

# McCormick Featured In Telephone Town Hall

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**Austin, TX – Senator Eddie Lucio** (D-Brownsville), recently hosted a telephone townhall for constituents of District 27. Dr. Joseph McCormick, former dean of the UT Health School of Public Health in Brownsville was featured in the Rio Grande Guardian.

## **Podcast: McCormick: It's like fighting a forest fire blindfold\***

BROWNSVILLE, Texas – Grappling with the current coronavirus pandemic is kind of like fighting a forest fire blindfold.

That is the view of Dr. Joseph B. McCormick, MD, MS, former regional dean of the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth) School of Public Health in Brownsville.

McCormick, a renowned epidemiologist, has battled epidemics in South America and Africa before. He said the current COVID-19 crisis is one of the worst epidemics he has witnessed.

“We are seeing one of the worst pandemics since the 1918 flu. I worked at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for over 20 years and investigated outbreaks from Brazil to the ebola outbreaks in west Africa and central Africa. But, this is one of the worst I have ever seen,” McCormick said.

McCormick noted that the United States is the richest country in the world and its population is only a quarter of the population of China.

“But, we have now surpassed China in the number of cases of this disease that we have. This virus is highly infectious and we don't have a vaccine, nor do we have treatment for this disease. We don't have adequate testing so that we know where the virus is and we are speculating on who might be infected. We are kind of fighting a forest fire blindfold.”

McCormick is now the James H. Steele Professor of Epidemiology at the University of Texas Houston School of Public Health. He made his comments during a virtual town hall meeting about the coronavirus hosted by state Sen. Eddie Lucio, Jr., of Brownsville.

In addition to Sen. Lucio, McCormick was joined at the virtual town hall meeting by Dr. James Castillo, II, MD, of Cameron County Public Health, Esmeralda Guajardo, health administrator for Cameron County Public Health, Dr. E. Linda Villarreal, MD, chair-elect of the Texas Medical Association, and Dr. John Hellerstedt, MD, commissioner of the Texas Department of State Health Services.

McCormick said he wanted to commend the leadership of Cameron County Public Health.

“I want to thank Esmeralda and her folks in Brownsville for their proactive efforts to create drive-thru screening and sheltering in place. These are extremely important procedures that will help to the spread of virus in our community,” McCormick said.

McCormick said the only prevention the U.S. has at present is for people to distance themselves and to maintain that “until the immune system of those who are infected eliminate the virus so they cannot transmit it.”

McCormick also praised health care workers.

“Our first responders and medical staff who show up to work, who are under-supplied but despite major risks to themselves and their families are depending on us to keep from being overwhelmed by dying people and becoming infected themselves.”

McCormick concluded his remarks by saying it is up each individual to help break the transmission of the coronavirus.

“Today, 51 physicians were among the over 900 dead in Italy. So our medical staff and first responders are definitely at risk. I cannot emphasize enough for all on this call to practice social distancing and sheltering in place over the next many weeks. It is the only choice we have for

breaking the transmission and for preserving the lives of our first responders, our families and our medical staff,” McCormick said.

Sen. Lucio said he hosted the telephone town hall so that the residents of South Texas could ask questions of leading public health and medical professionals. He said it was the first of its kind.

“There is a great need for factual, unbiased public health information. Unfortunately, at times there is half-information and ungrounded claims that circulate through social media and text messages,” Lucio said.

At times like this, Lucio said, the people of South Texas “deserve the truth from trustworthy sources.” He said he could not think of a better way to provide information than to hear it than directly from leading public health officials and respected medical professionals.

“Because your health and safety is my utmost priority, I am extremely thankful to the experts who made themselves available,” Lucio said.

Lucio said he was confident that by working together the people of the United States and the world can overcome the public health crisis.

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\* Munoz, Mario. “Podcast: McCormick: It’s like fighting a forest fire blindfold.” *Rio Grande Guardian*, 2 April 2020, <https://riograndeguardian.com/podcast-mccormick-its-like-fighting-a-forest-fire-blindfold/>