

## **Please stop the coronavirus hysteria. Now.**

Substitute prayer for the COVID-19 panic

By [Tim Constantine](#) -

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### **ANALYSIS/OPINION:**

Just over a year ago, long before the term coronavirus had entered our collective vocabularies, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) reported that in just a few short weeks of the 2018-19 winter season, the flu had sickened between 6 million and 7 million Americans. About half of those had gone to the doctor for help. Somewhere between 69,000 and 84,000 had been hospitalized. The good news, the [CDC](#) announced, was that it wasn't nearly as severe as the year before.

The previous year, 2018, the [CDC](#) reported 49 million Americans had been sickened by the flu. 960,000 were hospitalized and over 80,000 ended up dead. You read that right, in 2018 over 80,000 people died from the flu in the United States. Most of the victims were geriatric, many with compromised immune systems. There were a handful of pediatric deaths, most with immune systems not yet fully developed. All tragic deaths. All flu related.

Fast forward to 2020 and we find our world in utter panic due to something called the coronavirus. Monday morning the New York Stock Exchange halted trading when the Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped by nearly 1900 points (7%) in the first 15 minutes of trading. Coronavirus induced panic.

The organizers of South By Southwest — which draws hundreds of thousands of visitors and some of Hollywood and music's biggest stars to Austin, TX at this time each year — announced last Friday they had

canceled the annual arts and technology festival, saying they're "devastated" but recognize it is necessary to prevent a serious threat of contagion. This recognition came despite the fact Austin Public Health had stated as recently as Wednesday that "there's no evidence that closing SXSW or any other gatherings will make the community safer," No evidence that closing gatherings makes anyone safer and yet panic is setting in everywhere. The National College Players Association (NCPA) has asked the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to consider having its men's and women's basketball tournaments with no crowds in the arenas due to coronavirus fears. No crowds during the sweet 16 games? That may be the new definition of March Madness.

The same reactionary hysteria is taking place all over the globe. Saudi Arabia took the rare step of suspending religious pilgrimage trips to Mecca. Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte has ordered the lockdown of the country's northern region of Lombardy and 14 nearby provinces in an attempt to halt the spread of the coronavirus. A dozen passengers on a cruise line tested positive and more than 2300 other passengers and a crew of nearly 1100 were held hostage for days. Even upon release from the vessel, all will be quarantined for 14 days at various military facilities.

There are threats to close down public schools all across the United States. The Mayor of a Japanese town scheduled to host the 2020 Olympics this coming summer has suggested perhaps the Olympics should be canceled.

Hysteria. Total hysteria.

Is it possible the coronavirus is something less than the second-coming of the black plague? I have this crazy habit of checking facts and putting

things in context. As I write this column I am looking at the “real time” [CDC](#) website which lists the “COVID-19 US at a glance” statistics. The latest numbers? 566 cases of coronavirus in the entire United States. 22 related deaths. Obviously any death is tragic but does a count of 22 deaths in a country of 330 million people really warrant billions of dollars in Wall Street losses, the cancellation of festivals, games, community gatherings, schools, church services and more?

In a word, no. It is hysteria.

In 2018, nearly 1 million people were hospitalized in the US for the flu. Over 80,000 died. Games weren’t canceled. Festivals thrived. Concerts weren’t shut down. Flights continued on as originally scheduled. Business as usual despite 80,000 dead. Why then are we closing down society in response to 22 deaths? Why the madness? Why the total hysteria?

It may be because the mainstream media is quite sure that fear sells. Facts be damned. Every year during hurricane season The Weather Channel puts a 23 year old kid in an oversized rain slicker on the beach in the rain and wind to breathlessly report how Hurricane “Fill in the Name” may potentially be the worst hurricane to make landfall in the United States since Christopher Columbus arrived. The storm eventually peters out but not until after millions of fear-filled viewers have tuned in endlessly (and cleared the local grocery stores of water and canned goods). Fear does sell.

News media is taking the sale of fear to a new low with the coronavirus. The [CDC](#) told us that 49 million Americans were sick with the flu in 2018. That same [CDC](#) tells us only 566 are sick with coronavirus now, nearly all of whom are high risk, frail individuals. Do we find CNN and other

mainstream media reassuring us with that context? Of course not.

Instead they are reporting on new modeling from The Australian National University looking at seven scenarios of how the outbreak might affect the world's healthy and wealth. In the hastily assembled study's best case scenario the death toll is 15 million people and the global GDP loss will exceed \$2.4 trillion U.S. dollars. That is the best case scenario. It gets much worse from there. The modeling is suspect, the assumptions grotesque and the science nearly non-existent, but that hasn't stopped major news outlets from repeating the absurd conclusions. Fear sells.

Liz Specht, who has a PhD. in biology and is the associate director of Science and Technology for the Good Food Institute sent out her worries in a lengthy Twitter thread last Friday. Her assessment of how coronavirus is likely to impact the U.S. health care system suggests that hospitals will be quickly overwhelmed with patients, and that all available hospital beds will be filled by about May 8th. She says 10 percent of patients will require the ICU. Let me repeat that. Every single hospital bed in the United States will be filled with coronavirus patients by May 8th.

Now let me correct her. No they won't.

The people predicting at least 15 million deaths and overflowing hospitals are the same as the ones that told us the polar ice caps would completely melt by 2013. Reality check: According to official government data from the National Snow & Ice Data Center (NSIDC), Arctic Sea Ice is once again growing, with current 2020 levels exceeding 8 out of the previous 10 years.

Never ones to let hysteria flourish without spending taxpayer money, Congress rushed to approve \$8.3 Billion to fight the spread of the

coronavirus. Members literally bragged about who had come up with the highest dollar amount. Pressed for exactly what the money would be spent on and how it would stop sickness, Members stumbled. By the end of last week however, House Leadership was suggesting that perhaps Congressional staff should work from home to avoid getting sick, and some of the funds could be used to buy them new phones and new computers.

Only in D.C. would the fight against a dreaded virus entail buying congressional staff new telephones.

Over the weekend I watched Dr. Ben Carson's appearance on ABC's "This Week with George Stephanopolous." They spoke about the administration's response to the coronavirus. Dr. Carson is not only a Medical Doctor, he is quite literally one of the most respected and revered surgeon's on the face of the earth. He attempted to bring a logical approach to the discussion, assuring viewers that most were not at high risk. Primarily the frail and aged should be concerned. Dr. Carson encouraged people to learn what the real risks were, to wash their hands frequently and take other simple precautions, but also encouraged people to continue to live their daily lives. Stephanopolous however was having none of it. He kept insisting that the Trump administration should be doing a broad undefined "more." Despite Dr. Carson's medical expertise, George was busy selling fear.

Current headline in The New York Times: Virus Keeps Spreading as Governments Clamp Down. Very clever. A double dose of fear. People are petrified of disease and are also freaked out by the government making demands on them. Fear! Fear! Fear!

Stop. Please stop. Stop the hysteria. Stop the panic. Stop the grand ideas

intended to demonstrate that you're doing "something." Stop the fear. Stop talking about coronavirus non-stop. Stop with the gloom and doom. Instead let's try something much more simple. Let's follow the Centers for Disease Control suggestions for minimizing the risk of contracting coronavirus (or any other common cold/flu type illness):

Avoid close contact with people who are sick. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth. Stay home when you are sick. Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe. Follow [CDC](#)'s recommendations for using a face mask. [CDC](#) does not recommend that people who are well wear a face mask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19.

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.

If you feel you absolutely must do more, take a moment and say a prayer for the 22 lethal victims of coronavirus. As long as you're in the praying mood, say a prayer for the 80,000 dead victims of the flu too. Pray all you can ... but please promise to stop the hysteria.

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