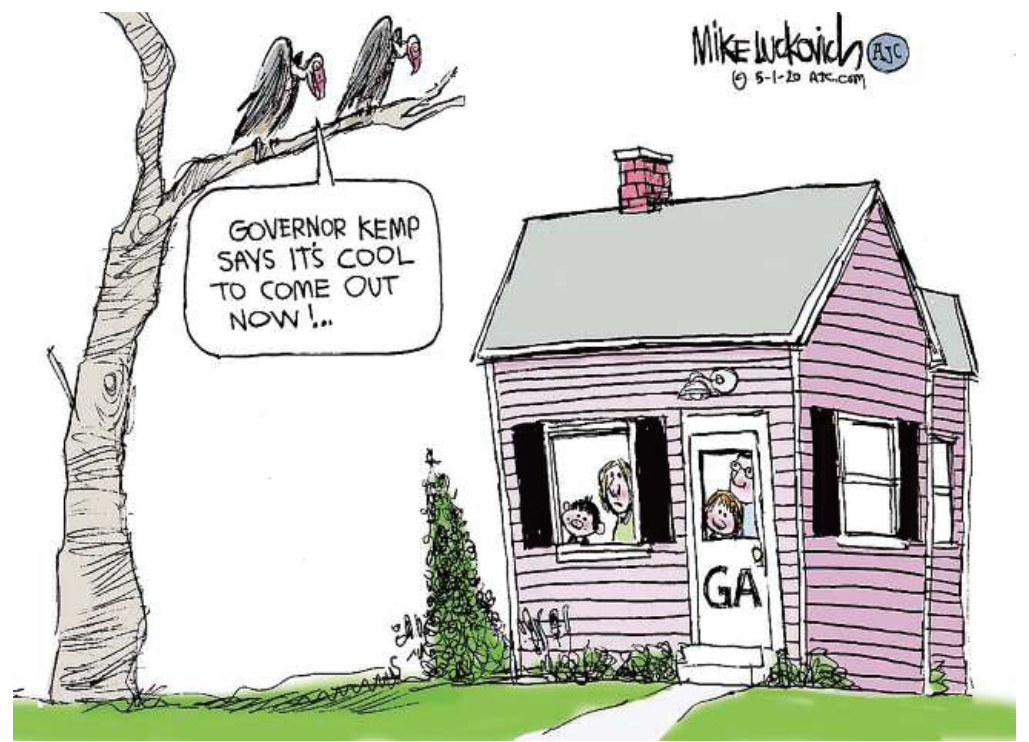


OPINION

Lisa Benson | Washington Post Writers Group



Mike Luckovich | Creators.com



# Employers want to help



Aurora Ortega picks up an unemployment form at a Miami-Dade County library during the new coronavirus pandemic in Miami. Both laid-off or furloughed employees seeking unemployment compensation and employers who have paid into the compensation fund are meeting frustrating roadblocks.

Nothing has been harder for our hospitality management teams than to tell talented employees that furloughs or layoffs were necessary steps. Some comfort was found in expediting submissions to the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, providing food to those employees as part of their social safety net and hearing about the federal CARES Act and the supplement to assist these wonderful heads of households and their families.

Why?

- Hotel workers were among the first to lose jobs as hotels temporarily closed or reduced staffs to stop the spread of COVID-19.
- These workers are at risk because they have limited or no resources to cover food, housing and medical costs.
- Hotels are revenue generators that benefit Tampa Bay and Florida's economy through sales tax collections and visitor spending.
- When the time comes to reopen our doors and rehire, we need our employees to be ready to return to work and rebuild our industry.



RON MCANOUGH



BOB MORRISON

Incredibly, there is another side to the frustration of an unemployment claims system whose design it is now clear was intended to deny, not assist. We are now being told that our team members' claims are rejected, in part, because our hotels failed to file the proper data. We know that to be untrue. How cruel.

Worse yet, the very employers / customers who pay into the compensation fund are met with the same roadblocks as our employees: failed systems, inaccuracies and no redundancy. The phone calls filled with tears and depression speak to the human side of this reality, that those in charge are fire-walled from experiencing. Yes, \$100 million dollars in the state's repair of the system was an overdue first step, but the system of "delay and deny" must come to an end. Our neighbors deserve better.

We need our governor and our local legislative delegation's leadership to answer this question: Why after seven weeks are our neighbors and team members still waiting? We appreciate Sens. Janet Cruz, D-Tampa, and

Darryl Rouson, D-St. Petersburg, previously speaking up to ask what could be done. But every voice of our delegation and state leadership needs to be pushing the panic button on behalf of the pain in our community.

These workers are living in fear of losing their homes or worry they do not have enough food to feed their families — and they do not have even the first slip of paper to confirm that help is on the way.

One simple step would help. If the Department of Economic Opportunity is overwhelmed, create a communication plan that targets the initial customer: The employer. We are helpless to respond or to provide a status update regarding our employees. Shouldn't employers, as contributors to the unemployment compensation fund, be receiving an update at the very least? We are prepared to help, but a partnership requires a state partner.

We are eager to reopen our doors, but we cannot do that without our trained, not strained, staff.

*Ron McAnough is general manager of Tampa Marriott Water Street and president of the Hillsborough County Hotel Motel Association. Bob Morrison is executive director of the Hillsborough County Hotel Motel Association.*

# The old surgeon, scrubbed, looks out the window

The surgeon washes his hands and stares out the window. He thinks back to the days when he washed his hands 20 or 30 times a day—sometimes for five minutes at the scrub sink, other times for two minutes on the "floor" between patient visits on rounds. He's sidelined now. It's been six years since he touched the knife with the intent to cure. His age puts him in the "vulnerable" category when it comes to this virus they call corona.

He stares out the window wondering if he'd be brave now. Would he volunteer to work in the COVID ICU? This surgeon is not unfamiliar with viral infection. He almost died from hepatitis B as a young faculty surgeon — a needle stick in the operating room. When AIDS came along he was very aware that it might be as likely that he might hurt the patient as the patient might hurt him. So, now would he volunteer?

He texts younger doctors. One, a surgeon in New York tells him he's in the unit. All elective surgery at NYU has been cancelled. So far he has had enough equipment. They are very busy; there is no time to be scared.



RICHARD C. KARL

His nephew is a resident in emergency medicine in Albuquerque. He's in the unit, too. Just 29 years old he has recently endured the death of his 32-year-old brother who was felled by an out-of-the-blue pancreas cancer. The brother fought hard. Multiple drug trials, rounds of chemotherapy and a big operation gave him five years. Yes, he was a five-year survivor. Five years and only a handful of days, though. We called him a warrior.

The surgeon texts the young emergency medicine doctor and tells him he's proud of his bravery. The young clinician tells his uncle that he has tried to be a brave as his brother. There are two kinds of bravery, the surgeon explains. One is to meet a difficult situation thrust upon you with strength and dignity (his brother). The other is when you volunteer, knowing the risk (him). The latter is even more noble, he tells him.

Thanks, he replies.

The surgeon stares out the window.

His initial impulse to respond to New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's entreaty to come to New York has been dimmed by the reports that though some 90,000 health care professionals answered the call, only a small fraction have been put to work in a meaningful way. Too bad, he thinks. He was born in the New York Hospital and 21 years later entered medi-

cal school in the same building. He thinks he's a New Yorker.

Dr. Anthony Fauci attended the same school. He graduated just as the surgeon was entering. The surgeon sees him daily on television, the same wiry guy — he must be almost 80 now, he thinks. *He* is not sidelined.

The surgeon wonders about antibody testing. He and his wife were very sick in January, just after returning from London and its streets crowded with holiday shoppers and tourists. Are they immune already? You'd think that the government would be buying 350 million antibody test kits (among other things). If immune, you could go out and spend money, work in a restaurant or grocery store or, as in his case, help take care of others. He muses as to why this president with a penchant for the pecuniary hasn't stirred himself, if only out of self-interest.

With nothing more to do, the surgeon washes his hands at the kitchen sink and stares out the window, waiting for a curve to flatten.

*Dr. Richard C. Karl is chairman emeritus of the surgery department at the University of South Florida Morsani College of Medicine and the author of a book of surgical stories, "Across the Red Line."*

# Now Biden should open his archives for impartial review

In his appearance Friday on MSNBC's *Morning Joe*, former Vice President Joe Biden was adamant that the accusation of sexual assault made against him by former Senate aide Tara Reade is not true.

It was a straightforward and strong denial. He made a sound proposal to ask the National Archives to search for a complaint that Reade claims she made to the Senate's human resources office more than a quarter century ago. But that makes one thing all the more perplexing: the way Biden dodged co-host Mika Brzezinski's repeated questions about the records of his Senate years that are under seal at the University of Delaware. Why, she asked him again and again, does he not open those archives to scrutiny?

Biden didn't adequately address the "why." He simply kept repeating that those files do not contain personnel records. We are expected to take his word for that. There is a good chance that Biden is telling the truth. But even if he is, those boxes of material might hold many other items that could be relevant: memos from staff members that mention Reade or her allegation, schedules that convey a sense of how much contact he had with Reade. The materials might include documents that speak to the general culture in the office. There might be



KAREN TUMULTY

... well, we just don't know what might be there, because Biden won't let anyone see them.

Here is one way the material might be examined quickly and efficiently:

He should open up the records of his 36-year Senate career that he donated to the University of Delaware in 2012 and that are under seal until two years after he leaves public life.

What might be in there? No one really knows until they look. The Senate does not operate under any equivalent of the 1978 Presidential Records Act, under which presidents and vice presidents are required to manage and preserve their records carefully. Then an archivist judges which should be made available to the public, which have information too sensitive to be disclosed and which are purely private.

Individual members of Congress, on the other hand, are left pretty much to their own discretion in deciding how to curate their records and what to do with them.

Biden's might or might not include memos or other documents discussing Reade's stint in his office as a staff assistant in 1993. The records might also show whether she ever lodged a complaint about his behavior — she says she did; Biden's campaign says she didn't — either to her superiors on the senator's staff, or under procedures then available to take her grievances outside the office.

It would be challenging to submit his records to an examination. There are nearly 2,000 boxes of documents, presumably most of them still to be catalogued, so it would be infeasible to allow journalists unfettered access. Nor should his adversaries be offered the opportunity to embark on a fishing expedition for all sorts of potentially damaging information to use to their own advantage.

But finding another way to search would be worthwhile. Over the past three years, I have spent more hours than I can count doing research at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and other repositories of records for a biography I am writing on Nancy Reagan.

In the course of doing this, I have become a big believer in the precept espoused by Robert A. Caro, the legendary chronicler of the life of Lyndon B. Johnson: "Turn every page. Never assume anything." Some of my most fascinating discoveries have been found in papers that have been misfiled, or randomly grouped with things that seem unrelated.

What Biden should do is name a small group of well-respected, impartial researchers — historians, academics, archivists. Then, he should ask the University of Delaware to give them access to his papers as soon as the precautions put in place as the results of the novel coronavirus are loosened. My own experience with the solitary endeavor of digging through boxes of documents suggests it would not be all that hard to practice rudimentary social distancing.

A team of independent researchers could probably get through the material in a matter of weeks or a couple of months at the most. They could then issue a report on whether they found anything that was relevant to what Reade claimed happened to her. It would then be incumbent upon Biden to make those records public.

If Biden were to do something like this, it would be an extraordinary gesture of faith in his own innocence and the starkest contrast imaginable with how President Donald Trump has handled the allegations of more than a dozen women who have accused him of sexual assault. Just as importantly, it would provide a badly needed example for others who find themselves in a situation like the one he is in.