

Biden administration lifts COVID testing requirements for international travelers

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The Biden administration announced starting Sunday it would end all COVID-19 testing requirements for international travelers inbound to the US. The mandate that had been placed into effect on January 26, 2021, shortly after Biden took office, required all international passengers give proof of a negative COVID-19 test prior to boarding their flight.

A senior administration official said that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) would reevaluate the issue of COVID-19 testing for international travelers every 90 days. However, the statement amounts to nothing more than a rhetorical diversion as the CDC has become an open instrument of big business and the financial markets.

The CDC's decision essentially ends the last remaining restrictions to contain COVID in the US. Airline stocks climbed briefly in the early hours of trading on the news before turning down again on the broader global economic dismay caused by surging inflation.

Apparently, travel remains the one bright spot in the economic news. The US Travel Association reported that though the US economy contracted in the first quarter, travel spending in April exceeded 2019 levels for the first time during the pandemic at \$100 billion, or 3 percent higher.

However, travel from overseas to the US has remained suppressed. CEO of US Travel Association Roger Dow commended Biden in an email, stating that rescinding the requirement "will welcome back visitors from around the world and accelerate the recovery of the US travel industry."

US Secretary of Commerce Gina M. Raimondo released the National Travel and Tourism Strategy for the year on June 6. The initiative "focuses the full efforts of the federal government to promote the United

States as a premier destination grounded in the breadth and diversity of our communities, and to foster a sector that drives economic growth, creates good jobs, and bolsters conservation and sustainability."

According to their five-year plan, the Biden administration hopes to attract 90 million visitors who will spend close to \$300 billion annually by 2027. Per point two of the strategy, in order to facilitate travel to and within the United States, they intend to "reduce barriers to trade in travel services and make it safer and more efficient for visitors to enter ..." The lifting of the current restrictions could bring almost 5.5 million travelers (an additional 4.3 million more passengers) and garner \$9 billion in spending through to the end of the calendar year.

To place this succinctly, public health measures during a continuing pandemic cannot be allowed to place any constraints on the ability to extract profit, including limited restrictions on travelers who may very well be carrying the latest variant of SARS-CoV-2.

Republican Senator from Mississippi Roger Wicker who is the ranking member of the Senate committee overseeing transportation, reveled in the lifting of the testing requirement, saying, "Ending this burdensome requirement is long overdue and something I have been urging for months. [I am] relieved that the Biden administration has finally seen reason and removed the requirement."

Democratic Senator Catherine Cortez Masto from Nevada seconded Wicker's endorsement, "I'm glad CDC suspended the burdensome coronavirus testing requirement for international travelers, and I'll continue to do all I can to support the strong recovery of our hospitality industry."

One must ask what is meant by burdensome? COVID

infections have been climbing since April, having reached a seven-day average of over 116,000 infections per day. Deaths have turned sharply upwards since June 2, with 448 deaths each day on average, according to Johns Hopkins.

Meanwhile, more than 60 percent of the population has been infected at least once and Long COVID affects 20 to 25 percent of those previously infected. On top of the more than 1 million deaths, the long-term impact of COVID on the population's health will be considerable.

A recent study published in *The Lancet Regional Health Europe* found that people infected with SARS-CoV-2, especially older people, had more than three times the risk of dying one year after recovering from their acute infection compared to those that were uninfected. Another study from Veterans Affairs found that mortality increased even after breakthrough infection, even among those with mild disease.

The policy of herd immunity continues to dominate the ruling elite's calculations and fortunes. COVID in permanence will continue to cull the eldest and most vulnerable, expunging those the ruling class sees as an unproductive liability. Charlatan Ezekiel Emanuel's hope for swift natural death has been combined with Thomas Friedman's demand that the cure can't be worse than the disease to assure Wall Street that only those who can work will survive.

In a report published by the *World Socialist Web Site*, Keith Begg and Virpi Flyg wrote "Johan Giesecke, a former Swedish state epidemiologist and senior adviser to the World Health Organization who was contracted to work with the FHM [Folkhälsomyndigheten, the Swedish public health authority] during 2020, stated that when the herd immunity strategy was in full swing in Sweden, 'The people who are frail and old will die first. And when that group of people begins to sort of thin out, you will get less deaths as well.'"

Attempts were quickly made by the likes of biosecurity expert Eric Toner to downplay the dangers posed by lifting the international travel testing restrictions. He said in an interview with Bloomberg, "I have long thought the testing requirement for travel to the US was not evidence based or logical—and most other countries have abandoned this approach. It's been a hardship for the airlines and a real hardship for travelers as people get back to travel for business and

leisure."

What Toner should say, if he were being sincere, is that almost every government has adopted a "live with the virus" strategy and there is no enforcement of any measures to stem infections or track and trace where they are spreading. Therefore, the current mandate under such conditions only impedes the free flow of commerce.

Dr. Vin Gupta, health adviser to the Biden administration's post-election transition team, made a more callous observation in the *Wall Street Journal*. "It's well past time to drop the testing requirement to international travelers to the U.S. There was the assumption that international travelers were bringing in new variants. Now we know new variants are cropping up in the US."



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