Governor Cuomo pleads for assistance as New York state plunges into an unprecedented health crisis

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The United States continues to see record numbers of new cases of COVID-19, posting 9,707 just yesterday, with 128 further deaths. With 64,563 cases of the infection, only 393 recoveries have so far been reported. More than 900 people have lost their lives thus far, and all these deaths must be considered preventable, had the government acted diligently and in earnest. New York state has faced the brunt of the pandemic, with 30,811 cases. However, many other states are being identified as centers of the disease, as new hot clusters deplete these regions of their already limited resources.

City after city in the United States is going into shutdown, and rapidly experiencing significant declines in revenue, while expenditures are rising dramatically in response to the health crisis. More than 90 percent of US Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and wages income stems from economic activities in large cities throughout the country. The pandemic, affecting urban centers predominantly, is quickly reaching a critical juncture in which the cities' fiscal crisis could impact their future recovery.

The Senate, meanwhile, is still wrangling over a bipartisan $2 trillion-dollar corporate bailout. Senator Charles Schumer of New York said, "To all Americans, I say, 'Help is on the way.'" Governor Gavin Newsom, in his update on California's response to the coronavirus, said yesterday that the state had seen more than one million unemployment claims in less than two weeks. The bill, however, will do little to stem the effects of mass unemployment for millions of working people, who will receive a completely inadequate one-time payout of $1,200.

Furthermore, the bill contains a paltry $150 billion that would provide economic aid to state and local governments. Andrew Cuomo, the Governor of New York, complained that the legislation would provide his state a mere $3.8 billion (only $1.3 billion for New York City), when the expanding outbreak is already severely straining the state's physical and financial response capacity. The state is facing a revenue shortfall of nearly $15 billion, a figure many times larger than the proposed aid from Washington. Cuomo called lawmakers yesterday, pleading for more assistance. At his daily briefing, he told reporters, "This is a drop in the bucket. How do you plug a $15 billion hole with $3.8 billion? You don't."

Dani Lever, Cuomo's spokeswoman, declared, "The gross political manipulation is obvious. Compounding this inequity is the fact that New York State contributes more to the federal government than any other state in the nation. It is just another case of politics over sound policy."

Last week, the United States Conference of Mayors sent a letter to Congress requesting $250 billion for direct emergency assistance to cities throughout the nation. They wrote, "Lost revenue from economic contraction will put pressure on the ability to deliver basic services—including police, fire, water, and sewer—or aid business sectors that serve as the foundation of our metro economies. Without significant federal assistance, we soon will be faced with having to make decisions that could include laying off employees, cutting budgets, and reducing or eliminating critically needed services."

The number of US states that have initiated lockdowns has increased to eighteen—New York, California, Washington, Connecticut, Delaware,

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Illinois, Indiana, Hawaii, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, West Virginia and Wisconsin. More states are expected to follow suit, as officials are compelled to respond to increasing cases of COVID-19 showing up in hospital emergency rooms.

It is also essential to note that a significant number of younger people in the US suffer from obesity and the concomitant triad of diabetes, hypertension and elevated cholesterol, putting them at increased risk. Louisiana, which has seen an exponential rise in new cases, reaching nearly 1,800 and with 65 deaths, reported today that 35 percent of those who have died were people under the age of 60. Nine of these people were under the age of 50.

The White House touted a slight modification of its suggestion that the economy could be reopened by Easter Sunday, suggesting that areas that are not as impacted can have restrictions lifted, businesses opened, and workers return to their place of employment. The administration also implied that cases in New York had peaked and thus that social distancing measures were proving successful. Numerous experts and medical sources said it was far too soon to draw this conclusion.

New York has completed more COVID-19 tests than any other state, but, due to strict restrictions on testing, the exact number of cases remains unknown. Additionally, as people begin to escape the city, they are taking the contagion with them, which occurred in Italy after a partial lockdown in the North, as well as in Wuhan, in China, before the Lunar New Year, causing the infection to spread beyond China's borders.

Without a national, simultaneous lockdown of the entire country that is kept in place for approximately three to four weeks, the infection will be transferred between states, leading to new clusters of outbreaks. In the US, the number of deaths is almost doubling every three days, with the number of new cases doubling in nearly two days. New York is seeing a doubling of its death rate almost every 1.5 days. Neither the US nor New York has shown an inflection in their curves.

Governor Cuomo is pleading for 30,000 more ventilators on top of the 7,000 presently on hand. With only 53,000 beds, he projected that 140,000 would be required when the apex of the wave slams upon the state. At Elmhurst Hospital Center in Elmhurst Queens, a refrigerated truck has already been stationed outside the 545-bed public hospital to receive the corpses that are beginning to pile up. In the last 24 hours, 13 people have died. As Governor Cuomo grimly forecast at his press conference, "Where New York is today, you will be in 3 to 4 weeks. We are your future."

President Trump continues to deny the seriousness of the disaster and ignores the need for urgent and massive medical intervention, instead highlighting the rise of the stock market over the last two days.

Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus of the World Health Organization (WHO) said during his news conference today that the world had squandered its first chance at containing the virus. He was referring to the time bought by China's massive efforts to slow the epidemic's progression in Wuhan and Hubei province. He warned that the world could not afford to squander the second opportunity.

The WHO, under immense pressure because of the financial support it receives from the wealthiest capitalist nations, must choose its language carefully. Despite the cautious wording of its statements, it is clear that the US response to the pandemic is one of malign neglect, which is endangering the lives of millions, especially the working class, all over the world.

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