

# **Our Turn: Jay Zhang and Koray Ozpolat: Other countries doing better than U.S.**

**By Jay Zhang and Koray Ozpolat**

Posted Mar 21, 2020 at 12:17 AM

In response to President Trump's calling COVID-19 the "Wuhan Virus" and a "foreign virus," a spokesperson for the Chinese government implied that the outbreak actually started in the United States. We believe this mutual blame-game is not the right way to respond to a pandemic but that the nations should cooperate and learn from each other.

The exponential increase in the number of infected people in the United States shows the seriousness of the outbreak.

Parts of China, South Korea, Iran and Italy have been under complete quarantine. COVID-19 is turning into a global disaster and we are not sure that our government is on top of the developments.

The Centers for Disease Control and the federal government were both caught off-guard, although they had over a month to prepare since COVID-19 was first seen in Wuhan.

We don't have enough testing kits, which means many Americans who are infected but not showing the symptoms yet are spreading the virus. The lack of necessary supplies, such as masks and disinfectants, could exacerbate the problem. Do we have the capacity if this outbreak hospitalizes millions at the same time?

Let's take a look at how other nations have responded:

Infected people being identified and isolated at high speed is the most helpful procedure to stop the infection from spreading. The Chinese government initially tried to hide the virus and threatened doctors who posted about a possible outbreak on social media.

Yet, once it realized the seriousness of the outbreak, it quickly took several reactions. It locked down the district of Wuhan, built two coronavirus hospitals, each hosting 1,000 patients, in only 10 days, and transformed large stadiums into “cabin hospitals” in preparation for a bigger outbreak.

Singapore implemented a strict protocol for tracking the cases of COVID-19. They developed an app to track people under quarantine, which shares data on where these people traveled to and stayed in the days and weeks before they were diagnosed.

South Korea has managed to keep the outbreak of the COVID-19 in a controllable situation. The public-government cooperation helped millions of citizens stay home voluntarily during the outbreak and enforce quarantines effectively. The government also developed standard operational procedures that included five steps: transparent information, high volume testing, quarantine of infected individuals, treatment of those in need, and disinfection of contaminated environments. Such procedures and execution, however, are lacking in the United States.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, rather than downplaying the COVID’s spread, honestly warned her people that 70% of Germans might become infected with the disease.

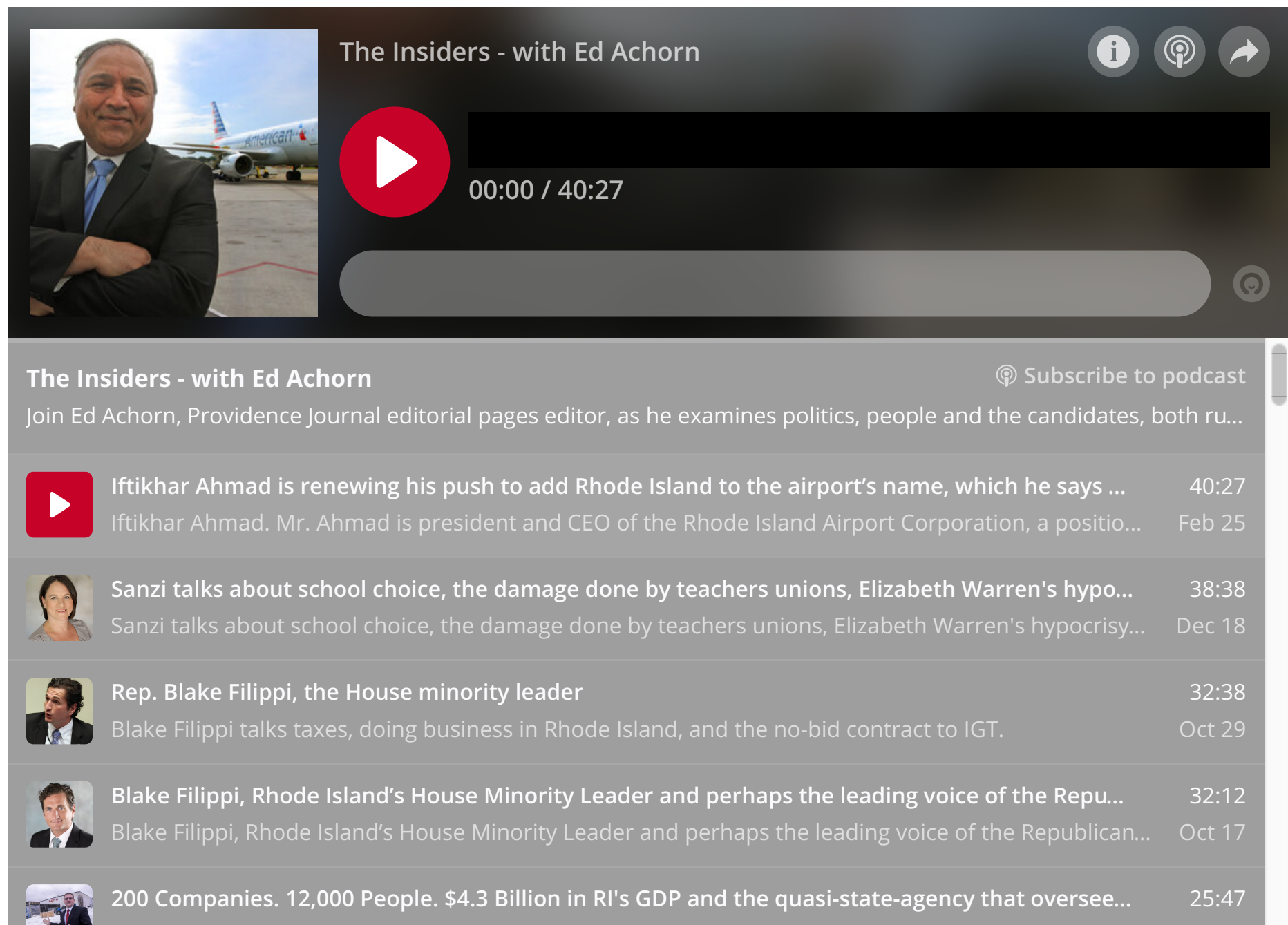
China, Singapore, South Korea, Germany and the United States have different political systems. Their response to this outbreak may somewhat differ. But what unites them all now is that COVID-19 has already become a global problem and deserves a coordinated global response. Travel bans alone did not prevent the virus from reaching our shores.

The world is looking at China and South Korea as role models to eradicate the virus. Our government and experts should engage more with the rest of the world in addressing this pandemic rather than isolating ourselves.

But there is also hope. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is helping Chinese health institutes fight COVID-19. Chinese conglomerate Alibaba founder Jack Ma pledged to donate a million masks and 500,000 testing kits to the United States.

In the recent past, the world successfully responded to eradicate past outbreaks of H1N1 and Ebola collaboratively. Referring to COVID-19 as “foreign” or “Chinese” could only be stigmatizing. Kicking China when it is down is not a humane strategy. Nor does coming up with conspiracy theories about the United States. We should all work together to save more lives.

Jay Zhang is a doctoral candidate in supply chain management and Koray Ozpolat is an associate professor in humanitarian logistics and disaster relief at the University of Rhode Island's College of Business.








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Opinion

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