

Tim Walz Was a COVID-19 Tyrant

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Vice President Kamala Harris has chosen Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz as her running mate. Walz was a moderate Democrat when he served in the House of Representatives but veered left during his two terms as governor. He referred to socialism as synonymous with neighborliness, pursued an extremely progressive governing agenda, and earned an F from the Cato Institute on fiscal policy.

Another notable thing about Walz is that he served as governor during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is thus possible to parse his approach to the virus—and that record is extremely disturbing. Indeed, Walz's coronavirus policies were extremely heavy-handed and restrictive; under his leadership, the state endured the pandemic in a fundamentally anti-libertarian fashion.

When the coronavirus was first spreading, Walz was an enthusiastic promoter of social distancing rules. He described the crowds in public, outdoor spaces as "a little too big." He even defended Minnesota's ridiculous hotline for COVID-19 snitches. That's right: Walz's government maintained a method for people to report their neighbors for failing to abide by social distancing rules. Walz insisted in a recent interview that "one person's socialism is another person's neighborliness"; denouncing one's neighbors as insufficiently loyal to government policies is a fundamental aspect of socialism, however.

When asked by Republicans to take down the hotline, Walz responded: "We're not going to take down a phone number that people can call to keep their families safe."

And though Walz instructed police to *merely* issue citations to people caught violating stay-at-home orders—which is still bad enough—he also maintained the right, via executive order, to issue \$1,000 fines and send violators to jail for 90 days. His government maintained that private, indoor gatherings should be limited to 10 people. Outdoor gatherings were arbitrarily capped at 25 people. On July 23, 2020, Walz declared a statewide mask mandate for most indoor spaces and even some outdoor spaces.

"If we can get a 90 to 95% compliance, which we've seen the science shows, we can reduce the infection rates dramatically, which slows that spread and breaks that chain," Walz said at the time. "This is the way, the cheapest, the most effective way for us to open up our businesses, for us to get our kids back in school, for us to keep our grandparents healthy and for us to get back that life that we all miss so much."

What followed was the implementation of one of the stupidest COVID-19 rules: Diners at restaurants had to wear masks while walking to their table and moving about the establishment but were allowed to go maskless as long as they were eating and drinking.

Later, in November and December of 2020, Walz issued and extended orders for restaurants, gyms, and other businesses to shut down. This included *outdoor* dining service for eating establishments. Over 150 businesses formed the Reopen Minnesota Coalition and urged the governor to relent, but Walz was unmoved.

By the spring of 2021, vaccines were widely available for the most at-risk groups, and people who wanted to protect themselves from the risk of severe disease and death were able to exercise that option. It was only at this point that Walz partly relented and allowed widespread reopening; however, he kept capacity limits in place for many businesses.

These nonsensical policies—the efficacy of which is now doubted by top U.S. health officials—are not unique to Minnesota; in fact, they were commonplace in blue states. But Walz was as vigorous an enforcer of them as any of his Democratic peers.

He was also one of the foremost defenders of a monstrous COVID-19 policy choice: sending sick, elderly patients back to nursing homes where the infection often spread to other vulnerable people, causing a disproportionate number of coronavirus deaths in such settings. A cover-up of nursing home deaths in New York brought an end to the political ambitions of Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who lied about his involvement in this policy. But Walz was a fellow practitioner; in fact, Walz said that it was "not a mistake" to release sick people back to nursing homes. That statement alone reflects poor enough judgment as to be disqualifying for the pursuit of higher office.

Pandemic policies are not nearly as salient today as they were two years ago, and so it remains to be seen whether Walz's record here matters much to voters. But for anyone who considers the COVID-19 restrictions to have been "the biggest assault on our liberties in our lifetime," Walz's veep candidacy should be a nonstarter.

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