

We've seen this movie before. Scientists warn of a serious threat. But in Trump World, the problem doesn't exist. It's just a product of alarmism. First, climate change. Now, the coronavirus, COVID-19.

Trump himself has worked hard to minimize the problem. "We have very few people with it," he said, and "people are getting better, they're all getting better," referring to U.S. patients. "I think that whole situation will start working out. Lot of talent, lot of brain power is being put behind it." In short, nothing much to worry about: "It looks like they're getting it under control, more and more, they're getting more and more under control. So I think that's a problem that's going to go away."

Fresh from receiving the Medal of Freedom from Trump, Rush Limbaugh minimized the significance of the virus and launched a couple of conspiracy theories. "Folks, this coronavirus thing, I want to try to put this in perspective for you. He called the virus "nothing but the common cold," and pointed out that 98% of victims survive. (That sounds a lot better than saying 2% die.) The virus itself, he said, was probably a Chinese military experiment that got out of control. And this minor health problem was being "weaponized as yet another element to bring down Donald Trump."

It's surely true that some people are more freaked out than they should be: this isn't the Black Death. But the problem is serious enough. There are about 330 million people in the U.S. Say half the people get the virus, and 2% of those die. That's over three million deaths. The economic impact will also be significant, as we're seeing in China right now.

Moreover, prospects for heading off the disease in the U.S. don't seem as rosy as Trump believes. The CDC has said that prospects for stopping the virus at the borders are falling as more countries experience outbreaks. Moreover, according to the CDC, "As we've seen from recent countries with community spread, when it has hit those countries, it has moved quite rapidly."

In addition, the CDC has warned, "disruption to everyday life might be severe." There's something of a tradeoff. The stricter the efforts to prevent spread, the more those efforts themselves will impact the economy. Unlike the Chinese, we probably don't have the capacity (or political will) to lock down entire cities. Moreover, the U.S. may be indirectly impacted by the spread of the disease abroad, as we're already seeing with supply chains involving China.

As always, there are uncertainties. The CDC may be too pessimistic about prospects for curbing the disease. After all, it's their job to think in terms of precautions. On the other

hand, things could be worse than expected, either due to some unexpected change in the disease or economic ripple effects.

What we've seen with Trump's response to the coronavirus really doesn't rank with climate denial. The Administration isn't pretending that the virus is a hoax. Given that Trump is a germaphobe, he's unlikely to go that route. Indeed, the Administration has already asked for \$2.5 billion in emergency funding, though that's probably not enough. Richard Shelby, the GOP chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, said "It seems to me at the outset that this request for the money, the supplemental, is lowballing it, possibly, and you can't afford to do that." Be that as it may, it's only a fraction of what Trump is diverting from the military to build his beloved border wall.