Biden, Pence both reject lockdowns to save lives as coronavirus pandemic explodes

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At press conferences held only minutes apart Thursday afternoon, President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President Mike Pence each flatly rejected any possibility of a lockdown of the US economy to save lives, despite the impending catastrophe from the coronavirus pandemic.

The twin statements amounted to a joint, bipartisan declaration that hundreds of thousands of Americans must die rather than sacrificing the profits of Wall Street and giant corporations, which demand that workers stay on the job no matter how hazardous the workplace has become as COVID-19 spreads uncontrollably in virtually every American state.

Pence's statement was merely the reiteration of the longstanding policy of the Trump administration. He appeared at the first public briefing by the White House coronavirus task force in many months, only in order to make it emphatically clear that there was no change in Trump's policy of back-to-work and back-to-school.

The timing of the press conference seemed to be determined by the announcement the day before that schools in New York City, the largest US school district, would end in-person instruction and revert to online instruction only because of a sharp increase in the positivity rate in COVID-19 tests administered to city residents.

Pence declared that the policy of the Trump administration remained that all schools should reopen for in-person instruction, even though this will mean a horrific toll in disease and death among teachers, students and school workers.

The Biden statement had more political consequence, since it was a declaration by what is still expected, by the media and corporate America, to be the next administration, one which was elected in large measure because of popular outrage over the indifference and callousness evinced in Trump's handling of the pandemic.

Biden was therefore at pains to demonstrate that he would be as obedient a servant of big business as Trump, so that there would be no reason for the financial aristocracy to seek to overturn Biden's clear-cut victory in the Electoral College and the popular vote.

Appearing side-by-side with his running mate Kamala Harris, Biden offered his usual mixture of vague and mushy responses to questions about economic policy, the transition process and Trump's efforts to overturn the election. But on the lockdown question he was categorical and definitive.

After an hour-long video conference with 10 Democratic and Republican state governors, largely dealing with the coronavirus pandemic, Biden first acknowledged that the United States had reached "another tragic milestone, 250,000 deaths," and the vast suffering this has caused. Biden then offered the victims of the pandemic only his prayers, while praising the governors for their bipartisan efforts to encourage mask wearing and restrict venues like bars and restaurants.

The president-elect said there was a great deal of consensus among the governors on the need for economic relief for states and cities, whose budgets have been devastated by COVID-19 related shutdowns and expenses. "The federal government has to deliver this relief sooner rather than later," he said, although he gave no hint as to how this would be accomplished given the six-month-long deadlock in Congress on the issue.

After a few generalities about the difficulties of coordinating the delivery of a vaccine to 330 million Americans—once one or more vaccines have been approved by federal agencies—and boilerplate remarks about how America could accomplish any goal if we "come together as a country," Biden took several questions.

He announced that he had already made a selection of a treasury secretary, although he did not reveal the name,

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and said that the person would be widely accepted within the Democratic Party as well as to "moderates" who had supported his campaign. In other words, not Senator Elizabeth Warren or anyone else identified with the left-populist wing of the Democrats. He voiced general support for the policy of the Federal Reserve, which has pumped trillions into the financial system over the past eight months, fueling the rise in the stock market and in the personal wealth of the billionaires.

When one reporter cited Biden's previous statements as a candidate, that he "would support a nationwide shutdown if scientists recommended it," Biden responded sharply, "it was a hypothetical question, and the answer was I would follow the science."

He continued, "I'm not going to shut down the economy period. I'm going to shut down the virus. That's all I'm going to shut down and let me say that again. No national shutdown. No national shutdown because every region, every area every community can be different. So there is no circumstance that I can see that would require a total national shutdown."

Biden went on to give a few banal examples of different degrees of restriction on operations of gyms, restaurants and churches, but he avoided the central issue of keeping large factories, warehouses and office buildings open, facilities which have been shown to be among the most important vectors for mass infection by coronavirus.

Besides his categorical assurances to corporate America that there would be no return to lockdown conditions, Biden spoke extensively, but in a deliberately obscure manner, on the increasingly frenzied efforts of the Trump campaign to overturn his election victory.

One reporter asked him to "take a step back and look at the way the president is handling in his refusal to concede. What do you think is really going on here?" Given the opportunity to characterize Trump's actions as a political coup, Biden reduced the issue to Trump's personality and psychology.

"Let me choose my words," he said. "I think we are witnessing incredible irresponsibility, incredibly damaging messages being sent to the rest of the world about how democracy functions and I think it is—well I don't know his motives, but I think it's totally irresponsible."

Asked about Trump's summoning Michigan Republican officials, including leaders of the state legislature, for a meeting at the White House today, Biden dismissed the suggestion that this action was "meant to overturn the election." He described it as "another incident where he will go down in history as one of the most irresponsible presidents in American history."

He then continued, "It's not within the norm at all. The question's whether it's even legal. But it will be interesting to see who shows up. We have won Michigan. It will be certified. We will end up making clear that they are—that we won."

Biden's press conference was held several hours after the Trump campaign's attorneys, headed by former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, held a 90-minute media briefing (beginning with a 60-minute diatribe by Giuliani) to publicize false and unprovable charges about vote-counting software supposedly being used to transform a "landslide victory" for President Trump into Biden's current 306–232 lead in the Electoral College, and six-million-vote lead in the popular vote.

Without offering a shred of evidence, Giuliani, Sidney Powell and Jenna Ellis made a series of claims based on anti-communist hysteria and outright anti-Semitism, charging that the Venezuelan government and Jewish billionaire George Soros had interfered in US elections in order to defeat Trump.

A major focus of these wild conspiracy theories, including xenophobic allegations about the votes of Americans being counted in Germany by a Spanish company, was the claim that Biden's lead of 148,000 votes in Michigan—his largest lead among the six states now being contested by the Trump campaign—was the result of systematic fraud by Democrats in Detroit and Lansing.

Soon after, the White House announced that top Michigan Republicans would meet with Trump in the White House on Friday. The leader of the state senate, Mike Shirkey, and the leader of the state house, Lee Chatfield, both declared this week that they did not support the state legislature appointing electors to replace those chosen by the voters on Nov. 3.

Such an action would have no precedent in American history, and would amount to a direct and unconstitutional usurpation of power by the Republican Party and Trump.

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