

## THE MOST VULNERABLE

by Michael Cruse

Ambassador Matthew Rycroft, of the United Kingdom, in his mission to the United Nations, once famously said, "How a society treats its most vulnerable is always the measure of its humanity."

During this COVID 19 pandemic the most vulnerable among us are again revealed to be subject to significantly higher rates of mortality.

However, this pandemic is different. It is a new virus circulating through human populations with significantly higher mortality rates than the seasonal H1N1 influenza. It is also different because all the mortality variables are not yet known.

For the past century we have adapted and co-existed with the seasonal flu and all its subsequently mutated variants. Influenza tests and vaccines have been crucial in reducing and marginalizing seasonal flu mortality rates. The aged and the medically compromised will always be the most vulnerable because it is an inescapable natural law governing a virus and its host. What is not an inescapable natural law is the political and economic decisions we make that will compromise the mitigation efforts.

Over the course of time, this virus and its subsequent variants is likely to assimilate us all. But how we get there and over what period of time matters greatly. Abrupt changes tend to have catastrophic consequences and gradual changes are more able to be accommodated. If we choose the abrupt course, we enter into the politics and economics of who dies and the unnecessary deaths that are associated with those decisions.

Physical Distancing and Sheltering in Place are behavioral strategies that flatten the contagion curve. Flattening the curve protects all of us and especially the most vulnerable. The cost of mitigation is our loss of immediate and near future economic security. The CARES legislation is only designed to get us four (4) months into the near future-through July 2020. Beyond the immediate and near future, without a pandemic resolution, we are facing a potential economic catastrophe.

We don't yet have a public policy solution should mitigation need to be continued beyond July 2020. At least for now, our best play is for public policy to be subordinate to the medical science of epidemiology as to when and how we begin to re-open the economy.

Our situation is not dissimilar to a game of Texas Hold-Em. Given the economic damage already incurred and that we have already wagered the next four (4) months of our economic future, we are now pot committed and it would be foolish to fold now. Let's play out the hand and see if we win or lose.

If we win, we can congratulate ourselves on a hand well played.

If we lose, we can deal ourselves another Keynesian hand and make another attempt at preserving our humanity by continuing to protect, THE MOST VULNERABLE.