

As US infections and deaths continue to rise

Democrats join with Trump in bipartisan push for rapid return to work

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14 April 2020

Having failed for weeks to take any steps to contain the spread of the deadly coronavirus in the United States, President Donald Trump is once again pressing for a rapid reopening of the economy, perhaps as early as the beginning of May. The financial oligarchy for which he speaks is banking on the increasingly desperate economic situation facing the working class, with thousands lining up at food pantries around the country in scenes recalling the bread lines of the Great Depression, to force workers to return to factories and work sites where no serious safety measures have been instituted.

At Friday's White House press conference, he touted his soon-to-be announced "Opening Our Country" task force, saying it would include "great business leaders." Fox News reported Monday that the task force, to be announced as soon as today, would include top White House aides and cabinet officials, many of them multimillionaires or billionaires. The list includes Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, Agriculture Secretary Sonny Purdue, Labor Secretary Eugene Scalia, and White House advisers Larry Kudlow, Peter Navarro, Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump.

Navarro, Trump's trade adviser and leading champion of trade war against China, in an interview with the *New York Times* denounced public health experts and medical advisers, who have repeatedly warned against a premature reopening of nonessential parts of the economy. "They piously preen on their soap boxes speaking only half of the medical truth without reference or regard for the other half of the equation," he said, "which is the very real mortal dangers associated with the closure of the economy for

an extended period."

Neither Navarro nor Trump could care less for the lives and health of the working population of the United States. Having mobilized their bribed politicians in both parties to approve a multitrillion-dollar bailout of the banks and corporations, the financial aristocracy is demanding that the country get on with the business of pumping out corporate profit from the labor of the working class.

This is a bipartisan effort, as signaled by the op-ed piece by former Vice President Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, in Monday's print edition of the *Times*, headlined "My Plan to Safely Reopen America." Also on Monday, the governors of seven Northeastern states—New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Delaware, Rhode Island and Massachusetts—announced the formation of a regional task force to plan out a return to work in the region, which has been the hardest hit by the pandemic.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, in attempting to justify the move to loosen restrictions and reopen workplaces, said Monday that "the worst is over" with the number of new cases having stabilized. This is under conditions where total COVID-19 deaths in New York state surpassed 10,000 last week, doubling over the previous week. Total cases in the state are nearing 200,000, and reports continue of desperate shortages in hospitals in New York City and other cities.

Massachusetts has risen to fourth place in per capita cases behind New Jersey and New York. Combined, these seven states in the Northeast have seen 328,892 cases and 15,251 fatalities, accounting for the majority of cases, with a disproportionate number of deaths, in

the US.

The Northeastern governors were joined by the governors of California, Washington state and Oregon, who announced their own regional task force for the same purpose.

All but one of the 10 governors is a Democrat.

Whatever tactical differences they have with the Trump administration over the precise timing of the back-to-work order, all are agreed on the priority of securing the profits and fortunes of the oligarchs over saving lives.

Both the Democrats and Trump promise to carefully weigh the advice of health and pandemic experts. But the scientific and public health community is virtually unanimous in warning that a premature return to work, without having controlled transmission, put in place a massive program of testing, contact-tracing and isolation, disinfected workplaces and provided workers with protective equipment, there will be a renewed surge in infections and deaths. None of these safeguards are in place, nor are the governments in the US or Europe planning to secure them.

The attitude of the US government to science and medical evidence was indicated by Trump's tweet Monday morning complaining of "fake news" and retweeting a call for the firing of the chief health adviser on the White House task force, Dr. Anthony Fauci. This followed an interview on Sunday in which Fauci acknowledged, under prodding, that lives would have been saved had social distancing measures been enacted sooner.

On Monday Trump began his press conference by calling on Dr. Fauci, who delivered an abject apology for his statement the previous day, saying that it had been "misinterpreted."

Trump also revived his description of the pandemic as the "Wuhan virus," in keeping with an intensified drive to use the health catastrophe to escalate trade war and military war preparations against China.

The nightmare scenario being prepared for the population by the ruling class, in which the pandemic and its attendant death and suffering are to be "normalized," was indicated Sunday by Neel Kashkari, the president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minnesota. Kashkari, who oversaw the \$700 billion bailout of the banks following the 2008 collapse of Lehman Brothers, said the United States was looking at

18 months of "rolling shutdowns."

"We're looking around the world as they relax the economic controls," he said. "The virus flares back up again. We could have these waves of flareups, controls, flareups and controls until we actually get a therapy or a vaccine."

Meanwhile, infections and deaths continue to rise across the country. Deaths increased by 1,535 on Monday, bringing the total to date to nearly 24,000. Infections rose by 26,641, bringing the national total to nearly 600,000.

The death toll among workers who remain on the job continues to skyrocket. The *Washington Post* reported that 41 grocery workers had died from the virus, while thousands have tested positive in recent weeks. Hospital and health care workers, transit workers, autoworkers and first responders continue to contract the disease and die in alarming numbers, with nothing done to halt the carnage.

Virginia-based Smithfield Foods announced Sunday that it is closing its pork processing plant in Sioux Falls after hundreds of workers tested positive for the coronavirus. And reports are mounting of deadly outbreaks at nursing homes, homeless shelters, prisons and within immigrant communities.



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