

Bill Kaplan: Justice Ginsburg, the election, fear and hope

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Trump's incompetent response to the pandemic has left the U.S. with the highest case and death toll in the world. There are 6.8 million cases nationally, over 100,000 in Wisconsin. U.S. deaths are above 200,000, over 1,200 in Wisconsin. And, the economy is in shambles, with mass unemployment and escalating business failures. Misery abounds.

When asked if he regretted anything about his response, Trump said: "No, I think we did a great job." That rang hollow to many in Wisconsin as multiple records of daily COVID-19 cases were broken last week. But Trump said: "If you take the blue states out, we're at a level that I don't think anybody in the world would be at. We're really at a very low level." Former Pennsylvania GOP Governor Tom Ridge responded: "It's so unworthy of a president. ... It's almost unspeakable in the middle of a pandemic to try to divide the country on a political basis"

When the news broke Friday night that Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg died, fear was palpable. Why? Trump acts like a tin-pot dictator, flouting norms and undermining our judicial system, while denigrating the military and press. Moreover, Trump blusters about delaying the November election and becoming president for life. Imagine another Trump Supreme Court justice to enable him.

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Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin tweeted: "Ruth Bader Ginsburg lived an inspiring and historic life, and her work has shaped America for the better. As a woman, I join so many others who will not allow her legacy to be diminished or

disrespected.” Utah GOP Senator Mitt Romney said: “Justice Ginsburg served our nation with a deep reverence for the law and our Constitution. Her fight for women’s equality inspired all women to pursue their dreams without limits... .” Lacking shame, Senator Mitch McConnell, Majority Leader, declared he would act to put a Trump nominee on the Supreme Court, in glaring contrast to his refusal to consider President Obama’s nominee in early 2016. Back then, McConnell said: “The American people should have a voice in the selection of their next Supreme Court justice. Therefore, this vacancy (Justice Scalia died) should not be filled until we have a new president.”

Joe Biden responded: “The voters should pick the president, and the president should pick the justice for the Senate to consider.” The GOP-led Senate has a 53-47 majority. Four GOP senators would be needed to prevent McConnell and Trump from “ramming through a Supreme Court appointment only a few months before the next president’s inauguration” (NYT). Don’t count on Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson, a flip-flopper like McConnell. However, Alaska GOP Senator Lisa Murkowski is opposed to a new justice before the election. And, Maine GOP Senator Susan Collins said whoever wins the presidential election should choose the nominee.

Healthcare coverage and protections, e.g., preexisting conditions, are in jeopardy because the Supreme Court will rule after the election if the Affordable Care Act is constitutional. Vote for a Democratic-led Congress and Joe Biden. Hope.

-Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C., for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 - 2009.