cabinet J. Michael Brown, the chosen prisoners were picked through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines as being more susceptible to COVID-19 because of existing respiratory, heart and/or other health problems.

This risky move is said to be a protection for both the inmates and the prison employees.

Was this done entirely in the name of health and wellness, or was it a way to lessen the economic burden the state has on the horizon of a gloomy economic state? That was the first question that came to mind.

The next questions I pondered involved the screenings administered.

How thorough were the screenings? Who administered the screenings? Did they take into account the non-symptomatic aspects of this mysterious virus? Did they consider the incubation period? Did they account for the unknown factors still being figured out by scientists and healthcare professionals?

Ultimately those speculations boil down to one question: Did he put an innocent population at risk?

The next question that came to my mind when I read this disheartening news was: What exactly is a non-violent offender?

Essentially, those hollow words mean just one thing. The prisoners released have not been convicted of murder.

While some heinous sexual crimes are categorized as violent, others are surprisingly not. Others non-violent offenses include drug dealing and manufacturing, robbery, kidnapping, extortion, and the list goes on.

Each and every one of the prisoners being released back into society were found guilty in a court of law, representing the state of Kentucky and the United States of America.

People sworn to uphold the law, to be just and fair, decided; Now it has been reversed. I can't help but feel that this hasty, knee jerk reaction will not bode well for the justice system in our fair state. Kentucky is already plagued with many non-violent offenders

who have a track record of being released through various programs only to commit the same crimes again.

Somehow I don't think the guilty-today-innocent-tomorrow motto will serve the Bluegrass well in the long run.

On the heels of this decision one Kentucky inmate considered non-violent, Jacob Burnett, was released from state custody after serving two weeks of a two-year sentence. According to the Department of Corrections Burnett was not released in response to COVID-19, but thanks to a re-entry program.

Only days after being released Burnett was re-arrested in Louisville on a murder charge.

Perhaps Governor Beshear should consider the myriad sources of statistics that indicate non-violent offenders often become violent if their criminal inclinations are not curbed early.

I understand the Governor is under a massive amount of pressure to release inmates. According to a recent article in the Courier Journal, a broad coalition of organizations — including the liberal Kentucky Council of Churches and ACLU of Kentucky and the American Conservative Union and Americans for Prosperity — has called on Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear to reduce the number of inmates to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

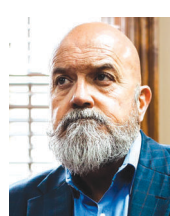
Punishment is not for revenge, but to lessen crime and hopefully reform the criminal. If Beshear continues to bend to these pressures, serving his role of politician first and Governor second, the future isn't hard to predict.

When the pandemic subsides, the criminal plague will be in full swing because a lack of consequences is no reform.

It will not only be in urban areas. In rural areas like ours drug use, drug abuse, and drug related crimes including theft, will be on the rise.

No matter what the reason's for, releasing prisoners already convicted of crimes is ultimately bad for our state. It's an unjust means to an end.

Community heroes keep us safe



By **JEFF JOBE**
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For the past few weeks, I have done my very best to motivate our team of community reporters and editors to coordinate news so that we can offer the best and most honest coverage available.

In a situation like this, it is so easy to get caught up in the panic mode. And from what I see is happening at this moment, there is no need at all for any of us to be in a panic.

As I scroll through social media, I am saddened by friends who want to use today's situation as some way to feed their biased political agenda.

The loons who spend hours on Facebook attacking people who have to go to the grocery store or have the nerve to visit a hardware store or lawn and garden outlet.

On the other side, I'm bombarded with theories of how the Chinese government created this virus as some communist attack on the world.

I don't have the resources nor desire to follow my neighbors and see if they are following the suggested protocol for slowing the spread of this virus. I trust in them and believe they, too, are as worried as I am. I believe that if they are on the road, they have a very good reason.

As a matter of fact, the more info I see, the more I realize that they - the working class of America - is at this very moment running our country. It's not the government worker that has been drawing full-pay and been home for weeks. It isn't the corporate owners who are managing by phone or teleconferences.

At this very moment, our country is being stabilized by truck drivers, grocery clerks, drive-thru personnel, hospital interns, and nurses and doctors who actually see patients.

These are the people who read my newspapers, and these are the people we so very much want to let know we appreciate them. Their lives and fears are every bit as real as any of ours, but they don't have the ability to simply say, "I'll work from home (wink, wink) and keep getting my full pay." They must get up and go to work every day they are scheduled and, quite possibly, put themselves at risk.

But guess what? There is no hazardous duty pay for most of them, and yet the Facebook crowds continue to assume they are on the road because they are just too dumb to know better.

Over the next few weeks, we will identify as many community heroes as we possibly can in our print and also share online across our region. We have hundreds scheduled already in each of our communities, and I hope to be able to recognize them all.

If you are a business manager as myself and are proud of the team you have who is unselfishly serving your customers, their families, and our communities, please send us their names and a photo, Consider helping us pay our appreciation forward by helping us provide this space to the 35,000 readers we have in South Central Kentucky.



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