As a communication scholar, I believe that Sen. Chris Murphy hit the nail on the head at Tuesday’s Senate coronavirus hearing. He explained why slowing the spread of COVID-19 is in large part a rhetorical problem.

Murphy noted we have “two parallel messaging operations,” leading to confusion and lack of compliance with CDC guidelines. President Trump refuses to wear a mask and overtly discourages people from doing so. His behavior and discourse directly contradict the message sent by the public health community. Murphy suggested what exacerbates this problem is that the agencies represented by the medical experts have a social media following of 5 million people while Trump has an audience of over 82 million.
The obvious questions: Why aren’t Republican members of Congress standing up and demanding the president stop encouraging behavior that threatens the health of the population? And why don’t the medical experts explicitly state that Trump’s political rhetoric undermines the health of the nation?

Richard Cherwitz  Austin, Texas