

## **County Judge Joe Weber Press Release**

**21 April 2020**

To the residents of Fayette County, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March I issued a County-wide Declaration Disaster as a result of the COVID-19 impending crisis. For almost six weeks now Fayette County residents have been under numerous guidelines, orders, mandates, directives and recommendations imposed at all levels of government – all with the intention of controlling the spread of the virus so that our healthcare providers and medical facilities would not be overwhelmed with caseloads which they could not manage. In conjunction with these actions, testing for the virus has been conducted under various protocols to identify those infected and to take the necessary measures to provide for their treatment and recovery. Mass testing has also been put in place in many areas of the country to gather much needed data required to learn more about this virus and enable our medical experts to make the most accurate predictions and assessments, with the hope of steering our daily lives back to some type of normalcy. I continue to remain grateful for all the efforts our county residents have made to both comply and cooperate with all the guidance and directives handed down. Because of your cooperation it is clear that at the national, state and local levels the tide may be turning in our favor.

There remains much we don't know about this virus. But there are things we do know. It is extremely contagious and must be taken seriously at all times with respect to the prevention and avoidance of infection. But we also know that it is not proving to be near as deadly as initial projections indicated. This is the good news and should allow us to remain optimistic about the vast majority of those infected, fully recovering at home. Our active cases in the county have been manageable and we continue to track and monitor closely those who are confirmed to be

infected. As of this morning there are 13 active cases within Fayette County. Three of our patients reside in medical facilities outside of the county and are in critical condition. I ask that you keep them and their families in your thoughts and prayers as they struggle to recover from the virus. The other ten are recovering at home and we expect sometime this week to have as many as four of them cleared and classified as fully recovered. Your thoughts and prayers need to be with these patients and their families as well. There is no doubt that we will see more positive tests, but we will deal with them accordingly.

Last Friday our Governor issued a series of executive orders that outlined his path for reopening our businesses and taking those first steps toward a return to normalcy for Texans state-wide. The two orders that immediately affect our county at this point in time are the lifting of restrictions on our medical facilities to perform elective procedures and allowing our teachers to enter their classrooms as they work toward continuing on-line and distant education with their students who continue to remain at home. I expect there will be more specific guidance coming from our Governor within a week or so regarding the gradual opening of businesses that have not been deemed “essential” up to this point in time. I and the rest of your county leaders will do our best to keep you informed as we learn more of our Governor’s intent and the effect of any forthcoming decisions on our county.

Yesterday, I met with the mayors and city managers of our incorporated communities to get their recommendations on what could be done to get all of our businesses and the local economies back to pre-coronavirus status. Immediately following this meeting, I met by teleconference with our state senator, state representative, all other state representatives and judges within our senatorial district. My message to them was, recognizing that our testing capacity and sampling have been relatively small compared with other larger counties, our

positive case file has not increased significantly and our residents for the most part have been diligent in exercising social distancing, sanitization and personal protection. These measures have proven to be the most effective in fighting the virus and will continue to be until a vaccine or some other preventative is discovered.

I believe it is time for Fayette County to strongly consider the opening of all our businesses on a conditional basis. Yesterday, I shared this belief with those state elected officials who represent Fayette and surrounding counties. It is my hope that they share this with our Governor as he decides what his next steps are going to be toward getting our economy going again. The other judges within our district seemed to be in general agreement that it is time to “take some risk”. A war and/or battle, as this has been referred to by so many, cannot be effectively waged and won without assuming some risk. We are told the virus will continue to spread until there is a vaccine in place, some of us may contract it more than once, there may even be a second wave in the fall.....but the good news remains that the vast majority of us who might contract it will recover at home, return to work and end up living normal, healthy lives. This is what the medical experts are telling us. I firmly believe the overall objective in this war/battle against the coronavirus is soon to be changing from controlling the spread to saving the vital economy of our nation and state, i.e. saving our country! Saving the country we know and love, and the individual freedoms we so treasure have become paramount, and I believe warrant some risk. Our forefathers and leaders before us felt the same on many occasions as they built this great nation under circumstances and conditions just as serious as those we face today. It's my belief we simply can't wait much longer to take the necessary steps to get our life blood economy and workforce back on track. Look at the current situation – we are running out

of money, people's patience, and potentially creating consequential effects on our society and way of life from which we may never recover. We're simply running out of time!

With the above in mind it is my intent to:

1. To rescind my order that closed our hotels, motels and B&Bs to transient, overnight occupants with the caveat that all social distancing, personal protective equipment and sanitization measures will be adhered to by both owners and occupants. This action will be codified on Thursday as part of Commissioners Court action updating the current County-wide disaster declaration.
2. To continue to aggressively pursue with state authorities and the Governor the option of Fayette County businesses reopening at the earliest possible date under the following conditions:
  - a. That all nursing homes, home healthcare facilities and assisted living facilities remain sealed off and closed to all except staff and healthcare providers, and that no transfers of inhabitants occur without the knowledge and direction of county healthcare and emergency management authorities.
  - b. That the above facilities, county EMS, county law enforcement and healthcare providers would at all times be adequately trained & equipped with personal protective equipment (PPE).
  - c. That our hospital, clinics and EMS have and maintain the capacity to triage, treat and evacuate as necessary coronavirus patients in the event a hot spot or flare up should develop.

- d. That our residents within the county, particularly our elderly, with chronic or underlying health conditions be identified by their healthcare providers and strongly encouraged to continue under the present stay at home policy.
- e. That those business owners who choose to reopen initiate strict social distancing, personal protection and sanitization measures for all their staff and workers, and strongly encourage the same for those who choose to enter their places of business.
- f. That coronavirus testing capacity during this period of reopening be ramped up in order to early identify any significant increase in cases as a result of the openings, as well as to continue to gather much needed data to better know and model the virus within our county.
- g. That assistance from the state in ramping up and conducting rural county testing, as in the Governor's plan, come to fruition.
- h. That informal monitoring for compliance of the above measures be the responsibility of not only county leaders and law enforcement, but all county residents to insure the spread of the virus remains at a minimum.

This could be the framework for a plan that works for our county to get all of our businesses up and running. I believe Fayette County and some of our neighboring rural counties, if permitted at this point in time, could lead the way by moving forward safely and responsibly in a very positive direction. Such a movement toward normalcy would require an even heightened awareness of the seriousness of the virus we face and an even stricter adherence and awareness of the personal responsibility we must all assume. And yes.....the acceptance of some risk is inevitable. As I have said before, government will not be the solution to delivering our lives and

economy to normalcy....it ultimately will be “us” as individuals working together and caring for one another, and continuing to do what we know are the right things to do. I continue to appreciate and remain grateful for the cooperation and leadership of our county leaders and for the personal responsibility and sacrifice all of our Fayette County residents have endured. Through unity there is strength, and if we stay strong we will ultimately overcome.

God Bless.....and stay healthy.