



Ted Cruz 
@tedcruz



9:59 PM · Nov 21, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

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John A. Carranza //

On November 21, 2020, U.S. Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) tweeted the cover image of a trussed and cooked turkey with a black star immediately above it and the words “Come and Take It” below. The tweet is a take on the flag used at the Battle of Gonzales in Texas, in which Anglo immigrants from the United States faced off against a Mexican force sent to retrieve the cannon given to them by the Mexican government to use as a defense against Native Americans. The Mexican forces were ordered not to engage with the Texians and, as a result, were forced to retreat when fighting broke out. This first battle that led to the Texas Revolution has come to be mythologized as a pivotal moment when white soldiers fought off a tyrannical government leading to Texas independence. The image was employed as a way to poke fun at public health experts’ recommendations that Americans avoid large gatherings at Thanksgiving. For Cruz, this is a stand against a tyrannical government attempting to limit freedom and not a real public health crisis in which over a quarter of a million Americans have died.

Cruz’s lackluster humor highlights an important and critical point in United States history today. Faced with a global pandemic, Americans are now at a crossroads over how to celebrate a holiday that has become engrained in national identity. Public health experts warn that large family celebrations should be cancelled, but many people will still travel home. Along the way they may encounter people who still feel a level of invincibility and won’t take precautions, are fatigued and prone to mistakes, are asymptomatic, or received a negative test that did not detect COVID-19 although they will likely test positive in days. Rates are already steadily rising in several states, putting a strain on healthcare workers and resources, and the holidays are likely to add to that

stress. However, many politicians, despite having had to quarantine after exposure—like Cruz—or having had the virus, continue to ignore public health recommendations as infringements on their rights.

How might public health experts reach the public at such a crucial time? Create outreach messages and programming that take into account at least three of four themes that historian John Duffy outlined in his history of public health. The first theme of recognizing the seriousness of the virus and reacting swiftly was carried out earlier this year but unraveled as Republican lawmakers began to challenge the wisdom of scientific and medical authority. Secondly, acknowledging that the United States has a diversity of citizens. Thanksgiving is celebrated by a majority of families in the United States as a common form of nationalistic pride and traditionalism rooted in history (Bell 145), but these families are still diverse along the lines of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, rural and urban populations, and any number of other characteristics. As a result, it would be useful to have national, state, and local governments develop outreach programs that speak to members of the community in their own language, create literature and an online presence that simplify the science for the layperson, and encourage friends and family to have frank discussions about the realities of living with the virus. Third, and most importantly, is the tension between what many consider to be individual liberty and the good of the public. This is admittedly tougher because lawmakers like Senator Cruz who advocate for individual liberty refuse to take coronavirus seriously, despite the alarming evidence of how much damage it is doing to the American population (Duffy 2-3).

Politicians ignoring public health crises and chuckling about them are not new. It is likely that medical resources will be stressed, and more Americans will die by the time we ring in a New Year. However, we might reverse these trends by doing our part to limit exposure, lobbying politicians for better leadership, and implementing more local- and state-level efforts to address coronavirus. The myth and tradition of being an American is strong and impenetrable from a national perspective, but on a smaller level it would be easier to appeal to other Americans' sense of reason and responsibility for their countrymen.

Suggested Reading:

Bell, Catherine. *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*. Oxford University Press, 1997.

Duffy, John. *The Sanitarians: A History of American Public Health*. The University of Illinois Press, 1990.