

As COVID-19 infections explode in the US, Fauci warns of 100,000 new cases a day

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With daily coronavirus infections in the US continuing to rise at record rates, pushing health care systems in many states to the breaking point, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the leading American expert on infectious diseases, warned Tuesday that the daily infection rate could rapidly rise to 100,000.

Testifying before the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said:

I'm very concerned about what is going on right now, particularly in the four states that are accounting for about 50 percent of the new infections ... we're going in the wrong direction ... so we really have to do something about that, and we need to do it quickly.

We can't just focus on those areas that are having the surge. It puts the entire country at risk. We're having 40-plus thousand new cases a day. I would not be surprised if we go up to 100,000 new cases a day if this does not turn around.

Asked to give an estimate of the likely death toll, Fauci said he could not give a number, but added, "I think it is important to tell you and the American public that I'm very concerned because it could get very bad."

Fauci's testimony underscored the grim reality that the pandemic in the US is now far more widespread than it was at its previous height in late March and early April, when states across the country imposed lockdowns to contain the spread of infections and deaths. A major factor in the imposition of the lockdowns was a series of wildcat strikes by autoworkers in the US and Canada, who refused to risk infection and death to continue

pumping out profits for the Detroit Three auto companies.

Once the bipartisan CARES Act was passed on a near-unanimous vote in Congress, putting in place a multitrillion-dollar bailout of Wall Street and the corporations, both Trump and media outlets aligned with the Democrats, particularly the *New York Times*, began demanding the "reopening" of the economy and the forced return of workers to the factories and workplaces.

This was carried out by the governors and mayor of both parties. It was done without any serious system of testing, contact tracing and quarantining in place. Now, just weeks later, the virus is raging out of control. Reported infections in the US are above 2.6 million and the death toll has topped 127,000.

Last week saw the highest daily average rise in new cases over a seven-day period: 39,000 per day. Last Friday set a new record of over 47,000 cases, and Monday saw an increase of more than 44,700. The number of infections is rising in between 26 and 38 states, depending on the data source.

Eleven states had an average daily increase in cases of over 100 percent over the past 14 days. These include Florida (237 percent), Texas (165 percent), Arizona (128 percent) and Oklahoma (176 percent). California's average daily increase is 70 percent; Ohio is up by 69 percent.

Not only are new cases up sharply, the percentage of positive tests is rising, and hospitalization rates are going up in 12 states.

The situation is so dire that 16 states have either paused or partially rolled back their reopening plans. None, however, have even suggested a shutdown or curtailment of nonessential production, despite the rise of infections and deaths of workers in meatpacking, auto, logistics and many other workplaces.

This was the context for Tuesday's hearing, which took testimony from Dr. Robert Redfield, director of the

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Adm. Brett Giroir, assistant secretary of health at the Health and Human Services Department (HHS), and Dr. Stephen Hahn, commissioner of the Food and Drugs Administration, in addition to Fauci.

Among the Republicans on the Senate panel, there was little in the way of a direct attempt to defend the response of the Trump administration to the pandemic, which is so badly discredited that many Republicans are fearful of losing control of the chamber in this November's election. The day before, Trump's White House press secretary, Kayleigh McEnany, had sought to defend Trump's denigration of masks and his moves to curtail testing by downplaying the scale of the surge, saying, "We're aware that there are embers that need to be put out."

The Democrats jumped at the chance to attack the easy target of Trump, who most crudely and nakedly promotes a policy with which, in all essentials, they agree. The common theme on both sides was how to "safely" and more efficiently carry through the reopening of the economy. The focus was on empty proposals to step up testing and contact tracing, with no discussion of allocating the needed resources, along with pleas to Trump to begin wearing a mask and speculation on the development of a vaccine.

The underlying premise on both sides was that the back-to-work drive would continue unabated, nothing would be done to impede the flow of profits to the corporations and banks, and the limitless flooding of the financial markets with cash from the Federal Reserve would proceed unhindered. Nothing, however, would be done to halt and reverse the catastrophic upsurge of the disease currently underway.

The ranking Democrat, Patty Murray of Washington state, set the tone in her opening remarks. Declaring that "a leadership crisis is raging in the White House," she spoke in vague terms of ramping up testing and developing a comprehensive national vaccination plan.

Not a single Democrat on the committee, including Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, called for a suspension of nonessential production or noted the spread of disease and death among workers forced to work under unsafe conditions.

Sanders, supposedly the scourge of the pharmaceutical giants and the "billionaire class," used his five minutes of questioning to urge that an eventual vaccine be made available to all regardless of income, in the course of which he said, "Our tax dollars are going to the tune of billions of dollars to drug companies to help develop this

vaccine and that's OK."

In a speech on the pandemic on Tuesday, former Vice President Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic presidential candidate, chose to attack Trump in militaristic terms. "Back in March," Biden said, "he called himself a wartime president ... Now it's almost July and it seems as if our wartime president has surrendered."

Biden actually underestimated the severity of the current situation, characterizing it as "half recovering and half getting worse," when, in fact, infections are soaring across the bulk of the country. He outlined a five-point plan, which consisted merely of increased testing, more personal protective equipment for front-line workers, the development of treatments and vaccines, uniform national standards for economic reopening and special attention to the elderly and people of color—none of which either he or the Democratic Party intends to carry out.

He said nothing of the back-to-work drive that is being imposed by threatening workers with a cutoff of unemployment benefits, made no mention of the wildcat actions by autoworkers and others against unsafe working conditions, ignored the Depression-era levels of unemployment and impoverishment triggered by the pandemic, and indicated, by his silence, his support for the massive bailout of Wall Street.

The real concerns of those sections of the ruling class that are backing Biden were indicated when he suggested that increased testing would give "every worker called back to the job ... confidence that they and their fellow workers are not infected," that is, create an illusion of safety to contain the mounting opposition of workers. Similarly, he warned that Trump's incompetent and callous handling of the pandemic was "making Americans lose even more faith in our government."

This, in a nutshell, is the policy of the Democrats: Do nothing that cuts across the crass profit interests of the corporate-financial oligarchy, continue the basic policy of "herd immunity" being carried out by Trump, but do a better job of concealing the class interests driving the ruthlessly anti-working class response to the pandemic.



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