

CEO pay rises to \$12.7M even as pandemic ravages economy

STAN CHOE - AP Business



Provided by Associated PressFILE- This photo combo shows from left, Brian Niccol, CEO of Chipotle, Advance Auto Parts CEO Tom Greco, Carnival Corp. CEO Arnold Donald. Pay packages rose yet again in 2020 for the CEOs of the biggest U.S. companies, even though the pandemic sent the economy to its worst quarter on record and slashed corporate profits around the world. (AP Photo/File)

NEW YORK (AP) — As COVID-19 ravaged the world last year, CEOs' big pay packages seemed to be under as much threat as everything else.

Fortunately for those CEOs, many had boards of directors willing to see the pandemic as an extraordinary event beyond their control. Across the country, boards made changes to the intricate formulas that determine their CEOs' pay — and other moves — that helped make up for losses created by the crisis.

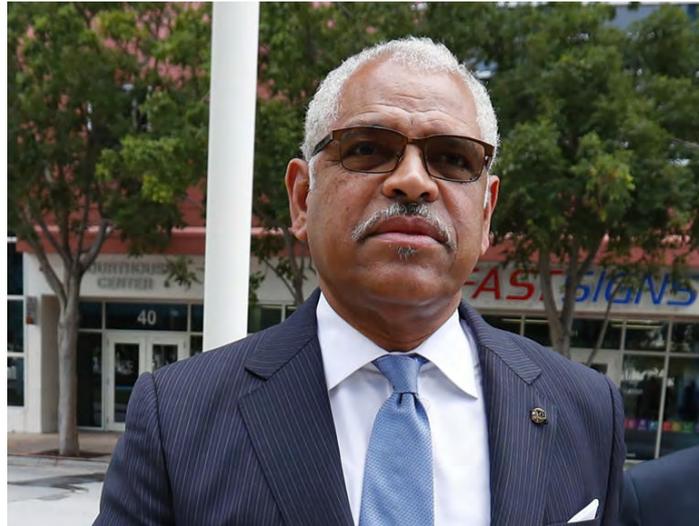
As a result, pay packages rose yet again last year for the CEOs of the biggest companies, even though the pandemic sent the economy to its worst quarter on record and slashed corporate profits around the world. The median pay package for a CEO at an S&P 500 company hit \$12.7 million in 2020, according to data analyzed by [Equilar](#) for The Associated Press. That means half the CEOs in the survey made more, and half made less. It's 5% more than the median pay for that same group of CEOs in 2019 and an acceleration from the 4.1% climb in last year's survey.



Provided by Associated PressFILE - In this June 13, 2016 file photo, Advance Auto Parts CEO Tom Greco visits the trading floor of the New York Stock Exchange. Pay packages rose yet again in 2020 for the CEOs of the biggest U.S. companies, even though the pandemic sent the economy to its worst quarter on record and slashed corporate profits around the world. (AP Photo/Richard Drew, File)

At Advance Auto Parts, CEO Tom Greco's pay for 2020 was in line to take a hit because of a mountain of pandemic-related costs. Extended sick-pay benefits and expenses for hand sanitizer and other safety equipment totaling \$60 million dragged on two key measurements that help set his performance pay. But because the board's compensation committee saw these costs as extraordinary and unanticipated, it excluded them from its calculations. That helped Greco's total compensation rise 4.7% last year to \$8.1 million.

At Carnival, the cruise operator gave stock grants to executives, in part to encourage its leaders to stick with the company as the pandemic forced it to halt sailings and furlough workers. For CEO Arnold Donald's 2020 compensation, those grants were valued at \$5.2 million, though their full value will ultimately depend on how the company performs on carbon reductions and other measures in coming years. That helped Donald receive total compensation valued at \$13.3 million for the year, up 19% from a year earlier, even as Carnival swung to a \$10.2 billion loss for the fiscal year.



Provided by Associated PressFILE - This Oct. 2, 2019 file photo, Carnival Corp. CEO Arnold Donald, walks to federal court in Miami. Pay packages rose yet again in 2020 for the CEOs of the biggest U.S. companies, even though the pandemic sent the economy to its worst quarter on record and slashed corporate profits around the world.. (AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee, File)

Meanwhile, regular workers also saw gains, but not at the same rate as their bosses. And millions of others lost their jobs.

Wages and benefits for all workers outside the government rose just 2.6% last year. That's according to U.S. government data that ignore the effect of workers shifting between different industries. It's an important distinction because more lower-wage earners lost their jobs as the economy shut down than professionals who could work from home.

"This should have been a year for shared sacrifice," said Sarah Anderson, who directs the global economy project at the left-leaning Institute for Policy Studies. "Instead it became a year of shielding CEOs from risk while it was the frontline employees who paid the price."

The AP's compensation study included pay data for CEOs at S&P 500 companies who have served at least two full fiscal years at their companies, which filed proxy statements between Jan. 1 and April 30. It doesn't include some highly paid CEOs who don't fit that criteria. The pay figures for CEOs sometimes include grants of stock and options they may never ultimately receive unless they hit certain performance targets.



Provided by Associated PressFILE - This June 9, 2015 file photo shows Brian Niccol, CEO of Chipotle, during an interview at The Associated Press in New York. Pay packages rose yet again in 2020 for the CEOs of the biggest U.S. companies, even though the pandemic sent the economy to its worst quarter on record and slashed corporate profits around the world. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan, File)

COMPLEXITY AND CORONAVIRUS

Last year's 5% gain for median CEO pay masks how much variation in pay there was beneath the surface. Some companies thrived as a direct result of the pandemic. Sales boomed for Lowe's amid a great nesting across the country, and CEO Marvin Ellison's pay nearly doubled after its stock more than doubled the S&P 500's total return through its fiscal year.

Other CEOs, meanwhile, saw their compensation cut. At Duke Energy, the board reduced CEO Lynn Good's short-term performance pay after its earnings per share fell short of its initial target, partly because industrial customers used less power during the pandemic. Good's pay dipped 2.6% to \$14.3 million, even though earnings ended up within the range Duke forecast for Wall Street early in the year. Duke didn't adjust formulas to raise Good's pay because of the pandemic.

Overall, 61% of the 342 CEOs in this year's survey did get a boost in compensation last year. That's almost the exact same percentage as the 62% in 2019, when the economy and corporate profits were growing.

That's also despite several CEOs taking high-profile cuts to their salary during the year as an act of shared sacrifice and to conserve a bit of cash for the company. Roughly one of every five CEOs in this year's survey had a smaller salary for 2020 than the year before.

But salary is often just a minor piece of a CEO's total compensation, which is derived from notoriously complex formulas. Each year, companies fill pages of their proxy statements with charts and footnotes showing how the bulk of their CEO's pay rises and falls with corporate performance. It's here, in the nuanced area, where many companies adjusted levers that ultimately helped CEOs get more in compensation.

A SUDDEN CHANGE

Boards typically stick with the formulas set for CEO pay early each year, but the global economy's sudden crash forced a reconsideration. What made things even cloudier was that they had few historical guides for how to proceed.

“Many committees asked us this very question: Does this compare to the financial crisis? What did people do then?” said Melissa Burek, partner at Compensation Advisory Partners, a consulting firm that works with boards.

But the pandemic was very different than the 2008 economic collapse, mainly because this crisis was caused by a virus, rather than by CEOs taking on too much debt and risk. As boards adjusted targets to make CEOs' incentive pay less difficult to get, many also limited the size of the possible payouts.

“I think there is a recognition, when unemployment is so high, of: Do we feel good about paying our CEO at this level?” said Kelly Malafis, also a partner at Compensation Advisory Partners, of the thinking by boards of directors. “The answer is: ‘We’re doing this for performance. When performance is not good, we don’t pay. When performance is good, we do pay.’”

At Carnival, for example, the company says that much of its CEO's compensation is tied to the company's financial and operational performance. The company said Donald received no cash bonus tied to 2020. And to preserve cash in the pandemic, the company gave him grants of restricted stock instead of salary from April through June. Then from July through November, it cut Donald's salary by half.

RATTLING AT THE GATES

Progressives in Washington are pushing for rules changes to narrow the gap between CEOs and workers.

Companies have to show how much more their CEO makes than their typical worker, and the median in this year's survey was 172 times. That's up from 167 times for those same CEOs last year, and it means employees must work lifetimes to make what their CEO does in just a year.

One bill in Congress proposes to raise taxes on corporations where the CEO makes 50 times or more than the median worker at the company.

At some companies, shareholders are pushing back on compensation packages approved by the board.

At the annual meeting of Chipotle Mexican Grill's shareholders earlier this month, just 51% of voting shares gave a thumb's up to its executives' pay packages, compared with 95% a year earlier. Across the S&P 500, such “Say-on-pay” votes routinely get more than 90% approval.

Chipotle's board excluded three months of sales results from the worst of the pandemic, along with several other items, while calculating pay for its CEO, Brian Niccol. That allowed him to get bigger compensation than he would have otherwise.

Chipotle called the move a one-time modification that's not reflective of Niccol's ongoing pay package. Chipotle was one of the relative winners of the pandemic, with revenue rising 7.1% and its stock soaring 65.7%.

While they're nonbinding, "Say-on-pay" votes are getting increasing attention from Wall Street. Between 2017 and 2019, stocks of companies that failed their votes lagged sharply behind the S&P 500 in the following 12 months, according to Morgan Stanley.

The trend didn't hold last year, when the pandemic may have unsettled everything, but Morgan Stanley strategists say they still see failed "Say-on-pay" votes as a red flag that a stock may struggle.

And if there's anything that investors on Wall Street care about, it's how well they're getting compensated.

\$2 trillion in taxes, \$6 trillion in spending, \$22 trillion in borrowing — what could go wrong?

Stephen Moore - Opinion Contributor



Getty Images

A few years ago some nutty professors came up with a crackpot idea called "modern monetary theory," or MMT. It was the idea that as long as interest rates stay low, the U.S. government can spend and borrow trillions upon trillions of dollars at almost no cost and we will all be richer. This is a little like saying you can jump out of an airplane without a parachute and as long as you never hit the ground, you will be fine.

This looney idea was mostly ridiculed as a flat-earth-society idea — and yet now we have a president, Joe Biden, who actually is practicing MMT. His latest budget calls for \$6 trillion in spending, soon to rise to \$8 trillion, paid for with a \$2 trillion tax hike on the rich and \$7.6 trillion in additional debt. This is more debt than accumulated by the previous four presidents — combined.

The red ink is also on top of the some \$5 trillion we spent to combat COVID-19. Now that the pandemic is over, a sane administration would be looking for ways to start to

pay off some of that debt burden, which will grow to more than \$150,000 per child born today. (And this from the same party that says it cares about the children.)

Seemingly everything the Biden administration does and spends money on in this budget manifesto is labeled an “investment.” Department of Education spending is an investment; so are child care expenses, paid parental leave, corporate welfare grants to wind and solar companies (many operating outside the United States), “environmental justice” grants, mass transit systems that few ride, aid to mismanaged blue states and cities, unemployment insurance bonuses that pay people more money not to work, ObamaCare subsidies, and on and on for 1,000 pages. Even the \$30 billion that President Biden wants to spend to hire 75,000 more IRS agents is an investment.

What is dispiriting is that, despite the fattest government budget in world history, the two agencies that matter most to our national well-being — the Defense Department and the Department of Homeland Security — get virtually no increase at all. Nearly every penny goes for domestic social programs that are designed not to expand wealth, but to redistribute it.

In a perhaps temporary display of honesty, the Biden team predicts growth rates over the next decade of just 2 percent. For the last 40 years, average growth has been closer to 3 percent. Given that a lot of the growth in GDP is going to come directly from government spending, private-sector GDP is going to be closer to 1 or 1.5 percent per year. There is a term for this: secular stagnation. Two percent growth is treading water.

Also, to his credit, Biden doesn't play this game of make-believe that somehow, somewhere in future years, we will have a balanced budget in Washington. No, the Biden budget forecasts tens of trillions of dollars of debt, presumably to infinity and beyond. In this Biden never-never land, there are no fiscal cliffs to tumble off.

What are the real-world pocketbook implications of a budget that recklessly raises spending levels every year with no plausible revenue source to pay for it all? More multi trillion-dollar levels of debt almost surely mean higher inflation and higher interest rates. So even if wages go up under Biden's policies, it is quite probable that the inflation rate will outpace pay raises for workers and we will have declines in living standards for those at the bottom and in the middle of the income scale and for seniors living on fixed incomes.

It reminds me of the saying back in the bad old days of the 1970s under President Carter: “My take-home pay won't take me home.”

With whiffs of inflation already turning into consumer sticker shock at the gas pump and cash register, Congress should be combating rising prices and the declining purchasing power of the dollar by whiting-out wasteful spending from the budget, not pumping it up.

Democrats dismiss any criticism from Republicans of Biden's runaway borrowing strategy by pointing to large deficits under Presidents Trump and Bush — and that's true. But Biden's debt levels are two to three times higher. That's at least twice as many bonds as we are going to need the Chinese to buy from us. (Ironically, I am

often asked whether China will try to devalue the U.S. dollar so that the Chinese yuan becomes the new world currency. My response has always been: China can't do that to us. We can only do it to ourselves.)

To stop this financial madness will require just ONE Democrat in the Senate to stand up for principle and prosperity over political party and say "No." It's time for a "have you no shame?" moment for the Democrats: Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.), Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.) — are you out there? Now is the time for all good men and women to come to the aid of their country.

(The views expressed by contributors are their own and not the view of the Hill)

Tom Cotton once again makes media look foolish
Joe Concha



Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) has once again made his critics - and there are many - look patently foolish after a [bombshell report in the Wall Street Journal](#) found that three workers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology were hospitalized for COVID-like symptoms in Nov. 2019, approximately one month before the first reported case in the region.

You may recall that it was Cotton who was [labeled a conspiracy theorist](#) last year for suggesting that the virus did not originate in a Wuhan wet market, which is what the Chinese government claimed as the reason (echoed by its puppet in the form of the World Health Organization), but in a lab a few blocks away.

"We don't know where it originated, and we have to get to the bottom of that," Cotton [said in an interview](#) in Feb. 2020. "We also know that just a few miles away

from that food market is China's only biosafety level 4 super laboratory that researches human infectious diseases."

Major media were quick to pounce on Cotton's suggestion not only by dismissing it but by calling him a conspiracy theorist.

Tom Cotton @SenTomCotton · Feb 9, 2020
.@ambcuiianki, here's what's not a conspiracy, not a theory:
Fact: China lied about virus starting in Wuhan food market

Face The Nation @FaceTheNation
NEW: @AmbCuiTiankai dismisses #coronavirus conspiracy theories pushed by @SenTomCotton that it's being used as biological warfare as "absolutely crazy." WATCH -->

Tom Cotton @SenTomCotton
Fact: super-lab is just a few miles from that market
Where did it start? We don't know. But burden of proof is on you & fellow communists. Open up now to competent international scientists.
11:54 AM · Feb 9, 2020
1.3K 251 Copy link to Tweet

"Tom Cotton keeps repeating a coronavirus conspiracy theory that was already debunked," read the [Washington Post headline](#) in its Politics section.

"Why Coronavirus Conspiracy Theories Flourish. And Why It Matters," read the [New York Times's take](#).

"Cotton repeats coronavirus conspiracy theory, despite evidence," according to MSNBC at the time.

"Sen. Tom Cotton Flogs Coronavirus Conspiracy Theory Dismissed by Actual Scientists," snarked The Daily Beast.

After the Journal report this week that lab workers fell sick with symptoms consistent with COVID in Nov. 2019, the media's tone remarkably changed.

"Timeline: How the Wuhan lab-leak theory suddenly became credible," reads the Washington Post's headline in its fact-checking section.





Drew Holden @DrewHolden360 · May 25, 2021



THREAD

That the Covid pandemic could've leaked from a lab in Wuhan went from terrible, racist conspiracy theory to plausible overnight for the mainstream media, without a shred of accountability.

If you don't believe me, look at these stories side-by-side, then vs. now



Drew Holden
@DrewHolden360

You may remember that much of the really bad coverage was focused on [@SenTomCotton](#)'s suggestion that we better understand the potential for a lab leak from Wuhan.

The difference in framing here from [@nytimes](#) between May 2020 and May 2021 is...stark.

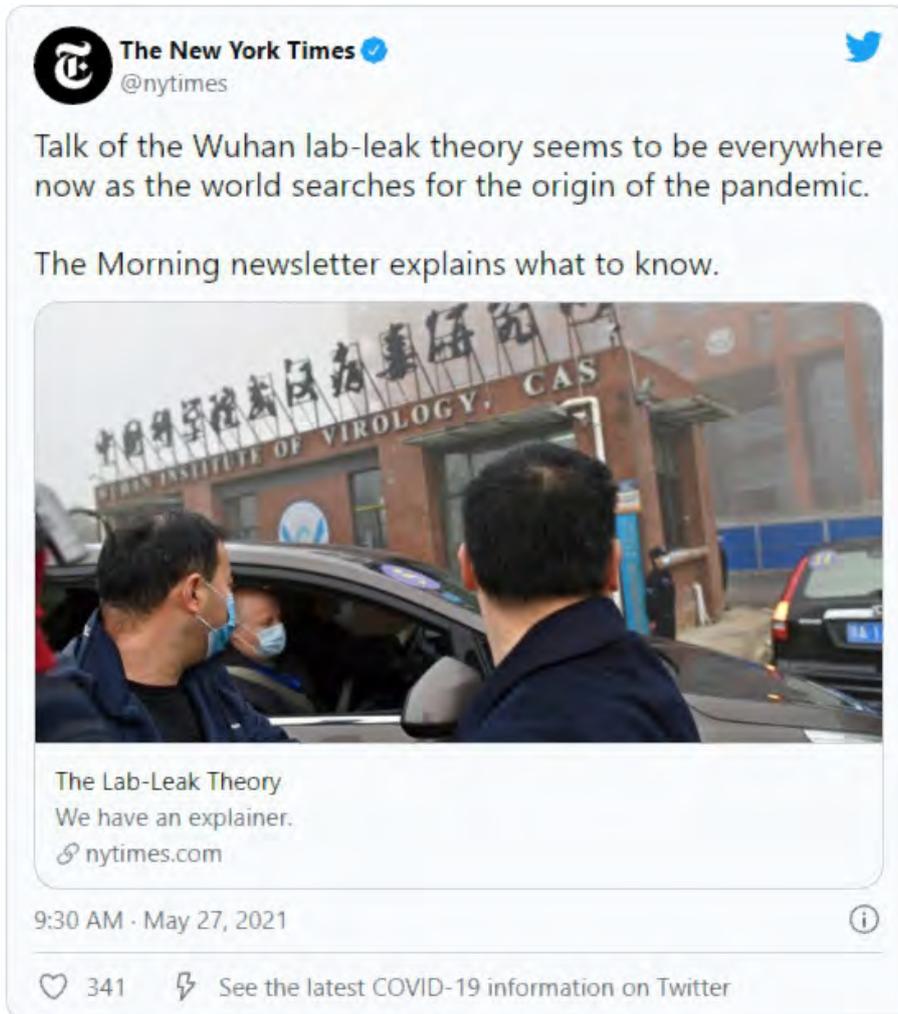


7:32 PM · May 25, 2021 from Washington, DC



3.9K 40 Copy link to Tweet

"Talk of the Wuhan lab-leak theory seems to be everywhere now as the world searches for the origin of the pandemic," the New York Times laughably writes.



And there are dozens more "here's how it started, here's how it's going" tweets from other news organizations that branded Cotton - and Donald Trump, who made the same claim - a conspiracy theorist.

Now, does this report mean the pandemic responsible for more than 580,000 Americans deaths did originate in a lab? We still don't know. And given that the Chinese aren't remotely forthright and transparent, we may never be 100 percent sure.

But it is safe to say it's no longer a fringe conspiracy theory. The timing is interesting as well, because, as we've seen time and time and time again, what were conspiracy theories during the 2020 presidential campaign when Trump was on the big stage are seen quite differently in 2021, with Joe Biden safely across the finish line and in the Oval Office.

2020: Hunter Biden's laptop is Russian disinformation, many media outlets told us.

2021: Well, it turns out *Hunter is under FBI investigation*. Oh, and the laptop looks like it does belong to him after all.

2020: Russia paid the Taliban bounties to take out U.S. troops and Trump gave Putin a pass.

2021: Well, it turns out the intelligence sourcing on that was bad and it's likely *no such bounties existed*.

2020: "Trump signs \$2 trillion coronavirus bill into law as companies and households brace for more economic pain," - *Washington Post*.





2021: "Biden stimulus showers money on Americans, sharply cutting poverty in defining move of presidency," - Washington Post

And this isn't the first time Cotton has been shunned by major media only to ultimately be proven right.

In June 2020, he [wrote an op-ed for the New York Times](#) advocating the deployment of the U.S. military to American cities to help control violent protests. Pretty prophetic considering what we witnessed during that horrific riot at the Capitol on Jan. 6. For whatever reason, the piece garnered severe public backlash from other writers at the publication, with Pulitzer Prize-winning editor James Bennet ultimately [being forced to resign](#) from the publication as a result.

Internal mob 1, veteran award-winning editor 0.

In a related story, in an ABC News/Washington Post poll taken before Cotton's opinion piece, 52 percent of Americans [supported deploying the military to control](#)

violent protests, making it a worthy debate that half the country agreed with and half didn't.

But in the end, the only poll that mattered at the Times belonged to activists in the newsroom posing as journalists.

Cotton once made a valid argument that COVID-19 may have come from a Wuhan virology lab. He was placed in the same corner as Alex Jones. Ignore the conspiracy theorist, they cried.

Fourteen months later, there's growing evidence that the senator may be proven right. Just don't expect any apologies anytime soon. That's not how it works anymore.

(Joe Concha is a media and politics columnist for The Hill.)

Oklahoma's lawmakers want to whitewash its history

Tom Mockaitis - Opinion Contributor



Istock

Gov. Kevin Stitt of Oklahoma has fired the latest salvo in the culture war. On May 7, Stitt signed a law effectively banning the teaching of critical race theory in K-12 schools.

Idaho has passed a similar law, and several other states have introduced such legislation. These laws have more to do with pandering to the Republican base than they do with teaching children.

The Oklahoma Department of Education has received no complaints about anyone teaching critical race theory. Nonetheless, Oklahoma Republicans believe they can earn political capital defending a celebratory version of American history.

The Oklahoma law prohibits schools “teaching or training students to believe certain divisive concepts,” including the idea that the United States is “fundamentally racist or sexist” and that individuals bear any responsibility for past actions committed by members of their race or sex.

Most pernicious of all is a sweeping injunction against teaching any concept that makes any student “feel discomfort, guilt, anguish or any other form of psychological distress on account of his or her race or sex.” Given the highly subjective nature of “distress,” this clause could be used by school boards, administrators, and even parents to veto any content they dislike.

Critical race theory became the bête noire of the far-right when President Trump condemned it in September 2020, but anger over the concept had been growing since the New York Times published the 1619 Project, a series of thought-provoking essays addressing the importance of slavery and segregation in American history. If the Oklahoma law is any indication, opponents of critical race theory have little understanding of it.

Legal scholars coined the term “critical race theory” in the 1970’s to address what they saw as the failure of civil rights legislation to achieve racial equality. The crux of the problem, these scholars believed, lay in defining racism solely as discriminatory acts perpetrated by individuals or groups instead of seeing it as a systemic problem embedded in institutions, policies and society itself.

“What good was the Fair Housing Act,” they asked, if economic inequality meant African Americans could not afford to buy homes?

Opponents of critical race theory acknowledge that discrimination happens but deny the existence of systemic racism. President Biden’s April 29 address to Congress and Sen. Tim Scott’s (R-S.C.) response illustrate these two perspectives.

“We have a real chance to root out systemic racism that plagues America,” Biden declared, acknowledging that racism is a structural problem. “I have experienced the pain of discrimination,” Scott responded.

“I know what it feels like to be pulled over for no reason, to be followed around a store while I’m shopping,” but he added, “America is not a racist country.” For Scott and his fellow Republicans, it seems that systemic racism does not exist.

Critical race theory does not unequivocally condemn the United States as a “racist country.” According to Kimberlé Crenshaw, one of its earliest proponents, the theory is “an approach to grappling with a history of white supremacy that rejects the belief that what’s in the past is in the past, and that the laws and systems that grow from that past are detached from it.”

Note that Crenshaw says “an approach,” not “the approach.” It is one of many ways to study history. My own department requires that introductory courses teach students

to “distinguish among multiple perspectives that shape interpretations of the past.” Critical race theory does not discount all other historical perspectives, nor does it insist that American history become a litany of grievances compiled by marginalized groups. But it does insist that race is an important analytical category for interpreting events.

Contrary to the fear expressed in the Oklahoma law, critical race theory does not seek to make anyone feel guilty about their behavior or that of their ancestors. In fact, the theory de-emphasizes individual actions in favor of examining structural issues.

By focusing on the alleged distress “divisive concepts” might cause students, however, the law illustrates a tendency of conservatives to personalize discussions of race and gender. “I am not a racist or a misogynist,” the argument goes, “I am not to blame.” Acknowledging the link between past and present, not encouraging feelings of guilt, is the goal.

Both the timing of the Oklahoma law and its insistence that the present generation not be held responsible for the sins of its predecessors are poignant and ironic. May 31 will mark the centenary of the Tulsa Race Massacre, a violent uprising during which white mobs murdered as many as 300 African Americans and destroyed the Greenwood neighborhood, dubbed the “Black Wallstreet” because of its prosperity.

Pressure to pay reparations to the descendants of the victims has been mounting. Until recently, most Americans were not even aware this atrocity had occurred. Eighty-three percent of Oklahomans did not hear of the massacre until they were adults, a compelling argument for why it must be included in history classes.

The most absurd aspect of the Oklahoma law is its insistence that educators do nothing to cause students “discomfort.” During my 35-year teaching career, I have repeatedly told students that part of my job is to make them uncomfortable with their cherished assumptions, not to upset them, but to help them grow.

Discussing race and gender in these fraught times makes everyone uncomfortable, but painful truths will not go away because we ignore them. Nor can inequality and injustices in the present day be overcome without studying their deep historic roots.

Being unified is a good thing, but not if it comes at the expense of ignoring any part of our history, no matter how unpleasant. Only by facing our past — the good, the bad and the ugly — can we move together into a brighter future. Critical race theory is neither an exercise in white guilt nor an iconoclastic attack on American heritage. It is a call to listen to voices that have been silent, ignored and suppressed for too long.

(Tom Mockaitis is professor of history and DePaul University and author of "Violent Extremists: Understanding the Domestic and International Terrorist Threat.")

Indonesia: Hundreds of Sinovac vaccinated health workers get Covid-19, dozens in hospital

Reuters

More than 350 doctors and medical workers have caught [Covid-19](#) in Indonesia despite being vaccinated with Sinovac, officials said, as concerns grow about the efficacy of some vaccines against more infectious variants.



Dimas Ardian/Bloomberg/Getty Images A healthcare worker prepares a dose of the Sinovac Covid-19 vaccine at Bogor Regional Public Hospital in Bogor, Indonesia, on January 14.

Most of the workers were asymptomatic and self-isolating at home, said Badai Ismoyo, head of the health office in the district of Kudus in central Java, but dozens have been hospitalized with high fevers and falling oxygen-saturation levels.

Kudus, which has about 5,000 healthcare workers, is [battling an outbreak](#) believed to be driven by the more transmissible [Delta variant](#), which has raised its bed occupancy rates above 90%.

Designated as a priority group, healthcare workers were among the first to be vaccinated when inoculations began in January.

Almost all have received the Covid-19 vaccine developed by Chinese biopharmaceutical company Sinovac, according to the Indonesian Medical Association (IDI).

While the number of Indonesian healthcare workers dying from Covid-19 has dropped sharply from 158 in January to 13 in May, according to data initiative group [LaporCovid-19](#), public health experts say the Java hospitalizations are cause for concern.

"The data shows they have [the Delta variant](#) (in Kudus) so it is no surprise that the breakthrough infection is higher than before, because, as we know, the majority of healthcare workers in Indonesia got Sinovac, and we still don't know yet how effective

it is in the real world against the Delta variant," said Dicky Budiman, an epidemiologist at Australia's Griffith University.

A spokesperson from Sinovac was not immediately available for comment on the efficacy of the Chinese firm's CoronaVac against newer variants of the virus.

*The World Health Organization (WHO) [approved emergency use](#) of Sinovac's vaccine this month, saying results showed it prevented symptomatic disease in 51% of recipients and prevented severe Covid-19 and hospital stays. [read more](#)
As Indonesia grappled with one of Asia's worst outbreaks, with over 1.9 million infections and 53,000 deaths, its doctors and nurses have suffered a heavy toll of 946 deaths.*

Many are now experiencing pandemic fatigue and taking a less vigilant approach to health protocols after being vaccinated, said Lenny Ekawati from LaporCovid-19. Across Indonesia, at least five doctors and one nurse have died from Covid-19 despite being vaccinated, according to LaporCovid-19, although one had only received a first shot.

Siti Nadia Tarmizi, a senior health ministry official, did not immediately respond to a request for comment on how many doctors have died since the vaccination program began.

In Kudus, one senior doctor has died, said IDI. Nadia said there had been no deaths in Kudus since a new outbreak began in the past several weeks among medical workers and that those who contracted Covid-19 have had mild symptoms.

In Jakarta, the capital, radiologist Dr Prijo Sidipratomo told Reuters he knew of at least half a dozen doctors hospitalized with Covid-19 in the past month despite being vaccinated, with one now being treated in an ICU.

"It is alarming for us because we cannot rely on vaccinations only," he said, urging people to take precautions.

Weeks after the Muslim Eid Al-Fitr holidays, Indonesia has experienced a surge in cases, with the positivity rate exceeding 23% on Wednesday and daily cases nearing 10,000, its highest since late February.

In its latest report, the WHO urged Indonesia to tighten its lockdown amid increased transmission and a surge in bed occupancy rates.

Chinese Foreign Ministry calls on Wuhan Institute of Virology to be awarded Nobel Prize *Michael Lee*

The Chinese Foreign Ministry is calling on the Wuhan Institute of Virology, which is at the center of controversy over the coronavirus pandemic's origin, to be awarded the Nobel Prize for medicine.



Provided by Washington Examiner

“The award is mainly given to individuals or research groups who have made or demonstrated significant achievements in the past five years ... China’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson stressed at Thursday’s press conference that scientists working at the WIV should be awarded the Nobel Prize in medicine, rather than being blamed for being the first to discover the gene sequence of the novel coronavirus,” [said a report from Chinese state media](#).

The story comes as the theory that COVID-19 may have originated in the Wuhan lab gains renewed interest, with [scientists acknowledging](#) the early dismissal of the idea may have been premature.

But the Chinese state media report calls the renewed investigation into the Wuhan lab “slander” while hailing it for its quick work in the early days of the outbreak.

“CAS said the WIV quickly carried out pathogen identification after the outbreak of COVID-19, completed the entire virus genome sequencing and virus isolation within a short time, confirmed that the COVID-19 virus shares the same functional receptor as the SARS virus, systematically analyzed the basic biological characteristics of the virus, and revealed that coronavirus carried by bats may be the evolutionary ancestor of the COVID-19 coronavirus,” the report said.

For its work on COVID-19, Chinese state media reports that the Wuhan lab has been nominated for the “2021 Outstanding Science and Technology Achievement Prize” of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

The report also notes that Chinese “bat woman” Shi Zhengli and the director of the Wuhan National Biosafety Laboratory, Yuan Zhiming, were nominated as “outstanding contributors.”

China Backed by 65 Nations on Human Rights Despite Xinjiang Concerns
John Feng

Attempts by Canada to raise concerns about human rights violations in China's Xinjiang region were met with stiff resistance on Tuesday following Ottawa's joint statement at the United Nations.



FABRICE COFFRINI/AFP via Getty Images United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet (L) looks on next to Human Rights Council president, Ambassador Nazhat Shameem Khan (R), after delivering a speech on global human rights developments during a session of the Human Rights Council on June 21, 2021, in Geneva, Switzerland.

Leslie E. Norton, Canada's permanent representative to the UN, issued an urgent plea for transparency and access to China's northwest, where rights groups and extensive media investigations have alleged widespread discriminatory policies targeting Uyghur Muslims living in the region.

Her statement was submitted on behalf of 44 signatories, including the United States, at the 47th regular session of the Human Rights Council.

However, her concerns were almost immediately dismissed by a group of 65 member states—led by Belarus—that sided with Beijing. Following the June 22 session, China said that it had support for its policies from more than 90 countries, while describing Western governments as "self-styled human rights judges."

Ambassador Norton told the UN that Canada and others were "gravely concerned about the human rights situation in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region." "Credible reports indicate that over a million people have been arbitrarily detained in Xinjiang and that there is widespread surveillance disproportionately targeting

Uyghurs and members of other minorities and restrictions on fundamental freedoms and Uyghur culture," she said.

"There are also reports of torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, forced sterilization, sexual and gender-based violence, and forced separation of children from their parents by authorities," Norton added in her cross-regional statement representing 44 states.

She called on China to grant "immediate, meaningful and unfettered access to Xinjiang for independent observers," including the UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet, who announced on Monday her intention to inspect Xinjiang this year. The Chinese government chided Bachelet for making "erroneous remarks."

The Canadian representative also touched on Tibet and the "deterioration of fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong" after China's enacting of a sweeping national security law in the summer of 2020.

"We call on Chinese authorities to abide by their human rights obligations," Norton concluded in the statement signed by, among others, the U.S., U.K., Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany, Italy and Japan.

Observers noted the distinct lack of Islamic nations in the joint statement, with the notable exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is majority Muslim. Canada's statement was later overwhelmed by the address by Belarus, which represented 65 member states in opposing "politically motivated and groundless accusations against China based on disinformation," the Chinese Mission to the UN said afterwards.

The Chinese government has consistently denied any wrongdoing in Xinjiang, where it claims safety has improved and unemployment has gone down thanks to its "deradicalization" efforts, which include vocational training facilities around the formerly majority-Muslim region. Rights groups have described them as mass detention centers.

China's office in Geneva said six Gulf states supported its position after Canada's joint statement. More than 20 other nations are also planning to back Beijing at Human Rights Council sessions in the coming days, still according to Chinese officials.

In a separate statement on Tuesday, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said the statement by Belarus stressed "respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries and non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states."

"The affairs of Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet are China's internal affairs, and the outside world should not interfere. All should ... respect the right of people of all countries to independently choose the path of human rights development in light of their national conditions, oppose politicizing and double standards on human rights issues, oppose politically motivated and groundless accusations against China based

on disinformation, and oppose interference in China's internal affairs under the pretext of human rights," it added.

"These self-styled 'human rights judges' are always eager to lecture others, but choose to turn a blind eye to or downplay their own serious human rights issues," the statement continued. More than 90 countries were against the attempt to "smear China," the ministry concluded.

The China-led retort at the UN mirrored similar developments in 2020, when German Ambassador Christoph Heusgen read out a joint statement by 39 countries raising concerns about Xinjiang on October 6.

The address to the UN General Assembly Third Committee was met with a [rebuttal by China and more than 70 other countries](#). A week later, [China, Pakistan, Russia and Cuba](#) were among 15 states voted onto the Human Rights Council for a three-year term lasting through 2023.

The 47th session of the UN Human Rights Council will run from June 21 to July 13. Newsweek has contacted the U.S. Mission to the UN for comment.

Disgraced former anchor Dan Rather is lecturing people again about the truth.



Provided by Washington Examiner

It's simply wild the guy who lost his job for trying to influence the 2004 presidential election with honest-to-God fake news has rebranded as an elder statesman of media, popping up online and on television at random to dish out pithy quotes and advice on what it means to stand for facts and accuracy.

Rather has set his sights on former Daily Show host Jon Stewart, who voiced support last week for the COVID-19 lab leak theory, which posits the coronavirus escaped from a research facility in China.

The press, which outright dismissed the lab hypothesis last year as an insane “conspiracy theory,” conflating it often with an entirely different theory alleging COVID-19 is actually a biochemical weapon, has largely come around to the idea the virus may have indeed escaped a research facility.

The media have come around even though there is no new evidence or data from when the hypothesis was first put forward by Republican Sen. Tom Cotton of Arkansas, who was branded a lunatic for even suggesting it. Members of the press have changed their minds for reasons that are not entirely clear.

To be clear, Stewart is not one of these people. What he said last week during an appearance on the Late Show With Stephen Colbert marked his first public remarks on the issue. Stewart began first by praising the scientists responsible for developing and distributing COVID-19 vaccines in record time. But Stewart also took aim at the scientific community in general, claiming it tends to play fast and loose with facts, theories, and public safety.

“Can I say this about scientists?” Stewart asked. “I love them, and they do such good work, but they are going to kill us all. The last words man utters are somewhere in a lab a guy goes, ‘Huhuh! It worked.’”

For Rather, it is deeply troubling, disturbing, etc., that the former Daily Show host would say such a thing.

“I cannot overemphasize how dangerous this line of thinking is,” [Rather said this weekend in an opinion article](#).

“We can expect that from the supporters of Donald Trump, but the words of Jon Stewart and many who share his politics show that this is not an issue that cuts neatly along partisan lines.”

“It is true that some scientists have done some bad things in the name of research — such as the Tuskegee experiments,” he added, “Scientists have been wrong. Science and technology have been tools that supported colonialism and oppression. Science does not release us from our moral responsibilities. All of this is the case because science is a human endeavor and scientists are human, subject to the same frailties and base instincts as any member of our species. But science is also a way of thinking, where we challenge our own dogmas and beliefs, where we change our minds and approach when the data show we were wrong.”

After all that, Rather notes, “Furthermore, it seems that most virologists do not think that the virus has the chemical fingerprints of human engineering. But that could be perhaps a possibility. We just don’t know. And we need to try to find out, letting the facts lead wherever they may.”

For the record, Stewart only said it seems likely the virus escaped a lab, not that it is a certainty.

“There’s a novel respiratory coronavirus overtaking Wuhan, China!” the former Daily Show host said, taking a shot at all the people who wouldn’t so much as consider the lab leak hypothesis. “What do we do? Oh, you know who we could ask? The Wuhan Novel Respiratory Coronavirus lab. The disease is the same name as the lab. That’s just — that’s just a little too weird, don’t you think?”

Stewart added, “And then the actual scientists are, like, how did this — ‘So, wait a minute, you work at the Wuhan respiratory coronavirus lab, how did this happen?’ They’re like, ‘Oooh, a pangolin kissed a turtle?’ No! The name of the lab! Look at the name! Let me see your business card! Show me your business card! ‘Oh, I work at the coronavirus lab in Wuhan!’ ‘Oh! Because there’s a coronavirus loose in Wuhan. How did that happen?’ Maybe a bat flew into the throat a turkey and sneezed into my chili, and now we all have coronavirus.”

Rather is not amused. He is upset with Stewart, accusing the professional funnyman of “playing into the trope of the mad scientist at a time when we need science more than ever to solve our more pressing problems — most notably climate change.” Can we be honest for a second here? Rather isn’t upset at what Stewart said but that a member of the team said it. This is the aggrieved reaction of a teammate betrayed.

“I fear this reasoning — or should I say ‘unreasoning’ — has not only consumed the modern Republican party but is in danger of consuming an even broader swath of the American and global public,” Rather writes, tying Stewart’s remarks to the GOP writ large.

Rather concludes, “I don’t think the world ends with a guy in a lab saying, ‘huh, it worked.’ It ends with a society, high on its own hubris, closing its minds to nuance, knowledge, and understanding. And that’s not a laughing matter. “

Speaking of hubris, now is as good a time as any to remind you all that [Rather still believes he did nothing wrong when he broadcast forgeries](#) supposedly showing George W. Bush was mostly "AWOL" during his years in the Texas Air National Guard.

For the record, Rather isn’t wrong. But Stewart also didn’t quite do what the former anchor alleges he did. And at any rate, let this sermon about truth and honesty come from someone who isn’t best known for trying to tank a presidential election with fake news.

*Tags: [Beltway Confidential](#), [Opinion](#), [Wuhan Lab](#), [Jon Stewart](#), [Coronavirus](#)
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