

HEALTH CARE

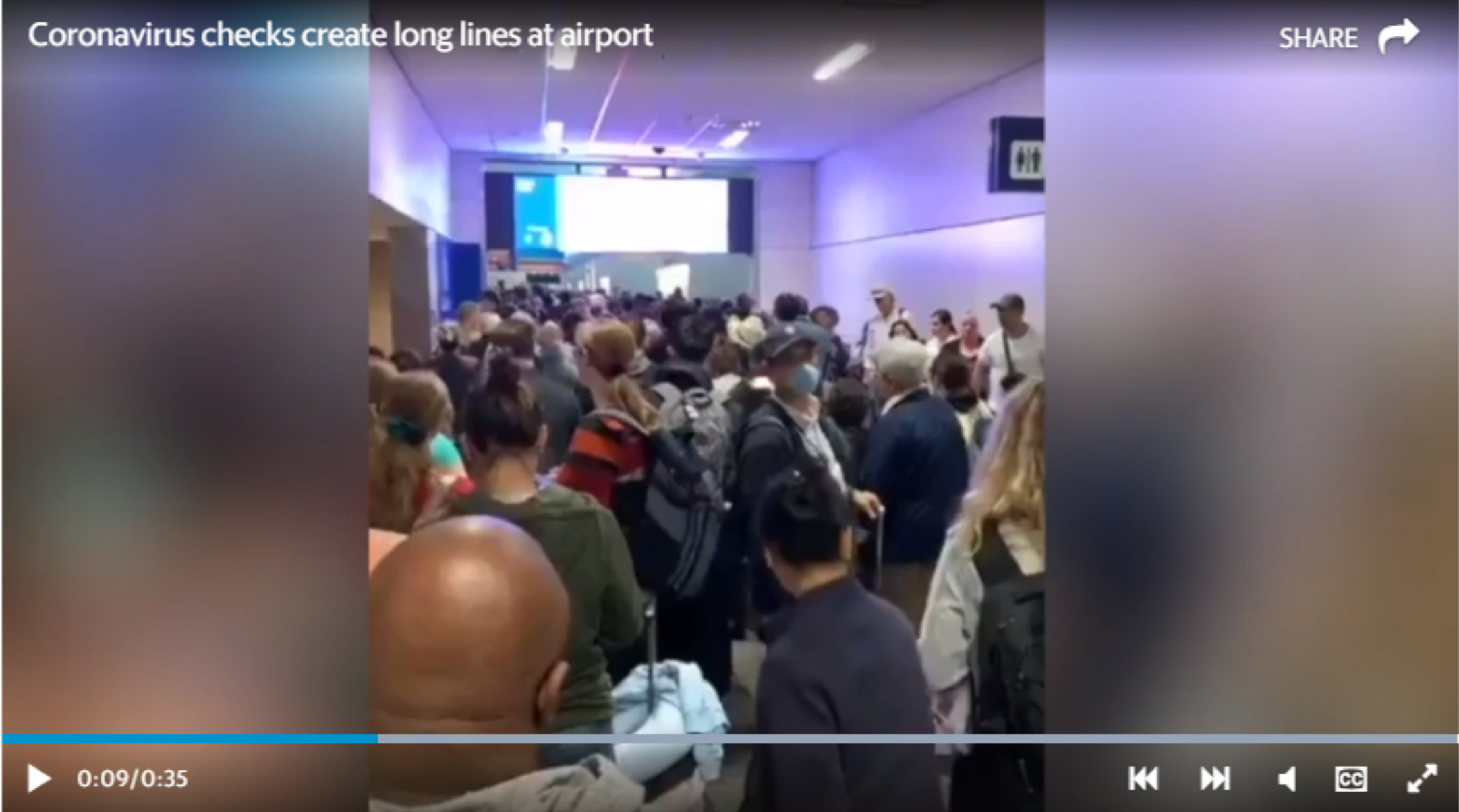
‘Things are not favorable for us.’ Hispanics more pessimistic amid coronavirus crisis.

BY BIANCA PADRÓ OCASIO

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Coronavirus checks create long lines at airport

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Passengers faced long waits at U.S. airports after they were subject to new “enhanced” screening measures for the coronavirus after returning from Europe. BY EZEQUIEL CONTRERAS VIA STORYFUL

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hundreds of others in Hialeah to get a state unemployment form. After he was laid off and lost his benefits as a ramp worker at Miami International Airport on March 18, he moved in with his parents and sister to save on rent. He has applied for food stamps, too.

Still, he estimates he can only survive one more month on his current savings.

“Things are not favorable for us. I can maybe keep going for about a month,” said Palma, a 41-year-old from Nicaragua who worked for Eulen America, a Spain-based company that employs outsourced workers for airlines and airports. “I’m really scared... I have nothing. My company didn’t give me benefits or anything.”

Palma, like many Latinos working in service industry jobs around the country, fears being disproportionately affected by the coronavirus crisis. While unemployment rates among Latinos were set to hit near-record lows in 2019, two new studies say Hispanics in the U.S. are more pessimistic about the future impact of the COVID-19 economic recession on their health and finances than the overall U.S. population.

According to a recent survey of 8,914 Latinos by the Pew Research Center, 50% of Hispanics said they see the outbreak as a major threat to their own personal financial situation, compared to 34% of the U.S. overall. And when it comes to health, 65% of Hispanics said they believe coronavirus is a major threat, compared to 47% of the overall population.

Latinos are over-represented in hospitality, leisure and service industry jobs, which experts say have been among the hardest-hit areas of employment in the pandemic, with no clear end in sight.

A new survey by the Florida Atlantic University’s Business and Economics Polling Initiative showed a dramatic drop in the Hispanic Index of Consumer Sentiment when compared to the last quarter of 2019, meaning most Latinos now have significantly less confidence in the country’s economic conditions.

While 65% of those surveyed said at the end of 2019 that they thought the U.S. economy would be strong in the next year, only 34% said the same in the first three months of 2020. And while 73% of those surveyed said in late 2019 that their financial situation would improve in the coming year, in 2020, only 58% said so.

“Why I think we are seeing a huge drop is because we never had the shock of a pandemic, something that affects the health of individuals,” said Monica Escalera, professor of Economics at FAU. “Even if consumers want to buy, we cannot buy.”

Despite this grim outlook, the FAU poll, which surveyed 741 Latinos nationwide, showed President Donald Trump’s approval rating among Hispanics had a slight, 2 point increase in the first three months of 2020, from 42% to 44%. Though the survey was taken in the first months of the pandemic’s spread through the U.S., Escalera said it would be interesting to see how Latinos continue to feel about their role in the economy.

“The first stress was the health issue. Now people are fearing about their jobs,” Escalera said.

Denia Fernandez, 52, is one of few airport workers to still be employed. She’s been working for HMS Host as a fast-food server for 21 years at a Burger King in Concourse E. Her hours have been cut to less than 30 a week. Some days, she doesn’t work more than four hours.

“No one has anything saved up for rent. Here in Miami, people live paycheck to paycheck. There’s people who have two jobs and they’ve been laid off from both jobs,” Fernandez said. “Even if it’s making hamburgers, our labor is important because we’re making sure this country keeps moving forward.”



Hispanics are more concerned about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on their personal health and finances than the overall U.S. population, according to recent surveys. PEDRO PORTAL PPORTAL@MIAMIHERALD.COM

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