**Adam Laxalt: Coronavirus and transparency**

**— these governors using crisis to hide actions from citizens**

**By Adam Laxalt[| Fox News](http://www.foxnews.com/" \t "_blank)**

Freedom of Information laws protect democracy by empowering citizens to hold officials accountable. This safeguard isn’t swept aside because our country is suffering through a [pandemic](https://www.foxnews.com/category/health/infectious-disease/coronavirus); it becomes more important to make sure politicians are acting responsibly.

In an editorial published last week, The New York Times rightly asserts that [public officials](https://www.foxnews.com/category/politics/state-and-local/governors) don’t get to withhold information and avoid accountability. In fact, the public deserves more transparency in difficult times.

“While the work of government continues, citizens are losing a fundamental right to transparency. That’s a threat to good government and [democracy](https://www.foxnews.com/category/us/constitution),” the editors write.

Those entrusted to process FOIA requests perform a critical service that cannot go unfulfilled or under-fulfilled, even during times of crisis. However, despite the greater need for transparency in the wake of COVID-19, some governors have decided to withhold vital information and obstruct the FOIA process.

For example, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, D-Mich., is using emergency powers provided during the pandemic to refuse a request by Americans for Public Trust.

APT is seeking vital information pertaining to a state contract run by the Great Lakes Community Engagement, headed by a Michigan-based Democratic consultant and managed in coordination with EveryAction, a project of NGP VAN, which boasts that it’s the “leading technology provider to Democratic and progressive campaigns and organizations.”

Why this no-bid contract was awarded by the governor’s office has never been explained.

The people of Michigan are being kept in the dark about why a Democratic political data firm was hired to conduct sensitive coronavirus-contact-tracing surveys that gave the firm access to personal and private health records.

Does the Democratic data firm have the health records of Michigan residents? If so, what are they doing with them; if not, where are the records? Who made this decision and why is the no-bid process being shielded from public vetting?

This apparent conflict of interest and refusal to provide basic information should raise more than a few eyebrows. Michigan’s own Lansing State Journal editorial board argues, “People want to know what local health departments are doing; whether the state is following its own guidelines; that regular government functions are operating properly during crisis; that details aren’t being overlooked.”

Whitmer is not alone in undermining public trust in government and the rule of law.

Govs. David Ige, D-Hawaii, and Tom Wolf, D-Pa., are telling state officials to ignore FOIA requests until normal operations resume, which could be months from now. Gov. Gina Raimondo, D-R.I., is giving administrators a 40-day extension to comply with the FOIA claiming her press conferences provide all the disclosure needed right now.

And Gov. Larry Hogan, R-Md., has given agencies discretion about when to respond to requests, allowing bureaucrats to freeze unfavorable reports for months.

All governors work for their citizens, not the other way around. A pandemic isn’t the time to end transparency and accountability, it’s the time to increase it.