

Since launching my campaign in May 2019, I have had the opportunity to travel throughout New Mexico's 3rd Congressional District, an area nearly the size of Florida, and listen to the issues concerning members of our diverse communities. Whether in our rural, urban, retired, or working class communities, I hear the same themes repeated time and again: We need to improve our education system, expand our economic opportunities, and protect our environment.

In short, New Mexicans want to keep their families happy, healthy, and safe. It's just one reason why I decided to put down roots and raise my family here, and today, it's the reason why I'm calling on all of us to play our part in stopping the spread of COVID-19. What we do today to stop the surge in cases will determine the well-being of our society for generations to come.

As of April 16th, 44 of *us* have died as a result of COVID-19. Over 1,500 of *us* have been infected and counting. I stress the word "us" because these aren't just statistics on individuals battling against a disease. These people are essential threads in the fabric of our community; what happens to them affects all of
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What happens to them, happens to
us
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And the tough reality is that those numbers only show a tiny sliver of the pandemic's devastating impact on our lives; between unprecedented levels of unemployment, looming healthcare costs, and uncertainty over when and if we'll ever return to "normal," many of us are

feeling sad. Angry. Helpless.

I feel sad that my kids are missing out on a large part of their sophomore year in college. I feel angry that I must wear a mask to go grocery shopping. I feel helpless when I can't meet with all the people throughout the District I wanted to before the June 2nd primary. But I also know that we can get through this. New Mexicans fight hard for what they believe in and we understand the need to protect our history, our culture, and our communities.

So how do we do that, both in the short-term and in the long-term?

We know for certain that the most effective way to save lives is to stay at home and practice social distancing. It is critical to decreasing the number of COVID-19 cases and flattening the curve. And while we may be tempted to ignore the directive - even for a few minutes - and let the kids have a playdate, sneak a coffee with our neighbor, or meet a colleague for a quick face to face meeting, we must remember that there are people counting on us: healthcare workers and at-risk populations. We must remember that staying in the comfort of our own homes is a privilege that many New Mexicans simply can't afford.

The fact of the matter is that members of our own communities don't have equal access to information, testing, or treatment. This pandemic is shining a light on existing disparities within our political, economic, and social infrastructures: healthcare, housing, education, employment, the environment - you name it.

Social distancing and the COVID-19 pandemic will be temporary but these inequalities won't be unless we work to address them too. As the dust settles, and we emerge from our homes, we need the right leadership to take a serious look at the policies that have failed us and pave a new path forward. If I am fortunate enough to be your next Congresswoman, I will confront these hard truths and stand up for every citizen of New Mexico, with the goal of keeping all of our families happy, healthy, and safe.

While in the CIA, I worked to protect America's national security. I managed top-secret covert programs designed to keep terrorists and rogue nation states from acquiring nuclear weapons. And now, during one of the most pivotal moments in our country's history, I am ready to serve again. This is a different kind of threat, no doubt, but I have the training and experience to

protect and serve the people of New Mexico during, and beyond, this crisis.

Together, we will come out of this more unified than ever before. I'm sure of it. As much as I would love to give a hug of support to every member of our district during this stressful time, I know keeping physical distance is what is healthiest for all of us. I look forward to earning your vote on June 2nd. Stay well!

By Valerie Plame
Guest Columnist