

Filling the Leadership Gap
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Without his political rallies to pump up his ego, President Trump has resorted to lengthy daily "Press Briefings" in which he endlessly congratulates himself, while elbowing out the scientists on the podium and butting in when they do speak. The dog-and-pony show on April 13 was a jaw-dropping two-hour rant, angry and spiteful about how unappreciated he was after the New York Times reported his failure of leadership, despite briefings and alerts to the danger of the pandemic. His intelligence community had attempted to brief him that action should be taken, but he ranted that they were just the "deep state," conspiring against his reelection.

The press tried to ask him the questions that I, for one, would have asked, and he pulled his daily stunt: calling reporters "fake" and said their medias had "low ratings" that "nobody believes" and why don't they ask better questions, like how wonderful he is.

Happily, for the sake of our country, his lack of responsible leadership has created a vacuum that has now been filled by state governors and mayors, any one of whom would be a better president than the one we have. Governor Cuomo, of New York, has become the go-to for reporters wanting to get real information about this pandemic and how leaders are dealing with it.

Cuomo called a number of governors from his neighboring states and they had a live conference about how they would work together and what criteria they would need before reopening business in their states. On the West Coast, California's governor summoned a comparable conference of adjacent governors. Each governor who spoke was serious, informed, heeding their scientists, and comporting themselves as leaders. What delighted me was that these conferences were covered by MSNBC, CNN, and Fox News! Fox listeners now have no excuse for making excuses for Trump's behavior. That emperor has no clothes.

In crises such as this one, we are used to looking to our president and the federal government to inform us, to empathize with our suffering, and to provide hope that there was a path to recovery.

We are seeing once more the wisdom of the Founding Fathers who prepared for such a crisis as this: dealing with an unfit president. Unlike President Trump's amazing pronouncement that as President, he has "absolute power" to override any decisions that the governors make. Many of us whipped out our copies of the Constitution to note that he has no such power.

Governor Cuomo quietly noted that the President never used his power to order a nationwide stay-at-home program; the governors did. Now he thinks that he can order the end to this program, no matter how many more people sicken and die from this decision. The governors will not obey it.

In the past, we had presidents who rose to the occasion. Even when congress had majorities from the opposite party, emergencies brought us all together. But that was before our politics grew toxic. We witnessed a phenomenon new to us, when President Obama was elected. Senate leader, Mitch McConnell, and complicit Republicans, resolved on election night to make this president's administration fail. Aside from the president's adept bipartisan handling of the financial meltdown he inherited, anything else he attempted to do was a big fight.

With President Trump attempting to revoke every initiative Obama promoted (addressing climate warming, pollution, safe water, food stamps, an affordable medical system), a new source of leadership is emerging. Mayors of big cities have become leaders of credibility. Many governors have done the same. This is a particularly American thing, that as a people, we step up when needed. There is much more can-do and compassion in the public than in our present government. It is saving us.

It is fortunate that the worst of us, the President's apologists, can belittle the pandemic by noting that it is no big deal, and is killing people "on their last legs anyway" (statements by Bill O'Reilly on Fox News). I can imagine other "true believers," fortunately few, nodding in agreement. They are outliers. We are better than that!

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