Pence Evades Important Questions

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As a communication scholar, I have written about President Donald Trump’s messages and their dangerous consequences. I now believe we should spend more time analyzing Vice President Mike Pence’s rhetoric. I say this not because he is the Vice President but since he is the head of the President’s coronavirus task force. In addition, Pence provides rhetorical balance to Trump; he tries to diffuse the President’s extreme statements, offering a softer as well as more tolerant response to reporter questions.

Nevertheless, Pence is one of the most frustrating, slippery, obsequious and evasive political communicators I ever have observed. He has a moderating tone and never attacks the interviewer or his opponents. However, what is interesting and less noted by the media and political pundits is how these qualities obscure the rhetorical significance and impact of Pence’s discourse.
For example, I listened attentively to Pence at Wednesday’s COVID-19 briefing. His failure to answer questions was appalling. While he “sounded” smooth, which no doubt is pleasing and in stark contrast to President Trump, every answer — or should I say non-answer — consistently turned into little more than praise for the Administration and misleading/false statements about how the country is making more progress than what health experts and governors (both Republican and Democratic) say.

Moreover, his delivery style is unique, making it hard for reporters to interrupt and stop him; the Vice President has a penchant for non-stop talking without taking a breath, rendering it nearly impossible to question what he says and hold him accountable — something he probably learned as a radio commentator.

In short, Pence’s rhetoric is more insidious and, yes, perhaps more worrisome and dangerous than the President’s.

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