

Democrats Are Running Out of Arguments

by Conrad Black



With a brisk economic revival and continued retrenchment of the virus, it is going to be increasingly difficult for the Democrats to prevail on the merits.

The battle lines on the issue of ending the economic shutdown are drawn more sharply each week. The terror campaign conducted by the media when the coronavirus outbreak began effectively compelled President Trump and most governors to follow the advice of the audible scientists and “flatten the curve” with a comprehensive shutdown requiring huge numbers of people to stay at home.

As the unemployment figures that resulted mounted swiftly toward 40 million, the American Left, now including almost all the official Democrats and almost all the national political media, became instantly addicted to the prospect of holding

the president responsible at the election in November for creating an immense economic depression.

When the president recognized the extent of the alarm over the virus in March, he decided he had no alternative politically (and probably none in terms of public health, either) but to shut the country down, acknowledging the authority of the governors to decide exactly how extensively in each state. He took care to announce, as he did this, that the shut-down would be reversed as soon as possible and that his objective was a V-shaped economic recovery: a return almost as vertical as the inevitable decline.

Starting in early April, the president moved more or less subtly to encourage governors to begin reopening their states. Predictably, Republican governors tended to respond positively and promptly to this proposal and their Democratic analogues were more or less sluggish. For a time, both sides moved with relative caution to preserve the fiction that this was a matter of lives, public health, national welfare and, above all things, was beyond politics.

Of course, every observant person knew that in this presidential term nothing has been above politics, (and little has been beneath politics, either). The president cautioned the Republican governor of Georgia Brian Kemp about a general opening of almost all small businesses, but the governor seems to have been justified in taking that step and the president subsequently has applauded it. The apparent Democratic presidential nominee, former Vice President Joe Biden—the personification of the shutdown, now lumbering determinedly through his third subterranean month in Delaware—urged caution.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo was at pains to emphasize that the status of New York as a “hot spot” required him to go slowly, though the debate in New York was overtaken by allegations against the Democrat of responsibility for the

deaths of thousands of elderly people by requiring COVID-19 sufferers be returned to nursing homes.

At the outset of the coronavirus crisis there was what proved to be an exaggerated fear that the hospital system would be overwhelmed with coronavirus patients. As a result of that belief, surplus capacity was quickly built in or moved to the larger cities and, instead of the homes for the elderly being protected and insulated from the start, they were in many cases allowed to become infestations of the illness swiftly transmitting the infection among residents. We now know that about one-third of the country's fatalities from COVID-19 happened in long-term care facilities.

As President Trump has steadily encouraged relaxation of the economic shutdown, public opinion—which once appeared committed to the shutdown and responded so uniformly to the calls for sacrifice—has drifted back to approval for a reopening somewhat timidly. But the tactical trap is closing in slow motion on the Democrats. Since the president's greatest vulnerability would be if he could not get the shutdown lifted in good time for the country to see the economy reviving before the election, the Democrats have lost the opportunity to flop back to complaints that are now becoming quite audible, that the shutdown should never have been imposed in the first place.

This weekend the president stated that had the experts known more about the virus in March, this comprehensive shutdown would not have been imposed. The Democrats thus are stuck with the shutdown and are stuck with an argument for continuing the shutdown that rests entirely on the continued propagation of exaggerated and unseemly fear.

So far, where the return from the lockdown has proceeded quickly—as in the Republican-governed states of Texas, Florida, and Georgia—the incidence of coronavirus has not risen. (Meanwhile, in Georgia, there has been the leitmotif of

Democratic gubernatorial candidate and inveterate seeker of this year's vice presidential nomination, Stacey Abrams, that she won the election which she lost by 55,000 votes to Kemp).

The rabidly Democratic media who effectively are conducting the campaign for the beleaguered official Democrats, are left clinging to an indefinite shutdown that only panic can justify and that an increasing number of people, now including the president, believe should not even have been imposed.

The president said that his most difficult decision would be when to lift the shut-down, and he now has his principal scientific adviser, Dr. Anthony Fauci, supporting a relaxation and the leading Democratic governors, Cuomo and Gavin Newsom in California, affirming the president's cooperation and efficiency. This makes the Democratic claim, launched by former President Obama as a truism with no need for further explanation that Trump has bungled this crisis, very difficult to sustain. Neither Obama nor habitual media Trump-bashers such as A.B. Stoddard last week in RealClearPolitics, offered a word of explanation for the unqualified assertion that the administration's performance has been a disaster.

As the United States has done substantially better than any large Western country except Canada and Germany, the claim that it has been a disaster is a false argument. Trump was clearly wise to close down direct air travel between China and the United States at the end of January, for which he was much criticized by the Democrats. His mobilization of the private sector, and particularly the swift development by Abbott Laboratories of an instant testing method, and the mass production of ventilators for which there was widely claimed to be an acute shortage, were very effective.

The results of Trump's calling on states to relax the shutdown

in April make it hard to criticize that move. The Democratic media appear at this point to be reduced to representing the loss of nearly 100,000 American lives as a tragedy for which Trump is somehow responsible. When he took the measures that he did, the so-called experts had not yet reduced their prediction of fatalities in the United States from over 2 million to between 100,000 and 240,000. The daily fatalities continue to decline and have fallen by over 60 percent in the last five weeks.

If this trend continues as the country reopens and there is distinct progress on bringing the unemployed back to work, it is going to be extremely difficult to run against the president on this issue. The polls reflect Trump's difficulty in moving from the president of the shutdown to the president of the reopening while brushing off the imputation to him of putting "soon ahead of safe." But he is moving between strengths and the polls do indicate a large lead for Trump over Biden on the issue of restoring the American economy.

With a brisk revival and continued retrenchment of the virus, it is going to be increasingly difficult for the Democrats to win this argument.

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