

# COVID is still killing Black people at higher rates. So why did the president declare the pandemic ‘over’?



by Dr. Shamard Charles The GRIO

**(OP-ED)** - In a recent interview on 60 Minutes, President Joe Biden declared that “the pandemic is over” despite more than 54,000 new COVID-19 cases and over 350 deaths per day on average.

His comments shocked senior health officials and the medical community alike, leaving many to wonder if his comments were merely an oversight, wishful thinking or worse, tone deaf.

While the need for masks and social distancing has waned across the country—largely due to the success of the COVID-19 vaccine, which has prevented nearly 15 million deaths worldwide since December 2020—COVID remains a problem that cannot and should not be taken for granted, especially for Black and brown people who continue to die or be hospitalized at higher rates than any other group.

Age-adjusted data from the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) shows that Black, Latinx, American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN), and Asian, Hawaiian, and other Pacific Islanders (NHOPI) still experience higher rates of COVID-19 cases and

deaths compared to white people. COVID-19 has hit AI/AN and Black communities the hardest—both groups are twice as likely to go to the hospital or die compared to other groups—while Latinx and NHOPI communities are doing slightly better, experiencing a death rate closer to white people.

It’s true that the death rate has fallen substantially in all groups as vaccine rates climb, but the declines are slower in Black and brown communities. Vaccine disparities are most stark in Black communities, where a combination of inequitable vaccine access and medical mistrust exists, but the risk of death or hospitalization remains high even in those who have received both vaccine shots and the booster due to underlying structural inequities in health, health care and socioeconomic status, factors that do not change because a person receives a shot in their arm.

More surprisingly, Latinx, Asian, and Pacific Islander groups continue to experience higher death rates compared to white people, despite higher vaccination rates, highlighting the massive impact of underlying environmental and socio-

cultural differences on health outcomes. Conclusion: You can’t vaccinate away the problems.

My hunch is that President Biden is a far cry from the acrimonious presidents who have served before him, but he is not above reproach. Surely, the president is not alone in his skewed perception of the COVID-19 situation. He simply got caught expressing a feeling that so many people hold. We’re outside and enjoying the activities that we love again. We’re hearing fewer and fewer horror stories about mass COVID outbreaks in nursing homes and people struggling to breathe (even though these events are still taking place to some degree). As the talk about COVID or feeling sick dissipates, especially in the summer months, it’s getting easier and easier to shove the pain caused by the last two-plus years aside.

As a society, we are desperately trying to put this pandemic behind us—but we can’t simply will our way to victory against this virus. Over 220,000 people have died so far in 2022, seven times higher than the average flu season. Hundreds of thousands more are in the hospital, and millions more are in harm’s way, unvaccinated and therefore unprotected from the virus. We can acknowledge the progress made and express cautious optimism while also encouraging prudence.

President Biden may have intended to infuse some unbridled enthusiasm into a long and frustrating situation—one that has been made worse by lingering sickness (particularly

symptoms of long COVID), rising inflation, and a looming recession—but as new issues arise, old ones don’t simply disappear. Relaxed COVID-19 regulations have made it possible for us to live in a relatively mask-free world that resembles our pre-pandemic world, but this only indicates that the health of the nation has gotten better. It is not a sign to stop the handwashing, vaccination and communitywide teamwork that has gotten us to this point. Any insinuation otherwise is misguided.

I’d like to believe that what surprised people about Biden’s comments wasn’t that he went off script but that he had a human moment that so closely resembles the moments we as medical professionals dream of...the day we can confidently tell our patients that this horrible period of time is over. Unfortunately, that day is not today—the continued disproportionate death rates of Black people at the hands of COVID are a sobering reminder.

Words matter. Truth matters. Both are much more than the intentions behind them because words and mistruths impact people in profound and unexpected ways. Declaring the pandemic over when it’s not does nothing but make the situation worse for the Black people who continue to suffer from COVID and its lingering social and economic impact on the community. Not only did the president inadvertently signal that the nation has moved on from COVID, even while people of color continue

to suffer, but he may have rationalized and even paved the way for governors to cut much-needed COVID funding and resources in communities that need it most.

At its extreme, the underlying sentiment of the president’s declaration was cruel and insensitive, but even if we take a more empathetic route and infer that his comments were not meant to be so, the comment was myopic and shortsighted, a cautionary tale to think before you speak.

Moral myopia, the inability to see ethical issues clearly, is sometimes described as a distortion or blindness to issues that do not affect you—this idea that if you are OK then everyone else is OK, too. It is not far-fetched to expect our president to exhibit caution when talking about issues that may be impacting communities differently than his own. Yes, many people have beat COVID, staved it off entirely or learned to live with its many health complications. But for countless U.S. adults, the remnants of COVID-19—sustained unemployment, declines in mental health and increases in drug use and stress-related illness—have been and will be far worse to their health than the virus itself.

Let’s hope President Biden revisits his comments and acknowledges how they may have minimized the suffering that so many people have experienced and continue to experience. But even if he does not, I encourage you all to continue doing the things that got us to this point. Remain vigilant—doctor’s orders.

**PFLUGERVILLE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**1401 WEST PECAN**  
**PFLUGERVILLE, TX 78660**  
**Ph 512 594-0089 Fax 512 594-0071**  
**September 20, 2022**

The Pflugerville Independent School District will accept responses to its Request for Proposals (RFR) from firms interested in providing services related to the district’s:  
**MEP & Commissioning Services**  
**on Wednesday, October 05, 2022 @ 2:00 p.m.**  
 Responses may be submitted (by mail or hand carry) to:  
**PfISD Purchasing Dept., 1401 West Pecan, Pflugerville, TX 78660**  
**Attn: Craig Pruett**  
 Proposals may be picked up in person or downloaded from the PfISD website at:  
<https://www.pfisd.net/Page/259>.

**NOTICE OF COMPETITIVE SEALED PROPOSALS**  
**Wieland Elementary School Window and Roof Replacement Project - Pflugerville ISD**  
**Deadline: Monday, October 17, 2022 at 2 p.m.**

Pflugerville ISD will accept Competitive Sealed Proposals from qualified construction firms until **2:00 p.m., Monday, October 17, 2022**, in the lobby of the PfISD Administration Building. Address all submittals to:  
**Craig Pruett, Executive Director of Procurement & Auxiliary Services, Pflugerville Independent School District, 1401 West Pecan Drive, Pflugerville, Texas 78660.** The anticipated budget for this project is estimated at **\$100,000.00**. The scope and schedule for this project as currently defined is described in the Proposal Document. Proposal documents may be obtained by contacting the Pflugerville ISD Purchasing Department by email at [craig.pruett@pfisd.net](mailto:craig.pruett@pfisd.net). Documents can also be downloaded from the district website at: <https://www.pfisd.net/site/Default.aspx?PageID=259>.  
*Pflugerville I.S.D. reserves the right to waive any formalities and to reject any or all Proposals.*

**Project Schedule of Events**

- Request for Proposals Released - September 23, 2022
- Pre-proposal Conference - October 03, 2022; 10:00 a.m.
- Due Date for Proposals - October 17, 2022; 2:00 p.m.
  - Board Approval Expected - November 17, 2022
  - Notify Firm - November 18, 2022
  - Contract Begins - November 18, 2022
  - Substantial Completion Date - July 15, 2023

## Man connected to Michael Brown case sentenced for performing illegal autopsies

### Associated Press

**TOPEKA, Kan. (AP)** — A Kansas man who admitted running an illegal autopsy scheme has been sentenced to nearly six years in prison for wire fraud.

Shawn Parcels, 42, who lived in Topeka and Leawood, was sentenced Monday in federal court to one count of wire fraud, the U.S. Attorney’s office said. He pleaded guilty in May. As part of the plea deal, nine other fraud counts were dropped.

Parcels, a self-taught pathology assistant with no formal education, as owner of National Autopsy Services persuaded a client to pay \$5,000 for an autopsy, according to court records. The client received an emailed autopsy report that appeared to be authored by Parcels. No pathologist was involved in the examination or report, which is illegal.

Parcels gained national attention in 2014 when he assisted a privately hired pathologist in an autopsy of Michael Brown, the unarmed Black 18-year-old from Ferguson, Missouri, who was fatally shot by a white police officer. The autopsy was commissioned by Brown’s family and no allegations of wrongdoing were raised in relation to it. But Parcels’ frequent media appearances led to scrutiny, including a CNN story revealing he had no specific certification or training.

Between 2016 and 2019, Parcels made more than \$1.1 million in Kansas from more than 350 clients for autopsies, most of which he did not perform, according to court records.

Parcels, who ran three companies, was also charged in 2019 by Kansas

Attorney General Derek Schmidt with conducting illegal autopsies.

In August, Parcels was banned from doing business in Kansas and ordered to pay more than \$700,000 in restitution and fines for the state cases. He was also ordered to pay over \$250,000 in restitution to 82 people that used his services.

That came after he was convicted in November of three felonies and three misdemeanors related to providing illegal autopsies in Wabaunsee County.

Prosecutors discovered that Parcels collected more than 1,600 biological samples, mostly human tissue, as part of the scheme. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment took custody of the samples and victims have until Oct. 6 to claim them.

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