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EDITOR'S NOTE



A terrible toll

125,000 dead and counting from COVID-19, so why isn't America a nation in mourning?

BY FOON RHEE / foonr@newsreview.com

On May 27, America passed an unimaginable milestone—100,000 dead in the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, as cases surge across the country, that terrible toll is well past 125,000 deaths, with no end in sight.

It again raises the question: Why aren't we a nation in collective grief?

Is it because we have a president who seems incapable of empathy, who brags about what a great job he's doing, who prefers to celebrate stock market numbers and who is now ignoring reality and holding campaign rallies again?

Is it because the pandemic has become so politicized? Polls show that Democrats and Republicans not only disagree on how President Trump is handling the crisis, but also on social distancing, wearing masks and the pace of reopening. There's even a partisan divide on the official death count. While some Republicans say the count is being inflated to make Trump look bad, many Democrats say it doesn't count people who are dying without being tested for COVID-19.

Or is it because—to prevent more infections—there have been very few public funerals and memorial services? What if TV news shows were featuring weeping families every day? What if there were fewer public health officials on TV warning how bad it is, and instead more images of people dying and their loved ones mourning?

Is it because so many Americans have been laid off, are feeling depressed and had to change daily lives due to stay-at-home orders? Maybe it's easier to mourn people we don't know when we're not dealing with our own problems. As businesses reopen and life returns more to normal, maybe the pandemic seems less serious. And then the protests over the police killing of George Floyd overshadowed the pandemic.

Or is it because there have been so many deaths that we're all just numb to the fact that each number is a real person, with friends and

family? Maybe the new spike of deaths, even before a potential second wave in the fall and winter, will shake us out of coronavirus fatigue. Maybe the numbers are just too big to wrap our heads around, especially if we don't personally know someone taken by COVID-19.

It's a combination of all these reasons, most likely.

Yet, contrast what's happening now with America's response after 9/11. The nation was united in its grief, and then its resolve. Nearly 20 years later, many still remember the solemn ceremonies when the body of a New York firefighter was carried out of the smoldering ruins of the World Trade Center.

And that was after 3,000 deaths. We nearly had that many in a single day from COVID-19 during the peak in April.

It was fitting that we reached the 100,000 landmark so close to Memorial Day. Some,



including Trump, like to compare the pandemic to a war. If it is, we have only won early battles and face a stubborn and unforgiving enemy. And we have our war dead, even if they're not buried under rows of white crosses in national cemeteries.

So if we're not going to mourn them, the least we can do is keep a safe distance, wear masks, get tested, take the vaccine when it's safe and effective—do everything we can so all these deaths are not in vain.