

Title: It's The Vaccine, Stupid

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# It's The Vaccine, Stupid



Rik W. Hafer

Bill Clinton used the slogan “It’s the Economy, Stupid” in his presidential campaign against George H.W. Bush. The idea was that a Clinton administration would deliver the economy from the recession caused by policies of the sitting president. Let’s revive the slogan, with slight modification, to defeat the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Incoming data show a definite pause in the economy’s expansion. The August jobs report reveals just how significant the recent surge in Covid-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths has impacted the economy. Compared to a monthly average of about 750,000 jobs created over the past few months, the Labor Department reported that employers added only 235,000 jobs last month.

Sure, it is a one-month number. But the size of the miss, along with other evidence of a slowdown has caused many to reconsider their growth forecasts. With many of the hardest hit industries—especially leisure and hospitality—recovering from last year’s debacle, they once again are in the eye of the storm. Even the retail segment took a hit, shedding 29,000 jobs.

The troubling fact is that this setback wasn’t caused by the mandated closures that characterized 2020. Consumer spending has paused as anxiety about the spread of Delta variant of the virus continues. With consumers accounting for over 70 percent of total spending, a slowdown in consumer spending will mean an ominous autumn for the economy.

Will the re-opening of schools precipitate another surge in cases and a repeat of last fall? For older kids, vaccines offer the best deterrent to contracting the virus. For younger ones who are not yet eligible for the

vaccine, masking is the best alternative. If schools are forced to shut down because of significant outbreaks, educational outcomes will suffer and the economic

expansion will be derailed.

Businesses have long recognized the importance of having a healthy workforce. In that tradition, many firms are requiring employees to be vaccinated. Tyson Foods mandates that its entire workforce be vaccinated by November 1. Other major firms with vaccine requirements include CVS, Eli Lilly, and Bank of America, to name a few. A vaccinated workforce makes good business sense: Fewer sick days means a more productive staff which translates into more profits.

Don’t such rules violate workers’ civil liberties? No more than the other mandates that you comply with, such as following dress codes, showing up for work on time, and not engaging in personal work while on company time. Why no protests against these intrusions on personal liberty?

Even though the virus and its Delta variant are novel, vaccine mandates are not. Many institutions—schools, the U.S. military, and others—have for years required vaccinations against contagious diseases, such as mumps and measles. Do those protesting Covid-19 vaccinations believe we should scuttle these public health measures? My guess is that most parents with children in school comply because they appreciate the fact that the kids are not being exposed to highly contagious diseases by their classmates.

What is it that those refusing to be vaccinated are trying to prove? By not getting vaccinated, their actions demonstrate all too clearly their disregard for the personal freedoms of others. Driving 80 through a residential zone, absconding with my car, or going to the grocery store naked may make you better off, but such actions impinge on others’ personal freedoms. That is why we have rules against such behavior, and why the vast majority of us agree to abide by them. It is part of being a member of society.

More of our fellow citizens need to abandon the

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selfish and wrongheaded notion that refusing to be vaccinated or not wearing a mask is somehow being patriotic. Failure to act responsibly will simply allow the pandemic to ravage our country, causing much unnecessary sickness, death, and economic hardship.

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