

THE DEADLY DUO

Trump and the Coronavirus

by Elliot Benjamin, Ph.D.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *This article is a modified and up-to-date version of my previous article of the same title that can be found at www.integralworld.net/benjamin105.html. References and notes are available from lavoz@esperanzacenter.org or the above website. Opinions expressed here are solely the author's own.*

From my perspective, the United States has been led by a narcissistic, egocentric, paranoid, deceitful, racist, ignorant individual.

I have repeatedly conveyed in my La Voz essays the past few years my belief that President Trump has continuously been putting the United States as well as the rest of the world in serious danger [1]. But what I focused upon specifically was the destruction of the environment and nuclear annihilation [1]. From my perspective, the United States has been led by a narcissistic, egocentric, paranoid, deceitful, racist, ignorant individual without any sense of human compassion. I had no faith in the stock market under Trump's leadership, basically because I believed that we were governed by an irrational individual who prioritized his own self-interest more than anything else in the world, and consequently I decided to put my retirement savings in a conservative low interest-bearing account. But I had absolutely no idea that we would soon be living under the overwhelming suffocating fear that now pervades virtually the entire world, and that we in the United States have President Trump in charge of getting us through this horrible existential crisis.

There has been a lot of talk about how Trump was not prepared for the Coronavirus crisis, due to his shutting down crucial disease research activities, not taking the advice of medical experts, minimizing the expected growth of the pandemic, and rejecting the offer of World Health Organization coronavirus tests

[2]. But for me, by far the worst action that Trump was giving serious consideration to enacting was to "celebrate" people going back to work and largely ending social distancing prematurely, with his goal of stimulating massive turnouts in churches all over the country for Easter Sunday [2], [3]. The responses from health experts to this plan made it clear that this would have been nothing less than a death sentence for a significant number of people in America, in particular for elderly people and people who are not in good health [3]. However, thankfully, Trump was under mounting pressure to extend his Easter goal for the economy to be back and running, by numerous public officials who pushed back against his statement as well as by a significant level of dissatisfaction in the public in regard to how he has handled the pandemic crisis; consequently Trump has extended his Easter timeline to the end of April [4].

Other countries have been somberly facing the severity of the Coronavirus with determined resolution through enforced national social distancing and "lockdown," meaning people are legally required to stay home except for buying necessities such as food, or for emergency medical needs, even if enacted later than should have been [5]. I am certainly very relieved that Trump decided to listen to his medical experts amidst the growing public unrest and fears about his Easter goal of promoting people going back to work and attending church in large numbers [6]. But I am still very concerned that when it comes down to it, Trump will put politics and economics over human life, and I am still afraid that far too many people in the United States could get persuaded and manipulated into doing what Trump tells them to do [7]. Trump was recently promoting his success as measured by hopefully "only" between 100,000 and 240,000 Americans dead, as opposed to 2 million, whereas the reality is that many Americans have died and many more will die because of Trump's negligence in dealing with the pandemic to begin with [2], [7]. And I believe that

Trump's motivation in foregoing his Easter Sunday church and back-to-work brainstorm is not a function of any kind of human



Other countries have been somberly facing the severity of the Coronavirus with determined resolution through enforced national social distancing and "lockdown..." The result is deserted cities throughout the world. Photo: Marketplace by pixabay.com

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compassion, but rather is solely a manifestation that his aides convinced him that his reelection would be seriously jeopardized if he is not perceived as showing concern about how many Americans die [7].

As a result of the public panic over the coronavirus, Trump/s approval ratings have been recently fluctuating rapidly and wildly, as can be seen from the fact that a few weeks ago his approval ratings increased to its highest point in his whole presidency, whereas a few days later they reversed course [6], [8]. There has been the prediction from experts that anywhere from 60,000 to over 2 million people could die in the United States alone [4], [5], [6], [7], [9], and I am afraid of how much worse Trump could make this. This is what motivated the title of this essay for me--The deadly duo--Trump and the coronavirus. Either one alone is dangerous, but if it were "only" Trump then we could (hopefully) vote him out of office in less than 7 months. If it were "just" the coronavirus and we had compassionate intelligent leadership for the United States, such as I believe Democratic presidential

Maine has recently shifted their meetings to this format, just as Indivisible and essentially all political organizations have done in all places. Toward the end of the meeting, when everyone was asked to give their closing thoughts or future agenda items that they had, I hesitatingly asked the group what they thought about Bernie Sanders dropping out of the race, given that Joe Biden at that time was the presumable Democratic nominee, as I said that I was concerned that Sanders' continued candidacy and severe criticisms of Biden could be helping Trump to get reelected [12]. And I was pleasantly surprised that my concerns were taken quite seriously, as some people voiced their agreement and the topic was put on the agenda to be discussed more at length at the following week's meeting. I knew that Indivisible as a whole did not like Joe Biden, and that their favorite candidates had been first Elizabeth Warren and then Bernie Sanders. So I didn't expect a very receptive response to my suggestion that perhaps Bernie Sanders should drop out of the race, and some people voiced their opinion that Sanders wanted to influence Biden to make Biden's



Closed playground due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Sydney, Australia



Cones and barriers are erected to remind people businesses are closed. Photo: pixabay.com

nominee Joe Biden would offer [10], then the disastrous consequences of the pandemic could at least be held in check as much as possible, and I think would likely be under control by the November, 2020 election, through nationally enforced social distancing and lockdown, as other countries are doing [5]. But what we have in the United States is the deadly duo, and this is what scares me the most and makes me feel so powerless and unable to do anything to change the deadly course of events that the United States has already started to experience [6], [7], [9].

Sure I can hope that Trump listens to the medical experts and that public opinion continues to put a damper on his willingness to put politics and economics over human life [6]. And I can hope that within a few months the deadly course of the virus starts to taper off and that the United States and the world eventually gain control of the virus. But in the meantime it is good for my mental health to continue to be actively involved politically with the goal of beating Trump in the November presidential election. So what can I do with this goal in mind?

Well recently I participated in an online grass roots progressive Indivisible meeting [11], as Indivisible where I live in

platform more progressive, but I could see that I stirred a few people to seriously think about this. And this motivated me to take things further and suggest to the Indivisible Northeast coordinator that perhaps it is time for Indivisible National to consider again the question of endorsing a Democratic presidential candidate, and that I believed it should be Joe Biden to be consistent with the Indivisible mission of defeating Trump in November [11], [12].

Well the Indivisible Northeast coordinator responded initially as I expected her to, conveying to me how Indivisible had given their highest scorecard ratings to Elizabeth Warren, followed by Bernie Sanders, and that Joe Biden received low ratings. She did not think Indivisible National was interested in doing another endorsement survey, as they had done one a few months ago and the response clearly indicated that Indivisible members generally did not favor a presidential endorsement. She went on to say that perhaps things could be reevaluated if Biden were to make his platform more progressive, which I think we both believed would never happen to anywhere near the extent it would take for Indivisible to have a change of heart towards Biden. Finally she

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said that once the Democratic nominee was chosen, that Indivisible would follow through with their Indivisible “pledge” [11] to completely support whoever the Democratic candidate was, to work toward the goal of beating Trump in November, and in hindsight I am glad to say that this indeed happened a few hours after Sanders dropped out of the race [10].

I wasn’t surprised by the response I received, but I pursued the communication and asked the Northeast coordinator if she would be open to conveying to Indivisible National the inclination of Indivisible Bangor if I were to bring this up at next week’s meeting and Indivisible Bangor strongly advocated for a re-appraisal of the endorsement issue. And I was pleased to receive a much more agreeable response from the Northeast coordinator, as she said yes she would be open to bringing this up to Indivisible National if Indivisible Bangor advocated for another endorsement appraisal. However, as I thought about it some more, I realized that if it were to somehow happen that Indivisible National actually endorsed Biden, this would likely have the effect of alienat-

edorsed Biden in a productive conversation that involved them forming six joint task forces consisting of staff members from both of their campaigns, and I must say that their 35 minute videotaped conversation actually did appear “nice” to me [10].

However, what had the most effect on me from this Indivisible meeting was that I learned that Biden has been accused of sexually assaulting one of his former campaign staffers, in an incident that purportedly occurred in 1993 [13]. I was afraid as soon as I heard this that this could be the magic bullet that Trump needed to get reelected if it were to go mainstream and mushroom. His accuser was a Sanders supporter, and she changed her story from last year, at which time she was one of a number of women who claimed that Biden had engaged with them in inappropriate touching, but nothing about sexual harassment to anywhere near the degree of this accuser’s 2020 allegation [13].

I don’t know what the truth is, but at the time I was concerned that if this allegation went mainstream and mushroomed then the difference this made could be just enough to give Trump the edge



A closed bakery shop during COVID-19 pandemic in Bergama District, Izmir, Turkey.



An electronic sign emphasizes the new guidelines for living. Photo: Belfast Traffic Management Sign by wikipedia.org

ing Sanders’ supporters from Biden even more than they already are. And if Indivisible National endorsed Sanders, then it would just be vice versa. So I came to the conclusion that working for an Indivisible endorsement of Biden at that time was not the way to go, not if I wanted to maintain my mission of beating Trump in November, as I knew that getting Sanders’ supporters to vote for Biden was an important piece of this process.

At the next Indivisible Bangor meeting my Biden/Sanders issue came up again for discussion, and some of the response was similar to that of the week before, in regard to the belief that Sanders was staying in the race to have an effect on making Biden’s platform more progressive, as well as an acknowledgment of my concern about the danger of Sanders weakening Biden and consequently helping Trump to get reelected. There was also a concern expressed that people may see a false equivalence between Biden and Trump, a wish expressed that Sanders should be “nice” to Biden, and it was conveyed that Sanders debating Biden again would likely have no effect on either the primaries or the general election. And as it turned out, much to my surprise and I believe the surprise of many people, not only did Sanders soon drop out of the race, but a few days later he

to get reelected. But in all fairness to Biden, these allegations are coming from a woman who was a Sanders supporter who changed her claim from last year in regard to Biden committing sexually inappropriate conduct against her, she is the only woman who has claimed that Biden committed sexually inappropriate conduct, and there were no witnesses to her claim [1e]. Furthermore, I learned from someone who posted a comment in my Integral World article about Trump and the coronavirus (see Author’s Note) that Biden’s accuser had made a statement a few years ago praising Biden for his work supporting violence against women, and that the accuser’s best friend did not believe her story. Thus weighing all the evidence, at this point I choose to believe that Biden is innocent of these allegations. But either way, Biden is now officially our only hope in November to get rid of at least the Trump half of the ‘deadly duo’ [10]. And working to get rid of the Trump half of the deadly duo is still something that for me is exceedingly important to do whatever I am able to with this goal in mind.

BIO: Elliot Benjamin is a philosopher, mathematician, musician, counselor and writer, with Ph.Ds in mathematics and psychology and is the author of nearly 200 published articles.