**Risk tolerance is political**

Outdoor dining has come to Philadelphia as COVID-19 cases drop. Yesterday I walked past Little Pete’s, a greasy little diner in the city’s fashionable Fairmount neighborhood known for great heaping servings of breakfasts. The diner has set up a yellow tent to house tables, and tables are scattered throughout the small plaza fronting Little Pete’s.

It was as if COVID-19 never happened. One table was packed tight – no social distancing – by a group of eight chattering, laughing twentythings. None wore a mask.

I see more and more Philly residents shunning the mask. And gathering in groups outside bars and restaurants with seemingly no interest in social distancing.

This got me thinking. Going on 100 days since Philadelphia locked down, it’s as though a civil war has broken out – the masked versus the unmasked. Those keeping their social distance while on the streets and those who don’t seem to give a damn.

It’s a matter of risk tolerance. Increasing numbers of people in the city see little risk of contamination and infection as cases drop. Others more cautious wear masks whenever outside and try to abide by the six-foot distancing rule. Why take a risk, they seem to say. Play safe.

Behind the compliant and non-complaint behavior lurks politics. Those unconcerned about risk at this point will say, “I want my freedom.” “The whole thing has been overblown.” In other words, don’t fence me in. They say enough is enough, what I do is my business, and get the government and its rules or guidelines out of my life.

Those still concerned about risk counter, saying, “Don’t be selfish.” “Think of other people, especially elders and those vulnerable due to underlying medical conditions.” “This ain’t over yet. There could be a resurgence.” “Reopenings are happening too fast.”

The other camp argues business reopeniings are moving far too slowly.

I see a political divide. Not based on party affiliation, but on personal ideology. The unmasked and unconcerned are the independents. Those continuing to wear masks and keep their social distance see people dependent on each other. Call them the populists.

This political confrontation is played out daily on the streets of Philly. Across the ideological divide, do the two camps talk to each other? Not much. The same confrontations and lack of commuicatoin are playing out in Washington. Both sides have their beliefs, which they keep to themselves or share with like-minded friends. It’s the same political polarity which divides the country these days, and has for decades.

I never thought I’d see PPE politicized. Public health politicized. Science politicized.

Sooner or later the pandemic will be controlled, by a vaccine or new medications and treatments. It may be later this year, in 2021, some will tell you’ll have to wait to 2022 for the “all clear” signal to be given. The PPE civil war will be over.

But still you’ll have two entrenched political mindsets. The leave-me-alone, get-the-government-out-of-my-affairs crowd. And the interdependent community-minded who see government – be it local, state or national – as necessary and not significantly intrusive in their daily lives.

You see the same division play out in the workplace. The safety champions and the safety resistors. With health and safety professionals acting as UN peacekeepers.