

Wait, Wait...Don't Tell Them

By Eric Rozenman



Anthony Fauci recently received standing ovations from nearly 7,000 people. Twice in less than half an hour. Unjustifiable, it is true, but not inexplicable.

Fauci, of course, is the recently retired head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infection Diseases and the Covid-19 pandemic's self-proclaimed Dr. Science. He is now on tour flogging his memoir *On Call: A Doctor's Journey in Public Service*, a *New York Times* bestseller.

The good doctor appeared as guest interviewee on an August taping of National Public Radio's Chicago-based news quiz show, "Wait, Wait...Don't Tell Me!" The love-fest took place in suburban Washington, D.C. at Wolf Trap Farm Park for the Performing Arts in Vienna, Virginia.

Wolf Trap is the only national park dedicated to show business. NPR says "Wait, Wait" ranks first per single-show among the network's programs, with five million listeners on 700 stations, plus more on podcasts. Affiliates market it as "wacky" and "irreverent."

The evening's temperature had barely dropped from the day's 95-degree high and sub-tropical humidity hung in the air, but program enthusiasts jammed the park's amphitheater and grounds. In this NPR crowd my wife and I were beneficiaries of free tickets from friends. Summers past at Wolf Trap we paid to see performances by pianist Diana Krall, rocker George Thorogood and the Destroyers and The Original Doo-Wop Show so, not doing anything else that night, we thought, why not?

Between the ovations for Fauci, "Wait, Wait...Don't Tell Me!" host Peter Sagal—who has headlined the show since just after its 1998 launch—fawned over his guest as if the doctor's star power rivaled that of Volodymyr Zelensky or Snoop Dogg.

Sagal's quick wit at times can remind one of Johnny Carson on the old "Tonight Show," instantly turning a guest's innocuous phrase into a double entendre. But don't expect any "Wait, Wait" laughs at the expense of targets left of center.

Interviewee Fauci received a gentle massage in the program's "Not My Job" segment. Sagal asked him three lightly comic questions about computer viruses under the heading "Here's a Virus Even You Can't Cure."

At one point Sagal characterized Fauci's June testimony before the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability's select subcommittee on the coronavirus epidemic as the doctor beating up Republicans. Good for an audience chuckle.

In fact, as James B. Meigs writes of the Covid-19 epidemic, "our public health officials, abetted by a politicized media, manufactured an airtight consensus on both Covid science and policy. This consensus was largely immune to scientific evidence or concerns about the real-world impacts of draconian policies" and closed ranks against "the idea that a bat-related coronavirus might have emerged from a Wuhan China lab devoted to studying bat-related coronaviruses" and funded in part by Fauci's NIAID ("The Fauci Conspiracy," *Commentary*,

July-August).

Meigs—a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute and former editor of *Popular Mechanics*—added, “I continue to be stunned by the duplicity of Anthony Fauci and other leading health officials on this issue. ... Fauci and his nominal boss, National Institutes of Health head Francis Collins, joined several key virus researchers in scrambling to distract Congress, the press, and the public from questions about their long-standing links to the Wuhan Institute of Virology.”

At Wolf Trap there was not a hint of Fauci’s rigidity regarding Covid-19 or evasions before the congressional subcommittee. Sagal and news quiz panelists Tom Papa, Negin Farsad and Karen Chee—apparently stars on the NPR comedy club circuit—did get laughs about Republican vice-presidential candidate Sen. J.D. Vance (Ohio) having sex with a couch and Olympic tri-athletes encountering brown floating objects as they competed in Paris’ chronically polluted Seine.

Somewhere around 6,900 of the 7,000-member audience loved it all. In fairness, it must be noted Sagal and “Wait, Wait” have hosted a range of political luminaries over the years. They span the spectrum from John Kasich (Republican) to Al Gore, Pete Buttigieg, Bill Clinton, Barack Obama (Democrats), Bernie Sanders (Independent, Socialist, Democrat) and Rachel Maddow (Deranged).

The late Rush Limbaugh used to dissect a bloc he called “low information voters.” That appellation did not apply to most of our fellow audience members at Wolf Trap. They were high-misinformation voters, in possession of shrink-wrapped talking-points delivered directly from the Democratic Party-news-entertainment media industrial complex. But wait, wait ...don’t try to tell them.

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