

# The Funeral Business Is Booming. And Not Because of COVID. "Spike in Deaths in 2022"

By Alex Berenson

Region: <u>USA</u>
Theme: Science and Medicine

Global Research, November 09, 2022

<u>Unreported Truths</u> 3 November 2022

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How bad is the rise in mortality?

So bad funeral companies are starting to worry.

Today Service Corporation International, the largest for-profit funeral operator in North America, had its quarterly earnings call. SCI had another great quarter, you'll be pleased to hear! So far in 2022 the company has made almost \$500 million in profits – and its stock rose more than 10 percent today after its earnings report.

(Death is your best investment!)

# Service Corporation International



NYSE: SCI

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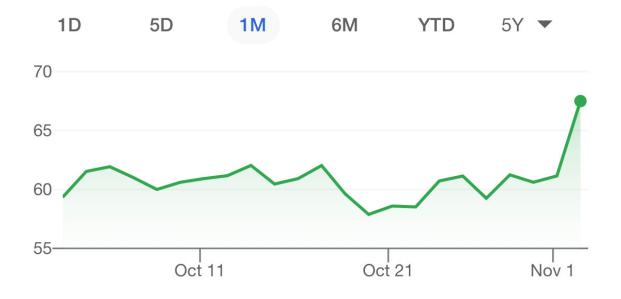
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SCI's management seems fairly open with investors. For many years, much of the company's growth came from buying family-run funeral homes as their operators, umm, died out. The underlying funeral business is slow growth and very predictable.

At least it used to be.

As Thomas L. Ryan, Service Corporation's chairman and chief executive, <u>told investors</u> <u>Wednesday morning</u>:

If you go back in this industry and particularly with SCI, year-to-year you would see the

numbers of deaths — probably in one year you may be down 1% or 2%, in the next year you're up 1% or 2% which you could predict was pretty good accuracy over a year and over a big footprint like ours what was probably going to happen... 2020 comes along, Covid, game-changer, right. We're having to do at one point of time 20 percent more funerals which is unheard of in a year versus, let's say, a year or two before.

So Service Corporation expected that once Covid passed, its business would go back to normal...

What we would have expected is, why wouldn't we go back towards, let's say, a 2019 level, maybe you get a percent or so growth of 2019, I would expect that. So that would be a reasonable level that we think would stabilize. And that's kind of what we anticipated...

Only that's not what has happened.

What we're telling you is, the third quarter of this year, we did 15% more calls than we did in the third quarter of 2019. That is not what anybody would have anticipated and that has just a very de minimis amount of Covid deaths [emphasis added] in it.





# SCI Investor Day May 5, 2022



Covid is gone. But people keep dying. Why?

**Unsurprisingly, Ryan did not mention mRNA vaccines anywhere.** Why would he? Doing so would only make for headaches he and Service Corporation do not need.

But, earlier in the call, he did point to "more cancer deaths" and more broadly a decline in overall health:

We believe these excess services are more permanent in nature into a combination of aging demographics, higher risk, less healthy lifestyle developed during the pandemic.

Ryan also suggested delayed medical care might be an issue.

These explanations are... strained, at best. Aging demographics are hardly new, and the lockdowns that drove a "less healthy lifestyle" ended as early as mid-2020 in most red states and by early 2021 almost everywhere. **Opioids and overdoses generally remain a horrendous crisis, but deaths appear to have peaked in early 2022 and fallen slightly since**. And for all the discussion of delays in medical care, hospitals and doctors

offices have functioned essentially normally for at least 18 months.

In any case, the United States is hardly alone in seeing a large and so far **unexplained spike in deaths in 2022.** Countries from Germany to Australia to Taiwan are seeing similar trends.

They all have something in common. No points for guessing what.

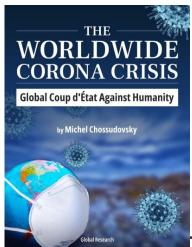
In any case, Service Corporation is expecting business to stay good for years to come.

"These trends are hard to reverse quickly," Ryan said. "I hope three, four, five years from now will subside a bit. But I don't think it's any time soon."

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