

Justin:

All right, welcome back to Bush School Uncorked. We're doing some things a little different tonight, Greg.

Greg:

Indeed we are. Why don't you explain to our listeners, Justin, how we are doing things different.

Justin:

Yeah, so we've shifted to Zoom. But that's not the new part, we've had a couple of ... our last three episodes would have been done by Zoom, but we're trying out a new live format. We sadly cannot gather in historic downtown Bryan, at Downtown Uncorked, and we miss our friends there. But we did want to give you an opportunity to join us for our conversations, so we're trying out a Zoom format. We have some audience here with us, hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds, I'm told can fit in a Zoom Room at one time, Greg.

Greg:

And maintain appropriate social distancing.

Justin:

And maintain appropriate social distancing. We've asked the audience to keep their microphones muted and their cameras turned off, and we're going to run this like a normal Bush School Uncorked episode. But the new piece is, one, we're live on Zoom, which is an experiment for us. We might eventually shift and we're doing it on Facebook as well if this is successful. But we'll take questions and commentary throughout, and we'll throw that to Faith. And Faith, actually, we didn't say this before. But if a question comes in and Greg and I are missing it, you should just interrupt us.

Justin:

I'm just going to go ahead and give you that ability to interrupt us with questions. Again, if you're just joining, make sure your camera is turned off. Thank you. So, we're doing our Zoom recording, looking forward to having a conversation with Greg. The last couple of times, Greg, we've had guests. We actually haven't caught up since at the very beginning of when I started to realize that Covid-19 might be something we were going to be dealing with for a while.

Greg:

I think it was before spring break.

Justin:

Yeah, it was the very beginning of spring break. I was down in Brownsville, Texas, working on some border research with our guests Christine Blackburn from last week. She had taken some students down there. And then I started kind of tuning back in to some of the news and it seemed like it was starting to spread here and that we were going to have to start engaging in some social distancing measures. That feels like years ago now.

Greg:

Yeah, it's still March, and it was really during spring break that I think the University started to take this more seriously. And I think people in the Brazos Valley started to take it more seriously. The University took the lead on this. We were supposed to have guests down over spring break, I was going to be here anyway. But I was in meetings, I think, almost every day during spring break as we tried to get ready for the switchover to teaching through Zoom, teaching at distance. Which I think is going pretty well. There have been some issues, but the technology has worked, very few complaints, very few technical glitches, I think. And so, while it's not my favorite way to teach, I think it's working and we can get through this semester, get people graduated in the school. And then hope that by the fall we're ready to go back to face-to-face.

Justin:

Texas A&M I think with a couple of other leading universities at the time acted fairly quickly to send ... to move classes online, to give students a week and faculty a week to adjust, and try to get us situated into this transition. Which for Texas A&M, has meant in general synchronous, at the same time, classes on Zoom, which I agree I think has gone really well. We've had great support at our extended education office at the Bush School to help make that transition, particularly at the Bush School the Zoom software has worked fantastic. One of the things I've taken away is that our students adapt even much quicker than we do. They've had no problems at all doing breakout rooms, discussions, adapting to the tools. It's even starting to make this millennial feel like an old timer.

Greg:

You can imagine how it makes me feel.

Justin:

Yeah, I do. I can imagine.

Greg:

[crosstalk 00:04:35].

Justin:

I'm wondering if you're still volunteering to go out on the front lines for me, Greg?

Greg:

No, we'll let Lieutenant Governor Patrick take care of that. But the only innovation that I really liked out of all of this is the Zoom cocktail hour. I even organized to show how on top of the technology, I organized a Zoom cocktail hour with my siblings on Sunday and they're spread over, so it was nice. One in New York City, which is, of course, the epicenter. But we had a very nice time.

Justin:

Yeah, I've got to do some of that as well. And I think I mentioned to you before, some of my happy hour friends were kind enough to join us for tonight and I think they will probably be asking some questions at some point. I won't be having drinks during, but maybe afterwards I might have one or two again with my cocktail buddies.

Greg:

I should report to the Bush School students, and faculty, and colleagues and staff and alumni who might be on that there is a silver lining to this dark cloud of not being able to have face-to-face classes. We have a lot of work to do in the Bush School in terms of renovation and kind of creating new spaces on both the first and the second floor because we've taken over the second floor. And with everybody out of the building, the construction crews have been able to work much quicker. And so, we have our fingers crossed that not only will everything be ready in August when school starts again for the Fall Semester, but we might be able to have the construction done much quicker than we originally planned. And that would be a real good ... a positive out of this, I think, generally negative turn of events.

Justin:

I'm glad they're able to continue to make some progress. My Economics friends at A&M remain unhappy with me that we have invaded the second floor.

Greg:

Well, they should consider their own utilities and we'll consider our [inaudible 00:06:55].

Justin:

All right. Faith, there you are. Got something for us?

Faith:

Yes, we have questions already.

Justin:

Okay, let's start with some questions.

Faith:

All right. Dr. Gause, you're a bit of a celebrity because this first one is directed to you. Could you give us your thoughts ... If I butcher this pronunciation, I'm sorry. Can you give us your thoughts on the Houthis shooting missiles over Riyadh? I guess the first ones were happening since 2018, can you give us some insight on that?

Greg:

Well, we're getting right into it, aren't we?

Justin:

Yeah, let's dive right in. So give us the background of the question, Greg, and tell us your thoughts.

Greg:

The Civil War in Yemen, one of the great humanitarian disasters of the modern age even before the corona virus. Which I'm sure is spreading in Yemen as well with no medical infrastructure to take care of people down there. That Civil War's been going on since 2015 when the Houthis, this ... how to phrase them? They are a political group based on a religious sect in Yemen, the Zaydi Shiite sect. They are Shiites but not Shiites like the Iranians, but the Iranians are supporting them. They look like they were going to take over the country and the Saudis and the United Arab Emirates intervened to try to prevent

that. And since then, it's been Civil War. The fighting has fractionated, there's all sorts of groups. The Emiratis have left, the Saudis are still bombing. The Emiratis and the Saudis are now supporting separate groups.

Greg:

Why would the Houthis launch missiles against Riyadh now? Well, of course, they claim to have launched missiles in September that hit the Saudi oil facilities. They closed those facilities down for a while. That's probably not true, this probably came from Iran or Southern Iraq. But, there's a peace initiative on through the UN to try to get a ceasefire. This could be an effort by groups within the Houthis who don't want to have a ceasefire, because in the last few weeks, the Houthis have made some gains on the ground. And so, it could be that. But I think that things are very much in flux in Yemen, so I would actually think that we should wait to see if the diplomacy works. And then, to see if the Houthi leadership can exert some centralized control on that. But it's just like the corona virus here, too early to tell where we're going to end up on the scene in Yemen.

Justin:

Thanks for that first question. I have nothing to add.

Greg:

[inaudible 00:09:56] studying the Houthis?

Justin:

Not in the same level of detail, I must say. I have been studying unemployment insurance which we will get there, and it's not the best state of affairs for unemployment insurance this past week. Faith, I see you back down there. All right, bring us our question two. I like this approach.

Faith:

All right, this is directed towards both of you. What long-term implications do you believe this ongoing pandemic will have on "business" of higher education?

Justin:

On the business of higher education. That's a really good question. Greg, you're the institutionalist. I'll say that I think one of the things that we are going to learn in kind of a broad experimental fashion is how useful our remote Digital Learning tools employed in mass. I have been a fan of them, I've been using Google Classroom doing a lot of online teaching. I was already working with Zoom. I think that we're going to see if this can be an effective way of delivering education, which will have some impacts ... could have some impacts on what revenue models we might use moving forward. That's one that I can think of. It might highlight the importance or non-importance of other activities that the university engages in, could shed some light on that.

Justin:

But the other piece of it's going to be kind of the role that large tech companies were already playing in helping deliver education. There's already some questions about what it means for Google to play such a large role in storage, and mail, and communication. There's a thing coming out of the New York District Attorney's office today or yesterday looking into Zoom's Privacy Practices. There's going to be some

questions about what does it mean that a professor can be recorded at any time in the classroom? That's going to have some impact, but that's about the only intuition I have. The other piece is going to be that states are going to take a huge hit. And if we're talking about public state education, like where I went to University of Georgia or Texas A&M, we're going to have some real budget concerns because the states are really likely to take a big hit. Greg?

Greg:

When you call me the institutionalist, I assume that that meant that I'm old.

Justin:

It meant that you're a Department Head and you sit in on these meetings.

Greg:

Yeah, how nice.

Justin:

I'm glad you're still going to work and that you're doing your public service. But don't go to the office.

Greg:

No joke. I have not been to the office in a week and a half, and I want to stay out, which we all should do. Shelter-in-Place, that's the order in Brazos County. We're saving lives. You're absolutely right about the state budgets, I think Congress is going to have to come back on that. If we're going two trillion more into debt, we might as well go three trillion into debt and help bail out states that might help the budget of public education going forward, one can only hope. We'll get into this further on, but 2020 is going to be a horrible economic year, and that means state tax receipts are going to be way down. In terms of delivery, we've always thought of "online courses" as being asynchronous. And you know, Justin, because you've been teaching them. I don't teach them, I'm too old.

Greg:

Well, we'll see. If the experiment with Zoom is just a success, there might be efforts to think about delivering online education, education at distance synchronously rather than asynchronously. The asynchronous element of it was supposed to give people flexibility in terms of when they did their work, when they engaged with the course. And that made a lot of sense. But there might be a market for synchronous because at least there's a little bit more of the human contact in it. That'll be interesting. I think that it's too early to judge on how it's going to affect "campus life". We're in the first flash of this, I think people are going to get really tired of it after a while.

Greg:

I think by the end of the semester, it's going to be people are going to ... students are going to be tired of it, we're going to be tired of it. I think students will miss the social element, but I don't just mean going to North Gate and going to the bars. I mean the social element of engaging with people over lunch, over dinner, in the dorms. It's a truism to say most of your learning is outside the classroom, at least some of it is. Even as a faculty member, I'm willing to [inaudible 00:15:41] that, and I don't think that this technology is going to replace that. So we'll see.

Justin:

Faith is back.

Faith:

Kind of bouncing off of that previous question, do you see any ways that the pandemic can particularly affect the Bush School specifically, and how soon do you see that?

Justin:

Well, it's hard to know. The things that we were saying generally about universities will apply, I would think, to the Bush School. Which is, you would imagine that if there's a tighter budget for the University, there's going to be tighter budgets for the Bush School. Some of the different types of sources that help support our functions from year to year, they will probably be less of on some things that maybe Greg can chat some about. We'll be running the same experiment, do these synchronous classes work? And so, for example, you might imagine a world in which it's harder to get international students to the US over the next year or two in particular. One thing that we might be thinking about is can we use these online tools to incorporate those students, even if we start going back to in-person here domestically? But I think there's going to be ... there's a recession coming.

Justin:

We'll talk about some of the estimates of what this could mean for the economy this year, and we're already seeing for unemployment. But this is really going to hit state budgets, and so that affects us. Now, the field and graduate school is kind of, like they say about alcohol, it's also good and bad times in general. So people, when the economy's bad, they go to grad school because there's no clear economic opportunities. So I would imagine that we see potentially an uptick in applications. People are also hearing a lot about in the news and general popular culture about Public Health and Epidemiology, and coordination and collaboration and things that might have them thinking about public service or public issues more than they were before. So I think it might draw more attention to us.

Justin:

The other thing is we're doing this, right? Greg and I have been having the podcast in person, this allows people from all over to come hang out with us and ask questions. This is already as many questions as we've ever gotten in person, and so we get to try out some new types of things. Some of us are thinking about ideas like virtual collaborations, virtual centers, to kind of build on this time when we're going to be socially distanced from one another. Those are a few of the impacts, if I had to guess. Greg?

Greg:

I don't want to talk about budgets because we haven't ... we just have gotten no information about that from central administration at the University, so it'd just be purely speculative. The State of Texas one can criticize it on many levels, but extremely supportive of the two flagship universities, our friends across the prairie and Austin, and us. And so we've written out, Texas A&M has written out past problems, fiscal problems with the State.

Greg:

There will be issues, but I can't see ... We might be flat lined for a while, no new hires, no raises, that kind of thing. But I don't see kind of the existing educational provision, the existing number of courses

cut down. I think that the biggest impact on the Bush School in the short-term would probably be our friends in office of extended education, as they sift through what this Zoom experiment has meant and does it mean that we can offer other kinds of courses, synchronous courses at distance? Is there a market for that? Are there people interested? I think that might be at the Bush School our biggest impact ... the biggest impact.

Justin:

All right. Looks like maybe there's a ... There she is. What we got, Faith? I'm loving this, I like the questions. It's kind of fun.

Greg:

Yeah.

Faith:

Dr. Gause is the star of the show again, this is one-

Justin:

Surprise, surprise.

Faith:

It seems as though most coverage of the pandemic has been focused on China and other developed countries. Occasionally we see some information coming out from the Middle East, but it doesn't appear to be a focus point for the media. Do you have any thoughts to speak about this in your opinion, and what would they be?

Greg:

Iran has been one of the earliest epicenters of the virus, and the Iranians did really a terrible job of dealing with it at the top. Like many governments, like the Chinese government, they kind of wished it didn't exist. Like our government wished it didn't exist and kind of ignored it. Maybe the most interesting thing about the Iranian cases it's so many people in the top levels of leadership have tested positive, and at least one Iranian Vice President has died from Corona virus. So it'll be interesting to see the combination of Corona virus, the inept way the Iranian government has dealt with Corona virus, and the general economic downturn with the collapse of oil prices. Although Iran has suffered from that before because it was under sanctions and hasn't been able to sell that much oil. What does that mean for the Iranian regime? I think it'll be very interesting to watch. I'm not of the school that says Iranian regime is about to go, but I do think that it is dealing with a number of crises across the board that it hasn't had to deal with before.

Justin:

One thing I would just add from a developing countries perspective, India's Modi offered a complete lockdown on 1.3 billion people. That'll be kind of a very large scale social experiment and to see if that's able to keep the spread from a place like India. I think the other thing that's worth noting, in the same way that ... In some ways this applies to rural areas or less developed areas even within ... also in cities, not just rural areas, but less developed areas in the US. Less developed countries are going to run into hospital capacity issues sooner, there's less capacity in general, you would think. And the other piece of

it is that the amount of testing, in the same way that it's hard to get testing done in the US, getting testing to get an accurate count of what's going on in less developed countries. Both of those challenges I would imagine would be exacerbated.

Greg:

Hospital capacity issues aren't limited to the third world, they aren't limited to Asia, and Africa, and South America. New York City is overwhelmed in terms of hospital capacity right now. Even the richest countries in the world with the best infrastructure in the world are getting overwhelmed with this, and Central Park we're setting up field hospitals.

Justin:

Yeah, that's definitely true. Exacerbated on top of what's already going to overwhelm our healthcare systems in the US by all accounts, you see stuff coming out of New York, stuff coming out of Miami, and Washington. One of the things we were talking about beforehand is that there's some indication based on the reported numbers that the exponential growth isn't increasing in its exponent. Whereas it was maybe growing at 25% new cases a day, it's more like 16% on the previous day. And we need to do kind of what we can, I think, to flatten that curve as kind of people have been talking about by social distancing and by staying home. But for New York and for other places where we've kind of ... in the US, where we've really delayed the social distancing and then didn't do it in a kind of a comprehensive way, even as the exponential growth starts to slow from an exponent standpoint, you're still talking about thousands, and thousands, and thousands, and thousands, of new cases for a long time.

Justin:

The US is going to have over 20,000 cases today, over 550 deaths. There was over, I think, 19,000 cases yesterday, over 19,000 the day before that. The growth rate in terms of per day new cases isn't jumping up like it was in the beginning. However, you're still talking about 20,000 plus new cases a day, and some percentage of those are going to be critical and we only have so much equipment for physicians, only so many surgical masks, only so many ventilators. Yeah, even in the developed world, it seems like in the US at this point we're likely to lead to kind of get close to the capacity, or most likely surpass the capacity of our hospitals to deal with intensive care patients.

Greg:

And we're so big a country that different parts of the country are hitting this different times. Washington State and New York City, the New York City, the Metropolitan area early. But we're starting to see serious increases in the number of cases in other parts of the country, Louisiana has seen big increases. One reads that Detroit is seeing big increases. This is going to roll through the country at different times and at different rates. And in that sense, it probably makes sense for us in terms of the United States, to address this as not a one size fits all. The places where this is rolled through first might be the first ones who can ratchet back some of the social distancing requirements. But for those of us who are on the front end of it like here in Texas, it probably makes sense for us to maintain social distancing longer than some of these places that we think of as having it worse than us.

Justin:

Yeah, they're definitely further along. The issue is going to be too because we don't have real ... We have borders, but we don't have kind of transportation borders in the US. This is going to be a real challenge for collaborating across states because, to your point, different states are going to peek at

different times. But travel across the United States in general has been pretty unfettered, you can just kind of go ... Now, there are some moves to kind of limit some of this, as we've heard in the news recently. But this is going to be a real challenge, I think. While different strategies might be better targeted at different states, and different states are going to be recovering at different times.

Justin:

We have to be really careful about going back to normal or kind of releasing some of these guidelines to stay in shelter and to not be out and about because it's not like we have border checks, at least not yet really in any meaningful way in the US. I think that's going to be a real challenge as we start ... as the exponential growth starts to decrease even some amount of time from now. Faith, I see you're back.

Greg:

Faith, what you got?

Faith:

So, kind of staying on the same topic and states that you just mentioned, do you guys see the Covid-19 pandemic driving a "new wave" of public leaders? So for instance, non politicians like Donald Trump or younger governors, do you see them reevaluating the ways in which federal, state, and local governments interact with one another?

Justin:

Well, I hope so. We're at the School of Public Service, I hope that part of people's take away from this is that there's not only a role for democratically elected politicians, but they need to be informed and society needs to be informed in general by an expert knowledge base. I've got a PhD, believe in academics, that's why I kind of devote life, my life to education and research in these areas. I hope that one of the takeaways is the importance of expertise, is the importance of collaboration, and the importance of coordination across local, state and federal and broad, consistent, guidance all the way down.

Justin:

And that this kind of reminds people that expertise matters and it's serving in ways outside of just traditional political elected office matters. Although, that also matters so much right now as well, that we have people within legislative and executive branches that are quality leaders, that are listening to experts. And that are trying to represent their districts, and again, listen to best evidence. I hope a disaster maybe should point people in that direction. But the wars of information and misinformation are very real right now in our society, and so I'm not sure if that will be the takeaway.

Greg:

I think the issue of Federalism has been part of our national dialogue since the 19th century, right, since the 18th century even. And whenever there's a crisis like this, there's I think an enormous sense that the center has to lead. Governors are looking for the federal government to act as the organizer of these efforts to deal with the virus. But all of these things are going to be implemented through states, and so the balance between states and the federal government is constantly being renegotiated. I think that the 20th century has been basically the concentration of power from states to the federal government. I don't think that we're going to see a reversal of that, but I think that the importance of State

Government for the provision of these kinds of services that people need in these kinds of crisis is going to, I hope, be one of the takeaways here.

Greg:

I think we're going to see the Federal State relationship re-examined. Maybe not re-centered or redistributed in terms of power, but the importance of the states in the provision of services, I think, is going to be a major topic. And it will be even more so because of the points Justin made about budget crises that the states are all going to face. Now, if you have to go to the federal government to get money to make up for the state budget shortfalls, then that puts more power back in the federal government. So we'll see how that goes, that's number one. Number two, expertise. Public health, we've tended to, I don't want to say ignore public health, but every presidential administration in the last three, has faced a public health crisis of one sort or another. A disaster preparedness crisis or a public health crisis.

Greg:

And they've tended to put together a decision-making kind of a functional group within the White House through the National Security Council or through other mechanisms to try to coordinate national and international responses to pandemics, to natural disasters. And then the next administration comes in and says, "We don't need that." Of course, the Trump Administration did that, but so did the Obama Administration. Disbanded the group within the National Security Council that the Bush Administration had, George W. Bush. I'm hoping that one of the lessons to come out of this is that we have to sustain not only the infrastructure of our public health, we should never run out of masks, we should never run out of ventilators.

Greg:

Just in time provision of health care, the goods needed to provide health care is not a rational long-term strategy. Just in time provision of widgets for making things in factories, great, we can deal without the widgets for a while. But we shouldn't have just in time inventory policies on things that when the flag goes up and the crisis hits, we can't get. We have to nurture public health infrastructure even in times when we don't need it, because when we need it, boy, do we need it. I'll shut up about this but-

Justin:

You're not long winded, Greg. You're not long winded.

Greg:

Not much. We have to have a 9/11 style commission after this is done to go through and to tell us, why were we unprepared? What were the key decision points where we made wrong decisions and right decisions? What are the lessons we can learn? One can argue that the 9/11 Commission, the lessons learned from the 9/11 Commission added layers of bureaucracy that maybe we don't need, maybe we do. But we need some kind of forensic on what we did wrong and what we did right in this, and I'm hoping that we can have a serious effort on the level of the 9/11 Commission. Where agree with it or disagree with some of its recommendations, it was a serious effort to go through. I still assign chapters of the 9/11 Commission in my Middle East classes. In fact, my class on Thursdays having to read chapters of the 9/11 Commission Report, it was very good.

Justin:

Thanks, Greg. Faith, you're back.

Faith:

I'm back again. All right, so next question is what is the US doing on a national security side to protect itself while attention is diverted on the Corona virus? Do you think that we're engaged as a world leader in combating Covid-19 and how?

Justin:

Oh goodness. Go ahead, Greg, you want to take the first swing?

Greg:

I think that jury's still out, but we haven't seen high profile efforts to coordinate internationally on this. And I think that is very much a reflection of President Trump's ideas of how one should engage with the world. You engage in America first, you're distrustful of other parties, you're distrustful of international organizations. I think that's not a good way to approach this, frankly. But we've seen the breakdown of some amount of comedy in the European Union, where the whole idea was open borders, and now borders are being closed. Understandable but when push comes to shove, you take care of your own country. I still think that we could have coordinated better. What statistics we're getting about foreign countries are coming to some extent through their obligations to report to international bodies on public health issues in their own country.

Greg:

The criticism of the Chinese is that they ... it's not so much that they're not telling the truth to their own people. That's their own business, they don't tell the truth to their own people about all sorts of things. But that they have signed on to international obligations to report on health issues to the world, to the World Health Organization specifically. And so, I think that we could have ... the United States could have played a stronger role through these organizations to put pressure on countries like China and Iran to report correctly. I think that's where ... one of the places that I would differ with the Trump Administration on international ... on how we've engaged internationally in response to the crisis.

Justin?

Justin:

I was thinking and trying to think about some of the national security component to see how that fits in with things I have been reading. I don't think I have a good response. The thing that I would echo is that it seemed like there ... it would have been nice if institutions like the G7 and others could have had a more coordinated response. And in the past, the US has played much more of a leadership role in some of the international institutions and kind of leading the dialogue and being a leader in those forums to encourage global cooperation. And as Greg mentioned, President Trump takes a different view of those institutions and a different view of what coordination and collaboration is.

Justin:

And is much more kind of a America first, go at it kind of alone, do what we want. As opposed to coordinating with allies and putting pressure on people on countries like China, as Greg mentioned, to behave responsibly internationally and to report the numbers accurately and to let the World Health Organization in to see what's going on. All these things that we could be leaders on and traditionally

have. And so at this particular time, there's a noteworthy lack of leadership from the US in guiding the international response. Faith, you're back.

Faith:

All right. Dr. Bullock, you mentioned earlier the problem of misinformation in our society. Do you and Dr. Gause believe that the pandemic will ameliorate or exacerbate the problems of the post-truth culture we're living in? And do you envision that effect being universal or will it vary by location?

Justin:

I don't know is the short answer, for sure. Greg is laughing at me.

Greg:

It's the beginning of wisdom to say what you don't know.

Justin:

Not so sure. The rubber will meet the road on some of this when people people know die, right? On some levels, at least some misinformation about corona virus and as the deaths become more widespread, there'll be some type of general reckoning with that, I think. However, my own kind of intake of kind of information, things floating around on social media, is that it seems unlikely that it will in any meaningful way break down the information silos that we've created, both from news media sources and from algorithms that target things to us. And the way in which we we live, we're actually going to be more distant from one another for a while. Not in terms of people moving near people they want to be around, but your network is going to get reinforced because you're already going to be using the same tools, and talking to the same people as partisan to social distancing.

Justin:

I'm not super optimistic, I'm not particularly optimistic that the pandemic is what breaks ... is what wins the war on misinformation. It seems like it will reveal some facts to people a little too late, and there'll be some really serious consequences for that. But my kind of sense of the narrative that I can pick up on from reading and from social media is that these narratives are already being co opted by the same types of information flows and information channels as they have been. I don't really anticipate that this will win the war on misinformation, and in some ways it seems to be intensifying. When it can intensify around the issue of death, it feels like it's pretty entrenched. Yeah, that's my take. Greg?

Greg:

The internet's an open sewer, we've known that forever. But it's also our savior in this period, right? We couldn't have this chat, we couldn't teach our classes through Zoom, we couldn't keep up with our friends through virtual happy hours. Like every technology, it can be used for good or for evil, as they say in the superhero movies. If technology isn't creating a post-truth culture and it's not going to defeat a post-truth culture, what's going to do that is our own leadership and our own followership. I'm pessimistic, we're going to have an election campaign where truth is going to take a beating. I think that's inevitable.

Justin:

We saw this recently, right?

Greg:

Yeah. And so, I'm not optimistic about short-term fixes to the amount of untruth that filters through the social media world. But I think that the only way we can combat that is by educating ourselves about the good sources, not the bad sources. The reliable sources, not the suspect sources. And I think that it's a little liberal Pollyanna, but John Stuart Mill, more debate rather than less. And I think we had a good example of that in the last couple of weeks. There was a prominent argument, including from the President, that the cure can't be worse than the disease. And this notion that we had to reopen the economy, we had to get it back to work, and we all had to be back at our jobs by Easter. And that the consequences for the economy would be a lot worse than the consequences of public health if we didn't.

Greg:

Lieutenant Governor Patrick here in Texas, probably the most bald faced statement of that idea, right? And for a good 10 days, we had a national debate about that question. And I think that the result of that debate was the White House saying, "Forget about opening up by Easter. We've got to extend the social distancing regs through April." I think that was a product of good ideas driving bad ideas out, doesn't always happen, but I think it was a good example.

Justin:

Actually I'm teaching a decision-making class this semester. And one of the things we were talking about today before our podcast was a contrast between idea labs where you have ideas compete, you search for truth and you try to get a better solutions. Versus echo chambers, where all new evidence is shut down and you just double down on tribalism, and zealots, and don't allow for any new debate. And just kind of by one person's opinion, just kind of push it through and then force ... try to encourage everyone else to agree. And there is just all sorts of evidence, I think, that debate and free speech and having these discussions out open and public and trying to figure out what the best ideas are is so much better than name calling and misrepresentation of arguments. These echo chambers where everyone's just encouraged to agree and not question. So it's good to see that kind of play out in real time. Hey, Faith. We're not out of questions yet, this is pretty crazy.

Faith:

I think this is probably going to have to be our last one though.

Justin:

All right, let's hear it.

Faith:

We're running on time.

Greg:

Dinner awaits.

Faith:

Last question, have Bush School professors been discussing the opportunity this pandemic provides researchers to study emergency preparedness plans and the success and failures of the response of governments, corporations, and nonprofits?

Justin:

Yes, is the answer. I was on a call on Friday, and as part of a proposal that we've been working on, we were incorporating some thoughts about ... We were already looking at disaster response and disaster response and technology, and how that impacts first responders. And so, this has led to conversations about the role pandemics would play in that. I was also in another conversation where we were talking about out how might we use things like autonomous vehicles as technology improved to deliver things like tests and test kits with simple instructions from kind of a remote tablet.

Justin:

There are certainly conversations going on about how to improve emergency preparedness and disaster response as a consequence of Covid, it's already reaching kind of the research. Just as another example, it's kind of transformed our show, for example, for the last month. There's a lot more dialogue around it, there's a lot more conversations. People are kind of having more back and forths about how should we have been prepared, and what types of tools should we use socially, and what does this mean for concerns about authoritarianism, and privacy, and the labor market? So yeah, I've personally been a part of a number of these conversations that people are having already. Greg?

Greg:

I think that's great, and that's what we should be doing [inaudible 00:49:05], right? Me, I've just been in Zoom meetings trying to figure out how Zoom meetings can be used to do classes. I have to say, my research life such as it is as an administrator has suffered even more during the crisis. I foolishly brought two books home with me when I said, "Okay, I'm not going to the office anymore. But I'm going to be home so maybe I'll have time to read these books." They have not been touched.

Justin:

Lisa Brown should know that I volunteered to provide you with any extra Zoom help that you needed.

Greg:

Well, thank you so much for your help. Your help is greatly appreciated but not necessary. Thanks very much. I figured it out [inaudible 00:50:00].

Justin:

That's after my comments last time me being not necessary is probably the best follow up.

Greg:

Well, I think you're necessary if we're going to keep the podcast going. Because talking, I might enjoy that because I've never lost the love of the sound of my own voice.

Justin:

I've probably been accused of the same thing.

Greg:

I do think a little back and forth helps the ship.

Justin:

Yeah, I agree. I think we will in the interest of time and those of you that'll be watching the video or podcast recording, we'll go ahead and stop the questions for now. This was a lot of fun. Greg and I had some things we were going to talk about the stimulus package, we were going to talk more about oil prices, unemployment insurance, so we still have some topics for the next conversation. Our plan for now given our new world is to do these weekly, sometimes we'll have guests, sometimes we won't have guests. Our intention will be to take questions, see how the Bush community is doing kind of out there social distancing. But for the time being, we'll do this at this link. So if you use this link tonight, we'll have another Facebook event, we'll make it available to you. The podcast will come out on our Bush School Uncorked feed, the video will be on our Facebook page and maybe in a couple of other places as well. I think that's all I have. Greg?

Greg:

Don't touch your face.

Justin:

Oh man, I know. I caught myself doing it a couple times tonight. I'm just hopeless.

Greg:

[inaudible 00:51:38] that's why I'm messing with my pen just to keep my hand away from my face.

Justin:

I know that, [inaudible 00:51:44]. At least I'm not going out much.

Greg:

Now you're touching your face as we speak.

Justin:

Again, just in the conversation about it. I have no chance. Thanks everyone, it was a lot of fun. If a couple of you want to hang around for a minute, I'm happy to have some additional conversations. But I think that will do it for our episode. Thanks, Greg. Always a lot of fun, man.

Greg:

Great fun. See you next week. Thanks, everybody.