

The COVID-19 pandemic shows that Trump simply isn't governing

And it isn't partisan to say that a president who can't or won't do his job should be replaced by one who can and will.

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More than 225,000 Americans have died from COVID-19. Many more have been infected, with long-term health consequences yet unknown. Lost jobs, savings, businesses, and homes are widespread. Americans are exhausted, anxious, and depressed.

President Trump isn't to blame for the virus reaching the US, nor for longstanding shortages in stockpiled medical supplies. Under another president, it's almost certain that some Americans would have died from COVID-19.

It's just as clear, however, that the number would have been far lower.

The Trump administration took a bad problem and made it immeasurably worse. For months it has refused to take the virus seriously as a public health threat. Again and again its political operatives have sidelined health experts, with disastrous results. Trump himself has used his public stage not to model responsible behavior but to undermine and ridicule it—even after he himself was infected—and so has led the way in transforming simple public health measures into yet another front in the culture war. It has been a stunning abdication of the fundamental responsibilities of governance.

Americans have long had honest disagreements about the rightful role and scope of government. Fighting a pandemic, however, is on the very short list of things the federal government exists to do, by almost any ideological measure. There is no cogent conservative argument against it. It wasn't controversial until Trump made it so. Creating controversy, after all, comes far more naturally to him than governing does.

Some conservatives don't like Trump yet remain unconvinced that he is as bad as a Democrat would be. Some liberals were reluctant to embrace impeachment for fear that Mike Pence, with his hard-line social positions, would be even worse. Both views assume that Trump is fundamentally a conventional politician who should be evaluated on his policy positions. They focus on ideology rather than on Trump's basic performance of his job.

This is a mistake, made clearer than ever by the administration's utter failure on COVID-19. In the two major parties alone, more than two dozen people ran for president in 2016. Some were no doubt more prepared to handle a pandemic than others. But it is hard to imagine any of them doing less to fight the virus—or more to exacerbate it—than Trump has done. His administration's malfeasance, negligence, and incompetence are in a class of their own.

Like many of our readers, we work for a faith-based nonprofit organization that does not make partisan endorsements in elections. We support this federal restriction, not least because it dovetails with the Christian call to keep our other loyalties at arm's

length.

But it isn't partisan to say that a president who can't or won't do his job should be replaced by one who can and will. Whatever our politics, we all need elected officials who will actually govern. If there were such a thing as noncontroversial, baseline norms anymore, this would surely be one of them.

A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title "The job Trump isn't doing."