

The 70 Seconds That Shook the World

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On March 16, 2020, following a long weekend of negotiations and deals about the coronavirus, Donald Trump, [Deborah Birx](#), and Anthony Fauci spoke at [a White House press conference](#) for the first time about nationwide lockdowns.

They handed out a sheet of paper – it mostly consisted of conventional health advice – that said in tiny print:

“bars, restaurants, food courts, gyms, and other indoor and outdoor venues where groups of people congregate should be closed.”

Shut it all down. Everything. Everyone. As if the whole economy were a nightclub closing early.

This amounted to a full repudiation of not only the Constitution but also freedom itself. At the very least, it was a fundamental attack on the First Amendment guarantees of the freedom of religion because it attacked the rights of Christians, Jews, Muslims, and everyone.

All evidence suggests that Trump did not know that the tiny text was in there.

The reading of the text was left to the question and answer session.

Even when it was read [by Fauci](#) from the podium, Trump seemed distracted by something else, almost as if he did not hear or did not want to hear it. Later he bragged that the whole thing was his doing, but looking back at the history of that day, it is not so clear.

Let's take this apart frame by frame to understand what happened in these 70 seconds as part of the Q&A session. A reporter starts by asking whether the federal government is telling people to “avoid restaurants and bars” or if the government is saying that “bars and restaurants should shut down over the next 15 days.”

Both Fauci and Birx knew for sure that the guidelines were calling for them to shut down.

After a long and tedious press conference about not much, following a very precise question, Trump turns to Fauci to have him answer. This might be because he wasn't listening carefully and did not know how to respond. Fauci then motions to Birx, who rises to the podium. Fauci probably believed that she would be the one to do the dirty work of announcing the lockdowns. Fauci is clearly egging her on: now is your time.

Birx begins her answer with a strategic deflection, speaking tendentiously about how long the virus lives on surfaces. It was nothing but smokescreen, and there is every reason to believe that she knew it. She pointedly was not answering the question. She chickened out at the last moment.

A possibly frustrated Fauci interrupts her with a hand signal from the side. Birx immediately realizes what he was going to do: he was going to read the order that Trump did not know was there. So she decides to pass the buck. She gets giddy and silly with excitement, adrenaline flowing. She starts stumbling around with her words, and says in a faux-girlish way that she will let Fauci speak because he is her mentor.

This was her way of saying that she would gladly pass this hot potato onto him.

She likely knew that this was the great moment they had all been waiting for. She was mad with excitement. Oddly, Trump was smiling too but possibly because of her antics, not because of what was about to happen.



Fauci steps up to the microphone. He does not personally call for lockdowns. Instead he reads the guidance word for word.

Dr. Fauci: The small print here. It's really small print. "In states with evidence of community transmission, bars, restaurants, food courts, gyms and other indoor and outdoor venues where groups of people congregate should be closed."

As he reads, Birx herself is smiling from ear to ear, as if the words were poetry to her. It was

not an unfamiliar text. She had been working on these words the entire weekend. Finally all her work had come to fruition.

Even better, she didn't have to read it. Fauci did.



What was Donald Trump doing during this time? He got distracted by someone in the audience who got his attention. He smiles and points a finger. One wonders who and why. Here is a screenshot.



Was someone assigned to do the job of distracting him? One cannot rule it out. This was the most significant moment of all. The big reveal had come. And Trump's attention was clearly elsewhere. To whom was he pointing and smiling?

Was he just pretending not to hear?

Who can say?

Fauci reads the text and then he steps away from the microphone. He had just read what is in fact the most totalitarian instruction ever given by any government in the history of the world – I can't think of another case of such a thing – that all human interaction must stop from sea to shining sea. After all, all congregate places include homes too. Then Fauci steps away from the microphone.

Trump then comes back to the podium. He briefly rolls his eyes, as if to say “There he goes again” but without a conception of what was just read or what it meant.



At this point, what happens? Birx is gleaming, internally cheering. The deed has been done. It's over. They worked for many weeks to pull off this caper and in an instant it was done.

Notice here that Fauci catches Birx's eye and gives a little nod. She smiles back. They were giving visual affirmations to each other.



It was then that Trump clarified that he is not telling anyone or anything to shut down, but this statement contradicts what was just read a few seconds ago.

The exchange went as follows:

Reporter: So Mr. President, are you telling governors in those states then to close all their restaurants and their bars?
Trump: Well we haven't said that yet.
Reporter: Why not?
Trump: We're recommending but-
Reporter: But if you think this would work.
Trump: ... we're recommending things. No, we haven't gone to that step yet. That could happen, but we haven't gone there yet.

This was another strange moment because Trump explicitly contradicted the words that were just read. The paper reporters were looking at were clearly a lockdown order. Any astute reporter would have seen the huge chasm separating the edict from Trump's own words or understanding.

Here you can watch the full 70 seconds. Deconstruct it yourself. See what you think. It was momentous, probably the most significant in American history, the culmination of weeks of persuasion and planning.

Everything followed from that brief moment: lockdown chaos, the closed schools and churches, the end of basic rights, the wrecking of business, and then began the spending, inflating, mad welfare checks, and the demoralization of the population that continues to this day.

The population now subjected to shock and awe, the mask and vaccine mandates seemed minor by comparison.

All of it unfolded in 70 seconds on March 16, 2020. So far as I know, this is the first and only article written so far to reconstruct this brief moment in time.

[Watch the video here.](#)

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