

On Coronavirus, Trump Takes Charge

The president fends off ankle-biting Democrats in Congress and the media.

by Conrad Black



Even in such a worrisome and dangerous time as the current public-health and economic crisis, there are some entertaining election-year maneuvers. The Trump-hating media have been reduced to desperate weaving back and forth in their search for a plausible alternative to the incumbent. And President Trump's domination of prime-time television every day with a demonstrably competent executive performance, even if it has not been without its Trumpesque flourishes of hyperbole and shifts of position, is propelling the practicing, wildly-out-of-the-closet Democrats such as Nancy Pelosi to severe lapses of judgment. I don't watch much television, but out of duty and in order to make an informed comment when necessary, I do a reasonable survey of the television, Internet, and national

print news. Striding to the front of a dense congestion of thundering hooves as the media charge to the November election finish in their competition to smear the president, Lawrence O'Donnell of MSNBC told his viewers last week that the president had said that if the country wasn't on its way back to work and school by Easter Sunday, it would be "dead." By this alarmist proposition, he apparently meant that the president had said that the whole country would be on suicide watch. The president was always clear that April 12 (Easter) was "aspirational," and all he said about suicide was that financial difficulties do increase the probability of extremely depressive and hopeless thoughts.

When the president was assuring everyone that the danger was overrated, the media magnified terror stories of the spread and possible lethality of the coronavirus. The usual opinionated talking (air) heads empurpled the airwaves with gloom and accused Trump of disregarding and scoffing at scientists, and of being a militant know-nothing who disparaged science in general. When the president executed a 180-degree turn on two wheels, they tried to shadow him by swarming the television studios and op-ed pages predicting six- to seven-month shutdowns that would bring the entire population except Bernie Sanders's "millionaires and billionaires" (such as, in the first category, Bernie Sanders) forward to feast off the destruction of the wealth of the middle and working classes. When Trump appeared to be impudently dodging that bullet by saying that the shutdown was necessary but need not be prolonged, this was the signal for former Labor secretary Robert Reich, former Treasury secretary Larry Summers, and the lamest duck in American history, New York mayor Bill de Blasio, none of whom knows enough about epidemiology to fill an eye-dropper, bravely to prepare the nation for six or seven months of quarantine, and, implicitly, grinding poverty and societal chaos. In de Blasio's case, this descent to an economic Stone Age was to be supervised by the armed forces, though what their role, apart from contracting

the coronavirus themselves, was to be has not yet been explained.

The president has trimmed his sails again and extended the present lockdown conditions to at least April 30. He appears daily with Dr. Deborah Birx and Dr. Anthony Fauci, renowned authorities in this field, squashing all the nonsense about disagreements between them and Trump's animosity to science, and in the latest attempt to mobilize the moral outrage that his enemies consider must be in a constantly febrile state, they have accused the president of changing his mind. No one can claim that he has not assembled, with the vice president, an outstanding task force; no one can say he has not been guided by its counsel. No one can say he has not moved swiftly and decisively to increase testing ability, distribute possible ameliorative medication, raise the country's supply of ventilators and distribute them fairly, and increase hospital capacity. And with a six-trillion-dollar financial-assistance and liquidity-assurance plan, he has responded and led effectively in a way no one can dispute.

But the most unmistakable sign of the Democrats' desperation was House speaker Nancy Pelosi's appearance on CNN on Sunday, in which she announced that the administration's delay in recognizing and addressing the coronavirus crisis would have to be "investigated." The president's polls have risen steadily, and all polls show public appreciation of his leadership in the crisis, yet the speaker not only demurs, but flops backwards into the Democrats' helpless addiction to trying to criminalize policy differences and personal antipathy towards Trump. The country awaits the results of the Durham special-counsel investigation of the origins of the Russian-collusion fraud by which Trump was belabored for over two years, and it was on Pelosi's miraculous conversion to the agitations of her extreme leftist House of Representatives colleagues that the most spurious impeachment attempt in the country's history was limply played out. (None of the previous

three – Andrew Johnson, Richard Nixon, and Bill Clinton – was justified, but the Trump impeachment was unfounded and unconstitutional, a disgrace and a mockery from A to Z.) Speaker Pelosi is technically the highest-ranking Democratic office-holder, though in protocol terms she would rank behind former presidents Carter, Clinton, and Obama, and if she is reaching for an investigation, like a drunk in the extremity of alcoholism reaching for the bottle, the Democrats really are gasping, biting the carpet, and scratching the walls.

The Trump-hating media have, successively, accused Trump of calling the coronavirus a “hoax,” when in fact he used that term to describe criticism of his response to the pandemic (*Politico*), and falsely claimed that the U.S. resisted purchasing test kits from the World Health Organization (NBC, CNN, NPR). The *Washington Post* published an op-ed that falsely accused the president of having closed the White House pandemic office, and this was taken up; MSNBC suggested Trump is guilty of homicidal negligence because of his handling of the issue; the media generally accused him of calling the coronavirus “the China virus” for racist reasons; MSNBC’s Joe Scarborough and Rachel Maddow and others have advocated not covering Trump’s daily press briefings; ABC accused him of causing the death of a man who self-medicated with something purported to be chloroquine (which Trump has suggested, with professional concurrence, could be potentially beneficial) that was in fact fish-tank cleaner.

At his press briefings, about a third of the journalists routinely arraign the president for his alleged previous utterances, attempt to mousetrap him, debate with him, and imply that he is distributing more aid to states that have voted for him than to others. Never in my time of watching these press encounters with the president, going back to the Eisenhower era, has there been such a blatant attempt to provoke the president to immoderate responses, or a more sustained effort to misrepresent what he says and does. The

fact that it is finally blowing up in their faces must aggravate the frustration and the rage of the anti-Trump media beyond imagination. They are grossly demeaning the status of the free press, which is dangerous for any democracy; none of their bullets now wounds the target.

As the president rises in the polls, meets the crisis, and walks the line between an over-hasty lifting of the shutdown and a rigid posture that would invite fearmongering about the enforced reduction of commercial activity continuing into the autumn, the Democrats have to face the implications of their position as, in their favorite phrase, "the walls close in." Trump gets the credit for acting promptly opposite China (for which he was reviled by officeholding and media Democrats as a "racist" and "xenophobe"), for launching a skillful containment of the coronavirus, for producing a mighty financial-assistance package, and for maintaining hope for a reasonably timely reopening, and the Democrats are reduced to trying to hide their presumptive candidate. Joe Biden cannot opine coherently on public-policy issues and seems like someone running for a position as a rural public-health commissioner, demanding a voice for the elderly, not as the 44th direct successor to George Washington. No civilized person takes pleasure in a man's serial embarrassment, but those who drafted Joe Biden for this role cannot possibly imagine that he can do more than spare the Democrats the utter annihilation they would suffer if they nominated Bernie Sanders.

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