

The Senate holds a COVID-19 hearing as US tops 200,000 COVID-19 deaths

Benjamin Mateus
24 September 2020

The number of individuals infected with COVID-19 is now more than 32 million globally, of which almost one million have perished. Since early July, when lockdowns were lifted, and economies were opened, the number of new cases has been steadily growing, and the number of daily deaths has kept abreast with 40 to 50 thousand dying each week.

In this regard, the United States has proven incapable of containing and quelling the pandemic by any reputable public health standard. With 7.1 million cases of COVID-19 and over 206,000 deaths, and despite having one of the highest per capita testing with over 300,000 tests per million population, it leads in almost every grim category, which underscores the obvious—the inability of the most powerful imperialist country to use its resources to protect the population.

The policy of herd immunity being pursued, as the perspective noted yesterday, is one of “social euthanasia” where the elderly and infirmed, considered unproductive and therefore worthless, are allowed to be culled by the infection, absolving them of supposedly any direct responsibility.

The recognition of the 200,000 deaths milestone by every major media outlet also means that damage control measures must be brought to bear on the chance of seeming too smug for “mission accomplished” claims as schools and universities have moved to ensure in-class education inaugurated by the return of 90,000 pre-K and special education students in New York City.

This was precisely what was behind the political theater yesterday that saw the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions hearing on the US’s response to the coronavirus, first lightly censuring, then offering their confidence, all to assure the population’s flagging trust in US health institutions.

This comes on the heels of acknowledgment that the Trump administration had been meddling with the CDC’s weekly scientific reports and publishing of guidance that did not support the president’s outlook. Additionally, recent guidance on testing asymptomatic individuals and retraction of aerosolization of the virus has all but irrevocably tarnished the reputation of the revered US CDC.

The fabulous four – Dr. Anthony Fauci, Dr. Robert Redfield, Admiral Brett Giroir, and Dr. Stephen Hahn – testified in support of their tireless and committed response to the

pandemic. Dr. Hahn told the panel that “every one of the decisions we have reached has been made by career FDA scientists based on science and data, not politics.” He then ensured the panel that he would “not permit any pressure from anyone to change that.”

On August 31, in an open letter to Dr. Hahn, Dr. Eric Topol, the editor-in-chief of Medscape, writes, “I’m gravely concerned about your leadership of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The circumstances of your statements in recent days have led to a crisis in confidence. Not only has your credibility been diminished, but so has that of the FDA, its 15,000-plus staff members, and, most importantly, your ability to oversee the health interest of the American people.”

Dr. Hahn was an aggressive proponent of Trump’s hydroxychloroquine debacle, granting the medication an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) without any evidence to support its efficacy.

Joined by the president and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, he touted the tremendous efficacy on mortality reduction of convalescent plasma based on a retrospective observational study whose claim on mortality reduction was completely unfounded, followed by announcing another EUA. Only after overwhelming criticism from the scientific establishment did he begin to walk back his remarks.

His issuance of a EUA for Remdesivir that broadened its application to any hospitalized patient with moderate COVID-19 symptoms violated the limited findings that it only had a marginal benefit for patients with severe COVID-19 symptoms with time to discharge. With a price tag of \$3,000 per treatment, clearly what motivates Dr. Hahn’s humanistic initiatives are the enrichment of the pharmaceutical companies, which will see to it that he is provided a choice position after his tenure at the FDA is over.

His remarks at the hearing yesterday being questioned on granting emergency approval for a COVID-19 vaccine have to be completely dismissed when he said he would seek guidance from a panel of outside experts and ensured that the process would be “transparent and independent.” In an interview with the *Financial Times*, “Dr. Hahn insisted there was a safe way to make a vaccine available before the end of the Phase Three trials – potentially by issuing an emergency authorization for

use by certain groups rather than a blanket approval.”

Dr. Redfield, who has recently been rebuked by Trump for his comments at a Senate committee last week when he told senators that a vaccine wouldn't be available till the middle of next year and that masks were a vital defense against the coronavirus, repeated his opinion that it would take until April to procure sufficient doses of the vaccine and possibly until July before the population could be vaccinated.

Moderna, the biotechnology company, supported by the assistance of the NIAID and funding from the government for its experimental mRNA vaccine -1273, has reported it could have enough data for its preliminary analysis by late December at the earliest. However, the stipulation is that it proves highly efficacious, and the trials could be stopped sooner. Realistically, they said that it could take ten months from the beginning of their trial, July 2020, to have sufficient cases to determine the vaccine is 60 percent efficacious. Yet, with the elections looming, these promises, and reality checks, have little significance compared to the political pressures behind the scenes.

Dr. Redfield admitted to the senators that the guidance issues on asymptomatic people were a byproduct of HHS Assistant Secretary Michael Caputo's insistence, who claimed, before resigning his position, that the CDC scientists were engaged in “sedition” against the president.

Admiral Brett Giroir, a member of the coronavirus task force and the Trump administration's official overseeing the coronavirus testing, had nothing to say on the state of testing in the United States. Despite the trumped-up claims of more testing than any other country, COVID-19 testing has stalled across the country with wait times for testing far longer than epidemiologists recommend for appropriate surveillance on contact tracing.

Instead, he regaled the senators with the declining cases, deaths, and hospitalization, which are by all accounts still far too high and neglected to mention that the infection has seeped deep into rural communities such as in Wisconsin and Minnesota, South and North Dakota, and finding a resurgence in Arizona.

Instead, he touted the purchase of 150 million point-of-care tests from Abbott, an extraordinary 750-million-dollar contract, of which 974,000 were sent to 7,600 nursing homes and 541,000 to 5,500 extended care facilities, 300,000 to Indian Health Services, and 249,000 tests to historically black colleges and universities.

There was no mention of contact tracing or the building of any public health infrastructure. He did not explain why these rapid antigen tests were not incorporated into the reporting dashboards to better glean where the virus has spread. The private enterprise is finding quite a lucrative industry in the pandemic.

Dr. Anthony Fauci's role as a celebrity scientist and darling of the political establishment was clearly highlighted in his

rebuttal to an attack by senator Rand Paul, who suggested that Dr. Fauci condoned lockdowns and “lauded New York for their policy.” He added, “New York has the highest death rate in the world. How can we possibly be jumping up and down and saying, “oh, Governor Cuomo did a great job?””

Dr. Fauci fired back, “No, you misconstrued that, senator, and you've done that repetitively in the past. They got hit very badly, they made some mistakes. Right now, if you look at what's going on right now, the things that are going on in New York, to get their test positivity to one percent or less, is because they are looking at the guidelines that we have put together from the task force.”

“Or they have developed enough community immunity that they're no longer having the pandemic because they have enough immunity in New York City actually to stop it,” Senator Rand interjected.

Fauci followed, “This happens with Senator Rand all the time. You were not listening to what the director of the CDC said that in New York, it's about 22 percent. If you believe that 22 percent is herd immunity, I believe you're alone in that.”

However, his most recent comments with teachers exposed him as a political stooge and not a scientist when he informed teachers that little was known about the transmission of the coronavirus among children and young people and that teachers were, unfortunately, going to be a part of a large experiment. This statement provided sufficient context that Dr. Scott Atlas' absence was immaterial, as Dr. Fauci's comments would not materially contradict Dr. Atlas' position.

Towards the latter half of the event, in an attempt to bolster public confidence, Senator Bob Casey asked the witnesses if they would publicly receive the vaccine when it was made available, with each one vouching to offer themselves and their families as guinea pigs.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact