

The Delray Democrat

The Republican Virus¹

Michael K. Cantwell

No, I'm not trying to rename a deadly coronavirus, as did Donald Trump in his predictably pathological and puerile effort to divert attention from his complete incompetence by calling it the "China Virus."

I'm not even referring to a physical pathogen. The Republican Virus is a metaphysical disease, one that attacks the mind and soul. It is more infectious than the novel coronavirus and also more deadly. It begins with a fever of the soul that stokes and feeds on hatred and ignorance, crippling the intellect, erecting a barrier to facts, creating a favorable environment for propaganda, and eradicating all traces of empathy.

Patients afflicted with the Republican Virus have been voting against their economic interests for a half-century. More recently they've started to vote against their very lives, dying prematurely and unnecessarily in record numbers because they lack health insurance.

Moscow Mitch McConnell and his minions in the Greed Over People Party may be disappointed to learn that they cannot claim credit for turning medicine into a profit center or creating an entire industry that feeds on the misery and fears of sick Americans.

That goes back, as does so much evil, to Richard Nixon. As Michael Moore [related](#) to Amy Goodman on Democracy Now, a young researcher working on Moore's film *Sicko* found a Nixon tape in which he and John Ehrlichman discuss whether to support the creation of health maintenance organizations:

And Ehrlichman says to Nixon, "You're going to love this, because this is private enterprise. This isn't like some freebie thing." Nixon goes, "Oh, I like that. Tell me about it." And then Ehrlichman says, "Well, this is how it's going to work, these HMOs. They're going to make more money by providing less care. The less care they give them, the patients, the more money the company makes." Nixon goes, "Ooh, not bad!" . . . And Ehrlichman and Nixon are just kind of rubbing their hands, going, "Oh, this is great."

The Affordable Care Act also treated healthcare as a privilege rather than a right, but it expanded the availability of insurance and provided subsidies to lower its cost for ordinary Americans, thus saving tens of thousands of lives.

¹ *The Delray Democrat*, April 2020, p. 1.

The Republican Virus struck back swiftly, reaching pandemic levels in 2010. Independents and even some Democrats were infected, and the Greed Old Party gained control of both the House and the majority of State Houses.

Four years later they flipped the Senate, and on November 8, 2016, a day that will live in infamy, they won the White House.

Neither the rent boys and call girls that comprise the Greed Old Party nor its Sociopath-in-Chief delivered on the promise to replace the ACA with “something beautiful.” They managed to cause the premiums to rise, however, making insurance unaffordable for millions of Americans and causing tens of thousands of premature deaths. Americans living in red states whose governors refused free federal money to expand Medicaid are also dying needlessly. And now, untold numbers more will die in a pandemic made a thousandfold worse because Donald Trump is an incompetent, ignorant narcissist more concerned with television ratings than Americans’ lives.

The Republican Virus lay dormant for much of the last Century. Schooled by the Great Depression, Americans came to view government as a force for good, and greed as a societal evil. In the stirring words of the great American jurist Benjamin Cardozo, this is nothing less than the philosophy that animates our Constitution: that we “must sink or swim together, and that in the long run prosperity and salvation are in union and not division.”

In 1980 the Republican Virus was revitalized by a genial snake-oil salesman who had once described Medicare as a socialist plot to destroy America. He replaced the New Deal with the Raw Deal and stood on its head the world-view that had taken America from the Great Depression to the Great Society.

By the end of the decade, “I got mine, Jack” replaced “we must sink or swim together” as a personal and political philosophy. Government itself became a dirty word while greed was celebrated. Overpaid CEOs cheated, squeezed, and discarded workers, many of whom continued to vote Republican.

And now, as Trump struts and blunders and creates chaos, and as his insufferable, incompetent son-in-law creates more chaos, America leads the world in confirmed cases of Covid-19 and will soon lead in Covid-19 deaths.

We broke the Republican Virus in 1932 and again in 2008, both times after Republican control of both the White House and Congress brought America to its knees. And this November 3, 2020, we can and I predict will restore decency and competence and democracy to our country. We must, for it will be our last opportunity.