

## An Open Letter to Governor Inslee

Dear Governor,

Trust Washingtonians. Please.

Washingtonians are a generous, compassionate, well-intentioned people who care about the safety and well-being of those around them.

They have earned the right to be trusted to act in a way that is in the best interest of their families, neighbors, communities, and state. They care deeply about protecting the safety of themselves and those they love. They've never needed the government to tell them how to do so.

Businesses, particularly local small businesses, rely on word of mouth and reputation. It is in their own interest to ensure that customers and employees feel safe as possible. That's just what businesses do, and anyone who's ever run a business knows this.

While I have no doubt your intentions are in the right place, a system of government that dictates to 7.6 million Washingtonians what to do and how to do it – every waking moment of the day – will never work. What's desperately needed is a government that informs people what the objective is and gives people discretion and room to navigate to accomplish that aim.

Tell Washingtonians the objective: control and limit the spread of COVID-19, so as to protect the lives of your fellow citizens. Continue to arm and inform them of best practices, such as wearing a mask, so as to protect others if you're an asymptomatic carrier; engaging in social distancing, self-quarantining if you're feeling ill, and utilizing good hygiene.

Do that, Governor, and then trust Washingtonians. Gone will be the illusory and emotionally cruel distinction between "essential" and "non-essential" businesses and workers. People will make their own choices about what is appropriate for them and their families. Some will choose to stay at home, rarely venturing out. Others will get back to doing what they love and serving those around them in a manner that protects their community. And our economy can begin to recover.

Not so long ago you told the Legislature how you “really believe in the state of Washington.” If you meant those words, then believe in our state now. Washingtonians will rise to the challenge.

While I would love to end my plea there, and that was my original intent, you said something during your May 8 press conference that is unbecoming of your office. It merits a response.

You characterized Republicans' approach to this virus as “abject surrender.” Shame on you, Governor. We all want what is best for the citizens of this state. We are all operating in completely uncharted waters here. The fact that we legitimately have different perspectives on how to achieve that aim doesn't make one “good” and the other “evil”.

Let me be clear: there is no Republican or Democrat plan to solve this virus. Science dictates how this virus gets solved, and every bit of science out there right now tells us it's done in one of three ways: (1) individual immunity, when a person catches COVID-19 and recovers; (2) community immunity, commonly known as "herd" immunity; or (3) vaccine immunity, when either a vaccine or treatment methods are developed that no longer makes this virus fatal.

That's it. Those are the options. While we wait and work for any or all combinations of those options to become a reality, we of course continue to believe people should wear masks in public as a way to protect others, practice social distancing and avoid large congregate gatherings.

But we also believe the following:

- Higher priority should be placed on those at highest risk, meaning elderly, fragile individuals in long-term care settings. Government's response to-date has been nothing short of tragic – a fact hidden until recently because the state is failing to report certain data.
- Issuing 22-point requirements on what a car-wash business must follow in order to be allowed to operate, including "Requirement #4: Arrange furniture in a manner that promotes social distancing" is beyond the pale and symptomatic of a government-knows-best mentality that is wholly detached from reality and historically replete with error.
- Most importantly, we believe individual Washingtonians are the ones best equipped to make decisions about their health, their communities, their businesses, and those around them. Our job as their elected leaders is to support them in doing that.

Nothing but harm is caused by hyperbole and aspersions. We are all in this together, and we must be able to engage in an honest and forthright dialogue with each other. Let this crisis bring out the best in us, not the worst.

In conclusion, I ask you to permit Washingtonians the opportunity to be rational decision-makers. They won't disappoint you, Governor. They will rise to the challenge and help ensure this virus does not get the better of us as a state.

The people of Washington have been trusting you. It's time for you to trust them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Braun", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John Braun