



## Virginia Joins Growing List of States Ordering People to Stay Home

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RICHMOND — Democrat Virginia Governor Ralph Northam held a special press conference at 2 p.m. Monday to announce his executive order requiring Virginians to “shelter in place” except for essential activities. This places the Old Dominion on a growing list of states that have enacted a “soft” form of what amounts to martial law requiring citizens to stay home.

Flanked by posters reading “Do Your Part, Stay At Home,” Northam began his announcement by saying, “Our message today is very clear: That is to stay home.” He went on to say that “social distancing and frequent hand-washing are our best tools to combat the coronavirus.”

That — of course — diminishes his claim of a “very clear” message to stay home. If social distancing (keeping a six-foot perimeter between people) and frequent hand-washing are “our best tools,” why is staying home necessary?

Northam — dressed in a suit with buttoned-up jacket and conspicuously absent a tie (in what this writer interpreted as a ploy to appear like the common folk) — added, “Most Virginians recognize this [the need to keep distance and wash their hands] and are complying. But I’ll say it again, because I want everyone to hear me: Stay home.”

He then went on to give examples of Virginians who have made him “proud.” Oddly, most of those examples were of people who were *not* staying home. He added, “We’ve also seen people adhering to the rules about social distancing, but it is clear more people need to hear this basic message: Stay home!”

After criticizing those who “literally packed” beaches and other recreational areas over the weekend, Northam said, “Everyone who is gathering in a crowd at any place around the state is putting themselves and others at risk.” This message creates a greater sense of alienation and feeds the fear that is already dividing Virginians.

This writer has seen people at local grocery stores walking around in a state that can only be described as shell-shocked. Dressed in surgical attire (masks, rubber gloves, booties over their shoes). They race along, head down — avoiding eye contact (as if the virus can be spread by a look). I have seen the fear and anger in their faces as I approach within two yards of them to take a needed food item off the shelves. That message is clearer than Northam’s: Everyone is a mortal enemy.



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on March 30, 2020

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The governor's message that by going out we are all putting others at risk will certainly add fuel to that hellish fire.

After admonishing citizens as if he were a disappointed father, Northam got to the meat of his announcement: "Today, I am announcing a 'stay at home' order. For all Virginians. Under this order, everyone in Virginia must remain in their place of residence unless they must go out for food, supplies, work, medical care, or to get fresh air or exercise."

Wait. What exactly does his "clear message" mean? If I can still go to the stores, restaurants, parks, and work, what exactly can I not do?

Northam then reiterated his previous dictate that "any parties or social gatherings of more than ten people are prohibited," he stated — as if that were anything new. He added that "Virginia's beaches will be closed to any activity other than exercise or fishing." This writer was left shaking his head and wondering what one could possibly do at a beach that would not fall neatly into one or both of those exempted categories.

After having been utterly ambiguous, Northam stated with an authoritative tone, "I want to be clear: Do not go out unless you need to go out. This is very different from wanting to go out.

Banging the fear drum, Northam used the phrase "stay home" until this writer literally lost count. But, again, he gave so many exemptions, that "stay home" does not mean anything. He stressed that this is now distinct from his previous request, as it is now an "order" by which he is "directing" people to — say it with me — "stay home."

Northam sounded more than a little like a manager who makes idiotic announcements only so he can be seen as being in charge. But, remember, government can only exert as much power as the people will bear. This is likely only the first round of his order. He was clear to say that there will be no arrests or fines at this time. That is likely round two. Once his fear-mongering has served its purpose and turned each man against his neighbor, he will find it easier to arrest and fine people who do not obey his "order" to "stay home." That is the art of incrementalism.

In the hour between watching Northam's "clear message" and writing this article, this writer walked across the street to a park and played frisbee with his wife and son. But, that is allowed because it was for fresh air and exercise. Not that it would likely have stopped me.

COVID-19 will certainly come and go. The question is whether or not the government-fueled fear that is dividing Americans from one another will have taken an irreversible toll. That part is up to each of us.

*Image: Oleksii Liskonih via iStock / Getty Images Plus*

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