

Timeline of the Coronavirus Pandemic and U.S. Response

by [Ryan Goodman](#) and [Danielle Schulkin](#)

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What follows is a comprehensive timeline of major U.S. policy events related to the novel coronavirus pandemic. We've focused on the U.S. government's preparation for a pandemic, tracking warning signals of COVID-19, and public and internal responses when the outbreak hit inside the United States.

In our view, the timeline is clear: Like previous administrations, the Trump administration knew for years that a pandemic of this gravity was possible and imminently plausible. Several Trump administration officials raised strong concerns prior to the emergence of COVID-19 and raised alarms once the virus appeared within the United States. While some measures were put in place to prepare the United States for pandemic readiness, many more were dismantled since 2017.

In response to COVID-19, the United States was slow to act at a time when each day of inaction mattered most—in terms of both the eventual public health harms as well as the severe economic costs. The President and some of his closest senior officials also disseminated misinformation that left the public less safe and more vulnerable to discounting the severity of the pandemic. When it came time to minimize the loss of life and economic damage, the United States was unnecessarily underprepared, had sacrificed valuable time, and confronted the pandemic with a more mild

response than public health experts recommended. These lapses meant that the United States was ultimately forced to make more drastic *economic* sacrifices to catch up to the severity of the pandemic than would have otherwise been necessary.

Readers can reach their own conclusions based on these publicly available facts. If we have missed any key information, please notify us by sending an email to lte@justsecurity.org.

TIMELINE

Friday, Jan. 13, 2017: The joint Obama-Trump transition teams run an exercise for pandemic preparedness.

The outgoing Obama team runs the Trump transition team through a series of [pandemic-scenarios](#). The transition documents, [obtained by POLITICO](#), show that the purpose of the exercise is to familiarize the incoming team with “domestic incident management policy and practices” in the face of major crises.

Key takeaways from the exercise include: (1) a collective understanding of the science and the disease must drive response decisions; (2) days and even hours are paramount in order to build as much lead time as possible; (3) a coordinated and unified national response and message is necessary; and (4) “medical countermeasure strategy is key for success,” including social distancing and addressing shortages in ventilators and personal protective equipment.

Trump administration attendees [include](#): Steven Mnuchin, Rep. Mike Pompeo, Wilbur Ross, Betsy DeVos, Dr. Ben Carson, Elaine Chao, Stephen Miller, Marc Short, Reince Priebus (*resigned*), Rex Tillerson (*fired*), Gen. James Mattis (*resigned*), Rep. Ryan Zinke (*resigned*), Sen. Jeff Sessions

(*resigned*), Sen. Dan Coats (*fired*), Andrew Puzder (*not confirmed*), Dr. Tom Price (*resigned*), Gov. Rick Perry (*resigned*), Dr. David Shulkin (*fired*), Gen. John Kelly (*resigned*), Rep. Mick Mulvaney, Linda McMahon (*resigned*), Sean Spicer (*fired*), Joe Hagin (*resigned*), Joshua Pitcock (*resigned*), Tom Bossert (*fired*), KT McFarland (*resigned*), Gen. Michael Flynn (*awaiting criminal sentencing*), Gary Cohn (*resigned*), Katie Walsh (*resigned*), and Rick Dearborn (*resigned*).

Pandemic Response: First Move

- Outbreak of novel influenza: H9N2
 - Large number of infections in London, Seoul, and Jakarta
 - Efficiently transmitting person-to-person
 - *Transmission likely through respiratory routes*
- Medical services are overwhelmed across parts of Asia
- Insufficient lab capacities in remote areas make reporting and tracking difficult
- Health officials warn that this could become the worst influenza pandemic since 1918
- No reported U.S. cases






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Sometime in 2017: The Trump Administration is briefed on an Obama-era [National Security Council Pandemic “playbook.”](#) The brief is reportedly not adopted as an official Trump administration strategy.

“We are aware of the document, although it’s quite dated and has been superseded by strategic and operational biodefense policies published

since," an NSC official later states about the document in March 2020. "The plan we are executing now is a better fit, more detailed, and applies the relevant lessons learned from the playbook and the most recent Ebola epidemic in the [Democratic Republic of the Congo] to COVID-19."

The playbook, [published here](#), is designed to assist the government in a high-intensity and time-pressured pandemic response. It includes questions to ask, agency counterparts to consult for answers to those questions, and the key decisions that must be made early and often. It also includes sample documents that can be used for intra-agency meetings. The Trump administration does not follow many of the playbook's suggested steps and recommended timelines.

The document was originally overseen by Timothy Ziemer's directorate for Global Health Security and Biodefense within the National Security Council, a unit the Trump administration [disbands](#) in 2018 (see entry for May 8, 2018).

Tom Bossert, the homeland security advisor, [expresses](#) enthusiasm about the playbook's potential as part of the administration's pandemic response strategy. Bossert is fired by John Bolton in April 2018 (see entry for April 10, 2018).

March-May 2017: President Trump [proposes cutting over \\$277 million in pandemic-preparedness funding](#). Congress, in bipartisan action, rejects the funding cuts.

President Trump proposes cutting \$136 million from the Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response (responsible for tracking outbreaks of disease), \$65 million from the National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases (a center that fights emerging infectious diseases), and \$76 million from the CDC's Center for Global Health (a center dedicated to

fighting international health threats).

[With bipartisan support](#), Congress [rejects](#) the funding cuts. "Cutting the Centers for Disease Control, I think, leaves you very vulnerable and the American people very vulnerable," Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK) states in a House budget hearing. "Sometime in the president's term, you will have a pandemic."

Spring 2017: The Trump Administration stops working on an Obama-era OSHA regulation designed to [prepare health care centers](#) to combat airborne infectious diseases.

The regulation was designed to ensure the safety of workers in health care centers, including nursing homes and hospitals, during an airborne infectious disease pandemic.

Based on [federal records reviewed by NPR](#), the proposed regulation was developed over the course of six years and was formally added to a list of regulations scheduled to be implemented in 2017 by the Obama administration. In spring 2017, the Trump administration removes the regulation from their regulatory agenda, likely due to the new administration's emphasis on deregulation.

May 11, 2017: The Intelligence Community's Worldwide Threat Assessment warns of major pandemic risks.

In written testimony before Congress on the presentation of the Intelligence Community's Worldwide Threat Assessment, the Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats [writes](#), "A novel or reemerging microbe that is easily transmissible between humans and is highly pathogenic remains a major threat because such an organism has the potential to spread rapidly and kill millions."

September 2017: The Trump administration contracts with a company to create a prototype of a reusable (rather than one-time use) N95 mask.

The administration [contracts](#) with Applied Research Associates of Albuquerque to create a prototype of this next-generation respirator. The prototype development phase is for 15 months, but is subsequently extended.

December 2017: The Trump administration reportedly bans the CDC from using the terms "evidence-based" and "science-based."

The Trump administration [instructs](#) senior officials at the CDC that they should not use the phrases "science-based" or "evidence-based" and instead use the suggested phrase: "CDC bases its recommendations on science in consideration with community standards and wishes."

The Department of Health and Human Services [denies](#) the report stating: "The assertion that H.H.S. has 'banned words' is a complete mischaracterization of discussions regarding the budget formulation process. H.H.S. will continue to use the best scientific evidence available to improve the health of all Americans. H.H.S. also strongly encourages the use of outcome and evidence data in program evaluations and budget decisions."

The New York Times [confirms](#) some of the details, but says it is unclear whether the ban is limited to CDC budget documents.

February 9, 2018: President Trump signs bill that cuts \$1.35 billion in funding for Prevention and Public Health Fund at the CDC.

President Trump [cuts](#) \$1.35 billion of funding for the CDC's [Prevention and](#)

[Public Health Fund](#), established in 2016 as part of the Affordable Care Act. The fund supports programs that monitor healthcare associated infections, programs that are responsive to rapidly emerging health issues, and programs that improve public health immunization infrastructure, among other things.

February 13, 2018: The Intelligence Community's Worldwide Threat Assessment warns of major pandemic risks.

In written testimony before Congress on the presentation of the Intelligence Community's Worldwide Threat Assessment, the Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats [writes](#):

The increase in frequency and diversity of reported disease outbreaks—such as dengue and Zika—probably will continue through 2018, including the potential for a severe global health emergency that could lead to major economic and societal disruptions, strain governmental and international resources, and increase calls on the United States for support. A novel strain of a virulent microbe that is easily transmissible between humans continues to be a major threat, with pathogens such as H5N1 and H7N9 influenza and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus having pandemic potential if they were to acquire efficient human-to-human transmissibility.

April 9, 2018: John Bolton starts his first day as National Security Adviser.

John Bolton [replaces](#) H.R. McMaster as President Trump's National Security Adviser.

April 10, 2018: Bolton fires Homeland Security Advisor, Tom Bossert.

Early in the morning, Bolton informs Tom Bossert that he is [fired](#). As White House Homeland Security Advisor Bossert “had called for a comprehensive biodefense strategy against pandemics and biological attacks,” reports the [Washington Post](#).

May 7, 2018: White House proposes cutting global health budget.

The White House sends a plan to Congress proposing budget cuts. It includes cutting out [\\$252 million](#) for health security preparedness in funds remaining from the 2014-2015 Ebola epidemic.

May 7, 2018: The National Security Council’s director of medical and biodefense preparedness warns that pandemic flu is the top health security concern and that the country is not prepared for it.

Luciana Borio, NSC director of medical and biodefense preparedness, [states](#), “The threat of pandemic flu is the **number one health security concern**. Are we ready to respond? I fear the answer is no.” Borio’s statement is part of her remarks at a symposium at Emory University to mark the 100th anniversary of the 1918 influenza pandemic.

May 8, 2018: The National Security Council removes the top official responsible for pandemic response and disbands the global health security team.

President Trump’s National Security Advisor, John Bolton, [removes](#) Rear Adm. Timothy Ziemer from the National Security Council and [disbands](#) Ziemer’s unit, the Directorate for Global Health Security and Biodefense. Previously, Ziemer was the sole senior official focused on pandemic preparedness. He is not replaced.

May 15, 2018: Two members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee

[write](#) to John Bolton, President Trump's National Security Advisor, to express their concern over the recent actions "taken to downgrade the importance of global health security."

Congressmen Gerald Connolly (D-VA) and Dr. Ami Bera (D-CA) write to John Bolton, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and head of the National Security Council, "to express the deep concerns with several recent actions the White House has taken to downgrade the importance of global health security."

"We fear these recent decisions will leave the United States vulnerable to pandemics and commit us to a strategy of triage should one occur," state the congressmen, citing Rear Admiral Timothy Ziemer's departure from the NSC, the elimination of Ziemer's global health team at the NSC, and the president's proposed funding cuts to Ebola pandemic-preparedness programs. They urge Bolton to reconsider the demotion of the "global health security portfolio and reject the proposal to rescind Ebola contingency funds."

May 18, 2018: Senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio sends the president a [letter](#) saying the decision to cut funding for global health programs and disband the global health team at the National Security Council could cost American lives.

Sen. Sherrod Brown, a moderate Democrat from Ohio, writes to President Trump expressing his concern over Rear Admiral Timothy Ziemer's departure from the NSC, the elimination of Ziemer's global health team at the NSC, and the president's proposed funding cuts for pandemic-preparedness programs. Sen. Brown urges the president:

"In our globalized world, where diseases are never more than a plane ride away, we must do all we can to prepare for the next, inevitable

outbreak and keep Americans safe from disease. I urge you to act swiftly in reaffirming your commitment to global health security by taking immediate action to designate senior level NSC personnel to focus on global health security, supporting adequate and appropriate funding for global health security initiatives, and leading the way in preparing for the next pandemic threat."

September 2018: The Department of Health and Human Services diverts funding from the CDC to pay for housing detained immigrant children.

HHS Secretary Alex Azar [reallocates](#) \$266 million of funds from the CDC to the Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC) program in the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR).

The same month: The Trump administration fails to follow through with an Obama-era project designed to protect against medical supply shortages during pandemics.

The Trump administration Department of Health and Human Services receives detailed plans by a medical manufacturer to create a new machine that would have the capacity to make protective masks at high speed ([1.5 million masks per day](#)). The machine was specifically designed to handle pandemic-related medical shortages and was the culmination of an Obama-era preparedness plan. The Trump Administration paid millions of dollars to the company but does not follow through with making the machine.

September 18, 2018: President Trump issues a Presidential Memorandum and National Biodefense Strategy designed to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated approach to biological incidents.

The [memorandum](#) establishes a Biodefense Steering Committee, which is chaired by the Secretary of Health and Human Services and includes the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Attorney General, the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Secretary of Homeland Security, and the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. The memo also directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services (Alex Azar) to create a Biodefense Coordination Team and that the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (then John Bolton) will serve as the lead for policy coordination and review.

The [National Biodefense Strategy](#) outlines a high-level roadmap of the U.S. response to biological threats and incidents.. The 2018 report identifies the need to “establish manufacturing surge capacity” for diagnostic tests and personal protective equipment in anticipation of a pandemic.

January 29, 2019: The Intelligence Community’s Worldwide Threat Assessment warns that the U.S. is vulnerable to a global pandemic.

As part of the annual WorldWide Threat Assessment by the Intelligence Community, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence [warns](#) that a major disease outbreak is one of the top global threats in the world, writing: “We assess that the United States and the world will remain vulnerable to the next flu pandemic or large-scale outbreak of a contagious disease that could lead to massive rates of death and disability, severely affect the world economy, strain international resources, and increase calls on the United States for support.”

April 2019: HHS Secretary Alex Azar says what keeps everyone in the Biodefense world up at night is the threat of a pandemic flu.

Secretary Azar says that one of the biggest concerns in the biodefense world is the [threat of a pandemic flu](#).

The thing that people ask what keeps you most up at night in the biodefense world, pandemic flu, of course. I think everyone in this room probably shares that concern, and working with Secretary Leavitt, President Bush and the Congress to create the pandemic flu preparedness work that we did that really helped rejuvenate a domestic annual flu vaccine capability here in the United States revolutionized, we're not there yet, but revolutionized our capabilities and capacities around flu production in the U.S., to minimize shortages so we hopefully never go through what we did in 04 on the Chiron shortage, and then [sic] now we've got capacity, but we still need to improve our speed of production of pan flu vaccine and our capacities.

June 24, 2019: Congress passes and President Trump signs a [bipartisan bill](#) designed to reauthorize prior pandemic response programs and enhance pandemic preparedness called the [Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness and Advancing Innovation Act \(PAHPAIA\)](#).

The bill reauthorizes statutory authority for several existing programs designed to prepare the United States for pandemic responsiveness, including the Strategic National Stockpile and the Public Health Emergency Preparedness program at the CDC. The original bill was signed into law on December 19, 2006 by President George W. Bush and has been continually renewed by each administration every five years. In 2013, President Obama renewed the original bill, which requires an annual review of the contents of the stockpile to ensure against depletion.

The bill is co-authored in the House by Rep. Susan Brooks (R-IN) and Rep. Anna Eshoo (D-CA). The bill is sponsored in the Senate by Richard M. Burr (R-NC) (see Burr's summary of the bill [here](#)) and co-sponsored by senators Bob Casey (D-PA), Patty Murray (D-WA), and Lamar Alexander (R-TN).

The 2013 PAHPRA (renewed again in 2019 as PAHPAIA) required an annual review of the contents of the stockpile to ensure against depletion.

July 2019: The Trump administration eliminates an American public health position designed to detect disease outbreaks in China.

The CDC [removes](#) an American public health official stationed in Beijing within China's disease control agency. The official, Dr. Linda Quick, worked with Chinese epidemiologists to help detect and contain diseases. "If someone had been there, public health officials and governments across the world could have moved much faster," Bao-Ping Zhu, who served in the role between 2007 and 2011, tells [Reuters](#) in March 2020. Thomas R. Frieden, former director of the CDC, said that if the Quick had still been in China, "it is possible that we would know more today about how this coronavirus is spreading and what works best to stop it." However, Scott McNabb, a CDC epidemiologist for 20 years and now a research professor at Emory University says, "it probably wouldn't have made a big difference." "The problem was how the Chinese handled it," he says.

No disease expert replaced Quick in the program following her departure.

"The decision to eliminate Quick's job came as the **CDC has scaled back the number of U.S. staffers in China over the last two years,**" Reuters reports.

End of summer 2019: The Department of Health and Human Services discontinues a maintenance contract for over 2100 ventilators in the federal government's emergency supply.

The Department of Health and Human Services [does not renew](#) the contract of a company tasked with maintenance for over 2100 ventilators in the federal government's emergency supply to keep the equipment from

breaking or becoming unusable. As a result, maintenance on the 2100 ventilators stops after the contract lapses and is not renewed until mid-January 2020. As of April 2, 2020, [these ventilators are still not deployable](#) to states in need.

September 2019: The President's Council of Economic Advisors (CEA) warns that an influenza pandemic may cause tremendous health and economic losses.

The CEA [warns](#) that there will be large health and economic losses if an influenza-like pandemic occurs in the United States.

"The United States is unprepared to deliver a sufficient number of vaccine doses quickly enough to stop the rapid initial spread of a pandemic virus," the CEA reports. "Pandemic influenza is a low-probability but high-cost problem that should not be ignored. The current influenza vaccine manufacturing infrastructure in the U.S. is dependent on egg-based production that is too slow to produce adequate doses of vaccines for unexpected pandemic outbreaks and may impair vaccine efficacy. This could lead to tremendous, avoidable costs."

October 2019: The Trump administration concludes a months-long simulation, code-named "Crimson Contagion," designed to respond to a global influenza pandemic. The Department of Health and Human Services determines that the U.S. is underprepared, underfunded, and under-coordinated to fight an influenza-like pandemic.

The Department of Health and Human Services concludes its "[Crimson Contagion](#)" simulation in August. The exercise simulated a U.S. response to a fictitious respiratory virus that began in China and quickly spread around the world. The result of the exercise, contained in an [internal draft report](#) in October 2019 and marked "Draft Do Not Distribute," includes a section

titled “resources.” The section foregrounds the lack of PPE preparedness in the event of a global pandemic and problems in the supply chain for medical equipment including ventilators and other ancillary medical supplies.

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5. Resources

- The current medical countermeasure supply chain and production capacity cannot meet the demands imposed by nations during a global influenza pandemic.
- Exercise participants were not clear on the applicability or use of Title I, Defense Priorities and Allocations Authority, of the Defense Production Act to mitigate medical countermeasure and ancillary supply shortages during an influenza pandemic response.
- Application of resource scarcity mitigation measures were not clearly communicated.
- States experienced multiple challenges requesting resources from the federal government due to a lack of standardized, well-understood, and properly executed resource request processes.
- Some states were not clear on pre-pandemic vaccine or the Strategic National Stockpile asset distribution in response to an influenza pandemic.
- States questioned federal resource allocation decisions in response to an influenza pandemic.

5. Resources

5.1. Scarcity

5.1.1. The current medical countermeasure supply chain and production capacity cannot meet the demands imposed by nations during a global influenza pandemic.

The U.S. lacks the ability to produce or source some of the inputs necessary to produce vaccine in sufficient quantities to respond to the domestic requirements of a severe influenza pandemic. Further compounding this challenge, global manufacturing capacity will also be unable to meet domestic demand for medical countermeasures, including personal protective equipment and ancillary supplies (i.e., syringes), and it is anticipated that countries will keep their own stockpiled supplies for their own citizens. The U.S. also lacks domestic manufacturing capacity for the production of sufficient quantities of personal protective equipment, needles, and syringes. Domestic supplies of on-hand stock of antiviral medications, needles, syringes, N95 respirators, ventilators, and other ancillary medical supplies are limited and difficult to restock, because they are often manufactured overseas.

5.1.2. Exercise participants were not clear on the applicability or use of Title I, Defense Priorities and Allocations Authority, of the Defense Production Act to mitigate medical countermeasure and ancillary supply shortages during an influenza pandemic response.

Title I of the Defense Production Act authorizes the federal government to ensure timely availability of critical materials, equipment, and services produced in the private market

The same month: The Trump Administration cuts funding for a government research program designed to recognize animal viruses that could infect humans and prevent pandemics.

The Trump administration [ends](#) its funding for PREDICT, a program run by the United States Agency for International Development, that is designed to identify and prevent pandemics related to animal-born viruses. The project was launched in 2009 and [field work stopped](#) in September 2019 as funding ran out.

And: Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security publishes a study that [ranks](#) the United States as the most prepared country in the world to face an epidemic or pandemic, but warns that "international preparedness is weak" and that "no country is fully prepared."

The study, produced by the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security along with the John Hopkins Nuclear Threat Initiative and [The Economist Intelligence Unit](#), is a 324-page report surveying 195 countries and their ability to address infectious disease outbreaks that can lead to international epidemics and pandemics. The study concludes: **“No country is fully prepared for epidemics or pandemics, and every country has important gaps to address.”**

During a [press conference](#) on February 26, 2020, President Trump refers to the study: “The Johns Hopkins, I guess — is a highly respected, great place — they did a study, comprehensive: ‘The Countries Best and Worst Prepared for an Epidemic.’ And the United States is now — we’re rated number one. We’re rated number one for being prepared.”

John Hopkins’ responds to the President’s comments the following day by restating the original conclusion of the study: “No country is fully prepared for epidemics or pandemics, and every country has important gaps to address.” The column also notes that although the United States ranked first in five categories (prevention, early detection and reporting, rapid response and mitigation, sufficient and robust health system, and compliance with international norms), the United States also ranked 19th in overall risk environment and vulnerability to biological threats. The latter includes political and security risk, socioeconomic resilience, the adequacy of infrastructure, environmental risks, and public health vulnerabilities that may inhibit a country’s ability to prevent or respond to an epidemic or pandemic.

November 17, 2019: Possible first case of COVID-19 emerges in Hubei province, China.

Internal Chinese government data, [obtained](#) by the South China Morning

Post (in March), show that Chinese government investigators found an earlier case of COVID-19 on November 17. It is not clear that Chinese authorities knew that they were dealing with a new virus at the time.

"Some of the cases were likely backdated after health authorities had tested specimens taken from suspected patients," the newspaper reports. "Interviews with whistle-blowers from the medical community suggest Chinese doctors only realised they were dealing with a new disease in late December." From the 55-year-old patient on November 17 onwards, one to five new cases of COVID-19 are reported each day, according to the government records.

Note: A [report](#) in *The Lancet* by Chinese doctors from Wuhan's Jin Yin-tan Hospital refers to the first patient in the study occurring on Dec. 1, 2019.

Late November-December 2019: U.S. intelligence agencies warn of a "cataclysmic" and "out-of-control" disease in Wuhan, China.

The Pentagon's National Center for Medical Intelligence (NCMI) circulates a [report](#) identifying a contagion sweeping through Wuhan, China. NCMI bases its report on wire intercepts, computer intercepts, and satellite images. "Analysts concluded it could be a cataclysmic event," a source tells ABC News (in April 2020).

Intelligence community bulletins begin circulating across the government around Thanksgiving. **"Those analyses said China's leadership knew the epidemic was out of control even as it kept such crucial information from foreign governments and public health agencies,"** ABC News reports.

The intelligence reports raise alarms inside the US government because the disease could pose a serious threat to U.S. forces in Asia.

In response to ABC News and other reports in April 2020, the Pentagon issues a denial. "We can confirm that media reporting about the existence/release of a National Center for Medical Intelligence Coronavirus-related product/assessment in November of 2019 is not correct. No such NCMI product exists," Col. R. Shane Day, Director of the NCMI, says in a statement provided by the Department of Defense.

Special note: In a [careful analysis](#) of the emergence of COVID-19 in Wuhan, Josh Marshall casts doubt on the ABC News reporting. He concludes, "I think the simplest answer is that the ABC report is simply wrong. Not in its totality necessarily but in dating the original report back to late November. If it's a month later that starts to look plausible." (The New York Times later [reports](#) that the NCMI concluded that the virus was likely to spread across the globe and could become a pandemic, but without a date as to that assessment except that it occurred by early January.)

Mid-to-late December 2019: A team of government public servants in Alberta, Canada responds to reports of an "influenza-like virus" in China by increasing their emergency stockpile of hospital masks, gloves, and gowns.

After hearing about a "strange flu" from contacts in China, the Alberta Health Services supply procurement team [doubles their normal order of hospital PPE](#) in mid-December. In late December, management approves a huge new purchase, including about 500,000 additional N95 masks.

During the same time period: COVID-19 is already circulating in France, according to a [study](#) published in May 2020.

December 30, 2019: A [whistleblower](#), Chinese doctor Li Wenliang, alerts more than 100 of his colleagues about a new disease in Wuhan in a widely circulated [post](#) on social media.

"7 SARS cases confirmed at Hua'nan Seafood Market," cautions Dr. Li in a WeChat group with more than 100 of his medical-school classmates. After another group member warns that the group chat might be censored, Dr. Li adds: "Coronavirus confirmed, and type being determined ... Don't leak it. Tell your family and relatives to take care."

December 31, 2019: Wuhan officials confirm treatment of dozens of cases of pneumonia with an unknown cause.

Health authorities in the Chinese city of Wuhan [confirm](#) that there are dozens of cases of pneumonia that originate from an unknown cause.

January-February 2020: U.S. intelligence agencies issue over a dozen detailed warnings about the threat of the virus in the President's Daily Brief, and issue classified reports about the virus; senior U.S. officials begin to form a task force.

The U.S. intelligence community includes a detailed explanation of the potential cataclysmic disease in Wuhan, China—based in part on wire intercepts, computer intercepts, and satellite images—in the [President's Daily Brief](#) in early January.

U.S. intelligence community classified reports [track](#) the spread of the virus, **warn that Chinese officials appeared to be minimizing the outbreak**, and warn of global danger from the coronavirus. They reportedly issue [over a dozen confidential reports](#) in the president's daily briefing, colloquially known as the "PDB," that warn about the lethal toll of the virus and explain that China is hiding information about the magnitude of the threat.

(Note: An official at the Office of the Director of National Intelligence has denied the reports, stating "The detail of this is not true.")

In early January, deputy national security advisor Matthew Pottinger receives a [call](#) from a friend, a Hong Kong epidemiologist who informs him of a ferocious outbreak of a new virus that has spread **far more quickly than the Chinese government is admitting**. The epidemiologist also explains that the virus is **spread by asymptomatic individuals**. In ensuing days, Pottinger held the view that the coronavirus problem was far worse than the Chinese government was admitting.

Senior U.S. officials, including CDC Director Robert Redfield, HHS Secretary Alex Azar, and NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci, form a [task force](#) dedicated to dealing with the novel virus.

“Donald Trump may not have been expecting this, but a lot of other people in the government were — they just couldn’t get him to do anything about it,” a U.S. official with access to the classified briefings told the [Washington Post](#). “The system was blinking red.”

Note: The U.S. intelligence community [reports](#) continue in January and February, as the disease spread beyond China, and spy agencies tracked its surge in other countries. The majority of the information came from public sources, but a significant portion came from classified intelligence sources, according to [The Washington Post](#). In early January, the State Department’s epidemiologist gives a [report](#) to the Director of National Intelligence stating that the virus was likely to spread across the globe and warning of its potential to become a pandemic.

January 3, 2020: Chinese colleagues alert the CDC Director about the virus, and he alerts Secretary Azar.

Chinese colleagues [alert](#) CDC Director Robert Redfield on the [spread](#) of the unknown and novel virus. Redfield [quickly relayed](#) the information to U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar who notified the National

Security Council.

Sometime later in the month of January: FDA chief Stephen Hahn asks HHS if he can start contacting companies about possible shortages of personal protective equipment and other equipment. HHS tells him no. That decision causes weeks of delay.

"Azar told associates such calls would alarm the industry and make the administration look unprepared," the Wall Street Journal [reports](#).

January 6, 2020: CDC Director Robert Redfield offers to send a CDC team to China.

China [rejects](#) the offer, and Azar tells CNN (on Feb. 14) that China did not provide permission for them to enter the country.

January 7, 2020: The CDC creates an "incident management" system for the novel coronavirus.

The CDC [activates](#) its "2019-nCoV Incident Management Structure."

January 9, 2020: China publicly identifies new "pneumonia-like" virus.

Chinese researchers publicly [identify](#) the pneumonia-like virus as a novel coronavirus that is the cause of the pneumonia-like outbreak in Wuhan.

The same day: WHO issues guidance for other countries to detect and respond to the novel coronavirus.

The WHO publishes a [guidance](#) to help countries perform risk assessments and create response plans to the novel coronavirus.

January 10, 2020: Chinese officials announce the first known death

from the new coronavirus.

The Wuhan health commission in China [reports](#) the first known death from a new coronavirus. The commission reports that 41 people have the virus and that 7 of them are in critical condition. The commission advises that there is no evidence that the virus can be spread between humans.

January 11: Chinese scientists publicly [release](#) the [genetic sequence](#) of COVID-19.

Mid-January 2020: HHS employees begin drafting contingency plans for enforcing the Defense Production Act to compel private companies to produce critical supplies.

Led by Robert Kadlec, an Air Force officer and physician at the Department of Health and Human Services who is responsible for preparedness and response, HHS begins to [draft plans](#) to prepare the administration to use the Defense Production Act to compel private companies to produce critical supplies. On January 14, Kadlec wrote one word in a notebook he carries: ["Coronavirus!!!"](#)

January 14, 2020: The head of China's National Health Commission confidentially informs other Chinese health officials that "the epidemic situation is still severe and complex ... and is likely to develop into a major public health event."

Ma Xiaowei, the head of China's National Health Commission (the [top medical agency](#) of the People's Republic of China), [speaks to health officials](#) in Chinese provinces during a confidential teleconference and warns them of the emerging epidemic, noting that the epidemic is "the most severe challenge" the country has seen since SARS and predicts that the epidemic will morph into a "major public health event." This warning is kept

confidential.

The National Health Commission later [publishes](#) a report of the meeting on their website (some time in February). This memo, dated January 14, 2020, suggests that President Xi Jinping instructed local Chinese officials to prepare for an epidemic prevention response. The memo also notes that human-to-human transmission must be closely monitored and that the spread of transmission may increase significantly.

The same day: The Wuhan Health Commission publicly states that they have not found proof of human-to-human transmission.

“We have not found proof for human-to-human transmission,” [reads the Commission’s public statement](#). “The possibility of limited human-to-human transmission cannot be excluded, but the risk of sustained transmission is low.”

Around the third week of January: U.S. diplomats in Wuhan [return](#) to the United States on chartered planes.

U.S. diplomats stationed in Wuhan urgently return to the United States, and they alert the State Department that the public health risk in the region is significant.

January 16, 2020: German researchers develop a diagnostic test for COVID-19.

German researchers at the German Center for Infection Research (DZIF) at Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin [develop and publish](#) the world’s first publicly available diagnostic test.

January 17, 2020: The CDC implements health screenings in three U.S. airports for travelers coming from Wuhan, China.

The CDC and Department of Homeland Security [implement health screenings](#) to detect ill passengers coming from Wuhan, China in San Francisco (SFO), New York (JFK), and Los Angeles (LAX).

January 18, 2020: Alex Azar tries to speak to President Trump about the outbreak for the first time. President Trump ignores the warning.

Alex Azar [speaks](#) to President Trump on the phone for the first time about the virus. President Trump instead asks to discuss vaping and whether flavored vaping products would return to the market. The Wall Street Journal [confirms](#) that officials debriefed on the call said Trump dismissed coronavirus concerns as alarmist, but Azar tells the Journal that the president had never been dismissive.

“Trump’s advisers struggled to get him to take the virus seriously, according to multiple officials with knowledge of meetings among those advisers and with the president,” the Washington Post [reports](#).

The same day: Dr. Rick Bright, Director of HHS’s Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), [urges](#) the administration to develop a coordinated government response group.

Bright urges Dr. Kadlec to organize senior level meetings, called Disaster Leadership Group (“DLG”) meetings, to coordinate government response plans across the different agencies. Dr. Kadlec initially rejects this suggestion stating, “Don’t know if we HHS has (sic) outstanding policy issues to resolve” and later responds that he is “[n]ot sure if that is a time sensitive urgency.” Dr. Kadlec later convenes the DLG meeting on January 23, 2020.

From: Kadlec, Robert (OS/ASPR/IO) <Robert.Kadlec@hhs.gov>
Sent: Saturday, January 18, 2020 3:02 PM
To: Bright, Rick (OS/ASPR/BARDA)
Cc: Yeskey, Kevin (OS/ASPR/IO); Phillips, Sally (OS/ASPR/SPPR); Shuy, Bryan (OS/ASPR/IO)
Subject: Re: NCoV DLG?

Rick I think there is value to your point to level set and an informational DLG is appropriate. Not sure if that is a time sensitive urgency.

Sent from my iPhone

January 20, 2020: The United States and South Korea each announce their first case of COVID-19 on the [same day](#).

The CDC [confirms](#) the first case of COVID-19 in the United States in Washington State.

South Korea's National IHR Focal Point (NFP) [reports](#) its country's first case of novel coronavirus on the same day. [South Korea quickly proceeds to mobilize](#) vast resources for diagnostic testing, including drive-through screening centers, and quarantines.

The same day: President Xi Jinping publicly announces for the first time that the coronavirus outbreak "[must be taken seriously](#)" and that the country must impose all possible measures to contain the virus. Chinese officials also [confirm](#) for the first time that the new coronavirus is transmissible via human-to-human contact.

Reports later emerge that by this date nearly 3000 Chinese citizens were [already infected](#) by the coronavirus.

January 22, 2020: China closes off the city of Wuhan. President Trump states that the United States has the pandemic "totally under control" and that he trusts China.

Chinese President Xi [imposes](#) a "cordon sanitaire" on Wuhan by barring

planes and trains from leaving the city and restricting all forms of public transportation.

"That was like, whoa," a senior U.S. official involved in White House meetings on the crisis [told](#) the Washington Post. "That was when the Richter scale hit 8."

When asked, in a CNBC [interview](#), whether he is worried about the pandemic, President Trump states, "No, we're not at all. And we have it totally under control. It's one person coming in from China." The reporter asks a follow up question, "Do you trust that we're going to know everything we need to know from China?, to which the president replies, "I do. I do. I have a great relationship with President Xi."

The same day: Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR) [warns](#) HHS Secretary Azar not to trust Chinese authorities and requests that the Department of Health and Human Services inform Congress if the administration discovers false or misleading information from Chinese officials.

"I'm deeply concerned that waging an efficient and successful campaign against this virus depends on the trustworthiness and transparency of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), an organization with a horrendous history in these matters," writes Sen. Cotton, a member of the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI).

"As you know, in the past the CCP has lied, falsified statistics, and suppressed information about the outbreak of disease in order to protect its political standing and cover for its own incompetence. ... For these reasons, the CCP's calls for transparency about the spread of the Wuhan coronavirus are deeply suspect. ... If you have reason to believe that U.S. officials are being provided with false or misleading information about the disease from Chinese government officials, I ask that you notify Congress immediately."

The same day: An expert states that COVID-19 can be transmitted by asymptomatic carriers, "masking the true numbers infected and the extent of person to person transmission."

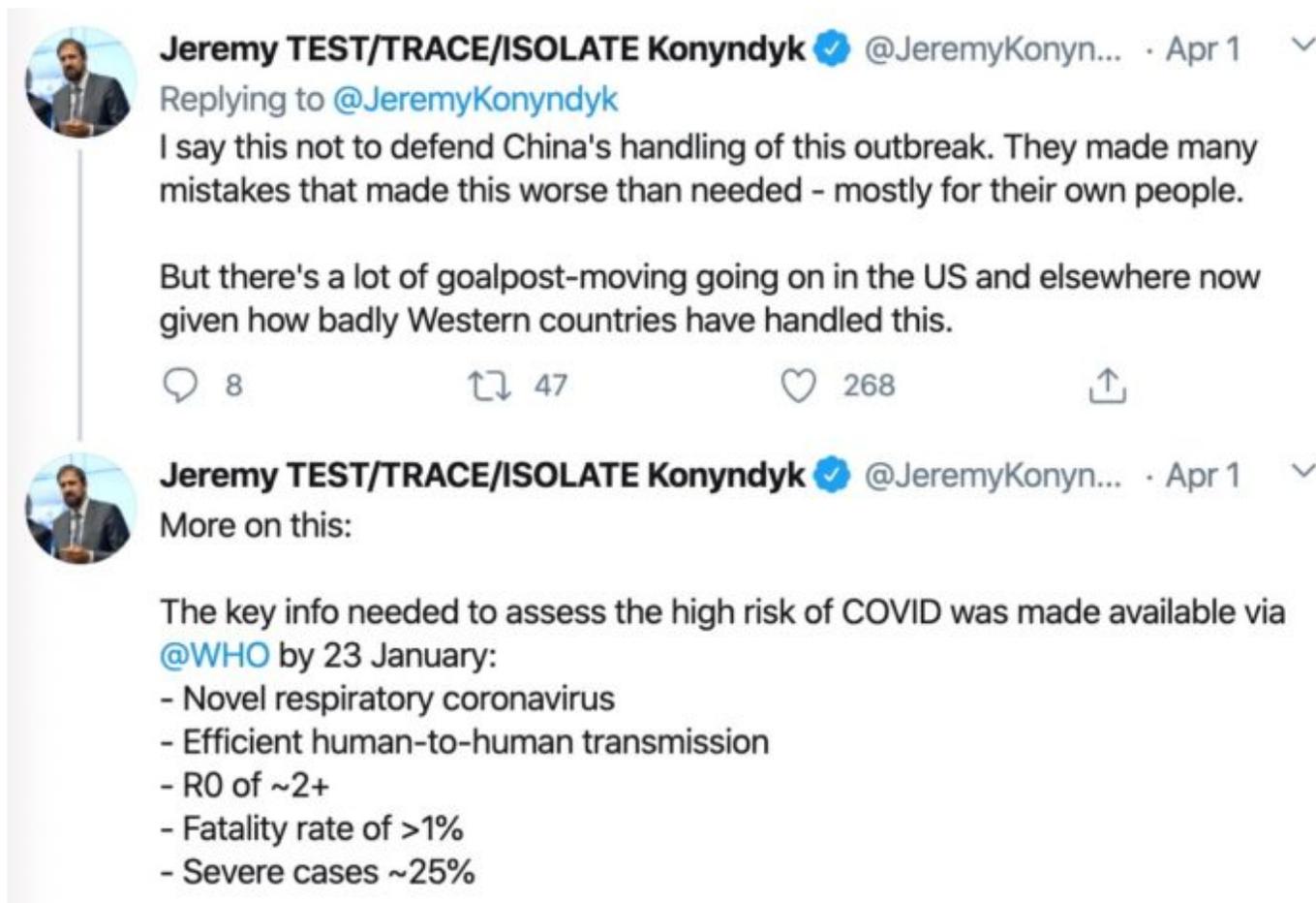
STATNEWS publishes a guide to the coronavirus, in which an expert [states](#) "It is clear some people are being affected and are infectious while experiencing only very mild symptoms or possibly *without experiencing symptoms at all (asymptomatic)*. This may be masking the true numbers infected and the extent of person to person transmission. It is a matter of urgency to work this out."

January 23, 2020: Singapore bans all inbound flights from Wuhan, China. The WHO releases a statement about the novel coronavirus that includes transmission rates, human-to-human transmission capability, and severity of the virus.

The Singapore government [announces](#) that all inbound flights coming from Wuhan are barred from entering into Singapore.

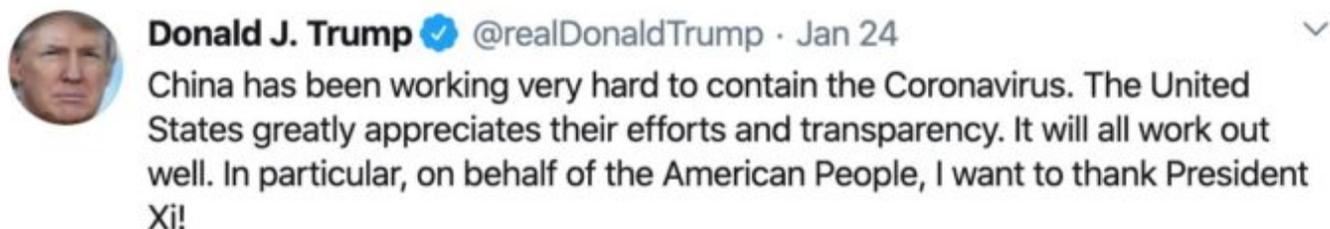
The WHO releases a statement [on the novel coronavirus](#) that includes transmission rates, the success of human-to-human transmission, and severity predictions:

Human-to-human transmission is occurring and a preliminary R0 estimate of 1.4-2.5 was presented. Amplification has occurred in one health care facility. Of confirmed cases, 25% are reported to be severe. The source is still unknown (most likely an animal reservoir) and the extent of human-to-human transmission is still not clear.



January 24, 2020: President Trump thanks Chinese President Xi for his transparency and effort in tackling the coronavirus.

"China has been working very hard to contain the Coronavirus," [tweets](#) the President. "The United States greatly appreciates their efforts and transparency. It will all work out well. In particular, on behalf of the American People, I want to thank President Xi!"



At the time, "some of Trump's advisers told him that Beijing was not

providing accurate numbers of people who were infected or who had died," the Washington Post [reports](#). Trump proceeds to publicly praise China's handling of the coronavirus at least [13 more times](#) between Jan. 29 and Feb. 29. These include Trump's [rejecting](#) the idea that China was covering up the full extent of coronavirus, public statements that contradicted what U.S. intelligence agencies told the president about China at the time.

That same day: The Lancet publishes a [study](#) that finds a 10-year old boy in China was "shedding [the] virus without symptoms," raising [concerns](#) of asymptomatic carriers.

January 25, 2020: Dr. Rick Bright, Director of HHS's Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), [warns others in the administration](#) that there is a critical need for procuring surgical masks.

"Hearing face mask supply is also getting very low as China and HK trying to procure," Dr. Bright informs Dr. Kadlec. "I've alerted cip on this throughout week." The next day, Dr. Bright forwards Dr. Kadlec a warning that "U.S. mask supply is at imminent risk."

January 26, 2020: Senior Chinese health officials state that the coronavirus is infectious during its incubation period – [before symptoms show](#) – making the virus harder to contain, the BBC reports at the time.

China Health Minister Ma Xiaowei [states](#), "From observations, the virus is capable of transmission even during incubation period" of one to 14 days." "There are hidden carriers," he warns.

That same day, researchers from the Guangdong Provincial Institute of Public Health publish a [study](#) (not peer-reviewed) stating that recent clinical

evidence suggests that asymptomatic cases can effectively transmit COVID-19, making the virus potentially worse than SARS. China's Xinhua News Agency also [reports](#) similar findings (based on an interview about a cluster of cases with Sheng Ji-Fang, director of the Department of Infectious Diseases of Zhejiang University First Hospital, deputy director of the State Key Laboratory of Infectious Diseases Diagnosis and Treatment).

USA TODAY runs the headline, ["5 US Coronavirus Cases Now Confirmed; Infection Can Spread Before Symptoms Show."](#)

The same day: Dr. Anthony Fauci states on a [local radio show](#) that the new virus is a low risk to everyday Americans, but is something that public health officials need to take "very seriously."

He warns that, while some coronavirus strains cause the common cold, the ones that jump from animals to humans, like the current strain of the coronavirus, tend to be deadly and have caused serious outbreaks over the past 20 years. He expresses hope that good public health measures can contain the outbreak.

"The American people should not be worried or frightened by this. It's a very very low risk to the United States. But it's something that we as public health officials need to take very seriously.

This is a virus that has emerged and jumped species from an animal reservoir. ... Interestingly, coronaviruses in general cause common colds every season. But what happened about 18 years ago in 2002 was that a coronavirus jumped species from an animal reservoir to humans in China and started infecting people with serious pulmonary disease. There were 8000 cases and about 75 hundred deaths. That was SARs. Then, in 2012, we had another similar outbreak of another coronavirus that jumped species and infected men and women in the Middle East and

that was called MERS, or the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome. And now, for the third time, we have a coronavirus in China that apparently jumped species from some animal reservoir, infected people, and now we have an evolving situation of many cases that are now evolving more and more each day. ...

We have on our hands an outbreak. ... It isn't something that the American public needs to worry about or be frightened about because we have ways of preparing and screening people coming in and we have ways of responding like we did with this one case in Seattle, Washington who had traveled to China. ... It's an evolving situation and everyday we have to look at it very very carefully. It does not seem to be as efficient in the persistent sustained transmission from human-to-human. Without a doubt it can spread from one human to another. What it doesn't seem yet to be doing as efficiently, certainly not like influenza, which spreads very efficiently in a sustained way, this does not do so. Which means that, just like SARS, we have the possibility with good public health measures of hopefully getting in control of it."

January 27, 2020: Acting Chief-of-Staff Mick Mulvaney meets with other senior officials about how the Trump administration is handling the virus. The President's Coronavirus Task Force begins daily meetings.

During the meeting, Joe Grogan (head of White House Domestic Policy Council) [argues](#) that the administration needs to take the virus seriously and that the President's reelection could be at stake.

The President's Coronavirus Task Force begins [daily meetings](#). Led by Alex Azar, members [include](#): Robert O'Brien (NSA), Dr. Robert Redfield (CDC), Dr. Anthony Fauci (NIH), Stephen Biegun (State), Ken Cuccinelli (DHS), Joel

Szabat (DOT), Matthew Pottinger (Deputy National Security Advisor), Derek Kan (OMB), Dr. Deborah Birx (State Department), Rob Blair, Joseph Grogan, and Christopher Liddell.

Officials are [alarmed](#) by the absence of the FDA Commission, Dr. Stephn Hahn on the task force, which they believe hampers coordination between the FDA, CMS, and commercial labs on testing.

The same day: South Korean officials inform private companies that they should start developing testing kits.

In an urgent meeting, South Korean officials disclose information on test methods and [encourage](#) companies to quickly develop test kits promising fast regulatory approval.

January 28, 2020: At top secret intelligence briefing, senior official informs President Trump that coronavirus will be “biggest national security threat” of his presidency.

In a top secret intelligence briefing. National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien, tells Trump, “This will be the biggest national security threat you face in your presidency,” [according](#) to Bob Woodward. The message is “jarring” and Trump’s head “popped up,” Woodward [writes](#). Deputy National Security Advisor, Matt Pottinger, concurs and [informs](#) the president it was evident that the world faced a health emergency on par with the flu pandemic of 1918, which resulted in an estimated 50 million deaths worldwide, including 675,000 Americans. Pottinger also [warns](#) Trump that asymptomatic spread was occurring in China, saying he had been told 50% of those infected were asymptomatic.

(In a May 6 interview with Woodward, President Trump appears to say he does not recall the warning. Woodward asked, “Do you remember that?”

The president responds, "No, no. No, I don't. No, I don't. I'm sure if he said it – you know, I'm sure he said it.")

January 28, 2020: Alex Azar holds a coronavirus press briefing and informs the public that the HHS has been monitoring the virus since December. A Department of Veterans Affairs official circulates a [warning](#) to government public health experts about the outbreak.

He says that HHS has been [monitoring the virus](#) and preparing a response since December and that he is speaking regularly with the president about the situation.

Dr. Carter Mecher, a senior medical adviser at the Department of Veterans Affairs, [emails dozens of his colleagues in government](#) and at universities about the coronavirus.

"The chatter on the blogs is that WHO and CDC are behind the curve. I'm seeing comments from people asking why WHO and CDC seem to be downplaying this. I'm certainly no public health expert (just a dufus from the VA), but no matter how I look at this, it looks to be bad," he warns in the email chain later [leaked to the N.Y. Times](#). "The projected size of the outbreak already seems hard to believe, but when I think of the actions being taken across China that are reminiscent of 1918 Philadelphia, perhaps those numbers are correct. ... **Any way you cut it, this is going to be bad.** You guys made fun of me screaming to close the schools. **Now I'm screaming, close the colleges and universities.**"

The email chain, dubbed the "the Red Dawn String" by its members based off the 1984 movie about a group of Americans trying to save the United States from a foreign invasion, later includes: Dr. Jerome Adams (Surgeon General of the United States), Dr. Larry G. Padgett (State Department), Dr. Anthony Fauci (NIH), Dr. Robert Kadlec (HHS), Dr. Robert Redfield (HHS),

Col. Matthew Hepburn (DARPA, DOD), nine other senior officials at the Department of Health and Human Services, eight senior officials from the Department of Homeland Security, among other academics, private sector employees, former government officials and state officials.

On 28 Jan 2020, at 18:04, Carter Mecher <[REDACTED]> wrote:

The chatter on the blogs is that WHO and CDC are behind the curve. I'm seeing comments from people asking why WHO and CDC seem to be downplaying this. I'm certainly no public health expert (just a dufus from the VA), but no matter how I look at this, it looks be bad. If we assume the same case ascertainment rate as the spring wave of 2009 H1N1, this looks nearly as transmissible as flu (but with a longer incubation period and greater R_0). The projected size of the outbreak already seems hard to believe, but when I think of the actions being taken across China that are reminiscent of 1918 Philadelphia, perhaps those numbers are correct. And if we accept that level of transmissibility, the CFR is approaching the range of a severe flu pandemic. But if we assume the case ascertainment rate is better than H1N1 and transmissibility is less than flu (it is still much more transmissible than SARS), and the CFR goes accordingly (1918 pandemic range). And if we assume the case ascertainment rate is even worse than 2009 H1N1, this is really unbelievable (higher transmissibility than flu). Any way you cut it, this is going to be bad. You guys made fun of me screaming to close the schools. Now I'm screaming, close the colleges and universities.

Is CDC monitoring the blogs? One thing I'm checking each day is availability of respirators on amazon and ebay (just curious since this is an indirect way of taking the temperature of the country).

The same day: Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR) [urges](#) senior White House officials to implement a targeted travel ban on China.

Senator Tom Cotton, a member of U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI), urges Secretaries Mike Pompeo, Alex Azar, and Chad Wolf to implement a targeted travel ban on China and warns the senior White House officials not to trust Chinese authorities. He writes in a letter:

China's own actions demonstrate the severity of the threat. Beijing has quarantined more than 50 million people—the combined population of our entire West Coast—and cancelled school indefinitely. Just this morning, Hong Kong has slashed travel from mainland China. These are not the actions of a government in control of the outbreak. ... Thanks to the deadly combination of Chinese duplicity and incompetence, the virus has now spread to most provinces in China and neighboring nations.

He also urges the White House "to marshal the full resources of the federal

government to engineer a vaccine to the virus."

The following day, Sen. Cotton [meets](#) with President Trump to discuss the coronavirus.

January 29, 2020: Singapore begins screening for temperatures, enforces mandatory quarantines for travellers coming from Hubei, and restricts entry for all travelers who travelled through China in the past 14 days.

The Singapore government begins to [enforce](#) temperature screenings at all land, air, and sea checkpoints and stations healthcare teams for all passengers coming from China. The government also enforces a two week recommended quarantine for all returning Singapore citizens from abroad as well as a mandatory quarantine for all recent travelers coming from Hubei. The government bars all entry into Singapore from visitors coming from Mainland China.

The same day: Economic Advisor Peter Navarro, in an internal memorandum, urgently recommends that President Trump impose a travel ban on China.

Peter Navarro sends President Trump and White House colleagues a memo recommending that the administration [impose an immediate travel ban](#) on China. The memo includes a detailed economic analysis of the potential for loss of economic activity as well as loss of human life.

January 30, 2020: (1) A research paper published by the New England Journal of Medicine confirms the existence of asymptomatic transmission of the coronavirus. (2) Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross says the virus will be good for the U.S. economy in a Fox News interview. (3) Secretary Azar directly warns President Trump that the

virus could morph into a pandemic, a warning the president discounts as alarmist.

(1) The New England Journal of Medicine publishes a [scientific study](#) from Germany showing that COVID-19 can be transmitted by patients who have no symptoms. "There's no doubt after reading this paper that asymptomatic transmission is occurring," [says](#) Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases the following day. "This study lays the question to rest."

[Doubts](#) are quickly raised about the [study](#), but Fauci [tells](#) the New York Times (on Feb. 4), "This paper may or may not be flawed — it needs further investigation. But I don't think it negates the concept." "We had been getting reports from highly reliable people in China — scientists, investigators and public health people who we've known over the years — and they've been telling us, *'There's asymptomatic disease, for sure, and we are seeing asymptomatic transmission,'*" Fauci says.

(2) "I don't want to talk about a victory lap over a very unfortunate, very malignant disease," Ross says. "But the fact is, it does give business yet another thing to consider when they go through their review of their supply chain. It's another risk factor that people need to take into account. So I think it will help to accelerate the return of jobs to North America."

(3) Secretary Azar, along with Mick Mulvaney, calls Trump aboard Air Force One and gives the president a [blunt warning](#) that the virus could morph into a pandemic, The president responds that Azar is being alarmist. Azar also recommends that China should be criticized for not being transparent. Trump rejects the idea of criticizing China.

The same day: The WHO declares that the COVID-19 outbreak is a "Public Health Emergency."

WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus [declares](#) that the COVID-19 outbreak is a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

January 30, 2020: President Trump states that the U.S. has the virus “under control” and hosts a campaign rally in Iowa.

“We think we have it very well under control,” [states](#) President Trump. “We have very little problem in this country at this moment — five. And those people are all recuperating successfully. But we’re working very closely with China and other countries, and we think it’s going to have a very good ending for it. So that I can assure you.”

Later that night, President Trump hosts a [campaign rally](#) in Iowa with thousands of people.

Early February 2020: White House officials call for more forceful response to the novel coronavirus, but Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin resists.

[Citing economic concerns](#), Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin resists calls supported by public health officials, including Anthony Fauci, to respond more forcefully to the novel coronavirus. Matthew Pottinger, the deputy national security adviser, [argues](#) for restricting the flow of travelers from Italy and other nations in the European Union that were emerging as hot spots, which Fauci supports.

Early February 2020: Officials concerned about testing capacity.

Joe Grogan, the head of the White House Domestic Policy Council, and other officials [reportedly](#) worry that there aren’t enough available tests to determine the rate of infection.

February 2, 2020: President Trump restricts entry into the United

States from China.

The Trump administration [suspends entry](#) into the United States of “immigrants or nonimmigrants, of all aliens who were physically present within the People’s Republic of China.”

The suspension comes after [45 other countries](#) implement travel restrictions on China and includes exemptions that allow [tens of thousands of passengers](#) to enter the United States. The U.S. action was suggested to Trump by his national security team, [according](#) to Woodward’s book, *Rage*.

February 4, 2020: Senator Richard Burr, chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, receives a briefing on the coronavirus.

Senator Burr receives a [briefing](#) from intelligence officials about the coronavirus and the status of the global health emergency, including economic fallout.

The same day: China admits to “shortcomings” and “deficiencies” in its handling of the novel coronavirus.

Chinese government officials [admit](#) that they have responded to the coronavirus with “shortcomings and deficiencies.”

The same day: South Korea announces [quarantine guidelines](#).

The guidelines include 14 days of self-quarantine for people who come into “routine contact” with someone with a confirmed case.

February 5, 2020: Senators [urge](#) the administration to take the virus more seriously.



Chris Murphy  @ChrisMurphyCT · Feb 5

Just left the Administration briefing on Coronavirus. Bottom line: they aren't taking this seriously enough.

Notably, no request for ANY emergency funding, which is a big mistake. Local health systems need supplies, training, screening staff etc. And they need it now.

Note: See also Sen. Murphy's [interview](#) with the Washington Post's Greg Sargent.

February 7, 2020: The CDC sends public health laboratories [contaminated and malfunctioning coronavirus test kits](#). As a result, nearly 100 public health laboratories cannot use the test kits to test for the virus.

An FDA spokesperson later announces on April 18, 2020 that the malfunctioning test kits came about because the "CDC did not manufacture its test consistent with its own protocol."

February 7, 2020: Dr. Rick Bright, program leader at BARDA, [insists](#) that the federal government increase N95 production for healthcare workers and first responders.

HHS supply chain officials respond stating that there is "no indication of supply chain shortage or of issues with masks."

February 7, 2020: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announces that the United States has donated nearly 18 tons of medical supplies to China.

The State Department [transports 17.8 tons of medical supplies](#) to China, including masks, gowns, gauze, respirators, and other vital materials. "These donations are a testament to the generosity of the American

people," says Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

February 7, 2020: President Trump admits his knowledge about airborne transmission and the significant dangers of coronavirus in interview with Bob Woodward:

In an interview with Bob Woodward, President Trump talks about the airborne transmission. "It goes through air, Bob. That's always tougher than the touch. You know, the touch, you don't have to touch things. Right? But the air, you just breathe the air and that's how it's passed. And so, that's a very tricky one. That's a very delicate one." Trump also says, "It's also **more deadly than your – you know, your, even your strenuous flus.**" The president adds, "This is more deadly. This is ... five percent versus one percent and less than one percent. You know? So, this is deadly stuff."

(The interview is revealed only in September 2020 when audio tapes and excerpts of Woodward's book, *Rage*, are [released](#).)

February 9, 2020: Peter Navarro, President Trump's economic advisor, [submits an emphatic 2-page memo to the coronavirus task force](#) urging the government immediately to stop exporting N95 masks abroad and ramp up production, to secure existing doses of a therapeutic drug Remdesivir, and to focus on developing a program to fast track a vaccine.

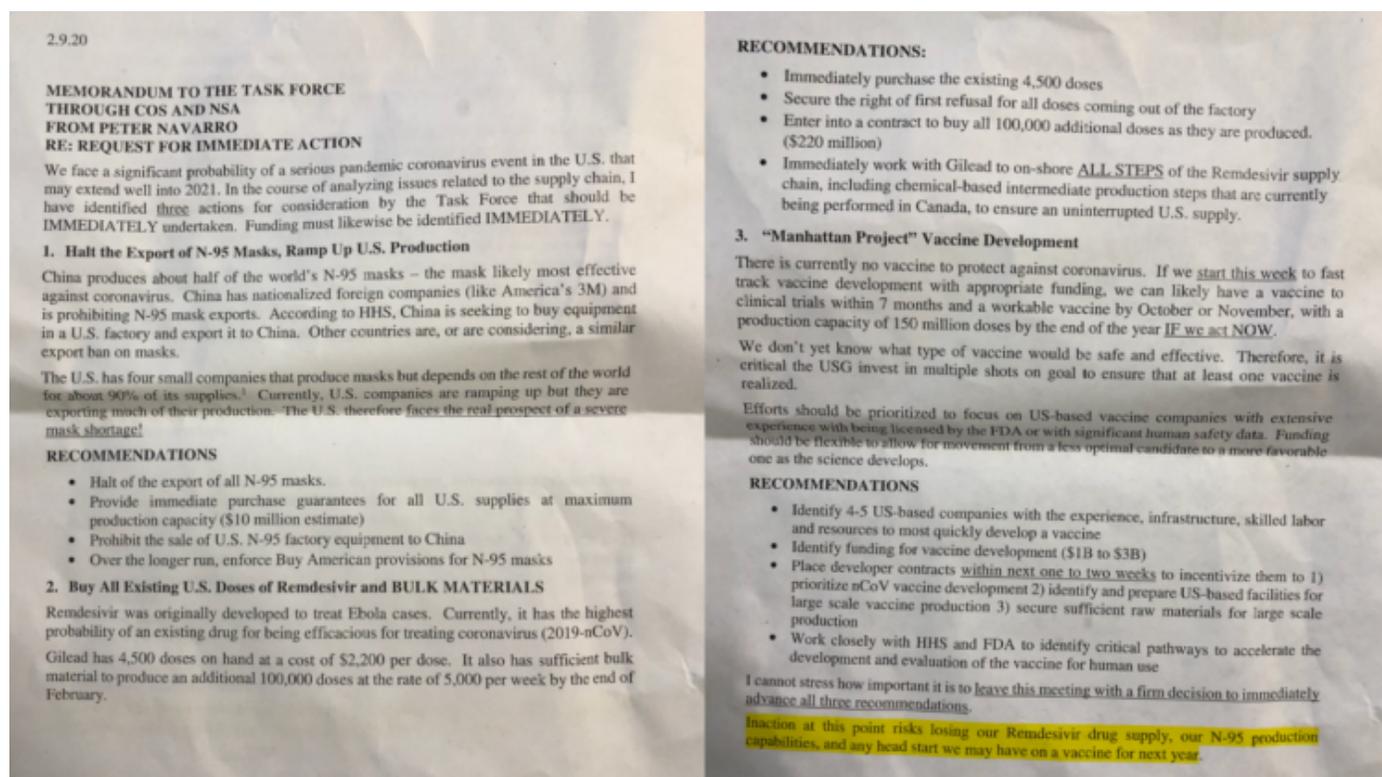
The memo is sent to President Trump's Chief of Staff, Mick Mulvaney and President Trump's National Security Advisor, Robert O'Brien. It's opening sentence reads, "We face a significant probability of a serious pandemic coronavirus event in the US that may extend well into 2021." The memo then identifies three actions that should be taken "IMMEDIATELY":

1. Halt the export of N95 masks and ramp up U.S. production of masks.

The memo states in this section, "The U.S. therefore faces the real prospect of a severe mask shortage!" (emphasis in original)

2. Secure all existing doses of Remdesivir and all bulk materials to make more and enter into a contract with Gilead to purchase all additional doses as they are produced.
3. Immediately fund a "Manhattan Project" for vaccine development.

The memo ends, "I cannot stress how important it is to leave this meeting with a firm decision to immediately advance all three recommendations" (emphasis in original). Inaction at this point risks losing our Remdesivir drug supply, our N-95 production capabilities, and any head start we may have on a vaccine for next year."



February 10-March 2, 2020: President Trump holds five rallies across the United States, each attracting thousands of attendees in confined spaces.

The rallies take place in [New Hampshire \(2/10\)](#), [Arizona \(2/19\)](#), [Colorado \(2/20\)](#), [Nevada \(2/21\)](#), [South Carolina \(2/28\)](#), and [North Carolina \(3/2\)](#).

February 10, 2020: [Contact-tracing](#) teams in Singapore begin to map out and identify coronavirus patients.

February 12, 2020: Burr receives another briefing on the coronavirus about the potential impact of an epidemic and whether the U.S. is prepared.

Senator Burr receives another [briefing](#) from intelligence officials about U.S. preparedness to combat an epidemic.

The Senate and House intelligence committees receive briefings from Robert Kadlec, the assistant secretary for preparedness and response, who is joined by CIA and other intelligence officials. Kadlec [reportedly](#) tells committee members that the virus posed a "serious" threat.

February 13, 2020: Burr sells 33 major stock holdings worth between \$628,000 to \$1.7 million.

Senator Burr [sells stocks](#) that are collectively worth between \$628,000 to \$1.7 million. Some of the stocks include stocks in hotel and tourism industries. Three other senators (Dianne Feinstein, James M. Inhofe, Kelly Loeffler) sell major holdings around the same time. Sen. Loeffler's husband also purchases stocks in a major PPE provider [four times](#) in February and March, as revealed by Sen. Loeffler's [financial disclosure forms](#).

Special Note: We include this entry in part as evidence that may indicate the intelligence assessments by that time were sufficiently precise and alarming for the senator(s) to take such actions.

February 13, 2020: Secretary Azar [announces](#) that the government will

establish a “surveillance” program in five cities which will then be expanded nationally, but the plan is delayed for weeks.

The plan is supposed to help experts measure the disease and predict next hot spots. “We were flying the plane with no instruments,” one official [told](#) the New York Times. The Washington Post [reports](#) that the plan would require diagnostic tests produced on a mass scale for rapid deployment.

February 14, 2020: The HHS and the National Security Council produce a memo titled “U.S. Government Response to the 2019 Novel Coronavirus.”

In a memo dated February 14, the HHS and National Security Council outline possible U.S. responses to the coronavirus, including what more [severe community mitigation measures](#) would look like:

significantly limiting public gatherings and cancellation of almost all sporting events, performances, and public and private meetings that cannot be convened by phone. Consider school closures. Widespread “stay at home” directives from public and private organizations with nearly 100% telework for some.

President Trump later cancels the meeting with senior HHS and National Security Council officials, when officials intended to present the memo and their recommendation for enhanced mitigation measures. “The White House focused instead on messaging and crucial additional weeks went by before their views were reluctantly accepted by the president — time when the virus spread largely unimpeded,” the New York Times [reports](#).

February 16-24, 2020: The WHO sends a team, including two U.S. experts, to China.

After securing permission, the WHO sends a [team to China](#) that includes two U.S. experts, although the Americans are [not permitted](#) to visit the “core area” in Wuhan. By that time, China had reported more than 75,000 cases of the virus.

Mid-February: The coronavirus begins to spread in New York from Europe, according to recent studies.

According to researchers at ICAhn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, the coronavirus [begins to circulate in New York](#) by mid-February. The researchers conclude that the majority of New York cases originated from Europe.

Note: As of publication, the [study](#) is still waiting on peer review. A separate team at researchers at N.Y.U. Grossman School of Medicine came to the [same conclusions](#), despite studying genomes from a different group of cases.

February 19, 2020: Trump assures the public against worrying about the coronavirus.

Trump [states](#), “I think it’s going to work out fine. I think when we get into April, in the warmer weather, that has a very negative effect on that and that type of a virus.”

February 21, 2020: Dr. Kadlec (HHS) [reportedly](#) convenes an urgent meeting of the White House coronavirus task force in an effort to determine not if but when the country would need to be in lock down to prevent the spread of the virus.

February 23, 2020: In an internal communication, Economic Advisor Peter Navarro urgently requests immediate supplemental

appropriation to combat the crisis. He warns that the virus “could infect as many as 100 million Americans, with a loss of life as many as 1-2 million souls” and “inflict trillions of dollars in economic damage.”

“There is an increasing probability of a full-blown COVID-19 pandemic that could infect as many as 100 million Americans, with a loss of life as many as 1-2 million souls,” [writes Navarro to the President](#). “To minimize economic and social disruption and loss of life, there is an urgent need for an immediate, supplemental appropriation of at least \$3.0 billion dollars to support efforts at prevention, treatment, inoculation, and diagnostics. ... Any member of the Task Force who wants to be cautious about appropriating funds for a crisis that could inflict trillions of dollars in economic damage and take millions of lives has come to the wrong administration.”

MEMORANDUM TO PRESIDENT

THROUGH NSA, COS, COVID-19 TASK FORCE

RE: REQUEST FOR SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATION

There is an increasing probability of a full-blown COVID-19 pandemic that could infect as many as 100 million Americans, with a loss of life of as many as 1-2 million souls.

February 23, 2020: Dr. Eva Lee informs HHS official Robert Kadlec in the Red Dawn email chain that COVID-19 can be transmitted asymptotically. Kadlec replies, [“Eva, is this true?! If so, we have a huge whole\[sic\] on our screening and quarantine effort.”](#) Lee confirms the reports and adds, “People are carrying the virus everywhere.”

In the Red Dawn group, Dr. Eva Lee, a researcher at the Georgia Institute of Technology, sends the group a list of insights about the spread of the virus reported in recent studies. She highlights a reference to a JAMA study of an individual who was asymptomatic and initially tested negative but spread

the virus to others. She says it confirms the assumptions of her own group's (Jan. 30) model.

In response, HHS's Kadlec picks out this specific finding and exclaims, "Eva Is this true?! If so we have a huge whole[sic] on our screening and quarantine effort." Lee responds, "People are carrying the virus everywhere." She includes a link to the [JAMA study](#) and says she also learned of the same kind of findings from the head of a Hong Kong lab on January 29, 2020.

Note: It is not clear whether Kadlec is responding simply to asymptomatic transmission or the combination of asymptomatic transmission and a negative test result. The next day, Kadlec submits a major proposal to the president for large-scale societal mitigation measures.

From: Robert Kadlec

Sent: Sunday, February 23, 2020 11:35 PM,

Eva Is this true?! If so we have a huge whole on our screening and quarantine effort.

"Means of spread: A study from AMA confirmed many of the parameters assumed in our models: A 20-year old infected with COVID-19 left Wuhan and went on infecting 5 relatives. When they tested positive, she was finally isolated, but tested negative still, and later tested positive, and remain normal on chest CT with no fever, stomach or respiratory symptoms (cough or sore throat as late as Feb 11 (time of the paper study duration). So spreading and its wide scope is unavoidable because there exists these very healthy individuals who can spread effectively -- even during incubation period -- while they remain perfectly healthy. It also showcases difficulty in testing -- negative test -- may not be the end of it."

February 24, 2020: Dr. Kadlec (HHS) gives President Trump a plan titled "Four Steps to Mitigation."

Alarmed by reports that healthy people could be asymptomatic carriers and spreading the virus, Dr. Kadlec, a top disaster response official at HHS, gives President Trump a plan. His group's report is titled, "[Four Steps to](#)

[Mitigation](#),” and they tell the president that the administration needs to begin preparing the public for historically extraordinary measures.

The same morning: senior members of the president’s economic team [convey uncertainty](#) about the impact of the virus on the nation’s economy to senior board members at a conservative think tank, the Hoover Institution, implying that the virus may be worse than what the White House is reporting publicly.

Later in the afternoon: President Trump gives false assurance that the stock market is “starting to look very good” and the coronavirus is “very much under control.” Stock markets decline sharply following news of the spread of the novel coronavirus.

“The Coronavirus is very much under control in the USA,” [tweets](#) President Trump. “We are in contact with everyone and all relevant countries. CDC & World Health have been working hard and very smart. Stock Market starting to look very good to me!”



Donald J. Trump 
@realDonaldTrump



The Coronavirus is very much under control in the USA. We are in contact with everyone and all relevant countries. CDC & World Health have been working hard and very smart. Stock Market starting to look very good to me!

4:42 PM · Feb 24, 2020 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

[U.S. stocks decline](#) following reports of more cases of coronavirus in China

and around the globe.

February 25, 2020: The US Army's National Center for Medical Intelligence raises the warning level that it is likely and imminent COVID-19 will become a pandemic. A CDC director says that community spread in the United States is inevitable and Americans should prepare for severe disruption of everyday life. Senior White House officials deny Messonnier's statements.

The Army's medical intelligence center raises its warning that the coronavirus would become a pandemic within 30 days from WATCHCON 2 — a probable crisis — to [WATCHCON 1](#) — an imminent crisis. The warning is provided in an [intelligence briefing](#) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff two days later. The center's analysis is usually shared with defense and health officials, including the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Dr. Nancy Messonnier, director of the CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, in prepared remarks, states that the [outbreak is inevitable](#) and may lead to severe disruption to everyday life. "Now is the time for businesses, hospitals, communities, schools, and everyday people to begin preparing," she adds. She says that she talked to her own children that morning. "While I didn't think that they were at risk right now, we as a family need to be preparing for significant disruption to our lives." ([Full audio recording](#) and [full transcript](#) of CDC's update on Feb. 25 with Messonnier)

During a press briefing that afternoon, Azar [seeks](#) to quell concerns following Messonnier's comments. He says the disease is "contained."

Later that night: Larry Kudlow, the President's National Economic Council Director is asked about Dr. Messonnier's comments. He tells CNBC, "We have contained this. I won't say airtight, but it's pretty close to airtight." "I

don't think it's going to be an economic tragedy at all," he adds. He also says he sees no problems with supply and availability of medical equipment. ([Full transcript.](#))

Kudlow: Coronavirus will not be economic tragedy

Hours later, Kudlow [privately delivers](#) a more ambiguous forecast of the situation to board members of the Hoover Institution, many of whom are major Republican party donors, stating that the virus is "contained in the U.S., to date, but now we just don't know."

February 24-26, 2020: Based off the Hoover Institution's meetings with senior White House officials, William Callanan — a member of the Hoover board of overseers and major hedge fund consultant — [circulates a memo](#) to hedge fund founders, senior business owners, and wealthy private investors warning that the spread of the virus may

be more serious than what the White House is reporting publicly and that the nation's health agencies appear unprepared.

February 26, 2020: President Trump falsely assures the public that the number of cases will go down.

"We're going to be pretty soon at only five people," President Trump [falsely assures the public](#). "And we could be at just one or two people over the next short period of time." He adds, "when you have 15 people, and **the 15 within a couple of days is going to be down to close to zero**, that's a pretty good job we've done."

The same day: Defense Secretary Mark T. Esper informs overseas American military commanders that they should "check in" and [provide advance notice](#) before making decisions on how to protect their military personnel from the virus.

Note: The day after the New York Times reports the exchange (Mar. 2), the Defense Department's spokesperson Jonathan Hoffman issues a [statement](#) strongly denying the accuracy of the Times' report. The day after that statement, Sec. Esper testifies before the Senate Armed Services Committee where he "seemed to confirm key details in a New York Times article," The Hill [reported](#).

February 27, 2020: HHS Secretary Alex Azar tells lawmakers that it's unlikely that large numbers of Americans will need to be hospitalized.

"The [immediate risk to the public remains low](#)," says HHS Secretary Alex Azar in testimony before the House Committee on Ways and Means. "It will look and feel to the American people more like a severe flu season in terms of the interventions and approaches you will see."

The same day: Senator Burr informs a private luncheon that the coronavirus is “much more aggressive” than the United States has seen in recent history and is probably “more akin to the 1918 pandemic.”

“There’s one thing that I can tell you about this: It is much more aggressive in its transmission than anything that we have seen in recent history,” Senator Burr [informs the private luncheon](#). The Senator had previously received private briefings as a chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee on the matter.

He counsels the group to reconsider sending employees to Europe, predicts that schools may close down, and the United States will mobilize the military to aid in the United States’ domestic response to the outbreak.

On the same day: President Trump privately complains that senior CDC official’s public warning is scaring the stock markets, and threatens to fire her. He publicly remarks that the number of coronavirus cases in the U.S. should be “close to zero” in a couple of days.

President Trump calls Azar to [complain](#) that CDC Director Nancy Messonnier’s warnings about the outbreak are scaring the stock markets. The president [threatens](#) to fire Messonnier.

Note: See also the Washington Post’s [reporting](#) at the time that President Trump was cautioning aides not to make public forecasts of the virus that might unsettle the market.

February 28, 2020: Dr. Carter Mecher emails the Red Dawn email chain and warns that the United States has a narrow window to implement nonpharmaceutical interventions (such as social distancing).

“[W]e have a relatively narrow window” to implement nonpharmaceutical interventions, writes Dr. Mecher, senior medical adviser at the Department of Veterans Affairs, based on data from the 1918 Spanish Influenza. “And we are flying blind,” he adds.

The same day: President Trump says that the virus “like a miracle” will disappear.

“It’s going to disappear,” says the president. “One day it’s [like a miracle](#), it will disappear.”

At a political rally in South Carolina, the president adds: “the democrats are politicizing the coronavirus ... [this is their new hoax.](#)”

Note: [The following day,](#) Trump [says](#) he was calling Democrats’ criticism of his response to the coronavirus a hoax, not the virus itself. [Fact checkers assess that the president did not call the coronavirus a hoax.](#)

February 29, 2020: Fauci says that Americans do not need to change their daily practices and the current risk is low, but could change.

On the Today Show, Dr. Fauci [says](#), “There’s no need to change anything that you’re doing on a day by day basis. Right now the risk is still low, but this could change.”

Here’s the full exchange:

Question: “So, Dr. Fauci, it’s Saturday morning in America. People are waking up right now with real concerns about this. They want to go to malls and movies, maybe the gym as well. Should we be changing our habits and, if so, how?”

Fauci: “No. Right now, at this moment, there’s no need to change

anything that you're doing on a day by day basis. Right now the risk is still low, but this could change. I've said that many times even on this program. You've got to watch out because although the risk is low now, you don't need to change anything you're doing. When you start to see community spread, this could change and force you to become much more attentive to doing things that would protect you from spread."

Question: "Dr. Fauci, quickly, how does this all end?"

Fauci: "You know, it ends if you — it depends on the nature of the outbreak. I mean, this could be a major outbreak. I hope not. Or it could be something that's reasonably well controlled. At the end of the day, this will ultimately go down. Hopefully we could protect the American public from any serious degree of morbidity or mortality. That's the reason why we've got to do the things that we have in our plan."

See [Politifact](#)'s analysis for more.

Late February: the CDC rejects using the WHO's Covid-19 diagnostic test.

The CDC [declines a diagnostic test made by the WHO](#). Instead, the CDC chooses to develop its own test, which it later has to recall, causing a long lag in the ability of the United States to meet testing demands.

When White House advisers criticize Sec. Azar for the delays, he lashes out at CDC director Dr. Redfield. "Did you lie to me?" one of the officials recalls Azar yelling, the Wall Street Journal [reports](#). Azar denies yelling; he tells the Journal, "That's not my style."

Azar cites a study published in the Chinese Journal of Epidemiology as the reason for not using the WHO test. The study is later [retracted](#).

Three lost weeks: It takes three more weeks for the administration's top health experts, among the rising number of COVID-19 cases, to persuade the President.

The New York Times [reports](#), "By the last week of February, it was clear to the administration's public health team that schools and businesses in hot spots would have to close. But in the turbulence of the Trump White House, it took three more weeks to persuade the president that failure to act quickly to control the spread of the virus would have dire consequences."

Sometime in March: A White House internal planning document commits about one-third of the nation's emergency stockpile of medical equipment to Kushner's plan for drive-through testing sites. Kushner originally promised thousands of testing sites, but only 78 materialized (as of Washington Post [reporting](#) on May 5).

"One White House official denied that a third of the stockpile went to Kushner's initiative, but declined to provide details," the Post reports.

Early March: Dr. Steven Hahn (Commissioner of the FDA) relaxes rules regulating whether hospitals and labs can create their own tests.

The regulations, which were activated by Secretary Azar's emergency declaration, were supposed to allow the FDA to speed up the approval process for new vaccines and therapies during a crisis. Instead, they [constrained the ability of researchers to create new Covid-19 tests](#).

March 1, 2020: Dr. Mecher warns the Red Dawn email chain that the United States "should have pulled all the triggers for NPIs [nonpharmaceutical interventions] by now."

Writing to the full Red Dawn email chain, Dr. Mecher says that the United

States is late to "[pull all the triggers](#)" to implement community mitigation strategies such as social distancing.

Dr. Eva Lee, a Senior Research Professor at the Atlanta VA Medical Center and professor at Georgia Tech, replies a day later: "**We need actions, actions, actions and more actions.** We are going to have pockets of epicenters across the country, West coast, East coast and the South. Our policy leaders must act now. Please make it happen!"

March 2, 2020: President Trump claims that a vaccine will be readily available.

"We're moving aggressively to accelerate the process of developing a vaccine," [says the President](#) at a coronavirus roundtable meeting. "A lot of good things are happening and they're happening very fast. I said, 'Do me a favor, speed it up, speed it up.' And they will — they're working really hard and quick." The president suggests the vaccine may be ready "over the next few months," but Fauci quickly interjects to [say](#), it would be "a year to a year and a half."

At a campaign rally in North Carolina that evening, the president [says](#), "We had a great meeting today with a lot of the great companies and they're going to have vaccines, I think relatively soon. And they're going to have something that makes you better and that's going to actually take place, we think, even sooner."

Earlier in the week, Dr. Fauci [had explained](#): "So although this is the fastest we have ever gone from a sequence of a virus to a trial, it still would not be applicable to the epidemic unless we really wait about a year to a year and a half."

March 3, 2020: Vice President Pence announces that the CDC will lift

federal restrictions on testing for the coronavirus.

“Today we will issue new guidance from the CDC that will make it clear that any American can be tested, no restrictions, subject to doctor’s orders,” [informs](#) the Vice President.

March 6, 2020: President Trump falsely claims that any American who wants a COVID-19 test can get a test.

“Anybody that wants a test can get a test,” he [says](#) to reporters after a tour of the CDC in Atlanta. “That’s what the bottom line is.”

Note: as of April 12, 2020, the CDC still [warns](#) that it may “be difficult to find a place to get tested.”

March 8, 2020: In an [interview on 60 Minutes](#), Dr. Fauci states that he does not recommend that everyday Americans wear masks. He explains that masks should be largely reserved for healthcare providers and people who are ill.

“The masks are important for someone who’s infected to prevent them from infecting someone else. ... Right now in the United States, people should not be walking around with masks,” he states. “There’s no reason to be walking around with a mask. When you’re in the middle of an outbreak, wearing a mask might make people feel a little bit better and it might even block a droplet, but it’s not providing the perfect protection that people think that it is. And, often, there are unintended consequences — people keep fiddling with the mask and they keep touching their face.”

He explains that the point he is trying to make is that the use of the masks by everyday Americans “could lead to a shortage of masks for the people who really need it.”

March 10, 2020: Vice President Pence announces that over 1 million tests have been distributed and that 4 million would be distributed by the end of the week.

Vice President Pence [promises](#) that 4 million COVID-19 tests would be distributed by the end of the week.

Note: as of April 12, the United States has conducted only [2 million tests](#) and states continue to report [testing shortages](#).

March 11, 2020: The World Health Organization (WHO) declares that COVID-19 is a global health pandemic.

"This is not just a public health crisis, it is a crisis that will touch every sector," [remarks](#) WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. "So every sector and every individual must be involved in the fights. ... We have rung the alarm bell loud and clear."

Later that same day: President Trump announces new travel restrictions from Europe.

In a prime time Oval Office address to the nation, President Trump [announces](#) new travel restrictions to and from 26 European countries, says that the United States has taken early intense action, and commends the "dramatically fewer cases of the virus in the United States than are now present in Europe." The travel restrictions do not apply to the [United Kingdom](#), even though the country has [among the highest numbers](#) of reported cases in the region. At the time, Prime Minister Boris Johnson also announces that he does not support social distancing policies.

In the address, Trump decides not to support calls for social distancing, school closures, and other measures in response to views of his business

friends and others, the New York Times [reports](#).

President Trump makes misstatements in his address about the U.S. policy. He states, for example, that the policy will “apply to the tremendous amount of trade and cargo.” The White House subsequently clarifies that trade and cargo are exempt from the ban.

Members of the Red Dawn email chain [criticize the president’s decisions](#). Tom Bossert (President Trump’s former Homeland Security Advisor) writes: “Can anyone justify the European travel restriction, scientifically? Seriously, is there any benefit? I don’t see it, but I’m hoping there is something I don’t know.” James Lawler (professor of internal medicine) replies, “Fuck no. This is the absolute wrong move.” Richard Hatchett (CEO of Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations) chimes in, “No justification that I can see.”

Dr. Eva Lee responds, “I was hoping he would mention about schools, government and private sector tele-work, community gatherings, things that really need everyone to actively engage in. And also extra resources for healthcare providers. We really need to protect providers who care for covid-19 patients.”

On Thursday, March 12, 2020 12:28 AM, Dr. Eva K Lee <[REDACTED]> wrote:

I was hoping he would mention about schools, government and private sector tele-work, community gatherings, things that really need everyone to actively engage in. And also extra resources for healthcare providers. We really need to protect providers who care for covid-19 patients. We must protect them because they are invaluable resources and we don't have enough. They are not like equipment that the President could ask a manufacturer to produce more.

Here in Georgai, students are partitioning the universities to do lectures online, but universities are not agreeing so far. I am sure they would listen to the President. But now they will wait until a teacher has covid-19. Spring break is a dangerous time, as we can see from Italy.

I wonder, closing all flights from Europe would mean that many Americans will be stuck in Europe. Or all those who want to come home will race and get a ticket to fly back on Friday before closing. And they will be quarantine for 14 days.

These views of the Red Dawn participants are echoed by [public health and disaster preparedness experts](#) on social media following the president's address.

March 12, 2020: A professor of internal medicine writes in the [Red Dawn email chain](#) that senior officials are throwing "15 years of institutional learning out the window and are making decisions based on intuition."

"We are making every misstep leaders initially made in table-tops at the outset of pandemic planning in 2006," writes James Lawler, a professor of internal medicine at the University of Nebraska in the Red Dawn email chain. **"We had systematically addressed all of these and had a plan that would work – and has worked in Hong Kong/Singapore. We have thrown 15 years of institutional learning out the window and are making decisions based on intuition."**

From: "Lawler, James V" [redacted] u

Date: Thursday, March 12, 2020 at 1:28 PM

To: Carter Mecher [redacted], "Dr. Eva K Lee" [redacted]
[redacted]

We are making every misstep leaders initially made in table-tops at the outset of pandemic planning in 2006. We had systematically addressed all of these and had a plan that would work – and has worked in Hong Kong/Singapore. We have thrown 15 years of institutional learning out the window and are making decisions based on intuition.

Pilots can tell you what happens when a crew makes decisions based on intuition rather than what their instruments are telling them.

And we continue to push the stick forward...

James Lawler, MD, MPH, FIDSA

March 13, 2020: President Trump declares a national emergency and promises a new website to link Americans to testing sites.

President Trump [declares](#) that the coronavirus pandemic is a national emergency. He also states: ["I don't take responsibility at all,"](#) in response to a question about the lack of available tests.

President Trump also [falsely announces](#) the development of a new website: "Google is going to develop a website ... to determine if a test is warranted and to facilitate testing at a nearby convenient location. ... Google has 1,700 engineers working on this right now. They have made tremendous progress."

Google Communications [corrects](#) the president's statement later that day:



5:16 PM · Mar 13, 2020 · [Twitter Web App](#)

Mid-March, 2020: Federal agencies begin placing bulk orders on N95 masks, ventilators, and other medical equipment.

Based on a [review of federal purchasing contracts](#) by the Associated Press, the Trump administration only starts to place bulk orders on necessary medical equipment in mid-March.

Week of March 16: FEMA Administrator Peter Gaynor [informs the House Committee on Oversight and Reform](#) that the White House did not invite him to join the joint-Coronavirus Task Force until the week of March 16, in advance of his appearance before Congress.

During the briefing, Gaynor explains that he was not not invited to join the White House Coronavirus Task Force until “earlier” in the week and FEMA did not host its first “interagency synchronization call” until March 20, the same day as the House briefing.

The Wall Street Journal later [reports](#) that Sec. Azar hesitated for weeks to involve FEMA “telling associates he wanted to keep control of the response and that including FEMA would further complicate the administration’s efforts.” Azar denies and tells the Journal that he invited FEMA’s participation in early February.

March 16, 2020: The President announces [Social Distancing Guidelines](#) to be in place for two-weeks.

The Guidelines are subsequently extended through the month of April.

Special Note: The Guidelines appear to be outdated. Even though the presidential task force later pivots to telling the public to try to stay home even if well or asymptomatic, the first line in the president’s guidelines states: “If you feel sick, stay home.”

THE PRESIDENT'S CORONAVIRUS GUIDELINES FOR AMERICA

30 DAYS TO SLOW THE SPREAD

Listen to and follow the directions of your **STATE AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES**.

IF YOU FEEL SICK, stay home. Do not go to work. Contact your medical provider.

IF YOUR CHILDREN ARE SICK, keep them at home. Do not send them to school. Contact your medical provider.

IF SOMEONE IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD HAS TESTED POSITIVE for the coronavirus, keep the entire household at home. Do not go to work. Do not go to school. Contact your medical provider.

IF YOU ARE AN OLDER PERSON, stay home and away from other people.

IF YOU ARE A PERSON WITH A SERIOUS UNDERLYING HEALTH CONDITION that can put you at increased risk (for example, a condition that impairs your lung or heart function or weakens your immune system), stay home and away from other people.



For more information, please visit
CORONAVIRUS.GOV

March 17, 2020: The Trump administration announces strict southern border controls and President Trump [states](#) that he felt like the crisis was a pandemic “long before it was called a pandemic.”

President Trump [announces](#) that the CDC will suspend entry into the United States from persons from Mexico and Canada. During the press conference, President Trump contradicts himself and [states](#) that he felt like the crisis was a pandemic “long before it was called a pandemic.”

March 18, 2020: President Trump signs an [Executive Order](#) allowing for use of the Defense Production Act, but the [president](#) and [vice president](#) make statements suggesting the administration will not use

the Act.

March 19, 2020: President Trump admits he has been publicly downplayed the dangers of the virus in interview with Bob Woodward:

In an interview with Bob Woodward, President Trump says, "Really, to be honest with you ... I wanted to always play it down. I still like playing it down, because I don't want to create a panic."

(The interview is revealed only in September 2020 when audio tapes and excerpts of Woodward's book, *Rage*, are [released](#).)

March 19, 2020: The CDC [issues](#) updated guidelines instructing medical professionals how to use homemade masks "as a last resort" if PPE is not available.

"In settings where facemasks are not available, [healthcare personnel] might use homemade masks (e.g., bandana, scarf) for care of patients with COVID-19 as a last resort," reads the [updated CDC guidance](#). "However, homemade masks are not considered PPE, since their capability to protect [healthcare personnel] is unknown."

The same day: President Trump states that the responsibility of supplying PPE to medical professionals lies with state governors, not the federal government.

"Governors are supposed to be doing a lot of this work, and they are doing a lot of this work," President Trump [says](#) at the daily White House briefing. "The Federal government is not supposed to be out there buying vast amounts of items and then shipping. You know, we're not a shipping clerk."

March 20, 2020: The Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Defense airlift 500,000 swab and sample kits for

COVID-19 tests from a private company located in Italy.

The Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Defense coordinate an airlift of [500,000 swab and sample kits](#) commonly used in COVID-19 diagnostic tests from Copan Diagnostics, a private company located in Italy.

March 23-27, 2020: Hospitals report facing severe shortages of testing supplies, widespread shortages of PPE, difficulty maintaining adequate staff, and overall shortages of critical supplies.

Principal Inspector General Christi Grimm at the Department of Health and Human Services [surveys](#) 323 hospitals across 46 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico from March 23-27, 2020. Grimm reports that hospitals are facing severe shortages of testing supplies, widespread shortages of PPE, difficulty maintaining adequate staff, and overall shortages of critical supplies. She also finds that in some cases the protective gear that the federal government provided to hospitals was expired or dry-rotted.

Due to shortage of safety gear at a Mount Sinai hospital in New York, nurses resort to wearing trash bags. Their image on Facebook goes [viral](#).



President Trump rebukes the Office of Inspector General's findings as "[Another Fake Dossier!](#)" and questions whether they are politically motivated. "It's just wrong," [states the president](#) in response to a reporter's question on the matter. "Did I hear the word 'Inspector General'? Really? It's wrong. ... Well where did he come from – the inspector general? What's his name? ... Could politics be entered into that?"

March 26, 2020: Reports emerge that there are still not enough diagnostic tests.

The New York Times [reports](#) that there are still not enough tests to test everyone who needs it due to a lack of tests as well as PPE for medical care workers.

March 27, 2020: President Trump signs H.R. 748, the "Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security" (CARES) Act.

The emergency legislation [implements](#) broad ranging remedial measures designed to curb the economic impact of the pandemic. It also modifies the FDA drug approval process, emergency paid sick leave programs, health insurance coverages for COVID-19 testing and vaccination, medical product supplies, and Medicare and Medicaid.

The same day: President Trump issues a [statement](#) that he has directed “the Secretary of Health and Human Services to use any and all authority available under the Defense Production Act” to get General Motors to produce ventilators.

GM [says](#) that the company is unaware of any order and that the president’s actions do not change plans that were already in the works to produce the ventilators.

The same day: President Trump questions whether state governors truly need the ventilators that they are requesting.

“I have a feeling that a lot of the numbers that are being said in some areas are just bigger than they’re going to be,” President Trump [tells](#) Fox News Host Sean Hannity. “I don’t believe you need 40,000 or 30,000 ventilators. You go into major hospitals sometimes, and they’ll have two ventilators. And now, all of a sudden, they’re saying, ‘Can we order 30,000 ventilators?’”

March 27, 2020: The CIA warns its employees not to take hydroxychloroquine, the medication touted by the president, because it can result in sudden death.

The CIA’s message to employees [states](#):

“At this point, the drug is not recommended to be used by patients except by medical professionals prescribing it as part of ongoing

investigational studies. There are potentially significant side effects, including sudden cardiac death, associated with hydroxychloroquine and its individual use in patients need to be carefully selected and monitored by a health care professional."

"Please do not obtain this medication on your own," it adds in bold text.

The same day: A \$2 trillion dollar stimulus bill—the CARES Act—passes through both the House and the Senate and is signed by President Trump.

The Trump Administration initially [requested \\$1 trillion](#) in relief but Congress doubled the amount.

The bill, designed "to provide emergency assistance and health care response for individuals, families, and businesses affected by the 2020 coronavirus pandemic," is the largest stimulus package in the history of the United States. The bill provides a one time payment of a \$1,200 check for individuals making up to \$75,000 per year or \$2,400 for couples earning less than \$150,000. It also includes loans to businesses, funds unemployment insurance, bails out airlines and cargo carriers, authorizes aid to states and defers taxes, [among other things](#).

March 29, 2020: President Trump falsely claims that he inherited "obsolete" and "broken" tests from the Obama administration.

Despite the virus being entirely novel as of late 2019, President Trump [falsely claims](#) that he inherited "obsolete" and "broken" coronavirus tests from the Obama administration.

At the same time: The Trump administration resists nationalizing the supply chain for PPE, causing "bedlam" in the PPE market.

“Today, I, as leader of FEMA’s supply chain task force, am blind to where all the product is,” [says](#) Rear Adm. John Polowczyk, the senior Navy official in charge of fixing the supply chain. Instead of using the Defense Production Act to nationalize the supply chain for PPE, the federal government resists doing so.

The result is a “[global supply-chain bedlam](#),” with states competing for critical medical supplies in the face of scams, logistical hurdles, and inflated prices.

End of March: Over 6.6 million Americans apply for unemployment benefits bringing the total to [over 10 million Americans](#) for the month of March.

A record number of Americans, over 6.6 million, apply for unemployment benefits in the last week of March. “We’ve never seen anything like this,” [report](#) experts. “The scale of the job losses in the past two weeks is on par with what we saw in two years during the Great Recession.” This brings the total number of Americans who applied for unemployment benefits in March to over 10 million.

April 2, 2020: The Trump administration continues to adopt an approach allowing states to adopt an uneven patchwork of state stay-at-home orders.

Multiple states continue to [resist implementing stay-at-home](#) orders as the Trump administration continues to reject calling for nationwide stay-at-home orders, but instead says that each governor should decide for themselves.

Note: It is [not clear](#) whether a president has the authority under existing federal statutes to adopt a binding nationwide stay-at-home order.

The same day: President Trump blames state governors for supply shortages in their states.

"Massive amounts of medical supplies, even hospitals and medical centers, are being delivered directly to states and hospitals by the Federal Government. Some have insatiable appetites & are never satisfied (politics?). Remember, we are a backup for them," the President [tweets](#).

"The complainers should [. . .] have been stocked up and ready long before this crisis hit. Other states are thrilled with the job we have done. Sending many Ventilators today, with thousands being built. 51 large cargo planes coming in with medical supplies. Prefer sending directly to hospitals."

Over the course of the prior week, on multiple occasions the president also tried to blame the Obama administration for leaving an "empty" stockpile, a statement that independent fact-checkers assess is [false](#).

And: Jared Kushner says that the national stockpile is not for states.

When asked about states' needs for supplies, Kushner surprisingly [states](#), "The notion of the federal stockpile was it's supposed to be *our* stockpile. It's not supposed to be states' stockpiles that they then use."

Jared Kushner thinks "our" stockpile should not be used by the states

The next morning, the [Strategic National Stockpile website is changed](#) to deemphasize its commitment to helping states in alignment with Kushner's statement.

And: The Trump administration announces that it is [finally using](#) the Defense Production Act for N95 masks and ventilators through presidential orders.

The use of the Defense Production Act comes in the form of orders in two [presidential memoranda](#). The president had previously said he "invoked" the Defense Production Act, but that apparently meant he told companies he could use the DPA if they did not produce certain products. In contrast, the Trump administration had used the Act "hundreds of thousands of times" over the past years for non-COVID products such as body armor for

border patrol agents, missiles, and drones, the New York Times [reports](#).

Late March-early April 2020: Several states, including [California](#), [New Jersey](#), [Michigan](#), and [New York](#), issue orders requiring nursing homes to admit recovering patients to dedicated COVID-19 units.

Early April 2020: FEMA reportedly seizes PPE from states.

[California](#), [Florida](#), [Illinois](#), [Kentucky](#), [Massachusetts](#), [New Jersey](#), among [other states](#) report that the federal government is seizing their PPE supplies.

FEMA denies the charges [stating](#), "FEMA and Customs Border Patrol (CBP) are working together to prevent fraud when PPE and medical supplies enter the United States from overseas. PPE being distributed internally within the United States is not being seized or re-routed by FEMA. Reports of FEMA seizing or re-routing supplies are FALSE."

April 3, 2020: President Trump says the coronavirus is going away.

During a coronavirus task force [briefing](#), Trump states, "I said it's going away and it is going away."

April 5, 2020: President Trump tells Woodward of his views on the continuing danger of the virus:

In an interview with Bob Woodward, Trump says, "It's a horrible thing. It's unbelievable."

(The interview is revealed only in September 2020 when audio tapes and excerpts of Woodward's book, *Rage*, are [released](#).)

April 6, 2020: Deaths from COVID-19 become the [leading cause of](#)

death in the United States.

April 7, 2020: President Trump removes Department of Defense inspector general who was in charge of overseeing the \$2 trillion coronavirus relief package.

President Trump removes Glenn Fine as the chair of the Inspector General of the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee, a committee in charge of overseeing the \$2 trillion coronavirus relief package. Fine was nominated to the position by his fellow inspector general colleagues. In response to questions on the matter, President Trump [insinuates](#) that there are a lot of inspector generals left over from the Obama administration and that there are reports of bias.

Note: Glenn Fine was first appointed as Inspector General of the Department of Justice by [President Bill Clinton in 2000](#) and served in that capacity through both the Bush and Obama administrations.

The same day: President Trump threatens to withhold money from the WHO. He also suggests that the WHO may have adverse political motivations and is "China-centric."

The president states at a [Coronavirus Task Force Press Briefing](#):

"The WHO, that's the World Health Organization, receives vast amounts of money from the United States. ... **They've been wrong about a lot of things. And they had a lot of information early and they didn't want to — they're very — they seem to be very China-centric.** And we have to look into that. So we're going to look into it.

.... But we want to look into it — World Health Organization — because they really are — they called it wrong. They called it wrong. They really — they missed the call. They could have called it months earlier. They

would have known, and they should have known. And they probably did know, so we'll be looking into that very carefully. **And we're going to put a hold on money spent to the WHO. We're going to put a very powerful hold on it, and we're going to see. It's a great thing if it works, but when they call every shot wrong, that's no good."**

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus [responds one day later](#): "The goal of all countries should be to save their people. Don't politicize this virus ... No need to use COVID to score political points. You have many other ways to prove yourselves."

April 8, 2020: A "volunteer" in Jared Kushner's coronavirus response group [submits a complaint](#) to the House Oversight Committee about the group. The group is tasked with securing PPE for hospitals and consists of about a [dozen private industry volunteers](#), many of whom have little relevant experience.

"Americans are facing a crisis of tragic proportions and there is an urgent need for an effective, efficient and bold response. . . . From my few weeks as a volunteer, I believe we are falling short," states the complaint.

The [complaint](#) alleges that the group is under-qualified, under-staffed, resorts to favoritism when awarding contracts, and uses personal emails, which contributed to their having little success in helping the government secure PPE or develop manufacturer relationships. "None of the volunteers had relationships with manufacturers or a clear understanding of customs requirements or Food and Drug Administration rules," according to the Washington Post which obtained the complaint. Volunteers involved in the PPE supply chain were given instructions to fast-track leads conservative journalists and Fox News hosts friendly to President Trump.

Six other administration officials later confirm key elements of the

complaint. The volunteer team includes members from McKinsey, Bain, Insight, and other private firms.

April 8, 2020: State governors consider creating a multi-state consortium to supply PPE.

Citing [concerns over state competition](#), egregious [price gouging](#), and general confusion as to how to secure PPE from the federal government, the National Governors Association announces that they are discussing creating a cooperative consortium of states to purchase and distribute supplies across the country.

"I'm bidding on a machine that Illinois is bidding on and California is bidding on and Florida is bidding on. We're all bidding up each other," [says](#) New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo at a briefing. "I'm trying to figure out how to do business with China where I have no natural connection as a state. And every state has to scramble to find business connections with China. It was crazy, that can't happen again."

April 9, 2020: The House Oversight and Reform Committee releases [federal documents](#) showing that the national stockpile of personal protective equipment is almost empty.

HHS spokeswoman Katie McKeogh [states](#) that the remaining stockpile (10% is left) will be kept in reserve to support federal response efforts. On March 31, Connecticut's Governor had [said](#), "It was disturbing today to find out that the national strategic stockpile is now empty," and that the state was "on its own" trying to secure ventilators and masks.

April 10, 2020: The date marks a full year that the administration has existed [without a Senate-confirmed secretary of homeland security](#), a cabinet position with a central role in pandemic response.

The president has not yet named a nominee for the post.

April 10, 2020: In a press conference, President Trump's answer to a reporter's question suggests the president confuses the coronavirus with multi-drug resistant bacteria.

"The germ has gotten brilliant" Donald Trump

April 12, 2020: Dr. Fauci states that "no one is going to deny" that earlier mitigation efforts would have saved lives.

"Obviously you could logically say that if you had a process that was ongoing and started mitigation earlier, [you could have saved lives](#). Obviously no one is going to deny that," says Dr. Fauci on CNN this past Sunday night. "If we had, right from the very beginning shut everything down, it may have been different. But there was a lot of push back for shutting everything down back then."

Tapper asks Fauci: Do you think lives could have been saved?

April 13, 2020: President Trump tells Woodward of the continuing dangers of the virus:

Trump tells Woodward, "It's so easily transmissible, you wouldn't even believe it."

(The interview is revealed only in September 2020 when audio tapes and excerpts of Woodward's book, *Rage*, are [released](#).)

April 13, 2020: Governors on the west coast and northeast announce interstate coalitions to coordinate reopening their regions.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo announces the formation of a [7-state coalition](#) to coordinate the reopening of the northeast region. The coalition includes Republican and Democratic governors from Connecticut,

Delaware, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island.

The Governors of California, Oregon, and Washington announce a similar joint regional framework called the [Western States Pact](#). In this pact, the three states agree to work together to reopen their communities using the following three principles: (1) residents' health comes first, (2) health outcomes and science – not politics – will guide decisions, and (3) the states will only be effective by working together.

April 14, 2020: The Justice Department [intervenes](#) on behalf of a small Mississippi church in a lawsuit challenging the city of Greenville's public health order that restricts church gatherings due to the pandemic.

The DOJ [states](#): "The United States has a substantial interest in the preservation of its citizens' fundamental right to the free exercise of religion, expressly protected by the First Amendment. ... There is no pandemic exception ... to the fundamental liberties the Constitution safeguards. ... The facts alleged in the complaint strongly suggest that the city's actions target religious conduct. If proven, these facts establish a free exercise violation unless the city demonstrates that its actions are neutral and apply generally to nonreligious and religious institutions or satisfies the demanding strict scrutiny standard."

The Justice Department's actions come days after Attorney General Barr, in a Fox News [interview](#) (on Apr. 8), said his department will "be keeping a careful eye" on whether states violate Americans' constitutional rights through public health measures to address the pandemic.

The same day: President Trump halts WHO funding pending the administration's investigation into the way the organization has

handled the coronavirus pandemic. The president does so despite an internal State Department memo, leaked to ProPublica, urging the President not to halt funding the WHO because doing so undermines the U.S. ability to address global urgent needs and the U.S. role as a global health leader.

President Trump [states](#) that he will [stop funding](#) the WHO "to assess the World Health Organization's role in severely mismanaging and covering up the spread of the coronavirus."

He continues: "One of the most dangerous and costly decisions from the WHO was its disastrous decision to oppose travel restrictions from China and other nations. They were very much opposed to what we did. Fortunately, I was not convinced and suspended travel from China, saving untold numbers of lives. Thousands and thousands of people would have died. Had other nations likewise suspended travel from China countless lives would have been saved. ... The reality is that the WHO failed to adequately obtain, vet and share information in a timely and transparent fashion. ... The WHO has not addressed a single one of these concerns nor provided an explanation that acknowledges its own mistakes, of which there were many. ... It would have been so easy to be truthful and so much death has been caused by their mistakes"

"We will continue to engage with the WHO to see it can make meaningful reforms. For the time being, we will redirect global health ... and we'll be discussing with other countries and influential global health partners what we do with all that money that goes to the WHO."

State Department officials [warn against this action](#) in a draft memo leaked to ProPublica.

"Current discussions regarding pausing U.S. assistance to the WHO to

combat the pandemic risks not only further undermining our ability to help host governments address urgent needs, but also undermines the U.S. narrative of a long-standing partner at precisely the time posts are most reliant on that narrative."

April 15, 2020: The White House [installs](#) "Trump loyalist" and longtime friend of Roger Stone, Michael Caputo, to serve as assistant secretary for public affairs at HHS.

April 16, 2020: President Trump announces his [Guidelines for Opening Up American Again](#).

The guidelines propose a three-phase approach to opening up the country, which would be implemented at the discretion of each state governor on a statewide or county-by-county basis.

April 18, 2020: Jared Kushner [tells](#) Bob Woodward privately that the United States is now in a "comeback phase." He explains, "Trump's now back in charge. It's not the doctors."

Trump is "**getting the country back from the doctors,**" Kushner tells Woodward. Kushner explains that the country is in a "negotiated settlement" that will lead a transition from a "panic phase" to a "pain phase" to a "comeback phase."

He goes on to say that, "The most dangerous people around the President are over-confident idiots" who've been replaced with "more thoughtful people who kind of know their place."

April 21, 2020: The Trump Administration [removes](#) the Director of the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), Dr. Rick Bright, from his post. A day later, Dr. Bright, still a U.S. official,

publicly states that he believes he was removed from his post because he “resisted efforts to fund potentially dangerous drugs promoted by those with political connections” ([full statement](#)).

“I believe this transfer was in response to my insistence that the government invest the billions of dollars allocated by Congress to address the Covid-19 pandemic into safe and scientifically vetted solutions, and not in drugs, vaccines and other technologies that lack scientific merit,” he [tells the New York Times](#). “I am speaking out because to combat this deadly virus, science — not politics or cronyism — has to lead the way. ... Specifically, and contrary to misguided directives, **I limited the broad use of chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine, promoted by the administration as a panacea, but which clearly lack scientific merit.**”

The director of BARDA reports directly to the HHS Secretary for Preparedness and Response, Dr. Robert Kadlec. Recently, there were [reports of clashes](#) between the two men.

April 22, 2020: In “recent weeks,” [reportedly](#) out of frustration with Sec. Azar’s lack of agency coordination, the director of the White House Domestic Policy Council convenes his own meetings with HHS agency leaders.

The same day: Citing economic concerns, President Trump suspends immigration into the United States. Steven Miller, a senior advisor to the President and key architect of President Trump’s immigration policy, tells conservative allies in a confidential call that this proclamation will reduce immigration beyond the coronavirus.

President Trump [announces a 60-day ban on immigration](#) into the United States. Titled, “Proclamation Suspending Entry of Immigrants Who Present Risk to the U.S. Labor Market During the Economic Recovery Following the

COVID-19 Outbreak," the executive action cites concerns about "disadvantaged and unemployed Americans from the threat of competition for scarce jobs" as well as strained healthcare resources. It excludes people who are already in the United States, guest workers, "any alien whose admittance would be in the national interest," and others.

In a [leaked phone recording](#) the same week, Stephen Miller, a senior advisor to the President and key architect of President Trump's immigration platform, tells conservative allies that, "**the most important thing is to turn off the faucet of new immigrant labor.**" He adds,

"As a numerical proposition, when you suspend the entry of a new immigrant from abroad, you're also reducing immigration further because the chains of follow-on migration that are disrupted. So the benefit to American workers compounds with time."

April 23, 2020: President Trump suggests checking whether the ingestion of disinfectants could help treat the coronavirus.

At the daily [Coronavirus Task Force Press Briefing](#), President Trump discusses injecting disinfectants into the body:

"And then I see the disinfectant, where it knocks it out in a minute. One minute. And is there a way we can do something like that, by injection inside or almost a cleaning. Because you see it gets in the lungs and it does a tremendous number on the lungs. So it would be interesting to check that. So, that, you're going to have to use medical doctors with. But it sounds — it sounds interesting to me."

White House officials [tell](#) the New York Times that it was one of the worst days in one of the worst weeks of Trump's presidency.

Watch: Donald Trump suggests injecting disinfectant to treat COVID-19

A day later, the president states he was being [sarcastic](#) “to reporters ... just to see what would happen.” Multiple [fact checkers](#), and Fox News [hosts](#), assess the President is [lying](#) or otherwise [not telling the truth](#) in claiming he was being sarcastic.

April 27, 2020: Attorney General Bill Barr instructs all 94 United States Attorney Offices to monitor state and local emergency responses that violate “the constitutional rights and civil liberties of individual citizens.” He says that the Department will bring cases in federal court against “overreach” by state and localities.

In a 2-page memo titled, “[Balancing Public Safety with the Preservation of Civil Rights](#),” Attorney General Barr directs all 94 United States Attorney Offices to “be on the lookout for state and local directives that could be

violating the constitutional rights and civil liberties of individual citizens.”

Barr directs United States Attorney’s Offices to monitor state and local directives that violate the First Amendment and other federal statutes, including actions that discriminate against religious institutions and believers, that discriminate against disfavored speech, and that unduly interfere with the national economy.

“If a state or local ordinance crosses the line from an appropriate exercise of authority to stop the spread of COVID19 into an overbearing infringement of constitutional and statutory protections, the Department of Justice may have an obligation to address that overreach in federal court,” he cautions. “[T]he Constitution is not suspended in times of crisis. We must therefore be vigilant to ensure its protections are preserved, at the same time that the public is protected.”

Note: See also April 14, 2020 entry about the Justice Department’s intervening on behalf of a Mississippi church in a lawsuit challenging a city public health order.

April 29, 2020: Bloomberg reports that the Trump Administration is working on a program to speed up the development of a vaccine . The program is called “[Operation Warp Speed](#).”

The Trump Administration is working on a program—called Operation Warp Speed—to accelerate the development of a vaccine. Financed by the government, the program brings together private pharmaceutical companies, government agencies, and the military to condense the amount of time vaccine development typically requires.

This kind of program has never been done before. Michael Caputo, a spokesperson for the Department of Health and Human services, says that

the president refused to accept the timeline for standard vaccine development.

If successful, vaccines could be available by the end of the year, instead of by next summer.

April 30, 2020: The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) [announces](#) that there is “wide scientific consensus that the COVID-19 virus was not manmade or genetically modified.”

In a press release, the ODNI states that:

The entire Intelligence Community has been consistently providing critical support to U.S. policymakers and those responding to the COVID-19 virus, which originated in China. The Intelligence Community also concurs with the wide scientific consensus that the COVID-19 virus was not manmade or genetically modified.

As we do in all crises, the Community’s experts respond by surging resources and producing critical intelligence on issues vital to U.S. national security. The IC will continue to rigorously examine emerging information and intelligence to determine whether the outbreak began through contact with infected animals or if it was the result of an accident at a laboratory in Wuhan.

May 1, 2020: The White House [replaces](#) the top inspector general of the Department of Health of Human Services.

The Trump administration replaces HHS’s principal deputy inspector general Christi Grimm, who published a [report](#) criticizing the administration’s response to the coronavirus (seen entry for March 23-27, 2020). She had previously reported, after surveying hundreds of hospitals,

that there were severe shortages of testing supplies, widespread shortages of PPE, difficulty maintaining adequate staff, and overall shortages of critical supplies.

Previously, President Trump had [questioned](#) whether Grimm's report was politically motivated and possibly false during a White House press briefing. He later [tweeted](#), "Why didn't the I.G., who spent 8 years with the Obama Administration (Did she Report on the failed H1N1 Swine Flu debacle where 17,000 people died?), want to talk to the Admirals, Generals, V.P. & others in charge, before doing her report. Another Fake Dossier!"

May 5, 2020: Dr. Rick Bright [files a whistleblower complaint](#), alleging "an abuse of authority or gross mismanagement" by the Department of Health and Human Services and other senior administration officials.

In his complaint, he alleges that administration officials violated [The Procurement Integrity Act](#), grossly mismanaged their coronavirus response, committed a gross waste of funds, abused their authority, committed acts that are substantial and specific dangers to public health and safety, and censored information related to scientific research. He adds that Dr. Robert Kadlec and other senior White House officials ignored his warnings in mid-January about supply chain shortages and the critical need to fast-track development on a vaccine.

He also says that he was concerned that the administration funded "potentially dangerous drugs promoted by those with political connections" and that he raised these concerns to other government officials, but that no action was taken at the time and he was subject to retaliation.

The complaint says, "President Trump falsely stated during a White House

press conference that clinical trials of chloroquine and/or hydroxychloroquine were producing ‘very, very encouraging early results’ and promised the American public that his Administration was ‘going to be able to make [chloroquine and/or hydroxychloroquine] available almost immediately.’ It also states, “Dr. Bright felt powerless to protect the public from this potentially toxic chemical that HHS, at President Trump’s insistence, was touting as a safe treatment.”

The [89-page complaint](#) (plus [exhibits](#)) includes multiple private and confidential emails and memos as evidence.

May 7, 2020: The Trump administration [shelves](#) a document created by the nation’s top disease investigators with step-by-step advice to local authorities on how and when to reopen public places. Agency scientists were told the guidance “would never see the light of day.”

An anonymous official leaks the [17-page report](#) titled, “Guidance for Implementing the Opening Up America Again Framework.” It was originally supposed to be published on Friday, May 1.

The same day: An internal “For Official Use Only” daily report of the Coronavirus Task Force shows that coronavirus infection rates are rising in many areas of the United States.

Several cities report over 70% increases in coronavirus cases over the last week, including Nashville, Tennessee; Des Moines, Iowa; Amarillo, Texas; Central City, Kentucky. Other cities are put on a “watch list” for increasing surges, including Charlotte, North Carolina; Kansas City, Missouri; Omaha and Lincoln, Nebraska; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Montgomery, Alabama; Columbus, Ohio; and Phoenix, Arizona.

Several days later, on May 11, President Trump [falsely declares](#) that the

number of coronavirus cases is “dropping around our country very, very substantially.”

May 8, 2020: The [Office of Special Counsel](#), an independent and prosecutorial agency within the government, recommends reinstating Dr. Rick Bright as Director of BARDA because there are “reasonable grounds to believe” that the Department of Health and Human Services violated the Whistleblower Protection Act by removing Dr. Bright from his position.

May 12, 2020: Dr. Anthony Fauci [testifies](#) remotely before the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee [along with](#) Dr. Robert Redfield (CDC), Admiral Brett P. Giroir (HHS), and Stephen Hahn (FDA). In his testimony, he states that the United States does not have total control of the outbreak and warns against prematurely opening up the economy.

At a hearing titled “COVID-19: Safely Getting Back to Work and Back to School,” Dr. Fauci stresses that reopening states without following federal guidelines could lead to more outbreaks. “I think we are going in the right direction, but the right direction does not mean we have, by any means, total control of this outbreak,” he warns. “If some areas, cities, states or what have you jump over those various checkpoints and prematurely open up, my concern is that we will start to see little spikes that might turn into outbreaks. Which paradoxically might actually set you back, not only leading to some suffering and death that could be avoided but could even set you back on the road to trying to get economic recovery.”

Dr. Fauci also warns against assuming children are immune to the virus, stating:

I think we better be careful, if we are not cavalier, in thinking that children

are completely immune to the deleterious effects. ... You're right in the numbers that children in general do much, much better than adults and the elderly and particularly those with underlying conditions. But I am very careful, and hopefully humble in knowing that I don't know everything about this disease. And that's why I'm very reserved in making broad predictions.

The same day: President Trump [criticizes](#) Dr. Fauci's testimony in front of the Senate HELP Committee saying that Dr. Fauci "wants to play all sides of the equation" and that his answer about schools not opening is not an "acceptable" answer.

"[Dr. Fauci] wants to play all sides of the equation. I think we're going to have a tremendous fourth quarter," [states the President during a media briefing](#) in response to a question about Dr. Fauci's warnings to the Senate HELP Committee earlier in the day. "[W]e are opening our country. People want it open. The schools are going to be open."

He continues:

"I was surprised by his answer, actually because, you know, it's just—to me, it's not an acceptable answer, especially when it comes to schools. ... This is a disease that attacks age and it attacks health and if you have a heart problem, if you have diabetes, if you're a certain age, it's certainly much more dangerous. But with the young children, I mean, and students, it is really just take a look at the statistics, it is pretty amazing."

May 14, 2020: Dr. Rick Bright [testifies](#) in front of the House Subcommittee on Health within the House Committee on Energy and Commerce urging the government to adopt a unified national response to the pandemic.

In his [prepared testimony](#), Dr. Bright states that the U.S. “missed early warning signals” and “forgot important pages from our pandemic playbook.” He warns that the virus could “eclipse the devastation” wrought by the 1918 pandemic, which claimed over 50 million lives. In response, Dr. Bright urges the government to implement a nation coordinated strategy using the “best scientific minds.” Dr. Bright recommends increasing PPE supplies, eliminating state competition by creating a national standard of procurement and distribution, and implementing a coordinated testing strategy. He warns, “If we fail to develop a national coordinated response, based in science, I fear the pandemic will get far worse and be prolonged, causing unprecedented illness and fatalities.”

In response to [questions from representatives](#), Dr. Bright states that he believes that the United States “still do[es] not have a standardized and coordinated plan” to combat the virus. He also states that he believes that “the best scientific advice and guidance was not being conveyed to the American public” in the early days of the government’s response to the pandemic. He testifies:

“By not telling America the truth ... people were not as prepared as they could have been and should have been ... We did not forewarn people. We did not train people. We did not educate them on social distancing and wearing a mask as we should have in January and February.”

The same morning, President Trump [tweets](#):

“I don’t know the so-called Whistleblower Rick Bright, never met him or even heard of him, but to me he is a disgruntled employee, not liked or respected by people I spoke to and who, with his attitude, should no longer be working for our government!”

May 18, 2020: A WHO independent oversight committee releases an

interim [report](#) on the WHO response to COVID-19, noting “significant” progress in WHO’s health emergency management response since reforms implemented in 2016 but also recommending further reforms in some areas.

The report commends the organization for its “significant progress” in its response to global health emergency management, but makes several recommendations for future reforms, including reforming Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) declarations to make the declarations a clearer trigger for member countries. The committee explains,

The urgency with which Member States took action based on the PHEIC varied both in terms of the timing and the comprehensiveness of public health measures in response to COVID-19. This raises questions about whether Member States view a PHEIC declaration as a sufficiently clear trigger. The IOAC notes that the design of the PHEIC is very broad, covering everything from a limited regional outbreak such as Ebola in West Africa to a large global pandemic that touches every country. Following the present crisis, it may be useful to review and update the IHR [International Health Regulations] to reflect lessons from the pandemic.

The report notes that the WHO became aware of the virus on December 31, 2019 and that the initial information about the virus from China “reflected an incomplete picture of the virus” but that “[a]n imperfect and evolving understanding is not unusual during the early phase of a novel disease emergence.” The report also recommends continued work on enhancing the data reporting process on information related to outbreaks.

While the committee reports that “the WHO Secretariat’s response to

COVID-19 was faster than for either the MERS or SARS epidemics," the committee explains that the WHO response "did not prompt similarly rapid action by all Member States" which "may indicate a gap between the current IHR and Member State expectations of WHO Secretariat's role." As a result, the committee suggests that member states' review the WHO's International Health Regulations (2005) to better understand the responsibilities of the WHO Secretariat and the duties of Member States.

The same day: President Trump [informs the Director-General of the WHO](#) that the United States will permanently revoke its funding for the WHO and reconsider its membership in the organization.

Citing a [White House investigation](#) of the WHO's response to the COVID-19 outbreak, President Trump states that the WHO failed in its response to the COVID-19 outbreak by (1) ignoring credible reports of the virus in Wuhan, (2) by not timely reporting the possibility that the virus could be transmitted by human-to-human contact ("probably for political reasons"), (3) by making "grossly inaccurate or misleading" claims about the coronavirus, (4) by employing "political gamesmanship" and "praising" China's response to the pandemic, among other criticisms.

President Trump concludes:

Many lives could have been saved had you followed Dr. Brundtland's example. It is clear that repeated missteps by you and your organization in responding to the pandemic have been extremely costly for the world. The only way forward for the World Health Organization is if it can actually demonstrate independence from China. ...

That is why it is my duty, as President of the United States, to inform you that, if the World Health Organization does not commit to major substantive improvements within the next 30 days, I will make my

temporary freeze of United States funding to the World Health Organization permanent and reconsider our membership in the organization. I cannot allow American taxpayer dollars to continue to finance an organization that, in its present state, is so clearly not serving America's interests.

May 19, 2020: President Trump [states that he is taking hydroxychloroquine](#) and encourages doctors to prescribe the drug.

A lot of good things have come out about the hydroxychloroquine. You'd be surprised at how many people are taking it, especially the frontline workers before you catch it. ... I happen to be taking it. Right now, yeah. I'm taking it, hydroxychloroquine. A couple weeks ago I started taking it... I get a lot of positive calls about it...I take a pill every day. I think people should be allowed to take [hydroxychloroquine].

Later in the week, on May 22, 2020, researchers [publish a multinational study](#) of the use of hydroxychloroquine or chloroquine and its use as treatment for COVID-19, concluding that the use of the drug is associated with an increased risk of significant and sudden heart arrhythmias and that they were unable to confirm a benefit for using the drug on hospitalized COVID-19 patients.

May 21, 2020: The CDC [updates its guidance](#) on COVID-19 transmission, explaining that the "virus spreads easily between people."

The [new guidance](#) confirms that the virus spreads easily between people:

The virus that causes COVID-19 is spreading very easily and sustainably between people. Information from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic suggest that this virus is spreading more efficiently than influenza, but

not as efficiently as measles, which is highly contagious.

And it also explains that the “virus does not spread easily in other ways,” such as by touching surfaces or from animals.

The same day: President Trump states that the United States would not shut down the country due to a second wave of infections.

“We are going to put out the fires,” he [says](#). “But we are not closing the country.”

Earlier in the week, Dr. Fauci [informed the Washington Post](#) that he has “no doubt” there will be a new wave of cases and that “the virus is not going to disappear.”

May 22-23, 2020: The White House removes CDC guidance warning about the risk of COVID-19 transmission by choirs during religious services.

On Friday, May 22, 2020, the CDC releases a set of guidance on the CDC website encouraging religious communities to “consider suspending or at least decreasing use of choir/musical ensembles and congregant singing, chanting, or reciting during services or other programming, if appropriate within the faith tradition. ... The act of singing may contribute to transmission of Covid-19, possibly through emission of aerosols.”

The next day, the CDC releases an updated version of the guidance that omits the risks of choir transmission and adds that the guidance “is not intended to infringe on rights protected by the First Amendment.”

As reported by [the Washington Post](#), the original guidance had not been approved by the White House, which quickly requested the CDC to update the document with the White House approval and changes.

The CDC had previously [reported](#) that group singing can cause superspreader events.

June 28, 2020: Paul Alexander, a political appointee and senior advisor to Michael Caputo, the HHS assistant secretary for public affairs, [accuses CDC officials of “undermining the President”](#) by [reporting on the potential dangers of the coronavirus to pregnant women.](#)

In an email [obtained](#) by the Washington Post and directed to Redfield and Caputo, Alexander says that the CDC is frightening women “as if the President and his administration can’t fix this and it is getting worse.”

Voicing concerns over a lack of data about why pregnant women were hospitalized, Alexander writes: “The CDC is undermining the President by what they put out, this is my opinion and sense, and I am reading it and can see the subtle and direct hits.”

Caputo later agrees with Alexander saying that while the CDC represents itself as the gold standard, “in the case of pregnancy analysis, it wasn’t even bronze.”

Some public health experts agree that the study lacks data but counsel that the information provided in the study contains important information that pregnant women may be more susceptible to severe side effects from the disease.

July 8, 2020: President Trump [threatens](#) to cut school funding if schools do not reopen fully. He also [tweets](#) that he disagrees with the CDC’s “very tough & expensive guidelines for opening schools.”

Mike Pence both [qualifies and defends](#) the President’s threat in a press conference later in the day, stating that “the President has made clear ...

that we think it's absolutely imperative that every state and territory in this country make – make steps and – takes steps, rather, to get kids back in the classroom to the fullest extent possible."

He adds, "as we work with Congress on the next round of state support, we're going to be looking for ways to give states a strong incentive and an encouragement to get kids back to school." He also explains that "the CDC is going to be issuing a new set of tools" because he does not want the guidance to be "too tough."

July 15, 2020: The White House [ends](#) the CDC's COVID-19 data collection system, turning over the responsibility to a private company.

Michael Caputo explains that the decision was made due because the CDC system was considered to be too slow. In a statement to reporters, Caputo explains: "The CDC's old data gathering operation once worked well monitoring hospital information across the country, but it's an inadequate system today." The decision is highly criticized.

Reports later [emerge](#) that White House Coronavirus Task Force Coordinator, Deborah Birx, led the data collection overhaul, undermining the ability of the public health agency to effectively combat the public health crisis.

July 14, 2020: CDC Director Robert Redfield [urges](#) President Trump to wear a mask to "set an example," calling mask-wearing for all Americans a "[civic duty](#)." Redfield also [warns](#) that the winter of 2020 and 2021 is going to be "probably one of the most difficult times we've experienced in American public health."

Redfield along with two other senior agency officials write in an [editorial in](#)

[JAMA](#) that “the public needs consistent, clear, and appealing messaging that normalizes community masking.” The authors explain:

“At this critical juncture when COVID-19 is resurging, broad adoption of cloth face coverings is a civic duty, a small sacrifice reliant on a highly effective low-tech solution that can help turn the tide favorably in national and global efforts against COVID-19.”

July 15, 2020: The White House begins conducting one-on-one interviews with health officials and political appointees, [reports Politico](#).

According to at least one person briefed on the interviews, the exercise is largely seen as “an exercise in ferreting out people who are perceived as not Trump enough.”

July 21, 2020: President Trump [vents](#) to Bob Woodward: “The virus has nothing to do with me. It’s not my fault.”

(The interview is revealed only in September 2020 when audio tapes and excerpts of Woodward’s book, *Rage*, are [released](#).)

August 8, 2020: Paul Alexander criticizes CDC scientists for using [CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reports](#) (“MMWRs”) to “hurt the President,” calling the scientific reports prepared by career CDC scientists “hit pieces,” and [demands](#) that he review each report before publication.

In an email obtained by Politico, Alexander writes:

“CDC to me appears to be writing hit pieces on the administration ... CDC tried to report as if once kids get together, there will be spread and this will impact school re-opening ... Very misleading by CDC

and shame on them. Their aim is clear. This hurts any President or administration. This is designed to hurt this President for their reasons which I am not interested in. I am intersted (sic) in this or any President being served fairly and that tax payers money not be used for political reasons. They CDC, work for him. ...

The reports must be read by someone outside of CDC like myself, and we cannot allow the reporting to go on as it has been, for it is outrageous. Its lunacy. ... Nothing to go out unless I read and agree with the findings how they CDC, wrote it and I tweak it to ensure it is fair and balanced and 'complete.'"

Alexander demands that the CDC revise a specific MMWR "or else Michael [Caputo] will pull it down and stop all reports immediately."

August 10, 2020: Dr. Scott Atlas from the Hoover Institute joins the White House Coronavirus Task Force as an advisor. Previously, Atlas was a vocal [advocate](#) for herd immunity as well as limited use of face masks.

In April 2020, Dr. Atlas, who is trained as a radiologist and not in infectious diseases, advocated for herd immunity on a conservative radio show. The doctor explained his reasoning:

"Those who are not at risk to be – to die or have a serious hospital-requiring illness – we should be fine with letting them get infected, generating immunity on their own. And the more immunity in the community, the better we can eradicate the threat of the virus."

Shortly after Atlas' appointment, [98 immunologists, epidemiologists and infectious diseases physicians](#) criticize Atlas and his views stating that "to prevent harm to the public's health," they "have both a moral and an ethical

responsibility to call attention to the falsehoods and misrepresentations of science recently fostered by Dr. Scott Atlas."

The experts further state that "herd immunity through unchecked community transmission is not a safe public health strategy. In fact, this approach would do the opposite, causing a significant increase in preventable cases, suffering and deaths, especially among vulnerable populations, such as older individuals and essential workers."

August 21, 2020: Paul Alexander criticizes the NIH's use of randomized, controlled trials, known as RCTs, which are considered [the best way](#) to study the efficacy of new treatments.

He writes in an internal [email obtained by Politico](#): "I think over time as I examine the good nonrandomized research, well conducted, strong methods, then I am saying that RCT evidence should not be considered the gold standard."

"Consider this as a philosophical sharing and debate to spurn discussion," he continues. "All this to say that if the NIH's position is that RCT evidence is your standard, then this must change."

August 23, 2020: The FDA issues an [Emergency Use Authorization](#) for convalescent plasma as a potential promising Covid-19 treatment.

President Trump [calls](#) the treatment a "powerful therapy" with an "incredible rate of success," a statement that draws some [criticism](#) from experts who claim that the treatment might be mildly helpful but has not been rigorously tested or proven safe. Other experts [argue](#) that the treatment is "largely a continuation of the status quo" for convalescent plasma.

August 24, 2020: The CDC restricts its testing recommendations to only symptomatic individuals who have been exposed to the virus, reportedly due to [pressure](#) from the White House.

The CDC recommends [that doctors should restrict COVID-19 testing to only those who exhibit symptoms](#) after being exposed to the virus, excluding asymptomatic and possibly infectious persons with the disease. According to [Politico](#), the quietly released new guidance was the result of political pressure from the White House.

Fauci disagrees with the guidance and says he was not included in the decision (due to having surgery). Reports later surface that the guidance is also [internally criticized harshly by the CDC](#) and externally by leading experts and [medical organizations](#).

[The CDC later reverses itself and reaffirms the need for testing asymptomatic persons. See entry for Sept. 18, 2020].

August 27, 2020: Paul Alexander disagrees with Dr. Fauci's press officers about the importance of children and university students getting tests "in a widespread manner."

In [emails obtained by Politico](#), Alexander critiques a pre-planned statement by Dr. Fauci. Alexander writes, "I continue to have an issue with kids getting tested and repeatedly and even university students in a widespread manner...and I disagree with Dr. Fauci on this. Vehemently."

The same day: Alexander states in internal emails that there is no reason to test for coronavirus in people who do not have any symptoms of the disease. He writes, "Testing of asymptomatic people to seek asymptomatic cases is not the point of testing."

In [an email obtained by Politico](#), Alexander says in favor of controversial new CDC guidance. "Testing of asymptomatic people to seek asymptomatic cases is not the point of testing." He adds that he supports the CDC guidance "to not test asymptomatic people carte blanche as it makes no logical sense." But he adds that people who enter high-risk areas, such as nursing homes, should continue to be tested.

Late August 2020: Alexander continues to push Dr. Fauci's press team to downplay the risk of children contracting and spreading the coronavirus.

In emails obtained by [Politico](#), a NIAID scientist refutes Alexander's claim that the coronavirus poses "zero" risk to children, citing multiple studies indicating that spread occurs among children.

Alexander replies by stating that wearing masks would be "traumatic" for children and retorting that there is "little, if any evidence" the children are at risk for contracting or spreading the coronavirus.

Late August: HHS Secretary Alex Azar [revokes](#) the FDA's ability to check the quality of tests developed by individual labs.

Alex Azar unilaterally changes the CDC's ability to check the quality of tests used by individual labs, [Politico](#) reports. While the move had been supported by universities and private labs in the past, the change was reportedly objected to by FDA Chief Stephan Hahn as well as other experts who believed that the decision risked allowing inaccurate tests into the market during a public health crisis.

Politico reports that the tension between Azar and Hahn rose to "screaming matches" over the issue.

When questioned on the subject, HHS chief of staff Brian Harrison states that the change was prompted by long-standing legal considerations on the issue and that news of the screaming matches were “a lie.”

Sometime in September: The White House blocks a draft CDC order requiring all passengers and employees to wear masks on public transportation.

The White House [thwarts a proposed CDC order](#) that would require masks and face coverings on all public transportation, the New York Times reports. The White House Coronavirus Task Force reportedly rejects the order.

While some task force members are reported to support the mask mandate, Dr. Scott Atlas and Vice President Pence do not.

September – October 2020: HHS awards a marketing company a \$250 million contract to launch a partisan advertising campaign to “defeat despair and inspire hope” with regard to the coronavirus pandemic. A subsequent House Committee on Oversight and Reform’s investigation states that the advertising campaign was used by HHS political appointees “to use taxpayer dollars to advance a partisan political agenda and direct taxpayer money to their friends and allies.”

The Trump administration requires the marketing company to track the political views of possible celebrity PSA spokespeople and their views of President Trump. Examples of such tracking in the “PSA Celebrity Tracker” include: Billie Eilish is “not a Trump Supporter, stated he is ‘destroying our country and everything we care about,’” George Lopez made a “controversial statement on President Trump in 2020,” and Cardi B “[e]ndorsed Biden for President.”

Later in the month, Caputo proposes that one of the themes of the ad

campaign should be: “Helping the President will Help the Country” and that one of the ad-campaign concepts is to communicate an effective mask-wearing PSA.

The Trump administration also encourages the marketing company to hire a small and not well known subcontracting company run by Michael Caputo’s long-time business associate.

The advertising campaign — as of November 2020 — has not been successful, as all vetted celebrity spokespeople declined to participate.

September 8, 2020: Alexander asks Dr. Fauci’s press team to “ensure” that the nation’s top infectious disease official does not promote mask wearing by children in schools.

Alexander writes in an [email obtained by Politico](#):

“Can you ensure Dr. Fauci indicates masks are for the teachers in schools. Not for children. There is no data, none, zero, across the entire world, that shows children especially young children, spread this virus to other children, or to adults or to their teachers. None. And if it did occur, the risk is essentially zero.”

He adds that children can take influenza home, but cannot do so with the coronavirus, a proposition not supported by scientific evidence.

In an interview with Politico, infectious disease epidemiologist, Dr. Saskia Popescu who read excerpts of Alexander’s messages, warns that this “statement has been proven wrong” and is “dangerous.”

September 11, 2020: Two senior officials at HHS, Michael Caputo and the head of SAMHSA, Dr. Elinore McCance-Katz, [criticize](#) the continued coronavirus lockdowns on Caputo’s podcast, [The Learning](#)

Curve.

September 13, 2020: Michael Caputo [posts](#) a Facebook [video](#) accusing CDC scientists of "sedition" and warning that left-wing hit squads are preparing for an insurrection. He further accuses CDC scientists of fostering "resistance units" within the agency in order to undermine the president. He states: "there are scientists working for this government who do not want America to get better."

"I'm under siege," he says. "I'm not going anywhere, they are going to have to kill me and unfortunately I think that this is where it is going ... If you carry guns, buy ammunition, ladies and gentlemen, because it's going to be hard to get." He later removes the video.

September 15, 2020: Alex Azar [bars](#) all of the nation's health agencies, including the FDA, from signing new regulations or rules without his signature.

The internal memorandum, obtained by the New York Times, states that the power to issue new rules regarding food, medicine, medical devices, vaccines, and other products is "reserved for the Secretary."

Experts call the memorandum inefficient and an attempt to gum up the ability of the nation's health agencies to respond to the pandemic. In response, the HHS Chief of Staff calls the move "good governance" and a "reset" for an agency.

The same day: Caputo [meets](#) with the marketing company awarded the \$250 million contract and proposes during the meeting that one of the themes of the ad campaign should be: "Helping the President will Help the Country" and that one of the concept is to communicate an effective mask-wearing PSA.

September 16, 2020: Michael Caputo [goes on medical leave](#) for 60 days and Paul Alexander leaves the Department of Health and Human Services altogether.

HHS releases a statement that Caputo decided to take the two months off “to focus on his health and the well-being of his family.” HHS does not state why Paul Alexander is leaving the department.

The same morning: Top HHS officials [testify in front of the Senate Appropriations Committee](#) and emphatically underscore the importance of mask wearing to prevent coronavirus transmission.

CDC Director, Robert Redfield, and Brett Giroir, Assistant Secretary for Health at HHS, both warn that the United States will not return to normal anytime soon and that new infections will increase if Americans do not take further precautions.

Redfield explicitly supports mask wearing as better protection than a vaccine during the hearing. He states,

“I might even go so far as to say that this facemask is more guaranteed to protect me against Covid than when I take the Covid vaccine because the immunogenicity may be 70 percent and if I don’t get an immune response to a vaccine it’s not going to protect me. This facemask will.”

Redfield also informs the committee that most Americans will not have access to a vaccine until “late second quarter, third quarter 2021.”

Later in the afternoon: President Trump [insists](#) Redfield was mistaken and “confused” concerning Redfield’s stance on face masks and the vaccine distribution timeline.

Trump states, “No, the mask is not as important as the vaccine He

made a mistake."

Later in the day: Redfield [rescinds](#) his earlier statement to the Senate Appropriations Committee, conforming his vaccine timeline to fit the President's.

September 18, 2020: The CDC [reverses its guidance](#) on testing for asymptomatic individuals.

After much criticism, the CDC [expressly reaffirms](#) its commitment to the significance of asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic transmission and reinforces the need to test asymptomatic persons.

By September 22, 2020: Over 200,000 people have [died](#) from the coronavirus in the United States since the beginning of the pandemic.

September 30, 2020: The White House [blocks](#) an extension of the CDC's cruise ship "[No Sail](#)" order, [Axios](#) reports.

CDC Director Robert Redfield supported extending the ban until February 2021, but was reportedly overruled by Vice President Pence. The February 2021 ban was also reportedly [opposed](#) by the tourism and cruise industry in Florida, a crucial swing-state in the 2020 presidential election.

Early October, 2020: An outbreak of coronavirus occurs in the White House. President Trump, [among many others](#), tests positive for the virus. The President is later hospitalized at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center for four days, requiring oxygen twice according to his doctor.

While infectious, Trump [leaves](#) the hospital in an SUV to wave at nearby fans, a move that is heavily criticized as endangering the health of the secret service who must accompany him.

October 2020: At least 27 political appointees have left HHS since February 2020 and the department is anticipating another wave of departures, according to interviews conducted by Politico with 17 current and former HHS officials.

October 5, 2020: The White House [rejects a CDC offer](#) to contact trace the coronavirus outbreak in the White House. No official contact tracing occurs for over 200 people potentially exposed to the virus from the White House outbreak.

October 8, 2020: The [New England Journal of Medicine](#) [calls](#) the Trump administration's response to the virus "incompetent" and calls for voting political leaders out of office, breaking the top-ranked journal's 208 year nonpartisan history.

The journal writes in an editorial that the United States has "failed" to respond to the coronavirus pandemic adequately. "They have taken a crisis and turned it into a tragedy," the journal writes about the Trump administration. "The magnitude of this failure is astonishing."

White House Coronavirus Task Force advisor, Dr. Scott Atlas, [calls](#) the editorial "an embarrassment to the journal" that is "the latest example of unacceptable, embarrassing delving into political editorializing rather than sticking with what they actually know, and what they are supposed to do, which is objective science."

October 12, 2020: President Trump holds a campaign rally in Sanford, Florida in his first public appearance after being hospitalized. He [declares](#) that he is "immune" to the virus and that he feels "so powerful."

October 14, 2020: WHO [calls](#) the White House [acceptance](#) of and

approach to herd immunity “unethical.”

The Director of the WHO states:

“Never in the history of public health has herd immunity been used as a strategy for responding to an outbreak, let alone a pandemic. It is scientifically and ethically problematic.”

Dr. Fauci also decries the statement that has been reportedly [embraced](#) by the White House as “ridiculous” and “total nonsense.”

October 18, 2020: Dr. Scottt Atlas [tweets](#) misleading information about the effectiveness of mask-usage to prevent the spread of the virus. Twitter removes the tweet in violation of its policy prohibiting false or misleading content related to COVID-19 that could lead to harm.

“Masks work? NO,” Atlas tweeted along with misrepresentations about the effectiveness of wearing masks. Twitter removes the tweet for violating its policy against false or misleading content that could lead to harm.

October 19, 2020: President Trump calls Dr. Fauci and other public health officials “idiots” and that if the US had listened to Fauci there would be “700,00 [or] 800,000 deaths,” not 200,000.

“He’s been here for, like, 500 years,” says Trump. “He’s like this wonderful sage telling us how — Fauci, if we listened to him, we’d have 700,000 [or] 800,000 deaths.” Trump continues, “People are tired of Covid. People are saying, ‘Whatever, just leave us alone.’ People are tired of hearing Fauci and all these idiots.”

October 24, 2020: HHS announces that the military will provide a logistics-only role in administering the COVID-19 vaccine.

October 25, 2020: Mark Meadows, White House Chief of Staff, says that the White House is “not going to control the pandemic.”

“We’re not going to control the pandemic,” White House chief of staff Mark Meadows tells CNN. “We are gonna control the fact that we get vaccines, therapeutics and other mitigation areas.” Meadows explains that the administration will not control the pandemic “because it is a contagious virus, just like the flu.”

The same day: HHS halts the production of a “Santa-plan” advertising campaign that offered Santa performers advanced access to the vaccine in exchange for performing in a promotional advertisement.

According to the [Wall Street Journal](#), a top Trump administration official wanted the campaign to include Santa and elf performers promoting the benefits of a COVID-19 vaccination. In return, the performers would get advanced access to the vaccine. “The deal was the brainchild of ... Michael Caputo,” the Journal reports.

October 26, 2020: President Trump tweets, “The Fake News Media is riding COVID, COVID, COVID, all the way to the Election. Losers!”

October 27, 2020: The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy [ranks](#) “ending the Covid-19 pandemic” as one of the highlight accomplishments of the Trump presidency.

In a [memo](#), the office includes “[e]nding the Covid-19 pandemic” on a list of major accomplishments, explaining: “From the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Administration has taken decisive actions to engage scientists and health professionals in academia, industry, and government to understand, treat and defeat the disease.”

After backlash, the office later [says](#) that the claim is “poorly worded” and that the intent was “to say that our goal is to end the virus.”

October 29, 2020: The United States experiences nearly 100,000 coronavirus cases in one day, the [highest number](#) of cases ever reported in a single day.

October 30, 2020: Dr. Fauci [informs](#) the Washington Post that the United States is “in for a whole lot of hurt” this upcoming winter.

“It’s not a good situation,” Fauci says. “All the stars are aligned in the wrong place as you go into the fall and winter season, with people congregating at home indoors. You could not possibly be positioned more poorly.”

The same day: President Trump falsely claims that doctors are overcounting coronavirus deaths in order to make more money.

He states at a [campaign rally](#) in Michigan:

“You know in Germany if you have a bad heart and you’re ready to die or if you have cancer and you’re going to be dying soon, and you catch COVID, that happens we mark it down to COVID. **You know our doctors get more money if somebody dies from COVID, you know that, right. I mean our doctors are very smart people.** So what they do is they say is, I’m but you know sorry everybody dies of COVID. But in Germany and other places, if you have a heart attack or you have cancer, you’re terminally ill, you catch COVID, they say you died of cancer, you died of a heart attack. With us, when in doubt, choose COVID. It’s true, no it’s true. No, they’ll say, Oh it’s terrible what he said, but it’s true. It’s like \$2,000 more. So you get more money. This could only happen to us.”

The same day: A [study of 18 Trump campaign](#) rallies by the

Department of Economics at Stanford University finds that the rallies likely led to an additional 30,000 cases of COVID-19 and likely 700 deaths.

October 31, 2020: the Washington Post publishes an [interview](#) with Dr. Fauci in which he says the Biden's campaign "is taking [the pandemic] seriously from a public health perspective." In contrast, Fauci says Trump is "looking at it from a different perspective." He said that perspective was "the economy and reopening the country."

Fauci also says, "All the stars are aligned in the wrong place as you go into the fall and winter season, with people congregating at home indoors. You could not possibly be positioned more poorly." His statement contradicts Trump's statements that the United States is "rounding the turn" on the pandemic.

November 1, 2020: During a campaign rally, President Trump [suggests](#) that he might try to fire Dr. Fauci.

Dr. Fauci is currently the "[designated senior representative](#)" of the U.S. government team who will monitor the results of COVID-19 vaccine trials, according to documents obtained by ProPublica and confirmed by the National Institutes of Health.

Though firing Dr. Fauci would likely prove difficult, as this [Washington Post](#) article explains.

November 2, 2020: Deborah Birx [circulates an internal alarm](#) to top White House and agency officials warning that the United States is "entering the most concerning and most deadly phase of this pandemic ... leading to increasing mortality." She strongly criticizes directly condemns the White House for not implementing an

“aggressive balanced approach.”

“This is not about lockdowns — it hasn’t been about lockdowns since March or April,” says Birx. She also directly contradicts Trump on multiple issues. She warns against campaign-rally attendees not wearing masks and contradicts the president — who blamed rising cases on more testing — by saying that testing is “flat or declining” in some areas where cases are rising.

Note from editors: The authors will continue to update the Timeline with new information concerning the preceding series of events and to add significant new developments. As a reminder, readers can send suggestions via email to lte@justsecurity.org.

[Editor’s note: Readers may also be interested in [A Topical Index of COVID-19 Articles on Just Security](#)]

Title Image: Getty