

# Congressman Hollingsworth: Please don't ignore the science

This guest commentary was submitted by Michael Hamburger, professor of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at Indiana University, on behalf of the organization Concerned Scientists @IU. CSIU is a non-partisan science advocacy organization not affiliated with Indiana University.

**U**.S. Rep. Trey Hollingsworth made the national news this week — sadly, for statements made in willful ignorance of the science surrounding the coronavirus pandemic. As members of Concerned Scientists @IU, a non-partisan group of more than 1,200 scientists, students of science, and supporters of science — and constituents of Hollingsworth — we are writing to ask you to listen to the scientific and public health expertise in your state.

As of this week, Indiana has more than 10,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19; more than 1,000 of those cases come from the 9th congressional district, and the number of new cases continues to rise. With this backdrop, it is shocking that Representative Hollingsworth suggested that a quick restart of the economy is more important than a more cautious approach to prevent more coronavirus deaths. In his interview on WIBC, Hollingsworth said, "In the choice between the loss of our way of life as Americans and the loss of life, of American lives, we have to always choose the latter."

We do not fault Hollingsworth for wanting to help get us back to our pre-coronavirus lives. We all do. We're eager to get back to work, to visit families and friends, go on vacations, attend rock concerts and basketball games. What we find deeply troubling is that an elected leader would make such statements without even a casual reference to the scientific basis for that decision. Fortunately, the majority of public officials, including our own governor, have acknowledged the importance of scientific input into management of the coronavirus pandemic.

Of course, there will be a time for us to gradually reopen the economy, and hopefully soon. Hollingsworth's enthusiasm for that goal is laudable. However, only through reliable scientific and medical information can we safely manage the pandemic and our recovery. As epidemiologists and public officials have warned, loosening our social distancing too quickly will likely lead to a disastrous resurgence of the virus and devastating consequences both for public health and for the American economy.

What are the key scientific elements of a carefully planned return to full activity? First, in the absence of a vaccine, we need to rapidly increase levels of coronavirus testing. To date, only about 0.8% of Hoosier residents have thus far been tested for COVID-19. Second, we need an effective system of contact

tracing, to limit growth of pockets of infection once we reopen. Third, antibody testing is needed to determine both the prevalence of coronavirus antibodies and the degree to which their presence confers immunity to future infection. Finally, we must work closely with public health experts from around the world to limit the global spread of the pandemic. It is inexplicable that the U.S., in the midst of a global health crisis, would seek to defund the World Health Organization, the world's authority on global infectious diseases and a key resource in managing the pandemic. Congressman, this is your opportunity to make a public declaration on the importance of global scientific collaboration at a critical moment for our nation's welfare.

It is essential that our political leaders benefit from the best scientific advice as we work through this pandemic — and our return to post-pandemic life. Despite a disastrously slow initial federal response, the social distancing measures recommended by public health officials now appear to have successfully slowed the progress of the disease and the mortality rate is starting to level off. But just as it's too early to throw off your mask and hit the mosh pit, this is no time to start ignoring the science for political and economic gain.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR