

Trump boasts holding US pandemic deaths to 200,000 would be “a good job”

Patrick Martin
31 March 2020

In a press briefing held Monday in the White House Rose Garden, President Donald Trump declared that a death toll of 100,000 to 200,000 in the United States as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic would represent “a good job” by his administration.

Trump’s self-congratulatory indifference to death on such a massive scale followed by several hours the statement of the coronavirus response coordinator for the Trump White House that 100,000 to 200,000 American deaths was a “best case” outcome of the pandemic, and that the death toll could rise substantially above that figure—into the millions—unless “we do things almost perfectly.”

The comments by Dr. Deborah Birx shocked her interviewer, Savannah Guthrie of NBC’s “Today” show, to the point where she declared that “you kind of take my breath away.”

The exchange is worth quoting:

Birx: The worst-case scenario is between 1.6 million and 2.2 million deaths if you do nothing. If we do things together well, almost perfectly, we could get in the range of 100,000 to 200,000 fatalities. We don’t even want to see that...

Guthrie: I know, but you kind of take my breath away with that, when I hear you say that’s sort of the best-case scenario. If everything works and people do the things you’re asking them to do, maybe you can hold the deaths to one to two hundred thousand, in this country.

Birx: The best-case scenario would be 100 percent of Americans doing precisely what is required, but we’re not sure, based on the data

you’re sharing from around the world, and seeing these pictures [of people on beaches and at church services] that all of America is responding in a uniform way and protecting one another. So we also have to factor that in.

The estimate put forward by Dr. Birx is a considerably more ominous projection than that advanced by Dr. Tony Fauci, the top federal infectious disease scientist, in television interviews the day before. Fauci presented the figure of 100,000 to 200,000 deaths as a middle-range outcome that could still be reduced significantly if the correct actions were taken. Birx presented the same number as the best-case scenario, the lowest possible number, and one likely to be surpassed significantly.

The projected minimum death toll of 100,000 to 200,000 people in the United States is more than combined American deaths in the imperialist wars of the past 75 years—the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf War, the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. It is more than the official death toll of 116,500 from World War I, and could quickly approach, as Birx indicated, the US death toll of 405,000 in World War II.

Wall Street, celebrating the trillions that corporations are being handed by his congressional lackeys, took the projection of hundreds of thousands of deaths in stride. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 690 points, somewhat more than 3 percent.

The coronavirus epidemic is a massive historical catastrophe, for the United States, for major European countries like Italy, Spain and France, and for the world as a whole.

The death toll worldwide is now approaching 38,000,

with 3,708 new deaths, up 500 from the day before by one calculation. Spain suffered 913 deaths, Italy 812, the US 563 and France 418—meaning that two-thirds of worldwide deaths took place in four countries with supposedly advanced “First World” health care infrastructures.

The US death toll demonstrates the utter failure of every level of the capitalist state in America—the federal government, the states and the various localities—and of all sections of the ruling elite, including the Democratic and Republican parties, the military-intelligence apparatus and the corporate financial oligarchy.

Despite ample warnings over more than a decade of the likelihood of global pandemics, and with the experience of near-misses like SARS, MERS and the H1N1 flu, there was no serious advance preparation by the American bourgeoisie, or any section of the capitalist class around the world.

The response to the statements by Dr. Birx has been an attempt to bury her admissions beneath a deluge of “happy talk” about likely breakthroughs in testing, therapeutic treatments and vaccines, in which the White House has been aided by a servile and compliant media.

At the White House press briefing late Monday afternoon, there was a clear effort to change the “optics” of the event, as Trump and Pence walked out alone, separated by six feet, without the usual backdrop of aides and experts. Pence sat down as Trump took the microphone alone, to announce that more than one million people had been tested in the United States.

Trump said nothing about the rise in the number of positive tests to more than 160,000, or the 20,000 new cases in America, or the nearly 600 deaths, by far the worst day for mass casualties in the United States since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The cumulative US death toll from the coronavirus has now surpassed the nearly 3,000 deaths on 9/11.

But instead of taking note of this grim milestone, and proposing any serious measures to mobilize the vast resources of the American economy and working population against the pandemic, Trump expressed his satisfaction with as many as 200,000 American deaths. He amused himself with a series of childish photo ops, called on several of his own health officials to give servile statements thanking him for his leadership, and invited a group of corporate CEOs to take bows and pledge the assistance of their companies for the fight

against the coronavirus. One business executive had the gall to draw the conclusion from this ongoing tragedy that the American people needed to “turn back to God.”

The response of the Democratic Party and its media allies to the statements by Dr. Fauci Sunday and Dr. Birx Monday has been virtually total silence. Former Vice President Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, called on Trump to stop squabbling with Democratic governors in Michigan, Washington and other states, and to base federal policy on the advice of Fauci and other experts.

“They should let Dr. Fauci and the experts run the show, speak more. Let them lay out exactly what’s happening,” he told MSNBC Monday afternoon. But he said nothing about the massive death toll estimated by Fauci and Birx, nor did he suggest that anything could be done to prevent it.

Similarly, the *New York Times* published a lengthy editorial under the headline, “How America Can Reopen,” which made no mention of the historic levels of casualties projected by the Trump administration or how to forestall such a catastrophe. Instead, the editorial chided the White House for rushing to reopen the US economy before adequate preparations could be made, and suggesting—echoing New York Governor Andrew Cuomo—that US workers should be systematically tested so that those who are not infected by the coronavirus can be sent back to work at once.

The main concern of all sections of the American ruling elite is to reestablish the process of extracting profits from the labor of tens of millions of American workers, regardless of the impact on their health.

Meanwhile, the dimensions of the economic crisis triggered by the pandemic were underscored by an estimate by the St. Louis branch of the Federal Reserve Board, the US central bank, that 47 million workers could lose their jobs and the unemployment rate could rise to 32.1 percent in the coming months.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact