

Coronavirus Failure in Orange Beach

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Public Servants like Orange Beach Mayor Tony Kennon must not ignore community health for party-boat preferences. Kennon is keeping Robinson Island open for boaters, during the coronavirus pandemic after a state-wide "Stay at Home Order" was issued by Alabama's Governor Kay Ivey on April 4, 2020, according to a report in AL.com (<https://www.al.com/news/2020/04/stay-at-home-order-issued-for-alabama-what-you-can-and-cant-do.html>).

"Orange Beach Mayor Tony Kennon took to Facebook this morning [April 3] to say he has no plans to limit boaters' access to the city-owned Robinson Island unless ordered to do so by state or federal authorities. Suggesting such a closure could 'cause chaos' and 'be unenforceable,'" according to a report by Gabriel Tynes in the Lagniappe (<https://lagniappemobile.com/orange-beach-mayor-robinson-island-will-remain-open-social-distancing-guidelines-enforced/>).

Leadership is not a fear of "chaos" from your base, fearing dereliction of your oath of office is more important. Elected Officials have a duty to keep residents safe, protecting their health and well-being even if it is an unpopular decision. Mayor Kennon's inability to lead is a tragedy, putting everyone at risk.

"COVID-19 in Alabama: 2,881 confirmed cases, 79 reported deaths", according to a report on Fox10TV News, April 10, 2020 (https://www.fox10tv.com/news/coronavirus/alabama-surpasses-1-700-confirmed-covid-19-cases/article_e80de830-6abd-11ea-9dfd-9b089de280c3.html).

The plan to defeat the coronavirus is simple. Lock everything down, heeding the warnings, ensuring the virus cannot jump to a new host and spread. Having boat-parties on Robinson Island defeats the singular objective of public health, staying at home is the only weapon we have to combat this virus.

"Resistance [to social distancing] prompts worries of [a] growing crisis", according to a report in The Hill (<https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/491097-social-distancing-works-but-resistance-prompts-worries-of-growing>).

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New Zealand is a country of 4.7 million people. They virtually eliminated the virus with a 4-week lockdown, stopping outdoor activities, including beach access and boating, resulting in fewer than 10 deaths. "New Zealand isn't just flattening the curve. It's squashing it." according to a report in the Washington Post (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/new-zealand-isnt-just-flattening-the-curve-its-squashing-it/2020/04/07/6cab3a4a-7822-11ea-a311-adb1344719a9_story.html?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpsrc=nl_most).

To clarify the key issue, Governor Kay Ivey issued a "Stay at Home Order" on April 4, according to a report on Fox News (<https://www.foxnews.com/politics/alabama-joins-states-under-coronavirus-stay-at-home-order>).

Unfortunately, the order only specified waters touched by the Gulf of Mexico, leaving islands in sight of the Gulf open to interpretation by local officials. Mayor Kennon took steps, ensuring his office did not close Robinson Island to boaters, because the island falls under his jurisdiction.

The Mayor's analysis exploited a small loophole in Governor Ivey's lockdown order, giving boaters the latitude to party on Robinson Island, knowing the police want to keep people out of the crowded jail, clearly establishing a zone of no consequences.

Understanding the counter-argument, "Kennon did say police officers would be on and around the island during peak times to monitor social distancing guidelines and take action if necessary," according to a report by Gabriel Tynes in the Lagniappe (<https://lagniappemobile.com/orange-beach-mayor-robinson-island-will-remain-open-social-distancing-guidelines-enforced/>).

Mayor Kennon also said closing the island is "unenforceable". Keeping the island open while taxpayer-funded police chaperone his island-party base was a policy decision, fully confident no boater is going to jail.

Perhaps Kennon believes social boating will protect us, creating herd immunity. Perhaps he thinks satisfying his base is the right thing to do. Perhaps he is confused, taking no action, leaving the island open as the safe course to steer. Perhaps he knows the virus won't leave us a vacation-rental dividend. Perhaps this virus is a policy emolument the public can avoid by staying home.

"Back on March 19th, 2020, all beaches in Alabama were closed. Despite these orders, boaters still visit beaches in the Orange Beach area," according to a report by Daniel Heiser on WKRG News 5 (<https://www.wkrg.com/health/coronavirus/boaters-still-visit-beaches-during-stay-at-home-order/>).

"The governor's order allows residents to leave home only for essential supplies, or if their jobs are considered essential," saying nothing about boat parties on Robinson Island,

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according to a report in NBC15 News (<https://myNBC15.com/news/local/baldwin-county-deputies-enforcing-stay-at-home-order-breaking-up-large-gatherings>).

Stay at home and stay six feet apart, is the message echoed by Orange Beach Police Chief Steve Brown and others on YouTube in a combined “Baldwin County Law Enforcement Message on COVID-19”, reported by WKRG (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JoGVLGWIRXQ>).

Keeping the community safe should be Mayor Tony Kennon’s priority whether or not he gets pushback from his boating base. We need to wrap our minds around the painful truth of his leadership, putting politics ahead of public health.

ENDS.

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