

*CBS Mornings*

06/18/24

7:30:12 a.m.

8 minutes and 23 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Dr. Fauci “On Call”; Talks Covid Pandemic Response, Bird Flu and Medical Career]

GAYLE KING: Dr. Anthony Fauci telling the story of his life and his pivotal role in fighting the Covid pandemic, and pivotal is the word here, more than five decade long career in public service included 38 years as the nation’s top infectious disease expert, working with seven different presidents. He oversaw critical research into HIV, developed programs to fight AIDS, and led the response to — listen to this — SARS, ebola, and anthrax cases. His new mar — his new memoir, rather, is titled *On Call* — it’s a great title — *A Doctor’s Journey in Public Service*. We’re happy to say that Dr. Anthony Fauci joins us live and in color here at the table. Good to see you, Dr. Fauci.

ANTHONY FAUCI: Thank you, Gayle. Good to be with you.

KING: This is a perfect title for you, *A Doctor’s Journey in Public Service* cause, boy, has it been a journey for you. I — I read your book over the weekend and I love how you started it, with Albert Bourla of Pfizer calling you to say, Tony, I think we have a vaccine and I think it works. You said you literally sort of broke down and had a very emotional moment because you didn’t think this would be possible that quickly.

FAUCI: No, I did not. I mean, this is historic in what was accomplished, 11 months, if this were 10, 15 years ago, this would have taken years and years. But, the combination of the exquisite science that was put in both for the MRNA as well as for the actual immunogen — or the business end of the vaccine —

KING: Yeah.

FAUCI: — was just amazing.

KING: Cause you were talking about — you were on the front lines of AIDS and, at the time, Bill Clinton said hopefully we’ll have a vaccine in ten years and, as you point out, we still don’t have an AIDS vaccine.

FAUCI: Right.

KING: But yet, we have this for Covid.

FAUCI: It was an amazing scientific accomplishment, and also the amount of effort that was put in with Operation Warp Speed to get millions and millions of doses made before we even knew it worked. That was very, very helpful in getting it done so quickly.

TONY DOKOUPIL: When we —

KING: Listen — go ahead, Tony.

DOKOUPIL: When we think about the response to the pandemic, Operation Warp Speed is clearly one of the success stories.

FAUCI: Indeed.

DOKOUPIL: And also the — the distribution of the vaccine, which happened very rapidly. As we get further from Covid, I think a lot of people, though, are asking themselves, what did we learn and what will we do better the next time? And one clear area seems to be the school closures —

FAUCI: Right.

DOKOUPIL: — which did enormous harm to kids on multiple levels and — and didn't seem to save lives. And I wonder, can we say today that is a mistake —

FAUCI: No!

DOKOUPIL: — the closures?

FAUCI: I think what was not a mistake is the actual closure because when we had to shut down that 15 day to flatten the curve, we were in a tsunami of cases. Right here in New York, you had freezer trucks in front of Elmhurst Hospital.

KING: Yes!

DOKOUPIL: Oh, I remember —

FAUCI: The [inaudible] —

DOKOUPIL: — the hospital outside my house. I'm not talking about the initial —

FAUCI: No!

DOKOUPIL: — I'm not talking about the initial —

FAUCI: No, no! I'm saying —

DOKOUPIL: — I'm talking about the depth and the prolonged.

FAUCI: — I'm going to get to that.

DOKOUPIL: Okay. Alright.

FAUCI: The issue is shutting everything immediately and we didn't shut it down completely, but essentially major social distancing and even schools was the right thing. How long you kept it was the problem because there was a disparity throughout the country, some — I mean, if you go back and look at the YouTube — I kept on saying, close the bars, open the schools, open the schools as quickly and as safely as you possibly can. But, initially, to close it down, was correct.

DOKOUPIL: I'm not talking about initially.

FAUCI: Keeping it for a year was not a good idea.

DOKOUPIL: So, that was a mistake in retrospect. We will not repeat it?

FAUCI: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

KING: But I want to focus on the word journey in your title because, as you sit here today, you're — you now have to travel with security. You, a public service officer who's done — who basically really has saved millions of lives, you have to travel with security today because even though you haven't been in this job for two years, you were still a lightning rod because people still — some of them — doubt what you say, how you did it, and the way you did your job. When — when what you always say in the book is that you were guided by science always and telling the truth and that still seems to have hurt you as we sit here today in 2024. I wonder how you navigate that.

FAUCI: Yeah, I mean, you have to stick with the science. What we've got to do a better job is to get the public to understand that science is a self-correcting process. Science is a process that allows you to gather information, data, evidence, and in the time that you have to make a decision about a recommendation or a guideline, you use the information you have. If you're true to the scientific process, as new information comes, the way it did, because clearly SARS and Covid was a moving target, then the scientific process will have you gather information and say, well, wait a minute, maybe this is the way it was in January and February, but this virus is different now.

KING: Yeah.

FAUCI: We are dealing with new information that we didn't have before.

KING: Yeah.

NATE BURLESON: Yeah.

FAUCI: That's getting confused. People think that science doesn't what they're doing.

KING: No.

FAUCI: That's the problem.

BURLESON: Yeah. And, for the American people, if we can't really grasp the science, we lean on our leadership.

FAUCI: Right.

BURLESON: And you've spoke about your relationship, and write about your complicated relationship with former President Donald Trump. He could possibly be our president again. Given that you know him, personally, from a public health perspective, do you believe he is fit to lead us if he is elected president?

FAUCI: You know, I don't want to get into what's fit or not, that — I want to stay in —

BURLESON: From public health — health perspective, though.

FAUCI: — from a health standpoint, he missed opportunities to use the bully pulpit of the presidency to tell people to do things that would keep them safe. That's what bothers me as a public health person, as a physician, who my only care and goal is the safety and the protection of the American public and their health. And, for example, he could have said when the masks came out, and the CDC said wear a mask, instead of saying I don't want to wear a mask —

BURLESON: Right.

FAUCI: — he could have said masks saves lives —

KING: Yeah.

FAUCI: — oh, wear a mask, and then, all the people who follow him religiously —

BURLESON: Mmm.

FAUCI: — would have been wearing masks.

KING: They would have believed him.

FAUCI: And it would have been the same thing.

BURLESON: They hang on every word.

KING: Early on, you called him to say, look, Mr. President, this is serious, this is — you have to be honest with the people and let them know how serious it is, and the very next day, Dr. Fauci, he's on — he's — he's saying the whole thing is a hoax.

FAUCI: Yeah.

KING: What did you think —

FAUCI: Yeah.

KING: — when you saw him say that, after you had a very extensive conversation?

BURLESON: Intimate meeting with him.

KING: Yeah.

FAUCI: I was flabbergasted. It was like whiplash cause when I was speaking to him, you know, one-on-one —

KING: Yeah.

FAUCI: — saying Mr. President, you've got to be honest with people. It will come back to bite you if you don't. We have a real problem. And I actually was convinced that he — he agreed with me. And then I went home and put the television on and he said it was a hoax.

BURLESON: Yeah. Umm —

KING: He said that he loved you. He said that he loved you, and he appreciated the work you did, but — but while he's screaming at you at the top of his lungs —

BURLESON: Yeah.

KING: — you said it's very unnerving even when you're right to be screamed at by the President of the United States.

FAUCI: Yeah, that is a fact, I have to say.

BURLESON: Yeah, we have to go, what about Biden. Do you believe he is fit to lead us for the next four years?

FAUCI: Oh, absolutely. You know, absolutely, because the first thing he did when I became his chief medical adviser, we had a conversation, literally the first day, saying we want to go with the evidence and the truth, and if we make a mistake, we correct it, but we've got to be honest with what's going on.

BURLESON: Yeah.

FAUCI: That was his first words to me.

KING: But now people blame you for Covid. There's some conspiracy that, you know, you're working behind the scenes, that there was a lab in China that you're responsible for. As we sit

here today, we still don't know the origin.

FAUCI: No, we don't. We don't.

KING: And it certainly didn't come from anything you've done —

FAUCI: No.

KING: — or did not do.

FAUCI: I mean, that's for sure. Because the viruses funded by the NIH were so distant from the origin standpoint, or we call it phylogeny, or evolutionarily —

KING: We all know what that means, yeah.

FAUCI: That's right. It's so different from SARS that it couldn't possibly have turned into SARS.

DOKOUPIL: I mean, there's a researcher named Alina Chan who's affiliated with MIT and Harvard —

FAUCI: Yeah.

DOKOUPIL: — who's a little fuzzier on the — on the covid —

FAUCI: But she's a pretty fuzzy person, quite frankly.

DOKOUPIL: — okay.

FAUCI: — when it comes to that, so —

DOKOUPIL: Alright, well, *The New York Times* published her op-ed. She thinks —

FAUCI: I'm surprised that *The Times* wrote that, yeah.

DOKOUPIL: — so you don't agree the most likely scenario is the lab leak theory?

FAUCI: No. I think that, for anybody to say it's most likely, we have to keep an open mind.

DOKOUPIL: Okay.

BURLESON: Yeah.

FAUCI: If you look at the virologists, the overwhelming —

BURLESON: Yeah.

FAUCI: — number of virologists in the country, they feel that the evidence, though not convincing —

BURLESON: Yeah.

FAUCI: — is more suggestive of it being a natural origin, though not — not a slam dunk.

DOKOUPIL: Okay.

BURLESON: Dr. Fauci, we appreciate you. Thank you for joining us. We gotta get to this commercial break.

KING: And thank you for saving lives —

BURLESON: *On Call: A Doctor's Journey* —

KING: — Dr. Fauci.

BURLESON: Yes.

KING: Thank you for saving lives.

BURLESON: — *A Doctor's Journey in Public Service* is available today.