



Trump is still in denial about the virus

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Some 200,000 people in the U.S. have died from the coronavirus. We're within days of hitting 7 million cases. Sure, a lot of those involve mild or no symptoms, but plenty of them involve hospitalization, weeks of illness and, for some, serious long-term harm. The fight against the pandemic, often with minimal assistance from the federal government, has produced a massive recession and severely disrupted the lives of almost everyone.

For a dissenting view, however, we have the president of the United States on Monday:

It affects elderly people. Elderly people with heart problems and other problems. If they have other problems that's what it affects, that's it. You know in some states, thousands of people — nobody young. Below the age of 18, like — nobody... **It affects virtually nobody.** It's an amazing thing.

Emphasis added. Look: I don't like to dwell on this stuff. But this one I can't let pass. What the president is saying is both false on the specifics (unfortunately, some under the age of 18 have died and many more have become ill) and grossly misleading about the larger picture, because there's an enormous population between the very young and the elderly.

Worse, it undermines public health. As experts have been saying for months now, it's essential for everyone to pitch in and follow best practices to stop the spread of the virus. Trump has singlehandedly made it difficult to get that message out, especially to those who listen to him the most. It's certainly plausible that this is one reason why each of the top 11 states in per-capita cases voted for Trump in 2016. (The states hit earliest were those that voted for Hillary Clinton and they still have the most per-capita deaths, led by New Jersey and New York; the rest of the nation has benefited from what doctors learned treating those early cases.)

But beyond that? This is monstrous behavior from any elected official. Imagine how those who have lost young loved ones to the pandemic feel when their pain is erased by the president. Or for that matter, anyone who has lost someone who doesn't qualify as "elderly ... with heart problems and other problems." Imagine how it feels for those who have been severely ill but recovered, when their suffering too doesn't count for Trump.

That's not to mention those of us who have been lucky enough to escape with minimal damage to ourselves and those close to us. We've also had our lives disrupted — we've missed weddings and funerals, graduations and reunions, even just regular visits to those we love. Others have been trapped in terrible situations or lost jobs or — well, you know all of this. It's perfectly obvious to all of us. But not to the president. For him, even the closures that he himself recommended, and which followed best practices promulgated by the federal government, are actually some sort of malign plot by his political opponents.

Trump botched the early weeks of the pandemic. He basically surrendered in mid-April. He abdicated his chief-of-state role in the early days of his presidency. The consequences? The U.S. remains about 11th worst in the world in per-capita cases and ninth worst in per-capita deaths, while cases appear to be flaring up in multiple states once again. Other than waiting for a vaccine, the president hasn't had any plan for months. And the guy we hired to be mourner-in-chief, to rally people together for a national effort, and to explain what's happening? He can't be bothered to do any of those things.

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