

Nashville, Tennessee mayor issues business-friendly “safer at home” order in face of coronavirus pandemic

Warren Duzak
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With Nashville, Tennessee claiming more than 200 confirmed cases of Covid-19 and the state soon to surpass 800 cases, Democratic Mayor John Cooper and Republican Governor Bill Lee took timid half-steps last weekend to control the virus’s spread.

Cooper implemented a “Safer at Home” order Sunday requiring employees of “non-essential” businesses to stay at home for 14 days. The Nashville Chamber of Commerce quickly hailed the order which treated almost every business as essential, including the delivery of flowers

Lee argued that Tennesseans should not be required to stay at home, a measure which the World Health Organization has insisted is critical to slowing the spread of the coronavirus, but such measures should only be “suggested.”

“On closures, utilize guidance, we’re not issuing orders, we’re issuing guidance and strong suggestions,” Lee said at a press conference. “We don’t have to mandate people not to do certain behavior because Tennesseans follow suggestions.”

Lee also suggested that workers and their families seek solace in prayer during the growing public health disaster. “Lastly, I want to encourage you to pray. I want you to pray for your citizens that are affected by economic downturns, by the sickness sweeping through the state. I want you to know that you’re being prayed for as leaders in your community that you will have wisdom and discernment.”

In response to this refusal to face reality by public officials like Lee, 2,000 physicians are among nearly 20,000 people who have signed an online petition calling for Lee to issue a “shelter-in-place” order like Texas, California, Illinois, New York and New Jersey. The petition was started by Dr. Jennifer Martin, a physician at

Vanderbilt University in Nashville.

“The COVID-19 virus is spreading exponentially, and the lives of Tennesseans are at risk. Our only chance to flatten the curve and save lives is to physically distance from each other,” the petition notes. “We need to ask the TN governor to enforce social distancing. Governor Lee, please make social distancing mandatory! All nonessential businesses (restaurants, bars, shops, salons, etc) should close, and people should shelter in place.”

A letter from the Tennessee Medical Association(TMA), urging its membership and others to sign the petition, states, “Lives of Tennesseans and the health and well-being of our patients and our medical communities are at risk. Our only chance to flatten the curve and save lives is to physically distance from each other.

“In the absence of aggressive testing and tracking positive patients and contacts (which we are not doing yet), restricting activities and movement of people is the best weapon we have to slow virus. South Korea controlled this with aggressive testing and quarantine. China and Wuhan won with aggressively enforced lockdowns.”

The limited measures taken so far by Tennessee’s governor and Nashville’s mayor were the signal for businesses to seek out new avenues for extracting profits from the working class.

The *Nashville Business Journal* reported Monday that Dollar General is moving forward with plans to double its hiring rate as more people stay home to aid in efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19 and increasing numbers of workers are laid off from their jobs. The low-cost retail company, headquartered in the Nashville suburb of Goodlettsville, plans to add up to 50,000 employees by the end of April.

“We are proud to serve as one of America’s essential retailers, and we believe our customers are relying on us now more than ever to provide an affordable, convenient retail option,” Kathy Reardon, Dollar General’s senior vice president and chief people officer, reportedly said in a news release.

“The Dollar General family continues to do its part in helping our customers and neighbors during these unprecedented times. We invite individuals looking to start or grow a career, as well as for those whose jobs may be temporarily impacted by COVID-19, to apply for opportunities to help further our mission of ‘serving others.’”

Dollar General, with annual revenues of \$25.6 billion, has more than 15,472 stores in about 45 states. The corporation boasts that approximately 75 percent of the American population lives within five miles of a Dollar General store.

Dollar General has the second-highest ratio of CEO pay when compared to the median worker’s annual income—770 to 1, according to the *Nashville Business Journal*. Dollar General CEO Todd Vasos is paid slightly more than \$10.6 million a year compared to the median Dollar General worker’s pay of just \$13,733 annually.

The *Nashville Business Journal* also reported that the company “anticipates” most of the new jobs will be part-time but there is potential for “long-term career growth opportunities.”

Already low-paid workers with little to spend will be assisted by even lower-paid workers desperate for work as millions more lose their jobs to the financial crisis which has been sparked by the pandemic. They will be forced to work for poverty wages driven down even further by Wall Street’s dream, a massive army of the unemployed.

Ignoring the health concerns voiced by physicians and health experts plus the prospect of trillions of dollars from Trump and the Democrats to bail out Wall Street means an investment heaven for business and hell for workers.



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