

The stench of eugenics at the White House

Andre Damon
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In remarks reminiscent of the darkest days of the eugenics movement, Rochelle Walensky, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), said Friday that the fact that COVID-19 predominantly kills people who are “unwell to begin with” is “encouraging news.”

As the number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 reached a record high, the CDC director was asked in an interview on ABC’s “Good Morning America” about “those encouraging headlines that we’re talking about this morning.”

Walensky replied:

The overwhelming number of deaths, over 75 percent, occurred in people who had at least four comorbidities, so really these are people who are unwell to begin with, and yes, really encouraging news in the context of Omicron.

As a factual matter, the claim that COVID-19 in general, and the Omicron variant in particular, is only affecting the elderly and ill is false. The spread of the new variant has driven a record surge in hospitalizations of young people, and in particular children and infants. The long-term consequences for those who survive and suffer the consequences of “Long COVID” are still little understood.

However, the suggestion that the “overwhelming number of deaths” occur among the elderly and those with preexisting conditions (comorbidities) is “encouraging news” is shocking in its implications.

Walensky’s comments were broadly condemned by doctors, scientists and advocates for the disabled as an embrace of eugenics by the Biden administration.

“This is eugenicist,” lawyer and disability activist Matthew Cortland, who is chronically ill, wrote on Twitter. “The problem is that the people running @CDCgov, including @CDCDirector, ****fundamentally believe**** it’s ‘encouraging’ if disabled and chronically ill people die. And all of their decisions are informed by, and enact, that belief.”

None of this is hyperbole. Walensky’s comments express the turn on the part of the White House and dominant sections of the US political establishment toward an open embrace of the view that the lives of the chronically ill, the disabled, and the elderly are fundamentally valueless.

The leading advocate of this policy is Ezekiel Emanuel, the former Obama administration official and current Biden COVID task force adviser, who is now being promoted in a full court press in the US print and broadcast media.

On Wednesday, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* published a set of articles by Emanuel and other former Biden health advisors arguing for making COVID-19 the “new normal” and calling on states to “retire” the reporting of COVID-19 deaths. These articles were treated as gospel in the US media, with fawning front-page write-ups in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*.

But this campaign went into overdrive on Sunday, with Emanuel serving as the unstated surrogate for the White House on NBC’s “Meet the Press.” Emanuel’s call for a “new normal” was simultaneously hailed by the lead editorial in the *Washington Post*, which called it a “sensible strategy for living with covid,” presented by “experts.”

In reality, the call by Emanuel and his co-authors is nothing more than a recapitulation of the pseudo-scientific Great Barrington Declaration, stripped of the myth that “herd immunity” would lead to the end of the pandemic. It is a plan for COVID-19 in perpetuity, with wave after wave, variant after variant, taking countless lives each year.

Neither “Meet the Press” nor the *Washington Post* editorial mentioned that Emanuel is a leading advocate of reducing life expectancy and slashing the provision of medical care for the elderly and chronically ill.

Emanuel, in the words of University of South Carolina philosophy professor Jennifer A. Frey, “thinks of disabled and elderly people as useless and ineffectual; when we run the cost/benefit analysis they cost more than they are worth.” Emanuel believes “that life after 75 [is] not worth living and old people a drain on our resources,” she concluded.

Emanuel “has expressed his eugenicist ideas time and time again,” noted journalist and disability researcher Laura

Dorwart.

Emanuel's basic precept is that the fundamental determinant of medical care must not be the individual's rights to decency and dignity, but rather a "cost-benefit analysis" driven by the costs to "society" of extending the lives of the ill and the elderly.

Emanuel claims—rightly—that the medical profession is averse to such cost-benefit analysis. But this is because the application of such an analysis to medicine and public health is informed by the legacy of eugenics and the German Nazi Party's murder of tens of thousands of people with chronic illnesses whom the Nazis branded "unfit to live."

In the bioethics textbook *From Chance to Choice: Genetics and Justice*, professors Allen Buchanan, Dan Brock, Norman Daniels and Daniel Wikler note the legacy of "cost-benefit analysis" in the American eugenics movement.

They cite the "Eugenics Catechism of the American Eugenics Society" of 1926, which argues, "It has been estimated that the State of New York, up to 1916, spent over \$2,000,000 on the descendants" of one family—the Jukes—claimed to be genetically deficient. "How much would it have cost to sterilize the original Jukes pair?" asked the society: "Less than \$150."

The book continues, "Similar examples abounded in the arithmetic books of German schoolchildren in the 1930s, extending to the cost of keeping institutionalized, handicapped people alive; not long afterward, tens of thousands lost their lives."

"In the autumn of 1939, Adolf Hitler secretly authorized a medically administered program of 'mercy death' code-named 'Operation T4,' writes the US Holocaust Museum. "The killings secretly continued until the war's end, resulting in the murder of an estimated 275,000 people with disabilities."

Today, hundreds of thousands of elderly and chronically ill people are dying, not in gas chambers, but gasping for air in America's hospitals. Seventy-five percent of those who have died from COVID-19 have been above the retirement age of 65, and 93 percent have been over the age of 50. In 2020, a year in which 373,000 Americans died from COVID-19, US life expectancy at birth fell by 1.8 years, from 78.8 years to 77.0, according to federal mortality data released last month.

But this reality is not, as Walensky says, "encouraging," but a horrifying source of guilt and shame, a condemnation of an utterly inhuman society driven by the needs of enriching the few at the expense of the many.

Scientists and doctors have responded to Walensky's remarks with the demand that she resign. Their anger is justified. But the fact is that Walensky was speaking not

only for herself, not only for the Biden administration, but for the entire capitalist class.

For years, American think tanks and military strategists have systematically advocated reducing the life expectancy of American workers. The pandemic has created the means by which this policy could be implemented through seeming inaction and incompetence.

It is, in fact, a deliberate policy, driven by the diseased reliance of all aspects of American capitalism on the perpetual rise in the markets, fueled by the ever-greater immiseration and impoverishment of the working class. Having bled much of the working class dry, the capitalist oligarchy looks to the elderly and the disabled as a source of untapped "value."

If they have their way, the cutting of outlays on Social Security and Medicare is to be accomplished not by politicians touching the "third rail" of American politics, but by allowing the pandemic to continue in perpetuity.

This filthy policy is accompanied by an equally filthy lie: That COVID-19 cannot be stopped. China has successfully executed a Zero COVID policy, with just 5,000 deaths in a country of 1.4 billion. If a similar policy had been carried out in the United States at the start of the pandemic, over 850,000 people would still be alive.

This homicidal "new normal" demanded by the capitalist oligarchy is being challenged by a growing movement of the working class to resist mass infection and mass death. Teachers in Chicago voted last week to oppose the resumption of in-person instruction, and teachers in Chicago, New York and San Francisco have launched sickouts. They will be joined this week with a wave of walkouts by students in opposition to the Biden administration's homicidal drive to keep schools open no matter the costs in human lives.

The open turn to eugenics by the ruling class expresses a fundamental reality that is dawning on millions of people: Capitalism is incompatible with the social rights of the great mass of humanity. Securing those rights requires the struggle to end this social order and replace it with socialism.



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