

In “major speech” on the coronavirus pandemic

Biden predicts surge in deaths, proposes no measures to stop it, and pledges to reopen the schools

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On Tuesday, Democratic President-elect Joe Biden gave what was billed as a “major speech” on the coronavirus pandemic. He spoke following a meeting with his coronavirus advisory panel.

In perfunctory remarks that lasted barely 15 minutes, Biden provided a grim description of the mass death already occurring and predicted that things would get only worse in the coming months. “We will lose tens of thousands more lives in the months to come,” he said. “Hospitals are being stretched beyond capacity. That is data before the impact of cases coming from the holidays and this coming holiday of New Year’s Eve.

“We have to anticipate that infections over the holidays will produce soaring death tolls in February. Turning this around is going to take time. We might not see improvement until we are well into March.”

If anything, Biden’s grim portrayal was a serious underestimation of the scale of death and suffering, not to mention the devastating economic crisis impacting tens of millions of workers and small business people.

In many cities across the US, intensive care units are at 100 percent of capacity. Freezer trucks are being used to stack bodies that cannot be accommodated by morgues.

Only hours after Biden’s speech, NBC Nightly News reported that overwhelmed hospitals in Los Angeles are beginning to ration care, deciding to withhold treatment from patients less likely to survive. Ambulances are waiting hours to deliver patients to triage wards. The broadcast showed an LA nurse tearfully saying, “Patients are dying like flies.”

Biden reiterated his earlier prediction that 400,000

Americans will have died of COVID-19 by the end of the Trump administration in mid-January. But once again, he presented this catastrophic wave of death and suffering as something inevitable and unalterable. He proposed no emergency measures to prevent tens of thousands of additional deaths over the next few weeks.

He incongruously combined clichés, happy talk and hollow exhortations—“Brighter days are coming. It’s going to take all the grit and determination we have as Americans to get it done”—with an acknowledgment that the process of distributing and administering vaccines has already virtually collapsed.

“The pace at which the vaccination program is moving now,” he said, “if it continues, is going to take years, not months to vaccinate the American people.” Even if Congress approved his requests for additional money for vaccinations, he added, “It would take ramping up six times the current pace to one million shots per day. It will still take months to have the majority of the United States population vaccinated.”

In concluding, he declared, “My ability to change the direction of this pandemic starts in three weeks, with thousands dying every day between now and then.” Under the heading of “What needs to happen now,” he limited himself to urging President Trump to reverse course and promote mask-wearing, adding, “I hope the president will clearly and unambiguously urge all Americans to take the vaccine.”

As for his administration’s pandemic policy, Biden rehashed previous pledges to encourage mask-wearing. He also said he would invoke the Defense Production Act to require private corporations to speed up the

production of vaccines and protective equipment. Most significantly, he restated his plan to reopen K-8 schools for in-person learning by the end of his first 100 days in office.

Thus, despite campaigning against Trump's criminally negligent response to the pandemic, on the central pillars of Trump's policy of "herd immunity," i.e., encouraging the spread of the virus, Biden and Trump are in agreement. When one of Biden's pandemic advisers, Dr. Michael Osterholm, called for an emergency shutdown of non-essential production with full income protection for the affected workers, Biden immediately repudiated any such action. "I am not going to shut down the economy, period," he declared.

The Biden administration will continue to force workers into unsafe factories and workplaces and double down on Trump's efforts to reopen the schools, so as to free working class parents to resume pumping out profits for the corporations. This is despite scientific studies proving that factories and schools are leading vectors in the spread of the virus.

When the ruling class and its political representatives, whether Republican or Democratic, talk about the "economy," they are not talking about the jobs and living conditions of the vast majority of the people who work for a living and produce all the wealth. They are talking about the exploitation of the working class and the profits and wealth of the corporate-financial elite.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained, this counterposition of human life and "the economy," with the latter prioritized over the former, is the "awful calculus" that is used to justify the normalization of death. Biden's miserable speech exemplifies the indifference to human suffering and death, on a scale previously unseen outside of wartime, which characterizes the entire political establishment. It is driven by class interests.

None of the half-measures proposed by Biden and the Democratic Party impinge in the slightest on the economic interests of the corporate-financial oligarchy that rules America and, for that matter, the world. The entire response of both parties to the pandemic, from the beginning to the present, has been dictated by the need to keep stock market prices rising and corporate profits and the fortunes of the super-rich growing.

These interests preclude any serious, scientifically

and socially driven measures to contain, treat and eradicate the virus. The pandemic has demonstrated that the capitalist system is incompatible with the most elementary social needs, including human life itself.

The fight against the pandemic requires the independent intervention of the working class, in the US and internationally, to impose the shutdown of all non-essential production and schools and full income protection for all affected workers and small businesses. It is a fight against Biden and the Democrats no less than against Trump and the Republicans. To secure the resources needed to contain the virus and save lives, the wealth of the capitalist oligarchs must be expropriated and the corporations and banks transformed into publicly owned utilities under the democratic control of the working class.



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