

Florida Governor DeSantis appoints right-wing surgeon general to oversee state's COVID policy

Benjamin Mateus
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Yesterday, more than 2,000 people died from COVID-19 in America. This brings the cumulative total of COVID-19 deaths to more than 705,000. With the return to school in full swing, September has been particularly horrific. Death tolls are averaging more than 1,635 deaths per day or over 11,450 per week. By the end of this month, more than 45,000 will have perished, exceeding the combined totals of August and July, which reached 43,000. In other words, close to 90,000 people across the US have needlessly died this summer.

To put this into perspective, this would make COVID-19 related fatalities once more one of the leading causes of death in the US, on par with cardiovascular and cancer deaths. Yet, such figures receive barely a mention in the media who have grown callous to such statistics.

Throughout the pandemic, the deadly Delta summer has catapulted Florida into the top ten position in this macabre category on a fatality per capita basis. If these statistics are further broken down for the most recent period, the number of deaths over the last seven days places Florida, with 328 deaths per day, in second place, just behind Alabama.

For the pandemic, there have been more than 53,000 COVID-related deaths in Florida. However, an astounding 14,843 have died over the summer, accounting for 28 percent of all COVID deaths. This translates to a rate of 165 people per day in the last three months.

The deadly track set upon Floridians has been instigated by the irresponsible measures taken by Governor Ron DeSantis and his administration. They have entirely dismantled the COVID tracking

dashboards that provide critical public health information to the population. He has resisted the most meager of measures to keep people safe from infections, all the while using the state's juridical systems to ensure schools and businesses remain open.

In this regard, the appointment of Dr. Joseph Ladapo, a graduate of Harvard's medical school and a UCLA researcher, as Florida's new surgeon general this week is a cunningly criminal strategy in promoting the policy of herd immunity which has morphed into the edict of learning to live with the virus at whatever cost.

Like Dr. Scott Atlas, a senior fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, appointed as Trump's advisor on the coronavirus task force, Ladapo brings a modicum of institutional credibility for DeSantis' nefarious efforts to keep Florida open despite the ravages of the pandemic.

Despite Dr. Ladapo's public health credentials, he has promoted principles advocated in the bankrupt Great Barrington Declaration, such as herd immunity through natural infection. He has also touted quack treatments like hydroxychloroquine and has been associated with ultra-right-wing America's Frontline Doctors.

Dr. Ladapo, like the governor, is opposed to mask mandates and believes vaccinations should remain a personal choice. "There is nothing special about them [vaccines] compared to any other preventive measures. It's been treated almost like a religion, and that's just senseless. We support measures for good health. That's vaccination, losing weight, exercising more, eating more fruits and vegetables, everything." Such a characterization of the role of vaccines in mitigating infections and protecting lives from the infection's

deadly consequences is both insulting to the victims of COVID and dangerous in its pseudoscientific construction.

In an opinion piece published in the *Wall Street Journal*, Dr. Ladapo called the initial life-saving lockdowns and measures employed in the first weeks as ineffective, perpetuating a condition within society he called “COVID mania.” His fallacious comments that COVID hardly poses a threat to most people are not borne by the devastation it has wrought as ICUs are filled with young people barely clinging to life. He can only resent the impact that “COVID mania” has had on policymakers’ social and economic reasoning.

He added, “Liberty has played a special role in US history, fueling advances from independence to emancipation to the fight for equal rights for women and racial minorities. Unfortunately, ‘COVID mania’ led many policymakers to treat liberty as a nuisance rather than a core American principle.”

In this sense, the “core American principle” is the unfettered right to make as much profit off the back of the working class at whatever cost. In this regard, Dr. Ladapo is certainly DeSantis’ go-to doctor.

On Wednesday, Ladapo issued a new emergency rule that only parents should decide when their children needed to quarantine if exposed to someone who tested positive for the coronavirus. Endorsing his Surgeon General’s decision, DeSantis echoed, “Quarantining healthy students is incredibly damaging ... it’s also incredibly disruptive.” Centuries of public health experience were cast aside in this asinine exchange of remarks.

Ann Fusco, Broward Teachers Union President, remarked, “The spread of the virus among children has gone up by triple digits, yet our governor and his newly appointed surgeon general continue to bury their heads in the sand. This is clearly politically, not public health, motivated.”

Robyn McCarthy, a parent of children attending schools in Florida, told the local news, “I feel like we’re in the twilight zone. We’re already playing Russian roulette, and I’m already throwing my kids in the lion’s den, so how much more to the breaking point are you going to put parents in?”

Close to 500 children have died from COVID-19 since the pandemic began. Over 100 children have lost their lives in the last five weeks, with 20 just in the

previous week. As Dr. Eric Feigl-Ding noted, this is on par with cancer death rates. He tweeted, “We don’t accept pediatric cancer deaths. We don’t accept even eight total infant pillow deaths. We should NOT accept COVID-19 deaths in kids either, dammit!”

Such fears are being shared by working families everywhere. Each day, as their children return home, the nagging worry that they have contracted COVID remains heavy on their minds. Anecdotal tragedies are legion. The story of the recent death of a Cincinnati woman, Amber Feltner, 37, a mother of eight, including three-year-old twins, from COVID, ricochet through communities, further fueling these constant concerns.

The developments in Florida are but the tip of the spear. The Delta surge has wrought havoc in states like Alabama, West Virginia, and Idaho as their hospital systems have become inundated with COVID patients. In contrast, their local and state officials defend their inaction as promoting personal freedoms and choice. They have also led to an exponential rise in deaths far beyond any previous time during the pandemic.

The diktats of the financial markets have guided the entire response to the pandemic across the political spectrum. It is precisely this cost-based risk-benefit approach to the pandemic that DeSantis and Ladapo have alluded to, which has exposed the ruling elites and their political functionaries’ true aim. The working class must wrest political power from their hands and make the right public health policies urgently needed.



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