

# THE ECONOMIC CLUB

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O F W A S H I N G T O N, D. C.

**Interview with Mayor Muriel Bowser, Ambassador Ashok Kumar  
Mirpuri, and Suzanne Clark**

**The Honorable Muriel Bowser  
Mayor of the District of Columbia**

**H.E. Ashok Kumar Mirpuri  
Ambassador of Singapore to the United States**

**Suzanne Clark  
President, U.S. Chamber of Commerce**

**Moderator:  
David M. Rubenstein,  
President, The Economic Club of Washington, D.C.**

**The Economic Club of Washington, D.C.  
Friday, April 24, 2020**

DAVID M. RUBENSTEIN: Hello. This is David Rubenstein. I'm coming to you again from my home in Bethesda. A home I've now spent more time in the last 30 days than I did in the previous 30 years. But I now know every nook and cranny of this house, and I enjoy it. But I also enjoy more talking to people who are doing things relating to the crisis in our region, around the country, and nationally.

So, let me talk about our guests today first. We're going to have three guests in our seventh virtual presentation. The first will be the mayor of the District of Columbia, Mayor Muriel Bowser. Second will be our – the ambassador from Singapore, Ashok Mirpuri, who has been the ambassador since 2012. And third will be Suzanne Clark, who's the president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

To remind everybody, we are going to have this taped, so that if you are not able to watch the entire program or if you know of people that want to see it later, it'll be on our website, [www.EconomicClub.org](http://www.EconomicClub.org), shortly after this broadcast – [www.EconomicClub.org](http://www.EconomicClub.org). So, and I would just like to remind everybody as well that we will have two programs next week. Our programs are typically on Fridays, but next week we will have two special programs. One on a Friday and on Tuesday.

Next Tuesday we'll have Tony Fauci, who is obviously the head of the infectious disease division of the National Institutes of Health, well-known person, clearly, now. And also, Arne Sorenson who is the CEO of Marriott. And then subsequent to that, on the following Friday, we will have another guest. The guest will be the head of the American Hospital Association. He will be – Mr. Pollack will be here. And he will be joined by David Skorton, who is the former head of the Smithsonian, but now is the head of the American College of Physicians and Medical Colleges. And also, he'll be joined by Jack DeGioia, the president of Georgetown University.

But let's start now with Mayor Bowser. Mayor Bowser was first elected in 2014 and reelected in 2018. She is the first woman to have been elected to a second term and the first person in 16 years to serve a second term. She is a native of the District of Columbia. Mayor Bowser is joining us from her home in the District. Mayor Bowser, thank you very much for coming here today.

WASHINGTON, D.C. MAYOR MURIEL BOWSER (D): Thank you, David. And thanks for having me and keeping everybody informed.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, let's go right to the heart of a couple of the issues. When do you think the District of Columbia might reopen? I think you now have an order out that says not until May the 15th will it reopen. Now, you've appointed an advisor group to advise you on the reopening. Can you tell us what the advisory group will do, and what your expectations are about reopening?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well first of all, David, we are following the science and looking at our experience in the District. And like many of the guidelines that you've heard discussed from the taskforce and other prominent schools of health, we're looking to see declines over a two-week period in our level of infection. And we're expecting that to happen sometime in mid to late

May. So, we're following it very closely. Now, our residents and businesses have been steadfast in staying at home and following our orders. And we feel like right now we're in a better position than we thought we would be with the level of infection in the District, but we still see rising infection levels. So, we're looking to mid to late May to be able to make some decisions around opening.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, to date how many people in the District of Columbia, to our knowledge, have been infected? How many have died from this disease? Do we know?

MAYOR BOWSER: Yes. We're over now 3,000 infections in the District, and over 150 deaths. We are very concerned, as we are across the country, about our vulnerable populations in particular – people who live in congregant settings, people who have underlying conditions and complex medical histories, and people who have, you know, pretty prevalent underlying conditions, especially in the African American community. One of the most startling statistics in Washington, D.C. is that 80 percent of our deaths are in the African American community.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, in New York we saw a surge of people coming into hospitals. The hospitals probably couldn't handle them. They didn't have enough equipment and so forth. Are the District of Columbia hospitals, the private hospitals, the public hospitals, are they equipped with the necessary ventilators, masks, gowns, to the best of your knowledge?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well, our hospital community has been incredible. As you know, they are very active in our both health and business communities. They employ a lot of district residents and are doing an incredible job. I asked them to increase their capacity by 125 percent to help us meet the number of beds that we need. And they're doing that. We are also working with the Army Corps of Engineers to have an overflow facility at the Washington Convention Center. And MedStar Washington is going to be our partner in advancing that alternate care facility.

We worked with the federal government on one of our big needs, and that's ventilators, to support that excess capacity. And we're getting close to where we need to be. But that – the PPE procurement, I think everybody knows, has been a task. But the extra time that we're getting to our surge, mid-May to late May, means that we've had the opportunity to procure a lot of those items. One of the best pieces of news that I got today was that we got a shipment of some of the masks that we've been trying to get, facemasks that we've been trying to get. So that'll help us, and help our hospitals be ready.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, if I am a resident of the District of Columbia and I want to get tested, because I think I've been coughing or I'm not sure, what do I do? Can I get the test? Or where should I go?

MAYOR BOWSER: We have – and just this week – we have expanded our eligibility for District-wide testing, and have given that advice to our hospitals and medical providers, that anyone who has been exposed – feels like they've been exposed to somebody who's been positive, or they're out doing essential work that makes them exposed, we're asking them to call their providers or to call our citywide hotline and be referred to one of the two citywide testing sites.

We're also working, David, because we're concerned that people still aren't – if they're not feeling quite well, they're still not reaching out to their providers. For COVID-related illness and for non-COVID-related illness. And so, we see too many people at home, or who have died from COVID at home. And we fear that other people who may be having other symptoms of illness, non-COVID-related, are not calling their doctors. So, we want them to do that. We have a comprehensive website out – [Coronavirus.DC.gov](https://www.coronavirus.dc.gov) – that has all of that information on where people can get tested right now.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, is the District of Columbia a territory? Or why do some people think it's a territory? And in the recent CARES legislation it was treated as a territory. Why was that?

MAYOR BOWSER: You know, it is a – something that none of us has been able to figure out. It is true that we are unique in the political system. We've had this conversation recently. We function as a city, a county, and a state. In some ways I have the responsibilities of a mayor, a county executive, and a governor all at once. And in all federal funding, especially disaster relief, we are always treated as a state in federal funding calculations. For some very strange reason that none of us has been able to figure out we were referenced as a territory in the first CARES Act. And that's very significant for a lot of reasons – 700 million, to be precise.

The least-populated states in this act were appropriated \$1.25 billion. And we were appropriated in this territory calculation \$498 million. So, you can see a \$700 million difference. And I don't care who you are, three-quarters of a billion dollars is a lot of money. And it represents a lot of response to testing, to making sure our hospitals have everything that we need, to be able to make sure that this nation's capital, the capital of the free world, has what it needs to respond to this virus. So, it's very important that this matter is corrected in the upcoming CARES four. We've gotten that assurance from our congresswoman, from the speaker of the House, from the leader in the House. And we've had every conversation on both sides of the aisle to make sure that this matter is corrected.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And is it possibly the case that maybe people thought you're not paying your fair share of taxes compared to these other states? Is that why you think you were treated this way?

MAYOR BOWSER: I don't. That level of ignorance, I think, you know, it's possible that some people didn't understand, but I think everybody understands that we pay more taxes, federal taxes, than 22 states. And maybe some people don't understand the difference between a territory and the District, or a territory and the states. So, let me be clear, the big difference is in territories they don't pay federal taxes, just like every American. So, I'm sitting in Northwest, you're sitting in Bethesda. We have the same tax obligations. You in Maryland, me in Washington, D.C. That's different than you in Maryland or me in D.C. and residents of Guam. Though we're all U.S. citizens, we pay the same taxes as our fellow Americans in the states. And that's why we're treated for federal funding just as the states.

Now, because of the success we've had in our city, we pay more taxes than 22 states. And we pay more per capita than everybody. We give the federal government more than we get

back. And that's why it's so important for us to have the \$700 million. Part of our reopening plan – everybody wants to get reopened. And we think our city can be a model if we have what we need. We have to make sure we have the testing capacities, the ability to isolate people who are infected, the ability to do this contact tracing, which is turning – which will turn out to be a huge expenditure, the ability to have medical staff for these extra beds when the time comes. All of those are huge expenditures that have to be fixed.

Now, this is at the same time we have a pandemic and a health emergency that we haven't seen in a hundred years, but we also have an economic disaster that we are responding to for businesses, but also for workers. But the other economic disaster is going to be for municipalities. We have seen just in the District a \$600 million decrease in our expected revenue. So, we have to balance our budget, actually in the next two weeks, to deal with our losses right now but also the losses we expect for the upcoming fiscal year. So those things – and this is what I tell all of my constituents – this is the type of disaster that can't be handled just locally, even though we are a jurisdiction that has been, and is, and will be again in great financial shape. This is a national, global disaster that's going to require a national response.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, have you talked to the president of the United States very much about the District's situation? And does he consult with you about what's going on in the District?

MAYOR BOWSER: We have been involved in the governors' calls with the president. I've talked directly with the vice president about the District in particular. We've had conversations with Treasury about our concerns, about CARES and how it can be remedied. And so, we keep an open line of communication, certainly, with the White House about the particular concerns of the District.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, when you decide you can reopen, who actually makes the decision? In other words, if you say I think the District can reopen, and the White House says they're not ready or vice versa, if the president says federal workers can go back to work but you're not comfortable, how does that get resolved?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well, the OPM and the administration are, of course, in charge of the federal workforce, just like I'm in charge of my workforce. With the governor of Maryland and Virginia just yesterday we sent a letter to the Office of Personnel Management asking them to continue their telework policies. Having the federal workforce – now, keep in mind, we have a lot of federal workers here. But there are federal workers all over the United States. But keeping federal workers home in this region will be important to us being able to flatten the curve and keep infections down. And we think in doing that that will actually get us back and get us open quicker.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, the public schools, you've shut the public schools down for the District of Columbia for this academic calendar year. What is your standard by which they can reopen in the fall?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well, our schools have been in a distance learning posture, David. And we made that decision very early. And we think making that decision along with modifying District government operations, closing bars and restaurants early in mid-March, is part of the reason that we see a lower level of infection in this region. But you put your finger on the issue that, you know, has me most anxious. And that's, how do we get our kids back in front of their teachers and their school buildings, so – with their friends? Because we think those are the best opportunities for learning. So, we are looking at a few things. And that is if we are in position with this virus in the summer, to have some in-person, in-seat learning opportunities for summer school, and also some earlier – opening the school year earlier if we're able to.

The one thing that we know – and one of our committees in the Reopen D.C. Advisory Committee will be looking at a whole host of options for learning. What we know is that our kids probably won't go back to school in the same way that they left school. And we're going to have to have more distance learning. There may be phases of kids coming back to school or reducing the number of kids and adults in the school at the same time. So, we're looking at all of those things, but our focus is how we keep kids safe and how we have learning opportunities, even if they're learning remotely.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, let's talk about the prisons that you have. You have a number of prisoners. I think a federal court said that maybe you should assess whether you're protecting them. How are you dealing with prisoners and their chance of getting this COVID-19 when they're in prison?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well, it's a tough situation around the country. As I noted earlier, these congregant settings where people can't social distance just because of the nature of the facility, as well as everybody else can. We're concerned about COVID. We have certainly stepped up our training of staff and inmates to what they need to do. We're trying to do some other physical things. For example, when we started this response to the pandemic, we had 1,800 inmates at D.C. Jail. Now we're under 1,500 inmates.

So, people who were close to their release dates and had the type of release plan that keeps the District safe, have been released. The courts on the front end are thinking of ways not to put people in the system. So there are a number of things that we've done to try to reduce the prison – the jail population where appropriate, and things that we're doing to make sure all of our guidelines around distancing inside the jail for staff and inmates are being followed.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, when you do open the District, whenever that occurs, do you expect that places like the Kennedy Center, the Smithsonian, the National Gallery of Art, that people that can go there will have to socially distance and wear masks? Or is that something that you won't be deciding yourself?

MAYOR BOWSER: We certainly send recommendations from the Department of Health. And we have a whole committee of folks. And we would love for you to participate in some way, David, in deciding how large venues will open. And the large venues were among the first affected, as you know. And they will probably be among the last coming back. And there still may be a while before they're operating as normal. And so, we need to understand, and give

some recommendations, and provide a toolkit, if you will, for folks so they can understand some spacing. I'm sure folks are already talking to architects, and engineers, and sanitation experts about ways to open differently. And the city wants to be here to support that.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, what about the homeless population? Has it increased because of this crisis? And what about food banks? Has the need for food banks increased dramatically?

MAYOR BOWSER: We have been very concerned about food, period, and the food supply, and keeping the food supply safe. We've done a number of things in the city to support people that are homebound and vulnerable populations that can't or shouldn't be going out with some delivery to our seniors and homebound. We have asked all of our food banks to let us know about what their needs are. We're supporting our SNAP populations in some changes that have been improved on the federal level to make sure we're maxing out food stamps, we're allowing people who have SNAP benefits to use them in delivery services, all of which is aimed at keeping our food supply going.

Early on we made sure that our school sites and our school system, kids could go to 20 different locations across the city and have meals. We've actually also added a grocery option to those meal sites, where a family could pick up a bag of groceries with fresh produce and the like and take home with them. Keeping the food supply and access to food safe is what is going to allow people to stay home.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, more people are staying at home. Is crime down, or is it up because people think that it's easier to go and break into someplace, or something? Is crime up or down?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well, we have one month of experience, and we are down in all levels – property crime, violent crime. Though we continue to tell people that we're concerned about illegal guns in our city and people who will use illegal guns. So, our police department, in addition to helping us remind people about social distancing and only being out for essential trips, is policing the District of Columbia.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, is my chance of getting a parking ticket greater or less than before?

MAYOR BOWSER: It depends on if you're illegally parking. It's probably – if you're illegally parking, you might get a ticket. Though we have – we're focusing our people – now, let me be clear about this. We are concerned about our workforce too. And we don't want them to be out for unnecessary work. And so, we have pulled back. A lot of people are at home and parking. So, we remind people, don't park in the bus lane. Don't park in the crosswalks. Don't park in the bike lanes. You're going to get a ticket. And we have in some of the other areas, like rush hour lanes and the like, we have more lax enforcement.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So now where are you working out of? You are now out of your home, I guess. But are you working out of your home or are you working out of some office in the District?

MAYOR BOWSER: I'm working out – we have set up our emergency operations center, and we're doing it at our Department of Health. We have several command centers across the District, but this one – given that we're responding to a pandemic – is at our Department of Health. And it was – and when I first became mayor, I got a tour of this EOC. And I thought to myself, why do we need an emergency command center here? And it has become so clear that having and being prepared for a pandemic is one of the most important things and responsibilities of government. And our Health Department employees are doing an incredible job of helping us contact and trace people who have been affected, issue guidance to our business community, and keep everybody informed. So that's where I and my senior team is working.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: How are you saying healthy yourself? Are you socially distancing? Are you wearing masks? You sanitizing your hands all the time? How are you saying healthy?

MAYOR BOWSER: Well, that's a good question, because it's a very different – and I know you're going to – when this is – when we're on the other side of this, you're going to interview a lot of CEOs about what it's like to manage an emergency when you have to stay distant from your team. And it is – it has been a learning experience for me. And what I try to do is work in the same place, not wander around in our building. I go to work, and I come home, and I am even – I have to social distance, like many people, from our parents and friends as well. And so, I've tried to limit all of my trips.

Now, when you're in the business that I'm in, you're in the people business and going to see people and visit different sites. And all of those things I've tried to limit because when I'm moving around like that it requires other people in the government to move around like that. So, trying to stick to the same workplace has been part of our social distancing. I'm doing press – almost daily press conference as a way to keep D.C. residents informed of what we're doing and trying to stay connected with the members of our D.C. Council. We're talking to them on a regular basis so that we have – we still have the regular operations of government, but also this emergency response.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: A final question. How is Miranda doing, and what does she understand about this? Is she around right now?

MAYOR BOWSER: She is. Miranda is doing fine. She – one thing that's different about this, that's very good for her, is that I'm home every night because – say hi, Miranda. Say hi to David.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Hello. How are you?

MAYOR BOWSER: Say hi.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Hello.

MAYOR BOWSER: And so, she's learning a lot. She's learning to talk and do other things that a toddler does. She'll be two in a couple of weeks. She hasn't gotten to see her grandparents or go to her swim class, so we're kind of sad about that. But she's doing fine.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, thank you for your time this morning, Mayor. And thank you, Miranda, for making a guest appearance.

MAYOR BOWSER: Thank you.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And we'll let you go back to running the District. And good luck in getting that additional \$700 million.

MAYOR BOWSER: Thank you. Thank you, David.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Thanks very much, Mayor.

MAYOR BOWSER: Bye-bye.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So now I would like to talk to Ashok Mirpuri, who is the ambassador from Singapore. He has been the ambassador here since 2012, about eight years.

Ashok, can you hear me now?

AMBASSADOR ASHOK KUMAR MIRPURI: Yes, I can hear you. And I can see you as well.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, my question to you is, Singapore early on got a lot of good attention for dealing with this crisis, but now it seems as if an infection has broken out in Singapore from foreign workers who are often involved in construction sites. What is the situation in Singapore now?

AMB. MIRPURI: Well, you know, David, I think we were one of the first countries to have a COVID-19 case in January; 23rd of January in fact was our first case. But at no point did we think that this was going to be overcome very quickly. So, we anticipated waves and waves of infections. And that's really where we are. That first wave we managed quite well. The key was, you know, making sure you are testing people, you are tracing them, and then you are isolating those who are infected. We had a second wave subsequently when many of our citizens from around the world started to come home, those that had been on holiday, many students who were studying here in the U.S. started to come home. That was the second wave. And the third wave is now that current one, which is quite significant, are foreign workers who are living and working in Singapore. They tend to live in close communal dormitories with each other. And there has been some infection with them.

To give you a scale of the thing, so far, we've had about 12,000 cases of COVID-19. About 80 percent of them have mild or no symptoms. They're asymptomatic. Because we're doing very aggressive testing, we're starting to see those people as well. So almost 8,000 of them are just kept in isolation wards, have been discharged. About 1,200 are still in medical

treatment, 1,300. Twenty-six of which are in critical care. And 12 deaths. Very unfortunate, but there have been 12 deaths as well. But it's really managing this in a broad – understanding that this is going to keep coming in waves.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, do you think that the infections in Singapore have come more from China, or from Europe, or the United States? Or what part of the world did they come from do you think?

AMB. MIRPURI: You know, we're a global hub. And people were flying all over. The initial cases seem to have first come from China, but they come from everywhere. The imported cases that we had in March were students coming back from the U.K. and the U.S. Students who had been infected over here as they started to go home. And so, we it's hard to put the finger on where exactly people are bringing infection from. But they care coming in from outside. And it is now obviously in parts of the community as well. But as a global hub, that's what you have to just expect. And anytime there's a crisis – we went through this about 15 years ago with SARS as well. At that time, we were less prepared.

This time we are much better prepared to understand and appreciate the situation. There was – very quickly a multi-ministry taskforce was set up, very open information was put out. The key thing that we've learned from that, SARS, is also the importance of contact tracing, where we try and reach out to everyone who's infected to see who they may have potentially met in the past 14 days. We've even created an app called Trace Together, with a very open protocol, that's available for everyone to use. We've encouraged everyone to download it in Singapore. And if you are then found to have had COVID-19, that app, which uses Bluetooth technology, can find out who you may have been in contact with in the past two weeks.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, let me ask you, you are very involved in the diplomatic community in the Washington area. What are the other diplomats doing? Are they all living in their residence? Are they living at the embassy? What are you doing? And what are the other ambassadors saying about this situation in Washington?

AMB. MIRPURI: Well, we stay in touch with each other. I think the first priority as the global pandemic was starting to hit for all of us was consular. Thousands of Singaporeans living here in the U.S., uncertain what to do. And I'm comparing notes with other ambassadors. Some have larger communities living here in the U.S. How do you deal with this in crisis? Do you start repatriating everyone home? As flights started to be cut back, the inability for people to get home.

So we have – I think the initial phase, I would say in late February, early March, was really focused on trying to reach out to the community, students who were here who wanted to go home because they saw that schools were now going to go online. University undergraduates, trying to get them home as quickly and safely as possible, and then dealing with those. And now those who've decided to stay, many of whom are professionals, staying engaged with them. So that consular part of that work, I think for every ambassador, would have been quite critical.

But the role of ambassadors is really coming out here, connecting with the administration, with the White House, with the State Department, and other agencies, talking to them about some of the key issues and areas where we can share information. I think the important thing about this global pandemic is how much information can we share with each other, because we are all learning as we go along. There is no easy answer. How do we make sure that we are connected, and sharing these ideas and perspectives?

Within Washington, D.C., we have set up phone conversations among the ASEAN ambassadors regularly. We speak to members of the administration. Secretary Pompeo just did a phone call earlier this week with the ASEAN foreign ministers. The ASEAN leaders have been speaking to each other as well. So that work of diplomacy must go on. And then the next phase is really looking at making sure that the economic recovery starts coming in. How do you keep supply chains open? What do you need to do for that economic recovery? And that's really the information sharing that we need to do with the administration and with fellow diplomats as well. But the world of wining and dining has gone away for a while.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So now you are – are you working at out of your residence? Is that your residence you're at now?

AMB. MIRPURI: Yes. I'm at home. The embassy is open because there are people who may need urgent assistance. So, we keep a very light staff in the embassy. The mayor has actually said that diplomatic embassies are essential. But we keep a very light presence. But I'm working generally out of home, with occasional trips out to the embassy.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: But if you were to go and drive into Washington, D.C. and do something you're not supposed to do, you have diplomatic immunity, is that right? You can't get arrested, is that right? Or you don't get parking tickets?

AMB. MIRPURI: [Laughs.] We get parking tickets. We get speeding tickets. And we make sure that we pay all of those. Our advice to all of our Singapore community, and everyone, is please follow the local guidelines. We don't want anyone to break any rules and laws. I think it's important that we do that. So, there's no diplomatic immunity from COVID-19.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So now you have two children. Are they with you now? Or where are your children?

AMB. MIRPURI: I have a son in London, and I have a daughter in Singapore. So, trying to get regular conversations with them at the same time sometimes is a bit challenging. Today happens to be my son's birthday. So early this morning, at 7:00 a.m. Washington time, 12:00 noon London, 7:00 p.m. Singapore we got into a big family Zoom so that he could cut a cake with all of us present. But that's part of that challenge. You know, we're more connected with them, in a way. They're in other parts of the world. Traditionally they wouldn't regularly call us, but now they're calling us to check on us, and we're calling on them to check on them as well.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, let me ask you, if I wanted to go to Singapore now can I show up at your embassy, get a visa, get on an airplane, and can I just walk off the airplane and walk into Singapore? How would I do that?

AMB. MIRPURI: It's complicated. First, the number of flights have been restricted. There are very few flights into Singapore. I think most airlines have stopped flights. U.S. citizens do not need visas to go to Singapore, but at this time we have suspended all international travel coming into Singapore. Anyone coming into Singapore, a returning Singapore citizen or permanent resident for example, will go into a 14-day quarantine, a stay-at-home notice. Any visitor coming in. So non-Singaporeans cannot enter Singapore yet.

And that's really part of that challenge as we start thinking ahead of what we do in the future as you start lowering border controls. How do you allow for the safe travel of people around the world? And how do you calibrate that process? I think countries are not yet – most countries have got in place some sort of border controls. And Singapore is one of them as well. But we want to get into a world where there's some sort of semi-normal state that you can start traveling around. It is very difficult for all of us – I mean, you travel regularly, I travel regularly. Not to be able to get out and meet people is part of that challenge.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, I assume the Singapore economy is shrinking a fair bit. And how are you going to address that problem? I assume that people are not working, and the economy is really not as strong as it should be.

AMB. MIRPURI: This has had – like the U.S. economy – this has had a deep hit on the Singapore economy. We're not able to forecast how bad the economic hit is going to be, but definitely the economy will go into some sort of recession. There have been a number of budget stimulus packages. About 12 percent of GDP has been put into those budgetary stimulus packages. There are efforts to make sure that people will stay at work, efforts to ensure that everyone is well-looked after, including many of those foreign workers who you spoke about earlier. The prime minister himself had addressed them and said: You will be looked after. We will make sure that will continue to be paid. And I think that's quite important. But it does – you do require a lot of budgetary support, because all economies have been hit, all the economies around us have been hit as well.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, what are you personally doing to stay healthy? Are you washing your hands all the time? Are you wearing masks? Are you exercising but avoiding other people? What are you doing?

AMB. MIRPURI: [Laughs.] I don't know about you, David, but I find I'm actually working more. It's more tiring to have these conversations online. And I find that I'm six or seven hours a day on the phone with people speaking about them, speaking and then doing a lot of reading and following up. To stay healthy, of course, washing hands. I try to get out for a walk with a mask at least once a day in the neighborhood, or a run if I can, do some exercises at home. But really it is – it's not like we're sort of a snow day that you can just sit around and twiddle your thumbs. There are things going on. And it's really trying to sort of stay in touch with that is quite important.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, let me ask you a final question. I've been to Singapore many times, as you know, have a great fondness for it. But for those who are watching who have never been to Singapore, when the world opens up again why should somebody want to visit Singapore? What's the attraction of visiting Singapore?

AMB. MIRPURI: Well, you know, it's – the reasons have always been that it's a multicultural place, a place that in a generation has transformed itself into a very modern society, yet maintains very strong connections to art, culture of Asia. And for people to go out there, to enjoy the food, to enjoy the drink. Many of your listeners or viewers may have had a Singapore Sling. That comes from Singapore. Our food is world-famous, including our hawker centers. We hope to be able to get visitors coming back as soon as possible. And I hope you'll be able to visit sometime in the not-too-distant future, David.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, I hope so. Ambassador, I want to thank you for your involvement with The Economic Club of Washington, leading our group of ambassadors. And thank you for appearing today. And stay healthy and stay connected to your children, OK?

AMB. MIRPURI: Thank you. And thank you for this opportunity.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Thank you.

So, I'm now going to talk to Suzanne Clark. Suzanne is the president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The first woman in the history of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to hold that title. And I want to thank her for appearing here. She is now in her home in Virginia. Is that right?

SUZANNE CLARK: That's right, David. Good morning.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Good morning and thank you for appearing. I have a couple questions, but let's start at the very beginning. The business community seems to be interested in reopening the society. Obviously, everybody is. But the business community's been lobbying a little bit more, maybe, than others to reopen society. Is that a fair characterization or unfair, that the business community wants to reopen the society relatively quickly?

MS. CLARK: What we hear from our members, both big companies and small, is both geographically dependent and also differs by sector. But I think they want to reopen when they can do it safely and sustainably. What they're focused on now is how can they be prepared when they get that green light.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So, let's divide the business community into two parts, the small business community and the big business community. Now, there's been a big concern that the small business community might go out of business because they can't sustain their businesses if they don't have a lot of cash reserves. So, the legislation that came out of Congress is designed to help small businesses, to some extent. Has that worked, in your view? Are you satisfied, and the Chamber of Commerce satisfied, with what's being done for small businesses?

MS. CLARK: I think we'll still have to do more. I mean, our most recent poll we did with MetLife said that more than a quarter of small businesses had less than eight weeks of cash reserves, less than eight weeks before they shuttered permanently. So, I think the impact on small business, the real pain that's out there, can't be understated. So, look, I think the government's doing a lot. SBA processed that first \$350 billion in 14 days. It's probably more loans than they've processed in the previous 14 years. So, there's been a remarkable amount of aid. We do think that they'll have to do more.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And what about the big business community? The Chamber represents big businesses as well. Do you feel that they are being adequately handled by the federal government? And do you worry for small businesses or big businesses and a lot of bankruptcies are in the future?

MS. CLARK: Well, you know, as you know, David, it's really an ecosystem. It's hard to make it so binary because a lot of our big business members are worried about their small business suppliers and their small business customers, right? If you have 47 percent of Americans employed by a small business, and they don't have access to a paycheck, they're not going to be buying things from big companies either. In fact, interestingly, we put out five different guidelines on how small businesses could access different aid and assistance available to them and our big business members were arranging conference calls with our experts for their small business suppliers and vendors. So, the ecosystem piece of this, I think, is a little underreported.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, right now do you have any doubt that we're in a recession yet? Or, I mean, not officially in it, but do you have any doubt that we're really in a recession? And do you think we'll go closer to a depression? Or how do you characterize what we're in, or going to be in?

MS. CLARK: Look, we see every day the tragedy and real pain that's out there in America. And certainly, we're in a recession. It looks like it can get worse. What we're hopeful about is that there's also a sharp recovery, that our, you know, means of production are still intact, our intellectual property is still intact, that there's pent-up demand. And unlike a traditional financial crisis, we know when this ends, because it ends when we can get out of our houses. So, we're hopeful for a quick recovery.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So as the president of the Chamber of Commerce, I assume you have ready access to the president of the United States, the White House, Treasury secretary. How has your relationship been with them? Do you have the access you want?

MS. CLARK: Yes. I mean, I think the administration's working really hard to listen to the business community about the safest and most sustainable ways to reopen. And so, we've been happy to share our ideas with them. We created something called The Path Forward, which is trying to catalogue the concerns and the cares that businesses of all sizes have about reopening in a way that we hope creates a framework for policymakers and business leaders to work together.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, let me ask you personally for a question for a moment. How are you dealing with this? Are you working out of your home? Are you going to the office? And how is this working out for you, in terms of doing all the Zoom calls?

MS. CLARK: I am working out of my home. I have a 14-year-old daughter, two four-legged co-workers, and my husband also working out of our home, and a Swedish au pair. So, there's a lot going on in this house, I'm not going to lie to you. What's been amazing has been the demand on the Chamber from all of our members. I've never felt that our mission was more critical. And so, the workload has just been phenomenal. And keeping our team motivated, encouraging people to take breaks. I mean, it's really hard to figure out how to take any time off when all of your employees are balancing work and family demands right now. So, it's remarkable. I'm also surprised at exactly how many media interviews I can do without shoes on.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Do you have shoes on now?

MS. CLARK: No.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Oh, OK.

MS. CLARK: [Laughs.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, so, let me ask you this. When you're lobbying members of Congress now, as I assume you are in the CARES legislation, other legislation, do you have to call them directly? Or is it harder to get them on the phone, or easier to get them on the phone?

MS. CLARK: I think a little easier. I mean, I think, again, as I said about the administration, we're finding government at all levels – governors, public health officials at the state level, mayors at the local level, members of Congress – really eager to hear what their business members, what the businesses in their districts can do right now, what they're able to do, what they feel like they can do in the future, what it will take to get up and running. So, I think they are thirsty for the kind of information that we have for the business communities in their districts.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, have you been in touch with the Treasury secretary, or his top people, about your concerns? And how responsive have they been?

MS. CLARK: I mean, almost daily. Almost daily. I think there's just a real thirst, again, for real information about what this takes.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, to deal with this problem we have been doing something that the Chamber generally is not in favor of, borrowing a lot of money. We've increased the federal debt by \$2, \$3, \$4 trillion. Are you worried about that? And how are we going to pay this off?

MS. CLARK: Look, of course we're worried about it, right, but we don't have a choice right now. This is an unprecedented global health and economic crisis. So, we don't think that there's a choice but to deficit spend. We do think that this underscores the reason you shouldn't be

deficit spending in normal economic times, so that you have more facility to do so during a crisis.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, what lessons have you taken away from this sort of self-isolation period and the way you're doing business, and the way that the business communities reacted to this whole crisis? What are the lessons you've taken away so far?

MS. CLARK: Well, gosh, I feel like there are a lot of them. I'll try to be brief. One is it's really remarkable to see the resilience of people. I mean, if you had told any of us March 1st that we would all be staying in our homes, that you'd be in Bethesda for 30 days, and when was the last time any of us stopped traveling like this? And it was all unbelievable. And yet, the resilience of people saying: OK. This is what I have to do for my family, and my community, and my business. And I'm going to do it. So, one lesson has been the real resiliency and adaptability of the American people.

A second has been the innovation. And I've loved seeing it, at a global scale and big companies retooling to make masks, or to make ventilators, or to make hand sanitizer. But even the small companies, the local restaurants doing craft cocktails. So, the innovation piece I think has been a real takeaway that I hope we'll hear more about as the crisis ends.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, the Chamber of Commerce has how many members – I assume hundreds of thousands? I don't really know. But do you expect that some will go out of business, then you'll have fewer members in the future because there are just not going to be as many companies around?

MS. CLARK: We're not worried about that. There's never been a greater demand for what we can do, and life is long, and relationships matter. And the Chamber of Commerce stood through the Great Depression, and World War II, and all kinds of previous historic times in the country. And we'll be here for the business community on the other side of this one.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. And in terms of the medical situation, are you worried about a return in the winter? Dr. Fauci and others have said that it's possible this could come back in the winter. And do you think the business community's prepared for a return next winter?

MS. CLARK: I'm an optimistic person. And as I said a minute ago, watching innovation through this has been really remarkable. And so, I think the whole idea of this stay-at-home period was in order to allow supplies to build up, hospitals to prepare, scientists to get ready, et cetera. And one of the Harvard epidemiologists we had on a program this week said: When the curve passes, when the emergency gets to the other side, then doctors, scientists, et cetera, can really study what it is they've learned. Why aren't children transmitting this? What does that mean? How long does immunity last, et cetera? How many people have had this and were asymptomatic?

And so, I think we're going to know a lot more by the fall. And I also think that there's a really good chance we have therapeutics by the fall. So, by the fall we don't have to take a blunt instrument if it comes back and say: Everybody's working from home and staying home. But

we're able to do more targeted shutdowns, tracing, and that there's also therapeutics that can help people if they get sick.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: One part of the federal government I haven't asked you about yet is the Federal Reserve. I assume you're in touch with the Federal Reserve. Are you pleased with what they're doing, or do you think they should do more?

MS. CLARK: Look, I think they're about to finalize this Main Street loan facility. And hopefully that continues to open up credit for medium and large companies. I think at this point we're seeing government at all levels do everything that they can. It's so unprecedented that this communication and collaboration just becomes more important. And so, yep, we continue to talk to them and bring them the concerns of the business community.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: And today as you look at the business community, what is the principal thing that they are worried about, their principal concern is the health of their employees, their ability to stay in business? What is the principal thing they're telling you they're worried about?

MS. CLARK: I think the principal thing that they're worried about right now is how to prepare for a reopening. So, when the public health officials determine that it's time, how are they prepared? And their concerns fall into a couple categories.

One is, will regulations make sense and flow together? Will they get clear guidelines on what's expected from them? We're already seeing some guidelines that have different temperature check ideas, for example. And as you know, businesses really need clarity to operate. So that's one. Will it be a patchwork of regulations? Will there be clear regulations?

The second is liability protection. They're concerned about reopening with imperfect information and what happens to their liability risk at that time.

The third is what are they going to be responsible for in terms of testing and tracing? And fourth, they're really concerned about the availability of PPE. Are they supposed to be supplying masks? Are they supposed to be, you know, getting the hand sanitizer that nobody can get their hands on? Are they supposed to be doing temperature checks? And if so, what does that mean for privacy rules and discrimination rules?

So, the task forces that we have that are sector-based are really starting to focus in on: This is what we're going to have to know if we're going to reopen safely and sustainably.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Now, let's talk about the Chamber for a moment. How many employees does the Chamber of Commerce have in Washington?

MS. CLARK: Around 500.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: All right. Have any of them been infected by COVID-19, to the best of your knowledge?

MS. CLARK: No.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: How have you avoided that? That's pretty impressive. So, did you take early precautions? Or you have a lot of good luck? Or God just likes the Chamber of Commerce?

MS. CLARK: I'm going to go for God likes the Chamber of Commerce. No, I don't know the answer to that. And I also don't think we know if people had it and were asymptomatic. What we know is that, you know, knock wood, we haven't had a major illness hit our employee base. And we're very grateful for that.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, when it's OK to come back to work, do you expect that your 500 employees will come back but you'll have social distancing, you'll wear a mask? Do you have enough masks? How do you expect the employee base to come back and actually work from the physical plant you have in Washington?

MS. CLARK: I think it's a really important question. It gets back to what every business leader is asking themselves right now, whether they have a huge company or a small company, right? How do you manage things like elevators? How do you manage breakrooms? How do you manage open spaces? What we're seeing and trying to learn from the businesses that never closed, right? And one thing that gets lost is there are a lot of essential workers and essential businesses still operating. And so, we're trying to learn from them, and from countries that have had sooner re-openings than the United States and look for best practices there.

One thing we're seeing, for example, is staggered days. You know, do you have a fifth of your workforce in every day of the week. And really the underlying concerns in D.C. will also be how soon are people feeling safe on mass transit, how soon does childcare reopen, what happens with the essential services that allow people to come back to a physical plant?

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, you have a 14-year-old daughter. Is she happy to be at home with her parents all the time? Or she wishes she was back in school?

MS. CLARK: It's every teenager's dream to be quarantined with their parents, as you might imagine, particularly an only child. She misses school, but she's an upbeat kid and so she's doing OK. You know, it's interesting what we're seeing in these teenagers, who loved their devices before this. Boy are they starting to appreciate face-to-face contact.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Right. So, you hope to be back at work physically in your offices in a month or so, would you say? Or two months? What do you think is realistic?

MS. CLARK: We'll listen to the mayor's guidelines on that. But we'd like to be back as soon as the mayor and the public health officials in D.C. say it's safe, and as soon as our employees feel that they are safe and that they can balance the needs of their families with coming in.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: So, if I'm a business in the United States and I really am not familiar with the Chamber of Commerce, why should I join the Chamber of Commerce? What are you going

to do for me that I don't get otherwise from just not paying dues? What's the benefit I'm getting by being a member of the Chamber?

MS. CLARK: I think that the benefit of being a member of the Chamber is that we wake up every day and try to figure out how to help you create jobs and grow the economy. And sometimes that's in general ways. Sometimes that's tax work, trade work, et cetera. And sometimes it's in specific ways – helping you specifically with a market that you want to try to get into, or litigation you have a problem with. And sometimes it's networking, and allowing you to meet CEOs just like you, maybe in a different industry so you don't have competitive issues, but you can learn from them. And that last piece is particularly important right now, helping people network, like The Economic Club does, where people can join each other and figure out the best practices, and help find answers to difficult questions in an imperfect time.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. Well, now I hope maybe some of the people will sign up. I don't know.

I wanted to thank you, Suzanne, for what you told us today and what you're doing at the Chamber of Commerce. And happy you could do this without your shoes on. I didn't think of that. I have my shoes on. But it's something I'm going to think about in the future.

MS. CLARK: It's an innovation. It's an innovation. I'm really thrilled that I shared that with your audience, as you might imagine. You're just an interviewer. Got it right out of me. [Laughs.]

MR. RUBENSTEIN: Well, that was the highlight of the interview, was that piece of information. [Laughter.] So, Suzanne, thank you very much. And congratulations on what you're doing at the Chamber.

MS. CLARK: Appreciate your time. Thank you for having me.

MR. RUBENSTEIN: OK. So now we've had these three discussions. And I want to thank each of the people, Mayor Bowser, Ambassador Mirpuri, and Suzanne Clark. This is the completion of our show today.

I just want to remind people of a couple things. Next Tuesday we have Tony Fauci in an interview for about a half-an-hour, and then Arne Sorenson for another half-an-hour of our interview. Arne is, of course, the CEO of Marriott, which is the largest hotel company in the United States, and the world actually. And then the following Friday, next Friday, we have a number of individuals, the head of the American Hospital Association Rick Pollack, with David Skorton, head of the American College of Physicians, and also we'll have Jack DeGioia, who's the president of Georgetown University.

So, if you wanted to see a replay of this, go to [www.EconomicClub.org](http://www.EconomicClub.org), and you can watch a replay of this. And I also wanted to mention that we have had the Chicago and the New York Economic Clubs watching part of this as well. Members were eligible to do that. And we

also want to thank the diplomatic community for watching. I know they've been participating as well.

And let me conclude by saying that we hope you're getting some benefit out of these interviews. We hope we're giving you some information that you find useful. But we're always open to a suggestion of how we can improve these. So, if you have ideas about how we can get different guests, or ask different things, or make these even more useful to you, or interesting, please let us know. Obviously, Mary Brady can facilitate anything that you would like and can be somebody that can respond to your inquiries or information requests you might have.

So, let me just conclude here and say thank you for watching and thank you for participating. And for all of you who are members of The Economic Club of Washington, or New York, or Chicago, thank you very much for what you're doing in the cities in which you live. Thank you.



**The Honorable Muriel Bowser  
Mayor of the District of Columbia**

Muriel Bowser is committed to making sure every Washingtonian gets a fair shot in a growing and prosperous Washington, DC. Her administration is focused on making DC's prosperity more inclusive, advancing DC values, and building safer, stronger, and healthier neighborhoods across DC's eight wards.

Washington, DC is unique in the American political system – the mayor, DC's chief executive, functions as a governor, county executive, and mayor. Like governors, Mayor Bowser runs Medicaid, issues driver's licenses, and has tax authority. Like county executives, Mayor Bowser runs the local jail, and, unlike most mayors, also oversees the public school system. In 2020, Washington, DC is home to 705,000 people across 68 square miles, has a AAA bond rating, and an annual budget of more than \$15 billion.

On November 6, 2018, Muriel Bowser became the first woman ever re-elected as the Mayor of Washington, DC and the first mayor to earn a second term in 16 years. Since taking office, the Mayor has taken bold steps to reset DC's global and national competitiveness, speed up affordable housing production, diversify the DC economy, increase satisfaction in city services, and invest in programs and policies that allow more families to live and thrive in DC.

In the past five years, Mayor Bowser has:

- added more than 57,000 jobs, reduced unemployment by 28 percent, and increased DC Government's annual spending with local businesses by \$200 million;
- chaired the National League of Cities Task Force on Housing, doubled the District's annual investment in affordable housing, and set a bold goal to build 36,000 new homes by 2025;
- transformed DC's homeless services system, building small, service-enriched shelters across the city and bringing chronic homelessness to a 15-year low;
- championed a wide range of family-friendly policies, including: raising the minimum wage to \$15/hour, adding more than 1,000 new child care seats, and focusing the DC Government's attention on improving maternal health outcomes;
- delivered a new stadium for DC United (Major League Soccer) and a new arena for the Mystics (WNBA) that includes a practice facility for the Wizards (NBA);
- deployed the first major city body-worn camera program;
- collaborated with leaders from C40 cities around the world to advance the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement;
- led diplomatic and economic development missions to China, Cuba, Israel, Canada, El Salvador, and Ethiopia; and
- spearheaded the 2016 voter referendum on DC statehood, with more than 86 percent of voters approving of statehood.

Prior to becoming Mayor in 2015, Bowser served as the Ward 4 Councilmember on the Council of the District of Columbia – first elected in a special election in 2007 and re-elected in 2008 and 2012. As a Councilmember, she served as the Chairwoman of the Committee on Economic Development which created more than 5,000 units of affordable housing, passed legislation to build the new soccer stadium, and secured from the federal government the best portion of the Walter Reed campus for DC. She also led her colleagues to pass comprehensive ethics reform and increased transparency in government contracting.

Mayor Bowser earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in History from Chatham University and a Master's degree in Public Policy from American University and received honorary doctorates from Chatham University and Trinity University. With more than 20 years of experience in local government, she first entered elected office as an Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner in the Riggs Park neighborhood.



**H.E. Ashok Kumar Mirpuri**  
**Ambassador of Singapore to the United States**

Mr. Ashok Kumar Mirpuri took up his appointment as Singapore's Ambassador to the United States of America in July 2012. Prior to his current appointment, he served as Ambassador to Indonesia from 2006 to 2012, High Commissioner to Malaysia from 2002 to 2006 and High Commissioner to Australia from 2000 to 2002.

A career diplomat, Mr. Mirpuri joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in 1984. In 1994, he was appointed Director of MFA's Policy Planning & Analysis Directorate I (Southeast Asia). In 1997, Mr. Mirpuri was seconded to Shell International Ltd in the United Kingdom as Corporate Advisor (Asia Pacific). He was subsequently assigned to the Singapore Embassy in Jakarta in 1998 as Minister-Counsellor and Deputy Chief of Mission, having previously served in Jakarta as First Secretary (Political).

Mr. Mirpuri graduated with an honors degree from the National University of Singapore. He received his MA at the University of London's School of Oriental & African Studies under a Raffles Scholarship. He attended the Programme for Executive Development at the Institute for Management Development, Switzerland, and the Advanced Management Program at Harvard Business School, USA.



**Suzanne Clark**  
**President, U.S. Chamber of Commerce**

Suzanne Clark is President of the US Chamber of Commerce, the largest business federation in the world.

Ms. Clark focuses on strategy, government relations and market innovation working in support of its more than 3 million member companies internationally. She leads a wide range of policy and operational initiatives at the quarter billion dollar organization and was the first Senior Executive Vice President in the institution's 104-year history.

Prior to re-joining the US Chamber in 2014, where she had previously served as Chief Operating Officer, Clark acquired and led a prominent financial information

boutique – Potomac Research Group (PRG) – which was recognized by the *Inc500* as the 135th fastest growing private company in 2012. PRG became a brand leader in the field of policy research and analysis for institutional investors – connecting “Washington to Wall Street;” and, the firm was sold to a larger macro research organization where she is a non-executive partner. As a seasoned business owner, Ms. Clark remains passionate about the need to create an environment where companies can innovate, grow and flourish.

In 2007, Clark was named President of the National Journal Group (NJG), a premier provider of information, news and analysis for Washington’s political and policy communities. NJG is an arm of Atlantic Media Company, and for the next three years Clark led NJG’s 6 distinct print, online, and event businesses and guided an evolution from long form journalism to cutting edge digital and mobile media, with the result that her group produced record-level profits and received multiple journalism awards.

Clark sits on the Board of two public companies – AGCO, a *Fortune 500* global leader in the design, manufacture and distribution of agricultural equipment, and TransUnion, a provider of global risk and credit information. She is also a member of the Board of So Others Might Eat, serving the poor and homeless in the nation’s capital, and St. Patrick’s Episcopal Day School. She is the former President of the International Women’s Forum (Washington Chapter), a global group of leading women in business, law, government, technology and the arts. Clark was named one of *Washingtonian Magazine*’s “40 Under 40: Young Washingtonians to Watch,” and later, one of the magazine’s “100 Most Powerful Women in Washington.”

Ms. Clark earned a BA, *magna cum laude*, and an MBA from Georgetown University, and lives in Virginia with her husband and their daughter.

