

Worth Remembering As We Move Past the Pandemic...



Back in February, I wrote a piece in which I described how I won't miss something I called "pandemic priors." I defined the phrase as "the mindset of an individual that their past or initial views of the pandemic are forever applicable and reliable, regardless of changed conditions... whether those conditions come from new data, new knowledge, new technology, new medical breakthroughs, or something else."

My broader point (which I repeated multiple times throughout the column) was that when conditions change, so do certain realities. And being that conditions have changed significantly many times over the past two years, those who never altered their positions on issues like lock-downs, mask-wearing, mask-mandates, COVID transmissibility, vaccine concerns, and overall risk assessment were very likely dead-wrong, in their views, at some point during the pandemic.

For example, I've seen a number of people point to the recent lifting of mask-mandates on airplanes and other forms of

public transportation as evidence that masks never served any real scientific purpose in combating COVID-19 in the first place. That is, of course, absurd. Before the COVID vaccines were created and made widely available, masks were the most effective and practical mitigation tools we had for getting back to some semblance of societal normalcy. We can argue all day about mask *mandates*, but the science behind mask-*wearing* has been proven in study after study.

Were masks perfect? Of course not. They were never a cure, some types worked far better than others, they were less effective against later (more contagious) variants, and they became less important as more and more people acquired vaccine and/or natural immunity. Also, to acknowledge you culture warriors out there, masks were sometimes worn to virtue-signal, and their mandated usage – in a number of circumstances – didn't make sense (for which those who enacted and maintained the mandates are absolutely worthy of scrutiny and criticism). But the practice of wearing masks *did* help mitigate the spread of the disease, especially during society's most vulnerable period. And for some people, in certain circumstances, I think it still has a part to play.

Today, however, I want to step back from the pandemic gripes of the living, and recognize those who weren't as fortunate. By just about every tally now, more than a million Americans (over 6 million globally) have died from COVID-19. To me, that's an absolutely staggering number.

It's surreal to look back at news reports from March and April of 2020, and be reminded of how Dr. Anthony Fauci was absolutely skewered by many (mostly on the right) for "fear-mongering" with his "ridiculous" warning that as many as 200,000 Americans could ultimately die from the coronavirus. We ended up quintupling that number, and unfortunately, hundreds are still being added to it every day.

The loss of life is something I think about a fair amount; I'm

guessing others still do as well. Yet, and at some point along the way, the COVID death toll feels like it has become little more than background noise while the news cycle has moved on to other things.

Conservative columnist Matt Labash, who hasn't forgotten about it, recently wrote a piece for his Substack breaking down that number in relatable terms.

"How many is a million?" he asks. "Well think of it as such: the population of the U.S. in 2020, when the plague kicked off, was 329 million. Which means one out of every 329 Americans have died of COVID... How many is that? Picture it this way. If you went to a Jets or Giants game at MetLife Stadium, the NFL's largest-capacity stadium at 82,500 people, and one out of every 329 people dropped dead by the fourth quarter, that would mean by the time you headed for your car ... there would be 250 dead fellow fans."

He references another number that is just as hard (if not harder) of a swallow: "COVID has deprived an estimated 194,000 children in the U.S. of either one or both of their parents."

As Labash points out, each of these deaths has a story behind it, and he cites some of the more heartbreaking ones he's read about over the past two years. The piece is very much worth a read.

Again, back in early 2020, such a human toll was unfathomable. Today, it's just sort of – well – uninteresting. We're back to business as usual, with many of our country's most engaged news consumers far more inclined to twist themselves into emotional knots over topics like Twitter, Disney, and insufficient awareness of white privilege.

To be clear, I'm not suggesting that we shouldn't move on from the darkest consequences of the pandemic. Like I said earlier: when conditions change, so do certain realities.

I just think it would be a good thing for our country (and humanity) to better factor those consequences, and how fortunate the rest of us are, into our collective perspective.