

Hello, my name is John Graham and this is the first edition of my video blog. I'm calling it Living Room Talk because, as you can see, that's where I am and that's the level of informality I'm aiming for.

The talks will focus mostly, but not entirely on current events.
Tonight's topic is President Donald Trump's positive test for the coronavirus.

First, let me be clear that I have no special source of information in the White House, no deep throat.

I have all the same sources of public information that you do.
Based on what I know I offer some initial ideas on Trump's diagnosis and what it means.

Point 1. Predictably there's been a huge upsurge in fake news, conspiracy theories, half truths mistruths and exaggerations about the president's condition and there will be a lot more.

So it's important that you and I rely on independent public health professionals and not politicians for our information

2. That said it's going to be hard for anyone to get timely accurate information about the President's condition.

First because the White House is going to spin this every which way from Sunday.
Second, there's a legitimate national security concern that we not make it too easy for America's enemies to learn of, and possibly try to take advantage of, any perceived lapses in our national leadership.

3. Rely on what we already do about the virus and apply that knowledge to the Trump situation.

We know for example that about half the people who test positive have no or mild symptoms and that about 4% actually die from it.

But we also know that the chances of a bad result escalates dramatically with age and overall health.

An obese 74-year-old male like Donald Trump is definitely a member of this most vulnerable group and as such has much higher probability of getting a serious case of the virus or of even dying from it than a young person.

News just in that today President Trump was taken to Walter Reed Hospital. Now most of the stuff that a President needs to run the country is in the White House and can't easily be duplicated at Walter Reed. So taking Trump to WR "for a few days" is a bigger deal than the WH is letting on. Which suggests that what the President is experiencing is more than a cough and a headache.

As to quarantine—we know that, in the rosier scenario—where symptoms are mild or nonexistent—the course of disease is about 14 days so a quarantine to stop the disease from spreading further should be at least that long. Of course in those cases that are more serious, the course of the disease can be far longer than 14 days.

And evidence is now accumulating of long-term damage to the body even after the virus has receded.

4. What will this mean for the campaign? Well, for sure, it won't do anything to rebuild the trust that polls show Donald Trump has already squandered through his dangerous and discredited words and actions that have only made things worse. And with just a month to go before the election, Trump's coronavirus condition will dominate the new cycles which is also probably not what Team Trump wants to happen.

In terms of campaigning, again under the rosier scenario— that his symptoms stay minor— Donald Trump won't be holding any in-person rallies for at least a couple of weeks. It's possible the second debate might take place virtually.

Of course if his symptoms become more serious, his campaign could be off the rails for the duration.

But also consider this scenario. Donald Trump bounces back from the virus and is out playing golf in a couple of weeks.

It's easy to see what his messaging would be then: "See I was right; it's like a bad cold and certainly not worth shutting down the economy for and keeping kids out of school."

5. What about the worst case scenario? After all Britain's Prime Minister almost died from Covid, If Trump symptoms worsen to the point he is hospitalized then his administration must consider using the 25th amendment to temporarily

transfer the powers of the presidency to the vice president. And if both these old men go down, the office passes to the Speaker of the House.

I'm going to stop my remarks here because I see I am in danger myself of engaging in wild-ass conjectures.

Again a huge amount depends on how serious Trump's case of Covid turns out to be.

So stay tuned—to solid independent professional sources.

Certainly don't depend for the truth on any official White House source.

OK. Now I need something from you. I need your comments on the substance and style of this talk so that I can improve it. Unless I'm totally booted off the stage I intend to do this roughly once a week, informal from my living room talking to you as if you were in yours.

You're seeing it on Facebook but maybe some other platform is better. Let me know also of topics you'd like addressed. And what day of the week is best for you. And anything else.

Signing off for now, from the living room