



Sid Miller

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Mary Brown Talley is a good friend and fellow Texan. She's the owner of Talley Amusements which is a fourth-generation, family-owned outdoor entertainment business. Mary and her family play an important role each year at the State Fair of Texas and she's the owner of the iconic "Texas Star" Ferris Wheel at Fair Park in Dallas. Talley Amusements was the Texas Department of Agriculture's first-ever amusement company to be certified as a Go Texan member. Mary is angry about how she and her industry have been treated during the COVID-19 Pandemic by state and local leaders across the country who have deemed the outdoor entertainment industry to be non-essential. Mary has every right to be angry. I am too. The outdoor entertainment industry is vital to agriculture because of the role it plays at state fairs, livestock shows, and rodeos across the United States. That's why I wanted to share her recent letter. It's written to her industry colleagues and urges them to join her in speaking out about the need to save their industry. Please take a moment to read it. It discusses in clear detail how, for their industry, the cure has been worse than the disease and why we must fully reopen our economy and get Americans back to work and American families back to normal. ~Sid

We must save our Outdoor Entertainment Industry, before it is too late!

by Mary Brown Talley

The response to the COVID-19 Pandemic has launched the largest human experiment in world history. Here in the United States, American citizens have been forced into confinement and our once thriving economy has been driven to a screeching halt with tens of millions now unemployed and tens of thousands of businesses on the brink of collapse. Decades-old family companies are at or very near bankruptcy as state and local governments continue to maintain their executive orders to keep closed, what they have deemed to be "non-essential" businesses.

In the span of just a few short weeks, the ability to earn a livelihood in the Fair and Outdoor Entertainment Industry has completely vanished. While these measures were said to be "temporary" in order to stop the spread of the virus, an important fact remains, these restrictions continue to remain in place and my ability to earn an income in my family owned business has evaporated into thin air. What was once a \$4.5 billion-dollar annual industry has been completely annihilated, not by the virus, but by the misguided attempts to prevent its spread.

In times like these, we depend on our elected leaders for guidance and sound recommendations. What we don't expect is for them to become power-hungry tyrants who have taken it upon themselves to pick winners and losers by choosing, oftentimes with no rhyme or reason, which businesses are essential and which ones are not.

Like most Americans, I was willing to put my life and my livelihood on a temporary hold if doing so meant saving lives. What I did not anticipate, and never agreed to do was to destroy my business, and the lives of so many who depend upon it. I now realize that I, just like so many of my fellow citizens and small business owners, have been duped. Criminally so!

We trusted and depended upon our leaders to make well-informed, courageous decisions. They have failed that test. Now, the time has now come to trust ourselves and to do what's best for our families, our businesses, our employees, and our customers by making well-informed, courageous decisions about the future of our own individual businesses and for our industry as a whole.

Those who really know me realize I have no fear in voicing my beliefs. The outdoor amusement industry needs a strong voice. That voice will be even stronger if my fellow industry leaders, their employees, and the customers we serve join in as well.

So, what can we do about the untenable situation we now find ourselves in? Are we going to sit back and just take whatever hand-out (if any) our state and federal leaders offer us? We are told we can get disaster loans (\$10k grant) or apply for payroll protection programs that will provide up to eight weeks of payroll, but what happens after the eight-week period comes to an end or when the government finally runs out of money?

Currently, we have no hope of getting back to work any time soon because we are constantly reminded by those in power that our industry is "non-essential." Isn't it ironic that Walmart, Home Depot, liquor stores and marijuana dispensaries are benefitting from some of the best revenues in their history? That's what happens when government picks winners and losers and some businesses are allowed to thrive while others are forced to die. Do we just tell our loyal employees they no longer have jobs and to file for unemployment? Do we shut down for good? Do we allow our industry to just go away?

For those who don't know me, please let me introduce myself. I'm a proud Texan and a fourth-generation amusement company owner. My children and my grandchildren have been raised in this industry. This industry has supported me and my family for decades. My business and this industry support so many others. Our industry is uniquely American. It provides not just an income, but joy and excitement to millions of our fellow citizens. Please, don't tell ever me that the industry I and so many Americans love and depend upon is "not essential." Don't ever tell me that my business and my industry don't matter. Doing so is a lie! Sadly, so many of our politicians either understand that it is a lie yet are all-too willing to continue the facade or they really have no clue about our industry and simply don't care.

I'm angry and I am no longer going to sit quietly while everything my grandparents, my parents, and now my own children and grandchildren have built over the years to be swept away by out-of-touch, ill-informed politicians and bureaucrats, most of whom have only signed the back side of a paycheck!

My family built Talley Amusements from the ground up. We are a family-owned business, not a publicly traded one like Walt Disney, Six Flags, or Sea World. Disney recently announced they are now taking reservations for future vacations at their parks starting July 1st and later. While these publicly traded companies operate, like us, outdoor entertainment businesses, there are plans being put in place across the country for them to be reopened, while there is no such planning taking place to allow carnivals, fairs and circuses, which also abide by all CDC guidelines, to do so. Most of the Fairs in the United States are community non-profit, agricultural fundraisers that contribute millions of dollars back to their local communities. Why do our leaders seem to care about only one segment of the entertainment industry and not the other? These are questions our industry needs to start asking our leaders. We deserve answers!

I have watched the dedication and hard work of generational outdoor amusement industry leaders destroyed by the poor decisions of government leaders and because of the lies of the liberal, anti-business, mainstream media elites who would rather create fear, panic, and hysteria instead of providing sound, scientifically grounded, and empirical evidence about how best to deal with this Pandemic.

Our leaders asked for us to shelter in place. We did. They asked us to flatten the curve. We did! They asked us to shutter our businesses. We did. We were asked to be good citizens and conscientious about health risks to our fellow Americans. We were! Now, we are being asked to accept this as a "new normal." We can't and we won't because there is nothing normal about the tragic and unfair situation we now find ourselves in. How dare these elected leaders and self-important media elites tell us what is normal? Who made them the virus Gods? I believe the Covid-19 virus is real and is a public threat, but I have also kept myself informed, studied, listened, and learned. It appears the Coronavirus is no more deadly than any other virus that has impacted our nation over the last 50 years, yet the dangerous and draconian measures put in place to "curb" this virus are unique and have never before been employed in our nation's history.

The carnival and fair industry in my home state of Texas and so many other States has not even been addressed in the phased-in plans being put forth to slowly reopen our economy. So-called "Coronavirus Task Forces" are making decisions that impact millions, yet their members simply do not have a clue about our industry and what we stand for. It's difficult, if not impossible, to make sound business decisions when you are at the mercy of someone else deciding your fate—someone who knows nothing about your industry.

I truly believe that if we don't stand and start fighting to defend our Constitutional freedoms, our generational businesses may be lost forever. Sure, the strong will survive, but even then, it will take years to recover from the ill-advised decisions made for us by career politicians. Please don't get me wrong. I truly care about people and their lives. Every life lost to this horrific disease is tragic. But how and when will this horrible nightmare come to an end? How long will we allow cities, counties, and states to make decisions for us that are rightfully ours to make? Just like many of my fellow outdoor amusement industry colleagues, my company has lost millions of dollars of revenue we will never be able to recoup. The cities and towns we visit each year have lost critical revenue used to pay for parks, roads, police, fire, and EMS services. Most importantly, our friends, neighbors, and fellow Americans have lost the joy and excitement that our industry provides and which has been a staple of American life for generations.

So, in conclusion, this is how I see it. There are those of us who fight like hell for what is right and there are those who sit timidly on the sidelines, ride the coattails of others, and yet still reap the benefits of the actions of those who do speak out. Unlike other times, it is now imperative that all of our voices are heard and paid attention to. In order to accomplish that, we must all, and I mean all (circuses, fairs, carnivals, our employees, and the good folks we serve), ban together and force these government decision makers in every city, county, and state to immediately put in place a plan for a phased-in reopening of our industry, just as they have already done for so many others.

Now is the time for all of us to set aside competitive differences and do what is right for our industry and for our country so that future generations will have the opportunity, just like we did, to continue the traditions of the outdoor entertainment industry and to create jobs, opportunities, and memories.

Please share this with your industry colleagues, family members, and friends so that we can reopen our industry, and, not only get America back to work, but also back to having fun again. God knows, we need that in our lives and in our great country, now, more than ever before.

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