

## From the Director's Desk: High Country Hispanic Community hit hard by COVID

A [Summit Daily](#) story from June 18th entitled, 'Backbone of our Workforce' addresses how COVID has disproportionately hit the Hispanic community. Many of our workforce woes, in construction, tourism and basic services are filled by this vital demographic. During this period of isolation with so few visitors, it has become obvious how much we rely on this population. The politization of immigration nationally continues to push this group further into the shadows.

The Summit Daily article is wrapped around a story of a Silverthorne family that decided to celebrate Mothers' Day with their 79-year old mother with tragic consequences. The article cites data from Summit County that reveals that although Hispanics make up only 14.6% of the total population there (undercounted) that in the state, Hispanics make up more than 40% of the COVID cases though only 20% of Colorado's population is Hispanic and 61% of the total COVID cases in Summit County. Wanting to be together as an extended family. Who can blame them?



I can relate. Visit family and put them at risk? Will meeting family put someone in the hospital? This is the kind of health calculus we are all doing right now. We are getting away as a family this month without visiting my parents in Oregon because they are at risk, and an [acute outbreak has occurred in their county at a fish processing facility in Newport Oregon](#) which has severely spiked cases there. The Summit Daily article shows how that situation crosses all racial lines. It is a scary time. There were a lot of tears in our house with grandparents over that decision, though it was clearly the right call. These kind decisions are hard on children, parents and grandparents who need the extended family connections right now more than ever.



Embracing our brethren during this time, connecting as humans who share a suffering, and later, afterwards when that time comes remembering our common humanity may be a positive outcome in the long run. For now, I can only read about Silverthorne resident Delfina Merino and her family and feel for them. I think, this could be us. "They" are us. My heart hurts.

For the long term, though, it is worth contemplating the social inequality that exists among

us. As many up-and-coming Hispanic kids who have come through our schools, where are the Hispanics on our school boards, town councils, NPO boards and in other community leadership roles?

Structural racism and inequality are suddenly all over the national news. Statues are coming down. Police reform is happening. Black lives matter. As we go about our daily lives

in the mountains, I don't know if you have noticed, but I am struck by how much we disproportionately rely on Hispanics to keep our local economy moving and how for all the "essential work" they do, that Hispanics remain a shadow population. Many of the jobs they fill don't have a work-from-home option. For being as embedded into our communities and economies as they are, Hispanics remain a woefully underrepresented population in local governance and are underserved by many of our core services, including access to health care. Some counties are addressing the access to services problem head-on, such as Eagle County with its MIRA bus program which takes those services to the neighborhoods. There are local agencies which are making inroads as a support network, such as FIRC in Summit County. Most local governments in our area have some form of translation assistance, but I am not aware of any that have a comprehensive Hispanic outreach and leadership cultivation strategy. That needs to change.



[For more info click here.](#)

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## CIRSA Liability Alerts for Local Government - Law Enforcement, Executive Sessions...etc

Most of our local leaders are hopefully dialed in with changes coming down the pike. CIRSA has just this past week sent out notices about a variety of changes to [police policy](#) and [executive sessions](#). A case in Basalt regarding not adequately reporting content of an executive sessions when it applies specifically to employment issues (specifically with the Manager) has resulted in heightened transparency guidelines. Police Department policies will need to be changed in the wake of Senate Bill 217. Many local police agencies are already in compliance, but others who don't yet have a body camera program, for instance, will have investments to make in short order. Managing body cameras is not easy or cheap. It is the right thing to do, protecting police departments from frivolous claims, holding officers accountable for actions. The data is also an IT and police management challenge. CIRSA's liability announcements are [available on our website](#).

# Restrooms - Public Health oasis or disaster?

Municipal waste collection and clean water distribution systems may be the most important public health breakthroughs of the last century. From a sanitation perspective, they represent a vast improvement from throwing buckets of night water out the window onto dirt streets, and people finding any dark corner outside to take care of business. Unfortunately, that very concentration of use so that human waste can be collected and treated is exactly what makes public restrooms an extremely high-risk environment. It is difficult to social distance in a restroom -even when you think you are alone. [NPR](#) has coined a phrase, "social piss-tancing," in a story that highlights the increase of "portable products," as in urinals and potties. Strange times. Even before COVID, we probably should always have worn face masks in public restrooms and brought along antiseptic wipes.

Al Tompkins at [Poynter Newsletter](#) quotes Pat Swisher, founder and CEO of [Enviro-Master](#), a national health and safety company, "every time a toilet is flushed, it ejects millions of tiny water droplets, which travel up to 10 feet and land on surfaces." He says, "researchers have found that (COVID) can be shed in fecal matter for up to a month after the illness," though Tompkins notes the CDC is less definitive on that. In any case, the confined space, poor air circulation, close quarters and many high-touch surfaces make restrooms, even those that appear relatively clean, well: even more SUPER YUCKY than they seem.



Years ago in Paris I remember seeing an artsy metal pod on the sidewalk about the size of two phone booths that required a coin to enter. Inside, it had a toilet on one side and a sink on the other. Wonder of wonders, each time a patron exited, the door slid shut and the entire inside was mist sanitized. Yeah, the inside was moist, but the air and all surfaces were actually clean. Instead, we have the urinal deodorizer puck which may absorb smell, but it does nothing for the moist particles breathed, coughed and vaporized by flushing that hang in the air.

So personally and as operators of public restrooms, we need a revolution in how they are managed. At the NWCCOG offices we have a new protocol posted with a sign in sheet and have the surface cleaners for each person to do their thing before and after they do their thing. Increasingly I am seeing access being limited to restrooms in stores and public places-this is a concern. In my view

there already were not enough facilities in enough places.

I admit to having an appreciation-disgust relationship with public restrooms. Public restrooms have saved me from many embarrassing, and un-hygienic poop-in-the woods or piss in my pants moments. It is a childhood anxiety and a reality of aging. There are two critical restrooms on my 3.5-mile recreation path loop in my neighborhood which have been closed in recent months due to COVID. Disclosure, at 52 years old am in closer consultation with my urologist than I ever thought I would be, and I probably should have a gut doctor too. I tried explaining my urgency issue to a State Patrol officer last year when I was speeding to the next exit. We really do need those restrooms open if we don't want to have the same problem the USFS has as most trailheads now that don't have restrooms. I am not alone. As there are more of us everywhere now, on paths, trails, recreating and we are an aging population, these sanctuaries that are vital to public health are critical infrastructure.

Where is the nearest restroom and what is the walk time? There should be an app for that.

**[See NWCCOG Coronavirus Resource Guide here](#)**

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please forward them to this link.*

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## SPECIAL EDITIONS

*News is developing as fast as the speed of the spread of the virus. For the next few weeks - hopefully not months -- we'll publish more frequently as needed to get the most current information to our members. If you have information you think should be shared on this newsletter, please send suggested content to [jstavney@nwccog.org](mailto:jstavney@nwccog.org).*

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