Twitter Thread by Phil Williams



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Finally got around to listening to Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee's Monday news conference, and *** I AM SO CONFUSED!!! *** 1/

On one hand, Lee told reporters that he did not impose a mask mandate because statewide mandates don't work, that people will only listen to their local elected officials. 2/

"A trusted voice in their community is their local official, the people that they elected to be their leaders," Lee argued. 3/

But, in Nashville where the local officials HAVE imposed a mask mandate, Lee said: "We know that people don't wear masks even when there's a mandate." 4/

So even local mask mandates don't work? 5/

Didn't Lee suggest Sunday night that local mandates do work? "Right now, 70% of Tennesseans are under a mask requirement," the governor said in his address to the state. "Because of that, 80% of Tennesseans report they wear their masks most or all of the time." 6/

But, by Monday afternoon, he had reached an entirely different conclusion. "We know that, despite the fact that 70 percent of our people are under a mandate, there are a lot of people who don't wear masks," Lee told reporters. 7/

Wait, local mandates don't work? "I think if they are instituted locally, people have more compulsion to wear. So I've encouraged mayors to do that," Lee said on Monday. 8/

(He has only given that authority to county mayors, but city mayors - who are presumably even closer to their constituents - do not have that authority.) 9/

So, if people will not listen to state officials -- and only want to hear from their local elected officials (but won't really listen to them) -- what was the purpose of his statewide address? 10/

"I made a very strong attempt last night to cut through the politics of this and to say 'Here's what the governor wants you to do.'" 11/

In the end, Lee suggested, the responsibility is on the news media to communicate the importance of masks and social distancing -- the same news media accused by his fellow Republicans in the House of "mask shaming." 12/

"Quite frankly," the governor told reporters Monday, "you could be very helpful in this process by saying 'the governor wants everyone to wear a mask.'" 13/

Wouldn't a statewide mask mandate communicate that message? "What we need," Lee said, "is for you and others to focus on Tennesseans wearing masks and not focus on whether or not someone has a mandate. That's what we need." 14/

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