

# A doctor's perspective: Trump's calamitous incompetence leaves us imperiled

By Warren M. Hern May 27, 2020

## Comments

We're just at the beginning, but the COVID-19 pandemic promises to be one of the great public health disasters in history. The extreme contagiousness of this virus and the nature of its basic pathology, which destroys lungs and other organs, makes it a terrifying adversary. The fact that most people who are infected don't die or that many have no symptoms is no comfort for those who face almost certain death with this disease, and it is no comfort for their loved ones who survive.

With the technology and communications available now that were not available during the 1918 influenza epidemic that killed 50 million people, including my grandmother, this epidemic is a test, above all, of national leadership. Our national leader, Donald Trump, has failed catastrophically. He is incapable of providing the leadership necessary to get us past this.

Our survival, and the survival of millions of Americans who will be infected with COVID-19 before this is over, and even the survival of our free society, will depend on many other people — the first responders, who risk their lives every day; the medical personnel and public health scientists, the governors, mayors, and local leaders, and the members of legislative bodies who are capable of thought. Some, including Donald Trump, are demonstrating that they are not only incapable of thought; they are opposed to it.

We all know by now that the most basic element of a coherent and effective public health response to an infectious disease epidemic is identification and correct diagnosis of each case of the disease. This requires not just clinical skills but accurate and reliable testing. This is accompanied by "contact tracing" that identifies every single person who has been in contact with the person who is infected and isolation of each contact by quarantine. This is the only way to prevent spread of the disease at this point

Donald Trump's response to warnings he received no later than January was to brush them off rather than to mobilize all the resources of the federal government to find, develop, and make available all testing materials and procedures that were possible and necessary. We need billions of free tests now.

Trump's failure to mobilize all the resources of the federal government under a central direction to supply personal protective gear to first responders, medical personnel, and other essential workers is nothing short of criminal. These people are dying because of his incompetence.

At Rocky Mountain Laboratories in Hamilton, Mont., scientists need to use embryonic stem cells and fetal tissue obtained from abortions to develop a vaccine against COVID-19. But this research has been stifled during Republican administrations, and now under Trump, by the opposition of anti-abortion fanatics to the use of such tissue for research.

The decision by Trump to withhold funds from World Health Organization under the circumstances of the worst pandemic in a century is criminal madness. More recently, he abruptly ended a long-standing National Institutes of Health grant that supports critical research on the origin of these viruses.

Aside from his blatantly unconstitutional and wannabe-dictatorial fantasy of absolute power, Trump's determination to save his re-election prospects by opening up the country while the epidemic is raging is utter madness. Maintaining social distance is the only thing for now to prevent hundreds of thousands of deaths in this country. These restrictions that are necessary to survive the pandemic are crushing blows to people in the most vulnerable positions in our society, but Trump is telling them to die to save the economy. His idea that we have the highest number of COVID cases is a "badge of honor" is hideous. Almost 100,000 people are dead.

Since Trump is incapable not only of thought but of empathy, this means that his ravings must be ignored while the rest of us find ways to protect ourselves.

If it had been Donald Trump's conscious purpose when he set out as a candidate for president five years ago to destroy utterly the United States as a functioning constitutional democracy, as a nation under laws, as a civilized free society, to destroy its values, its security, safety, the health of its citizens, stability, and place in the community of nations, what would he have done differently than what he has done?

Nothing. That is his purpose. Why?

Donald Trump's gross incompetence, colossal ignorance, sloth, unmitigated corruption, cruelty and multifaceted psychopathology are no longer adequate explanations for his catastrophic malfeasance as president. His purpose in life is to break things and hurt people. Destruction is his ecstasy and fulfillment. We as a people are now the clear targets of this blind malevolence.

At a time of great peril from the pandemic, we are at his mercy until election day. It can't come too soon. Trump is a monster.

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