



Polk County BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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May 4, 2020

Governor Tony Evers
115 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53702

RE: Open Letter to Governor Evers from Polk County Board Chairman, Chris Nelson

Dear Governor Evers,

I am writing to share my thoughts as the Chairman of the Polk County Board of Supervisors regarding the approach this State has taken in addressing the Covid-19 pandemic. Polk County is a rural county in the northwestern portion of the State and borders the Twin Cities metropolitan area. As of the date of this letter, there have only been four confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Polk County.

Often we northerners joke that State leadership in Madison often ignore the part of Wisconsin that is north of Highway 29, but this time, it is no laughing matter. While I can appreciate the enormity and complexity of what you face trying to keep Wisconsin safe, treating our region in the same manner as Madison and Milwaukee is doing more harm than good.

Personally, I have witnessed first-hand the difficulty our local officials have had in trying to interpret and advise our community on what is and is not allowed under your various executive orders. I have to commend our staff at Polk County as they have done their best to navigate the inconsistencies and ambiguities created by your executive orders. How absurd that our Public Health Department has to advise that golf courses cannot have a customer pay in person for their round of golf, but every drive-thru fast food place takes our credit cards and processes payments thousands of times every day. If a golf course can institute safe practices including sanitizing in between customers and wearing PPE, why are they subject to additional guidelines?

Our County Board held an emergency meeting last week to address this situation. Here are a few key excerpts from Polk County's Resolution "Concerning the County's Response to the Economic Emergency that has Resulted from Governor Evers' Safe-at-Home Orders":

- WHEREAS, local communities in this rural area in the best position to determine for themselves, with the input of experts, how to safely and methodically allow businesses to reopen while keeping safety as a priority.

- WHEREAS, many local businesses are at a high risk of shutting down completely or suffering irreparable economic damage that will have a lasting and negative impact on the livelihoods of many Polk County residents.
- NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Polk County Board of Supervisors vehemently urges the Governor to allow regions within the State to determine for themselves the best and safest way to allow businesses to slowly reopen.
- BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Polk County Board of Supervisors directs the County to work with local health experts to educate businesses on best practices regarding physical distancing and other safety measures to keep our community safe.

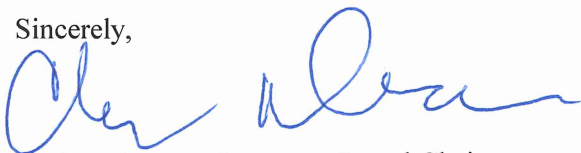
Doesn't it make sense to allow counties or regions of this State that have not been impacted by Covid-19 to the same extent as other areas to determine for themselves how to safely reopen, with the guidance from both public and private health care experts? We have rural outdoor dining establishments that could easily employ strict physical distancing, PPE and sanitation measures that would maintain the spirit and the intent of the Safer-at-Home orders while allowing these small businesses to survive. Our local public health department wants to be able to provide common-sense direct advice on health safety measures for local businesses, but they cannot currently because your orders do not provide for that kind of flexibility.

Our small communities are suffering needlessly. It is time we all recognize that all businesses are essential and that if a business can open safely, they should be able to do so. Two businesses that clearly "win" here in Polk County are Menards and Walmart. They are packed with limited social distancing and believe me, they are selling more than just "essential" items. Why can I buy clothes at Walmart, but I cannot go into the local thrift-store? In fact, I bet small retail establishments are in a much better position to implement and enforce physical distancing and sanitation. We have a sign up at the local Subway in our County Seat that says, "only two customers allowed inside at a time." Why does this work for them, but it cannot be implemented at other retail establishments? Are you starting to see how your orders have led to absurd results?

As you know from your visits last year, Polk County has already suffered a devastating economic blow in the aftermath of the tornados that hit this area in the summer of 2019. This makes it even more imperative that you recognize the urgent need to save our small businesses that are quickly losing any hope of survival.

Please consider allowing local officials to decide for themselves, either on a county or regional basis, how to safely and methodically reopen business while still maintaining the safety of their staff and their customers. Your one-size-fits-all approach fails to recognize the differences between what lies north of Highway 29 and what is south of Highway 29.

Sincerely,



Chris Nelson, Polk County Board Chairman

CC: media outlets