

As COVID-19 pandemic explodes out of control

## Trump holds Mount Rushmore event in defiance of health experts

By Barry Grey  
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With the US setting daily records for new COVID-19 infections, President Donald Trump held a mass pre-Fourth of July event at Mount Rushmore in Keystone, South Dakota Friday night. Trump spoke to a crowd of thousands, who were encouraged not to wear masks or socially distance.

In advance of the event, South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem appeared on Fox News' "The Ingraham Angle" and said: "We're asking them to come, be ready to celebrate, to enjoy the freedoms and the liberties that we have in this country. But we won't be social distancing."

This criminally reckless action—virtually certain to result in a new eruption of infections and deaths—was carried out in defiance of members of Trump's coronavirus task force, who had warned three days earlier against congregating in large groups and stressed the critical importance of wearing a mask in public. Testifying before a Senate committee, Dr. Anthony Fauci had said that unless urgent measures were taken to contain the spread of the virus, daily new infections in the US would likely rise to 100,000.

On Friday, reports emerged that members of Vice President Mike Pence's advance team sent to prepare his visit this week to Arizona had contracted COVID-19. Last month, members of Trump advance teams sent to prepare indoor rallies in Tulsa, Oklahoma and Phoenix, Arizona, two centers of the COVID-19 surge, also became infected with the virus.

The Mount Rushmore event, replete with fireworks, was the prelude to a far bigger White House-sponsored Fourth of July celebration set for today in the nation's capital.

With these actions, Trump is signaling the determination of the government and the ruling class to press ahead with their back-to-work drive, however many thousands, and perhaps millions, of lives of working people are lost due to infection in factories, warehouses, transit centers and other workplaces where employees have no real protection from the deadly virus.

A month ago, before the reopening of businesses across the country, the daily infection toll was around 20,000. On Thursday, it hit a new record of more than 57,000. Daily infections are rising in 40 of the 50 states. The average change in new cases has increased by 73.5 percent over the past two weeks. Florida alone reported 10,000 new cases on Thursday.

In states that opened earliest and most precipitously, the increases vary between 112 percent (Oklahoma) and 223 percent (Florida). In California, Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom is presiding over an increase of 79 percent. The severe lack of testing and contact tracing capabilities was summed up Thursday in scenes of Californians lining up for miles in their cars to get tested for the virus.

Hospitalizations are rising rapidly, threatening to overwhelm already understaffed hospitals. The *Washington Post* reported: "Patients suffering from COVID-19 are rapidly filling hospitals cross the South and West, with Mississippi, Tennessee, Texas, Nevada and Arizona setting records for hospitalizations Thursday, a sign that the coronavirus pandemic is entering a dangerous new phase."

The death rate has also begun to climb again. States reported that 700 people died Thursday of COVID-19, an increase of over 25 percent compared to the previous seven-day average.

In the face of this exploding crisis, the Trump administration is continuing to encourage people to defy health guidelines and act as though the pandemic was over. On Friday morning, Trump's surgeon general, Dr. Jerome Adams, made an appearance on the "Today" program and said matter-of-factly, "People will be going to beaches and barbecues" over the holiday weekend.

On Wednesday, one day after Fauci's dire warning of a dramatic rise in cases, Trump was interviewed on Fox Business, where he said of the pandemic, "I think at some point that's going to sort of just disappear, I hope." On Thursday, in a brief appearance before the press, he said,

“We have some areas where we are putting out the flames, or the fires, and that’s working out well.”

Later on Thursday, he tweeted: “There is a rise in coronavirus cases because our testing is so massive and so good, far bigger than any other country. This is great news, but even better news is that death, and the death rate, is down.”

Members of the Great Sioux Nation are among those who have denounced Trump’s Mount Rushmore event and announced plans to protest against it. Spokesmen for the tribes have condemned it both as a risk to the health of reservation residents already disproportionately impacted by the virus and as an affront to the history and rights of Native Americans.

“The president is putting our tribal members at risk to stage a photo op at one of our most sacred sites,” Harold Frazier, chairman of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, told the Associated Press.

“He hates Indians,” Terry FastHorse, a Sicangu Lakota citizen and Lummi descendant, told the press. “There’s no other reason to be there.”

Fellow Sicangu Lakota citizen Phil Two Eagle, executive director of the Sicangu Lakota Treaty Council, said, “To me, Mount Rushmore is a symbol of ethnic cleansing, forced assimilation and the theft of our territory. Trump is just reminding us of the continuing genocide of our people.”

It is a historical fact that Mount Rushmore sits on land stolen by the US government from the Sioux. In 1868, the government signed a treaty designating as the “Great Sioux Nation” territory that stretched across parts of North Dakota, South Dakota and four other states, and guaranteeing the tribes “absolute and undisturbed use and occupation.”

However, when miners struck gold in the Black Hills, the US army under General George Custer was dispatched to protect the prospectors and settlers who flooded into the region and suppress Native resistance. In 1877 Congress passed an act reclaiming the Black Hills and consigning the tribes to five small reservations in South Dakota.

Other critics of the event are raising the danger of the fireworks leading to forest fires. There have been no fireworks displays at the Mount Rushmore monument for 10 years, following a decision by the National Park Service that they posed a fire risk. That decision was overturned in April at the behest of the White House.

The United States is in the midst of a public health and social catastrophe without historical precedent. The scale of the disaster is not the inevitable result of the coronavirus. Rather, it is the outcome of the conscious decision of the corporate-financial oligarchy to subordinate all public health considerations to the protection and expansion of its wealth.

Trump is the most open proponent of this policy, but it is a

bipartisan one. Even as daily infections soar past 50,000 and the official death count—a substantial underestimation of the real toll—tops 130,000, Democratic governors and mayors continue to enforce back-to-work orders that are resulting in many tens of thousands of worker infections and thousands of deaths. They are standing behind companies such as Fiat Chrysler and Amazon that seek to crush wildcat work stoppages and walkouts by threatening to fire workers and by cutting off jobless benefits to those who refuse to risk their lives and the lives of family members.

There is a chilling rationale behind Trump’s seemingly mad actions, which can only fuel the pandemic and increase the death toll. The ruling oligarchy, which controls both parties and dictates government policy, has from the outset looked upon the pandemic as an opportunity to advance its class interests at the expense of the population.

It has seized upon the virus to provide a cover for rewarding itself trillions of dollars in bailout money from the US Treasury and the Federal Reserve, critical to addressing record levels of corporate debt that preceded the coronavirus outbreak. It is at the same time using the economic disaster triggered by the pandemic to destroy millions of jobs and force workers to accept wage cuts and speedup.

Finally, it sees the disease as a means of culling the population, via its “herd immunity” policy, of retirees who no longer provide a source of surplus value and profit. The fewer the number of older workers drawing on Social Security and Medicare, the more these programs can be gutted and the money channeled into the private fortunes of the super-rich.

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