

Biden Won't Let This Crisis Go to Waste – and Guess Who Else Won't

It's no secret that the 2020 presidential election will be a referendum on how President Trump has handled the pandemic that has put millions of Americans out of work and sent tens of thousands to the hospital – or to the morgue.

And with the election just a little over six months away, neither side is giving an inch: The president won't take responsibility for anything that's gone wrong and Democrats won't give him credit for anything that's gone right.

Running for reelection during a worldwide pandemic and a possible recession, or maybe even a depression, isn't what Donald Trump had in mind just a few months ago when the economy was strong and no one ever heard of COVID-19.

But harsh reality has a way of putting things into focus. So now both Donald Trump and Joe Biden are reminded that American history is strewn with the political corpses of presidents who were at the helm during times of crisis.

There's Herbert Hoover and the Great Depression. And Lyndon Johnson and the Vietnam War. And Jimmy Carter and those Americans held hostage in Iran.

And now there's Donald Trump and the coronavirus.

Just last Saturday, at his daily TV briefing on the virus, the president said he was the “king of ventilators,” that he inherited “broken junk,” that “we inherited a terrible broken system,” that when he came into office, “the cupboard was bare,” that “we started with garbage,” and of course, as is this president's standard reply to just about everything,

“We’ve done a fantastic job.”

The Democrats meanwhile, whose political instincts tell them to never let a crisis go to waste, can’t open their mouths without pointing out every Trump misstep – perceived or real. Nancy Pelosi even dredged up the ghost of Nero, the Roman Emperor, telling CNN that, “As the president fiddles, people are dying.”

No one knows at this point if the virus will claim Donald Trump as a political casualty, but there is something about this president that we do know. He’s got an uncanny ability to dodge bullets. He has survived more than a few crises that might have brought him down – but didn’t.

When he was running he said John McCain was “not a war hero.” He publicly mocked the looks of a woman running against him. At a rally he pretended to shake uncontrollably to make fun of a reporter who had a severe physical disability. He was caught on tape saying he could sexually grab women because, as he put it, “when you’re a star they let you do it.” He survived (false) accusations that he was working with the Russians to throw the 2016 election. And when Democrats tried to hang impeachment around his neck, he escaped the noose.

This is a president who has gotten out of more tight spots than Harry Houdini. The “invisible enemy” is just his latest challenge.

Neither he nor Joe Biden will be hitting the campaign trail anytime soon – at least not in the usual way. But unlike Biden, who is holed up at his house in Delaware, the president is on TV every day at those briefings, which have taken the place of his campaign rallies.

And at one point, to prove how powerful he alone is, he said as president, he “calls the shots,” that his “authority is total” and that states “can’t do anything without the approval of the president.”

Just one day later, he walked back the ridiculous bravado, acknowledging that it's up to 50 governors to decide when to loosen restrictions on the movement of their citizens and open up their economies.

Still, while Biden, like most Americans, remains under "house arrest," the president is out there on national television telling voters that without him, without his supposedly decisive leadership, millions of Americans would die. If significantly fewer die, Mr. Trump will claim credit. That's the good news for the president.

The bad news is the show is getting old. I think a lot of people tune in, not so much for the information about the virus, but to watch the fights between him and the press. But even that might be getting tedious.

His approval numbers, as outlined by Real Clear Politics, have dipped from late last month when most Americans approved of his handling of the crisis, 50.6 percent to 44.9 percent disapproval – to the most recent numbers, which give him a 47 percent approval rating and 50.7 percent disapproval.

And what if TV images of long lines at food banks don't go away as we approach November? What if the virus is still wreaking havoc and unemployment is still rising? If we're still miserable come November 3, are voters really going to blame Joe Biden?

Maybe not, but nothing has brought down Donald Trump yet. Not impeachment, not chronic dishonesty, not needless nastiness, and not unseemly bragging about what a fantastic job he's doing to keep Americans safe from the ravages of the coronavirus.

Joe Biden will continue to hammer the president, saying he's been "behind the curve" from the beginning, that he should "step up and do [his] job." Nancy Pelosi will continue to call him a "weak leader."

Rest assured that Democrats won't let this crisis go to waste. And there's one more thing we can be sure of: neither will Donald Trump.