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COLUMNS OPINION

Jim Lyons: Let coronavirus science be your guide on reopening the economy, Mr. President

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Dear Mr. President: We all share your concern for the future of our country. But, at this critical time, your focus on “reopening America,” is concerning.

Clearly our economic crisis and the coronavirus pandemic are linked. However, [moving too quickly to jumpstart](#) the economy in spite of the trepidation of your coronavirus science advisors could lead to a resurgence that could have even more dire consequences for both.

History is fraught with examples of leaders who challenged science because it did not comport with their values. Most notable was the imprisonment of Galileo 400 years ago for his science-based assertion that the sun, not the earth, was at the center of the universe in stark contrast to the beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church. Of course, Galileo was right, but he spent the rest of his life in prison as a result.



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Corona crises - Don't let the perfect coronavirus outcome be the enemy of a good one [capitalgazette.com/opinion/column...](https://www.capitalgazette.com/opinion/column...)





Science can help to validate our beliefs or challenge our values. But it is an essential foundation for creating sound policy. Science has led to American leadership in manufacturing, communications, and space exploration. Science has helped the United States' become the world's greatest military power. And STEM education – which starts with “Science” – will help produce our next generation of leaders.

I'm sure that nearly every American would like to see the country reopen. The shutdown is taking its toll. But, so is the disease.

The United States has far surpassed the rest of the world in Covid-19 cases. The United States is now reporting more deaths than any other country in the world. And in Queens, New York, the place you grew up, people have been particularly hard hit.

These are Americans who most need to get back to work to get a paycheck to put food on their tables and pay their rent. You were a landlord, so you appreciate when the rent isn't paid. I'm sure you share the concern of many of us that the coronavirus hits hardest those Americans who can least afford it.

As one of your science-advisors, Dr. Fauci acknowledged: “There is a discussion and a delicate balance about what's the overall impact of shutting everything down completely for an indefinite period of time.” You demonstrated prudence and patience in listening to your advisors and rethinking your first idea to reopen the economy by Easter. Thank you.

But you seem anxious about further delay and recently said that the country would open: “Very soon. Sooner than expected.”

Now the media is attacking your science advisors. Rush Limbaugh accused Dr. Fauci of being a “Hillary Clinton sympathizer” and plotting to ruin your reelection chances. And, Tucker Carlson, who has been concerned about the virus, accused Fauci of “getting it wrong on the coronavirus,” claiming that his reliance on medical models overestimated the scale of the crisis. As you know, Mr. President, the numbers don't lie. Leading in Covid-19 cases and deaths is not a winning formula for you or the nation.

To the contrary, Mr. President, your success in saving lives and reducing the number of people with the disease and those who die will be the real measure of your success as president.

Mr. President, don't fall into the trap of letting those who know nothing about the science of pandemics lead you astray. You should continue to trust in the scientific experts who have guided you thus far in fighting this pandemic.

Social distancing is working. The numbers of those stricken by the virus and those who have died are, so far, fewer than expected — proof that their advice is sound and should be relied upon to inform the critical policy decisions you will need to make — including when to “reopen” the country for business.

Don't repeat the mistakes of history by following those who falsely criticize science when it conflicts with their interests. And, most importantly, don't let the pundits of political science force your hand. To paraphrase, in this case, “It's NOT the economy, stupid.”



Jim Lyons, an Edgewater resident and forestry professor at Yale University, is a former undersecretary for natural resources and Environment in the U.S. Department of Agriculture.(Paul W. Gillespie / Capital Gazette file)

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