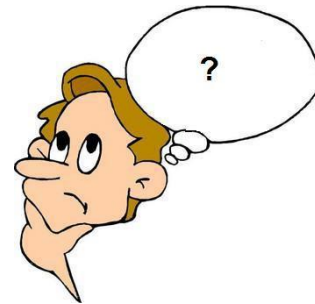


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Let's pause to think about some things

By Steve Bakke  April 17, 2020



Why has so much of the political discussion boiled down to hostile questions and answers at press-conferences and in political analyses on tv, radio, in print and on the internet? We really shouldn't be surprised. We've had almost two decades of "derangement syndromes" focused on our presidents. The ability of politicians to come together in bipartisan cooperation ended sometime after 9/11.

Our frames of reference have changed, so let's think about new questions we've been asking. I'm not going to deal with the "big 3" most common topics. Those are: number of diagnoses, number of deaths, and "how long until the economy is open, and I get to work?"

Let's think about drug development and approval protocol. It occurs to me that our process is set up for the slow and deliberate process for non-crises times, and that may be fine. But as we learn about the process for developing and approving an eventual vaccine, which is the only answer for getting totally back to "normal," we should ask, "why does the peacetime protocol have to apply?" Perhaps there's a good reason, but my money is on our ability to do things differently, more quickly, and effectively in this emergency.

On a very much related topic, we've heard about the potential of using existing drugs to fight COVID-19. There's a natural reluctance to rushing into doing that. That's fine for "peacetime," but with known levels of complications and toxicity for these drugs, and since there was considerable anecdotal success, it seems to me we should have loosened up on normal protocol during this crisis. I think we are now seeing that happen, but we didn't get there automatically. Our President had to push hard for it, and he's receiving significant push-back from his political opposition.

For me it's been a revelation as to the lack of U.S. self-sufficiency in terms of markets for critical medical equipment and supplies. Here's what China has been supplying the U.S. in large numbers and proportions of our total requirements: medical devices, medical face masks, protective clothing, penicillin, aspirin, acetaminophen, prescription drug ingredients, and certain vitamins. China is now second only to Canada in terms of exporting drugs and biologics to the United States. And it is a dominant provider of generic drugs. Add to that rare-earth metals used in technology production. I won't even list the household supplies, appliances and hardware coming from China. Their leverage over us is huge. That must be reversed.

We're observing how much value people put on their lifestyle, and also on their very existence – their lives. And right now, we're all "employed" full-time in the defense of human life – ours, and others. I'm hoping some of that will spill over into peacetime, and influence all of us to understand better the need to discuss the very definition of life – not only as it relates to social justice and that type of thing, but also as it relates to the question most Americans want resolved – the issue of the "right-to-life."

At some point we need to address the following:

- Should urban areas re-think some of their plans for high density living and metro transportation. Viruses spread more easily in those environments.
- Should we go back to allowing use of plastic bags in the retail setting? We have almost totally transitioned to cloth or reusable plastic bags. We now know those are an easy way for viruses to spread.
- Does mass inoculation of prophylactic medicine and vaccines require rethinking "patent law protection" during crises?
- What will be the impact on future policies about border control and border walls?
- It appears that we won't fully understand, during this crisis, exactly the true value and proper use of face masks.

Quoting Ross Douthat in the New York Times, "Neither Fauci nor any official institution can answer all these questions. We'll have to answer them one experiment at a time." There are many things we don't have the answers to, but we'll use the power of incentives in our free enterprise economic system to advance solutions on many fronts.