

NO ONE WANTS TO WORK [FOR YOU] ANYMORE: THE END OF OLIGOPSONY

[NB: Note the byline above, thanks. /~Rayne]

There are few ways faster to piss me off than to say, “Slackers don’t want to work” in response to the lack of candidates for low-wage jobs.

pic.twitter.com/8dwz2tB2I3

— 1əyoM nwoH2 (@shawnmoyer) May 10, 2021

This is what it looks like when a monopsonic or oligopsonic labor market is broken. It looks like workers can pick and choose the opportunity which best suits their needs rather than grabbing the first opportunity offered them because they are in precarity.

An oligopsony (from Greek ὀλίγοι (oligoi) “few” and ὀψωνία (opsōnia) “purchase”) is a market form in which the number of buyers is small while the number of sellers in theory could be large. This typically happens in a market for inputs where numerous suppliers are competing to sell their product to a small number of (often large and powerful) buyers. ...
[Wikipedia]

But there are more than one buyer (monopsony) or even very few buyers (oligopsony) of labor, you might say. Superficially you’d have a point.

Inside a one-mile stretch of the main thoroughfare where I live in Midwestern Suburbia, I can find 8-12 signs advertising job openings right now. I’ve lived here since the late 1970s and I’ve never seen this many postings for jobs.

Every single one of these jobs pays between \$3.67 (Michigan's minimum tipped hourly wage) and \$15.00 an hour. None of them are full time, most have variable schedules, and only one place assures workers one weekend day off every week. None of them offer health care or childcare assistance of any kind. None of them offer enough hours regularly with enough compensation to pay for a one-bedroom apartment within walking distance, and likely not within a 10-mile radius.

Until the pandemic, these employers were able to tell workers what they'd pay, take it or leave it. They could act in concert without having to coordinate to set market pricing because it was simply understood by workers that hourly workers' pay fell in this range and it was an employers' market.

Employers have acted like a cartel, with collusion on price fixing for labor enabled by other monopolistic entities like Facebook and Google.

Workers may have thought they had some inside information through access to technology, but the same resources which informed them what to expect for compensation also told employers what to indicate as expected compensation. It told them what their competitors were paying.

Further, employers could buy the continuation of their high profits, I mean, low wage environment, simply by donating to a member of Congress directly or through a business association like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. These same purchased entities also did their best over the last several decades to reduce workers' rights and suppress unionization.

It's been cheaper and more reliable to buy a GOP member of Congress than to increase automation or to pay workers a living wage.

It's also worked so well for so long that idiots like Sen. Marco Rubio unquestioningly parrot employers' complaints as plain fact, ignoring how many voters are workers while sucking up to

potential business donors:

.@marcorubio: "I'm here to tell you what small businesses are telling me and I believe are telling everyone that's here, and that is that enhanced unemployment benefits are creating an incentive for people not to return to work until they expire."

<https://t.co/WHiRKsE993>

pic.twitter.com/y2DBSG9JAw

– The Hill (@thehill) May 13, 2021

Never mind the cost of living for low-wage workers, though.

Miami builds housing for wealthy out-of-towners at the expense of its working and middle classes. The region's level of inequality is now the second-worst in the US, on par w/ Panama and Colombia:

<https://t.co/7RJJYjEZui>

<https://t.co/XAyNORjLeZ>

– Nicholas Nehamas □ (@NickNehamas) May 15, 2021

Seriously, Marco Rubio is a bought-and-paid-for moron who, along with the rest of the GOP, could give a shit about the lives of the working class.

1. Miami is now the 3rd least affordable metro on the country on the basis of housing cost to income. It is less affordable than San Francisco, Silicon Valley or NY. Only LA and San Diego or are less affordable.

<https://t.co/8yLaOpMj3b>

– Richard Florida (@Richard_Florida) May 16, 2021

What the pandemic has done is broken the

undocumented employer cartel and exposed the lack of bargaining power low-wage employees have had for decades. That unemployment compensation – a ridiculously low figure which doesn't truly provide subsistence income – is more than what employers have paid these workers is revealing. They've gotten away with forcing precarity on workers to keep profits up, distorting whether their business models were legitimate. Some of the precarity is bound up in deliberately unlawful behavior including wage theft.

With a bare minimum of unemployment and pandemic aid, these workers have had breathing room to decide whether to go back to work and risk their health, or wait for more people to be vaccinated. They've had financial space to stay with their kids who still don't have adequate childcare available or adequate support should schools need to transition back to remote classes on short notice.

These workers have also simply had enough – enough putting themselves at risk, jeopardizing their families' health, enough of being bullied by employers and customers alike.

guys it's happening
pic.twitter.com/Nf00WZQXEe

– KING LATIFAH (@HaritoMorales) May 8, 2021

...

the workers at this chipotle said no more exploiting us
pic.twitter.com/a99FHWc5vq

– brands getting owned (@BrandsOwned)
May 8, 2021

...

pic.twitter.com/znVbBQDQ03

– The Nap Ministry (@TheNapMinistry) May 7, 2021

This is just pathetic – a sandwich? Employers are going to respond to all that’s wrong with current working conditions by chumming applicants with sandwiches?

its like corporations are trying everything but paying people fairly
pic.twitter.com/0hSIJAATcu

– Karina Soni (@karinasoni) May 7, 2021

McDonald’s franchises have been offering cash ranging from \$50 in Florida to \$500 in Pennsylvania to applicants who showed up for an interview. At least one franchise is alleged to have called the state’s unemployment bureau to turn in applicants who didn’t accept their employment offer, in an effort to terminate their unemployment benefits.

All these nasty anti-worker machinations just to avoid paying a living wage, which employers *know* is the reason they aren’t landing applicants:

So, in an effort to attract new employees, a Tampa McDonald’s is now promising \$50 to anyone who just shows up for an interview.

Local McDonald’s franchise owner Blake Casper, who also owns Oxford Exchange, told Business Insider that a manager at his Dale Mabry and Chestnut location came up with the idea, but far so it hasn’t really yielded much success. ...

Of course, one way to attract new employees is to just pay them more, and while he hasn’t done it yet, Casper told Business Insider he’s now considering raising starting wages to \$13. As of now, according to a job posting on Indeed.com for the same Dale Mabry

McDonald's location, new employees can make up to \$11.50 an hour.

Last year, more than 60% of Florida voters approved a constitutional amendment to raise Florida's minimum wage to \$15 per hour by the year 2026.

Workers clearly believe 2026 is too long to wait for a living wage – and \$15 an hour in 2026 may not be a living wage by then, given the rate at which real estate investors have forced rental prices out of reach for low-wage workers.

Employers *know* better, and yet they have the goddamned balls to ask for more free labor:

Are you kidding me?
pic.twitter.com/h90ZxuzbVs

– Public Citizen (@Public_Citizen) May 12, 2021

Mind you, no more than three free days a month or the company *might* get in trouble – oh, and do be sure to dress like you're being paid for it.

Workers would rather bust hump on their own, eat deterioration of their own vehicle and amortize it rather than take a minimum wage hourly job:

Drivers here are saying they average out to about \$15-20/hr doing rideshare, after accounting for gas & car depreciation.

And if somebody's refusing to wear a mask or getting aggressive you can kick them out of their car, which you can't do to a boss.

– Dr Sarah Taber (@SarahTaber_bww) May 13, 2021

When they work as a contractor on a gig job, it pays better and their boss isn't a bullying

asshole who puts their safety at risk.

But of course the GOP has a problem with helping these small business persons with their tiny entrepreneurial aspirations who are trying to earn a living wage while not risking their physical and mental health:

To be clear, these GOP-led states aren't just eliminating the \$300 per week enhanced aid for unemployed workers – they are ending CARES Act programs that support gig workers, self-employed, and the long-term jobless.

Those workers will be completely cut off. \$0 income. <https://t.co/t2ItRUKBet>

– Rep. Don Beyer (@RepDonBeyer) May 12, 2021

Meanwhile, journalists aren't asking key questions, rolling over and playing dead for the likes of Marco Rubio when he trots out the fascist conventional wisdom that workers are lazy. They aren't asking businesses if they're re-examining their business model the way workers have had to re-examine their priorities.

THIS. <pic.twitter.com/rk26Ysems9>

– Ohh Hi There (@StillFrettin) May 12, 2021

The least we and journalists should be doing: asking business-owned chumps like Rubio more pointed questions about employers, especially when they're buying support yachts for their mega-yachts:

Why is it “if you can't pay rent, buy fewer lattes” and not “if you can't pay your employees a living wage, buy fewer yachts”?

– mohamad safa (@mhdksafo) May 14, 2021

THE DAY AFTER THE SECOND COVID MOTHER'S DAY

The cards have been opened and read, the flowers admired, the meal not cooked by Mom fussed over and the dishes done. We've passed our second Mother's Day under COVID.

Last Mother's Day we were still in a state of collective shock and denial about the pandemic.

It had been four months since SARS-CoV-2 had been sequenced, three months since the first outbreak in the U.S., two months since we began to lockdown in earnest. The country's daily average new case count was less than 200, and we counted deaths in tens of thousands.

As of this now-past Mother's Day we had lost 581,056 to COVID with 607 deaths reported Saturday, 246 more on Sunday. At least one recent study estimated the true number of deaths due to COVID at 900,000 – more than double the reported number.

Many of those lost were mothers and grandmothers, and mothers-to-be. In the the last several weeks mothers died of COVID after giving birth, having never held their infants.

We've lost mothers who will be coolly labeled "excess deaths," among them a mother and grandmother in my own family who did not seek help in adequate time.

This is not to minimize all the other mothers we've lost for a host of usual reasons, including unacceptable increasing maternal mortality in this country, disproportionately affecting women of color.

While we celebrated motherhood yesterday we must remember the day after and here forward not only

mothers who aren't here with us but the families they left behind who may have observed yet another first holiday without their loved one.

We must look after the mothers still with us.

~ ~ ~

Mothers who survived this past year of pandemic have been under incredible pressure; 35 million moms with children at home increased their unpaid care time by 57 million hours as childcare and home schooling fell to them disproportionately. They're exhausted, tapped out of resources, and fed up with the unrelenting guilt trips about the glory of motherhood on top of the nasty demands from the business world which insists workers are slackers laying about, sucking down unemployment benefits.

Meanwhile the previous shortage of childcare has become catastrophic, in part because many moms who worked as daycare providers and grandmothers who may have provided care for free have gotten sick, developed long COVID, or died.

What daycare remains open is increasingly expensive – in 2019 the average cost for an infant and a preschool child was \$22,000 a year – and moms who earn minimum wage may not be able to afford care depending on whether they are eligible for any state or federal aid.

Hourly tipped workers whose workplaces have limited capacity due to COVID restrictions may not earn enough tips – they certainly can't make enough on their base wages which in 18 states and Washington DC doesn't reach \$2.50 an hour.

What happens when an outbreak happens and schools need to rapidly change to remote learning? Moms drop everything and end up at home to care for their kids, needing to drop work hours and shifts or quit altogether. Far too many mothers can't get paid time off let alone unpaid time off to address their children's needs even when there isn't a pandemic; it's worse during COVID because there

are so few alternatives to simply quitting when there's no backup care provider.

If we truly want to do something meaningful and of real use for mothers in this country, we need to do more than send cards and flowers. We need to deliver for them the remaining 364 days a year.

Moms need:

- A living wage beginning with \$15 an hour for all minimum wage workers;
- Health care for all, not just insurance for some;
- A comprehensive program helping to meet the needs of new parents, persons with serious personal or family health challenges, providing paid leave (see the FAMILY Act);
- Establish a national paid sick days standard (see the Healthy Families Act);
- Establish a national childcare program to expand availability and at prices based on income, beginning with the Child Care for Working Families Act;
- Integrate the Universal Child Care and Early Learning Act into a national childcare program so that children do not have to be shuttled from daycare to preschool essential to preparation for K-12 education;
- Care for working mothers-to-be with passage of the Pregnant Worker Fairness Act, which protects pregnant workers' right to reasonable accommodation, prevents retaliation for requesting reasonable accommodation, and prevents pregnant women from being forced to take leave, paid or unpaid, if reasonable accommodation is available;
- Address the massive economic losses sustained disproportionately by women

during the pandemic, a considerable percentage of which are mothers.

Both the Healthy Families Act and the FAMILY Act were introduced in 2019 but ended up shuttled off to die in committee. The FAMILY Act has been resubmitted and needs to be passed if we are to successfully recover from this pandemic without further sacrifice on the part of mothers.

The Healthy Families Act does not appear to have been re-introduced yet under the 117th Congress (at least no bill comes up for this term under that name).

The Child Care for Working Families Act was re-introduced in April in both houses of Congress after failing to pass under the 116th Congress.

Senators Wyden and Warren introduced the Universal Child Care and Early Learning Act last month.

The Pregnant Worker Fairness Act has already been approved by the House Education and Labor Committee as of March 24; it has wide, bipartisan support and needs to be passed ASAP before any more pregnant workers are forced out of their jobs without reasonable accommodation.

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You made your phone call to the mothers in your life yesterday to tell them you care. Now make the calls to your representatives in Congress to follow through and insist they take action to pass the legislation to help mothers and grandmothers, and mothers-to-be.

Don't just talk, do the walk.

Congressional switchboard: (202) 224-3121 or use Resist.bot.

INDIA'S COVID SURGE: THE CURIOUS FACETS OF U.S. RESPONSE

The volume and tenor of pleas for help escalated to new heights this past week as India was engulfed in the pandemic.

You've likely seen images of numerous funeral pyres and many graves along with sick outside overfull hospitals.

Apart from the pyres, it looks like Wuhan in January 2020, the U.S. in March 2020, and Brazil at the end of this March.

And yet there is something really wrong here, very off. The case counts and deaths are truths which can't be escaped but the insistence the U.S. somehow is failing to meet India's needs is off base.

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All that's left of a couple thousand word post I wrote and wrote, and then rewrote over the last several days is what remains above.

The situation over this past weekend changed rapidly, thought the angry ranting at the U.S. and Big Pharma never let up.

The Biden administration issued a couple of statements between Sunday and Monday about the steps it would take to aid India, which included COVID testing kits, PPE, oxygen, therapeutics for treatment, raw materials for vaccine production, and funding to ramp up capacity of India's own vaccine producer, BioE.

The media did its usual weak sauce reporting.

Not a single outlet noted extremely curious facets about the Biden administration's outreach to India:

- U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan spoke with his counterpart,

India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval this weekend;

- There are no reports of Prime Minister Mahendra Modi contacting Biden to ask for help though they have spoken in the last 24 hours (perhaps as recently as this morning Eastern Time);
- There was scant coverage of U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken talks at least a *week ago* with his counterpart, India's External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, regarding COVID and vaccines.

Why did the National Security Adviser play such a big role, with the White House statement issued by NSC office?

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In the mean time invective against the Biden administration and Big Pharma has continued, some of it based in what looks like weak and less-than-thorough reporting.

Claims that Big Pharma has decided profits come before the lives of India's people follow reports that Big Pharma refused to give India patents or transfer intellectual property.

Except that Big Pharma is represented in India by AstraZeneca, which is making their adenovirus-vector vaccine in country. It's the same vaccine which has been used in Europe, and is still in FDA safety review here.

India also has its own Big Pharma in Bharat Biotech, which has developed Covaxin vaccine in collaboration with Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, Missouri. The vaccine left Phase 3 trials in early January.

Yet intelligent people continue to harangue the U.S. and Big Pharma about their refusal to help India with the IP needed for licensing. They retweet stuff like this:



Professional Time Thief
@danieteetee



My head is still spinning from reading that Pfizer asked Latin American countries and South Africa to put up sovereign assets like national banks and military bases in their contract terms for vaccine access. It's gonna take a minute to process that kind of depravity

12:22 PM · Apr 23, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

15.7K Retweets 1,046 Quote Tweets 58.9K Likes

The account that wrote this was opened only weeks ago in January 2021. There's almost nothing in its profile to suggest this is a human with credible background education or experience; the account hasn't been validated by Twitter. Note the number of times this has been shared by retweet or quote tweet, yet the majority of roughly 6000 tweets by this account are about pop culture.

This is the kind of social media content which ramped up tension around U.S. response to India's ongoing COVID surge and continues to do so because it remains uncontested.

The issue the tweet focused on was vaccine manufacturers' request for indemnification by countries which use its vaccine or licensing to manufacture vaccines. How odd that an account tweeting about beauty products and the Kardashians chose to phrase indemnification this way.

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One of the reasons the U.S. National Security Adviser may be involved is the lack of an effective top-level response by India's government to the surge. From Reuters via Yahoo:

NEW DELHI (Reuters) -India's government has decided to leave the import of COVID-19 vaccines to state authorities and companies, two government officials told Reuters, a decision that may slow acquisitions of shots as a second wave of the pandemic rips through the country.

They said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's

government would instead aim to support domestic vaccine makers by guaranteeing purchases from them. The government this month paid Indian producers in advance, for the first time, for vaccine doses.

Under fire for his uneven handling of the world's worst COVID-19 surge, Modi has opened vaccinations for all adults from next month but supplies are already running short.

Negotiations between countries on exports/imports are usually handled by their state departments or external affairs and not at lower state/province level. What amounts to the transfer of technology between a nation and individual states is a security risk, let alone problematic for individual pharmaceutical companies.

This is likely why the initial agreement between the U.S. and India's national security advisers addressed shipment of supplies and other support but not vaccines, technology, or licensing.

It surely didn't encourage the Biden administration to see how badly Modi has bungled handling the pandemic:

See chart below ☐☐ Why didn't Government of India place firm vaccine orders like other countries did in Jan this year? Just compare the huge numbers of vaccine doses ordered by US, UK to India's measly orders. Surely here the buck cannot be passed onto states.

#COVID19Vaccines

pic.twitter.com/1A3rNndv0Z

– Sagarika Ghose (@sagarikaghose) April 26, 2021

In late January, Modi indulged in a smarter version of Trump's March 10, 2020 remark, "We're prepared, and we're doing a great job with it. And it will go away. Just stay calm. It will go

away.”

Addressing the World Economic Forum’s online Davos Agenda Summit, PM Modi said India has beaten all odds to battle the pandemic. “When Covid-19 arrived, India had its share of problems. At the beginning of last year, several experts and organizations had made several predictions that India would be most affected by the pandemic. Someone had even said that 700-800 million would be infected and someone had said that over two million Indians would die from the pandemic. Looking at the condition of countries with better health infrastructure, the world was right in worrying about us,” he said.

“India, however, took a proactive public participation approach and developed a Covid-specific health infrastructure and trained its resources to fight Covid,” the PM added.

This was a mere 12 weeks ago; it was complete hogwash and hardly the stuff needed to instill confidence. India’s situation deteriorated greatly after Davos because Modi failed to take any effective measures to mitigate COVID’s spread in advance of a weeks-long major religious holiday, the Hindu observation of Kumbh Mela.

Nor has it helped develop trust in Modi and his government when they have demanded Twitter hide tweets critical of Modi’s COVID response from Indian public view.

Faith in the individual Indian states is tenuous at best; there are far too many anecdotes about state governments lying about COVID response and health care resources.

my grandmother lives in his state and just got covid, and she is among 1000s of people. this guy has been forcing labs to stop testing and undercounting

cases, and then comes on here to
blatantly lie about it.

<https://t.co/F3IqEDX2IH>

– tanvi (@Tanvim) April 26, 2021

This is an insane level of denial:

Amid reports of patients and hospitals struggling to find and maintain oxygen supply, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has asked officials to take action under the National Security Act and seize the property of individuals who spread “rumours” and propaganda on social media and try to “spoil the atmosphere”.

Mr. Adityanath asserted that there was no shortage of oxygen supply in any COVID-19 hospital – private or government-run – but that the actual problem was blackmarketing and hoarding.

The state of Uttar Pradesh is expending more resources on suppressing “rumours” than on demonstrating to the public there is ample oxygen and other resources for COVID therapy.

~ ~ ~

This level of narcissism, gross incompetence, and denial in another country’s leadership isn’t something the U.S. can fix. Obviously the U.S. is still struggling with cleaning up after its own run-in with a white nationalist populist who was narcissistic and grossly incompetent as well as corrupt.

We’re still playing catch up because the Trump administration obstructed a peaceful and efficient transition, what with Trumpist GSA Administrator Emily Murphy refusing to turn over the keys to Biden’s team after the election. We’re not as far along as we should be with vaccinating the public because there was no federal COVID program when Biden was inaugurated

and insufficient amounts of vaccine had been ordered by Trump.

Not to mention the January 6 attempt to overthrow the government and the Big Lie which continues to interfere with outstanding transition issues.

But the U.S. somehow bears some responsibility for the mounting disaster in India?

Otherwise smart people are trashing both the U.S. and their own cred with demands to remedy Modi's manifold failures; others insist immediate action in spite of global inaction for decades on pandemic preparedness.

Industry is BS-ing us saying, hey it's not about IP, we won't enforce our patents no, well, guess what? Production is encumbered by patents you don't own, what company in India, South Africa wants to set up production now only to have you grab back rights you do own in 2 yrs? 9/

– Gregg Gonsalves (@gregggonsalves)
April 26, 2021

Where was all this concern when Trump killed the pandemic monitoring program instituted under Obama?

Where is the awareness of the security risks posed by a failing state like India, which already has patents?

~ ~ ~

There's one more element in this mix which may explain the presence of the National Security Adviser in the aid offering to India.

Granted, I'm not certain how to get a handle on the risk involved, but some of the intellectual property and technology isn't as benign as a Play-Doh Fuzzy Pumper or an Easy-Bake Oven. It can be militarized and its output weaponized.

When talking about some of the COVID vaccines, we're talking about development which began as military programs. Research for adenovirus-vector vaccines now used against COVID began in the 1950s inside the Defense Department; a vaccine was developed and distributed to military personnel for more than two decades to prevent acute respiratory disease associated with adenovirus infections. This vaccine didn't become part of the scheduled vaccines American civilians receive, just as they didn't receive anthrax vaccines.

How much of the limitations we have seen tossed around in social media, attributed to Big Pharma greed, are really carefully parsed concerns about the potential for the vaccine IP and technology to be acquired by hostile entities for weaponization?

Can we really blame any legitimate pharmaceutical company for expecting indemnification against the misuse of their product, IP, or technology considering this kind of exposure? Let alone the potential claims against them for extremely rare side effects which may be worsened by incompetence in treatment, ex. treating unusual clotting events with blood thinners which may exacerbate the clotting.

But this goes to the lack of global systemic preparedness for pandemic. It's a global problem, not one for which the U.S. bears sole responsibility.

Imagine the possible blowback from questionable social media accounts with negligible provenance should the U.S. under the Biden administration choose to arbitrarily "Free the patents!" as so many demanded this past week over social media, without due diligence about the security risks these new vaccine technologies pose.

This pandemic requires us to imagine this and a lot more. We need to think systemically, more deeply and widely.

This includes thinking ahead to where will the

next crisis begin, because it's only a matter of time.

SOFT-HANDED ACADEMIC DUDES AND MINIMUM WAGE FAST FOOD: WHAT COULD GO WRONG?

I see tweets like this one in my timeline and I brace myself for the inevitable dogpile bashing workers:

Sonic in Albuquerque says "No one wants to work anymore."

pic.twitter.com/CR128n60mM

– Patrick Hayes (@K0BPatrickHayes) April 14, 2021

Unemployed minimum wage workers have collected too much from state unemployment and federal aid, the old white dudes opine from their cushy home offices somewhere in McMansionburbia, nudge-nudge-winking about prescient forecasts of inflationary pressures.

Sod off, you slack-bottomed, soft-handed gits.

Unemployed minimum wage workers were most likely to be laid off early in the pandemic, and may already have been laid off not once but twice or perhaps even more, depending on location and on whether they were or are juggling one or more minimum wage jobs to make ends meet.

These are the same workers whose jobs OSHA has categorized as High Exposure Risk:

Those who have frequent indoor or poorly

ventilated contact with the general public, including workers in retail stores, grocery stores or supermarkets, pharmacies, transit and transportation operations, law enforcement and emergency response operations, restaurants, and bars.

They're in the same risk class as mortuary workers who prep the bodies of those who died of COVID.

This group of workers are among the risk class most likely to experience an outbreak of COVID; just look at the workplaces where Michigan had outbreaks as of April 9:

Michigan outbreaks by site (bolded sites are more difficult to pinpoint outbreaks to):

1. Schools – 301 total
2. Manufacturing/Construction – 141
3. Senior/Assisted Living – 120
4. Retail – 81
5. Office Setting – 45
6. Restaurants/Bars – 44
7. Healthcare – 31
8. College/University – 28
9. Social Gathering – 23
10. Religious Services – 18
11. Other 18
12. Personal Services – 16
13. Corrections – 15
14. Agricultural/Food Processing – 9
15. Shelters – 5
16. Community Exposure, Indoor – 4
17. Community Exposure, Outdoor – 1

Not as bad as schools but how many of the K-12 and university students overlap in some way with fast food workers – either as consumers or employees?

Recall my chicken scratching from my last post about the unaffordability of the American Dream in which I calculate annual earnings for a full-time minimum wage worker:

Do the math:

Minimum federal wage \$7.25 x 40
hour week x 52 weeks = \$15,080
a year.

That's nowhere near enough to make a payment on the median home priced at \$301,000. It's not enough for a tiny dump of a house at one-third of median price.

The equation above already contains numerous generous assumptions: the employee makes 1) minimum federal wage, 2) at a full-time job, 3) for the entire year. For most minimum wage workers, at least one of these three points doesn't apply. Most employers who hire minimum wage workers avoid paying unemployment taxes by employing workers less than full time, which means a minimum wage worker must work two jobs (or more) to make \$15,080.

The average one-bedroom or studio apartment costs roughly \$1000 a month right now. What's left over for food, health care, transportation? Even if a worker can manage a roommate or two, what's left over for basic needs?

Gods help them if they need childcare or eldercare on top of shelter, food, health care, and transportation.

And with most employers refusing to hire minimum wage workers for more than 27-32 hours a week in order to avoid paying either unemployment insurance tax or contribute to health care, these workers are likely not to have any benefits like sick or paid time off, or any savings to offset time needed for illness.

Why would any food service or retail employer think for a moment that minimum wage workers should be beating down the doors to come back to more of the same if their health and their lives had been and could be again at risk, for an absurdly low wage? Why can't the usual pudgy white neoliberal male academic types grasp this?

The snotty, dismissive attitude by business toward minimum wage workers reflected in the tweet above – though labor appears to be an

essential component to the business – also reveals both carelessness and cluelessness of these businesses. If a piece of equipment needed repair for the business to remain open, they'd fix it. But apparently remedying the problems their workers face is a step too far or opaque to the business operator.

Minimum wage workers also need the right to organize. Amazon may pay more than the federal minimum wage, but there are businesses across the U.S. which also operate like Amazon but without the notoriety forcing Amazon to pay better wages. Those businesses must be forced to rejigger their business models. Amazon is no model employer, either; overall conditions are bad when Amazon looks good by comparison.

But demanding businesses rework their operations to protect workers' right to organize is too much to ask, one might say. Is it?

1. Today, @Kroger is closing two stores in Seattle to retaliate against a local \$4/hr hero pay law. More than 100 workers will be fired or dislocated.

Kroger made \$2.8B in profit in 2020. CEO Rodney McMullen got a pay raise to \$21M.

Some heart-breaking details are emerging. pic.twitter.com/vP8E0w5PY8

– More Perfect Union (@MorePerfectUS)
April 24, 2021

When businesses shut down sites to avoid unionization, they are rejiggering their business model, and they are doing it at a cost to the community as well as the workers. They are eating the cost of the closures to make an ugly point.

Kroger's Seattle locations aren't the only two sites the grocer is closing for this reason. At least three more closed in California to avoid paying higher wages to their workers who are disproportionately at risk of COVID – wages

mandated by local government to ameliorate the risks these workers take.

Workers need Congress to pass the Protecting the Right to Organize Act of 2019 (PRO Act) for this reason, as do their communities. Many older and disabled Americans rely on their local grocers; losing one is incredibly disruptive and expensive, especially when it creates a food desert. No business is obligated to do business in any location, but a business willing to pull up and leave a neighborhood and damage customer relations solely because it can't (read: won't) figure out how to pay a living wage needs to do its own reorganization internally, restructuring its business model to operate ethically. A workforce which has the right to unionize may be the only way to force business to reset its thinking and operations.

In other words, if a business's profits rely on paying wages which can't support a worker, the business model isn't legitimate. Unions may be the only means to make this clear to businesses.

Something needs to give soon, because this kind of scenario will continue – a clueless business thinking it must hire anybody at less than living wages, to work in conditions which may not be safe for either employees or customers.

The Youngsville mother of two was taken aback at the offer since she was only trying to go inside to get the food that was left out of her order after going through the drive-thru a first time. The lobby was closed, so she went back to the drive-thru window to get the order straightened out.

Then she learned why the lobby was closed.

"The manager told me, 'I'm sorry. I can't open the lobby because no one wants to work,'" Picou said. "And then she asked if I wanted a job. She said they'd hire anyone at this point."

Imagine thinking a fully-staffed indoor fast food lobby is necessary in the middle of a pandemic, instead of creating a safer alternative.

Waiting for those slack-bottomed academic types to nod their heads vigorously in affirmation as they wipe the fast food mung off their faces.

You'll notice that young mother in that article didn't jump at the offer.

GOODBYE, AMERICAN DREAM: THE UNAFFORDABILITY OF AMERICAN LIFE

My oldest sent me a text this past weekend:

Also houses down here are going for 1.5x value. [Friend] put an offer in at 200k for house selling for 160k and it ended up selling for 240k. There's no way it'll appraise that high but EVERY house is selling like that.

Folks in big coastal metro areas will laugh at these prices, but until recently \$160,000 bought a 900-1200 square foot home, three bedrooms and two bathrooms, a basement and a two-car garage in a suburban setting here in Michigan. At this price one wouldn't find a brand new home but one between 10 to 50 years old, with a medium sized suburban lot. If one was really lucky, the house would be move-in ready, the yard would be fenced, and there might be a shed in the backyard for the lawn mower.

A young professional earning \$80 to \$100,000 a year could afford this and a family and still have a tiny bit left over to put in retirement

savings.

But it's a stretch at \$200,000, and absolutely out of their range at \$240,000. They may not even have the 20-25% down payment for this larger price, and the housing market has tightened so quickly they certainly haven't been able to come up with an additional \$20 to \$40,000 to put down.

Wall Street Journal reported last week that as much as a third of single-family residential housing is now being snapped up by investors.

Big foreign investment firms that buy office buildings, hotels and shopping centers around the world have a new favorite real-estate play: single-family homes in American suburbs.

These institutions are partnering with U.S. housing companies to buy or build rental homes by the thousands. In suburban neighborhoods near cities such as Atlanta, Las Vegas and Phoenix, blocks of families are sending monthly rent checks to ventures backed by Canadian pension funds, European insurers, and Asian or Middle Eastern government-run funds.

The overseas investors are following in the footsteps of many big U.S. investment firms and pension funds, which started buying single-family homes on a large scale in the aftermath of the financial crisis.

This may well explain the huge jump in prices over the last 12-18 months.

The situation is so bad it's become a joke on TikTok and Twitter:

Our realtor shared this with us this morning and it's pretty spot on.
pic.twitter.com/2jvmeZmiVW

– Nathan Vickers (@nathanvickers) April

21, 2021

Speculation is doing to residential property what it did to oil prices before June 2008 when Congress passed legislation requiring an increase from 10% to 30% margin on options. Oil prices then dropped greatly, but not enough fast enough to prevent economic Jenga – many mortgages failed because homeowners had to choose between a tank of gas to get to work or making their house payment.

~ ~ ~

Now imagine the frustration of a prospective house buyer like [Friend] above. They're a two-career household with a small family, which means they have car payments, childcare expenses which likely exceed car payments, and student loans they'll be paying down for at least another decade if they are trying to juggle all these expenses.

They've scrimped and saved, kept their lifestyle minimal – not hard to do if you've had to weigh going to the movies on a date night against the cost of a babysitter and movie tickets – and they've amassed enough cash to put down 20% on a house and been pre-approved for a mortgage between \$120,000 and \$160,000. The higher end would be a push for them but sometimes the right house is a little pricier.

And then the dream for which they've scrimped and saved is gone in a heartbeat. As soon as they see the house on market they bid but they couldn't counteroffer enough money fast enough and it's gone.

Even in a pandemic with so many people out of work, the right house is gone.

It's probably been sold to a speculator who will put it up for rent at a price which is the same as [Friend]'s mortgage payment would have been, but at that price there's no room to save any extra money.

And that's what it's like in the Midwest. What's it like in more densely-populated coastal states?

How do young people who are competing for jobs on a national basis, earning pay which doesn't adjust all that much for location, buy a home and attain the American Dream?

They're giving up children to do this, we can see that by the flat to falling birth rates.

A major one. The National Bureau of Economic Research says that the largest component of child-rearing costs is housing. And the cost of housing in America has skyrocketed. The median U.S. home in 1953 cost \$18,080, or about \$177,000 in today's inflation-adjusted dollars. Today, the median home price is \$301,000. Young people who cannot afford homes or even a two-bedroom apartment are less inclined to marry and to have children. One 2014 study published in the Journal of Public Economics explicitly linked housing costs to fertility, suggesting that for every \$10,000 jump in housing values, fertility among nonowners fell 2.4 percent. Economists also point to the fact that the fertility rate has fallen every year since 2007, and suggest that the Great Recession compelled many Millennials to put off child-rearing for years. "What we learned from the Great Recession is that every 1 percentage point increase in the unemployment rate reduces births by 1 percent," said Wellesley College economics professor Phil Levine.

And in places like the greater San Francisco area they go homeless, living in their vehicles because they can't afford rent *if* there's rental housing available.

One solution to this mess is reducing student loan burdens. Getting tens of millions of young people out from underneath \$50,000 and a decade or more of payments would free them to have children and/or buy a home.

I hesitate to say they may also save for retirement but it's possible they're not able to until they are out from under their student loans.

This problem may explain why so many young people have jumped at online trading apps like Robinhood, causing increased volatility in the stock market. They can get in with very little money, get out quickly, and do it all over again rapidly. It offers them a chance to increase their asset value though it does nothing for the overall stock market while compromising their personal data privacy.

But putting some portion of their meager savings in the stock market isn't a solution – it's far too risky, too easily gamed (hah, GameStop, get it?). It's not a prudent approach to funding necessities.

Getting out from under student loan debt, though, would be a doable help with very little downside.

~ ~ ~

Removing at least part of student loan debt from younger consumers' shoulders will act as an economic stimulus, too. Those who are able to end their loan payments will be able to spend more of their income on expenses they've deferred in addition to housing.

Employment should rise as demand increases, and a tighter employment market will help boost some if not all wages.

Which brings us to the section of the market which may not benefit directly from canceling student debt. Workers who make minimum wage or are employed in tipped hourly jobs can't afford to buy the average home in the U.S.; they are

struggling to pay rent let alone save a down payment. Many of them are students.

Do the math:

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{Minimum federal wage } \$7.25 \times 40 \text{ hour} \\ & \text{week} \times 52 \text{ weeks} = \$15,080 \text{ a year.} \end{aligned}$$

That's nowhere near enough to make a payment on the median home priced at \$301,000. It's not enough for a tiny dump of a house at one-third of median price.

The equation above already contains numerous generous assumptions: the employee makes 1) minimum federal wage, 2) at a full-time job, 3) for the entire year. For most minimum wage workers, at least one of these three points doesn't apply. Most employers who hire minimum wage workers avoid paying unemployment taxes by employing workers less than full time, which means a minimum wage worker must work two jobs (or more) to make \$15,080.

Forget about it if the worker holds down a tipped hourly job; while in some cases tips can be quite good, the base wage in at least 16 states is \$2.13 an hour. On a bad day it may cost a worker more to show up than they make if they pay for any form of transportation besides shoe leather or a bicycle.

The minimum wage must be raised if roughly 1.8 million Americans have any chance at saving a down payment on a house, let alone buying one. And if businesses aren't already increasing wages now during pandemic market conditions, they're not likely to do so unless they're forced to by law.

~ ~ ~

Canceling a big chunk of student loan debt and raising the minimum wage will still not be enough to help tens of millions of Americans afford to buy their own home.

Once these folks have more disposable income and increase demand on the housing market, speculators will swamp the market even more so

than they are right now.

(Domestic policy aside, it's a marvelous way to ratchet up class conflict by locking out a couple generations of potential homebuyers if a hostile country's sovereign fund was looking to both invest and destabilize the U.S. at the same time.)

Canada's domestic housing policy encourages home owner occupancy of single family homes; speculative investment is far less than it is in the U.S. It hasn't solved their housing market problems – Toronto housing is *incredibly* expensive – but it does reduce competition for homes.

There must be some form of legislation which reduces market demand by speculators so that the only participants in the single-family home market are single families.

There should be some limitation on speculation for multi-family housing so that rental properties remain affordable. Eliminating overseas buyers or funds is one possibility.

~ ~ ~

We'll hear all kinds of caterwauling about how unfair it is that some students will have all their debt paid for them by canceling \$50,000 while they had to pay for all their student's education.

Bah. They can suck it up.

This month I finished shelling out a total of \$200,000 for two kids to go to college. This doesn't include what I've paid for their cell phone, health care insurance, and for the vehicles and auto insurance they've needed.

\$200K covered tuition, books, fees and some of the housing and food for one kid on a half ride to a private school, and a kid at a Big 10 public university. Both kids worked throughout their four-year programs and paid for their own gasoline and rent off campus, along with some sundries.

Because of this investment in them I've got to come up with income for another seven-plus years to pay for my health care, but at least my kids have a fighting chance right now that most of their cohort don't have. They don't need to live at home with me to scrimp and save. They can move out out state and chase a better job.

But even with this investment in both of my kids it will take years for them to save enough to make a down payment on a home and have a 6-month cushion in the bank.

I don't resent the fact they don't have school loans which might be canceled. What I resent is that they don't have the kind of world I had as a young adult, where if one worked hard they could make enough money to get ahead and expect a better life. (I do resent having to pay through the nose, five to ten times over what I paid for college, but that's another matter.)

If housing prices jump 20-60% almost overnight, my kids don't have that chance. They can't expect their friends to uniformly have that chance, either, as [Friend]'s situation demonstrates.

If their entire cohort is stifled by student loan debt, wages stagnant for decades, and competition for housing from speculation, even steep parental investment isn't enough to help them tread water.

And if all of their cohort of 20-somethings are stuck in the same boat, the entire economy is deeply skewed and screwed. Whatever assessment analysts are making of the stock market and the economy is manipulated by this iceberg of frozen, frustrated demand which cannot remain in stasis forever.

Something has to give.

We can start with canceling \$50,000 student debt, increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, and eliminating overseas speculation from the housing market while limiting single-family homes to sales between occupants and their

heirs.

DEREK CHAUVIN VERDICT

It is
in, we
just
do not
know
it
yet.
OJ



aside, a verdict coming this soon is often, if not usually, a tell.

Honestly, I think the way the trial judge, Peter Cahill has been an absolute embarrassment to due process and fundamental fairness. The amount of appealable error (that does NOT mean successful appealable error) Cahill has injectect is deplorable and nuts. That guy should not be sitting on any important criminal trial bench.

But, while we do not yet know what it is, this is a thread to discuss it. Evidentiary infirmities and bullshit argument from both sides and all.

3 THINGS: MYTHS OF OVERNIGHT SUCCESS, HERD IMMUNITY, AND COVID-19 VACCINE

[NB: I've spent several days drafting this post

only to have today's FDA's pause on J&J vaccine throw a wrench in the works. I will try to pull something together about that issue in a separate post. / ~Rayne]

Friends and family tell me they are frustrated by people they know who are dragging their feet getting a COVID-19 vaccine. Some are actively resisting vaccination, refusing to get one.

Nearly all of this has been driven by misinformation, often been spread by well-meaning but skeptical folks. Anti-vaxx disinformation has been spread by those who have a vested interest in seeing Americans getting sick and dying, accepted by the same audience.

One friend told me a skeptical acquaintance explained, "I'm not an anti-vaxxer, I just don't trust how fast this has been put together."

Others have waved off the vaccine, saying they "don't need a vaccine because we'll reach herd immunity," or "I already had COVID so I'm fine."

We are never going to reach herd immunity so long as people refuse to be vaccinated.

And people wonder why CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky was so emotional a couple weeks ago about the need to continue infection prevention and the rate of vaccination.

The problem in my home state is evident in this profile piece (now paywalled) featuring Michigan residents in the 10th congressional district. You'll recall Rep. Paul Mitchell who won in 2018 declined to run for reelection because of the political atmosphere. It wasn't just the toxicity in Washington DC from Trump and his backup singers in the GOP-majority Senate, but back at home where constituents have become increasingly unmoored from reality.

Michigan's COVID map looking like it slammed its whole thumb in the car door
pic.twitter.com/DcgaTqmC5u

— Sen. Seltzer (D-White Claw)
(@VernorsHerzog) April 3, 2021

Their part of the state is the worst for new cases and deaths; given how thinly populated the rural district is and how small these communities are, they have to know people who are severely ill and dying and yet they just don't give a flying fuck.

There will be no reaching some of these folks, ever, but we have to reach folks who are on the fence if we are ever going to stop the spread of COVID including new variants.

~ 3 ~

Misinfo/Disinfo 1: The vaccine was developed too fast.

Truth: The mRNA vaccines like Pfizer-BioNTech's and Moderna's were *at least* 31 years in the making. Work on adenovirus-vector vaccines like Johnson & Johnson's began in the 1950s looking at defenses against adenoviruses. These are the only two types of vaccines currently distributed in the U.S. under Emergency Use Authorizations.

Research for the COVID-19 vaccine began in 2002 with the emergence of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), caused by the coronavirus now known as SARSr-CoV. The epidemic which ran its course from 1 November 2002 – 31 July 2003, resulted in approximately 8,000 cases and nearly 800 deaths.

Research into Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), another coronavirus which is very similar to SARSr-CoV and SARS-CoV-2, also contributed to the body of knowledge. MERS epidemic resulted in 2,500 cases and nearly 900 deaths.

In total there were at least 12 years of research into similar coronaviruses before funding dried up because neither then-known coronaviruses were spreading.

In tandem with the research on coronaviruses, technology used for genetic sequencing and analysis improved exponentially in sensitivity, capability, and speed. Once SARS-CoV-2 was

isolated and the unique spike protein identified, the vaccine research had most of what it needed to develop a trial-worthy vaccine candidate. The genetic sequencing in January 2020 couldn't have done so quickly and in such detail in 2002.

The mRNA approach used by Pfizer and Moderna was first proposed in the late 1980s after more than a decade of conjecture; research into HIV and Ebola are among the diseases which contributed to the body of knowledge for these COVID vaccines. That's more than 30 years of research leading up to the current vaccines.

If funding for research hadn't stopped in the mid-2010s, COVID vaccines might have been delivered weeks or even months earlier than late October/early November last year.

~ 2 ~

Misinfo/Disinfo 2: Don't need vaccination because of herd immunity.

Truth: We are nowhere near herd immunity. The safe approach to herd immunity also relies on vaccines.

While there are a number of ways this concept is being distorted, I ran into a situation last week in which someone I know who is a health care provider had begun to doubt the use of vaccines for COVID.

They'd been exposed to a European doctor's claim that wearing masks and the vaccines themselves prevented our bodies from eliciting a natural immune response.

Ignoring, of course, the fact that nearly 600,000 Americans alone have died from the effects of their natural immune response to infection with SARS-CoV-19. That's the disease, COVID – the response to the infection.

I went and did some digging to check this Euro doc's credentials and lo, there it is: he's a fucking DVM. A veterinarian who did some work on viruses in animals, with a handful of papers

published a couple decades ago about viruses in donkeys. I won't even name this bozo because I don't want to give his nonsense any more oxygen.

In retrospect this guy is akin to the French researcher whose early, extremely small, and utterly lousy study was used to rationalize the use of hydroxychloroquine as COVID therapy. Poor credentials and bad track record combined with inadequate evidence, launched from overseas into American consumers' social media – and they lapped up his misinfo and disinfo without any skepticism let alone the wherewithal to check credentials.

Just stop them. Cut them off as soon as they start talking about herd immunity.

That includes cutting off morons like Texas Gov. Gregg Abbott:

Texas Gov. Abbott says state is 'very close' to herd immunity.

Uh no.

I'm with @mtosterholm who says it perfectly:

"There is no way on God's green earth that Texas is anywhere even close to herd immunity"<https://t.co/46gVGVoBRr>

– Ashish K. Jha, MD, MPH (@ashishkjha)
April 12, 2021

Nobody should listen to this stupid asshat when it comes to COVID-19 because he's propagating false information when he should be turning this over to professionals with appropriate credentials.

I'll let biologist Carl Bergstrom discuss the concept of herd immunity with regard to a pandemic in this Twitter thread:

1. In the op-ed pages of newspapers and on cable news shows, I'm seeing frequent confusion over what it means to reach

herd immunity—and whether we can relax COVID precautions once we do so.

It will take a few posts, but let me try to explain.

– Carl T. Bergstrom (@CT_Bergstrom)

April 4, 2021

Bergstrom distills the challenge:

“The key thing to note is that the herd immunity threshold is the point at enough people are immune (by vaccination or previous infection) to prevent a new epidemic from starting from scratch.

It is **not** the point at which an ongoing epidemic disappears.”

COVID will still be with us after a majority of the adult public has been vaccinated because children and unvaccinated adults will constitute 20-30% of the population while the herd immunity threshold for COVID as an airborne disease will be closer to that of other other airborne diseases like pertussis and measles. This means at least 90% percent of the public must be immune before the disease will stop spreading.

And with only 35.9% of the U.S. having had a dose of vaccine, there’s no way in hell any part of the U.S. is close to herd immunity – including Texas where as of today only 19.9% of residents have been fully vaccinated.

All of this assumes there isn’t a new strain mutating in an unvaccinated person which may bypass the existing vaccines. It’s urgent that we vaccinate as many people as possible as quickly as possible to stem the spread of the disease before this can happen, setting off a new epidemic.

Anybody who is waiting for herd immunity while refusing to wear a mask and rejecting the vaccine is a nihilist wishing sickness and death

on others if not themselves.

But don't take my word for it; find virologists, epidemiologists, public health experts, and/or others with solid credentials who'll explain why we need to be vaccinated to reach herd immunity.

~ 1 ~

And then the excuse used by the oppositional defiant/libertarian/owning the libs crowd –

Misinfo/Disinfo 3: Getting vaccinated means submitting to the federal government which is taking away freedom by issuing “vaccine passports.”

Truth: NO. Fuck, no. The only thing being issued at vaccination sites is a record of vaccination. Vaccination records are shared with one's doctor under HIPAA privacy regulations.

I am so disappointed with former representative Justin Amash on this point. It's as if he's forgotten universities and public schools have long required proof of vaccination for entrance, because education provided in a shared public space requires students who are not at risk of death from other students' diseases.

It's as if Amash has forgotten the Constitution is not a suicide pact, and that the nation's founders lived in a world when travel was often restricted by epidemics like smallpox, measles, and yellow fever requiring mandatory quarantines.

Or that state and federal governments regularly require proof of baseline safety measures like passing vision and driver's tests for a driver's license.

Businesses and government functions should not be held hostage by a pandemic. They should be able to ask their employees and customers to act prudently to protect themselves and others, which may include providing proof of vaccination.

(Florida's Gov. Ron DeSantis can pound sand with

his ridiculous executive order banning “vaccine passports,” intended to prevent cruise ships requiring booking passengers to have proof of COVID vaccination. It’s as if he’s completely forgotten what happened to cruise passengers last year.)

Here’s a more personal example as a business case for required vaccination. My youngest contracted mild food poisoning from a chain restaurant’s takeout, but the first question posed by his employer and co-workers who all work in a facility which tests foods and pharmaceuticals, is whether he really contracted COVID since some symptoms like nausea may be present after infection with SARS-CoV-2. Imagine the repercussions to the supply chain if someone asymptomatic simply went to work in that environment.

My kid is taking the day off and getting tested for COVID to assure their workplace is safe, but imagine this happens again next week to a different employee, and the week after that to yet another. The cost to business and to workers could be staggering when simply requiring vaccination with proof could resolve the challenge.

And your own foods and drugs might also be safer for it.

Fortunately my youngest will be vaccinated soon; my oldest already is as of last week when Michigan opened vaccinations to all ages.

~ 0 ~

As of this morning we have lost 562,007 Americans to COVID – 476 died yesterday, the lowest number of daily deaths since last autumn.

Most of these deaths were not caused by UK variant B.1.1.7 which is now dominant in the US, nor by Brazilian variant P1, nor by South African variant B.1.351, all three of which appear to be more transmissible, and in the case of P1, more deadly, sickening younger people more often, and *re-infecting* those who already

had an earlier strain.

Had we not mitigated the first strains of COVID with a combination of social distancing, mask wearing, increased hygiene, and lockdowns as well as vaccines, we would be on our way to several million dead.

But we are still on our way to that number if people do not continue mitigation measures and get vaccinated. Brazil's 1,480 deaths yesterday alone, most caused by P1, offers proof.

OPEN THREAD: NASA'S PERSEVERANCE ROVER MARS LANDING

OMG it feels soooo good to be able to think about future-looking science instead of worrying about the country blowing up!

We're waiting now for NASA'S latest Mars rover craft to land on the red planet. Follow along with these videos:

This is NASA Mission Control with a 360-degree video feed (some browsers may not support this):

This is raw feed from NASA's Jet Propulsion Lab:

Some of the content may be duplicative, but it's still exciting to listen to this team as they reach a major landmark in their Perseverance project.

Why is Perseverance so different and important compared to the previous Mars rover missions? From the Mission Overview site:

The Perseverance rover has four science objectives that support the Mars Exploration Program's science goals:

Looking for Habitability: Identify past environments capable of supporting microbial life.

Seeking Biosignatures: Seek signs of possible past microbial life in those habitable environments, particularly in special rocks known to preserve signs of life over time.

Caching Samples: Collect core rock and "soil" samples and store them on the Martian surface.

Preparing for Humans: Test oxygen production from the Martian atmosphere.

In other words, we've moved beyond successfully arriving at the planet, landing, and taking a look around. We're now ready to engage in the science which supports humans once they arrive in a near-future stage of exploration.

That last goal is huge; if we can't manufacture oxygen on Mars using the planet's resources, we're going to have to bring means to support humans with us in future exploration.

UPDATE-1 – 3:39 PM ET –

10 minutes ago from The Oatmeal:

20 minutes until EDL
pic.twitter.com/nWLSK0wsZP

– The Oatmeal (@Oatmeal) February 18, 2021

RunPeeNowHURRYLOL

UPDATE-2 – 3:55 PM ET –

TANGO DELTA.

Touchdown!! Perseverance is on Mars' surface!!
WOOHOO!!

Poor scientist calling the tick-tock just gave a massive sigh of relief over the raw feed.

And now they have an image from the surface!



Congratulations, Team Perseverance!!

UPDATE-3 – 4:25 PM ET –

And now the first tweet from Perseverance on Mars!

Hello, world. My first look at my forever home. #CountdownToMars
pic.twitter.com/dkM9jE9I6X

– NASA's Perseverance Mars Rover
(@NASAPersevere) February 18, 2021

Team Perseverance has run through their post-landing review. The next phase of the mission has now begun.

Wow, it feels so good to have some successful science under the belt today!

What science would you like to see tackled this year? Share in comments.

THREE THINGS: IT'S OUR LUCKY DAY

Though friends and family in Texas are still desperately miserable, we had an unusually lucky day.

~ 3 ~

Don't know about you folks but my sleep cycle

has been extremely erratic during this pandemic. I'm up at 3:00 a.m. for a few hours, finally fall back to sleep, and wake again at no set hour.

Today I woke a few minutes before nine a.m. ET, launching Twitter immediately as one does while still trying to shake off the Trump era habit of checking for the apocalypse on rising.

Lo and behold, the first tweet in my timeline was the live stream of the impending implosion of Trump's shuttered Atlantic City hotel.

I huddled under my blankets in rapt attention for several minutes waiting for explosives' detonation and BOOM-boom-boom-boom-boom, there it was and I blinked and the hideous structure was gone when I opened my eyes.

WATCH: Trump Plaza casino in Atlantic City is imploded
pic.twitter.com/08xAoKiYB2

– philip lewis (@Phil_Lewis_) February 17, 2021

Dust slowly rose into the air and sailed out over the ocean like fine confetti.

It was glorious – a sign like smoke over the Vatican, a portent of better things to come.

~ 2 ~

And there it was, the dusty oracle delivered.

One of the meanest, nastiest, most useless sacks of flesh *assumed room temperature* today.

Right-wing talk radio blabbermouth Rush Limbaugh succumbed from complications due to lung cancer.

Don't tell me I'm being unusually harsh; I'm using the contemptible toad's own words. When homeless rights activist Mitch Snyder died, Limbaugh said Snyder *assumed room temperature*.

Nor should you imagine for one goddamned moment I will now demonstrate an iota of respect for

that dead wretch because respect is earned. The racist, misogynist ignoramus who played a key role in the progress of the GOP away from a pro-democracy political party earned no respect from me.

This obituary at Huffington Post says it best, though there's plenty it left out even though it's unsparing. Michael Tomasky at Democracy Journal faults Bork and Scalia for Limbaugh's poisonous rise across our publicly-owned airwaves (there's a lesson in this).

Adios, motherfucker. Give my regards to Hades.

~ 1 ~

Good news from White House COVID-19 Response Team today

Our 7-day daily average of 1.7 million doses administered compares to an average of 892k the week before President Biden took office. That's almost double in just four weeks.
pic.twitter.com/JgRbIjMofP

– White House COVID-19 Response Team
(@WHCOVIDResponse) February 17, 2021

Doubling the weekly average is great, considering the response team had NOTHING, ZIP, NADA in the way of a federal plan for rolling out the vaccine as of Inauguration Day. The Trump Administration's plan appeared to consist of dumping vaccine on the states in quantities which may have been rationalized by politics, and telling the states to just do it, just distribute it – if they listened to VP Pence's team.

If they listened to Secretary Azar – like Florida's Gov. DeSantis surely did, with emphasis added by grocery store chain Publix's heiress's donation – then commercial pharmacies were going to run the show.

VANITY FAIR – “A Huge Potential for

Chaos': How the COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout Was Hobbled by Turf Wars and Magical Thinking"<https://t.co/Vuh4LkrsEP>

– Coronavirus War Room (@Covid19WarRoom)
February 8, 2021

What a fucking shit show.

With luck in spite of the lingering Trumpy mess, some of you have had your first and possibly second vaccination if you're in health care or older than 65 (age threshold depends on states' criteria and how closely they followed the CDC's guidance, I think, correct me if I'm wrong). Good. I won't receive mine for another eight weeks, I estimate, based on my state's current roll out schedule.

President Biden says that the U.S. will have enough coronavirus vaccine to inoculate 300 million Americans by this summer. Biden says Moderna and Pfizer will deliver the doses by the end of July, more than a month earlier than initially anticipated.

<https://t.co/5F0DQvmHLu>

– The Associated Press (@AP) February 11, 2021

With the announcement that enough doses have been ordered for delivery in late July, the rest of the country may expect to be vaccinated by late summer. Depending on how the last push for vaccinations is organized and pulled off, school this fall is likely to be on campus and in classrooms once again.

That is very good news.

~ 0 ~

If you feel inclined to assist Texans who are suffering from the worst of the intersection between their elected GOP officials and capitalist profiteering, the Texas Tribune

reported where help is accepted (bottom of article):

Here's how to help:

Dallas: Dallas Homeless Alliance President and CEO Carl Falconer said donations can be made to Our Calling, who is managing the city's shelter at the convention center.

Austin: Chris Davis, communications manager for Austin's Ending Community Homelessness Coalition, or ECHO, said people can find a list of ways to help here. These donations range from sleeping bags to monetary donations for hygiene and snack kits.

San Antonio: South Alamo Regional Alliance for the Homeless Executive Director Katie Vela said their biggest area of need is volunteers to work the overnight shifts, especially those living in the downtown area who might be able to walk to the shelters. Vela also said the shelters are also in need of hot meals beginning Tuesday. People can find the list of shelters here.

Houston: Catherine B. Villarreal, the director of communications for the Coalition for the Homeless, said people can donate to any of the organizations in The Way Home listed here.

I hope Texans are thinking ahead to the thaw when all that snow and ice will turn into flood water, which may be as soon as Friday.

TRUMP IMPEACHMENT II - THE BEGINNING

And so it begins any minute now. Don't fret, it will not take long, because Pelosi, Schumer and

the Dems have so decreed out of political cowardice. Is that politically expedient at the start of the nascent Biden Administration? Maybe! But they all took an oath to protect and defend the Constitution, not their political expediency.

So where are we at the onset of proceedings?

The tentative schedule is this:

First, there will be a debate over the “Constitutionality” of even holding and impeachment trial at all. This is a ridiculous argument, and will fail, but with much cowardly GOP Senate support.

There will be up to four hours equally divided between the impeachment managers and the president’s counsel to debate the constitutionality of the trial. Again, that will fail as to Trump. Then there will be sixteen hours per side to argue their case. It will be predictable baloney from both sides, with no actual evidence submitted and admitted. And, no, “video presentations” do not count, that is simply argument by propaganda. Each party’s arguments are delimited by not being able to go over two days, and cannot exceed eight hours each.

“After the presentations are done, senators will have a total of four hours to question both sides. Then there will be four hours divided equally between the parties for arguments on whether the Senate will consider motions to subpoena witnesses and documents, if requested by the managers.

...

There will be up to four hours equally divided for closing arguments, along with deliberation time if requested by the senators before the vote takes place.”

Much of the above, though not all, came from an excellent report by Barbara Sprunt and Diedre

Walsh at NPR.

Is this year another stupid and truncated show trial by Pelosi, Schumer and the Dems, in order to look like they are doing something while they are cowering? Of course it is. Same as it ever was.

There will also be discussion of an "organizing resolution". Don't fall for that, the parameters have already been agreed to behind the scenes.

Lastly, while joint stipulations may always be made, otherwise the general parameters are controlled by the extant Senate Rules on Impeachment. They are here for your reference.

And here is Leahy's feckless "Dear Colleagues" letter.