

Those Dangerous Anti-Vaccine Conservatives!



I wasn't quite sure what was going on the other day when I logged into my social media accounts and was immediately overwhelmed with scores of impassioned posts on the typically unexciting topic of vaccinations.

Everyone was talking about it, and most of the rhetoric seemed to come in the form of angry parent-shaming, with folks broadly taking to task the people who choose not to get their kids inoculated against different types of diseases.

I thought to myself, "*Of course* parents should immunize their children. It's dangerous not to. But why is everyone so fired up?"

As it turns out, it all stemmed from a CDC report on a measles outbreak linked to the Disneyland resort in California back in December. As a result, 102 people from 14 states were reported to have been infected by the disease.

Experts insist that there is no risk of measles spreading across the nation, largely due to the fact that the overwhelming majority of people living in this country have been vaccinated against it. As the *Wall Street Journal* reports, this isn't even the largest measles outbreak in recent years. Yet, it still managed to turn into a major news

story overnight, in large part because of a remark made by U.S. Senator and likely 2016 presidential candidate, Rand Paul.

“I’ve heard of many tragic cases of walking, talking, normal children who wound up with profound mental disorders after vaccines,” Paul said on Monday.

It was a controversial comment for sure, though it would have likely gone unnoticed by the liberal media had it been spoken by Democrat. Unfortunately for Paul, he’s no Democrat. He’s a Republican. So, the media did what the media typically does when a Republican says something stupid: They hold the entire party and the conservative movement accountable for what was said, and they portray the fringe viewpoint as an exemplification of what righties *really* think in their bizarre, radical minds.

With Chris Christie’s earlier, benign comment about parental choice serving as the icing on the cake, the media narrative began to flow.

“Measles Outbreak Proves Delicate Issue to GOP Field” read a *New York Times* headline. In the column, Jeremy Peters and Richard Perez-Pena write that the resistance to vaccinations is an example of settled science “not widely accepted by conservatives.”

A *Washington Post* headline read, “Vaccination debate flares in GOP presidential race, alarming medical experts,” and Time magazine gave us, “Measles Vaccinations Roil Republican Presidential Race.”

On *MSNBC*, Joy Behar was in an absolute panic. “This is this, again, Neanderthal thinking on the right that is really, it’s scary and dangerous,” she said on the set of Morning Joe. “Climate change deniers, vaccination deniers, I mean they are going to kill us.”

Conservatives killing people with their anti-vaccine beliefs? That sounds pretty serious. The problem is that it's utterly ridiculous.

As many in the conservative media have pointed out, what little anti-vaccine sentiment that exists in this country crosses party lines and political ideologies. Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and John McCain all expressed caution on the topic of immunizations back in 2008 when they were running for president. In recent years, the three loudest voices falsely declaring a link between vaccinations and autism have been Robert F. Kennedy, Jenny McCarthy, and Jim Carrey – all liberals. 92 of the 102 Americans who contracted measles from the Disneyland outbreak live in liberal counties in California. In 2014, a survey conducted by Yale professor Dan Kahan showed that just as many Democrats as Republicans are suspicious of vaccines... and that number isn't very large.

Personally, the only people I've ever met who could be considered *anti-vaccine* are not wing-nuts or activists. In fact, they are largely apolitical. Their concerns aren't based on principle or philosophy, but rather on a frightening physical experience that they or someone they know encountered after receiving an immunization. I'm sure the reckless rhetoric of people like Jenny McCarthy didn't ease their worries.

So why, then, is the media trying to brand the GOP as the *anti-vaccine party* whose politicians are required to tap-dance around the topic out of fear of offending the political base? There are a couple of reasons.

First of all, the media likes to take every opportunity to portray Republicans as "extreme" and Democrats as *well within the mainstream*. In other words, they want Americans to view the parties the same way *they* view the parties. That's why they decided this week to make Rand Paul the voice of Republicans and Hillary Clinton's "Let's protect all our kids"

tweet the message of Democrats.

David “Iowahawk” Burge on Twitter nailed the second reason: “The purpose of media vaccination stories is to inoculate you to these stories: ISIS burns Jordanian pilot alive.”

When Americans are battling against each other over domestic wedge issues, they’re not focused on legitimate threats and real enemies like Radical Islam. They’re not focused on beheadings and people being burned alive. They’re not paying attention to the administration’s extensive list of foreign policy failures, and they’re certainly not demanding for a plan to deal with such problems.

When the villains are parents whose negligence can potentially lead to disease, *anyone* can enter the battlefield and open fire, simply by broadcasting their opinions across the Internet. It’s an easy fight to wage, but ultimately a meaningless one. Minds on immunizations can be changed with PSAs. A strategy to defeat ISIS requires that serious, consequential decisions be made – ones that can have global ramifications.

Soon after the media began pointing to conservatives as the source of the anti-vaccine sentiment in this country, other likely Republican presidential candidates who are certainly more socially conservative than Rand Paul and Chris Christie had no problem coming out and saying in no uncertain terms that immunizations are vitally important. Hopefully that will nip this little media narrative in the bud, but I wouldn’t count on it. The truth never stood in the way of a good “The Republicans are too extreme!” story.

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