

OUR VIEW

Virus has us in uncharted territory

There has been a whirlwind of dramatic developments this week at every level to curtail the spread of COVID-19, or coronavirus.

The World Health Organization reported the number of cases of COVID-19 outside of China increased 13 fold in two weeks. As of Wednesday, there were more than 118,000 cases in 114 countries and 4,291 people had died from the disease with thousands more hospitalized.

The NBA suspended its season. The NHL followed suit. Universities, athletic conferences and the NCAA canceled games. NASCAR banned fans from races. The MLB is delaying opening its season. Movie studios are delaying the release of blockbusters.

President Donald Trump announced a travel ban to the U.S. from Europe. Thursday morning, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown banned large gatherings in the state. Major universities shifted to remote classes for 80,000 students.

Local and regional organizations canceled events, including the Grande Ronde Hospital Foundation’s annual gala. The newspaper is compiling a list.

Thursday night, Brown shut down Oregon’s K-12 schools for two weeks beginning Monday.

Is all this an overreaction?

Not even the bravest of keyboard warriors on social media can say with certainty. We are in uncharted territory. Officials, however, appear to be acting with an abundance of caution. They can look to Philadelphia for the dark possibilities of what could happen.

Philadelphia on Sept. 28, 1918, held a massive parade to promote Liberty Loans, the federal bonds to pay for World War I. By then, the Spanish flu — a misnomer — was nearing the end of its deadly second wave. As Smithsonian Magazine described the scene, “some 200,000 people jammed Broad Street, cheering wildly as the line of marchers stretched for two miles.”

The throng and the City of Brotherly Love would pay a terrible price for the display.

Within three days of the parade, the sick filled every bed in Philadelphia’s 31 hospitals. By the end of the week of Oct. 5, 2,600 people in the city died from the flu or its complications. The next week, the death toll neared 4,600.

No one is comparing COVID-19 to the lethal flu of 1918 that killed as many as 50 million people worldwide. We can all have a good laugh about panic buying of toilet paper, but there is plenty of sobering news. The WHO declared COVID-19 a “global pandemic.”

That’s not a hoax or a partisan political conspiracy. It is real. Not allowing large gatherings to prevent a new disease from running through a community is hard to argue against in the face of the facts.

As of midweek, Oregon recorded 21 presumptive and confirmed cases. State health officials Thursday morning warned Oregon likely has somewhere between 150 and 200 cases. Closer to home, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confirmed Umatilla County’s first case of COVID-19 and officials identified a second presumptive case.

The precautions protect the most vulnerable among us — the elderly and those already suffering from underlying health conditions. “Social distancing” prevents some people from getting the virus and helps spread out serious case over time, preventing a spike from overwhelming medical resources.

Ultimately, we are all responsible for our own health and well-being. And we have a social obligation not to make a bad situation worse.



MY VOICE

Who offers the Rx for troubled times?

Aworsening coronavirus outbreak could injure President Donald Trump’s reelection prospects, although no reasonable American would hope for a medical crisis to tip an election. But what about Democrats? How might a pandemic affect their nomination contest?

A spiraling health emergency would create a dramatic shift, thrusting two candidates to the forefront: former Vice President Joe Biden and Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar. Klobuchar, who dropped out Monday, would make an ideal running mate for Biden under the circumstances.

Imagine a scenario in which Americans stay home, supplies run short, businesses suffer, schools close. It’s an awful prospect, one that would profoundly alter the public’s priorities. Voters would gravitate to the man who comforts like a wise old uncle, and the woman who favors compromise and comes across as a loving mom.

When asked about coronavirus at a CNN town hall, Biden was at his best, explaining in detail how he and the Obama Administration dealt with Ebola.

Regarding the current crisis, he said, “We need to invest immediately. We should have done it from the beginning, the moment the virus appeared. But we’re getting late, but we’ve got good scientists. And I just hope the president gets on the same page as the scientists.”

A health emergency underscores the need for a president who speaks the truth. Americans won’t expect their president to know everything about the science; they’ll prefer to hear that from scientists. But they

About the Author



Peter Funt is a writer and speaker. His book, “Cautiously Optimistic” is available at Amazon.com and Candid-Camera.com.

will want someone who is consistently honest and excels in comforting those who are suffering.

At just about every campaign stop Joe Biden is approached by folks who face a crisis in their lives. He unfailingly provides sympathetic understanding, speaking openly about his own personal tragedies.

My heart breaks each time I hear Biden recount the deaths of his wife and daughter in a 1972 car crash, followed by the blow in 2015 when he lost his son Beau to cancer. My spirits soar when he explains how he rallied after promising his dying son he would not withdraw from public service.

“He knew I would take care of the family,” Biden says with eyes moist, “but he worried what I would do is I would pull back and go into a shell and not do all the things I’ve done before. It took me a long time to get to the point to realize that that purpose is the thing that would save me. And it has.”

This year’s Democratic candidates have many compelling qualities, but none can match Joe Biden’s empathy for those who are in pain. If a more serious health crisis were to develop, he would be the man to whom many voters would turn.

Amy Klobuchar is most effective when she stresses her Midwestern grit. Her record of working with Republicans in Congress is unparalleled among current candidates, and that quality will be important in the event of a prolonged health emergency.

Klobuchar speaks from the heart about working with her friend John McCain, traveling with him to Afghanistan and other war zones. As he neared death at his home in Arizona, Klobuchar visited McCain. “He pointed to a sentence in his book,” she recalls, “and told me ‘that’s all that matters.’ The sentence was this: ‘Nothing in life is more liberating than to fight for a cause larger than yourself.’”

In a time of crisis voters will pay less attention to the long-term plans of Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren.

They won’t care about the billions spent on TV advertising by Michael Bloomberg, and I doubt many voters were impressed by his 3-minute TV buy in which he attempted to position himself as the candidate best suited to battle the virus.

As for Biden, for months I have been worried about his stamina and occasional lapses on the campaign trail. I believe his age is a factor and before news of the epidemic I had gone so far as to suggest that he consider withdrawing to clear the way for center-left Democrats to coalesce. Times and circumstances change.

Would Joe Biden and Amy Klobuchar consider joining forces to provide trusted leadership for a troubled nation?

It might be the best prescription to battle a runaway virus.

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