

A Deadly Virus Infects Presidential Politics

The coronavirus has infected people on every continent except Antarctica. It has spread to more than 100 countries. As I write this about 109,000 people have been infected. More than 3,800 have died.

More than 535 cases have been reported in the United States so far and at least 21 people have died. By the time you read this, those numbers will be higher.

In some cases, authorities have no idea how the people got infected. And more cases of unknown origin are expected.

“If we were worried yesterday, we are even more worried today,” Dr. William Schaffner, an infectious disease specialist at Vanderbilt University Medical Center told the New York Times. “Now we have to ask: How widely, really widely, is this virus out there?”

It’s an important question. And the honest answer is ... nobody really knows. But Dr. Scott Gottlieb, the Food and Drug Administration commissioner during the first two years of the Trump administration, says “We’re past the point of containment.”

Right now, people here in the United States, and every place else, are walking around already infected and don’t know it. And they’re spreading the virus.

And since everything is infected by partisan politics these days, there also will be political casualties from the coronavirus. Democrats and their media allies, who blame President Trump for just about everything anyway, are already blaming him for not doing enough to protect Americans from the virus.

It's a safe bet that partisans won't suddenly cross the bridge that divides us and come together – even over a crisis like this; they'll use the virus to their political advantage – or at least try.

And if the virus continues spreading throughout America, if our way of life is put on hold and disrupted, Donald Trump won't be immune from its effects.

It's no secret that the president wants to run for re-election on a strong economy that he has presided over. But if the coronavirus hits us hard, the economy also will be hit hard.

People are already cutting down on travel and eating in restaurants. Some are working from home. As the virus spreads, they'll shop less. They won't go to sporting events. They'll stop going to concerts or movies. They'll stay home and quarantine themselves. And when people stop going out and spending money, the economy, which runs on consumer confidence, will tank.

The president also expected to run on a booming stock market, for which he often takes credit. That may not be easy since the virus has made the stock market look like a roller coaster – up a thousand points one day, down a thousand the next. It's gut wrenching. Since the virus hit, the U.S. markets have lost more than they've gained. A lot more!

He rightfully boasts about how millions of Americans have found jobs since he became president. How unemployment is at historic lows. If the virus slams the economy, it'll also slam jobs. A lot of Americans will lose theirs.

Recession is not out of the question.

Only two incumbent presidents in the modern era have lost re-election: Democrat Jimmy Carter and Republican George H.W. Bush. Both presided over a weak economy.

Donald Trump could help himself by showing presidential leadership. Whether he's doing enough to combat the virus largely depends on what side of the partisan line you're on.

A crisis might encourage a change in the way the president normally behaves. If the virus hits us hard, we'll find out if there's another more substantial Donald Trump hiding inside the impulsive tweeter who likes to humiliate his detractors. He'll need to tell the truth about the virus and not sugarcoat or downplay bad news. He'll need to get his facts straight for a change and actually know what he's talking about. His future may depend on all of that.

Early on President Trump told us that, "The risk to the American people remains very low." That may have been nothing more than wishful thinking, but let's hope he's right. A lot is riding on that optimistic observation – including the president's own political health.