Ever since Donald Trump took the reins of the presidency, he has been accused of incessant lying. This prompted the media, pundits and concerned citizens to ask: How can we trust the President of the United States on important issues when the occupant of the White House has a documented record of ignoring the facts and failing to tell the truth?

The significance of this question now is more apparent than ever.
Case in point. With the coronavirus threat, now classified by the World Health Organization as a pandemic, the United States is starting to feel the tangible and severe impact of not having done massive testing like other countries. In contrast, South Korea swiftly performed thousands of tests: 200,000 to date compared to 11,000 in the U.S. Unfortunately, from day one President Trump failed to portray this health threat as a crisis; moreover, he did not immediately enact plans for handling the crisis.

On March 11, Donald Trump spoke to the nation. The hope was that he would finally display an understanding of the facts and reassure us that threat is being addressed. Instead, what again became clear is that Trump—at best—can read dispassionately the words of others from a teleprompter.

But those words cannot change reality. They cannot will away the enormous problem confronting the country. For example, when the President suddenly and dramatically changes the tone and content of his message from what he had been saying for the past couple of weeks, Americans could not possibly know that the nation is prepared and the Commander-in-Chief is telling the truth.

In addition, it is reasonable to ask: How can the nation be confident that the problem is being resolved effectively and quickly when literally minutes after the President’s national address White House and health officials retracted and modified the measures Trump outlined. This included who is involved in the foreign travel restrictions and whether
products actually would be barred from entering the United States as the President said.

In short, the President’s speech left Americans confused and far from reassured. Make no mistake about it. Not having a credible and trusted leader who can be believed will continue to have disastrous consequences. Sadly, we are only today starting to comprehend the magnitude of those outcomes.

We should be worried and frightened by the fact that the President did nothing in his televised address to persuade the country we have the necessary facilities, personnel and equipment to treat the large numbers who inevitably will be diagnosed with the coronavirus—a warning public health officials have been making since the inception of the COVID-19 threat. And we should be alarmed that less than 24 hours after Trump’s speech Dr. Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at the National Institutes of Health, declared that the United States is “failing” on testing.

If any of us are not concerned, we should be. Some public health officials are beginning to wonder at what point the confusing and late response by Trump will leave no option other than to require a quarantine for all citizens. Put bluntly, reality is impinging and words won't change that--not even for a President who for his entire life, including his tenure in the White House, has used rhetoric to undermine, avoid and deny reality. What's happening no longer can be dismissed as fake news.
Words do indeed matter—and, if that wasn’t obvious, it certainly is now.

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