To the Editor:

The South Dakota Department of Health sent a press release on March 30 informing the public that 2 employees of the Saloon No. 10 had tested positive for COVID-19.

Out of 108 positive cases and rising, in South Dakota, the Saloon No. 10 is the only private, non-medical business to be specified to the media by the Department of Health. This has created an unnecessary additional hardship for our employees and their families. They are being discriminated against in their daily lives and harassed online, which is unacceptable. If this action was sincerely taken out of concern for public health, then we need to know where all other COVID positive cases work, and where they have been during the time they might have been contagious.

Besides that, I’d like to report that both of the Saloon 10 employees who contracted the virus are feeling better and on their way to a full recovery. Next, I feel it is essential that I set the record straight because when information is released as it was, it is natural for anyone and everyone to panic and jump to conclusions. We closed our card games on March 20 and then followed through and closed the Deadwood Social Club and the bar at 9pm on March 21. My entire staff of 104 employees have been in self quarantine to date and have now been instructed to remain in self quarantine through the April 4 for safety measures.

To further put a stop to rumors, on March 25, the City of Deadwood set the necessary steps into motion to close all non-essential businesses. There was no resistance. Many businesses had already closed, including the Saloon No. 10. The City of Deadwood and Deadwood businesses all understand how critical it is to stop the spread of the Coronavirus. Deadwood’s ordinance was implemented immediately on March 25 making it the first mandatory non-essential business closure in the Northern Black Hills and among the first in the state. Even before then, Deadwood cancelled all organized events for the annual St. Paddy’s celebration March 13 & 14.

To top it off, media reports on local television stations incorrectly reported the date that the Saloon No. 10 closed, claiming it was 9 days after we had actually closed. That just added fuel to the fire.

Until we see our Governor make decisions like Deadwood and surrounding communities in the Black Hills did, we will continue to send an invitation to every ignorant, naive individual that refuses to believe we are living in a serious Pandemic. Believe me, business throughout our State continues in bars and restaurants and other non-essential businesses, but only because the doors are open. My challenge to every non-essential South Dakota business is to close your doors. Believe it or not, your employees are frightened. They may not tell you but working the front line during a pandemic is horrifying. Your most treasured commodity should be your employees. Do it for them.

Everyone’s bottom line, including our State Government, should be to create a State that our residents are proud of and to be a state that people want to visit because we all did the right thing.

Louie Lalonde

Saloon No. 10, owner