

As COVID deaths and infections climb, Biden presses claim that pandemic is over

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COVID deaths and infections continue to climb in the United States, with 400 people a day dying from the deadly SARS-CoV-2 virus and daily new infections averaging 60,000. Both figures are regarded as drastic undercounts since systematic daily reporting has been shut down in virtually every American state.

Yet President Joe Biden has continued to maintain his claim that “the pandemic is over,” despite the mounting deaths and widespread criticism of his comments by health experts. Biden first made the statement in an interview broadcast Sunday night on the CBS News program “60 Minutes.”

While walking with Biden through the expansive hall at the convention center in downtown Detroit hosting the North American International Auto Show, Scott Pelley of CBS News asked him, “Mr. President, [this is the] first Detroit auto show in three years. Is the pandemic over?”

Casually, Biden said, “The pandemic is over. We still have a problem with COVID. We are still doing a lot of work on it. But the pandemic is over.” He added, “If you notice, no one is wearing a mask. Everyone seems to be in pretty good shape. I think it’s changing, and this is a perfect example of it.”

Biden’s own senior health officials, according to a report in *Politico*, only became aware of his comments from social media and headlines in the mainstream press leaving them in the lurch as they attempted to field questions about his remarks that reverberated across the world.

Amid commentaries by public health experts expressing surprise and even outrage at Biden’s remarks, the White House initially downplayed their significance. On Tuesday, speaking at a fundraiser for the Democratic National Committee with big-money contributors, Biden sought to backtrack, but only slightly.

Noting that “I got criticized for saying the pandemic is, quote, ‘over,’” he sought to modify his language, conceding that many were still dying, “But it basically is not where it was.”

He went on to blame the victims of his own policy of

“living with the virus,” saying that the problem was not the ending of all social mitigation efforts, but the failure of individuals to get the necessary vaccinations. “Guess what?” he said, “Over 65 to 80 percent of the people who died, of the 5,000 dying never got their shot, never got their booster shot.”

Many reports in the press, like contributing columnist Leana Wen for the *Washington Post*, applauded the off-the-cuff comment touting the forever COVID argument and the need to learn to accept SARS-CoV-2 as a permanent fixture in our daily lives.

In reply to the numerous criticism and outrage by scientists and public health experts on Biden’s irresponsible comments, Wen wrote, “These criticisms don’t detract from Biden’s point. He’s right. By multiple definitions, the pandemic is over. That doesn’t mean that the coronavirus is no longer causing harm; it simply signals the end of an emergency state as COVID has evolved into an endemic disease.”

Meanwhile, the editorial board at the *Wall Street Journal* acknowledged the importance of Biden’s comments but demanded the end of the official declaration of a COVID public health emergency. They wrote, “President Biden finally dared to say it on Sunday ... that the ‘pandemic is over.’” They added, “his comments recognize the reality of the disease at this stage and the public mood. The trouble is that his administration still hasn’t lifted its official finding of a COVID public-health emergency.”

Among the Biden administration’s COVID team, many were hailing the supposed verbal “gaffe” as a stroke of luck to end finally and officially what everyone already felt had ended. However, there were some reservations that declaring the crisis over was a political gamble if a new variant surged again, especially as the White House had just promoted its vaccine campaign.

Political advisers were also concerned that Biden’s remarks would strengthen the Republicans’ hand in resisting any further funding request to “keep the federal COVID response afloat,” as *Politico* commented. It would also

undercut the administration's rationale for relieving student loan borrowers of \$500 billion in debt to the US government, since the White House claimed the authority to take the action under the pandemic emergency, which made it even more difficult for borrowers to earn enough money to make debt payments.

Notably, the United States has lagged behind in getting boosters into the arms of its population, making millions ever more vulnerable to the constantly mutating and immune-evading coronavirus. Only one in three Americans have received any boosters, and one in four over 50 has received a second booster. According to a scenario modeling COVID data from mid-August, as many as 181,000 deaths could be expected over nine months from a pandemic that is supposedly "over." And these do not include predictions of a severe flu season that usually peaks in February.

As usual, Anthony Fauci, Biden's chief medical adviser, attempted to cover up the dire contradiction between Biden's words and reality, stating Monday, "We are not where we need to be if we are going to quote 'live with the virus.' We still must be aware of how unusual this virus is and continues to be in its ability to evolve into new variants which defy the standard public health mechanisms of addressing an outbreak."

Another concern to the administration, more than continued mass death, is the blow that Biden's words dealt to the stock values of key pharmaceutical companies. Investors jumped off the COVID vaccine like rats jumping off a sinking ship. Almost \$10 billion was wiped off the market value of the main COVID-19 vaccine makers, according to the *Financial Times*. Evan Seigerman, an analyst at BMO Capital Markets, told the FT the fall in shares was driven by Biden's comments and concerns over the uptake of the new bivalent boosters.

Health experts have weighed in on the "pandemic is over" declaration. Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, observed, "Public health has really lost the trust of many because we seem to be whipsawing back and forth between different positions. [And] here's an example of one right now. If you say the pandemic is over with, why would people need to get these boosters?"

Eric Topol, the Scripps Research Translational Institute Director, tweeted on Biden's comment, "Wish this was true. What's over is @POTUS's and our government's will to get ahead of it, with magical thinking on the new bivalent boosters. Ignore Long COVID, inevitability of new variants, and our current incapability for blocking infections and transmission."

Biden's supposed verbal "gaffes" frequently—and sharply, may we add—expose the ruling elite's fundamental outlook

on key class questions. Walking around the Detroit auto show and declaring things appear in good shape is a knife thrust into the side of the working class, which has borne every consequence of the herd immunity policy from death to Long COVID. But it underscores the salient point that "the economy"—that is, corporate profits—will never play second fiddle to public health concerns.

In the opening segment of the "60 Minutes" interview, just before his "the pandemic is over" declaration, Biden spoke of his optimism in the economy and the markets, irrespective of the inflationary pressures that have made life unbearable for hundreds of millions just in the US. And following his comment on being in "good shape," the interview turned to the railway dispute, where Biden boasted how he and his administration brokered a sell-out deal on the eleventh hour with the rail unions to avert a national strike that would have caused a seismic convulsion in the economy. The pandemic is over means being back in business per usual.

It's difficult for workers to square the un pitying comment, "in good shape," with the evident reality they have faced and will continue to face. The average of daily COVID cases remains high at over 60,000 each day, a number everyone knows is gross undercounting. COVID has remained the third leading cause of death in the United States after heart disease and cancer. Life expectancy in the last two years has seen its sharpest decline in nearly 100 years.

The average COVID death toll in the US has remained over 400 since July. In the last three months, more than 32,000 Americans have succumbed to COVID, and over 360,000 died in the previous year. Meanwhile, upwards of four million have such debilitating Long COVID that they have permanently left the workforce. Long COVID advocates have called for Biden to declare it a national emergency.

But these are just the cost of doing business for Wall Street. In their own coarse and sadistic manner, the *Wall Street Journal's* editorial board, in their attempt to defend the pandemic declaration, said, "About 400 Americans each day have been dying from COVID this summer, but most are elderly or have other medical ailments." In other words, they are no longer productive and, therefore, a drain on the earnings of Wall Street executives and their investors. The decline in life expectancy among working people is considered a boon for the financial aristocracy.



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