

Van Mobley: Weighing the costs of next steps in lives and money

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Recently an 86 year old woman who lived in New York (and seems to have been virus free) was hit on the head and killed by a fellow hospital patient who appears to have been terrified that the elderly woman was inadvertently violating the “social distancing” guidelines our current health experts have recommended to help save people from the virus. This death (we are still waiting to see how it will be charged by the prosecuting authorities in New York) reminds us that there are economic and non-economic costs involved in any response to a public health crisis.

For this reason it is essential to note that those voices suggesting we may be reacting inappropriately to this particular public health crisis are not solely, or even primarily, concerned that an inappropriate response will inflict (or is inflicting) a heavy economic cost on all Americans. It comes with a heavy cost in lives as well.

In addition to the elderly woman from New York many others may have been, or soon will be, lost as a result of our reaction to the virus. Health problems, like stress induced coronary attacks, complications from high blood pressure, mental health issues, depression, suicide, domestic violence, etc. that might not have emerged if we had simply let the virus run its course, or if we had chosen another response to it, or chose the current moment to reverse course and loosen, rather than tighten, the draconian restrictions that have been introduced, are emerging. If we don't think carefully and act appropriately the lives lost unnecessarily might pile up fast - and they might be in bigger numbers than the lives lost to or threatened by the new virus. We mustn't leave any of the lives we are dealing with at this juncture out of the equation — even if the “experts” in high places among us are focused primarily on those particular lives that might be carried away by the virus. Everyone deserves to be included in our health equation - whether or not they are susceptible to the virus.

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Plus we must remember other poignant considerations. For example, in addition to the lives that are being and will be lost as a result of our response to the virus (whatever it is) we should factor in the precious time our current response to the virus is annihilating for certain vulnerable sectors of our population. For example, as a result of our collectively self-imposed lock down college and high school seniors will never get their senior years back. And that will make their lives different, and perhaps more diminished, than would otherwise be the case. Then too, little kids aren't getting to play on the playground, or on little league teams, this spring. Their absence from such innocent diversions comes at a cost. Being a kid only comes along once and when that fleeting moment is gone an individual doesn't get it back, no matter how long he or she may live in an old folks home.

All people of good will agree that every life is precious, which is why public health authorities are normally reluctant to intervene in our lives in the fashion they have chosen over the last few weeks - and propose to do indefinitely into the future. And there is zero reason why people of good will should indefinitely defer to their calculations — particularly as the experts have yet to demonstrate that they are putting all the relevant data in their equations. When did they show us the graph that demonstrates it is worth depriving millions of children of their fleeting opportunity to run and play on a playground in order to extend by a few days or weeks (perhaps) the lives of countless individuals wandering about an Alzheimer's facility? Wouldn't it be nice to see more detailed, better science out of our experts on such questions? And how does "science" inform such decisions anyway? Perhaps instead of locking everybody down it is best to isolate the vulnerable and let the children and the healthy run free?

It is hard to think in pressure situations but that is precisely when careful thought is most necessary. Is it really wise or noble to sacrifice our way of life, even for a moment, in an effort to save a small percentage of the population- when it seems possible, and perhaps even probable, we are not even pursuing the most effective strategies to protect that vulnerable, small percentage of our population? We should stop conceding our right and duty to think and decide on such questions to the health experts who occupy unelected offices. President Trump and Governor Evers should remember something most old village presidents learn somewhere

along the way. Experts are a dime a dozen. Any one of them, or group of them, can always be replaced by imminently qualified, even more respectable experts, who dispense better, more thoughtful and scientific advice.

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