

Rand Paul Isn't Buying Fauci's Tale of NY COVID Success

Sparks flew on Capitol Hill this week when Sen. Rand Paul questioned Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, over the doctor's praise of New York's COVID-19 response.

During a Senate committee hearing, the Kentucky Senator asked Dr. Fauci how he could laud New York's lockdown policies when the Empire state has "the highest death rate in the world."

"To those who argue that the lockdown flattened the curve in New York and New Jersey, the evidence argues otherwise," Paul said in his opening statement. "New York and New Jersey wound up with the sharpest spike or highest death rate in the world, at over 1,700 deaths per million."

New York's results were a sharp contrast to many other nations, including Sweden, which had a death rate about one third that of New York despite having few government mandates and mostly voluntary guidelines.

"You've lauded New York for their policy," Paul said. "New York had the highest death rate in the world. How can we possibly be jumping up and down and say, 'Oh, Governor Cuomo did a great job.' He had the worst death rate in the world."

Fauci admitted that New York had "made mistakes" – likely a reference to Cuomo's order that effectively [forced nursing homes](#) to admit COVID-19 carrying residents released from hospitals – but said Paul was mischaracterizing the facts.

"You misconstrued that Senator, and you've done that repeatedly in the past. [New York] got hit very badly. They've

made some mistakes,” countered Fauci, adding that New York’s more recent success is the result of effective implementation of the White House Coronavirus Task Force’s recommendations, including frequent handwashing, social distancing, and the use of face masks.

It’s unclear which point Fauci was alluding to when he said Paul was misconstruing the record. But Paul was correct on at least two points.

First, Paul’s figures are accurate. New Jersey and New York do have higher COVID-19 death rates than [any single nation](#) in the world, with [1,825](#) deaths per million and [1,707](#) deaths per million, respectively. Additionally, New York’s death rate is indeed about three times that of Sweden (581 per million).

If one dislikes the comparison between New York and Sweden, other measures are equally bleak for New York. Data from *The Economist* and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that New York City has the most excess COVID-19 deaths in the entire world, data analyst Justin Hart pointed out on Twitter.

To be fair, it’s unclear if Fauci was actually questioning Paul’s figures. One might suspect that Fauci was challenging Paul’s assertion that Fauci had praised New York as a lockdown model. However, in July, Fauci did cite New York as an example of an effective government response to COVID-19.

“We know that, when you do it properly, you bring down those cases,” Fauci told *PBS NewsHour*’s Judy Woodruff in [an interview](#) published on July 17. “We have done it. We have done it in New York. New York got hit worse than any place in the world. And they did it correctly by doing the things that you’re talking about.”

The quote makes it clear that Fauci isn’t praising New York for its high death toll, but for the decrease in COVID-19 cases.

There's no question that New York's COVID-19 numbers have fallen precipitously. Much like Sweden, the Empire state has not experienced a "second wave" of coronavirus while many other parts of the world have – states such as [California](#), [Florida](#) and [Michigan](#), as well as countries such as [France](#), [Spain](#), and [Italy](#). The question is *why*.

The truth is we don't really know.

In his exchange with Paul, Fauci attempts to take credit for the drop in cases in New York, saying that New Yorkers are now heeding the Task Force's guidelines – washing hands, using masks, social distancing, and spending more time outdoors.

Paul, on the other hand, suggested that places like Sweden and New York have seen their numbers flatline because they have reached a certain level of herd immunity, an idea Fauci rejected out of hand.

Are the numbers in Sweden and New York a reflection of the virus running its course or the effective management of government officials?

These are difficult questions to answer, especially for those of us who are mere economists, not epidemiologists or virologists. But economics can help us understand behavior and incentives.

One would be naive to assume Dr. Fauci has no incentive to proclaim that the government's COVID-19 lockdowns have been effective. After all, the toll of the lockdowns – historic [economic destruction](#), [psychological deterioration](#), and vast [loss of life](#) – has been immense.

Fauci, the leader of the nation's COVID-19 response team, has an incentive to show this destruction has not been in vain. New York offered such an opportunity.

The Empire State might have one of the highest COVID-19 death rates in the world, but its reversal in cases allows Fauci to turn a tragedy into a success story. New York's change of fortune is the result of *the plan*. Fauci's plan.

In a sense, as Paul pointed out, the pandemic has forced Americans to answer a difficult question.

"Is man really capable of altering the course of an infectious disease through crowd control?" Paul asked.

For Paul, the answer is clear.

"The statistics answer a resounding no," Paul said. "The evidence argues mitigation efforts have failed to flatten the curve. That most countries regardless of public health policy suffered a significant spike in deaths and then a gradual decline."

In a sense, Fauci and Paul are not just arguing over COVID-19 data. They are arguing about something much larger.

Many decades ago, the great economist Ludwig von Mises argued that a great deal of the struggle in society is over a simple question: who gets to design the world, individuals or authorities?

Mises, like his mentor F.A. Hayek, believed that central planners were a threat to society because they sought to enforce their own plan over those of individuals.

"What those calling themselves planners advocate is not the substitution of planned action for letting things go. It is the substitution of the planner's own plan for the plans of his fellow-men," Mises wrote in *Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis*. "The planner is a potential dictator who wants to deprive all other people of the power to plan and act according to their own plans."

It would be easier to dismiss Mises's portrayal of the central

planner as a “potential dictator” if America had not just endured two seasons of state-enforced lockdowns (for their own good) that resulted in 40 million job losses and a [33 percent annual drop in GDP](#) as millions of Americans were effectively placed under house arrest.

The figures are shocking, but they are even more jarring if we discover the lockdowns were all for naught. Yet Mises suggests we should not expect central planners to acknowledge a mistake, whatever the results.

“[The central planner] aims at one thing only: the exclusive absolute pre-eminence of his own plan,” Mises wrote.

Many people might wonder how the state with the highest COVID-19 death rate in the world became a success story of the pandemic.

Ludwig von Mises would not be the least bit surprised.

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