

November 21, 2020

Thanksgiving Day – Stopping COVID-19 Pollution

As we approach the Thanksgiving weekend for 2020, the US death toll from COVID-19 has reached 261,626 (<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/us/>). The *New York Times* reported today that 1,947 people died yesterday, Friday, November 20. It is as if 6 full jumbo jets had crashed in one day, killing all of their passengers.

Valuing the loss at \$5 million per lost life, we lost over \$9.7 billion yesterday. Dr. Anthony Fauci was quoted in today's *New York Times* (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/20/us/coronavirus-today.html>):

“I think that December, January and early February are going to be terribly painful months”.

President Donald Trump has essentially lost interest in ongoing losses due to COVID-19, waiting with hope for a new vaccine that will end the pandemic. Without indulging in hyperbolae, it is as if a military campaign accepts the losses of 2,000 troops per day because six to twelve months down the road there will be a new “Doomsday” weapon to vanquish the bad guys.

So ... he won't help us. What can the adults in the room do in the meantime to minimize the fearsome costs that COVID-19 is levying on us? YB has likened the costs of COVID-19 to the costs of pollution. Almost all economic activities pollute the environment to a lesser or greater degree. Economists have tools to address pollution.

1. Try to prevent it. Do not engage in polluting activities.
2. Keep it very local. This means that sick people should stay away from well people, and not travel, or congregate, and wear masks if we must travel or congregate. Even the most intransigent Republican Governors such as Kim Reynolds of Iowa or Doug Burgum of North Dakota have recognized this ... as their states hemorrhage COVID-19 deaths due to their failure to do this earlier.
3. Impose a *pollution tax*. COVID-19 is a so-called *effluent*, that pollutes the environment. Rather than closing restaurants entirely, it might be appropriate to levy a 20% sales tax on “dining in.” Encourage the restaurants to pass the tax along to their consumers. Those consumers who feel they have a “right” to pollute should pay the price.
4. Identify pollution hot spots. Restaurants, bars, (yes) houses of worship, and communal events spread this pollution. Would-be consumers should know which of these places are safe and which are not.

The reduced economic activity due to these measures will cost jobs. Reducing pollution almost always does. There are no short-term “Green New

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Deal” air cleaners that will help us through this next six- to twelve-month period. The federal government is working on a vaccine (the Doomsday weapon) that, when distributed, will help render COVID-19 harmless. This is the 2020 “Manhattan Project.” Only the federal government has the resources to implement a project of this size.

Meanwhile, because he won’t help us, we must help ourselves. Less travel, smaller dinners, and watch a lot of football ... this Thanksgiving.

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