



COLUMNIST

A Trump Defeat can be Tracked to a Single Failure

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Should President Trump be denied a second term as appears likely at this point, post-election analysts in the media and political world will sort through the Election Day rubble to explain how and why Trump became the third incumbent chief executive since 1980 to fail to secure a second term.

For the millions of Americans whose lives don't revolve around receiving a paycheck for appearing on television roundtables to offer sage and learned insight, the lesson of the president's defeat doesn't require a great deal of analysis or ivory tower reflection.

The Administration's chaotic, incoherent, logic-defying response to the most serious and deadly public health crisis to befall the country in a century will have driven the president from office.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck the nation in March, the Administration embarked on the worst direction since the Egyptian army decided to take a shortcut across the Red Sea.

Even as public health experts raised alarms, the president dismissed the virus as no worse than seasonal flu, followed by his assurances that it would run its course by the time warmer weather arrived and there was no need to take protective steps.

Granted, many others besides the president initially misread the potential impact of the pathogen and were late in reacting as its severity became more apparent.

It was Trump, though, who doggedly stuck to his view that the threat was minimal and temporary, sprinkling his comments and tweets with assurances that a vaccine was imminent, that the country had turned the corner, and that his Administration had done an exemplary job in combatting the pandemic.

He insisted that businesses and schools could and should be re-opened and routine life resumed.

It was all at striking odds with the real life experience of a fearful populace: more than eight million people infected, approaching a quarter million dead and predictions of an even greater toll.

Trump in the meantime ridiculed his Administration's public health and infectious disease experts, rejecting their advice and refusing to heed their warnings.

He promoted unproven treatments and scorned those who wore protective masks in public, suggesting they were cowards and weaklings.

Even after he and his wife were infected, he told the American people there was nothing to be afraid of and they should not allow the illness to dominate their lives.

At a crucial time when the nation looked to him for leadership, his actions were an incredible denial of reality. Americans saw family members, relatives, friends and co-workers fall victim to the virus while their president insisted there was nothing to worry about.

Parents were concerned about their children, fearful that despite the younger population's greater resistance to the virus, they were not immortal. The death of a child was too painful to contemplate and they wanted some assurance, some hope that governmental leaders were bringing every resource available and enlisting every expert to protect them.

Instead, Trump embraced a theory promoted by a neuroradiologist with no background or expertise in infectious diseases that those most at risk – the elderly and those with underlying medical conditions – be isolated and protected while the remainder of the population be exposed, infected and treated, providing what is termed "herd immunity."

The theory holds that given sufficient time susceptibility will vanish and the virus will simply die off from a lack of victims.

It is a stunning approach, bordering on official criminal negligence – Darwinism run amok. Experts warn that potentially hundreds of thousands would die needlessly, sacrificed in service of a cockeyed unproven theory that more properly belongs in a science fiction film.

The Administration handling of the pandemic has been abysmal – lethally abysmal – ranging from denial to outright falsehoods and wacky conspiracy theories.

To be sure, the president and the nation confronted an unprecedented crisis for which there was no history or experience to guide a response.

It is, though, precisely in times like this that leaders lead, that strong personalities step forward, provide an aura of calm and competence, and reassure people that their safety and protection is paramount.

Instead, Trump has produced uproar and anger, confusion and uncertainty, indifference and negligence.

Should the Trump campaign fail in another two weeks, Americans will be subjected to an endless, repetitive narrative of his shortcomings in virtually every area of governance – foreign and domestic – exacerbated by a personality and style that is destructive rather than constructive.

His defeat, though, will be a direct and irrefutable result of an historic and abject failure to fulfill the most fundamental obligation of a president – assuring the safety and well-being of the people.

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