The Dangerous Consequences of Pence’s Unique Rhetorical Style

July 13, 2020

As a communication scholar, I have written about the dangerous consequences of President Trump’s messages. However, it now is time to analyze Vice President Mike Pence’s rhetoric. He heads the President’s coronavirus task force and provides rhetorical balance to Trump, often diffusing the President’s extreme statements and giving softer and more tolerant responses to reporter questions.

Nevertheless Pence is one of the most frustrating, slippery, obsequious and evasive political communicators I have observed. Admittedly, he has a moderating tone and never attacks the media or his opponents. However, it is these qualities that obscure the rhetorical significance and impact of Pence’s discourse.

For example, I listened attentively to Pence’s Wednesday 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 say.

Pence’s 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.

For these reasons, Pence’s rhetoric is more insidious and perhaps more dangerous than the President’s.

Rick Cherwitz
Austin, TX