



Written by [Veronique de Rugy](#) on March 26, 2020

Creativity and Compassion Continue to Combat the Coronavirus

It's easy to feel depressed and scared these days. News about the impact and death toll of the new coronavirus, COVID-19, is constant. Government responses have been chaotic, ranging from near-indifference to suddenly shutting down the economy, with politicians offering to pay for everything.

Yet we shouldn't lose sight of the exceptional vitality that the private sector is demonstrating during this mess. It will make a difference, so cheer up!



After what can only be described as a multilevel government failure that resulted in the United States having practically no coronavirus tests available for weeks after the onset of the pandemic, the private sector ramped up its production so much that we're now testing 65,000 people *every day*. This number is bound to grow. The tests are a crucial component of making it through this crisis, and they'll become even more accurate and deliver results faster as innovators do what they do best when they're unhindered by silly or contradictory government regulations.

Singapore's Veredus Laboratories, for example, said it will soon release "Lab-on-Chip" kits to test patients for three kinds of coronavirus within two hours. Four American startups had also launched at-home tests for COVID-19, until the Food and Drug Administration unwisely demanded they stop issuing or testing kits.

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There are many other remarkable developments. For instance, only a few weeks after the beginning of this outbreak in the United States, many pharmaceutical firms worked at lightning speed to develop a vaccine. Last week, the first doses of an experimental COVID-19 vaccine were administered to a group of volunteers. Many companies are hard at work trying to come up with a cure. Whether it's testing old medications to figure out if they can mitigate the virus's effects or developing new drugs, the private sector is going full speed ahead to help.

Americans, especially health care professionals, need face masks. Companies nationwide are shifting resources to produce more masks. The firm 3M, for instance, announced that it "ramped up to maximum production levels of N95 respirators and doubled our global output to a rate of more than 1.1 billion per year, or nearly 100 million per month." 3M Chairman and CEO Mike Roman added that "more than 500,000 respirators are on the way from our South Dakota plant to two of the more critically impacted areas, New York and Seattle, with arrivals expected starting tomorrow. We are also ready to expedite additional shipments across the country."

What about companies that weren't in the face mask business? A group of American apparel and textile companies like Fruit of the Loom and Hanesbrands came together almost overnight to create a medical



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face mask supply chain to help hospitals, health care workers and citizens battling the virus's spread. Efforts like this abound.

It gets even better. Researchers trying to understand where best to send supplies or how to mitigate outbreaks are now being helped by Facebook's disease prevention maps that display population density, demographics and travel patterns. As George Mason University's Tyler Cowen also explains for Bloomberg, "Skype and Zoom sessions will replace many a class, and the textbook companies are stepping forward with electronic portals that present classroom materials, interactive exercises and grade student answers."

Creativity and selflessness are on display everywhere. In Canada, an anesthetist managed to turn one life-saving ventilator into nine. In Italy, a company used its 3-D printer to manufacture much-needed ventilator valves to be used in that country's overwhelmed hospitals. These entrepreneurs then created another life-saving device. As they explain in *The New York Times*, they modified "a snorkeling mask already on the market to create a ventilation-assisted mask for hospitals in need of additional equipment, which was successful when the hospital tested it on a patient in need."

And where I live in Virginia, a couple has been 3D-printing shields to protect N95 masks. The *Washingtonian* reports, "For each request received, the Filkos are covering shipping costs and sending four free masks to doctors, nurses, and other healthcare workers."

Companies are indeed stepping up to help those in need. Burger King is giving out two free kids' meals to everyone who orders food through their app. U-Haul is providing one month of free storage for students displaced from their universities by the virus.

So, during these depressing times, don't underestimate human ingenuity. Just keep your eyes open, and prepare to be amazed.

Veronique de Rugy is a senior research fellow at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University. To find out more about Veronique de Rugy and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate webpage at www.creators.com.

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