FDR’S “Hoovervilles”—A Rhetorical Lesson for Biden

June 1, 2020

The coronavirus pandemic and our nation’s response to it will be a major factor in the 2020 election.

Consider a rhetorically brilliant move from our history: As a candidate for president, Franklin Roosevelt used the label “Hoovervilles” to describe the shantytowns that resulted from President Herbert Hoover’s inability to provide relief to thousands of Americans during the Great Depression.

The challenge for the Democrats and Joe Biden is to use vivid rhetorical images to prevent voters from reelecting President Donald Trump. Part of that strategy might include the use of photos of food lines, bodies being stored in refrigerated trucks and relatives who could not be with their loved ones at the end of life.

Effective use of rhetoric can help voters feel the health and economic pain that Americans now are suffering — realities that Trump denies, ignores, downplays or, to use the President’s favorite pastime, “plays through.”

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