



Trump's denialist tweets are the coronavirus reaction we feared

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In two Monday morning tweets, President Trump made it painfully obvious that he is in complete and utter denial about the coronavirus threat.

Monday has seen a flood of bad news related to the coronavirus, particularly on the economic side. The stock market fell sharply amid fears that the measures necessary to combat the virus's spread will slow economies around the world. The drop was so precipitous that trading on the New York Stock Exchange was automatically suspended for 15 minutes — a stabilizing measure designed to prevent a complete collapse.

The stock market is not a particularly good measure of economic health in general, but it's one Trump cares for quite a bit. In response to the sell-off, he had two basic options: acknowledge the public's legitimate fears and take steps to improve confidence in the US response, or blame the media and convince everyone that the problem isn't real at all.

Guess which one he took?

Saudi Arabia and Russia are arguing over the price and flow of oil. That, and the Fake News, is the reason for the market drop!

Both of these tweets are deeply misleading.

It is true that Saudi Arabia and Russia are in the midst of a spat over oil production levels and that it's causing a drop in the price of oil. However, you can't separate the oil situation from the coronavirus problem. "Coronavirus is key. It is causing demand to drop dramatically — effectively shutting down the big Asian economies, cancelling flights and causing people to stay home," writes Emma Ashford, an expert on oil politics at the libertarian Cato Institute.

But a lot of the stock sell-off is about the economic effects of the virus itself, particularly fears that the measures taken to contain it, such as canceling events and restricting travel, will grind the global economy to a halt. Trump seems to be arguing that the market reaction is paranoia stoked by a fake news media inflating the risks from the illness. Doesn't the flu kill more people, after all?

There are many, many problems with this comparison. One big one is that the US health care system is equipped for dealing with the seasonal flu — but not the flu and another potentially deadly contagious disease at the same time, so more extreme measures may be necessary to prevent it from being overwhelmed. Another is that people have immunities to the flu but not to

the coronavirus, which means that one person with Covid-19 could spread it much more easily in an office or school than a person with the flu.

Fundamentally, the issue with these tweets is bigger than Trump not telling the truth. It indicates that instead of facing the reality of a global public health and economic crisis, the president of the United States is living in denial. He is choosing to pretend this is a fake problem and, worse, seems to think he can convince the country and the world that it is, too.

For Americans counting on the Trump administration to protect them from the disease, this should be deeply disturbing.