

# Biden pledges to continue Trump's campaign to open schools and businesses

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Nearly one year since the first case of COVID-19 was detected in the United States, more than 400,000 people have lost their lives.

The daily death toll and new cases are at record levels. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as many as 90,000 people could die in the next three weeks. Even this could be an underestimation. New, more contagious variants of COVID-19 have been detected in more than 20 states, raising the prospect of an even more rapid spread of the pandemic.

This catastrophe is the background of the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden, who is set to assume office on Wednesday riding a wave of popular revulsion and outrage over the Trump administration's disastrous mishandling of the pandemic.

Biden's apologists claim that, unlike Trump, Biden will "listen to the scientists" and take the measures necessary to save human lives. Commenting on Biden's COVID-19 policy, the *New York Times* published an editorial Sunday titled, "The Next President Actually Has a Covid Plan."

It concludes, "It's hopeful, then, that the country is just days away from leadership that takes these problems seriously. President-elect Joe Biden has announced plans to revamp the nation's flagging coronavirus response."

The *Times* editorial, however, is a dishonest narrative aimed at obscuring the fact that Biden and the Democrats have opposed and continue to oppose the measures urgently required to bring the pandemic under control.

In explaining the origins of the present catastrophe, the *Times* writes of the "obvious mistakes" made by "officials" over the past year. "In spring and summer, the problem was testing and personal protective equipment; this fall and winter, it has been vaccination and genomic surveillance."

No, these were not "mistakes." The Trump administration deliberately undermined testing infrastructure in the United States with the aim of

preventing a panic in the financial markets until it had secured a bailout for Wall Street. As the *Financial Times* noted, Jared Kushner, who organized the White House's pandemic response behind the scenes "had been arguing that testing too many people, or ordering too many ventilators, would spook the markets and so we just shouldn't do it."

This cover-up was entirely bipartisan. Despite receiving numerous classified briefings by US intelligence agencies about the massive danger of the pandemic, Democratic members of Congress did nothing to alert the public. The *Times* did its part to sweep the looming pandemic under the rug, refusing to write a single editorial on the subject between January 29 and February 29.

But while the deplorable state of testing and contact tracing helped ignite the pandemic nationwide, the principal cause of the continued uncontrolled spread of the virus is the rejection by the entire political establishment of any measures that undermine the interests of Wall Street and the profits of the ruling class. In particular, following the bailout of the banks in late March, the Trump administration spearheaded a "back-to-work" campaign, with the support of the Democratic Party governors throughout the country.

In fact, an extensively researched feature article published by the *Times* on the same day as its editorial notes, "The severity of the current outbreak can be traced to the rush to reopen last spring."

And while the *Times* refers obliquely to "officials" who made "obvious mistakes," it was on the pages of the *Times* itself that the demand, "the cure can't be worse than the disease," was first raised, by *Times* columnist Thomas Friedman. This became the slogan for the bipartisan campaign to reopen schools and businesses.

As for the measures now necessary to halt the further spread of the virus, the *Times* refers to the need for "face

masks, physical distancing, closures and travel restrictions,” writing that “these measures will work when they are used consistently and correctly,” and that “the incoming administration will have to drive this point home as forcefully as possible.”

But the most basic “social distancing” measures include the shutdown of schools and nonessential production. One recent study published in *Science* magazine found that limiting social gatherings to 10 people is the most effective method to contain the pandemic, followed closely by closing schools and universities, then followed by closing “most nonessential businesses.”

While Biden claims his administration will “listen to the science,” the Democrats are absolutely opposed to all of these measures. “I’m not going to shut down the economy, period,” Biden said in November. “No national shutdown... there is no circumstance that I can see that would require a total national shutdown.”

On the contrary, at the center of his COVID-19 program is the pledge to accelerate the premature reopening of schools and workplaces. “We’ll also do everything... to safely reopen the majority of our K-through-eight schools by the end of the first 100 days,” Biden said Thursday.

The new administration has made clear that the central aim of the drive to reopen schools is to get workers back into workplaces to generate profits for major corporations. Last week, Brian Deese, Biden’s incoming director of the National Economic Council, told a Reuters conference, “We need to get the schools open so that parents... can get back to work.”

Beyond continuing the drive to reopen schools and businesses, the central plank of Biden’s COVID-19 response is a mask mandate “for federal workers and federal property, on interstate travel like trains and planes.” This is an utterly token and meaningless measure, applicable to just a tiny fraction of the American workforce.

As for Biden’s pledge to back the quick passage of \$1,400 “stimulus checks” (reduced from \$2,000), this is a diversion from what is actually necessary: full income for all workers in nonessential industries so that they can stay home until the pandemic is under control.

While the *Times*, with its characteristic dishonesty, simply ignores out of hand Biden’s rejection of calls to close schools and businesses, a more direct explanation of the Democrats’ policy on the pandemic was given this month by New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, who said lockdowns are unacceptable because “the cost is too high.”

“We simply cannot stay closed until the vaccine hits critical mass,” Cuomo said. “The cost is too high. We will have nothing left to open. We must reopen the economy.”

This claim, coming from the governor whose state contains New York City, the billionaire capital of the world, is absurd. According to a report published last month by the Institute for Policy Studies, the wealth of America’s billionaires has grown to \$4 trillion, up by \$1 trillion since the pandemic.

Combined, America’s 10 wealthiest billionaires have a net worth of over \$1 trillion, a figure larger than the annual economic output of more than 150 individual countries.

It is subordination of human life to the enrichment of the financial oligarchy that has led to the deaths of more than 400,000 people. If hundreds of thousands of lives are to be saved, exactly the opposite policy must be carried out: the selfish concerns of the financial oligarchy cannot get in the way preserving human life!

The Socialist Equality Party demands the immediate closure of all nonessential businesses and schools. This must be accompanied by full compensation for lost wages and small business income, paid for through the expropriation of the vast sums hoarded by the rich. Trillions of dollars must be invested in health care infrastructure to treat, contain and eradicate COVID-19 and ensure that society is protected from the threat of infectious diseases in the future.

The SEP calls on all workers to organize emergency action committees to enforce emergency measures, including the shutdown of nonessential production. This struggle raises the question of who controls society: the capitalist class on the basis of profit, or the working class on the basis of social need.

The pandemic is demonstrating the basic reality that capitalism is incompatible with the most basic needs of society. The working class must mobilize in a united struggle against this bankrupt and homicidal system.



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