

Episode 158: “After Covid: Recovering Our Liberty” with John Tamny and Don Boudreaux

Announcer ([00:00](#)):

(music)

Announcer ([00:04](#)):

Welcome to the Bill Walton show, featuring conversations with leaders, entrepreneurs, artists, and thinkers. Fresh perspectives on money, culture, politics, and human flourishing. Interesting people. Interesting things.

Bill Walton ([00:24](#)):

Welcome to the Bill Walton show. I'm Bill Walton. Little over a year ago, I had my friend John Tamny on the show to talk about his then new book. It turns out to be quite a prescient book. The title of it is, *When Politicians Panicked: The New Core of Coronavirus Expert Opinion and a Tragic Lapse of Reason*. Here's how I introduced the book back then. The book's premise is that the so-called experts are not the answer to the crisis, they are the crisis. What was needed at the outset of the virus was leadership wise enough to let sensible Americans figure out how to protect themselves instead of draconian lockdowns and mandates. Our political leaders needed to provide information and guidelines about the risks, protect the vulnerable and their caregivers, and otherwise let people take care of themselves and each other. Give people the facts and a little bit of guidance in their native intelligence and common sense will see them through. Well, that did not happen.

Bill Walton ([01:33](#)):

And now, almost two years on, we're seeing the catastrophic economic and social cost of the overreaction and overreach by governments, not just in the United States, but worldwide. And so, joining me to help figure out where we go from here are John Tamny, our author friend and economist, and Don Boudreaux. And Don Boudreaux's particular note. He runs the operation, a blog called *Cafe Hayek*, which has become sort of the go-to source for COVID-19 information and related. And if you want to learn about how you should really think about that, I would recommend that blog. John I'll re-introduce, by the way, Don is also a professor of economics at George Mason and author of many bestselling books in economics. John's the editor of *Real Clear Markets*, author, *End of Work* and *They're Both Wrong*, and *When Politicians Panicked*. Yes. So, welcome back, guys. We had you on, I guess, about eight months ago or something.

Don Boudreaux ([02:34](#)):

No, it was summer of last year.

Bill Walton ([02:36](#)):

Summer of last year. Oh my gosh.

Don Boudreaux ([02:37](#)):

Time flies. COVID time flies.

Bill Walton ([02:39](#)):

COVID time.

Don Boudreaux ([02:41](#)):

It's distorting it.

Bill Walton ([02:42](#)):

Don Why don't we kick off? Describe where we are.

Don Boudreaux ([02:46](#)):

With COVID?

Bill Walton ([02:47](#)):

Yeah.

Don Boudreaux ([02:50](#)):

It's hard to say bill and it seems at the moment that the fear of the Delta variant is receding a little bit, so maybe we're returning to normal yet again, but we've been down this road before. Another variant is going to come up. As winter comes on, the cold weather comes on around the country, people are going to hunker down more in homes, they're going to be rises in cases. I fear that people will panic. I hope the panic will be less than it has been in the past, but I'm not at all confident that it won't be. As John talks about, as I'm sure you've talked about in the show before, I talk about all the time, this obsessive focus on COVID cases is insane.

Don Boudreaux ([03:28](#)):

Testing positive for the SARS COVID two virus does not mean that you're ill, does not mean you're going to suffer any significant disease consequences. And yet we have this obsessive insistence on counting these COVID cases. So I worry that as the cold months come and we start counting these COVID cases, the cases are going to rise and panic is going to ensue again. So, were to the point where I cannot have any confidence in any optimistic feelings that might occur to me.

John Tamny ([04:03](#)):

I tend to agree with Donna, and particularly when we're around here, it feels like it hasn't ended. And it's disturbing. You see people in masks everywhere. It just seems they've accepted this taking a freedom and they've moved on. But it's interesting to point out, get outside of what we constantly talk about as this bubble Madison, Wisconsin, are you kidding me? Madison left-wing Madison. Did you see the football stadium opening week of the season, packed with people living their lives again. If you get out to Nashville, Tennessee, you almost feel like there's been no lockdowns. People have gotten on with their lives. And so I think to some degree, there's a, there's a geographical thing, because it's a political thing, it's been a political thing for a while. People were wearing their mask, they drove along in their car and his way of saying, okay, I side with the left. And so, I think once you get out of DC, it seems like in many ways the pandemic has ended.

Don Boudreaux ([05:03](#)):

I agree with that. Some of my best friends live in Basalt, Colorado, just outside of Aspen, pretty, that's a pretty blue part of that state. And they tell me that people in that part of the state, I described the mask wearing in my hometown of Fairfax where I live, and he said, there's nothing like that here. Very few people wear masks.

Bill Walton ([05:21](#)):

Well, it's become political.

Don Boudreaux ([05:22](#)):

It's political.

Bill Walton ([05:23](#)):

I had Jeffrey Tucker on a couple of weeks ago. And I said, so Jeffrey, there's a lot of evidence that matter of fact, massive evidence that masks don't work. He said, no, they do work. They signal which side of the political aisle you're on. And it really has become something where it's a virtue signal for people on the left. And in Montgomery county and surrounding areas in DC, if you're not wearing your mask, you're not part of the club.

Don Boudreaux ([05:50](#)):

Political costume. It's a political custom.

Bill Walton ([05:53](#)):

So, how lethal is the virus? I mean, was all this reaction we had worth it? I mean, did we stop the flu of 1918, Spanish flu? I mean, where are we?

Don Boudreaux ([06:07](#)):

It certainly wasn't that lethal. Look, I mean, I think it is a serious disease, particularly if you're older, your health is compromised, it has killed people. I've never denied its existence. I've never said it's not. It's not dangerous, but the proportion of the reaction to COVID has been way excessive. It's been far out of proportion to the underlying dangerous. There are a lot of people who refuse to acknowledge that the age distribution of COVID negative impacts is relevant, but we've known since March of last year. So, March of 2020, right when this thing first became big, we've known that COVID overwhelmingly reserves its ill effects for very old people, people in their eighties. And I still encounter people who say, "Oh, that's irrelevant, we shouldn't care about that".

Don Boudreaux ([06:58](#)):

Well, of course we should care about that. That's a relevant fact for two reasons. Number one, it's just the fact that people might not like this, but when someone in their eighties dies, it's sad, it's not tragic. Unlike when someone in their twenties or thirties or a teenager dies. Second, because we know that it affects mostly old people, overwhelmingly old people, that means we could have, as the great Barrington Declaration advised, we could have focused our protection on that vulnerable group. Instead, we have this one size fits all nonsensical, insane lockdown that doesn't focus protection. And I think there's some compelling evidence that the lockdowns actually wound up being more lethal than the lethality we would have suffered had we followed the advice given in the great Barrington Declaration.

John Tamny ([07:48](#)):

There's no question. And I would just not one up Don. I would say we knew from long before March that the virus was real, but not terribly lethal. And we knew this from China. China's the second largest market for McDonald's, for Nike, for the book for the Hollywood box office there's 4,200 Starbucks in China. If it had been a lethal killer, there's no way it could have been hidden from a country like that.

Look at even Cuba recently. Videos were getting out of people, of people protesting an economically primitive country. Like you think the sensors could have hidden mass death? but I think we have to take it further. What if it had been a major killer of Chinese people, tens of millions?

John Tamny ([08:31](#)):

If that's the case, the argument for lockdowns becomes even more ridiculous. Who among us needs to be forced to avoid behavior associated with death and hospitalization? The more lethal something is, the more important Liberty is precisely because that's when you need to find out most by free people acting what is the behavior most associated with sickness and death instead, while claiming it was lethal and a danger to us, they chose to blind us by locking us down, one size fits all solutions when we needed broad answers.

Bill Walton ([09:07](#)):

Well, the thing that's striking though, is that we're not just talking about freedom of movement, we're talking about freedom of speech. We're talking about the real blackout of certain topics. For example, you're not allowed to talk about ivermectin. You're not allowed to talk about whether the vaccines are effective. I mean, right now YouTube is pulling everything that's even slightly skeptical about vaccines. So John, in some sense, that's true. People could figure it out, but right now people aren't allowed to have a free discussion, because there are only certain answers that you're allowed, to conclusions you're allowed to reach about this.

John Tamny ([09:47](#)):

Well, look, Martin Kulldorff, one of the authors of the declaration, the guy at Harvard, he writes frequently, I think he's exactly correct that. I mean, he's not the only one, but he's one of the more articulate people who write on this. He says, look, science has really taken a beating in this whole episode. The assumption that there is one correct answer, and then any scientific dissent from that one correct answer is somehow illegitimate. This is religious dogmatism. It's not science. And so, the authors of the great Barrington Declaration, the proposal that they put forward, just about a year ago in October of 2020, in effect advocated what all the best public health experts until that time, well until January of last year, advocated.

John Tamny ([10:38](#)):

And suddenly within a matter of months, the longstanding consensus among public health scholars and researchers, gets cast aside and then declared to be a heresy. And if you dare even mention the heresy, you are stifled, you're cut off, and you're you're silenced. And so science itself, the people who were supposed to uphold the values of scientific inquiry and discourse, they fallen down on the job. And that means, I think science has taken a big hit.

Bill Walton ([11:14](#)):

Well, science has taken... There are a lot of places I want to take this. One of the things you and I talked about before was this notion, and John this very well, this idea of an economics, one of the iron laws is the seen and the unseen. And that people take a look at the immediate consequences of something, let's say, stopping a virus. That's the thing you see. But what you don't see are all the things that are happening, like all the other health consequences, all the other public health issues, the excess deaths from not getting cancer treatment, screenings, from heart disease, from diabetes, from alcoholism on

and on. So, we talked about excess deaths. I think the real excess deaths, maybe the ones that are not directly due to COVID, but they're due to the lockdowns.

Don Boudreaux ([12:04](#)):

Well, not people not getting their cancer screenings, as you point out people not going to doctors, people afraid when they get injuries, in some cases of not going to the hospital to take care of their injuries. And people talk about about long COVID. This is just alleged, the long lasting consequences.

Bill Walton ([12:20](#)):

What is long COVID?

Don Boudreaux ([12:22](#)):

So, you get COVID, you survive, but you might have some lasting consequences that lasts for who knows how long and COVID is only been around for a couple of years. But one of the arguments that is constantly thrown at me when I advise against the hysteria that we've all experienced is, when I point out, well look, the fatality rates actually, it's not so high as to justify the success of reaction. Oh, yeah, but what about long COVID? Yeah, maybe not everyone's dying, but they're suffering. And the data on long COVID, I think a pretty sketchy.

Don Boudreaux ([12:58](#)):

But even if there's such a thing as long COVID, what I worry about most is long lockdown. I worry about the lasting consequences to the economy, and to the polity, to society, to the legal system, of what's happened in the past 18 months. We've set a precedent that, in January of 2020, I would not have believed we could possibly have set. We've just basically allowed the experts in government to say, okay, we are your lab rats. You tell us what to do in order to save us from this one pathogen. It doesn't matter if we suffer in any other way, but just save us from this one pathogen. And that's the attitude that too many people, at least for a while came to have.

Bill Walton ([13:44](#)):

Well, and if you're Anthony co Anthony Fauci in your trade, he's an epidemiologist.

Don Boudreaux ([13:53](#)):

I'm not sure what he's actually doing. He's not a doctor.

Bill Walton ([13:55](#)):

You're watching the bill Walton show. I'm here with Don Boudreaux and John Tamny, and we're talking about the cost that COVID has caused, the real price we're paying in terms of our freedom. And John I can't think of anybody who's more of an advocate for free market voluntary exchange. I think you guys [inaudible 00:14:15]

Don Boudreaux ([14:16](#)):

We all are.

Bill Walton ([14:17](#)):

But you look at the economic consequences of this. We're now seeing supply chain issues, we're looking at you know all these issues with people not wanting to go back to work because of the government. It seems like all the measures that government took really wrecked the economy longterm. Talk about long COVID, long lockdown. I think the long hammer that's been put on the free market is stunning.

John Tamny ([14:46](#)):

And it was needless. Let's not forget that the virus had been spreading for. It had been in the news in the U.S alone, since January of 2020, and businesses were responding, they were changing. They started wiping down more regularly. They started removing tables long before the lockdowns began, because they were adjusting to what their customers wanted, a different, a more scared customer base. And so, but you talk about the economics. Let's never forget that, as Don knows vividly, what's that eye pencil, the pencil as a consequence of global cooperation. When we rich America, when we take a break from reality, as we've done, the global implications are tragic, because so much of the economic activity happening here is global in scope. And so, you look at a country like El Salvador, much of it's a build, the consumption there is a consequence of economic activity here.

John Tamny ([15:47](#)):

So, when tens of millions of jobs are lost, suddenly the El Salvadorans are putting white flags up on their huts. And a white flag in El Salvador is a sign that there is starvation happening in this hut. And you look globally, in Philippines, you look in India, the remittances to these countries from their relatives in the us, and in developed countries around the world plummeted, such that even the New York times was admitting 285 million people around the world rushing towards starvation. As we, in the rich countries, experienced mass hysteria over a virus. Well, the hatred of poor people that this is exhibited is nothing short of uninspiring.

Bill Walton ([16:32](#)):

This thing is disproportionately hit poor people. I mean, if you're working in the digital economy, you're doing just fine, but if you're not, if you're the delivery man, you're not doing so well. I want to plug the book you just mentioned, or the essay Eye Pencil, Leonard Read. And it really talks about all the different facets of, if you make a pencil, you got the metal, you've got the rubber tip, you've got the led, you got the wood in there. Thousands of people in industries or manufacturers that go into making just a simple pencil.

Bill Walton ([17:05](#)):

That gets me back to one of my pet peeves is this idea early on, where they could take some mayor and she could declare, or some governor, this business is essential, this business is not essential. And they wouldn't so far as sort of sub subdividing home Depot and said, well, this department's essential, this one's not. You guys are economists. Explain why that's crazy.

Don Boudreaux ([17:31](#)):

Because, and John alluded to it, the economy is this the vast network of interconnected specializations. And so, even though you might, people might say, oh physicians are really essential because they save lives, but both physicians need to eat. Physicians need their equipment, physicians need their supplies delivered. So, we are all part of this global economy, we are all highly specialized in what we do. And if you obstruct one part of it, that has ripple effects in ways that no one can predict in detail, but it has ripple effects throughout the economy. So, even if we would all, again, to agree that Bill Walton is more

essential than Don Boudreaux shutting down, Don Boudreaux might still impact your ability to do what you do. What's that?

Bill Walton ([18:16](#)):

Mrs. Boudreaux may disagree.

Don Boudreaux ([18:17](#)):

Oh she might. Definitely.

Bill Walton ([18:20](#)):

But that's basically the thing though, is you're valuable, you're not. And they said that tens of millions of people. You speak about outside the United States. I mean, peoples, I got a phone call from a caddy at my club who got kicked out in March of 2020, you and I talked about it. He was absolutely, he said, bill they've declared me a non-person. I'm not essential. And he didn't have the long train of, I think he worked in a cash economy, so he was not able to get the relief that other people got.

John Tamny ([18:54](#)):

Yeah. Suddenly people were told they didn't count. And you think about the illogic of it. But again, I think it's important to always just stick. The freedom is the answer always. The freedom was the answer to this, but it was illegal to go into a flower shop, is illegal to go into a clothing store. It was illegal to do, but you could go to Walmart and get all those things. And so, the supposition was that the very humans who've driven all economic progress, where suddenly a lethal menace. That if I was around you, I was going to kill you if I got too close. And as you think about that. So, it's based on this ludicrous supposition. So, let's narrow the, the range of businesses that people can shoe horn themselves through as a solution when everything about this defied basic common sense. And that's why I think it's so important what we're doing writing talking about.

Bill Walton ([19:44](#)):

But why do we feel like such lonely voices in this? I mean, I look at some of the institutions on the libertarian world and the conservative world, and they folded like a tent early on. I mean, everybody got terrified by this as something that was... I mean, we've had flues, we've had viruses, we've had things and we've dealt with them. And then all of a sudden we came out of all this draconian stuff and nobody really fought back. Heritage didn't fight back, Cato didn't fight back. I'm a donor. So, I get to say things. But their whole lot of the institutions are or think tanks or people on our side who just did not fight back.

Don Boudreaux ([20:28](#)):

I was a good job. I was very young in Boston in 1972 because my parents were living there. And they were stunned when Nixon won 49 states to one, because Boston, as people, it's a very collegiate, it's a very left-leaning. And I think to some degree, again, are we lonely voices? Probably we're lonely voices in Washington, DC, but it's kind of interesting to-

Bill Walton ([20:54](#)):

I think you're right. You're right. You get out of town, you get sensible people.

Don Boudreaux ([20:59](#)):

Will see you and Sarah out in Rappahannock on weekends. I'm guessing you're running into an entirely different viewpoint on all.

John Tamny ([21:08](#)):

This is just a speculation.

Don Boudreaux ([21:10](#)):

But it is true that a lot of the people, not all, but a lot of the people and organizations who, and that I would have expected, 18 months ago, to be furious in a vocal way against this unprecedented assault on human Liberty were quiet. Didn't say anything. And I don't understand. I could not keep my mouth shut about it, I could not keep my keyboard silent on it. Because short of a hot shooting war, I believe this is perhaps the worst calamity, certainly that modern, we modern human beings have inflicted on ourselves. I don't think anything comes close. I don't want to compare it to a hot shooting war. But short of that, this is just it's appalling. And I don't have the word strong enough, actually.

John Tamny ([22:03](#)):

So, but you get shouted down, maybe shout it's too strong a word, but you're shamed into thinking, well, if you're for the things we want, which is to let people take care of themselves and their families and take central precautions, I mean, it used to be, you got a cold, you just didn't go out and you didn't walk around with a mask on. But I mean, you've gotten people saying because your position you've got blood in your hand.

Don Boudreaux ([22:27](#)):

I've had people tell me, literally I have blood on my hands, as if I've had any impact on policy. Which of course I haven't, but because I advocate against the lockdown policies and against the hysteria, I've had people literally tell me I have blood on my hands, and I don't understand it. I mean, you just leave. I don't get angry at it. I get saddened and misdefine it. It's just sad. I don't get it. We have these heavy handed, one size fits all obstructions on our lives that are unprecedented. Why aren't more of our friends speaking out against them. well, it's a mystery to me.

Bill Walton ([23:11](#)):

The vaccine mandates.

Don Boudreaux ([23:13](#)):

Against them.

John Tamny ([23:15](#)):

I'm against all central planning. Why is central planning so discredited in all other ways?

Bill Walton ([23:21](#)):

Because John, it worked really well in the Soviet union.

John Tamny ([23:26](#)):

It's amazing.

Bill Walton ([23:26](#)):

You forgetting that's control.

John Tamny ([23:27](#)):

So, controlling human action in a commercial sense is just thoroughly discredited. But suddenly when we've got this virus that is a threat to the whole world, centralized human action is fully supported. In this case, it staggers the imagination that people don't see the obvious correlation, that once again, free people produce the optimal outcome, precisely because they're trying different things.

Bill Walton ([23:55](#)):

Well, let's do... You're watching the bill Walton show. I'm here with John Tamny and Don Boudreaux. We're about to be educated about how things really happen at the granular level where people are interacting, doing things, and they solutions don't come from top-down.

John Tamny ([24:13](#)):

They can't. The Soviet union had experts, brilliant people. Cuba has experts. North Korea has got experts. But let's never forget that the collective knowledge of the people is the marketplace, and it squashes the minimal knowledge of one person or two people. And so, remember, the experts said this time around, unless we act, the less you do as we think you should do, there'll be a crisis. Well, that was a self-fulfilling statement right there. Because once you suffocate the marketplace, which is the people, and then substitute in there the narrow knowledge of an Anthony Fauci, it's possible, he's brilliant, but his knowledge can never measure up to that of the marketplace. And so, they say we must act, which is in an inevitably the crisis be a central planning can not replace the diffused knowledge of people.

Bill Walton ([25:05](#)):

Well, the thing that I think we need to make the point that people who think as we do ultimately have faith in people's ability to take care of themselves and in common sense, and figuring things out, maybe not by themselves, but with their community, with their family, with things like that. And that through history, is the way things have happened. And so, we've got a really very positive view about people. And yet if you're sitting there in a big office on Constitution avenue or wherever the bureaucracies are, and you think you're going to write this edict to tell tens of millions of people how to behave, that's arrogance. And it's also saying those people don't know enough to take care of themselves. So, it's up to us and this Ms. Bureaucrat to do just that. And it never works.

Don Boudreaux ([25:54](#)):

One of the many distressing events or attitudes that arose in the last 18 months is this notion that science can answer questions of public policy. Science is important. Science can give us good information about various consequences of different paths that we choose when we choose different policies. Science cannot tell us which public policies to choose. Science cannot tell us how much risk we should or avoid, science cannot make trade off sports. That is inevitably decisions that have to be made at the collective level politically, and hopefully more at the individual level. It's not a scientific, it's just not in the domain of science. And yet so many people now believe that Anthony Fauci or some other scientific genius has the answer for what we should do. And science simply can't do that. And no more than science can. Science can tell me what my chances are of being killed as I drive home a little while

from the studio here, science cannot tell me whether or not I should drive home. It's up to me to make that choice.

John Tamny ([27:01](#)):

And can we just add that? We expect people and we want people to exercise their common sense, but sometimes the people not exercising common sense are the most important information producers of all. They're your control group. We want everyone to act the same way. No, you wanted young kids out of the bars hitting on, making out with people and doing all the things the young kids do to find out is it true? Is that how you spread the virus? Is it dangerous to live your life? Because you see we, all of us here know-

Bill Walton ([27:32](#)):

Do you know how many teenagers would love to have you as a parent?

Don Boudreaux ([27:35](#)):

That's right.

Bill Walton ([27:36](#)):

Would you go out and be a control group for us?

John Tamny ([27:40](#)):

We all practice central planning in our houses. It's different thing, but it's important to stress. We're all socialists on a local level as we know, but it's very important to stress that you want people trying different things. And so, when you needed... Let's never forget the right brothers were viewed as complete nut jobs for presuming that man could fly. It was accepted wisdom that you couldn't. So, you need the oddballs trying different things to produce the crucial information. They literally, in their desire to find an answer to the virus, chose to blind us to what the answers might be. Who knows maybe it is ivermectin. I don't know, but that's why you want people trying to.

Bill Walton ([28:20](#)):

I've got some doctor friends who believe very much it's ivermectin, but that's not a very profitable drug. Well the thing that is striking is you talk about the control group, which is funny, but we're seeing this real attack on federalism, where states are not, increasingly, they don't want states to come up with separate policy solutions. They want all states to look like California. And then we're seeing this in the international world where they're trying to impose a minimum tax on corporations worldwide so that people can't choose low tax countries like Ireland and protect. So, there's this overwhelming movement, I think, to centralize things right now. I mean, I thought we were making progress and that feels like we're slipping.

Don Boudreaux ([29:06](#)):

Yeah, I think I, I think part of it stems from this ridiculous belief in the power of experts. If society were a science project, then yeah, we find the experts in society, we give them the power hour to tell us what to do. But society's not a science project. Society's a place where we interact, we each have our own preferences, and my preferences different from Johns, and different from yours. And the best we can do is to all get along as best as we can. And in a free society we do that, we do so productively, and we all

actually wind up helping each other a better pursuit each of our ends, as opposed to head some experts sitting in Washington DC, or in some world capital telling us what to do. But the belief of academics now, the belief of so many people in the media now is that society is a science project. And there's a correct answer out there. And all we have to do is find that correct answer.

John Tamny ([29:56](#)):

Yeah, there's no doubt. And I think one of the biggest myths is that we actually federalism this time around. People say, well Florida lockdown and April 3rd and New York lockdown on March 15th, they were different. Okay, there were different responses, but we didn't really have federalism. Ask yourself the question, what if the federal government had stayed out of this? What if Donald Trump had stayed up as Donald Trump and said look, if states wanna lockdown, that's fine, but they're gonna have me to deal with, I'm gonna campaign against them every day.

John Tamny ([30:27](#)):

Instead we got a 2.9 trillion Cares Act from the federal government that subsidized the lockdowns in California. Ask yourself the question, could California have lockdown even for a week if there had been no federal coming in? I think the question answers itself. If the federal government stays out of this, which it should have, so that states can be the laboratories of ideas that we all want, there would've been an entirely different response. The federal government's role in this cannot be minimized. And this includes from Republicans. Let's never forget that Republicans panicked too.

Bill Walton ([31:02](#)):

Yes they did.

Don Boudreaux ([31:03](#)):

Including Trump.

John Tamny ([31:04](#)):

Mm-Hmm (affirmative)

John Tamny ([31:05](#)):

Including Trump, unquestioned.

Don Boudreaux ([31:06](#)):

People forget that.

Bill Walton ([31:07](#)):

Yeah. I'd worked for Trump for a while, and I still like Trump, but I was dismayed the way he turned the reigns over to Fauci. I mean, that was just disgusting to watch those press conferences where Trump stood in the background of Fauci was commanding the stage as if a guy knew how to deal with the virus. And it's not clear he really does anyway, but he just handed them the keys.

Don Boudreaux ([31:30](#)):

Yeah. I saw a clip or a still from this recent Disney special on Fauci. Yeah. And it's really telling. Fauci is working at his home office beneath a larger than life size portrait of Fauci.

Bill Walton ([31:47](#)):

You're kidding.

Don Boudreaux ([31:50](#)):

No. I mean the arrogance of it, the self importance of it is just mind blowing.

Bill Walton ([32:00](#)):

I was thinking of a Disney cartoon when you mentioned. I was trying to figure out how we'd animate him, but maybe he's a cartoon.

Don Boudreaux ([32:07](#)):

I wish he would become a cartoon.

Bill Walton ([32:09](#)):

I'm talking with a couple of smart economists here. So, let's talk about the labor market. What was the effect of all these payments? Why are people not going back to work? Do we ever put the genie back in the bottle in terms of people going to work and the work ethic?

Don Boudreaux ([32:24](#)):

I don't think there could be any question that if you pay people not to work, you get but fewer people working. I mean, this is basic economics 1 0 1. It's not been repealed by a virus, it's not been repealed by Trump being thrown out of office. It's it's basically economics. Putting the genie back in the bottle, I think eventually people have to get back to work when these funds run out. But what I worry about this is part of the long COVID. I mean, excuse me, the long lockdown consequence that I mentioned earlier. Will government allow that? It's too tempting for politicians to say, well, it's a little bit longer. Let's come up with a new relief package. Because people still scared of the virus.

Bill Walton ([33:03](#)):

It'll be part of the long lockdown-

Don Boudreaux ([33:04](#)):

Yeah. And then on top of that, you have a lot of the schools are still either doing part-time, and I think many of them still feel at risk that they'll shut down if there's an outbreak, an increasing cases. So, a lot of parents don't want to go back to work because, what are they gonna do with their kids if they're back at work and their kids are home?

John Tamny ([33:25](#)):

I agree with Don that there's a slight disagreement there that I don't even think there's necessarily disagreement on. There's no doubt if you pay people, if government is bidding against the market for labor, government is going to win on occasion. But I think I also speak for the three of us right here, that it would cost you a lot of money to get me to stop working. I love my work so much. I can't get enough of it. And I think it's important to point, I don't think Americans have suddenly been lazy, made lazy by a handout from government. I think it's gotta be remembered. Look at what the politicians did, and let's look at the restaurant industry specifically. There's not a lot of pediatricians married to chefs or

investment bankers, married to servers. There are a lot of servers married to chefs and servers married to Sue chefs.

John Tamny ([34:15](#)):

So, one day these people have jobs, the next parents of kids suddenly are both wiped out, no jobs to speak up. You think there's some reluctance on their part to reenter these industries that were so thoroughly suffocated by political panic? And so I think to some degree, a lot of these people not going back to work is because they've seen what happened. And are you gonna get back on that train again? And then I think you also hit on something crucial. Childcare is enormously expensive. So, long as the schools are shut down, what are parents supposed to do? Because that, for even well paid people, childcare is basically a high salary after taxes.

Don Boudreaux ([34:58](#)):

Yeah. And even if the schools, again, even if the schools aren't currently shut down, they are at risk of being shut down. Because we're constantly here. The teachers unions continue to complain about school's reopening. And the teachers unions are very powerful, and parents understand in that slight uptick in cases, their schools may shut down again, they go off to work, and who's gonna watch the kids?

Bill Walton ([35:22](#)):

Watching the Bill Walton show. I'm here with Don Boudreaux and John Tamny. We're talking about sort of the economic consequences and social consequences of all the government measures. I think like an investor, that's my basic background. And I think about investing. And I think you're saying the same thing, John, about people going back to work. You don't wanna deploy your capital of something. If you think there's some Fiat that can change the investment landscape. I mean, you mentioned that the hospital or the restaurant adjusted to the tables and they got that going and they could go back in the business knowing that that was the landscape. But if you think it's gonna change every week, you're not gonna do anything. And so, you're saying, you're not gonna invest if you're doing what I do, but you're not also not gonna go back to work if you think it's gonna get ripped away from me again. Is that the-

John Tamny ([36:22](#)):

Yes, humans are capital. They're the most important capital. You know this as an investor. If suddenly you don't know if that's going to be the only change, yeah, it is the only capital, and we suffocated in response to the virus, but we also suffocated its ability to operate in the marketplace. Is it any surprise that there's some reluctance to go back, because remember the assumption was once some of these payments end, people are going to flood back into the job market.

Bill Walton ([36:52](#)):

Well, that's not happening.

John Tamny ([36:52](#)):

It turns out that hasn't happened. And because it was never what was assumed, "Oh, Americans are just lazy". I found that so insulting that, that Americans could just be bought off by a check. And I know you don't believe that, but I think some on our side said that and I thought, oh, you got to be kidding.

Don Boudreaux ([37:10](#)):

I think, I think it has an impact at the margin. Of course it has an impact at the margin, but the margin in this case can be pretty extensive. And you're talking about a labor force of close to 160 million people. One of the best economics books written in the past 50 years, the book written by the economic historian, Bob Higgs, Robert Higgs called Crisis and Leviathan. And in that he explained excuse me, I'm getting his books wrong. That is one of the best books by the way. But Bob Higgs wrote another book a few years ago where he explains the length of the great depression. The reason the great depression lasted as long as it did was because of the immense uncertainty created by new deal policies. Investors simply didn't want to go back in because they didn't know what the Roosevelt administration would do. And they didn't go back in until after Roosevelt died, and the more conservative Harry Truman's in office than Republicans surprisingly win in 1948. That's when the economy started really to pick back up again.

Don Boudreaux ([38:04](#)):

I think we have the same kind, and Bob Higgs call that regime uncertainty. I think we have the same kind of uncertainty now. We have regime may maybe even in a worse way. Certainly in different ways, we have great uncertainty about what the government's going to do when we have new reports about what's happening to cases. And when you have this kind of uncertainty, I think John is right on this, that is a disincentive to return to the job.

Bill Walton ([38:31](#)):

I think we're getting at some really fundamental here. I mean, the arbitrariness with which these governments say things, it chills so many other things besides-

Don Boudreaux ([38:40](#)):

The rule of laws out the window.

Bill Walton ([38:42](#)):

Yes. And I know John, you see China as a rosier scenario than I do. But if you look at Xi in China, Xi decided recently that private tutoring was something that shouldn't be in the private sector. And there's some big private tutoring businesses that a lot of American investors had gone into, and he decided overnight, you're not allowed to make a profit if you're in the private tutoring business. We're beginning to feel a bit like that, where you can get a governor that says, well, your business isn't essential. What's the difference?

John Tamny ([39:20](#)):

There is no difference. I, to give you the other side on China, we see them attacking businesses. And I say, well, how's that different from Mark Zuckerberg and the CEO of Google, and every time successful in the United States, you better pay your tithe here, because if you don't, where you're gonna end up, you're gonna be brought to testify for Congress and be berated by Congress.

Bill Walton ([39:43](#)):

Do you think they're gonna be disappeared like Jack Ma? I MEAN, he's gone.

John Tamny ([39:48](#)):

In a sense, they go quiet. You know this from wall street very well. Remember the fortune cover back in the 1980s of the young guy with the cigar on the cover fortune, about how he's making 500,000 a year,

and a terrified investment bankers. Do not advertise your wealth, because it gets the attention of politicians. Michael Milk, the greatest capitalist who ever lived, served time in prison for making that mistake, albeit in a different way. And so, it's not to defend China, but I think politicians are universal in their desire to tell business whose boss.

Don Boudreaux ([40:22](#)):

I mean, well, certainly the arbitrariness with which Xi did the move against the private tutoring that you just mentioned. That is indistinguishable from the arbitrariness that the governors, and in any case mayors imposed on businesses around the country. You shut down, shut down. Oh, you can stay open.

John Tamny ([40:42](#)):

Great point.

Don Boudreaux ([40:42](#)):

Completely arbitrary. And with no legislative oversight, very few courts would stand up to these people.

Bill Walton ([40:52](#)):

You guys don't do politics, but there seems to be a political piece of this that's so sinister. I mean, they use the virus and the fear of people interacting with each other to put all these paper ballots out and all the mail-in ballots. And they flooded the zone with mail-in ballots in 2020.

Don Boudreaux ([41:10](#)):

Really scary.

Bill Walton ([41:13](#)):

I'm not in a camp that think there was a lot of tampering with the machines, but I think the paper ballots were used in an egregious manner to get a lot of votes for Biden. And maybe they count as legitimate, maybe they don't, but then you see fast forward to today, you see, was it Fairfax county, now is saying to the governor, you gotta give us a break. We no longer need a sec. We should no longer have a second signature on a mail-in ballot, because people are afraid of having somebody else come close to them to sign the piece of paper. And Ralph Northam in Virginia under the emergency see orders or whatever that is, if he declares aa medical emergency, he can addict that.

Don Boudreaux ([41:59](#)):

So, politicians have learned and, and the media have learned, if you scare people enough, they will become sheep, unfortunately. You may disagree with that John, but I think that people were scared. In Britain, we know Laura Dodsworth wrote a book about it. In Britain, we know the government intentionally ramped up the level of fright in order to make the British people more-

Bill Walton ([42:23](#)):

I didn't know that how so, what they do?

Don Boudreaux ([42:25](#)):

Oh, they had, I forget what the name of the operation was, but there's a great book by Laura Dodsworth, I think it's called the State of Fear, on the very conscious effort by the British government to

ramp up fear of COVID in order to entice people to become more obedient to the government's COVID restrictions. No doubt, a lot of these people thought they were acting in the best interest of society, but it's completely antithetical to the principles of a free society.

Bill Walton ([42:57](#)):

We gotta wrap up. I hate to wrap up, because we're just getting deeper and deeper into something. How do we restore Liberty? How do we develop a movement that gets people saying, G, wait a second, enough's enough. Give us back our freedom.

Don Boudreaux ([43:17](#)):

Last year I said 64 billion question, now 64 trillion given the inflation that's coming. Yeah, it's a difficult question to answer, Bill, but we certainly have to start with speaking out against these arbitrary, unprecedented restrictions done in order to protect us from a pathogen. It's intolerable. You can't have a free society if people are willing to be corralled and silenced, just because a relatively dangerous pathogen is on the loose.

Bill Walton ([43:49](#)):

I think the line of action in my view might start with the vaccines, because we there's gotta be some pushback on these vaccines and these vaccine mandates, which are great. John.

John Tamny ([44:01](#)):

I think that it's gotta be, and this may or may not surprise you. I think the dangerous path we're going down right now is that we're making the too statistical. I get it. 99 point something percent survival rate. Anytime you use statistics, you win the argument, but you lose the war, because it implies that there's a rate of death at which point politicians can take our freedom. No, no, no. They can not take our freedom. And so, I think the only answer is to make this about freedom, pound that over and over again, that free people on its own as essential virtue.

John Tamny ([44:38](#)):

It's a pro-health virtue. In addition, it's a pro economic growth in addition to that, but it's gotta be about freedom. That we would be against lockdowns, even if you could prove what you can't, that the lockdown save lives. No, no, no. You just don't take away freedom because anything else they can trample on, they can always say, well, this time is different. This one's more lethal. This time we can lock people down without any kind of economic implications. There's always going to be an excuse at which point we've gotta make it about free people. That's the only answer.

Bill Walton ([45:12](#)):

It's a wrap. Thanks, John. That's pretty good. I think that's a good. Don, cafe Hayek is primarily where we can find everything you're writing and thinking.

Don Boudreaux ([45:21](#)):

Yes. Cafe. I post several times each day at cafe Hayek.

Bill Walton ([45:25](#)):

Yeah, highly recommended. I also recommend getting on his email list, because every day something coming through that's incredible useful.

Don Boudreaux ([45:33](#)):

Yeah. You can sign up. You can sign up at the sign up.

Bill Walton ([45:34](#)):

Great service. Yeah. John, where do we find you?

John Tamny ([45:37](#)):

Oh, Real Clear Markets, and my books that people should buy lots of copies on Amazon.

Bill Walton ([45:42](#)):

We should buy Lots of books, especially When Politicians panic.

John Tamny ([45:45](#)):

It's a great book.

Bill Walton ([45:46](#)):

We gotta keep John in the writing business. So anyway, thanks for joining it. It's been Bill Walton's show, and Don Boudreaux and John Tamny. And we hope you enjoyed the conversation we had about the price we're paying for the draconian measures against the lockdown. But there'll be more to come and more to talk about. We hope you join us. Join us back then. So thanks.

Bill Walton ([46:09](#)):

I hope you enjoyed the conversation. Want more? Click the subscribe button or head over to the [BillWaltonshow.com](#) to choose from over a hundred episodes. You can also learn more about our guest on our interesting people page. And send us your comments. We read everyone and your thoughts help us guide the show. If it's easier for you to listen, check out our podcast page and there. In return, we'll keep you informed about what's true, what's right, and what's next. Thanks for joining.

Bill Walton ([46:45](#)):

(music)