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Pandemic During a Presidential Campaign: It's a Perfect Storm

By Steve Bakke  March 27, 2020



We're in the middle of a highly charged 2020 presidential campaign and along comes the coronavirus health crisis. The idea of a "perfect storm" conveys a confluence of events and conditions which combine to become a powerful and dangerous situation. Our politics and the very real coronavirus threat are combining into a very real societal perfect storm.

It started on December 31, 2019. The world was alerted to the pneumonia-like COVID-19, but too much was going on for us to take much notice. In early January the CDC issued a travel notice for Wuhan, China, and on January 31 Trump declared a public health emergency and banned travel to and from China. The intrepid campaigner Joe Biden wasted no time before calling the President's response "hysterical xenophobia," and "fear-mongering." This early political maneuvering added an early layer of energy to the developing "perfect storm."

The impeachment proceedings left no room in the newsrooms, nor in our collective consciousness, to be on top of Trump's dealings on the healthcare front. And Congress was too taken up with the impeachment proceedings to really be diligent about what was going on in Wuhan, China. Trump was acquitted on February 5th and gradually we let ourselves become aware of something dangerous happening, as the storm quietly gained momentum.

During February, Democrats accelerated charging Trump with racism, xenophobia, fumbling the virus situation, and failing as president. In March, the economic shut-down, and the ensuing tanking of the stock market really got our attention. A few days ago, we were close to bi-partisan agreement on financial relief legislation when democrat leadership shouted "STOP"! We began to understand that partisan politics ruled the day when House Majority Whip James Clyburn (D-SC) told Democrats: "This is a tremendous opportunity to restructure things to fit our vision." You could feel the growing intensity of the gathering storm. Thankfully, it appears historic financial relief legislation will finally get done.

Other elements adding to this storm continue to pile on. Consider the following:

- Border control, a political hot potato, is important for stopping the spreading virus.
- After using the "China virus" tag for weeks, the mainstream press decided to stop and accuse Trump of racism for doing the same thing.
- Federal and state governments jockeyed for position on advancing a solution and are blaming one another for advancing the problem.

- Democrats falsely accused Trump of calling COVID-19 a hoax.
- We're becoming aware of our country's alarming reliance on China for pharmaceuticals.
- It's becoming apparent that the push, during recent decades, for high density housing and mass transportation, increases the contagion of viruses.
- ACLU is pushing for mass release of prisoners, for their own protection.
- Hatred of Trump by his opposition does battle with his outrageous and hyperbolic, style.

These elements build and feed on each other, and we all react in different, sometimes unusual ways. While paging through a newspaper, I came across an ominous photo coming out of Afghanistan. There was a picture of two masked men, one standing rigidly as the other held a gun to the obviously nervous fellow's head. I got a sinking feeling when I saw this obvious Islamist execution. Then I read the caption. It was an Afghan health official taking a citizen's temperature. The "gun" was a temperature scanner device. We see things through our own filters, and things aren't necessarily as they first appear.

For many of us, this crisis brings us face to face with our mortality, and we're learning how much we hold life near and dear. People do unexpected things to provide comfort and safety for themselves and loved ones. You've certainly heard the term, "grasping for straws." That's what people are doing. In this case it's toilet paper and hand sanitizer, not "straws." I think I'm finally understanding this human reflex. Comfort is found in unexpected places. Humans want to have some sense of control, and to feel like they are contributing to their own safety and comfort.

In closing, I'll quote from an editorial letter in the March 24th Waterloo, Iowa Courier: "To those who are filled with hate, please isolate yourselves so you don't infect others. Find the cure and join the rest in love and hope!"