

Small Business Fills Mask Vacuum

On March 31, President Donald Trump's coronavirus taskforce [told](#) the nation that between 100,000 and 240,000 Americans could die as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

As state officials attempt to deal with this realization, [taking](#) measures that would eventually lessen the regulatory burden keeping hospitals and healthcare clinics from expanding, private citizens everywhere use their skills and their own business resources to quickly produce essential medical supplies.

Vacuum Bag Masks

One of the latest stories involving private businesses stepping up to fix a supply shortage comes from Willmar, Minnesota, where a local shop owner [used](#) his vacuum cleaner bag supply to produce much-needed masks.

Trevor Hanson, the owner of AB Vacuum Center, learned that healthcare workers across the country were experiencing a mask shortage. That's when he had the idea of using vacuum cleaner bags. After all, these bags are designed as hypoallergenic filters meant to greatly reduce the number of potential allergens in the air. Perhaps, Hanson thought, they could help protect health workers too.

"It's a tough deal for everybody," he told a local news outlet. Despite the difficulties, he knew he could come up with something useful.

"I sat down and made about 25 prototypes," he said. "Just trying to come up with the best design."

With a finished prototype on hand, he started recruiting

volunteers to help. With 40 people working in their homes across town – including Hanson’s mother – Hanson quickly had 2,200 masks ready to go.

As of April 8, the figure had ballooned to just under 10,000, and friends of Hanson say another 17,000 masks will be available next week.

His invention is already catching people’s attention. Some of the first healthcare groups to call were nursing homes.

“The first nursing home that called me said, we are either going to have a choice of wearing your masks or no masks,” Hanson told reporters.

On [Facebook](#), Hanson’s volunteers share tips on how to sew the pockets for the elastics, organize donation drives, and report on their latest achievements with a growing group of locals who are also stepping up to help.

Entrepreneurs Vs. Paper Pushers

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), N95 masks are the gold standard when it comes to protecting people from viral exposure. However, director of the University of Minnesota’s Institute for Engineering in Medicine John Bischof told reporters, something is always better than nothing.

After designing his own mask made of different filtration material, Bischof found Hanson’s initiative worthy of praise.

“I think what you’re doing is awesome,” Bischof told Hanson.

Now, samples of Hanson’s vacuum bag masks are being sent to Bischof’s team for testing.

“If I wasn’t doing it, I would almost feel guilty,” the entrepreneurial shop owner told reporters. “Knowing that we

have this, we should be doing it.”

Unlike Hanson, bureaucrats in some corners of the country are doing the very opposite.

In Indiana, federal officials knew of a nearly 1.5 million expired N95 respirator masks sitting in a warehouse owned by the federal government. Despite knowing CDC’s guidelines state that expired N95 masks are safe for use, they [decided](#) to just sit on them, even as the [shortage reports](#) coming from New York hospitals flooded the news.

Now, federal officials are saying the masks are being sent to Transportation Security Administration (TSA)’s personnel, who are demanding masks of their own—not healthcare workers.

As bureaucrats remain hopelessly slow to act, even when the health of Americans is at risk, private citizens and entrepreneurs left and right [work](#) around the clock to help healthcare workers save lives.

Some do it also out of a need to remain in business while others who have the means simply step up because their community needs them.

Can we say the same about government agencies?

Government Enterprise: Inherently Inefficient

In his *Man, Economy, and State with Power and Market*, Murray Rothbard [wrote](#) that government programs are always inefficient.

This is due to the “excessive demand fomented by free and other underpriced services,” which distort demand and prompt state agencies to misallocate resources in order to supply services where they aren’t needed while ignoring areas that

need help the most.

Private enterprises, on the other hand, rely on consumers and investors, two groups that provide resources for businesses and that help them assess how their resources must be allocated.

In other words, businesses listen to people and provide services and goods as they are required. Governments don't have to listen to reason—or taxpayers, for that matter—because they have access to endless funds.

If they run out of cash, all they have to do is to come up with a new tax.

This distorted incentive mechanism, Rothbard added, infects government workers as well, who quickly learn that “economic skills of production” aren't necessary. Political skills, however, are quickly picked up.

How to fawn on political superiors, how demagogically to attract the electorate, how to wield force most effectively. These skills are very different from the productive ones, and therefore different people will rise to the top in the government from those who succeed in the market.


That explains why it's so hard to trust career bureaucrats, whereas private businesses act fast as soon as they see a need.

If anything, Americans should be thankful that we still have business owners with an entrepreneurial spirit. Even as states install lockdowns, shutting down what they deem to be “non-essential” businesses, we still see people like Hanson rising to the occasion.

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