

COVID 19: The Big “If”

by Phillip W. Weiss

To gain the cooperation of the people in the effort to manage the COVID-19 virus, the people must believe that the virus poses a clear and present threat to their survival. According to the news media, also known as FAKE NEWS due to the media’s propensity to exaggerate, distort, misrepresent, and fabricate news in order to promote a political agenda, the COVID-19 does pose a threat and that threat is real. How truthful is that message? Or is it politically driven hyperbole meant to deliberately instill and spread fear?

Regardless of the media’s motivations, some people are rejecting the media’s message of gloom and doom. Meanwhile other people have bought it. They DO believe the media’s message that the threat is real and that therefore the policy of containing the virus through a lockdown of the economy is necessary. To them, the media’s alarmist reporting is not fake news, it is REAL news.

What is not fake is the toll that the lockdown is having on the economic activity. That is obvious to all. Stores are closed, streets are empty (except for the presence of the homeless who apparently have a pass to ignore official directives), jobs have been lost, and consumption curtailed. These are incontrovertible facts.

According to the media, as reported to them by the government, because of the economic shutdown, over thirty million people are unemployed. Thirty million people who, again according to the media, had jobs that were considered

unessential and therefore expendable. On this fact there is no argument or debate. No one disputes that number.

Nevertheless, for many, the massive economic losses sustained thus far is worth the price in order to stop the virus from spreading and save lives. To date, according to the media, the COVID-19 virus has killed over seventy thousand in the United States. Yet, despite that daunting number, others continue to believe that the main threat is not the COVID-19 virus but the lockdown which has totally disrupted their lives.

The media wants the public to believe that the threat to humanity posed by the COVID-19 virus is real. But to believe the media requires that there be faith in the credibility of the messenger, which, in the case of the news media that has time and again proven itself unworthy of trust, is asking a lot. No knowledgeable person can ever forget how the media botched its now infamous prognostications for the 2016 presidential election. Now the same media is reporting that there is a microscopic organism out there that can kill.

In response to the media's morbid message, two camps have emerged: the believers and non-disbelievers. The believers are pro-lockdown and equated with the left-wing while disbelievers are anti-lockdown and equated with the right-wing. Each group is accusing the other of using the crisis to promote their respective ideological agendas. That the response to the crisis is now being framed along ideological lines does not bode well for efforts to arrive at a political consensus regarding the best way to manage the COVID-19 crisis.

What the nation needs is unity; instead, what the nation has is political rancor as both factions, driven by ideological considerations, attempt to use the crisis to gain political advantage. This self-serving political maneuvering distorts efforts to formulate policy and weakens the nation.

There are few aspects of social conduct that poses a more insidious threat to the effective governance of a nation than partisan politics. Elected officials routinely deny accusations of being partisan. They always insist that they have the interest of the entire community in mind when promoting a legislative agenda. Those comments are disingenuous and self-serving. Ideology and politics are inexorably intertwined.

There is no way that any politician can avoid being partisan. Consensus politics does not win elections, appealing to specific constituencies at the expense of others does. Hence, the political process is divisive. That produces political bickering, infighting, posturing and showboating, all of which weakens efforts to control the COVID-19 virus.

Nevertheless, despite the divisive nature of the political process, we, by which is meant the American people, will beat the virus. We cannot afford to fail. We have triumphed over other existential threats in the past – war, economic collapse, and social unrest – and will succeed in transcending the political bickering and overcome this crisis too, if we want to. That is a big if.

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