

Ending masks on transit, White House demands permanent mass infection

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On Monday, the Biden administration announced, via the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), that it is ending mask requirements on public transportation, including buses, trains and aircraft.

Following the TSA's announcement, United Airlines, Alaska Airlines, American Airlines, Southwest Airlines, Delta Air Lines, JetBlue Airways, the national rail line Amtrak and numerous rail and bus lines dropped their masking requirements.

With tens of millions of Americans—including a disproportionate number of low-wage workers—commuting to work on public transit every single day, the announcement will mean a dramatic increase in the risk of COVID-19 infection for broad sections of the population.

Delta Air Lines, a key lobbyist for ending any remaining restrictions on the spread of COVID-19, hailed the announcement, declaring, “We are relieved to see the U.S. mask mandate lift to facilitate global travel as COVID-19 has transitioned to an ordinary seasonal virus.”

While Delta's statement was intended to falsely minimize the threat posed by COVID-19, it in fact reveals what the policy of major US corporations and the Biden administration is: The permanent mass infection and reinfection of the population, in which every flight or bus ride to work becomes a game of Russian roulette.

The Biden administration's announcement comes as cases are surging with the spread of the BA.2 variant, and as the US is on the cusp of one million COVID-19 deaths, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) tracker.

The ending of mask mandates on public transit marks yet another milestone in the systematic dismantling of all public health measures to stop the spread of COVID-19.

It will mean that all people who travel for work or to see family will now be more likely to contract COVID-19, not only risking severe illness, lost wages and the threat of death or permanent disability, but the anxiety of infecting a vulnerable loved one.

There are approximately 10 million Americans who fit the strict definition of having a weakened immune system. This section of the public, for whom vaccination is not as effective as the rest of society, face the prospect of working and living in

a society with no measures in place to protect them. They will face the agonizing choice of total isolation or risking their own lives. For many forced by economic circumstances to work outside their home, it will be a death sentence.

The Biden administration used as the pretext for abandoning mask mandates on transportation a semi-literate ruling by Florida judge Kathryn Kimball Mizelle.

Mizelle was appointed by Donald Trump, despite being called “unqualified” by the American Bar Association, primarily because she is an acolyte of the fascist ideologue and insurrectionist Stephen Miller.

The ruling argues that masks are not a sanitation measure because sanitation measures “refer to measures that clean something, not ones that keep something clean. Wearing a mask cleans nothing. At most, it traps virus droplets. But it neither ‘sanitizes’ the person wearing the mask nor ‘sanitizes’ the conveyance.”

This argument is completely moronic. It is like saying an oil filter in a car does not clean oil, a water filter does not clean water, or a furnace filter does not clean air. It is obvious that air in a rail car in which passengers are masked has fewer dangerous exhaled viruses than a rail car with unmasked passengers. It is therefore more sanitary, making masks an obvious sanitation measure.

This ruling would be immediately struck down in the face of any serious legal challenge. If the Biden administration had disagreed with the ruling, it would have made an emergency appeal and demanded a stay of enforcement of the order until a decision to overturn it.

The stay could have been obtained in a matter of hours, preventing the order from going into effect. Instead, the TSA immediately announced, “Due to today's court ruling, effective immediately, TSA will no longer enforce its Security Directives and Emergency Amendment requiring mask use on public transportation and transportation hubs.”

On Tuesday, 24 hours after seizing on the ruling to end mask mandates, the White House announced that it *might* appeal the court decision, but only “if CDC concludes that a mandatory order remains necessary.”

Asked whether people should mask on airplanes, Biden did not even encourage individuals to do so, telling reporters that

wearing a mask is “up to them.”

Bloomberg columnist Matthew Yglesias put the matter bluntly in a column titled, “The Lifting of the Mask Mandate Is a Gift to Democrats.” He wrote, “So the judge—a Trump appointee who is surely no fan of Biden, Pelosi or their party—may have succeeded in getting an awkward topic off the agenda. For that, Democrats ought to be grateful.”

Yglesias noted that there is support on the part of both parties of the American oligarchy for overturning the mask mandate on transportation. “The U.S. Senate took a vote last month to overturn the mandate and it passed 57-40, with a number of Democrats breaking ranks to join a unanimous Republican caucus,” he wrote. “If it came to the floor of the House for a vote, it would likely pass there, too.”

Early this year, the Biden administration seized upon the surge of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 to dismantle any remaining public health measures, arguing that “everyone” will get infected with COVID-19, and that therefore no measures should be taken to stop the spread.

The strategy of the Biden administration was detailed in an article published by *Politico* in February titled, “So long, Omicron: White House eyes next phase of pandemic.”

“The Biden administration is plotting a new phase of the pandemic” aimed at “conditioning Americans to live with” COVID-19, *Politico* reported. The administration is planning a “conscious messaging shift meant to get people comfortable with a scenario where the virus remains widespread.”

In order to “condition” public sentiment and make the public “feel differently” about the pandemic, the Biden administration has determined that “the best political strategy is not to have it dominate the news every day,” *Politico* wrote.

To this end, the Biden administration has carried out a systematic shutdown of daily COVID-19 reporting. In February, it ended reporting of in-hospital COVID-19 deaths and then worked with states to encourage them to end daily reporting. There are now only seven states that report COVID-19 cases daily.

As a result, there is no serious way to track COVID-19 infection in the United States.

As *Politico* wrote in a separate article Tuesday,

some experts working on the response believe the undercounting is more severe than has been publicly acknowledged, with one administration official estimating that the government is only recording one out of every six new cases. The data gap has fed internal concerns over how exactly the government should publicly message the seriousness of the situation. “They’re like, ‘We don’t know if this is something to be worried about or not,’” said one person close to the White House. “But you can’t tell the public that.”

If there is public confusion about the danger posed by the pandemic, it is because the Biden administration and US media have been systematically lying and covering up cases in an effort to make the public believe the pandemic is over.

In fighting to end all measures to stop the spread of the pandemic, the Biden administration has promoted all forms of backwardness and noxious individualism. Last year, Biden declared the United States was “declaring our independence from a deadly virus” by ending masking, while CDC Director Rochelle Walensky called masking “The scarlet letter of this pandemic.”

The political establishment’s grotesque celebrations of the lifting of the mask mandate are one expression of the backwardness that has been systematically cultivated in the United States: American individualism has reached its most noxious nadir.

In opposition to the Trump administration’s homicidal response to the pandemic, millions of people voted for Biden in the 2020 presidential election because of his promise to “follow the science” and “end the pandemic.” Instead, he has been even more aggressive in implementing Trump’s program than Trump himself.

This basic reality confirms the assessment made by the *World Socialist Web Site*, that the elimination and ultimate eradication of COVID-19 requires “the development of a powerful international and unified mass movement of the working class. Only a mass movement that is not driven by the profit motive and fettered to the obsessive pursuit of personal wealth can generate the social force required to compel a change in policy.”

While the measures necessary to save lives are in the interests of the broad mass of the population, they are fundamentally in conflict with the interests of the capitalist financial oligarchy and the society it dominates.

On May 1, the International Committee of the Fourth International is holding an International May Day Online Rally, which will fight for a socialist strategy to mobilize the working class against mass death in the COVID-19 pandemic, war and inequality.



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