As the pandemic spirals out of control, Trump attacks testing, holds indoor rally in Phoenix

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On Tuesday, as the COVID-19 crisis continued to spiral out of control, President Donald Trump derided coronavirus testing and held yet another mass indoor event, this time in the hotspot of Phoenix, Arizona, in defiance of city officials and new warnings from health experts.

Over the past week, the average reported number of new cases across the country has risen by 28.1 percent, reaching 28,387, according to *Stat News*. This has brought the total number of infections to more than 2,300,000 and the reported death toll to more than 121,000—figures that are widely acknowledged to significantly underestimate the actual scale of the public health disaster.

New infections are rising in 25 states, with a marked increase in cases among young people. Those states in the South and Southwest that lifted social distancing measures and shutdowns the earliest and the most precipitously, in line with Trump's back-to-work campaign, are seeing astronomical surges in infections.

Over the past week, average daily new cases in Texas (3,932) have increased by 92.2 percent over the previous level, with Houston becoming a new international center of the pandemic. Florida has seen an 84.2 percent rise to 3,270 daily new cases. Oklahoma, where Trump held a campaign rally on Saturday, has recorded an average increase in new cases of 91.2 percent, hitting 331 infections.

Arizona, where Trump spoke Tuesday night before some 3,000 people at a "Students for Trump" convention, has seen a rise in average daily infections (2,554) of 97.8 percent. Maricopa County, which includes the state capital Phoenix, where the rally was held, has suffered a 120.3 percent rise in average daily infections. Hospitals in the city are being flooded with a record number of patients. The state of Arizona, meanwhile, has one of the lowest coronavirus testing rates in the US.

The deadly back-to-work drive is bipartisan, with Democratic governors and mayors taking the lead in reopening businesses and forcing workers to return to the job without any real protection from COVID-19 infection. In California, headed by Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom, daily infections have risen by 37.5 percent over the past week.

Following his sparsely attended campaign rally in Tulsa on Saturday, Trump is insisting on holding a series of mass events, including the rally in Phoenix, in order to reinforce his policy of ending all efforts to contain the pandemic and fully resuming business operations regardless of the toll in human life. The complete subordination of public health to the drive for profit and the interests of Wall Street investors is the policy of both parties of the financial oligarchy in the US, and of capitalist governments all over the world.

Trump spoke to reporters Tuesday morning on the White House lawn as he left Washington for Arizona. Asked about claims by his press secretary that he was joking when he told his supporters in Tulsa that he had asked officials to slow down COVID testing in order to lower the number of reported infections, Trump said, "I don't kid. We did 25 million tests. Testing is a double-edged sword."

On Monday, asked about the risk of spreading the virus by holding an indoor event in Phoenix, he had brushed the question aside, saying, "I'm not worried." On Tuesday, it was reported that two more members of his advance team had contracted the virus, bringing the total to eight.

As at the Tulsa rally, attendees are being required to sign a waiver saying they will not hold the event host or the venue responsible if they contract the disease. The

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mayor of Phoenix, Kate Gallego, a Democrat, has opposed the Trump event on public health grounds. The City Council voted last Friday to mandate face masks in public, but the Trump team has refused to require those attending his rally to comply.

Trump devoted most of his remarks Tuesday morning to denouncing protesters for seeking to topple monuments, calling them "hoodlums" and "anarchists," and pledging to send them to prison for long terms. Prior to his Phoenix rally, he visited several sites in Yuma, Arizona to tout his wall with Mexico and his shutdown of immigration from Mexico.

Also on Tuesday, members of the now sidelined White House Coronavirus Task Force testified before the House Energy and Commerce Committee. Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases; Dr. Robert Redfield, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Adm. Brett Giroir, assistant secretary for health at the Department of Health and Human Services, and Stephen Hahn, commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, all indicated that they did not agree with Trump's suggestion that coronavirus testing be slowed down.

Fauci and Redfield also made clear they had not been consulted on Trump's decision to pull out of the World Health Organization, that they disagreed with the move, and that they were continuing to work closely with the organization.

Asked about Trump's refusal to wear a mask in public and his disparagement of those who do, Fauci made clear that he disagreed with the president and was critical of his holding large rallies in the midst of the pandemic. "You should not congregate in crowds," he said. "If you do, please wear a mask."

All four witnesses referred to the likelihood of a further spread of the coronavirus in the fall and winter and the added danger of the return of the annual flu season. Asked to characterize the present situation in the US, Fauci began by calling it a "mixed bag," noting the decline in infections in former hotspots on the East Coast and saying he remained "cautiously optimistic" on the prospects for a vaccine by early 2021.

"However," he warned, "in other areas we are seeing a disturbing surge of infections that looks like it is a combination. One of the things is increasing community spread and that is something I am quite concerned about… Right now, the next couple of weeks are going to be critical in our ability to address those surges we are seeing in Florida, Texas, Arizona and other states."

In general, the Republicans on the committee either praised Trump's response to the pandemic or evaded the question. The Democrats criticized aspects of the administration's criminal response, such as Trump's discouragement of the use of masks and his hostility to testing. But there was no criticism of the premature reopening of the economy or the forced return to work, which has already led to tens of thousands of workers in auto, meatpacking, logistics and other industries becoming infected and hundreds dying.

Nor was there any discussion of the social catastrophe facing tens of millions of workers whose jobs have been permanently destroyed, along with their health insurance and the ability to pay rent and feed their families. There was, as well, general silence on the multi-trillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street and the corporations that was passed by a near-unanimous vote by both parties in March.

The hearing demonstrated once again that, behind the minor tactical squabbles and political posturing of the two parties, the homicidal policy of "herd immunity" dictated by the corporate oligarchy is being implemented on a bipartisan basis.

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