

Weekend Edition: July 11-12, 2020

BY [ELIJAH WOLFSON](#)

Making COVID-19 a Moment for Climate Change Action

I imagine it's hard for anyone right now to clear space in their minds or hearts for anything beyond the coronavirus pandemic that has killed over 560,000 worldwide and continues to ravage many parts of the globe, and the overdue reckoning with institutional racism and terroristic police violence against Black people that have plagued the U.S. for its entire existence. It's certainly nearly impossible for me. Nevertheless, I've forced myself to because I still believe climate change is *the* story of our lifetime.

As my colleague Justin Worland wrote in his brilliant cover story for this past week's issue of TIME: "From our vantage point today, 2020 looks like the year when an unknown virus spun out of control, killed hundreds of thousands and altered the way we live day to day. In the future, we may look back at 2020 as the year we decided to keep driving off the climate cliff—or to take the last exit."

This year was meant to be an important one for the global climate-change mitigation and adaptation agenda—and then, of course, COVID-19 reared its head. But in many ways, that has only made this year *more* crucial to the future of the planet with regard to climate change. That's because everything is going to happen faster than we had planned. Usually, governments take years to decide how to spend their money and then more years to actually spend it; countries have already spent \$11 trillion to help stem the economic damage from COVID-19, and have plans in place to spend trillions more. How we use that money could end up locking us into a crash course with dangerous levels of warming—or it could help us build a new social and economic infrastructure designed to adapt and mitigate climate change.

Consider how the current global economic and social orders were largely forged in the wake of the World Wars of the 20th century; the earth-shattering events of the first half of 2020 will inevitably lead to a similar restructuring of how we live, work and relate to one another and our environment. There are countless reasons this could go wrong, but this might be our only real chance to get it right. In what other scenario can you imagine governments around the world pulling out the checkbooks simultaneously, all prepared to fill them out with as many zeroes as they can fit?

As always with climate change, it's hard to see the stakes, because it's a slow-moving catastrophe. It's infinitely harder to see when there's a virus, here and now, killing thousands every day. But if we can't find a way to make this disaster into an opportunity, only disaster awaits.

[Read Justin's story here.](#)

[And check out the full climate-focused issue here.](#)

OVER THE WEEKEND

Disney World Reopened

No major U.S. sports leagues have restarted play; the museums of New York City, Washington and Los Angeles all remain closed; and all of the major movie theater chains in the country have yet to screen a film this summer. One thing you can do in your free time as of yesterday: visit Disney World.

Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom and Animal Kingdom reopened yesterday, and Epcot and Disney's Hollywood Studios will follow this coming Wednesday. All are in Orlando, Fla., and all have been closed since mid-March. If perhaps you already had tickets to visit this summer, this might sound like good news. Most public health experts would not agree. Florida is one of the states currently facing the worst COVID-19 trajectories and driving a significant portion of the country's steep increase in daily new cases. A month ago, Florida was averaging about 2,000 new cases a day; as of yesterday, that average has quintupled to over 10,000. And just today, Florida [set a new daily record](#) with over 15,000 new cases.

Orange County, where Orlando is the county seat, has seen a similar trajectory on a smaller scale, though the Miami area has been Florida's epicenter. However, that might in part be because without the Disney and Universal Studios theme parks open, there's been practically no one there to catch or spread the virus. By some counts, Orlando gets [75 million visitors a year](#), the vast majority to visit the theme parks.

Disney will have new rules to limit the spread: there are temperature screenings at park entrances, for example, all guests over two years old have to wear a mask, and there will be empty rows on certain rides. Also, you [can't hug Mickey Mouse](#). But it's easy to imagine such a notoriously crowded and hectic destination, filled with people from all over the country (many who might, unbeknownst to them, be vectors of the virus), ending up a public health disaster no matter how well the rules are followed.

Trump Wore a Face Mask for the First Time

The politicization of the coronavirus pandemic is one of the [likeliest explanations for the U.S.'s failure](#) to contain the virus. And if there's one clear symbol of the stark political divide in attitudes and beliefs about the pandemic, it's the face mask. For months, Republican leaders largely did not wear face masks in public while their Democrat counterparts largely did, and there was a notable dearth of masks at the May and June protests demanding states reopen.

But then those states reopened, cases of COVID-19 skyrocketed, and now even Republican leaders, including Vice President Mike Pence, have begun to wear face masks in public appearances. There are now some [20 states](#) that have some public mask mandate, and even some previously staunch anti-mask local politicians have [backtracked on earlier legislative decisions](#) regarding face coverings.

Still, President Donald Trump has out-and-out refused to wear a mask, [despite calls from his own party members](#) to do so. The issue, of course, is that Republican voters take their cues from Trump, and Trump has

generally signaled disdain for face masks; a June 25 [Pew Research Center poll](#) found that 63% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents say masks should always be worn in public places, compared to just 29% of Republicans and Republican leaning independents. But even Republican leaders now see the folly of these beliefs, and in some cases have practically begged Trump to be a good example.

This weekend it finally happened: yesterday, Trump visited the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in suburban D.C.—with a mask on his face.

[Read more here.](#)

Japanese Officials Chastised the U.S. Military About a Marine Base Outbreak

U.S. Marine officials say that at least 60 people on two bases on the Japanese island of Okinawa have tested positive for COVID-19. Local Japanese officials are not exactly thrilled with the way the U.S. military has handled the situation, according to the Associated Press. It took repeated requests from Okinawa before the U.S. military agreed to disclose the exact figures, and within hours of that finally happening, the governor of Okinawa demanded top leadership to take tougher prevention measures and more transparency.

[Read more here.](#)

U.S. Education Secretary Doubles Down on Schools Reopening This Fall

There are currently no concrete federal plans on school reopening in the U.S.; the closest thing the country has are [guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), which are just recommendations, not law. Even so, last week, Trump said he disagreed with them, calling them “very tough and expensive,” and then threatened to withhold federal money from school districts if they don’t fully reopen in the fall. Earlier today, Betsy DeVos, the Secretary of Education, went on CNN's *State of The Union* and said, essentially, that school will reopen this fall, no matter what. “Kids need to be back in school and that school leaders across the country need to be making plans to do just that,” she said. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi appeared on CNN shortly after DeVos’ interview and said that the education secretary’s remarks on the show were “appalling.”

[Read more here.](#)

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Today's newsletter was written by Elijah Wolfson.