

Bill Kaplan: Trump and Johnson harmed country and themselves

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The pandemic is not “under control” nor is “the end in sight”. Instead, the U.S. leads the world with 7.4 million COVID-19 cases and about 210,000 deaths. Wisconsin is seeing record daily increases, well over 130,000 cases, near 1,400 deaths and hospitalizations hitting new highs. Staggering.

The NYT reports: “Oshkosh, Wis. – Steve VanderLoop, 64, heard that several of his co-workers at a manufacturing plant in Wisconsin had fallen ill from COVID-19. Then there was his brother-in-law’s entire family in nearby Washington County. A good friend in Appleton, up the shore of Lake Winnebago. And last week, the gut punch: Mr. VanderLoop’s 96-year-old mother learned she had the virus”.

Wisconsin has “nearly half the places with the worst outbreaks now.” In descending order: Oshkosh-Neenah, Green Bay, Appleton, La Crosse, Platteville, Marinette, Stevens Point and Fond du Lac (NYT). Yet Trump and many Wisconsin GOP politicians campaigned around the state with abandon. No masks or social distancing. Trump said: “We’ve had no negative effect (at the rallies)” More of the same was scheduled for La Crosse (later Janesville) and Green Bay.

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Doctors, local leaders and Wisconsin Democratic Governor Tony Evers implored Trump to reconsider, to no avail. Then Trump and Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson tested positive for COVID-19. The irresponsible and reckless campaign rallies were canceled. Trump was flown by helicopter to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, “getting care, treatments available to few other Americans”

(Washington Post). It is not clear what Trump's condition is. Johnson said he would self-quarantine. Trump's wife, 2 other GOP senators, several White House aides, Trump advisers, his campaign manager and the head of the Republican National Committee all tested positive. No zip code or political party is immune.

Trump and Johnson have downplayed the risk of coronavirus from the beginning. Masks and social distancing are avoided — or worse, mocked. Doctors and scientists are reviled. Both have pushed unproven or potentially dangerous treatments. All the while, lowballing the death toll, erroneously comparing COVID-19 fatalities to the less than 40,000 annual auto-related deaths. Moreover, Wisconsin GOP state legislators have obstructed every effort by Governor Evers to control coronavirus infection and spread.

Finally, Trump went to the Supreme Court to have the Affordable Care Act (ACA) struck down. And, he is trying to stack the deck with his Supreme Court nominee Amy Coney Barrett who has disparaged the ACA. Good-bye coverage for over 20 million and protections for many more with preexisting conditions, including 7.4 million who tested positive for COVID-19.

Senate Democrats, including Wisconsin's Tammy Baldwin, are fighting back. They, along with 6 GOP senators (not Johnson), voted to block the Trump administration from supporting the lawsuit against the ACA. Johnson supported a nonsensical alternative that would allow insurers to offer bare-bones coverage, set annual and lifetime limits and charge women higher premiums.

Joe Biden is right to offer thoughts and prayers for Trump (and Johnson), despite their misdeeds. He is also right to keep fighting to save (and improve) the ACA.

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