

Biden doubles down on reopening schools as child COVID-19 cases surge

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The speech by President Joe Biden Thursday afternoon, laying out a six-point program to address the mounting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, was a declaration of his administration's determination to push ahead with the reopening of schools and forcing workers back to their jobs, regardless of the danger of infection and death.

Biden gave the speech under conditions where the pandemic has taken a leap forward over the past two weeks that brings daily deaths perilously close to the highs reached last winter. As the ruling class program of full reopening of schools and businesses unfolds, the impact of the pandemic is likely to exceed even that harrowing toll.

The US death toll for Thursday, September 9, almost certainly exceeded 2,000, a figure last reached in February. According to the Worldometers.info site, the total for the day had reached 1,929, with 10 states, including Michigan, Ohio, Missouri and Wisconsin, still to report, and with Florida reporting a suspiciously low nine deaths, despite averaging more than 100 deaths every day in August.

Unlike the catastrophic winter spike in infections and deaths, which occurred before vaccinations had become widely available, the current explosion in the pandemic takes place at the point that nearly 75 percent of the US population 12 and over have been vaccinated.

This was the focus of Biden's speech, in which he characterized the rising toll of infections and deaths as a "pandemic of the unvaccinated," a phrase which has become a staple of his administration's propaganda.

The purpose of this language is to focus on individuals who have failed to get vaccinated, or who refuse to do so, rather than targeting the institutions responsible for permitting the spread of pandemic—above all, the capitalist system itself.

It is the profit requirements of the capitalist ruling class which have blocked the only rational strategy for combating the deadly pandemic, a full, society-wide lockdown, with full economic support for all families, to deprive the virus of the human hosts it requires to propagate, until mass vaccination and other public health measures can exterminate it.

Scientists who participated in a forum last month organized by the Socialist Equality Party estimated that this could be accomplished in two months or less. As a statement of the SEP,

published this week as a perspectives column in the WSWS, explained:

Vaccination is a powerful tool. However, disconnected from a broader strategy aimed at rapidly reducing new infections to zero and thus eradicating COVID-19, vaccinations and other mitigations amount to nothing more than palliative care.

Biden sought to accentuate the contrast between his preferred strategy, mitigation of the worst of effects of COVID-19, and the strategy of his opponents among the Republican governors, who oppose any mask or vaccination mandates in pursuit of a policy of "herd immunity."

Governors like Ron DeSantis in Florida and Greg Abbott in Texas—whom Biden singled out for criticism, without naming them—oppose any restriction on the operation of schools or businesses (in the name of "individual freedom"). They are effectively demanding that the virus be given free rein to infect the entire population, after which the survivors of this holocaust would supposedly be immune.

While the vast majority of the American population rejects this policy with revulsion, the mitigation strategy of Biden and the Democrats leads to the same destination, even if by a more circuitous route. This is demonstrated in his continued embrace of reopening schools and keeping them open regardless of the impact on the health and lives of children, teachers and their families.

He declared, "The third piece of my plan, and maybe the most important, is keeping our children safe and our schools open." Of course, these two are diametrically opposed. Children cannot be kept safe if they are sent back into schools without vaccinations being available to those under 12, the vast majority.

Biden claimed, "We know if schools follow the science and implement the safety measures like testing, masking, adequate ventilation systems that we've provided the money for, social distancing and vaccinations, then children can be safe from COVID-19." But the reality is that crumbling schools don't

have adequate ventilation systems, overcrowded schools don't permit social distancing, testing is rudimentary, and masking alone (when it occurs) is not nearly enough to prevent the spread of the deadly virus.

The president made this claim after a week in which 250,000 child coronavirus cases were reported, more than at any previous point in the pandemic, and a month in which 30,000 children were hospitalized, overwhelming the limited resources of pediatric hospitals, particularly in the Southern states.

Despite Biden's notorious promise last February, to a small child in Wisconsin, that she was highly unlikely to contract the infection or bring it home to her parents, some five million children have tested positive for COVID-19 since the pandemic began, and they are just as likely to transmit the virus to others as adults are.

The entire six-point program Biden outlined in his speech was tailored to the requirements of corporate America. For example, he proposed vaccine mandates for federal government workers, for the employees of federal contractors, and for hospitals and other health care facilities supported by Medicare and Medicaid. Many of these companies have already announced or implemented such mandates, which are completely justified.

But Biden did not propose a vaccine mandate for air travel, something which is well within the powers of the federal government. Passengers boarding planes are barred from carrying deadly weapons, and they can just as rightly be barred from carrying deadly viruses. Such a mandate, however, would disrupt commerce and affect the profits of major corporations, including the airlines.

As always from a US president, much of the speech consisted of brazen lies, an effort to tell the American people: Don't believe your eyes, pay no attention to the rampage of COVID-19 through schools and workplaces, this is not the fault of the policy of reopening schools in the midst of a global pandemic. It's just the result of bad people, who refuse to get vaccinated.

Children are not refusing to get vaccinated. For those under 12, the vast majority, no vaccine is available. But they are being sent back into schools where the virus has ideal conditions to spread rapidly and is already forcing the shutdown of entire classes, grades and even buildings. Dozens of teachers and students have died, and schools have not even fully reopened yet.

Biden boasted about how many Americans have been vaccinated since he became president. He was silent on how many Americans have died of COVID-19 since he became president—270,000, added to the 400,000 who died while Trump occupied the White House. At the current rate, Biden will have presided over more deaths than his ignorant, anti-science predecessor by the end of this year.

The Delta variant is the driving force of the current upsurge in the pandemic, Biden explained. But he neglected to say that

the policy of "living with the virus," rather than eradicating it, has allowed SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, to develop new and ever more infectious and lethal mutations, with the ultimate danger that some variant will become invulnerable to the current vaccines.

The policy of eradication is essential for defending the population from the impact of the lethal virus, not only in the United States, but around the world. The working class must fight for this policy against all factions of the corporate ruling elite. As the SEP statement explained:

The sacrifice of tens of millions of lives on the altar of corporate profit ranks among the most horrific crimes in modern history. The "herd immunity" and mitigation policies of the ruling elites will not be reversed outside of the building of a mass movement of the working class. In every part of the country and globally, mass protests and strikes to close schools and nonessential workplaces must be prepared.

Rank-and-file committees, independent of the teachers unions and both big business parties, have been formed throughout the US and globally to prioritize workers' lives over profits. This network must be built in every school district and neighborhood to fight for the immediate closure of schools and nonessential workplaces, combined with the provision of ample resources to all workers affected and to provide high quality remote learning.

Such a movement will quickly spread across industries and countries, as rank-and-file committees prove to be the only form through which the necessary measures will be implemented to eliminate and ultimately eradicate COVID-19 on a world scale.



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