This article is VERY LONG.  It actually lists “595 hard facts about Trump’s abysmal COVID-19 response,” and it provides much information about these “595 hard facts.”

The article’s link is here -- <https://www.alternet.org/2020/08/anatomy-of-a-man-made-disaster-here-are-595-hard-facts-about-trumps-abysmal-19-response/> -- but AlterNet makes non-subscribers “white-list” it to see the article without ads or other interference, so I copied the text below.

President Donald J. Trump addresses the nation from the Oval Office of the White House Wednesday evening, March 11, 2020, on the country’s expanded response against the global Coronavirus outbreak. (Official White House Photo by Shealah Craighead)

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Written by [Dan Benbow](https://www.alternet.org/author/dan-benbow/) August 30, 2020 Commentary

Crises have a way of sorting the good presidents from the bad.

Historians [rank](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_rankings_of_presidents_of_the_United_States) Abe Lincoln and Franklin Delano Roosevelt among the top three presidents for their handling of the Civil War, the Great Depression, and World War II.

By contrast, the string of catastrophes that trailed [George W. Bush](https://benbosophy.blogspot.com/2019/03/the-master-of-low-expectations-666.html), from [9/11](https://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/11/opinion/the-bush-white-house-was-deaf-to-9-11-warnings.html) to [Iraq](https://benbosophy.blogspot.com/2020/03/bloodbathiniraq.html) to [Hurricane Katrina](https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2015/08/hurricane-katrina-george-w-bush-new-orleans) to his [obliviousness](https://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/21/business/21admin.html) to warning signs in the housing market before the 2008 crash guarantee that he will have a permanent place in the bottom tier of presidents.

Also certain to be at or near the bottom of that list is Donald Trump.

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Trump has been able to maintain 40% approval ratings by effectively manipulating the [lizard brains](https://www.vox.com/identities/2017/12/15/16781222/trump-racism-economic-anxiety-study) of white Republicans, but even before COVID-19 hit, he was considered one of [the worst](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-worst-president-presidential-greatness-survey-presidents-day-obama-george-washington-a8218721.html) presidents in the two surveys of scholars done in 2018.

Trump’s increase in attention to the COVID-19 crisis for the brief window of time between when he declared a national emergency (on March 13) until he shifted most of his attention back to his re-election campaign (roughly six weeks later) helped mitigate the damage somewhat, but his inaction from [January 3](https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2020/3/21/21189179/coronavirus-trump-intelligence-reports-warned-pandemic) (when the administration claims to have first become aware of the virus) until March 13 made the situation exponentially worse than it should have been. And his failures of governance since March 13 greatly outweigh the handful of positive steps he took in that time in scope and number.

As Anthony Fauci [said](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/08/05/dr-fauci-agrees-the-us-has-the-worst-coronvirus-outbreak-in-the-world-the-numbers-dont-lie.html), numbers don’t lie. Our federal response has been [the shame](https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/%22%20%5Cl%20%22countries) of the first world, as America has posted over 170,000 deaths (4X any other developed country) and 5,500,000 infections (more than 10X any developed country), both [significant undercounts](https://www.businessinsider.com/us-coronavirus-cases-deaths-real-scale-estimates-charts-2020-7) from the true numbers.

This story starts, as many tales of Republican incompetence do, with sheer ignorance and lack of curiosity. Ronald Reagan was able to [ignore](https://lithub.com/ronald-reagan-presided-over-89343-deaths-to-aids-and-did-nothing/) the AIDS crisis for years because it was “a gay disease” and didn’t impact anyone close to him until his old Hollywood acquaintance Rock Hudson asked for—[but did not receive](https://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/nancy-reagan-rejected-rock-hudson-plea-aids-article-1.2101827)—his help in 1985. Despite having spent months manipulating post-9/11 public fear with [an orchestrated campaign of lies](https://publicintegrity.org/politics/search-the-935-iraq-war-false-statements/) about fictitious WMDs, George W. Bush [still didn’t understand](https://www.commondreams.org/views/2007/06/15/what-every-american-should-know-about-iraq) the historical friction between Sunnis and Shias in Iraq when he invited Iraqi guests of mixed faiths to a super bowl party two months before the invasion.

History repeated itself with Donald Trump, like Reagan and Bush a P.R.-centric empty suit lacking intellectual curiosity, policy chops, or any interest in the mechanics of governing.

It was common knowledge before Trump took office that an infectious outbreak of some kind was likely to occur during his presidency. [As reported](https://www.healio.com/news/infectious-disease/20170111/fauci-no-doubt-trump-will-face-surprise-infectious-disease-outbreak) on **January 11, 2017**, Anthony Fauci told a pandemic preparedness forum (held at Georgetown University) “history has told us definitively that [outbreaks] will happen because [facing] infectious diseases is a perpetual challenge. It is not going to go away. The thing we’re extraordinarily confident about is that we’re going to see this in the next few years.” (W1\*)(\**Pandemic-related warnings will be abbreviated throughout this piece with a* red W)

On **January 13, 2017**, seven days before Trump took office, officials from the Obama administration had a [three-hour transition meeting](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/16/trump-inauguration-warning-scenario-pandemic-132797) with top Trump officials in which they discussed disaster management. Of the exercises they went through together, the pandemic response exercise was “perhaps the most concrete and visible transition exercise that dealt with the possibility of pandemics, and top officials from both sides — whether they wanted to be there or not — were forced to confront a whole-of-government response to a crisis. The Trump team was told it could face specific challenges, such as shortages of ventilators, anti-viral drugs and other medical essentials, and that having a coordinated, unified national response was ‘paramount.’” (W2)

Unfortunately for the hundreds of thousands of Americans who would die of the coronavirus, and the millions more who would get infected, stable, competent staffing and effective collaboration in the executive branch were prerequisites to an effective national response. Whereas Obama’s administration would maintain the same cabinet members and White House staff through his first term, 2/3rds of the Trump staffers attending the transition meeting [would be gone](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2020/05/07/how-instability-and-high-turnover-on-the-trump-staff-hindered-the-response-to-covid-19/) by the time the pandemic was in full swing, leading to a major loss of institutional memory. (1)

Another key element of an effective national disaster preparedness response was a president who was engaged in the process. From before he took office, there were concerns that Trump [wasn’t up to the task](https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/12/outbreaks-trump-disease-epidemic-ebola/511127/) because of his ignorance of the subject and indifference to getting up to speed with this crucial part of his job.

[According](https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/02/trump-response-coronavirus/606610/) to Peter Nicholas of *the Atlantic*, “When a senior White House aide would brief President Donald Trump in 2018 about an Ebola-virus outbreak in central Africa, it was plainly evident that hardships roiling a far-flung part of the world didn’t command his attention. He was zoning out. ‘It was like talking to a wall,’ a person familiar with the matter told me.” (2)

This indifference manifested with Trump’s first budget to Congress. Though the administration found money for big increases in the already-[bloated defense budget](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/27/us/politics/trump-budget-military.html) and later passed a $[2.3 trillion](https://www.politico.com/story/2018/02/28/tax-cuts-trump-gop-analysis-430781) tax cut [overwhelmingly tilted to the 1%](https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/12/18/16791174/republican-tax-bill-congress-conference-tax-policy-center), Trump’s minions [cut funding](https://www.apha.org/news-and-media/news-releases/apha-news-releases/2017/trump-budget-cuts) (3) for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the agency tasked with protecting public health in the face of the opiate epidemic, AIDS, flu, and infectious outbreaks.

Within the tax cut bill were [steep cuts](https://www.the-scientist.com/daily-news/cuts-to-prevention-and-public-health-fund-puts-cdc-programs-at-risk-30298) to the Prevention and Public Health Fund (called “the core of public health programs” by Tom Frieden, who headed the CDC under [Barack Obama](https://benbosophy.blogspot.com/2017/01/ten-reasons-barack-obama-is-clearly.html)). (4)

On **May 11, 2017**, Trump’s Director of National Intelligence, Dan Coats, submitted a [threat assessment](https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Testimonies/SSCI%20Unclassified%20SFR%20-%20Final.pdf) to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence which said “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.” (W3)

Appointed to head the CDC, in **July 2017**, was Brenda Fitzgerald, a right-wing Republican from Georgia who replaced interim director [Anne Schuchat](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/anne-schuchat-interim-cdc-director_n_5886a37de4b096b4a2344cd4), a highly-experienced, long-time public health advocate (5). Among Fitzgerald’s priorities was scrubbing [seven dirty words](https://www.theverge.com/2017/12/16/16785100/cdc-seven-prohibited-words-science-evidence-transgender-fetus-entitlement-diversity-vulnerable)—including “evidence-based,” “science-based,” “diversity,” and “fetus”—from CDC budget documentation.

Fitzgerald’s time at the CDC was brief: she resigned on January 31, 2018 when it came out that she had owned stocks in a tobacco company even as she ran an agency dedicated to anti-smoking campaigns (6). *Politico* [reported](https://www.politico.com/story/2018/01/30/cdc-director-tobacco-stocks-after-appointment-316245) that “one day after Fitzgerald purchased stock in Japan Tobacco, she toured the CDC’s Tobacco Laboratory, which studies tobacco’s toxic effects.”

On **February 1, 2018**, *the Washington Post* [reported](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2018/02/01/cdc-to-cut-by-80-percent-efforts-to-prevent-global-disease-outbreak/?utm_term=.ff3917c3c439) that “CDC to cut by 80 percent efforts to prevent global disease outbreak” (7):  “The [global health section of the CDC](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2018/02/01/cdc-to-cut-by-80-percent-efforts-to-prevent-global-disease-outbreak/) was so drastically cut in 2018 that much of its staff was laid off (8) and the number of countries it was working in was reduced from 49 to merely 10. Meanwhile, throughout 2018, the U.S. Agency for International Development and its director, Mark Green, came repeatedly [under fire](https://www.devex.com/news/white-house-opens-new-front-in-war-on-us-aid-budget-93310?mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiWXpNeFpEaG1ZbU5rT0dNNCIsInQiOiJka0JEdVNGY1FIM2hhTzZkUVpNNmdSOEdVWEk2RVFyVkltN0JuWUlRdTZpRFhPdFBYS0lGUFZhQ2F1K0FuOWxMOSs4TkRlc1h3QW1xeWt4a3NLMTFQcWhTM20xaXpndGVUNnpCVGRaNjg1ZnVEalpvT0ptcU5cL2lGeEdtTlpYdVMifQ%3D%3D&utm_campaign=newswire&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter) from both the [White House](https://khn.org/news/religious-conservatives-ties-to-trump-officials-pay-off-in-aids-policies-funding/?utm_campaign=KHN%3A%20First%20Edition&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=65367866&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-_1qQIODfqXazw2GSe4Qlnu7d7Jc08ArhvTSjMcfE-EdcLTKmuO-lEFhK6ZZZA-DKjsPSM7SLOz15tkBmI-9Ziu7bkAQpExQVDONqf4rZUMPool0bI&_hsmi=65367866) and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. (9) And though Congress has so far managed to block Trump administration plans to cut the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps by [40 percent](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/white-house-announces-proposed-revamp-of-federal-government-including-a-consolidation-of-social-safety-net-programs/2018/06/21/64fdb8ca-756a-11e8-9780-b1dd6a09b549_story.html) (10), the disease-fighting cadres have steadily eroded as retiring officers go unreplaced.” (11)

On **February 13, 2018**, Dan Coats (Trump’s Director of National Intelligence) submitted a [threat assessment](https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Testimonies/2018-ATA---Unclassified-SSCI.pdf) to Congress which stated that “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.” (W4)

On **April 10, 2018**, Trump hired John Bolton, one of the architects of George W. Bush’s [invasion of Iraq](https://benbosophy.blogspot.com/2020/03/bloodbathiniraq.html), as his National Security Adviser. Bolton in turn [fired](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/tom-bossert-trump-s-homeland-security-adviser-resign-n864321) Homeland Security advisor Tom Bossert (12), whom *the Washington Post* [reported](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2018/05/10/top-white-house-official-in-charge-of-pandemic-response-exits-abruptly/) “had called for a comprehensive biodefense strategy against pandemics and biological attacks.”

On **April 27, 2018**, at the Malaria Summit in London, Bill Gates discussed the federal government’s lack of readiness for the “significant probability of a large and lethal modern-day pandemic occurring in our lifetimes.”

**In the second week of May, 2018**, “the White House [pushed](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2018/05/10/top-white-house-official-in-charge-of-pandemic-response-exits-abruptly/) Congress to cut funding for Obama-era disease security programs, proposing to eliminate $252 million in previously committed resources for rebuilding health systems in Ebola-ravaged Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea. (13) Under fire from both sides of the aisle, President Donald Trump dropped the proposal to eliminate Ebola funds a month later. But other White House efforts included reducing [$15 billion](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/trump-calls-on-congress-to-pull-back-15-billion-in-spending-including-on-childrens-health-insurance-program/2018/05/07/9427de18-5216-11e8-a551-5b648abe29ef_story.html) in national health spending (14) and cutting the global disease-fighting operational budgets of the CDC, NSC, DHS, and HHS. (15) And the government’s [$30 million](https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/05/09/ebola-is-back-and-trump-is-trying-to-kill-funding-for-it/) Complex Crises Fund was eliminated. (16)

[An article](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2018/05/10/top-white-house-official-in-charge-of-pandemic-response-exits-abruptly/) by Lena Sun of *the Washington Post* touched on just how big of a blow these moves were to U.S. disaster preparedness:

“The White House proposal ‘is threatening to claw back funding whose precise purpose is to help the United States be able to respond quickly in the event of a crisis,’ said Carolyn Reynolds, a vice president at PATH, a global health technology nonprofit. (W5)

“Collectively, warns Jeremy Konyndyk, who led foreign disaster assistance at the U.S. Agency for International Development during the Obama administration, ‘What this all adds up to is a potentially really concerning rollback of progress on U.S. health security preparedness.’

“‘It seems to actively unlearn the lessons we learned through very hard experience over the last 15 years,’ said Konyndyk….‘These moves make us materially less safe. It’s inexplicable.’” (W6)

That same week, on **May 9, 2018**, “Luciana Borio, director of medical and biodefense preparedness at the [National Security Council], spoke at a symposium at Emory University to mark the 100th anniversary of the 1918 influenza pandemic. That event killed an estimated 50 million to 100 million people worldwide.

‘The threat of pandemic flu is the number one health security concern,’ she told the audience. ‘[Are we ready to respond? I fear the answer is no](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2018/05/10/top-white-house-official-in-charge-of-pandemic-response-exits-abruptly/).’” (W7)

On **May 10, 2018**, Trump’s national security adviser John Bolton “re-organized” the National Security Council (NSC), or more accurately “[fired the government’s entire pandemic response chain of command](https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/01/31/coronavirus-china-trump-united-states-public-health-emergency-response/), including the White House management infrastructure” which had been set up by the Obama administration after the Ebola crisis, by collapsing the NSC’s Office of Global Security (17). In the wake of Bolton’s action, the top official tasked with coordinating a response to a pandemic, Rear Adm. Timothy Ziemer from the National Security Council, resigned on [the same day](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2018/05/10/top-white-house-official-in-charge-of-pandemic-response-exits-abruptly/) that a new Ebola outbreak was reported in the Congo. (18)

The Office of Global Security had been a comprehensive crisis response team which brought together principals from the National Institutes of Health, the CDC, the National Security Council, and the Department of Homeland Security; the Trump administration replaced neither Ziemer nor the command infrastructure (19).

On **May 15, 2018**, Virginia Democrat Gerald Connolly, a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, wrote Bolton [a letter](https://connolly.house.gov/uploadedfiles/connolly_bera_letter_to_nsa_john_bolton_on_global_health_security.pdf) “to express the deep concerns with several recent actions the White House has taken to downgrade the importance of global health security.” Looking forward, the letter stated, “We fear these recent decisions will leave the United States vulnerable to pandemics and commit us to a strategy of triage should one occur.” (W8)

Democratic senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio piggybacked on these concerns in a **May 18, 2018** [letter](https://www.justsecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/sherrod-brown-letter-president-trump-WH-Global-Health-Security-5.18.18.pdf) to President Trump:

“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.” (W9)

In **September of 2018,**Trump’s Department of Health and Human Services [diverted $266 million](https://www.yahoo.com/news/exclusive-immigrant-children-detention-hhs-cuts-funds-programs-like-cancer-research-230259583.html) from the CDC to operations to detain immigrant children. (20)

In **January of 2019**, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence put out a threat assessment warning that “[the United States and the world will remain vulnerable](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/u-s-intel-agencies-warned-rising-risk-outbreak-coronavirus-n1144891) 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.” (W10)

On **April 17, 2019**, at a bio-defense summit, Health and Human Services secretary Alex Azar [said](https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/03/politics/kfile-officials-worried-over-pandemic-last-year/index.html), “Of course, 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.” (W11)

According to John Bolton, on **June 29, 2019**, when Trump met with Chinese president Xi Jinping in Japan, Trump “turned the conversation to the coming U.S. presidential election, alluding to China’s economic capability and pleading with Xi to ensure he’d win. He stressed the importance of farmers and increased Chinese purchases of soybeans and wheat in the electoral outcome.”

In **July of 2019**, under pressure from industry groups, the administration quietly [seeded a future disaster](https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/disability/news/2020/04/21/483545/trump-administrations-deregulation-nursing-homes-leaves-seniors-disabled-higher-risk-covid-19/) by “relaxing the requirements tied to infection control” in nursing homes. (21)

In **September of 2019**, a “[study by the Council of Economic Advisers](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Mitigating-the-Impact-of-Pandemic-Influenza-through-Vaccine-Innovation.pdf) ordered by the National Security Council [predicted](https://www.rawstory.com/2020/04/trump-ignored-white-house-economists-warning-of-devastating-impact-of-pandemic-months-ago-report/) that a pandemic similar to the 1918 Spanish flu or the 2009 swine flu could lead to a half-million deaths and cost the economy as much as $3.8 trillion.” (W12)

That same month, [the Trump administration ended PREDICT](https://www.latimes.com/science/story/2020-04-02/coronavirus-trump-pandemic-program-viruses-detection), “a pandemic early-warning program aimed at training scientists in China and other countries to detect and respond to such a threat.” The program “gathered specimens from more than 10,000 bats and 2,000 other mammals in search of dangerous viruses. They detected about 1,200 viruses that could spread from wild animals to humans, signaling pandemic potential. More than 160 of them were novel coronaviruses, much like SARS-CoV-2.” (22)

In their fiscal year 2020 budget, the Trump administration proposed a [20% cut](https://inkstickmedia.com/budget-cuts-have-made-the-us-less-ready-for-coronavirus/) to the CDC budget (23). On **November 18, 2019**, one day after [the first known case](https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/3074991/coronavirus-chinas-first-confirmed-covid-19-case-traced-back) of COVID-19, “an independent, bipartisan panel formed by the Center for Strategic and International Studies [concluded](https://healthsecurity.csis.org/final-report/?utm_campaign=KFF-2018-Daily-GHP-Report&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=79793549&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-8HgwTDqeSUbA_EHRDOE3KL1aGBFeH4zjEJexxgVfmkTZC-B8TqCB1McjhjEOkNhdpC0RVP5Nuu3yr8YInPmfooPQxRjMRUUwP2xuQuwxLHAk_05OA&_hsmi=79793549) that lack of preparedness was so acute in the Trump administration that the ‘United States must either pay now and gain protection and security or wait for the next epidemic and pay a much greater price in human and economic costs.’” (W13)

[According to](https://abcnews.go.com/amp/Politics/intelligence-report-warned-coronavirus-crisis-early-november-sources/story?id=70031273&id=70031273&__twitter_impression=true) Josh Margolin and James Gordon Meek of ABC News, in **December of 2019**, intelligence sources gave multiple briefings about the threat of COVID-19 to “the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Pentagon’s Joint Staff and the White House.”

The White House pushed back on this reporting, claiming that they were [first informed](https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2020/3/21/21189179/coronavirus-trump-intelligence-reports-warned-pandemic) of the coronavirus on **January 3, 2020,**when Robert Redfield, Trump’s CDC head, received a phone call from China.Around this time, intelligence services began putting information about coronavirus in [Trump’s Daily Brief](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2020/04/04/coronavirus-government-dysfunction/?arc404=true). (W14)

On **January 8**, the American public was made aware of COVID-19 when *the Washington Post* [reported](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/specter-of-possible-new-virus-emerging-from-central-china-raises-alarms-across-asia/2020/01/08/3d33046c-312f-11ea-971b-43bec3ff9860_story.html) an outbreak of an “‘unidentified and possibly new viral disease in central China’ that was sending alarms across Asia in advance of the Lunar New Year travel season.”

Already, “Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines were contemplating quarantine zones and scanning travelers from China for ‘signs of fever or other pneumonia-like symptoms that may indicate a new disease possibly linked to a wild animal market in Wuhan.’”

In response, the CDC [issued](https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/han00424.asp) a public health alert.

Rather than address the new potential public health crisis, Trump tried to score cheap partisan points by [lying](https://www.politifact.com/article/2020/jan/08/fact-checking-donald-trumps-speech-after-iran-miss/) about Barack Obama’s [Iran peace deal](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-08-13/how-we-got-iran-deal) at that day’s press conference (24).

Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Alex Azar wasn’t able to get Trump’s ear about the coronavirus until **January 18**, fifteen days after the administration claims they had been notified (25). [According to](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/us-intelligence-reports-from-january-and-february-warned-about-a-likely-pandemic/2020/03/20/299d8cda-6ad5-11ea-b5f1-a5a804158597_story.html) *the Washington Post*, Trump was more concerned about short-term political pressure than public health: “When [Azar] reached Trump by phone, the president interjected to ask about [a proposed ban on] vaping and when flavored vaping products would be back on the market.”

That same day, Rick Bright, who headed the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), [pleaded](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/09/us/politics/whistle-blower-trump-coronavirus.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20200510&instance_id=18372&nl=the-morning&regi_id=126380121&segment_id=27142&te=1&user_id=d83df742c3b67c9afcdc1a7c3e05db74) with his boss, Dr. Robert Kadlec (the assistant secretary for preparedness and response) to “convene high-level meetings about the virus.” Kadlec responded that was “not sure if that is a time sensitive urgency.” (26)

On **January 21**, the day the [first coronavirus case](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/21/health/cdc-coronavirus.html) in the U.S. was confirmed by the CDC, Dr. Bright emailed Laura Wolf (the director of the Division of Critical Infrastructure Protection, which is under the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response). The email [asked](https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/in-the-early-days-of-the-pandemic-the-us-government-turned-down-an-offer-to-manufacture-millions-of-n95-masks-in-america/2020/05/09/f76a821e-908a-11ea-a9c0-73b93422d691_story.html?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most) Wolf to reach out to Michael Bowen, the CEO of Prestige Ameritech, a domestic medical supply company.

Appearing on CNBC on **January 22**, Trump offered the first of dozens of false reassurances when he told an interviewer, “We have it totally under control. It’s one person coming in from China, and we have it under control. [It’s going to be just fine](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/01/22/trump-on-coronavirus-from-china-we-have-it-totally-under-control.html).” (27) Asked if he trusted the COVID-related information he was getting from China, Trump said he did because “I have a great relationship with President Xi” and “We just signed probably the biggest deal ever made.” (In reality, Trump was covering up for Xi; Trump’s intelligence briefings had [made it clear](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/presidents-intelligence-briefing-book-repeatedly-cited-virus-threat/2020/04/27/ca66949a-8885-11ea-ac8a-fe9b8088e101_story.html) China was suppressing information about the virus, but Trump was more concerned about increasing trade with China, which he thought could help him win a second term.)

Earlier in the day, Michael Bowen had emailed “top administrators in the Department of Health and Human Services” and [offered to produce 1.7 million N95 masks per week](https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/in-the-early-days-of-the-pandemic-the-us-government-turned-down-an-offer-to-manufacture-millions-of-n95-masks-in-america/2020/05/09/f76a821e-908a-11ea-a9c0-73b93422d691_story.html?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most) for the national stockpile.

Bowen’s offer was turned down by Laura Wolf, so he sent a follow-up email on **January 23**which stated “We are the last major domestic mask company….My phones are ringing now, so I don’t ‘need’ government business. I’m just letting you know that I can help you preserve our infrastructure if things ever get really bad. I’m a patriot first, businessman second.”

Despite Rick Bright’s warnings about a coming shortage of masks (W15)—the national stockpiles had around [1/50th](https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/in-the-early-days-of-the-pandemic-the-us-government-turned-down-an-offer-to-manufacture-millions-of-n95-masks-in-america/2020/05/09/f76a821e-908a-11ea-a9c0-73b93422d691_story.html?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most) of what the country would need during a pandemic—and multiple emails from Bowen alluding to the “imminent risk” of a mask shortage and the mass orders he was getting from China and Hong Kong, the administration would never follow through on Bowen’s offer. (28)

This indifference was reflected in two meetings of Trump’s disaster management team that took place on the 23rd. Bright’s concerns about medical supplies and BARDA’s lack of funds [weren’t shared by Robert Kadlec or Alex Azar](https://theintercept.com/2020/05/07/coronavirus-whistleblower-hhs-n95-ppe/) (29), who “asserted that the United States would be able to contain the virus and keep it out of the United States. Secretary Azar further indicated that the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] would look at the issue of travel bans to keep the virus contained.” Bright was punished for his outspokenness; Azar and Kadlec excluded him from the next disaster management meeting. (30)

That same day, Trump was briefed by a CIA analyst and National Security Adviser Robert O’Brien, who communicated that COVID-19 could “spread globally.” (W16)

On **January 24**, one day after China had [shut down](https://www.cnn.com/2020/01/28/politics/trump-coronavirus-prepared-national-security/index.html) Wuhan and other cities, Trump [tweeted](https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1220818115354923009?lang=en) praise of China’s “transparency” and said that “It will all work out well.” This would be just one of [fifteen times](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/15/trump-china-coronavirus-188736) Trump praised China in January and February of 2020.

On **January 25**, Michael Bowen [emailed Bright](https://theintercept.com/2020/05/07/coronavirus-whistleblower-hhs-n95-ppe/) “about the mask shortage, explaining that his company was getting requests from China and that nearly half of the masks in the U.S. are imported from Chinese manufacturers. ‘If the supply stops, US hospital will run out of masks. No way to prevent it.’” Bright [forwarded](https://www.kmblegal.com/sites/default/files/NEW%20R.%20Bright%20OSC%20Complaint_Redacted.pdf) the information to Kadlec the following day. (W17)

On **January 27**, “White House aides huddled with then-acting chief of staff Mick Mulvaney in his office, trying to get senior officials to pay more attention to the virus, according to people briefed on the meeting. Joe Grogan, the head of the White House Domestic Policy Council, argued that [the administration needed to take the virus seriously](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/us-intelligence-reports-from-january-and-february-warned-about-a-likely-pandemic/2020/03/20/299d8cda-6ad5-11ea-b5f1-a5a804158597_story.html) or it could cost the president his reelection, and that dealing with the virus was likely to dominate life in the United States for many months.

“Mulvaney then began convening more regular meetings. In early briefings, however, officials said Trump was dismissive because he did not believe that the virus had spread widely throughout the United States.” (31)

On **January 28**, twenty five days after the administration had officially become aware of coronavirus, on the day that China’s president met with the Director-General of the World Health Organization to map out responses to COVID-19, the same day that Department of Veterans Affairs senior medical adviser Dr. Carter Mecher told colleagues that “[the projected size of the outbreak already seems hard to believe](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/11/us/politics/coronavirus-trump-response.html)”and mitigation efforts would soon be necessary on a “[Red Dawn](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/11/us/politics/coronavirus-red-dawn-emails-trump.html?action=click&module=Spotlight&pgtype=Homepage)” email (W18), CNN [reported](https://www.cnn.com/2020/01/28/politics/trump-coronavirus-prepared-national-security/index.html) that “Trump has not…named a single official within the White House responsible for coordinating the administration’s response. (32) That has some wondering whether enough is being done in advance of a potential crisis, particularly since the role of the National Security Council under Trump has shifted away from leading a response to a health crisis to merely coordinating between agencies.”

Trump’s indifference was [a direct contrast to Barack Obama](https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/01/31/coronavirus-china-trump-united-states-public-health-emergency-response/), who had “[anointed](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/01/now-trump-needs-deep-state-fight-coronavirus/605752/) a former vice presidential staffer, Ronald Klain, as a sort of ‘epidemic czar’ inside the White House, clearly stipulated the roles and budgets of various agencies, and placed incident commanders in charge in each Ebola-hit country and inside the United States.”

On the same day Trump was told (again) by an intelligence briefer that China was “[withholding data](https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/05/02/849619486/trump-received-intelligence-briefings-on-coronavirus-twice-in-january)” about COVID-19, he [gushed](https://www.c-span.org/video/?468445-1/president-trump-rally-wildwood-jersey) at a campaign rally in New Jersey that he had “signed a fantastic new trade agreement with China that will boost New Jersey exports and defend New Jersey jobs.”

On **January 29**, Peter Navarro, an economic adviser to Donald Trump, sent a memo to the White House warning that [coronavirus could kill up to 543,000 Americans](https://www.axios.com/exclusive-navarro-deaths-coronavirus-memos-january-da3f08fb-dce1-4f69-89b5-ea048f8382a9.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top). (W19) Despite Navarro’s memo, and the fact that the U.S. had yet to take any significant actions to counteract the coronavirus (33), Trump continued his narrative of false assurances with a tweet that he had “Just received a briefing on the Coronavirus in China from all of our GREAT agencies, who are also working closely with China. We will continue to monitor the ongoing developments. We have the best experts anywhere in the world, and they are on top of it 24/7!” (34)

On Thursday, **January 30,**World Health Organization (WHO) director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus declared a global health emergency while praising China’s efforts to contain the virus.

On a flight to campaign appearances in the Midwest, Trump received a call from Alex Azar, who warned him a second time of the destructive potential of the pandemic. [Trump dismissed Azar as “alarmist](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/11/us/politics/coronavirus-trump-response.html).” (35)

Later that day, speaking in front of Michigan auto workers on the day the WHO had declared a global health emergency, the day the CDC [reported](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/p0130-coronavirus-spread.html) the first person-to-person transmission in the U.S., Trump said, “We think we have it very well under control. 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.” (36)

Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross doubled down on Trump’s denial, [telling](https://www.marketwatch.com/story/wilbur-ross-says-coronavirus-will-help-to-accelerate-the-return-of-jobs-to-north-america-2020-01-30) *Fox Business News* that the virus “will help to accelerate the return of jobs to North America.” (37)

Though Ross claimed the virus would increase job growth, and Trump was confident that the U.S. had “very little problem” with the virus, the Trump Administration delivered one of a string of [mixed messages](https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2020-03-30/trumps-mixed-messages-confuse-coronavirus-response) (38) when they announced the formation of a Coronavirus Task Force on the same day.

In contrast to the efficient and responsive crisis management model [Barack Obama](https://benbosophy.blogspot.com/2017/01/ten-reasons-barack-obama-is-clearly.html) had set up, where Ron Klain coordinated actions among diverse agencies, Trump’s commission had confusing lines of authority, where “[at least three different people](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/07/trump-coronavirus-management-style-123465)—[Health and Human Services head Alex] Azar, Vice President Mike Pence and coronavirus task force coordinator Debbie Birx—can claim responsibility.” (39) In a crisis where immediate, decisive action was needed, the administration chose a slow-moving model choked with discussion and deliberation which focused on closing off borders [rather than](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2020/04/04/coronavirus-government-dysfunction/?arc404=true) testing and tracing and countrywide mitigation (40).

Klain offered a prescient prognosis at *the Atlantic Monthly*: “The U.S. government has the tools, talent, and team to help fight the coronavirus abroad and minimize its impact at home. But the combination of Trump’s paranoia toward experienced government officials (who lack ‘loyalty’ to him), inattention to detail, opinionated rejection of science and evidence, and isolationist instincts may prove toxic when it comes to managing a global-health security challenge. [To succeed, Trump will have to trust the kind of government experts he has disdained to date, set aside his own terrible instincts, lead from the White House, and work closely with foreign leaders and global institutions—all things he has failed to do in his first 1,200 days in office](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/01/now-trump-needs-deep-state-fight-coronavirus/605752/).”

Writing in *Foreign Policy*the next day, **January 31**, Laurie Garrett (a Pultizer-winning science journalist) posed an important question: “The epidemic control efforts unfolding today in China—including placing some 100 million citizens on lockdown, shutting down a national holiday, building enormous quarantine hospitals in days’ time, and ramping up 24-hour manufacturing of medical equipment—are indeed gargantuan. It’s impossible to watch them without wondering, ‘What would we do? [How would my government respond if this virus spread across my country](https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/01/31/coronavirus-china-trump-united-states-public-health-emergency-response/)?’”

Her government that day declared [a public health emergency](https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2020/01/31/secretary-azar-declares-public-health-emergency-us-2019-novel-coronavirus.html) and restricted Americans who had been in China over the past two weeks from re-entering the country.

Trump presented the decision as a *coup de grâce* to the pandemic. Speaking to Fox’s Sean Hannity on **February 2**, Trump said, “We pretty much shut it down coming from China.” (41) In fact, as Ron Klain would mention to Congress a few days later, [over 100,000 people\*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/03/14/tracking-trumps-false-or-misleading-coronavirus-claims/) had come to the States from China in the month before the ban, so “the horse is already out of the barn.” (\**the New York Times*would later point out that this was a significant underestimate, as [430,000 travelers](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/04/us/coronavirus-china-travel-restrictions.html) would enter the country from China from January-April of 2020, including [40,000](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-trump-china-travel-ban-45a2da12-8063-4ad9-ba28-61cdeb1ce0b3.html) after the travel ban, 42)

Trump would go on to brag repeatedly about the China ban as an example of a gutsy leadership move, but he made the decision reluctantly (after Delta Airlines and American Airlines had suspended flights from China and United [notified](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/one-final-viral-infusion-trumps-move-to-block-travel-from-europe-triggered-chaos-and-a-surge-of-passengers-from-the-outbreaks-center/2020/05/23/64836a00-962b-11ea-82b4-c8db161ff6e5_story.html) the White House that they were about to do so) and he wouldn’t restrict travel from Europe, which brought [many more travelers](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/one-final-viral-infusion-trumps-move-to-block-travel-from-europe-triggered-chaos-and-a-surge-of-passengers-from-the-outbreaks-center/2020/05/23/64836a00-962b-11ea-82b4-c8db161ff6e5_story.html) into the U.S.. than China and would provide [the bulk of New York’s cases](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/08/science/new-york-coronavirus-cases-europe-genomes.html), for six more weeks (43). In just the month of February, two million Europeans would come to the U.S., [hundreds](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-spread.html) bringing the virus with them.

In a **February 3** [interview](https://www.democracynow.org/2020/2/3/laurie_garrett_coronavirus_trump_admin_response) with Amy Goodman on *Democracy Now*, Laurie Garrett explained that John Bolton’s dissolution of the pandemic response office (see #17) was done out of spite: “it was a big mistake by the Trump administration to obliterate the entire infrastructure of pandemic response that the Obama administration had created. Why did he do it? Well, it certainly wasn’t about the money, because it wasn’t a heavily-funded program. It was certainly because it was Obama’s program.” (44)

Pressed by Goodman to provide more detail about the Global Security Office, Garrett continued:

“It was a special division inside the National Security Council, a special division inside of the Department of Homeland Security…and collaborating centers in HHS, headquarters in Washington, the Office of Global Health Affairs, and the Commerce Department, Treasury Department. But what Obama understood, dealing with Ebola in 2014, is that any American response had to be an all-of-government response, that there were so many agencies overlapping, and they all had a little piece of the puzzle in the case of a pandemic.”

“…What the Obama administration realized was that you can’t corral multiple agencies and things from private sector as well as public sector to come to the aid of America, unless you have some one person in charge who’s really the manager of it all. And in his case, it was Ron Klain, who had worked under Vice President Biden. And he was designated, with an office inside the White House, to give orders and coordinate all these various things….Well, that was all eliminated. It’s gone. And now they’re hastily trying to recreate something.”

On **February 4**, *the Wall Street Journal* posted an [op-ed](https://www.wsj.com/articles/stop-a-u-s-coronavirus-outbreak-before-it-starts-11580859525) by Trump’s former FDA commissioner, Scott Gottlieb, titled “Stop a U.S. Coronavirus Outbreak Before It Starts,” in which he stressed the importance of ramping up testing for the virus so that public health officials would know where to focus their efforts. (W20)

That same day, the administration rolled out new regulatory guidelines. Any lab that wanted to test needed to meet strict criteria to get an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). Though Trump had [gutted every environmental regulation](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/climate/trump-environment-rollbacks.html) in sight, and [scaled back](https://prospect.org/economy/trump-s-assault-financial-reform/) oversight of Wall Street, his FDA over-regulated this crucial public health function (45), [forcing public health labs to re-run their tests](https://www.motherjones.com/environment/2020/03/the-fda-is-forcing-the-cdc-to-waste-time-double-testing-some-coronavirus-cases/), which would delay reporting of the number of confirmed cases (46), robbing public health officials of vital information about the spread of infection in their areas. The EUA also slowed down private labs by demanding that they get CDC approval before using their tests (47).

On **February 5**, [Democratic senators met with administration officials and proposed emergency funding](https://www.msn.com/en-us/money/markets/senator-says-white-house-turned-down-emergency-coronavirus-funding-in-early-february/ar-BB11OvE1) “for essential preventative measures, including hiring local screening and testing staff, researching a vaccine and treatments and the stockpiling of needed medical supplies.” (W21)

HHS secretary Azar declined the funding, claiming it wasn’t needed. (48)

After the meeting, Senator Chris Murphy of Connecticut [tweeted](https://twitter.com/chrismurphyct/status/1244640034386579457) “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.”

On **February 6**, the World Health Organization shipped out [250,000 test kits](https://www.una-sf.org/covid19-resolution). The administration could have requested WHO kits, but insisted that the U.S. develop its own tests. That day, the CDC shipped out [90 test kits](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2020/04/04/coronavirus-government-dysfunction/?arc404=true). (49)

On **February 7**, the same day World Health Organization head Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that “The world is facing [a chronic shortage](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-health-who/who-warns-of-global-shortage-of-coronavirus-protective-equipment-idUSKBN2011EK) of gowns, masks, gloves and other protective equipment in the fight against a spreading coronavirus epidemic,” the same day that Rick Bright’s suggestion that the federal government begin mass production of masks [was rejected](https://theintercept.com/2020/05/07/coronavirus-whistleblower-hhs-n95-ppe/) by Trump’s disaster management team, (50) Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tweeted about “the transportation of nearly 17.8 tons of donated medical supplies…including masks, gowns, gauze, respirators, and other vital materials”—[to China](https://www.ourquadcities.com/news/local-news/u-s-sent-17-8-tons-of-masks-respirators-other-ppe-to-china-in-february/).

These shipments represented just a fraction of the vital medical supplies,  later desperately needed inside our borders, which would be exported from the U.S. due to the Trump administration’s [failure to plan ahead](https://theintercept.com/2020/04/01/coronavirus-medical-supplies-export/) and ban exports, as Germany, South Korea, and twenty-two others countries did. (51)

Asked at a news conference that day if he was concerned that China was covering up the full extent of the virus, Trump [replied](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-marine-one-departure-82/) “No. China is working very hard. Late last night, I had a very good talk with President Xi, and we talked about — mostly about the coronavirus. They’re working really hard, and I think they are doing a very professional job. They’re in touch with World — the World — World Organization. CDC also. We’re working together. But World Health is working with them. CDC is working with them. I had a great conversation last night with President Xi. It’s a tough situation. I think they’re doing a very good job.”

He said much the same thing on Twitter, where he praised China’s leadership and pushed misinformation about warm weather ending COVID-19: “Just had a long and very good conversation by phone with President Xi of China. He is strong, sharp and powerfully focused on leading the counterattack on the Coronavirus. He feels they are doing very well, even building hospitals in a matter of only days. Nothing is easy, but…….he will be successful, especially as the weather starts to warm & the virus hopefully becomes weaker, and then gone. Great discipline is taking place in China, as President Xi strongly leads what will be a very successful operation. We are working closely with China to help!”

Rick Bright continued his focus on medical supplies on **February 8**, when he met with Trump’s economic adviser, Peter Navarro (see W19). Bright and Navarro “[drafted a memo](https://theintercept.com/2020/05/07/coronavirus-whistleblower-hhs-n95-ppe/) sent to the White House coronavirus task force that called for the U.S. to immediately halt the export of N95 masks and ramp up production.” (W22)

On **February 9**, “a group of governors in town for a black-tie gala at the White House secured a private meeting with [Dr. Anthony] Fauci and [CDC head Robert] Redfield. The briefing rattled many of the governors, [bearing little resemblance](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2020/04/04/coronavirus-government-dysfunction/?arc404=true) to the words of the president.”

On **February 10**, Trump repeated a false talking point multiple times. “Trump [said](https://factba.se/transcript/donald-trump-interview-trish-regan-fox-business-february-10-2020) on Fox Business: ‘You know in April, supposedly, it dies with the hotter weather.’” (52) He [told state governors](https://factba.se/transcript/donald-trump-remarks-business-meeting-governors-february-10-2020): ‘You know, a lot of people think that goes away in April with the heat — as the heat comes in. Typically, that will go away in April.’ (53) And he [told supporters](https://factba.se/transcript/donald-trump-speech-kag-rally-manchester-new-hampshire-february-10-2020) at a campaign rally: ‘Looks like by April, you know, in theory, when it gets a little warmer, it miraculously goes away. I hope that’s true.’” (54) Just before the rally, when asked by Trish Regan of Fox News about China’s COVID-19 transparency, Trump said that the Chinese “[have everything under control](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAwlsIG9NWg)….We’re working with them. You know, we just sent some of our best people over there…It’s going to be fine.”

On **February 11**, Federal Reserve chairman Jay Powell contradicted Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross (see #37) when he said that the coronavirus would “very likely” impact America’s economy.

On **February 12,** *the New York Times* reported that [Trump’s CDC had sent state labs flawed test kits](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/12/health/coronavirus-test-kits-cdc.html), further slowing down the testing process. (55)

HHS secretary Alex Azar appeared before a Senate committee on **February 13** and said, “As of today, I can announce that the CDC has begun working with health departments in five cities to use its flu surveillance network to begin testing individuals with flu-like symptoms for the Chinese coronavirus….This effort will help see whether there is broader spread than we have been able to detect so far.”

The statement gave the impression that the Trump administration was making progress in combating the virus, which was false, as the cities still lacked functional tests and the surveillance systems weren’t in place. Azar knew this, but was desperate to create positive spin for the administration (56).

On **Valentine’s Day**, as worldwide deaths from the virus were at 1,000 and climbing, Trump spoke before the National Border Control Council. He again wheeled out the false assertion that warm weather would douse the virus (57) and said, “We have a very small number of people in the country, right now, with it. It’s like around 12. Many of them are getting better. Some are fully recovered already. So we’re in very good shape.”

On **February 18**, Trump tweeted [opposition](https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1229790102949449728) to a measure that would limit sales of U.S. technology to China and again defended President Xi. Asked at a news conference what he thought of “the data coming out of China,” Trump [said](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-air-force-one-departure-joint-base-andrews-md-2/), “Look, I know this: President Xi loves the people of China, he loves his country, and he’s doing a very good job with a very, very tough situation.”

Taking stock of Trump’s handling of COVID-19 so far, *Atlantic*contributor Peter Nicholas [offered](https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/02/trump-response-coronavirus/606610/) perceptive summations of the Trump Administration’s failures of governance and the challenges ahead:  “He has hollowed out federal agencies and belittled expertise (see #1), prioritizing instead his own intuition and the demands of his political base. But he’ll need to rely on a bureaucracy he’s maligned to stop the virus’s spread.”

The article cited the ramifications of Trump’s allergy to bad news: “‘We have a president who doesn’t particularly care about competent administration, and who created a culture in which bad news is shut down,’ (58) says Democratic Senator Brian Schatz of Hawaii, whose state is home to one of multiple airports screening passengers for the coronavirus. ‘And when you’re dealing with a potential pandemic, you need to know all the bad news. If this disease ends up not overwhelming us, that would be a blessing. But it would not be because the Trump administration was ready. They were not.’”

Nicholas also addressed Trump’s continual lies and distortions about the scope of the virus: “Since Trump’s first upbeat assessment, the number of people sickened by the virus has spiraled. At the time of the CNBC interview (see #27), 17 people in China had died from the virus and about 540 were infected. Today, the death toll is about 1,900 and the number of infections tops 73,000. At least 15 cases have been reported in the U.S., and [an additional 14 Americans](https://www.wsj.com/articles/fourteen-americans-headed-home-from-coronavirus-cruise-ship-test-positive-11581931972) infected with the virus arrived yesterday following their evacuation from a cruise ship in Japan.”

Undeterred by scientific facts, Trump pushed the warm weather myth again on **February 19**, telling a reporter  “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. So let’s see what happens, but I think it’s going to work out fine.” (59)

He also went to bat for President Xi. Asked how confident he was “that China is being 100 percent honest with us when it comes to this scary virus?,” Trump said, “[I’m confident that they’re trying very hard](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ylx23c8WUZI)….I know President Xi. I get along with him very well. We just made a great trade deal….I think it’s going to work out fine.”

On **February 20**, *Politico* [reported](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/02/20/cdc-coronavirus-116529) on the flawed test kits the CDC had sent out and mentioned that the cost of the kits was so high ($250/each) that Trump’s Health and Human Services department was starting to run out of money (60)—which could have been avoided if Azar had accepted additional congressional funding proposed on February 5 (see #48).

The coronavirus task force met on **February 21**. Reviewing the escalation in cases abroad, the group “[concluded](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/11/us/politics/coronavirus-trump-response.html) they would soon need to move toward aggressive social distancing, even at the risk of severe disruption to the nation’s economy and the daily lives of millions of Americans.”

Early on the morning of **February 23**, Michael Mina, an epidemiologist and professor at Harvard, [tweeted](https://twitter.com/michaelmina_lab/status/1231503805159813121?lang=en) that “the US remains extremely limited in [#COVID19](https://twitter.com/hashtag/COVID19?src=hash) testing. Only 3 of 100 public health labs have [@CDC](https://twitter.com/cdc) test kits working (61) and CDC is not sharing what went wrong with the kits. How to know if COVID19 is spreading here if we are not looking for it.” (62)

Later that day, Peter Navarro wrote [a memorandum](https://www.axios.com/exclusive-navarro-deaths-coronavirus-memos-january-da3f08fb-dce1-4f69-89b5-ea048f8382a9.html) to the president stating that “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…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.” (W23)

Unconcerned with trifles like data, Trump [told](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-marine-one-departure-83/) reporters that day, “We’re very much involved. We’re very — very cognizant of everything going on. We have it very much under control in this country.”

On Monday, **February 24**, trying to make up for previous short-sighted budget cuts, the administration “[asked Congress for $2.5 billion in emergency funds](https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/02/what-we-know-about-the-trump-admins-response-to-coronavirus.html) to handle coronavirus in the United States. (To compare to a recent health crisis, the Obama administration requested $6 billion in emergency funding for the 2014 Ebola outbreak and eventually received $5.4 billion.) Though Democrats in Congress have pushed the administration to call for emergency coronavirus funding since early February, *Politico* states that ‘White House officials have been hesitant to press Congress for additional funding, with some hoping that the virus would burn itself out by the summer.’”

The $2.5 billion request was a pittance, approximately 1/1000th the size of Trump’s tax cut (63), [most of which went](https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/12/18/16791174/republican-tax-bill-congress-conference-tax-policy-center) to the wealthiest 1% of Americans. Azar knew the funding was inadequate, but was hamstrung by administration officials who [didn’t grasp](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2020/04/04/coronavirus-government-dysfunction/?arc404=true) the seriousness of the virus and lacked pull with Trump to override them in favor of the public interest.

Even as the news grew worse, Trump continued to give false assurances, tweeting “The Coronavirus is very much under control in the USA….Stock Market starting to look very good to me!” (64). In fact, Trump had no idea if things were “under control” because his administration had failed to get functional test kits out.

That same day, the stock market had its [second biggest drop](https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/trump-stock-market-starting-look-very-good-plunging-1000-points-2020-2-1028933348) in its history.

The following day, **February 25**, the stock market cratered for the fourth consecutive day, losing 879 points to end at 27,081.

While the Dow Jones tanked, Nancy Messonier, the director for the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, [made the case for community mitigation](https://www.aappublications.org/news/2020/02/25/preparedness022520) and told reporters that the virus would cause “severe” disruptions in American’s lives. Unaware that his public health officials were planning to propose mitigation efforts, Trump [scolded](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/us-intelligence-reports-from-january-and-february-warned-about-a-likely-pandemic/2020/03/20/299d8cda-6ad5-11ea-b5f1-a5a804158597_story.html) Messonier’s ultimate boss, Alex Azar, for the toll her announcement had on the stock market (65) and the next day demoted Azar, putting Mike Pence in charge of the coronavirus task force. [As a result of Trump’s temper tantrum](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/11/us/politics/coronavirus-trump-response.html), the task force’s time-sensitive recommendations for social distancing, school closures, and cancellations of crowded events was put on hold.

It would be three long, deadly weeks before Trump would finally announce social distancing recommendations on March 16 (66), during which time the CDC would later [estimate](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6918e2.htm?s_cid=mm6918e2_w) “COVID-19 cases increased more than 1,000-fold.” [According to](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/20/us/coronavirus-cases-deaths.html) researchers at Columbia University, the last two weeks of delay cost the lives of tens of thousands of Americans. (67)

At a time when bipartisan harmony was more important than ever, Trump trolled Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer on Twitter for pointing out that $2.5 billion wasn’t remotely adequate to the task: “Cryin’ Chuck Schumer is complaining, for publicity purposes only, that I should be asking for more money than $2.5 Billion to prepare for Coronavirus. If I asked for more he would say it is too much. He didn’t like my early travel closings. I was right. He is incompetent!” (68)

And even as it was [reported](https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-cuts-programs-responsible-for-fighting-coronavirus-2020-2) that “Trump spent the past 2 years slashing the government agencies responsible for handling the coronavirus outbreak,” Trump tweeted that “CDC and my Administration are doing a GREAT job of handling Coronavirus.”

While in India that day, Trump told reporters, “You may ask about the coronavirus, which is very well under control in our country. We have very few people with it, and the people that have it are…getting better. They’re all getting better….As far as what we’re doing with the new virus, I think that we’re doing a great job.” (69)

Trump’s economic adviser Larry Kudlow [echoed Trump’s lies](https://www.thedailybeast.com/larry-kudlow-claims-america-has-contained-coronavirus-says-its-pretty-close-to-airtight) and contradicted CDC officials when he told CNBC, “We have contained this, I won’t say airtight but pretty close to airtight.” (70)

Meanwhile, *the Washington Post* [reported](https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/shortages-confusion-and-poor-communication-complicate-coronavirus-preparations/2020/02/25/d9e56396-575d-11ea-9b35-def5a027d470_story.html) on the severe shortage of N95 masks American hospitals were facing due to onerous federal regulations (71) and a lack of support from the Trump administration (72), and the administration’s lack of a plan going forward, which was causing confusion and panic among state and local officials (73). Though the administration had had three years to to build national reserves of emergency medical supplies, Azar’s testimony to the Senate Appropriations Committee that day showed that “the Strategic National Stockpile had only 30 million masks. That number is less than one one-hundredth of the 3.5 billion that a [specialized group](https://report.nih.gov/crs/View.aspx?Id=2641) within HHS that focuses on the risk from viral outbreaks has estimated are necessary.” (74)

The next day, **February 26**, *Politico* [reported](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/02/26/coronavirus-cdc-117779) that the “U.S. isn’t ready to detect stealth coronavirus spread” due to poor coordination among crisis management staff (75), the administration’s failure to get functional test kits out in a timely fashion (76), and needlessly strict test criteria: “Just 12 of more than 100 public health labs in the U.S. are currently able to diagnose the coronavirus because of problems with a test developed by the CDC, potentially slowing the response if the virus starts taking hold here. The faulty test has also delayed a plan to widely screen people with symptoms of respiratory illness who have tested negative for influenza to detect whether the coronavirus may be stealthily spreading.”

Only six states were testing for the virus and the testing was limited to people who had been to China or were experiencing symptoms, which was allowing the virus to spread undetected. Harvard epidemiology professor Mark Lipsitch told *Politico*, “China tested 320,000 people in Guangdong over a three-week period. This is the scale we need to be thinking on.”

Meanwhile, on the same day he was told that community spread [was present](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/inside-trumps-frantic-attempts-to-minimize-the-coronavirus-crisis/2020/02/29/7ebc882a-5b25-11ea-9b35-def5a027d470_story.html) in the U.S., Trump [tweeted](https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1232652371832004608) that the U.S. was in “great shape,” (77) continued to compare coronavirus to the flu, though the virus has approximately [20 times](https://www.sciencealert.com/the-new-coronavirus-isn-t-like-the-flu-but-they-have-one-big-thing-in-common) the mortality rate (78), and told White House reporters, “Because of all we’ve done, the risk to the American people remains very low….[When you have 15 people, and the 15 within a couple of days is going to be down to close to zero](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-president-pence-members-coronavirus-task-force-press-conference/). That’s a pretty good job we’ve done.” (79) In reality, the States had 60 cases at the time, the number was increasing, and the real number was far greater but undetected due to the administration’s failure to get functional test kits out.

The poor communication among officials overseeing the coronavirus response continued, as “[Health and Human Services Secretary Alex] Azar didn’t know until late in the afternoon that Vice President Mike Pence would be [in control](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/trump-says-coronavirus-risk-americans-very-low-administration-effectively-handling-n1143756) of the process. The HHS secretary was reportedly ‘[blindsided](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-downplays-risk-places-pence-in-charge-of-coronavirus-outbreak-response/2020/02/26/ab246e94-58b1-11ea-9000-f3cffee23036_story.html)’ by the news.”

In picking Pence to lead the administration’s response to coronavirus, Trump referred to his vice president as an “expert” and someone with “a certain talent for this,” though Pence’s reluctance to support needle exchange and steep cuts to Planned Parenthood (which provides HIV testing in addition to birth control) as governor of Indiana [had contributed to an HIV outbreak](https://www.factcheck.org/2020/02/pence-moved-slowly-in-combating-hiv-outbreak/) there.

With Pence’s ascension, FDA commissioner Stephen Hahn was finally brought into the coronavirus committee. For weeks the FDA’s powers to work with private companies to increase production of test kits, PPE, and other medical necessities [had been ignored](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-coronavirus-response-squandered-time/2020/03/07/5c47d3d0-5fcb-11ea-9055-5fa12981bbbf_story.html) (80).

As of **February 27**, 2,800 people had died and 82,000 cases had been reported worldwide. *Business Insider* had [the following headline](https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/trump-defends-cuts-cdc-budget-federal-government-hire-doctors-coronavirus-2020-2-1028946602): “Trump defends huge [19%] cuts to the CDC’s budget (81) by saying the government can hire more doctors ‘when we need them’ during crises.” Trump responded to criticisms of the budget cuts by saying, “I’m a businessperson. I don’t like having thousands of people around when you don’t need them….When we need them, we can get them back very quickly.”

Despite the increasing gloom, the administration continued to play pretend. [Appearing](https://www.c-span.org/video/?469774-1/hhs-secretary-azar-testifies-presidents-2021-budget-request) before the House Ways and Means committee, Alex Azar said, “The immediate risk to the public remains low” (82) and “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.” Trump told an audience attending an African American History Month event at the White House, “It’s going to disappear. One day it’s [like a miracle, it will disappear](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/28/trump-coronavirus-misleading-claims).” (83) He also tweeted “Only a very small number in U.S., & China numbers look to be going down. All countries working well together!” (84)

On Friday, **February 28**, nearly two months after the administration had first been informed of the coronavirus, NBC [reported](https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/after-missteps-cdc-says-its-coronavirus-test-kit-ready-primetime-n1145206) that the U.S. had done fewer than 500 tests, even as China had done over 300,000 and South Korea was doing 10,000 or more/day.

 *ProPublica* offered one of many post-mortems to come, highlighting[the grave error the administration had made in bypassing World Health Organization test kits](https://www.propublica.org/article/cdc-coronavirus-covid-19-test) which were ready to go (see #49) in favor of CDC test kits, which weren’t:

“The CDC announced on Feb. 14 that surveillance testing would begin in five key cities, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle. That effort has not yet begun.

“Until the middle of this week, only the CDC and the six state labs — in Illinois, Idaho, Tennessee, California, Nevada and Nebraska — were testing patients for the virus, according to Peter Kyriacopoulos, APHL’s senior director of public policy. Now, as many more state and local labs are in the process of setting up the testing kits, this capacity is expected to increase rapidly.

“There are other ways to expand the country’s testing capacity. Beyond the CDC and state labs, hospitals are also able to develop their own tests for diseases like COVID-19 and internally validate their effectiveness, with some oversight from the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. But because the CDC declared the virus a public health emergency, it triggered a set of federal rules that raises the bar for all tests, including those devised by local hospitals.

“So now, hospitals must validate their tests with the FDA — even if they copied the CDC protocol exactly. Hospital lab directors say the FDA validation process is onerous and is wasting precious time when they could be testing in their local communities.” (85)

As Margaret Hamburg (Obama’s FDA commissioner from 2009-2015) would later tell Olga Khazan of *the Atlantic*, “[the [FDA] could have proactively reached out to different national and international labs to see whether their tests could be approved for use in the U.S.,” but there’s no evidence that they did](https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/03/why-coronavirus-testing-us-so-delayed/607954/) (86), and in fact the FDA “told one Seattle infectious-disease expert, Helen Chu, [to stop testing](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/10/us/coronavirus-testing-delays.html?action=click&module=Spotlight&pgtype=Homepage) for the coronavirus entirely….Chu was not alone. Dozens of labs in the U.S. were eager to make tests and willing to test patients, but they were hamstrung by regulations for most of February, even as the virus crept silently across the nation.”

Uncertainty over the virus contributed to the markets having [their worst week](https://www.nbcboston.com/news/business/stocks-tumble-on-virus-fears-wall-street-plunge/2083133/) since the crash of 2008.

Later that night, even as other countries had started social distancing in response to the virus, Trump put thousands of his supporters at risk of exposure with a political rally in North Charleston, South Carolina. It was one of [eight campaign events](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2020/04/04/coronavirus-government-dysfunction/?arc404=true) Trump would have after being notified of coronavirus. (87)

Asked about administration efforts to combat coronavirus before the rally, Trump told Sinclair Broadcasting, “[I think it’s really going well](https://factba.se/transcript/donald-trump-interview-sinclair-media-group-eric-bolling-february-28-2020). We did something very fortunate: we closed up to certain areas of the world very, very early — far earlier than we were supposed to. I took a lot of heat for doing it. It turned out to be the right move, and we only have 15 people and they are getting better, and hopefully they’re all better. There’s one who is quite sick, but maybe he’s gonna be fine….We’re prepared for the worst, but we think we’re going to be very fortunate.” During the rally, Trump accused Democrats of politicizing the coronavirus and said [concern over the issue was a “hoax](https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2020/02/29/at_sc_rally_trump_blames_dems_for_stoking_virus_fears_142533.html).” (88)

Trump’s chief of staff Nick Mulvaney used the same talking point that night, telling reporters at the Conservative Political Action conference, “The reason you’re seeing so much attention to it [the coronavirus] today is [Democrats] think this is going to be what brings down the president….That’s what this is all about….I got a note today from a reporter saying, ‘What are you going to do today to calm the markets?’ I’m like, really, what I might do to calm the markets is tell people to turn their televisions off for 24 hours.” (89)

The next day, **Saturday, February 29**, [the first American death at the hand of the coronavirus “hoax” was reported](https://www.cnn.com/2020/02/29/health/us-coronavirus-saturday/index.html). Speaking in Maryland before the Conservative Political Action Conference, Trump said “And we’ve done a great job. And I’ve gotten to know these professionals. They’re incredible. And everything is under control. I mean, they’re very, very cool. They’ve done it, and they’ve done it well. Everything is really under control.”

Appearing on CBS’s “Face the Nation” the next day, **Sunday, March 1**, Alex Azar [claimed](https://www.mercurynews.com/2020/03/11/fact-check-a-list-of-28-ways-trump-and-his-team-have-been-dishonest-about-the-coronavirus/) that, “In terms of testing kits, we’ve already tested over 3,600 people for the virus. We now have the capability in the field to test 75,000 people, and within the next week or two we’ll have a radical expansion even beyond that.” Like most of the Trump administration’s public messaging, this was false. (90) At the time, less than 1,000 tests had been completed. By comparison, South Korea, a country 1/6th the size of the U.S., which had discovered the virus within its borders on the same day—January 20—[had done over 80,000 tests](https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2020/mar/25/donald-trump/trumps-boast-about-us-south-korea-coronavirus-test/).

As of **Monday, March 2**, U.S. coronavirus deaths were up to six; globally over 90,000 cases had been reported.

Dr. Matt McCarthy, a physician at New York-Presbyterian, told CNBC that he still didn’t have any test kits (91): “‘This is not good. We know that there are 88 cases in the United States. There are going to be hundreds by the middle of the week. There’s going to be thousands by next week. And this is a testing issue.’ McCarthy added, ‘[They’re testing 10,000 a day in some countries, and we can’t get this off the ground](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/02/coronavirus-new-york-city-doctor-has-to-plead-to-test-people.html)….I’m a practitioner on the firing line, and I don’t have the tools to properly care for patients today.’”

Dr. Eva Lee, an infectious disease researcher at the Georgia Institute of Technology, commented in [a Red Dawn email](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/11/us/politics/coronavirus-red-dawn-emails-trump.html?action=click&module=Spotlight&pgtype=Homepage) (see W18) with Trump administration public health officials: “We need 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!”

At a campaign rally the same day in Charleston, North Carolina, Trump said, “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.” [This was patently false](https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/public-global-health/484702-health-official-says-coronavirus-vaccine-will-take-at) (92), as Dr. Anthony Fauci, the chief medical expert on the coronavirus task force, had told Trump earlier that day. Fauci estimated that it would take a year-and-a-half for a vaccine to emerge.

After solid gains on Monday, the Dow lost 800 points on **Tuesday, March 3**, bringing it down to 25,917 at day’s close. Speaking to reporters, Trump continued to minimize the virus, claiming, “There’s only one hot spot, and that’s also pretty much in a very — in a home, as you know, in a nursing home.” In fact, the nursing home in Washington state wasn’t the only cluster of known coronavirus activity, as California and Oregon had both reported areas of community contagion. (93)

On **Wednesday, March 4**, the death toll in the U.S. reached ten and New York reported an infected community. Two months after the administration had been notified of the virus, and six weeks after Michael Bowen had written Health and Human Services (HHS) officials about the need for mass production of masks (see #28), HHS [finally ordered](https://theintercept.com/2020/05/07/coronavirus-whistleblower-hhs-n95-ppe/) 500 million N95 masks.

Speaking to airline executives at the White House, Trump [continued to downplay the extent of the crisis](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-president-pence-coronavirus-briefing-airline-ceos/), saying, “Some people will have this at a very light level and won’t even go to a doctor or hospital, and they’ll get better. There are many people like that.” (94) He also blamed the Obama administration for the lag in testing, claiming an Obama regulation had slowed the administration down, which was false (95).

Trump’s lies and blame shifting continued in an interview with Sean Hannity which appeared later that day. Trump [falsely claimed](https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/04/politics/donald-trump-obama-testing-lamar-alexander/index.html) that the Obama administration “didn’t do anything about” swine flu and that based purely on his intuition, science-based coronavirus fatality rates were flawed—“I think the 3.4 percent is really a false number — and this is just my hunch — but based on a lot of conversations with a lot of people that do this, because a lot of people will have this and it’s very mild, they’ll get better very rapidly. They don’t even see a doctor. They don’t even call a doctor. You never hear about those people.” (96)

On **Friday, March 6**, reported cases in the U.S. passed 300 and deaths were up to 17, including the first on the East Coast.

*The Atlantic*ran an article about [the administration’s failure to get functional test kits out](https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/03/how-many-americans-have-been-tested-coronavirus/607597/) called “The Strongest Evidence Yet That America Is Botching Coronavirus Testing.”

Two months after the Trump administration had first been notified of the coronavirus and one month after a task force had been formed, only 1,895 tests could be verified, a fraction of the 10,000-20,000 tests South Korea was performing daily.

According to the authors, “The figures we gathered suggest that the American response to the coronavirus and the disease it causes, COVID-19, has been shockingly sluggish, especially compared with that of other developed countries….The net effect of these choices is that the country’s true capacity for testing has not been made clear to its residents. (97) This level of obfuscation is unexpected in the United States, which has long been [a global leader in public-health transparency](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Global_Health_and_the_Future_Role_of_the/aaA4DwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=united+states+leader+public+health+disease+surveillance&printsec=frontcover).”

Earlier in the day, Trump had appeared at a signing ceremony for the Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act, which would dedicate $8.3 billion to fighting the coronavirus. The funding was more than three times what the administration had requested (see #63) and yet still a pittance relative to the scope of the virus, roughly [1/235th of the amount Trump spent on his tax cut, the bulk of which went to the upper 1%](https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/12/18/16791174/republican-tax-bill-congress-conference-tax-policy-center). (98)

Many public health officials felt the appropriations came a month too late (99), shortchanging localities of crucial resources for testing and personal protective equipment.

At the signing, Trump offered false assurances and minimized the scope of the public health disaster that he was spending $8.3 billion on, saying, “And in terms of deaths, I don’t know what the count is today. Is it eleven? Eleven people? And in terms of cases, it’s very, very few.” (100)

After the signing, Trump visited CDC headquarters in Atlanta, where [he continued to lie about test kits](https://www.inquirer.com/health/coronavirus/trump-coronavirus-test-fact-check-20200312.html): “Anybody that needs a test can have a test. They are all set. They have them out there. In addition to that they are making millions more as we speak but as of right now and yesterday anybody that needs a test that is the important thing and the test are all perfect like the letter was perfect.” (101)

Asked about the passengers on the Grand Princess cruise ship docked in San Francisco who were forced to stay on the ship for the time being, Trump expressed concern that allowing them onshore, where they would be added to the number of confirmed cases, would make him look bad: “I would rather — because I like the numbers being where they are. I don’t need to have the numbers double because of one ship. That wasn’t our fault, and it wasn’t the fault of the people on the ship, either. OK? It wasn’t their fault either. And they’re mostly Americans, so I can live either way with it. I’d rather have them stay on, personally.” (102)

Trump also said “I hear the numbers are getting much better in Italy,” [though the country was entering a lockdown](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/09/world/coronavirus-news.html) and would experience two hundred more deaths over the weekend to come.

On **Saturday, March 7**, *Politico* led with “[Trump’s mismanagement helped fuel coronavirus crisis](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/07/trump-coronavirus-management-style-123465),” an in-depth feature by Dan Diamond exploring the impact of the Trump administration’s internal dysfunctions on their crisis management response.

Diamond’s exposé revealed that Mike Pence and other administration officials had wanted to evacuate the Grand Princess cruise ship in order to keep the passengers who didn’t have coronavirus from getting it from those who did, but that Trump had overruled his advisors because he didn’t want the number of reported cases to increase.

The article stated that “As the outbreak has grown, Trump has become attached to the daily count of coronavirus cases and how the United States compares to other nations, reiterating that he wants the U.S. numbers kept as low as possible. Health officials have found explicit ways to oblige him by highlighting the most optimistic outcomes in briefings (103), and their agencies have tamped down on promised transparency. The CDC has stopped detailing how many people in the country have been tested for the virus (104), and its [online dashboard](https://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-in-us.html) is running well behind the number of U.S. cases [tracked](https://www.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6) by Johns Hopkins and even lags the European Union’s [own estimate](https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/geographical-distribution-2019-ncov-cases) of U.S. cases.”

The article confirmed that onerous regulations and Trump’s lack of policy engagement (see #2) were key elements in the test delays and that “Trump’s aides discouraged [HHS Secretary Alex] Azar from briefing the president about the coronavirus threat back in January” because Trump “rewards those underlings who tell him what he wants to hear while shunning those who deliver bad news.” (see #58)

“…The pressure to earn Trump’s approval can be a distraction at best and an obsession at worst: Azar, having just survived a bruising clash with a deputy [Seema Verma, head of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services] and sensing that his job was on the line, spent part of January making appearances on conservative TV outlets and taking other steps to shore up his anti-abortion bona fides and win approval from the president, even as the global coronavirus outbreak grew stronger.

“Around the same time, Azar had concluded that the new coronavirus posed a public health risk and tried to share an urgent message with the president: The potential outbreak could leave tens of thousands of Americans sickened and many dead.

“The jockeying for Trump’s favor was part of the cause of Azar’s destructive feud with Verma, as the two tried to box each other out of events touting Trump initiatives. Now, officials including Azar, Verma and other senior leaders are forced to spend time shoring up their positions with the president and his deputies at a moment when they should be focused on a shared goal: stopping a potential pandemic. (105)

“‘The boss has made it clear, he likes to see his people fight, and he wants the news to be good,’ said one adviser to a senior health official involved in the coronavirus response. ‘This is the world he’s made.’” (106)

The closing paragraph read “‘If this sort of dysfunction exists as part of the everyday operations—then, yes, during a true crisis the problems are magnified and exacerbated,’ said a former Trump HHS official. ‘And with extremely detrimental consequences.’”

The following day, **March 8,**as international cases had passed 100,000 and the importance of social distancing was becoming increasingly obvious, HUD secretary Ben Carson was asked by ABC’s George Stephanopoulos about the advisability of Trump holding rallies where thousands of people were crammed together. Carson, a neurosurgeon who knew better, [chose Trump’s favored talking point over public safety](https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/week-transcript-20-sen-bernie-sanders-dr-ben/story?id=69465733):  “…going to a rally, if you’re a healthy individual and you’re taking the precautions that have been placed out there, there’s no reason that you shouldn’t go. However, if you belong to one of those categories of high risk, obviously, you need to think twice about that.” (107)

As of **Monday, March 9**, the official tally in the U.S. was over 700 infections and 26 deaths. The Dow lost 2,000 points that day, [the biggest one-day loss in history](https://www.foxbusiness.com/markets/us-markets-march-9-2020).

Former Republican senator and governor [Judd Gregg offered a sober appraisal](https://thehill.com/opinion/white-house/486533-judd-gregg-trump-sails-into-the-perfect-political-storm) of Trump’s handling of the coronavirus:

“The budget he recently submitted to Congress savaged the BioShield account (108). This is the program that was set up after the SARS epidemic and anthrax events well over a decade ago to allow the federal government to fund research on pharmaceutical responses to biological attacks or a pandemic outbreak.

“The program was needed because this type of research is extremely expensive and has little commercial upside. The drugs developed are unique and narrowly targeted.

“Thus, in order to get this research up and running, Congress and the prior administrations created the program. In this instance, Congress actually anticipated a serious issue and began addressing it effectively.

“But the president and his people got it wrong. In their usual naive and uninformed style, they have tried to eviscerate the program.

“This action came in the face of significant warnings from the intelligence community that a biological attack is one of the primary threats we face from terrorists. And now we know a pandemic is also a primary threat.”

Gregg’s key takeaway: “The president and his people also have an abysmal track record when it comes to preparing for pandemics.”

While the virus spread undetected, testing continued to move at a glacial pace, and the Dow was in free fall, Trump kept busy attacking imagined foes on Twitter.

One tweet read “This is your daily reminder that it took Barack Obama until October of 2009 to declare Swine Flu a National Health Emergency. It began in April of ’09 but Obama waited until 20,000 people in the US had been hospitalized & 1,000+ had died. Where was the media hysteria then?” In actuality, Obama had declared a public health emergency [two days](https://www.dhs.gov/news/2009/04/26/press-briefing-swine-influenza) after the first swine flu death (109).

A second tweet read “The Fake News Media and their partner, the Democrat Party, is doing everything within its semi-considerable power (it used to be greater!) to inflame the CoronaVirus situation, far beyond what the facts would warrant. Surgeon General, ‘The risk is low to the average American.’” (110)

Trump also tweeted his mistaken talking point about coronavirus being akin to the flu, not for the first time: “So last year 37,000 Americans died from the common Flu. It averages between 27,000 and 70,000 per year. Nothing is shut down, life & the economy go on. At this moment there are 546 confirmed cases of CoronaVirus, with 22 deaths. Think about that!” (111)

By **Tuesday, March 10**, over 113,000 coronavirus cases had been reported globally and more than 4,000 people had died.

At a hearing about Trump’s 2021 budget proposal, Russ Vought, the administration’s director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), [defended a 15% proposed cut to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://thehill.com/policy/finance/486817-trump-budget-chief-holds-firm-on-cdc-cuts-amid-virus-outbreak) (112) and a steep cut to the annual contribution to the Infectious Diseases Rapid Response Reserve Fund. (113)

More administration failures were uncovered by David Lim and Brianna Ehley of *Politico* with [a big scoop](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/10/coronavirus-testing-lab-materials-shortage-125212) titled “U.S. coronavirus testing threatened by shortage of critical lab materials.”

The piece detailed how a shortage of lab materials (114) was exacerbating America’s already-slow pace of testing, thereby jeopardizing public safety (115) by keeping public health officials from having accurate data about the number of cases and the areas with high concentration.

The article pointed out that seven weeks after the first case was discovered in the U.S., just over 5,000 people had been tested, though “HHS Secretary Alex Azar had told lawmakers [one week earlier] that U.S. labs’ capacity could grow to 10,000-20,000 people per day by the end of the week.” (116)

All evidence to the contrary (see #1-#116), Donald Trump continued to blame his predecessor and pitch the case that his administration was doing a good job of crisis management. During a briefing at the capital, Trump said, “As you know, it’s about 600 cases, it’s about 26 deaths, within our country. And had we not acted quickly, that number would have been substantially more.” He added that “…I think the U.S. has done a very good job on testing. We had to change things that were done that were nobody’s fault, perhaps, they wanted to do something a different way, but it was a much slower process from a previous administration and we did change them.”

The next day, **Wednesday, March 11**, the U.S. had over 1,000 reported cases and 32 deaths. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus a pandemic. The Dow lost over 1,000 points for the second time in three days, ending at 23,553. The National Basketball Association suspended its season.

CNN.com posted [an investigative piece](https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/12/us/coronavirus-testing-problems-nationwide-invs/index.html) entitled “Confusion over the availability and criteria for coronavirus testing is leaving sick people wondering if they’re infected.”

The article noted that though Mike Pence had recently said on CNN’s “New Day” that anyone with a doctor’s order could get a test, this was not the case in practice, as the U.S. was woefully unprepared to provide tests on this scale. (117)

People were also not getting tests due to strict CDC criteria: “In order to be prioritized for testing, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises that one must have a fever, cough or difficulty breathing as well as have been in close contact with a person known to have coronavirus. Or, they had to ‘have a history of travel from affected geographic areas within 14 days of their symptom onset.’”

As the article noted, “only 11,079 specimens [have] been tested in the U.S., paling in comparison to the [more than 230,000 people](https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/12/asia/coronavirus-south-korea-testing-intl-hnk/index.html) tested in South Korea, which has about one sixth the US population.”

Dr. Rod Hochman, the CEO of Providence St. Joseph Health, told *Politico*, “Testing is so critically important because it helps us as clinicians figure out the extent of the spread. It has implications for how we care for patients and where we put them….It’s unraveling the detective story of how the virus spreads but we are trying to do it now with no data.”

On Rachel Maddow’s show that evening, Ron Klain, who had been Obama’s Ebola czar (see #39, #41), pointed out that one of the Trump administration’s biggest mistakes was to privatize testing. [As related](https://buzzflash.com/articles/privatization-may-be-killing-us-mystery-of-why-the-trump-administration-still-hasnt-sent-out-promised-million-cv-tests-as-delay-is-facilitating-transmission-of-the-virus-by-undetected-carriers) by journalist Thom Hartmann, “Instead of taking the World Health Organization (WHO) test kits which are cheap and widely available all over the planet, and having them distributed across the country back in December, or January, or February when we knew this disease was spreading in the United States, Klain said that Trump has outsourced the testing to two big American companies, Quest and Labcorp.” (see #49)

Trump’s public appearances on Wednesday didn’t inspire confidence. During a press conference with Ireland’s prime minister, Trump again minimized the threat by saying, “It goes away….It’s going away. We want it to go away with very, very few deaths.” (118)

Though the virus was supposedly going away, Wednesday’s 1,000-point drop in the Dow convinced Trump to address the nation in a prime-time speech that was [roundly panned](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-coronavirus-teleprompter-speech/2020/03/12/81bc8a3a-647a-11ea-acca-80c22bbee96f_story.html). Again he minimized the threat (claiming coronavirus had a “very, very low risk” for most Americans, 119), cast blame on China and Europe for having the disease before the U.S., gave confusing information while ad-libbing that contradicted administration policy (120), and again lied about the slow pace of testing when he said, “Testing and testing capabilities are expanding rapidly, day by day. We are moving very quickly.” The address was meant to reassure the American public and stabilize the markets, but Trump’s ill-prepared speech [sent stock futures tumbling in real time](https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/12/investing/premarket-stocks-trading/index.html).

Republican journalist and former W. Bush speechwriter David Frum [predicted the future with uncanny precision](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/trump-ensuring-worst-possible-outcome-coronavirus-crisis/607867/):

“More people will get sick because of his presidency than if somebody else were in charge. More people will suffer the financial hardship of sickness because of his presidency than if somebody else were in charge. The medical crisis will arrive faster and last longer than if somebody else were in charge. So, too, the economic crisis. More people will lose their jobs than if somebody else were in charge. More businesses will be pushed into bankruptcy than if somebody else were in charge. More savers will lose more savings than if somebody else were in charge. The damage to America’s global leadership will be greater than if somebody else were in charge.”

On **Thursday, March 12**, the day after Trump’s prime time address meant to reassure the nation and calm the stock market, the Dow Jones lost almost 1,000 points, ending at 21,200.

In an email thread with Tom Bossert, Trump’s former homeland security adviser (see #12), James Lawler (director of Clinical and Bio-defense Research at the National Strategic Research Institute) said, “We are making every misstep leaders initially made in [simulations] 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](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/11/us/politics/coronavirus-trump-response.html) 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.” (121)

The most glaring of the Trump administration’s failures was its inability to get test kits out. Even Republicans were starting to grumble, [as detailed in](https://www.stamfordadvocate.com/news/article/In-Congress-bipartisan-complaints-to-Trump-15126672.php) “Testing lag ignites political uproar as Trump insists process is very smooth.”

Cutting against Trump’s consistently self-serving narrative, Anthony Fauci, Trump’s key coronavirus advisor, said, “The system is not geared toward what we need right now, what you are asking for….[It is a failing. Let’s admit it](https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/it-failing-let-s-admit-it-fauci-says-coronavirus-testing-n1157036).”

The piece pointed out that more than two months after the administration first became aware of the virus, “only about 11,000 people have been tested, according to figures shared with members of Congress on Thursday. According to statistics compiled by the American Enterprise Institute, nationwide capacity to process the test kits being distributed has so far ramped up only to about 20,000 people per day – meaning it could be weeks before any tested patient gets results.

“Lawmakers of both parties reached for the same touchstone – South Korea, which has managed to treat hundreds of thousands of its people, allowing it to avoid the rapid spread seen in China, Italy and other countries….‘South Korea is able to process tests in an hour, and in the U.S. it takes more than two days – that’s not adequate,’ said Ben Sasse, a Republican senator from Nebraska.” The article pointed out that South Korea tests in a single day the number of people the U.S. has tested in over two months, with drive-up exams which aren’t possible in the U.S. due to strict testing guidelines. (122)

Burdensome and deadly regulations were further discussed at *ProPublica*, which revealed that an FDA directive “requires that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a sister agency, re-test every positive coronavirus test run by a public health lab to confirm its accuracy.

“The result, experts say, is [wasting limited resources at a time when thousands of Americans are waiting in line to get tested for COVID-19](https://www.propublica.org/article/cdc-coronavirus-covid-19-test).” (123)

Duplicate tests were just one element of a failed operation. [The Trump administration’s key mistakes](https://www.npr.org/2020/03/12/814881355/white-house-knew-coronavirus-would-be-a-major-threat-but-response-fell-short) were summarized by *Politico* reporter Dan Diamond in an interview with NPR’s Terry Gross:

“The Trump administration and health officials knew back in January that this coronavirus was going to be a major threat. They knew that tests needed to be distributed across the country to understand where there might be outbreaks. But across the month of February, as my colleague David Lim at Politico first reported, the tests that they sent out to labs across the country simply did not work. They were coming back with errors.

“The CDC, the Centers for Disease Control, recognized that and promised that new tests would be distributed soon. But one day turned into two days turned into three days turned into several weeks, and in the meantime, we know now coronavirus was silently spreading in different communities, like Seattle. By the time that the Trump administration made a decision to allow new tests to be developed by hospitals by clinical laboratories, it was a step that was seen as multiple weeks late.” (124)

“…I don’t use this word lightly, Terry, but I’d say that this testing failure and the broader response to the coronavirus has been a catastrophe.

“…the Trump administration failed to plan for this moment. There were leadership failures, like failing to think through the implications of not having a testing strategy in place. (125) There were leadership failures in allowing feuds to fester for months and months that – in the middle of a crisis, those cracks have widened and caused delays in making simple decisions.

“He cut funding for a program that predicted when viruses could jump from animals to humans basically around the same time that this new coronavirus appears to have jumped from animals to humans in China.” (see #22)

Amid the disaster unfolding all around and because of him, Trump continued to lie to the American public. Asked about the lack of testing at a White House briefing, Trump said, “over the next few days, they’re going to have four million tests out” and “Frankly, the testing has been going very smooth….If you go to the right agency, if you go to the right area, you get the test.”

He even found a way to brag about the administration’s response:

“It’s going to go away….The United States, because of what I did and what the administration did with China, we have 32 deaths at this point…when you look at the kind of numbers that you’re seeing coming out of other countries, it’s pretty amazing when you think of it.” (126)

The administration did one thing right on March 12: its Health and Human Services Department placed its first order for N95 masks. Unfortunately, the order came far too late and [wouldn’t be filled until the end of April](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/u-s-wasted-months-before-preparing-for-virus-pandemic?fbclid=IwAR0O6BHcxnjIWRK3V6fqrbC7z_TSMI_YmV998CaEObXypNQFB1CXgiohrMQ), long after the pandemic had started to ravage America’s emergency rooms.

**Friday the 13th** was again all about the test kits. Where were they?

*Raw Story* reported that [the Trump Administration’s Health and Human Services agency had finally named a testing czar—ten weeks after being notified of the virus](https://www.rawstory.com/2020/03/were-weeks-into-this-cnn-reporter-crushes-trump-for-just-now-appointing-coronavirus-testing-czar/). (127)

Caitlin Owens of*Axios* pointed out that “[less than a dozen academic labs” were doing tests because of strict administration guidelines](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-testing-labs-delay-a3868ece-a2e5-4ed2-8822-44d20c73774d.html). Medical directors discussed how their requests to test had been delayed or denied until it was too late. (128)

[According to](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-51836898) the BBC, testing capacity in the U.S. was just 22,000 people/day while South Korea, which is 1/6th the size of the U.S., was testing up to 20,000 people/day. And the 22,000 projection was very optimistic, according to Andy Slavitt, Barack Obama’s acting administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, who [tweeted](https://twitter.com/ASlavitt/status/1238304906219528192), “We can at best do 10,000 tests/day. We should be able to do millions” and “All of this could have been ramped up and solved in January & February and right now we would be talking about containment.”

*The Atlantic*reported that [less than 14,000 tests had been done in the ten weeks since the administration had first been notified of the virus](https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/03/why-coronavirus-testing-us-so-delayed/607954/), though Mike Pence had promised the week prior that 1.5 million tests would be available by this time.

The article’s key takeaway?

“Getting out lots of tests for a new disease is a major logistical and scientific challenge, but it can be pulled off with the help of highly efficient, effective government leadership. In this case, such leadership didn’t appear to exist.” (129)

Speaking to one of the prime causes of that failure in leadership, Beth Cameron, who ran Obama’s pandemic office in the National Security Council, explained [the disastrous operational vacuum caused by John Bolton’s closing of the Global Security Office (](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/nsc-pandemic-office-trump-closed/2020/03/13/a70de09c-6491-11ea-acca-80c22bbee96f_story.html)see #17): “In a health security crisis, speed is essential. When this new coronavirus emerged, there was no clear White House-led structure to oversee our response, and we lost valuable time.”

“…The job of a White House pandemics office would have been to get ahead: to accelerate the response, empower experts, anticipate failures, and act quickly and transparently to solve problems.

“Our team reported to a senior-level response coordinator on the National Security Council staff who could rally the government at the highest levels, as well as to the national security adviser and the homeland security adviser. This high-level domestic and global reporting structure wasn’t an accident. It was a recognition that epidemics know no borders and that a serious, fast response is crucial.

“A directorate within the White House would have been responsible for coordinating the efforts of multiple federal agencies to make sure the government was backstopping testing capacity, devising approaches to manufacture and avoid shortages of personal protective equipment, strengthening U.S. lab capacity to process covid-19 tests, and expanding the health-care workforce.

“The office would galvanize resources [to coordinate a robust and seamless](https://www.nti.org/analysis/atomic-pulse/united-states-must-lead-fight-against-coronavirus/) domestic and global response. It would identify needs among state and local officials, and advise and facilitate regular, focused communication from federal health and scientific experts to provide states and the public with fact-based tools to minimize the virus’s spread. The White House is uniquely positioned to take into account broader U.S. and global security considerations associated with health emergencies, including their impact on deployed citizens, troops and regional economies, as well as peace and stability. A White House office would have been able to elevate urgent issues fast, so they didn’t linger or devolve to inaction, as with coronavirus testing in the United States.”

Ben Rhodes, Obama’s deputy national security director, piggybacked on these criticisms with a look at [the culture of mis-governance Trump bred and embodied](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/white-house-set-fail/607960/), and Trump’s fixation on his 2020 campaign to the exclusion of all else:

“As the first COVID-19 cases began to spread with alarming speed and lethality in China, President Trump evidently did not choose to make the issue a priority. Based on his public comments and Twitter feed, the incoming information that consumed his attention was more likely to come from cable television or political gossip than deep inside his intelligence briefings. (130) Presumably, he also had a certain view of what he’d be doing in early 2020—chiefly, preparing the ground for his reelection campaign—and veering off course to prepare for a pandemic would have undermined those plans.  A simple presidential communication of interest in a subject can set the government in motion, but in this case, that signal apparently never came.” (131)

“…Instead of seeing U.S. government expertise as a resource, Trump has routinely derided career experts as “deep state” operatives, insufficiently loyal to him and his agenda. (132) Well into the COVID-19 outbreak, he said things such as ‘A lot of people think that it goes away in April with the heat,’ or ‘This is a flu.’ I doubt that any government expert would suggest that Trump say those things. The statements, instead, suggest a president either making things up or cherry-picking things he’s heard from non-experts to offer false reassurance to the public.”

“…By constantly trying to get himself through the news cycle, Trump has done irreparable damage to the long-term objective of ensuring that he’s a credible voice on the COVID-19 crisis.” (133)

That night, as the administration got ready to [take food stamps away from 700,000 Americans in the middle of a pandemic](https://www.vox.com/identities/2020/3/13/21178257/trump-administration-food-stamps-coronavirus-economy) (134), a 1,000-point loss in the Dow prompted Trump to finally declare a national emergency.

At a press conference announcing the news, Trump failed to model coronavirus safety protocols, [as he had done all week](https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/investigations/2020/04/09/instead-prepping-coronavirus-trump-partied-golfed-held-fundraisers/2941076001/), shaking hands and standing cheek-by-jowl with other administration officials (135). Trump also made a [false claim](https://www.vox.com/recode/2020/3/15/21180518/coronavirus-google-verily-website-testing-trump) about Google constructing a testing center and, reality aside, claimed that “the administration expects 1.4 million tests in the next week and 5 million within the month.” (*ten*days later, less than 300,000 tests would be completed; *one month* later, [less than three million](https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/%22%20%5Cl%20%22countries) would be completed, 136)

Asked if he took responsibility for the lag in testing, Trump said, “[I don’t take responsibility at all](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-president-pence-members-coronavirus-task-force-press-conference-3/) because we were given a set of circumstances, and we were given rules, regulations, and specifications from a different time that wasn’t meant for this kind of an event with the kind of numbers that we’re talking about.” (137)

Asked by PBS reporter Yamiche Alcindor how he could say he had no responsibility for the testing failures despite his appointee’s elimination of the Global Security Office (see #17), [Trump again ducked responsibility](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/video/2020/mar/13/coronavirus-trump-slams-reporter-for-nasty-question-over-pandemic-response-team-video), saying “That’s a nasty question…When you say me, I didn’t do it. We have a group of people [in the administration].”

That night, after stocks rebounded on news of the declaration, Trump “sent a note to supporters that included a chart showing the Dow Jones Industrial Average dramatically rising roughly at the time he [began a news conference declaring a national emergency over coronavirus.](https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/13/politics/donald-trump-emergency/index.html) The President signed the chart.”

On the [chart](https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/13/politics/trump-stock-market-gains-signed-photo/index.html) were the words “‘The President would like to share the attached image with you, and passes along the following message: From opening of press conference, biggest day in stock market history!’”

Peter Wehner, a conservative Republican who had served under multiple Republican administrations, summed up the historical moment in an *Atlantic* post:  “…[the president and his administration are responsible for grave, costly errors](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/peter-wehner-trump-presidency-over/607969/), most especially the epic manufacturing failures in diagnostic testing, the decision to test too few people, the delay in expanding testing to labs outside the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and problems in the supply chain. (138) These mistakes have left us blind and badly behind the curve, and, for a few crucial weeks, they created a false sense of security. What we now know is that the coronavirus silently spread for several weeks, without us being aware of it and while we were doing nothing to stop it. Containment and mitigation efforts could have significantly slowed its spread at an early, critical point, but we frittered away that opportunity.”

On **Saturday, March 14**, in “From complacency to emergency: How Trump changed course on coronavirus,” Gary Orr and Nancy Cook of *Politico* [reported](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/14/how-trump-changed-course-on-coronavirus-129528) on Donald Trump’s 180-degree turn.

Just three days before he declared a national emergency, Trump had said the coronavirus “will go away” and that his administration’s “response was ‘really working out.’” In fact, Trump’s indifference to the crisis had forced city and state leaders to step up before a federal response of any kind had taken shape.

Though he was purportedly now focused on helping the American people get through an economic crisis, Trump continued to advocate [a payroll tax](https://talkingpointsmemo.com/news/coronavirus-payroll-tax-cut-trump-economics-skepticism) which would steal revenue from Social Security and Medicare and give more money in real dollars to the wealthy and upper-middle class, doing little for the people who needed the money most. (139)

The following **Monday, March 16**, *the Washington Post* led with, “[How U.S. coronavirus testing stalled](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/03/16/cdc-who-coronavirus-tests/?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most): Flawed tests, red tape and resistance to using the millions of tests produced by the WHO.”

The key stat-line in the piece was that “From mid-January until Feb. 28, fewer than 4,000 tests from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention were used out of more than 160,000 produced.” (140)

The CDC had come up with a test quickly, by January 17, but “From there…U.S. efforts fell quickly behind, especially when compared with the efforts of the [World Health Organization], which has distributed more than 1 million tests to countries around the world based in part on the method developed by the German researchers….As early as Feb. 6, four weeks after the genome of the virus was published, the WHO had shipped 250,000 diagnostic tests to 70 laboratories around the world.

“By comparison, the CDC at that time was shipping about 160,000 tests to labs across the nation — but then the manufacturing troubles were discovered, and most would be deemed unusable because they produced confusing results. Over the next three weeks, only about 200 of those tests sent to labs would be used.”

“…U.S. efforts to distribute a working test stalled until Feb. 28, when federal officials [revised the CDC test](https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/02/27/coronavirus-testing-california/?tid=lk_inline_manual_40&itid=lk_inline_manual_40) and began loosening up [FDA rules](https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/02/29/new-fda-policy-will-expand-coronavirus-testing/?tid=lk_inline_manual_40&itid=lk_inline_manual_40)that had limited who could develop coronavirus diagnostic tests.”

Due to the flawed test kits and CDC regulations, as of February 21, “Health officials across the country began pleading for a test that worked, or at least the authorization to use another test.”

Interviewed for the article was Alex Greninger of the University of Washington. “His lab had developed its own test and began seeking approval to use it on patients on Feb. 18. But that test, along with others that had been developed in various academic centers and hospitals, could not be used on patients until the FDA relaxed its testing rules.

“[Greninger] noted that many of the state public health labs had also figured out how to use the CDC test properly — by tossing one of its components — but were not allowed to actually do so until the FDA approved the workaround that same day.

“We had all these state public health labs that had a perfectly good [test] on their hands, and they knew it, they were upset,” Greninger said.

“…As late as Feb. 27, only 203 specimen tests had been run out of state labs; another 3,125 had been run out of the CDC.”

Even as earlier stumbling blocks to mass testing had been overcome, new hurdles that had been overlooked by the administration (141) were appearing, as [reported](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/16/coronavirus-testing-glitch-cotton-swabs-132692) by David Lim of *Politico*:

 “A potential shortage of cotton swabs and other basic supplies needed for coronavirus testing is emerging as a new threat to the Trump administration’s plans to roll out high-volume testing to 2,000 sites across the country by the end of the week.”

“…The materials in question include swabs that medical workers use to collect samples of patients’ phlegm and saliva for testing, and disposable plastic tips for the pipettes that lab technicians use to transfer liquids. Testing labs say they’re also concerned about the availability of personal protective equipment for their staff.”

Asked at a press conference that day how he’d rate his response to the crisis, Trump said, “I’d rate it a ten,” part of a pattern of [over 100 self-congratulatory remarks](https://www.mediaite.com/trump/you-should-be-saying-congratulations-here-are-116-times-trump-has-praised-his-own-coronavirus-response/) he would make throughout his upcoming press briefings.

The following day, **Tuesday, March 17**, *the Washington Post* published an [article](https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/covid-19-hits-doctors-nurses-emts-threatening-health-system/2020/03/17/f21147e8-67aa-11ea-b313-df458622c2cc_story.html) about another disastrous facet of the pandemic which the administration had failed to prepare for:  “Covid-19 hits doctors, nurses and EMTs, threatening health system.” (142)

In addition to the concern about hospital overcrowding and a lack of beds, the virus was now threatening the health and lives of the clinicians tasked with administering to the sick, putting yet another strain on the system:

“Dozens of health-care workers have fallen ill with covid-19, and more are quarantined after exposure to the virus, an expected but worrisome development as the U.S. health system girds for an anticipated surge in infections.

“From hotspots such as the Kirkland, Wash., [nursing home](https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/nursing-home-with-the-biggest-cluster-of-covid-19-deaths-to-date-in-the-us-thought-it-was-facing-an-influenza-outbreak-a-spokesman-says/2020/03/16/c256b0ee-6460-11ea-845d-e35b0234b136_story.html?tid=lk_inline_manual_3&itid=lk_inline_manual_3%22%20%5Co%20%22www.washingtonpost.com) where nearly four dozen staffers tested positive for the [coronavirus](https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/02/28/what-you-need-know-about-coronavirus/?tid=lk_inline_manual_3&itid=lk_inline_manual_3), to outbreaks in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, California and elsewhere, the virus is picking off doctors, nurses and others needed in the rapidly expanding crisis.

“They have been put at risk in the United States not only by the nature of their jobs, but by shortages of protective equipment such as N95 face masks (143) and government bungling of the testing program, which was delayed for weeks while the virus spread around the country undetected.

“Because testing has lagged, health-care workers often have no way to know whether people walking through the door with respiratory symptoms are suffering from the flu or covid-19, providers said. Even when precautions are taken, the virus has found its way into health-care facilities.” (144)

As clinicians in the trenches struggled with shortages of protective gear, swabs, and their own illnesses thanks to Trump’s indifference to the virus for ten weeks, Trump [said](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/17/us/politics/trump-coronavirus.html) at a press conference, “This is a pandemic…I felt it was a pandemic long before it was called a pandemic.” One week earlier he had said that the coronavirus “will go away.”

Though the president had changed his tune, many of his followers still thought the virus was a hoax (see #88). After two months in which Trump had minimized and dismissed the seriousness of the virus with a steady stream of propaganda, polling showed that 79% of Democrats understood that “the worst is yet to come,” while [only 40% of Republicans grasped the obvious](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/meet-the-press/me-worry-coronavirus-it-depends-your-politics-n1160256), a level of ignorance which would lead to a lack of compliance with public safety guidelines and a major spread in infections in the ensuing months. (145) Despite Trump’s numerous failures to protect the public from the virus (#1-#145), 81% of Republicans approved of Trump’s management of the crisis.

On **Wednesday, March 18**, *New York* magazine’s Jonathan Chait discussed [imminent, devastating human consequences](https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/03/coronavirus-surge-hospitals-trump-beds-respirators-ventilators-fema-cdc.html) which could have been significantly reduced with proper planning in “The Hospital Deluge Is Coming. Washington Has Done Almost Nothing to Prepare.” His opening paragraph summarized why America found itself in such a disastrous situation:

“The most efficient first step would have been to prevent the coronavirus pandemic from spreading in the first place. As many reports have widely documented, that first step never took place because the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention failed to deploy an effective coronavirus test. ‘This is such a rapidly moving infection that losing a few days is bad, and losing a couple of weeks is terrible,’ Ashish Jha, director of the Harvard Global Health Institute, tells [Bloomberg News](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-17/coronavirus-testing-shortage-u-s-called-private-sector-too-late). ‘Losing 2 months is close to disastrous, and that’s what we did.’

“The loss of those two months deprived the government of any chance to prevent the pandemic from sweeping across the entire country. Officials have been forced into reaction mode (146), deploying blunt measures of closing public spaces to try to slow down the spread. Even so, it is highly likely that, within a few weeks, the number of infected patients will exceed the capacity of the hospital system to treat them.

“Washington has had weeks and weeks to prepare for this surge. The three most obvious and foreseeable shortages are hospital beds (147), respirator masks to protect medical staff (148), and ventilators (the machines that are needed to pump air into the lungs of patients with the most serious coronavirus symptoms). (149)

“You would think the government would have spent the last two months scrambling to produce more of all three. There is no evidence this has happened, and a great deal of evidence it has not.”

The answer to the supply shortage was clear: Trump needed to invoke the Defense Production Act, which would marshal the resources of the federal government to mass-produce the medical supplies needed by American hospitals. Fifty-seven House Democrats had sent [an open letter](https://andylevin.house.gov/media/press-releases/57-house-members-urge-president-invoke-defense-production-act-authority) to Trump on March 13, asking him to trigger the act. Though the situation was clearly about to become desperate, Trump told a reporter, “Well, we’re able to do that if we have to. Right now, we haven’t had to, but it’s certainly ready. If I want it, we can do it very quickly. We’ve studied it very closely over two weeks ago, actually. We’ll make that decision pretty quickly if we need it. We hope we don’t need it. It’s a big step.”

The scale of the administration’s negligence to help prepare states and localities was laid out with grim statistics:

“Oregon [sent a letter](https://drive.google.com/file/d/11JLocjh05rPY-1cUnr2X4KSuHDYWHZKD/view) to Vice President Mike Pence on March 3 asking for 400,000 N95 masks. For days, it got no response, and only by March 14 received its first shipment, of 36,800 masks. But there was a problem. Most of the equipment they got was well past the expiration date and so ‘wouldn’t be suitable for surgical settings,’ the state said. (150)

“New York City also put in a request for more than 2 million masks and only received 76,000; all were expired, said Deanne Criswell, New York City’s emergency management commissioner.” (151)

Over at *Axios,*Bob Herman[focused](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-hospital-bed-crunch-capacity-18e22c81-006b-4654-a74c-40ff86488431.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top) on just one aspect of the coming shortage in “No part of the U.S. has enough hospital beds for a coronavirus crisis.”

Herman reported that, “Every corner of the U.S. is at risk for a severe shortage of hospital beds as the coronavirus outbreak worsens.”

“…Why it matters: Total nationwide capacity for health care supplies doesn’t always matter, because hospitals in one area can help out neighboring systems when they’re overwhelmed by a crisis. But these projections indicate that won’t be an option with the coronavirus — everybody will be hurting at the same time.

“By the numbers: Harvard’s projections show if 50% of all currently occupied hospital beds were emptied and sizable percentages of Americans were infected, the country would need at least three times more beds to care for everyone.

“Those models line up with James Lawler, an infectious disease doctor at the University of Nebraska Medical Center who forecasted in a recent presentation to hospital insiders that the U.S. may eventually have as many as 96 million cases, resulting in 4.8 million hospitalizations. He told Axios he stands by those projections.

“The U.S. has [924,000](https://www.aha.org/statistics/fast-facts-us-hospitals) total hospital beds, or less than three beds for every 1,000 people. Roughly 5% of those beds are in standard intensive care units, where the sickest coronavirus patients would need to go.”

Due to the expected shortage in hospital beds, medical facilities were delaying heart surgeries, “slow-growing or early-stage cancers,” and cancer screenings such as mammograms and colonoscopies (152, 153, 154).

On **Thursday March 19**, as the full scale of the disaster was coming into clearer focus, *the New York Times* [documented the Trump administration’s failures](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/19/us/politics/trump-coronavirus-outbreak.html) to act on information that was readily available in “Coronavirus Outbreak: A Cascade of Warnings, Heard but Unheeded.”

The piece revealed that Trump’s Health and Human Services department had run a series of simulations (called “Crimson Contagion”) about responding to a hypothetical respiratory virus from China from January to August of 2019. The simulations “drove home just how underfunded, underprepared and uncoordinated the federal government would be for a life-or-death battle with a virus for which no treatment existed.” (W24)

Further, “The draft report, marked ‘not to be disclosed,’ laid out in stark detail repeated cases of ‘confusion’ in the exercise. Federal agencies jockeyed over who was in charge. State officials and hospitals struggled to figure out what kind of equipment was stockpiled or available. Cities and states went their own ways on school closings.

“Many of the potentially deadly consequences of a failure to address the shortcomings are now playing out in all-too-real fashion across the country. And it was hardly the first warning for the nation’s leaders. Three times over the past four years the U.S. government, across two administrations, had grappled in depth with what a pandemic would look like, identifying likely shortcomings and in some cases recommending specific action.”

“…Asked at his news briefing on Thursday about the government’s preparedness, Mr. Trump responded: ‘Nobody knew there would be a pandemic or epidemic of this proportion. Nobody has ever seen anything like this before.’

“The work done over the past five years, however, demonstrates that the government had considerable knowledge about the risks of a pandemic and accurately predicted the very types of problems Mr. Trump is now scrambling belatedly to address.

“But the planning and thinking happened many layers down in the bureaucracy. The knowledge and sense of urgency about the peril appear never to have gotten sufficient attention at the highest level of the executive branch or from Congress.”

Just as Republicans did when [George W. Bush failed New Orleans](https://www.cnn.com/2005/POLITICS/09/28/katrina.brown/) after Hurricane Katrina and contributed to the deaths of [1,800 Americans](https://www.insurancejournal.com/blogs/corelogic/2015/08/03/374178.htm) through sheer incompetence, Trump passed the buck to state governments. At a press conference that day, Trump said, “Governors are supposed to be doing a lot of this work…the federal government is not supposed to be out there buying vast amounts of items and then shipping. We’re not a shipping clerk.”

As *New York Magazine*’s Jonathan Chait [pointed out](https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/03/trump-coronavirus-governors-hospitals-ventilators-respirators.html), “It is absolutely astonishing that Trump believes state and local governments should have primary responsibility for handling a national pandemic. Those governments lack the bargaining power and national scale to take control of industrial processes that lie outside their borders.” (155)

At the same press conference, a *Washington Post* photographer noticed that Trump had made one change to the notes he was using while speaking to the press—crossing out the word “coronavirus” and writing the words “Chinese virus” above it, [a dog whistle to his racist supporters](https://www.commondreams.org/news/2020/03/19/washington-post-photographer-spots-crossed-out-coronavirus-favor-chinese-virus-trump) and a needless provocation to a country we should have been collaborating with who could provide the U.S. with pharmaceuticals and personal protective equipment (156).

As of **Friday, March 20,***eleven weeks* after administration officials were first officially notified of the coronavirus, [states and localities were still waiting for tests](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/20/coronavirus-tests-states-138426) so that they could know where outbreaks were concentrated.

According to reporters Dan Goldberg, Brianna Ehley, and David Lim of *Politico*:

“…governors and public health officials say they are still being forced to dramatically ration the tests (157), while labs are confronting daunting backlogs that delay the results (158)….governors have been on the phone with Vice President Mike Pence and other federal officials, begging for additional supplies, testing kits, swabs, reagents and protective equipment.

“The shortage of tests means that in many states people who believe they might have contracted the virus can’t know for sure and are told to stay home for weeks. (159) It means health care workers don’t know whether they’ve contracted the illness even as they treat infected patients and tend to members of high-risk groups, such as the elderly, who might be in the hospital for other reasons. (160) And it means public health officials are left guessing where they should direct resources because they can’t be certain whether there are clusters of cases.” (161)

“….That’s left states to impose strict criteria on who can be tested, frustrating people across the country who are showing symptoms, worried but were told to wait and see if their cases worsen. (162) In several states, only those who are hospitalized or at high risk, including those with underlying conditions, can be tested.”

Karen Weise and Mike Baker of *the New York Times*gave a preview of [the severe rationing American hospitals would soon face](https://www.boston.com/news/health/2020/03/20/chilling-plans-who-gets-care-when-washington-state-hospitals-reach-their-max):

“Medical leaders in Washington state, which has the highest number of U.S. coronavirus deaths, have quietly begun preparing a bleak triage strategy to determine which patients may have to be denied complete medical care in the event that the health system becomes overwhelmed by the coronavirus in the coming weeks.

“Fearing a critical shortage of supplies, including the ventilators needed to help the most seriously ill patients breathe, state officials and hospital leaders held a conference call Wednesday night to discuss the plans, according to several people involved in the talks. The triage document, still under consideration, will assess factors such as age, health and likelihood of survival in determining who will get access to full care and who will merely be provided comfort care, with the expectation that they will die.” (163)

Not only were hospitals likely to have shortages in beds, but clinicians would be hampered from doing their jobs because of the Trump administration’s failure to help states get adequate surgical masks and other personal protective equipment. (see #143)

In “[Where are the Masks?](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/going-war-butter-knife/608428/),” Wajahat Ali revealed that to date the U.S. had tested only 82,000 people (by comparison to 270,000 tested in South Korea, 1/6th America’s size), leaving clinicians in the dark about whether their patients had the virus, and that “2,629 health workers had been infected” in Italy, giving a preview of what medical workers in the States had to look forward to if stocks of protective gear weren’t ramped up quickly. If clinicians get sick, “no one else will be left, especially in small communities, to take care of patients as the coronavirus exponentially spreads.”

Trump had committed to using the Defense Production Act to address this issue two days earlier, but had changed his mind later that night, [tweeting](https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1240391871026864130) that he would only invoke the Act “in a worst-case scenario in the future.” (164)

Ali reported that “Almost every health-care professional I interviewed criticized the government’s lack of preparedness. ‘The biggest mistake we’ve made is that we awakened to this problem too late,’ said [a] New York emergency-room doctor. ‘We had three months of warning from China and then Europe, and we didn’t take it seriously.’”

Another New York physician told Ali, “We have known for six weeks, and there was literally zero response and preparedness….The entire health-care system is a massive failure on a federal level.’”

Clinicians “also voiced frustration toward the CDC and its changing guidelines on personal protective equipment. A few weeks ago the CDC said physicians needed N95 masks. Later, it said surgical masks would suffice. This week, it said bandanas and scarves can be used as a last resort. The physicians said they believe these shifting guidelines are driven by equipment shortages, and not the actual safety of health-care workers.” (165)

With cities and some states shutting down, reported cases increasing by the day, widespread testing still not happening, hospitals overburdened and expecting worse, adequate PPE nowhere in sight, and a record number of Americans about to file for unemployment in no small part due to administration inaction from January 3 until March 13, Peter Alexander of NBC asked Trump at that day’s daily coronavirus briefing, “What do you say to Americans who are watching you right now who are scared?”

Trump’s [response](https://www.forbes.com/sites/mattperez/2020/03/20/trump-rages-over-simple-question-id-say-that-youre-a-terrible-reporter/) to this reasonable question was, “I say that you’re a terrible reporter, that’s what I say. I think it’s a very nasty question, and I think it’s a very bad signal that you’re putting out to the American people.”

**Saturday, March 21** featured an autopsy of executive branch failures from *Politico*’s resident expert on the Trump administration’s response, Dan Diamond.

Diamond pointed out that while Trump’s sudden shift to publicly acknowledging the coronavirus with regular briefings and promises of federal assistance was assuaging gullible and uninformed Americans, [behind the scenes the failures were evident](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/21/short-term-thinking-trump-coronavirus-response-140883):

“…no one in the White House had devised a national strategy for obtaining and distributing the necessary supplies in the likely months-long fight against the pandemic that lies ahead, said three people with knowledge of the planning efforts. Those supply-planning efforts are only now underway.” (166)

As a result of 10 weeks of inaction from the administration, Seattle and New York City “have effectively abandoned efforts to conduct broad testing on residents, instead urging them to stay home given the shortages — an acknowledgment that efforts to contain coronavirus have failed and they need to prioritize limited supplies (167). Local officials also are making unusual crowdsourcing appeals.

“‘We need companies to be creative to supply the crucial gear our healthcare workers need. NY will pay a premium and offer funding,’ New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo tweeted on Friday. ‘If you have any of these unused supplies, please email COVID19supplies@esd.ny.gov.’”

Not only was the Trump administration not using the Defense Production Act, they were actively competing with states for equipment, robbing states of supplies in order to build up national reserves. (168)

Supply-chain shortages would not only negatively impact coronavirus victims, people who couldn’t get surgeries due to the flood of coronavirus victims into hospitals, and the clinicians who serve them, but women having babies (169). According to *ProPublica*, “Over the next three months, nearly a million women in the United States will give birth to nearly a million babies — a huge influx of mostly healthy, highly vulnerable patients into a hospital system that’s about to come under unprecedented strain. Pregnant women, not surprisingly, are anxious. Those in their third trimester, looking to deliver during an epidemic, are close to frantic.”

As the crisis in our hospitals became clearer, Trump continued to blame his predecessors.

Though the Obama administration had [briefed](https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/488069-obama-officials-walked-trump-aides-through-global-pandemic-exercise-in-2017) the incoming Trump administration on the importance of pandemic planning (see W2), [run through a pandemic exercise](https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/488069-obama-officials-walked-trump-aides-through-global-pandemic-exercise-in-2017) with them, and left highly competent officials in charge of the CDC and the NSC’s Office of Global Security, when asked about the shortage of masks in his daily briefing, Trump said, “Many administrations preceded me — for the most part they did very little, in terms of what you’re talking about…We’re making much of the stuff now, it’s being delivered now.”

On **Sunday, March 22**, ABC [reported](https://abcnews.go.com/US/coronavirus-live-updates-us-now-highest-globally-covid/story?id=69733219&cid=social_fb_abcn&fbclid=IwAR0DNxBtaHYTbxapeU-_kvqBDNavfe56QqnlC0gpl58jQ4JfJ2iv05tRozU) that the U.S. “now has the third most cases worldwide,” over 31,000.

Appearing on CNN, Bronx/Queens representative Alexandra-Ocasio Cortez said, “The fact that the president has not really invoked the Defense Production Act for the purpose…of emergency manufactur[ing] [is going to cost lives](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/22/ocasio-corteztrump-going-to-cost-lives-141701).”

Because the Trump administration had failed to think ahead and was refusing to invoke the Defense Production Act—while [stealing supplies from states](https://www.businessinsider.com/coronavirus-trump-outbid-states-on-medical-supplies-2020-3) to stock the national reserves—administration officials were tasked with coming up with contingency plans for hospitals as they run out of PPE, ventilators, and vital medical supplies.

As reported by *the Washington Post*, “Most disturbing for some people is the idea that the wealthiest nation in the world is leaving its caregivers unprotected in this crisis because it did not plan for it and [wasted precious weeks](https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/government-scrambling-to-advise-hospitals-that-run-out-of-basic-supplies/2020/03/21/d9c36702-6b88-11ea-abef-020f086a3fab_story.html) before responding.” (170)

Further into the piece, the authors looked at the Trump administration’s original sin:

“CDC Director Robert Redfield heard from Chinese counterparts on Jan. 3 that a spreading respiratory illness could be caused by a novel coronavirus. Redfield told Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, who sought to immediately notify the White House National Security Council, according to four senior administration officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal government actions. Azar briefed Trump on Jan. 18 about the virus, but the president was said to be quickly disinterested. (see #25) The CDC, HHS, National Institutes of Health, State Department, National Security Council and other agencies and aides began meeting to discuss the virus in January.

“Yet Trump and several of his aides were reluctant to take the virus seriously until the first confirmed U.S. case surfaced on Jan. 21, according to two senior administration officials. (171) Trump continued to downplay the threat of the virus until this month.

“Not until the first week of March did the administration and Congress agree to an $8.3 billion supplemental spending bill to address the outbreak, wasting weeks that could have been used to respond to equipment shortages…”

“…Lauren Sauer, director of operations for the Johns Hopkins Office of Critical Event Preparedness and Response, said, ‘Lack of clarity from the White House has been frustrating….It feels like every decision that is being made from the administration is the first decision they’ve had to make on this.’” (172)

Not only was the administration failing to provide clear guidance to hospitals as to how to cope with the man-made disaster that awaited them, but due to the shortages—which were exacerbated by the administration outbidding states—states were competing with one another and even against other countries. As Illinois governor J.B. Pritzker told CNN, “[It‘s a wide Wild West…out there](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/22/wild-west-states-pritzker-says-141580). And, indeed, we’re overpaying, I would say, for [personal protective equipment] because of that competition.” (173)

Trump’s response to Pritzker’s criticism of the grossly inadequate federal response, in the middle of a pandemic he had made infinitely worse than it needed to be (see #1-#173), was to spend his precious time [trolling Pritzker on Twitter](https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1241760294776561667?lang=en) (174).

When he wasn’t using Twitter to attack public officials who tried to hold him accountable, Trump added to the chaos and suffering he’d already caused by tweeting that “HYDROXYCHLOROQUINE & AZITHROMYCIN, taken together, have a real chance to be one of the biggest game changers in the history of medicine. The FDA has moved mountains – Thank You!”

As *ProPublica* [reported](https://www.propublica.org/article/lupus-patients-cant-get-crucial-medication-after-president-trump-pushes-unproven-coronavirus-treatment?utm_source=pardot&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=majorinvestigations), “Trump’s push to use hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19 has triggered a run on the drug. Healthy people are stocking up just in case they come down with the disease. That has left lupus patients…and those with rheumatoid arthritis suddenly confronting a lack of medication that safeguards them, and not only from the effects of those conditions.”  (175)

Moreover, there was no concrete evidence that the combination was effective. As Trump’s top medical coronavirus advisor, Anthony Fauci, told an interviewer, “The information that you’re referring to is anecdotal. It wasn’t done in a controlled clinical trial, so you can’t make a definitive statement about it.” (176)

Fauci’s inability to keep Trump focused on facts popped up again on **Monday, March 23**, in an interview with *Science Magazine*. Asked about Trump’s constant bragging about closing off travel from China and 180-degree turn from [praising China effusively](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/15/trump-china-coronavirus-188736) in January and February to blaming them for the state of the pandemic in the United States in March (177), Fauci said, “I know, but what do you want me to do? I mean, [seriously Jon, let’s get real, what do you want me to do](https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/03/i-m-going-keep-pushing-anthony-fauci-tries-make-white-house-listen-facts-pandemic)?”

Fauci’s lack of sway was again evident in Trump’s messaging at that day’s briefing. Despite all available information that the impact of the virus was increasing dramatically, with the country now at over 42,000 cases and 100 deaths in a day, and the warnings of health officials that a shutdown was [necessary to flatten the curve](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/23/coronavirus-economy-trump-restart-145222), Trump minimized the scope of the pandemic by mentioning the number of fatal auto accidents annually (178), again compared the coronavirus to the flu (179), and said he would [review](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-says-he-may-soon-lift-restrictions-to-reopen-businesses-defying-the-advice-of-coronavirus-experts/2020/03/23/f2c7f424-6d14-11ea-a3ec-70d7479d83f0_story.html?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most) his decision to shut the country down once the initial 15-day order was up, potentially re-opening parts of the country while the pandemic continued to spread. He even claimed that there would be more suicides from social isolation than deaths from the virus itself (180).

That same day, Michael Poznansky of *the Washington Post* [reported](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/03/23/apparently-trump-ignored-early-coronavirus-warnings-that-has-consequences/) that the administration had had access to “repeated” intelligence warnings since the beginnings of the virus (see W14), but it was unclear if Trump was aware of the information in real time because “Trump reportedly does not read intelligence assessments, does not ask probing questions of his intelligence advisers (181), and does not schedule intelligence briefings nearly as often as his predecessors.” (182)

[Another major (and unforced) administration error](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-china-cdc-exclusiv/exclusive-u-s-axed-cdc-expert-job-in-china-months-before-virus-outbreak-idUSKBN21910S) was revealed by journalist Marisa Taylor, who reported that “Several months before the coronavirus pandemic began, the Trump administration eliminated a key American public health position in Beijing intended to help detect disease outbreaks in China.”

According to Taylor, “the American disease expert, a medical epidemiologist embedded in China’s disease control agency, left her post in July [2019]…The first cases of the new coronavirus may have emerged as early as November, and as cases exploded, the Trump administration in February chastised China for censoring information about the outbreak and keeping U.S. experts from entering the country to help.

“‘It was heartbreaking to watch,’ said Bao-Ping Zhu, a Chinese American who served in that role, which was funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, between 2007 and 2011. ‘If someone had been there, public health officials and governments across the world could have moved much faster.’ (183)

“As an American CDC employee, they said, Quick was in an ideal position to be the eyes and ears on the ground for the United States and other countries on the coronavirus outbreak, and might have alerted them to the growing threat weeks earlier.” (A follow-up [article](https://www.mercurynews.com/2020/03/26/trump-administration-slashed-cdc-staff-inside-china-prior-to-coronavirus-outbreak/) by Taylor would reveal that the disease expert was just one of many health officials in Beijing who were pulled out by the administration, which had eliminated 33 of 47 positions at that location.)

Asked about the story at a press conference, Trump said the report was “100 percent wrong” but offered no factual rebuttal of the information provided.

Seeking to mitigate the unfolding disaster that Trump had created, Congress was at work on a time-sensitive stimulus bill. As ever, Republican Mitch McConnell [played chicken with the Democrats](https://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/ny-oped-the-wrong-coronavirus-stimulus-20200323-h6erlkfgvjg5vlmrizphmgpdb4-story.html), crafting a Senate bill that shortchanged everyday people and desperate medical facilities while directing enormous sums of taxpayer subsidies to business interests with no strings attached.

When Democrats refused to play ball, McConnell blamed the Democrats for the delay, a dishonest rhetorical thrust [echoed by the president](https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1242293340151873536) (184) which forced Nancy Pelosi to step in and shape a stimulus package that would at least try to strike a balance between public needs and private interests. With no thanks to the president, [Pelosi molded](https://washingtonmonthly.com/2020/03/26/americans-can-thank-democrats-for-a-strong-stimulus-package/?fbclid=IwAR0KZNLnjovNCiUAUBDsniWeTCp6U6Yx-A3VWtocriDQCWAT3i4pNo8mBvI%22%20%5Cl%20%22.Xn_DECAoB28.facebook) a bill that spent more money on hospitals, unemployment benefits, and federal disaster management, included progressive tax cuts (in place of the regressive tax cuts Trump/McConnell wanted), and made airlines getting huge infusions of taxpayer money follow green practices.

**Tuesday, March 24** offered another post-mortem on [the Trump administration’s failures](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/24/dhs-pandemic-coronavirus-146884) to act on the coronavirus with “DHS wound down pandemic models before coronavirus struck” by Daniel Lippman at*Politico*.

The opening paragraphs tell the crux of the story:

“The Department of Homeland Security stopped updating its annual models of the havoc that pandemics would wreak on America’s critical infrastructure in 2017, according to current and former DHS officials with direct knowledge of the matter.

“From at least 2005 to 2017, an office inside DHS, in tandem with analysts and supercomputers at several national laboratories, produced detailed analyses of what would happen to everything from transportation systems to hospitals if a pandemic hit the United States.

“But the work abruptly stopped in 2017 amid a bureaucratic dispute over its value, two of the former officials said, leaving the department flat-footed as it seeks to stay ahead of the impact the COVID-19 outbreak is having on vast swaths of the U.S. economy. (185) Officials at other agencies have requested some of the reports from the pandemic modeling unit at DHS in recent days, only to find the information they needed scattered or hard to find quickly.” (186)

Former Obama DHS official Juliette Kayyem said the administration’s blindness to the value of the models could be attributed to its singular focus on [scapegoating Mexicans](https://time.com/4473972/donald-trump-%26/):

“We should not be surprised that a department that has for the last 3½ years viewed itself solely as a border enforcement agency seems ill-equipped to address a much greater threat to the homeland.” (187)

This short-sightedness robbed crisis management officials of information that could have helped them from the outset of the virus’s expansion into the U.S.: “The former DHS officials said if the pandemic models had been maintained properly, the administration might have had an earlier understanding of where shortages might occur, and acted accordingly to address them…(188)

“‘A lot of what we’re doing now is shooting in the dark, and there’s going to be secondary impacts to infrastructure that are going to be felt in part because we didn’t maintain these models,’ (189) said one of the former DHS officials. ‘Our ability to potentially foresee where the impacts are or may manifest is a result of the fact that we don’t have the capabilities anymore.’”

The impact of not having these models in the present was grim, as states strained under the weight of [medical supply shortages and record numbers of unemployment claims](https://www.politico.com/states/new-jersey/story/2020/03/24/governors-beg-for-cash-as-unemployment-claims-crush-states-1268856). Nowhere was this felt more acutely than New York, which was now “the U.S. epicenter of the pandemic, with 25,665 cases,” and facing a disastrous shortage of ventilators and other crucial medical equipment. The state had 7,000 ventilators and needed 30,000. The administration had thus far sent just 400 ventilators. (190)

Addressing the shortage, New York governor Andrew Cuomo [said](https://www.axios.com/andrew-cuomo-coronavirus-ventilators-bfbd9ef5-a03f-4c52-b5c9-48905ba6f2b8.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiospm&stream=top), “I understand the federal government’s point that many companies have come forward and said we want to help, and General Motors and Ford and people are willing to get into the ventilator business. It does us no good if they start to create a ventilator in three weeks or four weeks or five weeks. We’re looking at an apex of 14 days….The [Defense Production Act] can actually help companies, because the federal government can say, ‘Look, I need you to go into this business. I will contract with you today for x number of ventilators. Here’s the startup capital you need’….Not to exercise that power is inexplicable to me.” (191)

Bridling, as he always does, at criticism—even when it is well-deserved—Trump [falsely accused](https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2020/mar/25/donald-trump/donald-trump-misses-key-facts-claim-new-york-gover/) Cuomo of creating death panels during a Fox News virtual town hall that day and continued to refuse to activate the Defense Production Act. This was of a piece with the administration’s pattern of delay and obfuscation, as [reported](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/24/us/politics/coronavirus-ventilators.html) in “Slow Response to the Coronavirus Measured in Lost Opportunity” at *the New York Times*.

Had the administration called on its potential industrial power in January, when they knew about the virus’s destructive power overseas, or even early February, when Democratic senators proposed emergency funding (see #48), hospitals could have had sufficient stocks of equipment when the first big wave of cases came in, but due to administration delays, the proposed partnership between GE and General Motors wouldn’t produce equipment until June (192). The administration’s promise to send out 60,000 test kits fell well short of the “tens of millions needed.”

Even as the administration failed to get ventilators out (despite having an awareness of ventilator shortages in Chinese hospitals [two months earlier](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/u-s-wasted-months-before-preparing-for-virus-pandemic?fbclid=IwAR0O6BHcxnjIWRK3V6fqrbC7z_TSMI_YmV998CaEObXypNQFB1CXgiohrMQ)), even as public health officials recommended a shutdown of up to “[a year or more](https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2020/3/17/21181694/coronavirus-covid-19-lockdowns-end-how-long-months-years),” even as the spokesperson for the World Health Organization had said that very day that the U.S. could be [the next epicenter](https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/25/united-states-coronavirus-pandemic-new-epicenter/) of the coronavirus, Trump [said](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/24/coronavirus-response-trump-wants-to-reopen-us-economy-by-easter.html) “the faster we go back, the better it’s going to be” during a virtual town hall and told Fox viewers that he wanted the country to be “[opened up and just raring to go by Easter](https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/24/politics/trump-easter-economy-coronavirus/index.html).” (193)

While official cases increased from 7,800 to 53,268 in just one week, one of the [root causes of the public health disaster](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/25/trump-coronavirus-national-security-council-149285) was explored the next day, **Wednesday, March 25**, by *Politico*reporters Nahal Toosi and Dan Diamond in “Trump team failed to follow NSC’s pandemic playbook.”

According to the piece, [Barack Obama](https://benbosophy.blogspot.com/2017/01/ten-reasons-barack-obama-is-clearly.html)’s National Security Council had a plan for just these kinds of situations, but the Trump administration had ignored the playbook for the past twelve weeks, thereby enabling the catastrophe that was unfolding in New York City and other parts of the country. (194)

One excerpt from the playbook read “‘Is there sufficient personal protective equipment for healthcare workers who are providing medical care?’ the playbook instructs its readers, as one early decision that officials should address when facing a potential pandemic. ‘If YES: What are the triggers to signal exhaustion of supplies? Are additional supplies available? If NO: Should the Strategic National Stockpile release PPE to states?’”

The plan consisted of “hundreds of tactics and key policy decisions laid out in a 69-page National Security Council playbook on fighting pandemics….Other recommendations include that the government move swiftly to fully detect potential outbreaks, secure supplemental funding and consider invoking the Defense Production Act — all steps in which the Trump administration lagged behind the timeline laid out in the playbook.”

“….The guide further calls for a ‘unified message’ on the federal response, in order to best manage the American public’s questions and concerns. ‘Early coordination of risk communications through a single federal spokesperson is critical,’ the playbook urges.

“However, the U.S. response to coronavirus has featured a rotating cast of spokespeople and conflicting messages (195); Trump already is discussing loosening government recommendations on coronavirus in order to ‘open’ the economy by Easter, despite the objections of public health advisers.

“A former Obama official said, ‘These are recommended discussions to be having on all levels, to ensure that there’s a structure to make decisions in real-time.’”

Though briefed on the playbook (officially titled the Playbook for Early Response to High-Consequence Emerging Infectious Disease Threats and Biological Incidents) by outgoing Obama administration officials, Trump’s NSC never followed through on its recommendations.

Another example of [how not to handle a pandemic](https://www.propublica.org/article/internal-emails-show-how-chaos-at-the-cdc-slowed-the-early-response-to-coronavirus) appeared on *ProPublica*’s website the following day, **Thursday, March 26**.

“Internal Emails Show How Chaos at the CDC Slowed the Early Response to Coronavirus” gave examples of the Trump administration’s miscommunications with state health officials in Nevada and failures to gather accurate data about the number of coronavirus cases.

Among the key findings:  1) the CDC gave contradictory information about test guidelines to public health officials (196); 2) the CDC intended to outsource testing to state health departments, but this was slowed down because of delays with the test kits; 3) the CDC asked states to use DCIPHER, a web platform, but provided no training on how to use the platform until February 24 (197); and 4) the CDC protocol for screening passengers at Los Angeles airport returning from China was unclear and ineffective (198).

Returning to the present, [hospitals were weighing universal do not resuscitate orders](https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/26/health/coronavirus-hospitals-do-not-resuscitate-bn/index.html) in order to keep clinicians safe: “The conversations are driven by the realization that the risk to staff amid dwindling stores of protective equipment — such as masks, gowns and gloves — may be too great to justify the conventional response when a patient ‘codes,’ and their heart or breathing stops.” (199)

“‘…It’s extremely dangerous in terms of infection risk because it involves multiple bodily fluids,’ explained one ICU physician in the Midwest, who did not want her name used because she was not authorized to speak by her hospital.”

One New York nurse who died from COVID-19 worked on a unit where [clinicians had to wear garbage bags due to a shortage of PPE](https://www.businessinsider.com/kious-kelly-hospital-nurse-dies-trash-bags-2020-3). (200)

That evening, it was reported that [3.3 million Americans had applied for unemployment](https://www.inquirer.com/health/coronavirus/coronavirus-jobs-unemployment-20200327.html), a record number (201), and Trump told 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](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/26/trump-ventilators-coronavirus-151311). And now all of a sudden they’re saying, ‘Can we order 30,000 ventilators?’” (202\*)(\**The New York Times* would [report](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/26/health/coronavirus-ventilator-sharing.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage)the next day that the state of New York was so short of ventilators that patients were actually *sharing* ventilators, 203)

Trump’s minimizing of the crisis extended to his daily briefing, where he talked about classifying areas of the country based on known infection rates and [opening up the spots with lower rates](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-pushes-to-open-up-the-country-as-governors-in-hard-hit-states-warn-more-needs-to-be-done-to-combat-pandemic/2020/03/26/6f426042-6fa5-11ea-b148-e4ce3fbd85b5_story.html), even though testing had been limited, the extent of the virus was unknown and had been underestimated in the past, and there were no guarantees of safety.

Trump’s false narratives prompted a discussion at [*Axios*](https://www.axios.com/trump-coronavirus-briefings-media-22d51064-ec2a-468d-b248-b3722d956a8c.html)*,*“Trump’s coronavirus briefings see big audiences. Some argue that’s bad.” The piece explored the inability of networks to fact check Trump’s claims in real time, allowing the president’s inaccurate and often unscientific statements to confuse millions of viewers with poor critical-thinking skills. (204)

As just one example, one month earlier, Trump had [told reporters](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-president-pence-members-coronavirus-task-force-press-conference/), “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.” As of March 26, the United States had over 1,000 deaths, [the most reported cases of any country](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/26/usa-now-has-more-coronavirus-cases-than-either-china-or-italy.html), and the numbers were increasing significantly every day.

Stories detailing Trump’s denial about the scope of the crisis continued on **Friday, March 27**. Aaron Blake and William Wan of *The Washington Post* reported that Trump’s steady stream of public lies and misstatements had been [taken at face value by many of his supporters and other low-information voters](https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/03/27/coronavirus-models-politized-trump/) (205), contributing to most Republican governors refusing to order shelter-in-place edicts, thereby endangering public safety. Further, the variance in individual states’ commitments to combating the virus was making it hard to create sound epidemiology models, keeping public health officials from knowing true risk levels (206), which should be the driver of public policy. It was pointed out that the cities that lifted shelter-in-place orders too soon during the 1918 Spanish flu paid a steep price.

The same day that it was reported that the number of official cases had passed 100,000, [twice what they had been three days earlier](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/27/us-coronavirus-cases-top-100000-doubling-in-three-days.html) (and yet still a major underestimate due to test delays), Jonathan Swan at *Axios* [reported](https://www.axios.com/donald-trump-coronavirus-easter-timeline-cb04697d-d7ab-4efb-a58d-b251f2cd78a2.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top)that “weaning Trump from setting a date for millions of Americans to get back to work is a delicate, ongoing process.” One administration official said, “I don’t think he feels in any way that his messaging was off….He feels more convinced than ever that America needs to get back to work.” (207)

To his credit, Trump did take some productive actions Friday the 27th—nearly three months after the administration had first been informed of coronavirus.

Earlier in the day, he signed the two trillion-dollar stimulus bill with no Democrats present, as he couldn’t help being [petty](https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2020-03-27/house-to-hold-voice-vote-on-coronavirus-rescue-package-sending-to-trumps-desk) and partisan (208) in this moment of national crisis.

Friday evening he finally invoked the Defense Production Act to have General Motors produce ventilators, [more than two months](https://www.lmtonline.com/news/article/The-U-S-was-beset-by-denial-and-dysfunction-as-15179067.php) after Robert Kadlec (an Air Force physician and the assistant secretary for preparedness and response at Health and Human Services) had started readying the process. The ventilator request was too little, too late, and Trump’s use of the Defense Production Act didn’t extend to any other badly-needed medical supplies or personal protective equipment (209), but it’s better than what the administration had done so far, which was close to nothing.

The ventilators wouldn’t be ready anytime soon, and [according](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/27/nyregion/coronavirus-new-york-update.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiospm&stream=top) to *the New York Times*, New York was estimated to need “20 million N-95 masks, 30 million surgical masks, 45 million exam gloves, 20 million gowns and 30,000 ventilators, all astronomical amounts compared to New York’s current stockpile.”

On **Saturday, March 28**, the U.S. passed 2,000 COVID-19 deaths and David Atkins of *Washington Monthly* wrote about the administration’s penchant for [giving or withholding medical supplies](https://washingtonmonthly.com/2020/03/28/is-trump-using-critical-medical-supplies-to-blackmail-blue-state-governors/) based on whether governors publicly challenged Trump’s false and self-serving narratives about his response to coronavirus. (210)

On **Sunday, March 29,**as the scale of the crisis and Trump’s central role in it was becoming more evident to the public, [Republicans reverted to deflection and character assassination](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/29/trump-campaign-joe-biden-ron-klain-153056), attacking Ron Klain (see #39, #41) for having the audacity to publicly call the administration out for its lackluster response to coronavirus (see #1-#210).

GOP blameshifting continued on **Monday, March 30**, as Republicans alleged that [Democrats bore some responsibility for the administration’s failures](https://www.rawstory.com/2020/03/panicked-republicans-now-want-to-blame-impeachment-for-bungling-the-coronavirus-response-report/?utm_source=&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=4139) because of their impeachment drive, though Democratic senator Chuck Schumer had “urged the Department of Health and Human Services on Jan. 26 to declare coronavirus a public health emergency, which would free up $85 million in funding to control the outbreak” and Democratic senator Chris Murphy had made a similar request on February 5 (see #48).

As medical workers across the country panicked due to a shortage of ventilators, *ProPublica* reported that a company in Pennsylvania which had received taxpayer money to design a ventilator—the Trilogy Evo—[had yet to ship a single unit to the national stockpile](https://www.propublica.org/article/taxpayers-paid-millions-to-design-a-low-cost-ventilator-for-a-pandemic-instead-the-company-is-selling-versions-of-it-overseas-?utm_source=pardot&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=majorinvestigations)—even as they had sold units abroad. The administration could have blocked exports of vital medical equipment to help its own citizens, as Germany, South Korea, and 22 other countries had done (see #51), but chose to side with business interests instead.

[Another thing the administration wasn’t doing](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/30/coronavirus-masks-trump-administration-156327) was recommending masks, a common practice worldwide and an oversight they would have to correct later. (211)

What the administration *was* doing was providing false hope. [Speaking](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-members-coronavirus-task-force-press-briefing/) to reporters that day, Trump said, “Stay calm, it will go away. You know it — you know it is going away, and it will go away, and we’re going to have a great victory.” (212)

On **Tuesday, March 31**, *Politico* opened with “What they told us about the coronavirus,” a list of [contradictions in the administration’s messaging](https://www.politico.com/newsletters/playbook/2020/03/31/what-they-told-us-about-the-coronavirus-488757) about whether or to what extent they had control over the situation, how much exposure one needed to get the virus (213), who was susceptible to the virus (214), when we would be able to ease up on social distancing (see #193), whether or not we should cover our mouths (215), the accessibility of tests, and the availability of ventilators.

Later that day, the White House Coronavirus Task Force predicted that [there would be 100,000-240,000 deaths](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/03/31/coronavirus-latest-news/?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most) in the U.S. due to COVID-19. Though this number was potentially an underestimate, and was far higher than it would have been if the administration had responded in a competent fashion, Trump said at that day’s briefing that if  “[we have between 100 and 200,000…we altogether have done a very good job](https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2020/04/how-donald-trump-plans-on-spinning-200000-coronavirus-deaths-as-a-win/).”

On **Wednesday, April 1,**[Trump bragged about his Facebook ratings](https://www.thepoke.co.uk/2020/04/03/5-reactions-to-trump-boasting-about-his-facebook-ratings/) and Mike Pence tried to play an April Fool’s joke on CNN’s Wolf Blitzer. In response to Blitzer’s comment about Trump’s consistent dismissal of COVID-19’s destructive potential through January, February, and the first two weeks of March, Pence [said](https://www.rawstory.com/2020/04/wolf-blitzer-spars-with-pence-it-would-have-been-good-if-the-president-wasnt-belittling-the-pandemic/?utm_source=&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=4170), “Well, Wolf, respectfully, I’d take issue with two things that you just said. I don’t believe the president has ever belittled the threat of the coronavirus.”

Back in the real world, *the Washington Post* reported that [the national stockpile of protective gear was “nearly depleted”](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/coronavirus-protective-gear-stockpile-depleted/2020/04/01/44d6592a-741f-11ea-ae50-7148009252e3_story.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiospm&stream=top) due to the Trump administration’s lack of foresight (see #28) and Margaret Talev of *Axios* reported that coronavirus was further exacerbating [the yawning levels of inequality helped along by Trump’s tax cut and reverse-Robin Hood budget priorities](https://www.axios.com/axios-ipsos-coronavirus-index-rich-sheltered-poor-shafted-9e592100-b8e6-4dcd-aee0-a6516892874b.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top). While nearly half of upper-middle class Americans and 39% of the wealthy were able to work remotely and stay safe, only 17% of middle-class Americans and single digits of lower middle- and poor Americans could work remotely, forcing our most economically-vulnerable citizens to risk infection or go broke. (216)

And as millions were losing their healthcare, *Raw Story* [reported](https://www.rawstory.com/2020/04/fanatical-cruelty-as-pandemic-rages-trump-refuses-to-reopen-affordable-care-act-enrollment-to-help-uninsured/) that Trump was ignoring requests by “advocacy groups and more than 100 members of Congress” to re-open the Affordable Care Act marketplace. (217)

Human desperation continued to dominate news stories on **Thursday, April 2**.

Matthew Yglesias of *Vox* reported that unemployment filings for the previous week reached 6.6 million, [smashing the record set the week before](https://www.vox.com/2020/4/2/21203850/unemployment-initial-claims-march-28). (218)

Ina Fried looked at [the uptick of domestic violence in Seattle](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-domestic-violence-de98b402-51f2-49ec-919c-c70052e29eef.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosvitals&stream=top) (near the first reported infection in the U.S.), a sign of things to come (219), while Nadja Popovich of *the New York Times* showed [how far behind the U.S. was in diagnosing the disease](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/04/01/us/coronavirus-covid-19-symptoms-data.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top) due to the administration’s lag time in getting functional test kits out.

 *ProPublica* [reported](https://www.propublica.org/article/terrified-pregnant-health-care-workers-at-risk-for-coronavirus-are-being-forced-to-keep-working?utm_source=pardot&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=majorinvestigations) that New York State, the epicenter of the pandemic in the U.S., was being forced to pay “Up to 15 Times the Normal Prices for Medical Equipment” (see #173) and looked at [the anxieties of pregnant medical workers](https://www.propublica.org/article/in-desperation-new-york-state-pays-up-to-15-times-the-normal-price-for-medical-equipment?utm_source=pardot&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=majorinvestigations) on the front lines who lacked PPE (220) or clear safety guidelines from the CDC. (221)

In this grave national moment, when unity was more important than ever, Trump trolled Democrats with [an open letter](https://www.politico.com/f/?id=00000171-3f7b-d6b1-a3f1-fffb5e270000&nname=playbook&nid=0000014f-1646-d88f-a1cf-5f46b7bd0000&nrid=00000166-11bf-d9ac-a967-93bfa7030000&nlid=630318) to Democratic senator Chuck Schumer of New York and a [tweet](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2020/04/02/coronavirus-trump-hits-governors-says-andrew-cuomo-working-hard/5108421002/) blaming states, who hadn’t had numerous intelligence warnings about coronavirus in January and February, and didn’t have anywhere near the pandemic resources the federal government had, for the predicament the administration had put them in: “Massive amounts of medical supplies… are being delivered directly to states…Some have insatiable appetites & are never satisfied (politics?). The complainers should have been stocked up and ready long before this crisis hit.” (222)

As of **Friday, April 3**, over 7,000 Americans had died from COVID-19 and the U.S. had [its biggest single-day bump in cases](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/04/03/coronavirus-latest-news/?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most)—30,000. [African-Americans were being hit particularly hard](https://www.propublica.org/article/early-data-shows-african-americans-have-contracted-and-died-of-coronavirus-at-an-alarming-rate?utm_source=pardot&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=majorinvestigations).

In “How Trump surprised his own team by ruling out Obamacare,” Adam Cancryn, Nancy Cook, and Susannah Luthi of *Politico*provided a behind-the-scenes account of[Trump’s decision not to open the Affordable Care Act (see #217) to people who’d lost their health insurance](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/03/trump-obamacare-coronavirus-164285): “[Opening Affordable Care Act enrollment] made sense to many in both the industry and Trump’s own administration, because Americans who lose their health insurance as a result of losing their job are already eligible to sign up for Obamacare outside the traditional monthlong enrollment period. With the coronavirus pandemic straining hospitals and the administration’s projections growing increasingly dire, health officials began signaling to insurers that it was preparing to give the broader pool of uninsured Americans a fresh shot at getting coverage…

“And by late March, administration officials sent word to insurers that the call would soon be official: They were reopening Obamacare, an unprecedented move that would have recognized the depth of the public health emergency.

“Major health insurance groups prepped news releases in anticipation of an announcement as soon as March 28, two people with knowledge of the arrangements said.”

Loathe to expand a program they had long wanted to kill, or to spend more money later if further funding was needed to maintain coverage, the administration instead opted for the much narrower and wholly inadequate policy of helping hospitals defray the costs of infected patients.

One Republican “close to the administration” told a reporter, “You have a perfectly good answer in front of you, and instead you’re going to make another one up….It’s purely ideological.” (223)

The administration’s failure to get functional test kits out in a timely fashion was again put under a microscope on **Saturday, April 4** in “[Inside the coronavirus testing failure](https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/2020/04/03/coronavirus-cdc-test-kits-public-health-labs/?arc404=true): Alarm and dismay among the scientists who sought to help.”

The piece reported that “On Jan. 10, CDC scientists received an important break when the Chinese government published the pathogen’s genetic sequence. The sequence, a long string of letters representing the RNA structure of SARS-CoV-2 described a coronavirus never before seen in humans. It also gave scientists a path to create a precise diagnostic test that could detect the virus.”

On January 15, a top scientist at the CDC told health officials from around the country that they would have test kits soon.

The CDC test wasn’t approved until February 4, but the model sent out to states and localities was flawed (see#55), leading to further delays. Due to FDA regulations, public health labs weren’t allowed to use their own tests unless they jumped through an inordinate number of bureaucratic hoops. As minimum requirements, labs were required to complete a 28-page application and spend two weeks testing their kits. Alex Greninger, a scientist at the University of Washington (see #140), reported being denied (after having spent 100 hours on testing and documentation) because he’d submitted his application via email. (224)

On February 27, though the U.S. had done virtually no testing, “CDC Director Robert R. Redfield [testified] to the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and nonproliferation that the ‘CDC believes that the immediate risk of this new virus to the American public is low.’” (225)

This contradicted what Redfield knew to be true, as “Privately, the CDC concluded that a ‘much broader’ effort to testing is needed. An internal memo titled, ‘A Plan to Increase Covid-19 testing in the U.S.,’ frankly acknowledged the approach was not working. The spread of the virus was ‘leading to significant impact on healthcare systems and causing social disruption,’ it said. ‘A much broader interagency approach is needed to fill the greater need for diagnostics by commercial manufacturers and laboratories capable of developing their own tests.’”

The CDC didn’t loosen regulations until February 29, six weeks after they had promised health officials that they’d have test kits ‘soon,’ leaving state and local public health officials in the dark about infection rates and allowing COVID-19 to spread in the shadows.

On the **Sunday, April 5** edition of “Meet the Press,” Surgeon General Jerome Adams told host Chuck Todd, “The next week is going to be our Pearl Harbor moment. It’s going to be our 9/11 moment. It’s going to be the hardest moment for many Americans in their entire lives, and we really need to understand that if we want to flatten that curve and get through to the other side, everyone needs to do their part. Ninety percent of Americans are doing their part, even in the states where, where they haven’t had a shelter in place. But if you can’t give us 30 days, governors, give us, give us a week, give us what you can, so that we don’t overwhelm our healthcare systems over this next week. And then let’s reassess at that point. We want everyone to understand you’ve got to be Rosie The Riveter you’ve got to do your part.”

The next day, **Monday, April 6**, the U.S. passed [10,000 official deaths](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/us-deaths-from-covid-19-soar-past-10000/2020/04/06/865fe0ec-7806-11ea-9bee-c5bf9d2e3288_story.html) and Republican judges ensured that Wisconsin would be the one state to hold a primary during the height of a pandemic (16 other states and territories had [postponed primaries](https://www.nytimes.com/article/2020-campaign-primary-calendar-coronavirus.html)).

[Knowing that COVID-19 would disproportionately impact turnout in the Democratic strongholds of Madison and Milwaukee](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/10/wisconsin-primary-coronavirus-republican-voting-by-mail), where people would be at greater risk of catching the virus and would have to wait longer to vote due to population density, state Republicans appealed Democratic governor Tony Evers’ last-minute executive order to postpone the election.

The Republican majority on the state Supreme Court forced the vote in order to give an advantage to the Republican Supreme Court candidate backed by Trump, leaving tens of thousands of voters who hadn’t received absentee ballots in time with two terrible options (staying home and not voting or risking their health by voting in person).

Despite putting hundreds of thousands of Wisconsinites’ safety at risk for partisan advantage and [purposely disenfranchising](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/13/us/wisconsin-election-voting-rights.html?auth=login-google&campaign_id=9&emc=edit_NN_p_20200414&instance_id=17621&nl=morning-briefing&regi_id=126380121&section=topNews&segment_id=25091&te=1&user_id=d83df742c3b67c9afcdc1a7c3e05db74) thousands or tens of thousands of Democrats, [Republicans lost the state Supreme Court race by almost eleven points](https://ballotpedia.org/Wisconsin_Supreme_Court_elections%2C_2020).

Asked about the Supreme Court contest at a briefing on **Tuesday, April 7**, Trump claimed Tony Evers had sought to move the election because he (Trump) had endorsed the Republican candidate, though Democrats had filed a lawsuit trying to move the election back [before Trump issued his endorsement](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/trump-coronavirus-conspiracy-wisconsin-election_n_5e8cfd39c5b6e1d10a6b590c). Trump also claimed he had had [no inkling](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-president-pence-members-coronavirus-task-force-press-briefing-april-7-2020/) of Peter Navarro’s prescient warnings in January (see W19):  “I read about it maybe a day, two days ago,…It was a recommendation that he had, I think he told certain people on the staff, but it didn’t matter. I didn’t see it.”

And though vote-by-mail elections are [less expensive, more secure, and more convenient](https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/5/23/17383400/vote-by-mail-home-california-alaska-nebraska) than in-person elections, and [he used mail voting himself](https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/491674-trump-defends-his-mail-in-ballot-after-calling-vote-by-mail-corrupt), Trump signaled that he would suppress the Democratic vote in the upcoming presidential election with a baseless attack on mail voting: “Mail ballots are a very dangerous thing for this country because they’re cheaters,” the president said, adding, “They collect them, and they get people to go in and sign them, and then they have forgeries in many cases. It’s a horrible thing.” (226)

Further negative impacts on working-class Americans were reported in “[Public transit’s death spiral](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-public-transportation-subway-bus-ridership-9f039bd9-459b-45f9-954c-b26380a037dc.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosvitals&stream=top)” on **Wednesday, April 8**. While 36% of essential workers across the country used public transportation, transit lines were operating “at only 10% capacity” due to funding shortages and workers getting sick. Transport managers were faced with the challenge of keeping service running despite cash shortages while maintaining safety for riders and employees alike, and there was no telling when or if vital transportation systems would be fully functioning again. (227)

As public transit strained under budget shortfalls, [the Trump administration was handing out billions of dollars with scant oversight](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/08/trump-coronavirus-aid-oversight-176160), in violation of the terms of the bipartisan stimulus bill.

According to reporter Kyle Cheney, Trump diminished government oversight by dismissing the chairman of one of the watchdog boards tasked with overseeing stimulus fund disbursement, choosing a highly partisan White House loyalist likely to generate Democratic opposition as one of the inspector generals, and “issuing a signing statement that said it would be unconstitutional to require Executive Branch watchdogs to report any obstruction in their investigations, unless Trump himself approves.” The result was that taxpayer money would be sent out to banks, hospitals, and small businesses with little attention to where those funds were needed most. (228)

Another failed allocation of federal resources came to light when *the Washington Post* [reported](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/kushner-coronavirus-effort-said-to-be-hampered-by-inexperienced-volunteers/2020/05/05/6166ef0c-8e1c-11ea-9e23-6914ee410a5f_story.html) on a whistleblower report about the failure of Jared Kushner’s coronavirus response team to secure PPE “in part because none of the team members had significant experience in health care, procurement or supply-chain operations. In addition, none of the volunteers had relationships with manufacturers or a clear understanding of customs requirements or Food and Drug Administration rules.” (229)

On **Thursday, April 9**, as the number of reported infections in the U.S. continued to skyrocket, with record tallies of daily deaths just a few days out, Jonathan Swan [reported](https://www.axios.com/some-trump-aides-eye-may-1-start-to-coronavirus-reopening-edde842d-e3f7-4722-96ab-c93190a9893b.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top) that “Some Trump aides eye May 1 start to coronavirus reopening.”

One official told Swan, “We are looking at when the data will allow the opportunity to reopen” the economy, in hopes that Trump wouldn’t have to run for a second term during a steep recession. An official at Health and Human Services said, “Talk of reopening the American economy — when we don’t fully understand the virus, and can’t even crank our own domestic assembly lines to make diagnostic tests, respirators and ventilators — isn’t just myopic, it’s flat out ridiculous.” (230)

Stuck with the reality that even targeted re-openings which put citizens in danger would do little to improve [the deep economic slump he had contributed to](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-unemployment-filings-6cb04d2d-9cc4-45b4-a473-9acbf4c99d43.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiospm&stream=top), Trump continued to [shift the blame to others](https://apnews.com/58f1b869354970689d55ccae37c540f3), from the Obama administration to Democratic governors to China to the World Health Organization.

As for his own administration’s response, when asked by a reporter if he could have done more, Trump said, “I couldn’t have done it any better,” part of a pattern of [116 times Trump had congratulated himself or his administration](https://www.mediaite.com/trump/you-should-be-saying-congratulations-here-are-116-times-trump-has-praised-his-own-coronavirus-response/).

**Friday, April 10**, marked the two-year anniversary of Trump’s elevation of John Bolton to head the National Security Council (NSC). Bolton had fired the head of Homeland Security, Tom Bossert (see #12), [who had](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2018/05/10/top-white-house-official-in-charge-of-pandemic-response-exits-abruptly/) “called for a comprehensive biodefense strategy against pandemics and biological attacks,” and disbanded the Global Security Office inside the NSC (see #17), effectively [gutting the administration’s main pandemic response unit](https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/trump-fire-pandemic-team/).

Unconcerned with these relevant but inconvenient facts, the Republican National Committee (RNC) announced that they would be running digital ad spots [*praising* Trump’s response](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/10/rnc-trump-coronavirus-ad-178625) to the coronavirus.

While the RNC tried to re-write history, Mike Pence quietly [cleaned up one of Trump’s messes](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/10/trump-pence-easter-coronavirus-178677), according to Gabby Orr of *Politico*. To make sure that houses of worship connected to the White House knew that Trump wasn’t serious when he’d said that he wanted churches open on Easter (see #193), and wouldn’t embarrass the administration with public services on Easter, Pence and his staff called allies in the faith community and made the case for social distancing.

*ProPublica* [reported](https://www.propublica.org/article/rationing-protective-gear-means-checking-on-coronavirus-patients-less-often-this-can-be-deadly?utm_source=pardot&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=majorinvestigations) on another one of the messes caused by Trump’s incompetence—due to a shortage of PPE, hospital clinicians were having to ration time with patients to avoid infection, leading to shortfalls in patient care (231), patients being alone for hours at a time (232), and patients dying alone. (233)

On **Saturday, April 11**, America passed 20,000 known deaths, making the U.S. [#1 in the world](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/04/11/coronavirus-latest-news/?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most). COVID-19 was now the [leading cause of death](https://www.livescience.com/coronavirus-leading-cause-of-death.html) in the United States.

Dave Jamieson of *Huffington Post* [reported](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/osha-labor-department-coronavirus-cases-at-work_n_5e91cc70c5b6f7b1ea8218bf) that the administration had used Friday afternoon—a great time to dump damning information—to announce that “employers outside of the health care industry generally won’t be required to record coronavirus cases among their workers, a decision that left some workplace safety advocates incredulous.

“…if employers don’t have to try to figure out whether a transmission happened in the workplace, it could leave both them and the government in the dark about emerging hotspots in places like retail stores or meatpacking plants.” (234)

“Debbie Berkowitz, a worker safety expert at the National Employment Law Project, told HuffPost in an email that the implications of the guidance are larger than they seem. She said it would lead employers outside of health care to ‘not consider any of these [infections] work-related and therefore something they can prevent.’

“‘This is despicable and will lead to more cases among workers and the public,’ (235) she said in an email. ‘[OSHA] should be requiring employers to keep workers six feet apart, provide double cotton layer masks, hand sanitizers throughout facilities, [and] time to wash hands with soap and water.’”

**Sunday, April 12**, Katie Thomas and Knvul Sheikh of *the New York Times* reported that Chloroquine, a drug very similar to Hydrochloroquine, falsely billed by Trump as a miracle cure for COVID-19 (see #176), was [causing irregular heartbeats in test subjects](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/12/health/chloroquine-coronavirus-trump.html).

On **Monday, April 13**, *Politico* led with “States still baffled over how to get coronavirus supplies from Trump.”

[Fourteen weeks after CDC head Robert Redfield was first informed of the virus, the administration was still failing states](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/13/states-baffled-coronavirus-supplies-trump-179199?nname=playbook&nid=0000014f-1646-d88f-a1cf-5f46b7bd0000&nrid=00000166-11bf-d9ac-a967-93bfa7030000&nlid=630318). Pleas from Jared Polis (the Democratic governor of Colorado) to FEMA were ignored. Messages from Polis to Mike Pence were ignored. (236) Miraculously, when Republican Senator Cory Gardner made a request to the administration, ventilators were sent out the next day, but even that shipment was far short of what was needed—only 100 units. (237)

The lack of a formal process was creating chaos:

“The federal government’s haphazard approach to distributing its limited supplies has left states trying everything — filling out lengthy FEMA applications, calling Trump, contacting Pence, sending messages to Jared Kushner, Trump’s son-in-law, and trade adviser Peter Navarro, who are both leading different efforts to find supplies, according to local and states officials in more than a half-dozen states. They’re even asking mutual friends to call Trump or sending him signals on TV and Twitter.

“Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn’t.” (238)

“…The confusion is indicative more broadly of how Trump and his administration have responded to a number of crises. The president often bounces from one issue to the next, reacting to the headlines of the day. Record turnover rates and competing power centers have hampered long-term planning. The result has been rotating strategies that are hard to fully chronicle.” (239)

Allocations were based not on need, but on public flattery of Trump:

“‘Right now, you have more discretion at the White House, and we have prized our relationship in order to secure some of the ventilators and other supplies,’ said an aide to one governor, who asked that even the state not be named for fear of jeopardizing the supplies. ‘We operate within the world we live in. We made the decision to have a very constructive and amicable relationship.’” (240)

Trump’s megalomania was again a topic of discussion on **Tuesday, April 14**.

Amanda Marcotte of *Salon* opined on the previous evening’s daily presser, [which was even more bizarre than usual](https://www.salon.com/2020/04/14/trump-says-his-authority-is-total--while-he-blames-everyone-else-for-his-failures/). In addition to making White House reporters watch a propaganda video claiming against all available evidence (see #1-#240) that the administration had done a good job of handling COVID-19, Trump said that he alone would decide when states opened back up: “When somebody’s the president of the United States, the authority is total, and that’s the way it’s got to be.”

When a reporter questioned this, Trump barked back, “Enough!”

While Trump’s attacks on reporters were boorish and unpresidential, his temper tantrums took much more consequential forms. In his continuing effort to deflect blame, Trump froze U.S. funding to the World Health Organization (WHO) for 60 days (241). Trump claimed—with no evidence—that the WHO was covering up for China, part of his P.R. strategy to scapegoat China and racialize the pandemic (242), even as he had publicly [praised China 15 times](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/15/trump-china-coronavirus-188736) in January and February (and sent them medical equipment, #51) while he was hoping to cement a trade deal.

As [reported](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/15/world-health-organization-trump-funding-cuts-187615) by Quint Forgey and Nahal Toosi on **Wednesday, April 15**, the move caught overseas allies and Trump’s own staff off-guard: “The order was just the latest example of officials seeking to fill in the details of a lurching policy shift by the president, who is prone to the bureaucratic equivalent of shooting first and asking questions later.”

“Josep Borrell Fontelles, the European Union’s foreign policy chief, [said](https://twitter.com/JosepBorrellF/status/1250356625803599875) there was ‘no reason justifying this move’ by the American president ‘at a moment when [WHO’s] efforts are needed more than ever to help contain & mitigate the #coronavirus pandemic.’”

The abrupt funding cut-off came after the administration’s 2021 budget proposal had [slashed America’s contribution by 50%](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/FY-2021-CBJ-Final-508compliant.pdf)(243), while the U.S. was still $99 million in arrears to the organization.

Chaos within the administration was further detailed by James Hohmann of *the Washington Post* in “Leaked CDC and FEMA plan warns of ‘significant risk of resurgence of the virus’ with phased reopening.”

[Directly undermining Trump’s advocacy for re-opening the economy](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/daily-202/2020/04/15/daily-202-leaked-cdc-and-fema-plan-warns-of-significant-risk-of-resurgence-of-the-virus-with-phased-reopening/5e9688d288e0fa101a763033/), a “draft national strategy to reopen the country in phases, developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, emphasizes that even a cautious and phased approach ‘will entail a significant risk of resurgence of the virus.’ (244)

“The internal document, obtained by The Washington Post, warns of a ‘large rebound curve’ of novel coronavirus cases if mitigation efforts are relaxed too quickly before vaccines are developed and distributed or broad community immunity is achieved.

“The framework lays out criteria that should be in place before a region can responsibly ease guidelines related to public gatherings: a ‘genuinely low’ number of cases; a ‘well-functioning’ monitoring system capable of ‘promptly detecting’ spikes of infections; a public health system able to react robustly to new cases and local health systems that have enough inpatient beds to rapidly scale up in the event of a surge in cases.”

As Hohmann pointed out, the administration was nowhere near to meeting these criteria—in fact, [commercial testing plummeted 30% that week](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/14/coronavirus-testing-delays-186883) (245)—and Trump hadn’t committed to following the guidelines because he was “fearful of the potential damage to his reelection chances.”

Re-opening the economy to help the 2020 campaign, consequences be damned, was a foregone conclusion within Trump’s inner circle, putting his appointees in pre-emptive damage control mode: “Trump’s advisers are trying to shield the president from political accountability should his move to reopen the economy prove premature and result in lost lives, and so they are trying to mobilize business executives, economists and other prominent figures to buy into the eventual White House plan, so that if it does not work, the blame can be shared broadly.” (246)

Meanwhile, it came out that stimulus money to desperate Americans would be [delayed](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/coming-to-your-1200-relief-check-donald-j-trumps-name/2020/04/14/071016c2-7e82-11ea-8013-1b6da0e4a2b7_story.html) by Trump’s insistence that his signature appear on the checks. (247)

On **Thursday, April 16**, *the Washington Post* reported that all of the job gains of the [lengthy Obama recovery](https://www.forbes.com/sites/chuckjones/2020/02/17/obamas-2009-recovery-act-kicked-off-over-10-years-of-economic-growth/%22%20%5Cl%20%224681b5368b77) were gone (248) as the pandemic surged. Just days after reaching 20,000 deaths, the U.S. passed [30,000 deaths](https://www.axios.com/31-days-coronavirus-pain-47bfd3a9-7be1-42fd-9da8-ddb67b516697.html).

At that day’s briefing, Trump gave governors the authority to decide when to re-open their states, [contradicting his statement earlier in the week](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/16/trump-plan-for-reopening-economy-191073) that he had “total authority” over state-by-state re-opening. Allowing states to make their own decisions would allow Trump to blame governors if infections spiked, even if he had urged them to re-open in the first place. (see #246)

[Friday Trump contradicted Thursday Trump](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/17/trump-states-stay-at-home-orders-192386) on **April 17** when he Tweeted support for fringe-right extremists in Michigan, Virginia, and Minnesota who were protesting stay-at-home orders, even as the U.S. had experienced [a record number of deaths](https://www.wsj.com/articles/coronavirus-surges-in-some-asian-countries-that-had-been-lightly-hit-11587031743) (4,591) the day before, twice the record set earlier in the week. (249)

Asked at a press conference if he was recommending the orders be lifted, Trump contradicted himself yet again: “No, but elements of what they’ve done are too much….It’s too tough.” (250)

In a public statement, Washington governor Jay Inslee said, “I hope someday we can look at today’s meltdown as something to be pitied, rather than condemned. But we don’t have that luxury today. There is too much at stake.”

An AP feature on **Saturday, April 18** looked at the danger of re-opening before adequate testing had been done.

According to the authors, “[more than a month after [Trump] declared, ‘Anybody who wants a test, can get a test,’ the reality has been much different](https://apnews.com/9983363b779562ec9ebaaf6303922ecb). People report being unable to get tested. Labs and public officials say critical supply shortages are making it impossible to increase testing to the levels experts say is necessary to keep the virus in check.

“‘There are places that have enough test swabs, but not enough workers to administer them. There are places that are limiting tests because of the CDC criteria on who should get tested,’ said Dr. Megan Ranney, an emergency physician and associate professor at Brown University. ‘There’s just so many inefficiencies and problems with the way that testing currently happens across this country.’” (251)

The piece went on to mention that [testing would have to increase three-fold](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/04/17/us/coronavirus-testing-states.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20200419&instance_id=17774&nl=morning-briefing&regi_id=126380121&segment_id=25500&te=1&user_id=d83df742c3b67c9afcdc1a7c3e05db74) to give public officials the data they needed to make safe and informed decisions and that Trump was pawning responsibility for testing off on the states, though he knew states didn’t remotely have the resources necessary due to “shortages of swabs, protective gear and highly specialized laboratory chemicals needed to analyze the virus’ genetic material.” (252)

The delays in getting functional test kits out, the biggest factor in [America’s first-in-the-world totals in infections and deaths](https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/%22%20%5Cl%20%22countries), was the subject of two *Washington Post* articles, one focused on [the CDC’s failure to follow agency protocols](https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/contamination-at-cdc-lab-delayed-rollout-of-coronavirus-tests/2020/04/18/fd7d3824-7139-11ea-aa80-c2470c6b2034_story.html), which contributed to contaminated kits being sent out (253), as well as [a detailed timeline of all of the Trump administration’s test kit errors](https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/2020/04/18/timeline-coronavirus-testing/?arc404=true).

*The Post*’s key conclusion: “[it took 70 days from [China’s initial notification t0 CDC head Robert Redfield] for President Trump to treat the coronavirus pandemic seriously.](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2020/04/04/coronavirus-government-dysfunction/?arc404=true)” (254)

David S. Cloud, Paul Pringle, and Eli Stokols of *the Los Angeles Times* continued this thread the following day, **Sunday, April 19**, in “[How Trump let the U.S. fall behind the curve on coronavirus threat](https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-04-19/coronavirus-outbreak-president-trump-slow-response).”

The piece looked at chronic dysfunction within the top tiers of the administration and the central role Trump’s fixation on the Senate impeachment trial and re-election (i.e. his inability to pivot from political combat to governing) played in the confusion and inaction:

“Trump’s unwillingness to take the health threat seriously and disagreements among his top aides effectively sidelined the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, leaving key responders without direction from a White House that was focused on the president’s impeachment trial in the Senate.” (255)

“…‘In an ideal world, there would have been a structure and someone with vision empowered in the White House,’ said J. Stephen Morrison, a health policy expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank. ‘Everything was seen through the impeachment and reelection process.’”

“…At the White House, Trump and his close advisors, consumed by his impending impeachment trial in the Senate, rebuffed attempts by Redfield’s boss, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, to alert them about the threat, according to a former federal official with knowledge of the communications.” (see #58)

“…The conflicts inside the White House along with the impeachment trial underway in the Senate kept the health threat barely on Trump’s radar.

“‘You have Trump as the lone-wolf operator,’ said Anthony Scaramucci, who served briefly as Trump’s director of communications and has recently been critical of the president. ‘What happens is everybody gets immobilized. They don’t know what their marching orders are … so that’s caused them to be very slow-footed in the midst of this crisis.’”

“…The federal government had an array of options to prevent the predictions from becoming a reality, experts said, including invoking the Defense Production Act to require private companies [to address shortages](https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2020-03-18/coronavirus-stimulus-bill-trump-treasury) of medical masks, ventilators and other equipment; mobilizing the military [to construct field hospitals](https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2020-03-20/u-s-military-can-help-in-responding-to-the-coronavirus-outbreak-within-limits) and organize testing centers around the country; and [dispatching Navy hospital ships](https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-03-27/mercy-hospital-ship-with-1-000-beds-arrives-in-l-a-to-help-with-coronavirus) to New York and Los Angeles sooner.

“But there was little urgency to the government response.

“‘It was one failure after another, piling up on each other,’ said Dr. Ashish Jha, faculty director of the Harvard Global Health Institute. ‘When that happens, it usually means it wasn’t a priority. It was a lack of leadership.’” (256)

The lack of leadership was (again) evident that day when [Trump finally triggered the Defense Production Act to increase production of testing swabs](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/19/trump-dpa-testing-swabs-reported-shortages-195721), “weeks after reported shortages” and months after easily-foreseen shortages (257), supply shortages that were being exacerbated by [the administration’s blockade of supplies ordered by the states](https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/04/hospitals-face-a-white-house-blockade-for-coronavirus-ppe.html) themselves. (see #168)

On **Monday, April 20**, the U.S. [passed 40,000 deaths](https://themedicalprogress.com/2020/04/20/coronavirus-the-united-states-crosses-the-40000-dead-mark/) and the gulf between vital public health imperatives and the Trump administration’s self-serving political agenda widened.

Interviewed that morning by George Stephanopolous, Anthony Fauci [stressed the danger of re-opening the economy too soon](https://www.mediaite.com/news/dr-fauci-condemns-protesters-clamoring-for-end-to-lockdown-premature-reopening-will-backfire/): “If you jump the gun and go into a situation where you have a big spike, you’re going to set yourself back….So as painful as it is to go by the careful guidelines of gradually phasing into a reopening, it’s going to backfire [if you reopen prematurely]. That’s the problem.” (W25)

Despite his awareness of the public health dangers and his [public statement](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/16/trump-plan-for-reopening-economy-191073) four days earlier that governors should decide when to end or modify statewide shelter-in-place laws, behind the scenes Trump was pushing governors—particularly Republican allies—to re-open the economy prematurely for fear that mass unemployment could doom his re-election bid (258).

As reported in “[Trump revs up for a state-by-state fight over coronavirus shutdowns](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/20/trump-revs-up-state-fight-coronavirus-shutdowns-195443)“:

“Over the next two weeks at the urging of the Trump administration, the map of the U.S. will start to resemble a patchwork quilt, with some states open for business while others remain locked down because of the spread of the virus.”

Trump was only too happy to exploit divisions between the majority of Americans who grasped the threat of the virus and the vocal minority of rabid ideologues who didn’t:

“Senior administration officials and Trump advisers say the level of hostility between the president and governors will probably only increase in the coming days, in part because Trump sees so much political opportunity in stoking those divisions during his reelection campaign. Governors have become his latest political foil, along with China and the World Health Organization, and he’s trying to bully and scapegoat them amid his administration’s response to the pandemic.

“Small protests over the weekend in Texas, North Carolina, Michigan and New Hampshire only highlighted the frustration of some Americans about the shuttering of huge swaths of the economy. Trump aides and advisers are closely monitoring those protests because they think the demonstrations give momentum to the president’s argument to reopen the economy as soon as possible — not to mention a potential source of energy heading into the fall election.”

Though governors had nowhere near the purchasing/negotiating power and resources of the federal government, and could neither afford nor realistically be expected to get hold of the amount of supplies necessary (see #155), “The White House has been setting itself up for weeks now to blame governors for the response to the coronavirus, including any failure to procure medical equipment and resources, or problems that arise from restarting businesses and resuming public life.” (259)

While the administration sought to deflect attention from their failure to plan ahead, statnews.com reported on **Tuesday, April 21**, that [Trump’s allergy to science and reasoned disagreement was continuing to hamper the administration’s COVID-19 response](https://www.statnews.com/2020/04/21/rick-bright-out-at-barda/): “Rick Bright, one of the nation’s leading vaccine development experts and the director of the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, is no longer leading the organization, officials told STAT.

“The shakeup at the agency, known as BARDA, couldn’t come at a more inopportune time for the office, which invests in drugs, devices, and other technologies that help address infectious disease outbreaks and which has [been at the center of the government’s coronavirus pandemic response](https://www.statnews.com/2020/04/06/barda-coronavirus-response/).” (260)

“…BARDA was expected to play an even larger role in the coming months; Congress more than tripled BARDA’s budget in the most recent coronavirus stimulus package. Already, the office has a role in some of the splashiest Covid-19 projects, including partnerships with Johnson & Johnson and Moderna Therapeutics, both of which are developing potential Covid-19 treatments.”

Appearing on “Face the Nation” a few days later, Trump’s former FDA head Scott Gottlieb said, “I think [changing leadership in that position right now certainly is going to set us back](https://thehill.com/homenews/sunday-talk-shows/494734-gottlieb-says-reassigning-vaccine-chief-is-going-to-set-us-back)….It’s hard to argue that that’s not going to have some impact on the continuity and also make businesses, companies that need to collaborate with BARDA, a little bit more reluctant now to embrace BARDA now that there’s a cloud hanging over it and some uncertainty about the leadership.”

It would come out later that Bright (see #26) was demoted because he had [disagreed with Trump’s focus on the pie-in-the-sky cure-all of hydroxychloroquine](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/22/rick-bright-trump-hydroxychloroquine-coronavirus), part of Trump’s consistent pattern of punishing public health officials who didn’t parrot his ill-informed talking points. (261)

The same day, *the National Review*, a conservative publication, put the lie to one of Trump’s favorite talking points in February and early March with “[Coronavirus Kills More Americans in One Month Than the Flu Kills in One Year](https://www.nationalreview.com/2020/04/coronavirus-kills-more-americans-in-one-month-than-the-flu-kills-in-one-year/).”

The theme of Trump’s [blatant lies and bad advice](https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/trump-coronavirus-timeline-dismissed-969381/) came up again at that day’s briefing when PBS reporter Yamiche Alcindor related an anecdote about a family who’d gotten infected (after taking Trump’s misinformation at face value) and asked the president, “Are you concerned downplaying the virus maybe got some people sick?”

The president of the United States said that [the infections he caused in effect didn’t matter](https://www.rawstory.com/2020/04/trump-shows-a-total-inability-to-have-empathy-remorse-when-confronted-with-the-consequences-of-his-actions/) because “a lot of people love Trump, right?,” because he’d “[won](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/01/how-russia-helped-to-swing-the-election-for-trump) an election,” because he’d probably “win” another one. Though the amount of testing and detection was still [not remotely adequate](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/22/coronavirus-testing-problem-america-201372) almost four months after the administration had first been notified of the virus (262), and the desperate and chaotic situation in America due to Trump’s failures had been likened to “[a third world country](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/apr/22/top-economist-us-coronavirus-response-like-third-world-country-joseph-stiglitz-donald-trump),” Trump then told Alcindor that his single action of closing off travel from China—even as [he had allowed infected travelers to stream in from Europe for another six weeks](https://theintercept.com/2020/04/12/u-s-got-more-confirmed-index-cases-of-coronavirus-from-europe-than-from-china/)—proved that he had taken COVID-19 seriously.

Just how seriously the administration had taken the pandemic was again revealed the following day, **Wednesday, April 22**, when Aram Roston and Marisa Taylor of *Reuters* reported that a “[Former Labradoodle breeder was tapped to lead U.S. pandemic task force](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-hhschief-speci/special-report-former-labradoodle-breeder-was-tapped-to-lead-us-pandemic-task-force-idUSKCN2243CE).”

The piece explained how Alex Azar had put the day-to-day operations of the Coronavirus Task Force in the hands of Brian Harrison, a 37-year-old with a background in dog breeding. Harrison “was an unusual choice, with no formal education in public health, management, or medicine and with only limited experience in the fields.” (263)

At that day’s press briefing, the lies continued when Trump [said](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/22/trump-downplays-risk-of-coronavirus-rebound-202325), “If [coronavirus] comes back though, it won’t be coming back in the form that it was, it will be coming back in smaller doses that we can contain….it’s also possible it doesn’t come back at all.” This [flatly contradicted CDC head Robert Redfield’s statement the day before](https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/04/21/coronavirus-secondwave-cdcdirector/) that the second wave of COVID-19 could be worse than the first and represented yet another example of the mixed messaging the administration was putting out to the public. (264)

As of **Thursday, April 23**, [U.S. unemployment rates had reached Depression-era levels](https://apnews.com/e928d091f81f75b9bc8830c7370f41fb) (265). Trump continued to push misinformation, claiming that [sunlight could wipe out coronavirus](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/23/trump-coronavirus-sunlight-205969):  “‘The whole concept of the light, the way it kills it in one minute, that’s pretty powerful,’ Trump said during a White House press briefing. He raised the possibility of hitting a human body ‘with a tremendous — whether it’s ultraviolet or just very powerful light.’” (266)

He also sang the praises of [the miracle cure of injecting disinfectants](https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/04/24/disinfectant-injection-coronavirus-trump/?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most):  “Then I see the disinfectant, where it knocks it out in a minute, one minute. Is there a way we can do something like that, by injection inside, or almost a cleaning?” (267)

The next day, **Friday, April 24**, COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. [passed 50,000](https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/public-global-health/494484-us-hits-grim-milestone-50000-coronavirus-deaths), more than twice the number of deaths in any other country.

As media wheels spun over Trump’s off-the-wall comments from the day before, he tried to shake off bad press by falsely claiming he was being sarcastic. His comments were no laughing matter, as [a rash of disinfectant-related accidents](https://www.forbes.com/sites/robertglatter/2020/04/25/calls-to-poison-centers-spike--after-the-presidents-comments-about-using-disinfectants-to-treat-coronavirus/%22%20%5Cl%20%224556ea211157) would prove. (268)

Another one of Trump’s coronavirus quick fixes was revealed as quackery when Trump’s own “[Food and Drug Administration](https://www.cnbc.com/id/10000889) warned consumers…against taking malaria drugs chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine to treat Covid-19 outside a hospital or formal clinical trial setting after deaths and poisonings were reported.”

That weekend, on **Sunday, April 26**, Helena Bottemiller Evich of *Politico* reported on [the incompetence of Trump’s Agriculture Department](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/26/food-banks-coronavirus-agriculture-usda-207215) in “USDA let millions of pounds of food rot while food-bank demand soared.”

According to Evich: “Tens of millions of pounds of American-grown produce is rotting in fields as food banks across the country scramble to meet a massive surge in demand, a two-pronged disaster that has deprived farmers of billions of dollars in revenue while millions of newly jobless Americans struggle to feed their families.

“While other federal agencies quickly adapted their programs to the coronavirus crisis, the Agriculture Department took more than a month to make its first significant move to buy up surplus fruits and vegetables — despite repeated entreaties.” (269)

“….Images of farmers destroying tomatoes, piling up squash, burying onions and dumping milk shocked many Americans who remain fearful of supply shortages. At the same time, people who recently lost their jobs lined up for miles outside some food banks, raising questions about why there has been no coordinated response at the federal level to get the surplus of perishable food to more people in need, even as commodity groups, state leaders and lawmakers repeatedly urged the Agriculture Department to step in.” (270)

On **Monday, April 27**, with the U.S. death toll over 55,000, Greg Miller and Ellen Nakashima of *the Washington Post* reported that [Trump had received “more than a dozen [intelligence] warnings” about the coronavirus](https://www.sfgate.com/news/article/President-s-intelligence-briefing-book-repeatedly-15229783.php) in his January and February Presidential Daily Brief (PDB), even as he publicly dismissed concerns about COVID-19. It was unclear if Trump ignored the warnings or never heard them because he “routinely skips reading the PDB and has at times shown little patience even for the oral summary he now takes two or three times per week.” (see #181, #182)

That same day, Trump’s Attorney General William Barr sent a [two-page memo](https://www.washingtonpost.com/context/attorney-general-william-p-barr-s-memo-balancing-public-safety-with-the-preservation-of-civil-rights/749fc86a-f81c-4baf-b002-b68deb3f1ade/?itid=lk_inline_manual_2) to all 94 United States Attorney Offices instructing them to sue any state and local governments who “go too far” in public safety mandates. (271)

When asked on **Tuesday, April 28**, about his non-response to more than a dozen intelligence briefings about COVID-19, Trump claimed that “[most people thought earlier this year that the coronavirus was going to blow over](https://twitter.com/jeffmason1/status/1255165563632062477?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1255165563632062477&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.rawstory.com%2F2020%2F04%2Ftrump-lies-about-dire-intel-he-received-on-virus-and-says-most-people-thought-it-would-blow-over%2F).” In reality, there had been numerous warnings in January and February that the virus would blow up (see W14-W23).

As of **Wednesday, April 29**, the U.S. had [passed 60,000](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/us-passes-60000-dead-as-hopes-rise-for-a-promising-drug-therapy/2020/04/29/c8c42d92-8a0a-11ea-9dfd-990f9dcc71fc_story.html) official deaths and [one million infections](https://www.vox.com/2020/4/28/21239172/coronavirus-us-confirmed-cases-update-1-million), far more than any other country; there were [2,502 deaths that day alone](https://www.barrons.com/news/us-records-2-502-coronavirus-deaths-in-past-24-hours-tracker-01588207503). Trump announced that he would not be extending social distancing recommendations past Thursday (272). Jared Kushner “predicted that by July the country will be ‘[really rocking again](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/04/29/coronavirus-latest-updates.html).’” (273)

AP reported that [the U.S. economy had contracted 4.8%](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/29/us-economy-coronavirus-220441) in the first quarter of 2020, the biggest drop since the economy lost 8.4% of its value in the final quarter of 2008, as [George W. Bush](https://benbosophy.blogspot.com/2019/03/the-master-of-low-expectations-666.html)’s presidency was winding down. Forecasters predicted that the second quarter of 2020 would be even worse.

Eager to shift attention away from the grim human toll of the administration’s failure to get ahead of COVID-19, senior administration officials were pressuring intelligence agencies to find a link between coronavirus and state-run labs in China, as [reported](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/30/us/politics/trump-administration-intelligence-coronavirus-china.html) in *the New York Times* on **Thursday, April 30**.

This theory—[part of a coordinated Republican response](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/24/gop-memo-anti-china-coronavirus-207244) to change the subject and misinform the public (274)—had [floated around the right-wing echo chamber for a while](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/18/us/politics/trump-china-virus.html), but “Most intelligence agencies remain skeptical that conclusive evidence of a link to a lab can be found, and scientists who have studied the genetics of the coronavirus say that the overwhelming probability is that it leapt from animal to human in a nonlaboratory setting, as was the case with H.I.V., Ebola and SARS.”

“….In a statement released earlier on Thursday, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence said that the intelligence community ‘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.’

“Intelligence agencies, the statement said, concur ‘with the wide scientific consensus that the Covid-19 virus was not man-made or genetically modified.’”

On **Friday, May 1**, Courtenay Brown and Kyle Daly of *Axios* [reported](https://www.axios.com/creaky-unemployment-systems-plague-jobless-americans-b5244634-f72b-4b33-a65d-dbc2f0f5492a.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top) on the inability of many states to keep up with unemployment claims due to the steep economic collapse tied to Trump’s failure to contain the virus. (275)

“One out of every five working Americans” (30,000,000) had filed for unemployment over the prior six weeks, but this was an undercount. The true number could be as high as 44,000,000, but was hard to determine because understaffed state agencies couldn’t keep up with the applications.

As millions of Americans and their families struggled to get by, the administration continued to try to conceal its gross negligence by [blocking](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/white-house-blocking-fauci-testifying-congress-about-coronavirus-response-n1198276) Anthony Fauci from appearing before a Democratic-led House Appropriations Committee investigating the administration’s COVID-19 response—at the same time as it was announced that Fauci would be allowed to speak to a Republican-led Senate Health Committee hearing. (276)

Later that day, [in another act of petty revenge](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/01/us/politics/trump-health-department-watchdog.html), the administration replaced Christi Grimm, a Health and Human Services deputy inspector general who had authored an unflattering but objective report: (277)

“[Her report, released last month](https://oig.hhs.gov/oei/reports/oei-06-20-00300.asp) and based on extensive interviews with hospitals around the country, identified critical shortages of supplies, revealing that hundreds of medical centers were struggling to obtain test kits, protective gear for staff members and ventilators. Mr. Trump was embarrassed by the report at a time he was already under fire for playing down the threat of the virus and not acting quickly enough to ramp up testing and provide equipment to doctors and nurses.”

The administration announced the move Friday evening so that the story would be buried.

The next morning, on **Saturday, May 3**, it was reported that [the 2,909 Americans had died on Thursday, one of the highest totals to date](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/02/who-us-just-reported-deadliest-day-for-coronavirus.html?fbclid=IwAR3Y5JDL1sXSdK0beExlE1ESFI-hnqFY2xAR20JZq-OeuP5lE_Sg-RgIO6I). A few hours later, *the Washington Post* published a blockbuster exposé entitled “[34 days of pandemic: Inside Trump’s desperate attempts to reopen U.S.](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/34-days-of-pandemic-inside-trumps-desperate-attempts-to-reopen-america/2020/05/02/e99911f4-8b54-11ea-9dfd-990f9dcc71fc_story.html)”

The article revealed that despite the warnings of public health officials of a second wave of infections (see #244), Trump had been obsessed with re-opening the economy for the sole purpose of helping his re-election bid.

To this end, the administration had formed a “small team led by Kevin Hassett – a former chairman of Trump’s Council of Economic Advisers with no background in infectious diseases (278)….[who] quietly built an econometric model to guide response operations.”

“…senior administration officials said [Hassett’s] presentations characterized the count as lower than commonly forecast (279) – and that it was embraced inside the West Wing by the president’s son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and other powerful aides helping to oversee the government’s pandemic response. It affirmed their own skepticism about the severity of the virus and bolstered their case to shift the focus to the economy, which they firmly believed would determine whether Trump wins a second term.

“For Trump – whose decision-making has been guided largely by his reelection prospects – the analysis, coupled with Hassett’s grim predictions of economic calamity, provided justification to pivot to where he preferred to be: cheering an economic revival rather than managing a catastrophic health crisis. (see #230)

“…By the end of April – with more Americans dying in the month than in all of the Vietnam War – it became clear that the Hassett model was too good to be true. ‘A catastrophic miss,’ as a former senior administration official briefed on the data described it. The president’s course would not be changed, however. Trump and Kushner began to declare a great victory against the virus, while urging America to start reopening businesses and schools.

“‘It’s going to go. It’s going to leave. It’s going to be gone. It’s going to be eradicated,’ the president said Wednesday, hours after his son-in-law claimed the administration’s response had been ‘a great success story.’” (280)

“…And though Trump was fixated on reopening the economy, he and his administration fell far short of making that a reality. The factors that health and business leaders say are critical to a speedy and effective reopening – widespread testing, contact tracing and coordinated efforts between Washington and the states – remain lacking.” (281)

Two stories on **Monday, May 4**, made it clearer than ever that Trump was willing to sacrifice hundreds of thousands of American lives to win a second term.

“[Models shift to predict dramatically more U.S. deaths as states relax social distancing](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/04/cdc-daily-deaths-coronavirus-234377)” revealed that “A key model of the coronavirus pandemic [favored by the White House](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/24/trump-coronavirus-model-207582) nearly doubled its prediction Monday for how many people will die from the virus in the U.S. by August – primarily because states are reopening too soon. (W25)

“The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington’s School of Medicine is now projecting 134,000 coronavirus-related fatalities, up from a previous prediction of 72,000. Factoring in the scientists’ margin of error, the new prediction ranges from 95,000 to 243,000.

“Dr. Christopher Murray, the director of IHME, told reporters on a call Monday the primary reason for the increase is many states’ ‘premature relaxation of social distancing.’”

Even as the White House knew relaxing social distancing and other stay-at-home measures would kill tens of thousands more Americans (at a minimum), and up to 3,000 people daily, later that day it was reported that “[Trump cheers on governors as they ignore White House coronavirus guidelines in race to reopen](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-cheers-on-governors-as-they-ignore-white-house-coronovirus-guidelines-in-race-to-reopen/2020/05/04/bedc6116-8e18-11ea-a0bc-4e9ad4866d21_story.html).” (282)

One state that followed Trump’s lead was the Republican enclave of Texas. As reported on **Tuesday, May 5**, Texas saw its [biggest single-day infection totals](https://www.newsweek.com/texas-sees-highest-single-day-jumps-coronavirus-cases-since-outbreak-began-within-two-days-1502061) two days after throwing off social distancing guidelines.

The circumstances in Texas were predictable, given the state of the pandemic. As reported by *the New York Times* that day, “Any notion that the coronavirus threat is fading away appears to be [magical thinking](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/05/us/coronavirus-deaths-cases-united-states.html?auth=login-email&campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20200506&instance_id=18254&login=email&nl=the-morning&regi_id=126380121&segment_id=26699&te=1&user_id=d83df742c3b67c9afcdc1a7c3e05db74), at odds with what the latest numbers show.”

Despite the clear connection between premature re-openings and increased infections, Trump faced no political repercussions among his base because [most Republican voters were in the dark about COVID-19](https://www.axios.com/axios-ipsos-coronavirus-week-8-5a1947d5-9850-4e58-9583-9b617e6fdc1b.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top) due to poor critical thinking skills and/or a resistance to valid sources of information. A poll reported by Margaret Talev of *Axios* showed that 76% of Republicans didn’t realize that [the official death tallies were significant undercounts](https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/coronavirus-deaths/) due to under-reporting in many states and a large number of people who weren’t counted because they died before being diagnosed with COVID-19. Forty percent of Republicans actually thought the official numbers *were too high*. (283)

Some of the Republican ignorance was attributable to the fact that communities of color had so far been hit at far higher rates than the white-majority communities many conservatives lived in. [As reported in *Politico*](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/05/black-counties-disproportionately-hit-by-coronavirus-237540), “Counties across the country with a disproportionate number of African American residents accounted for 52 percent of diagnoses and 58 percent of coronavirus deaths nationally, according to a new study released Tuesday.”

The study, “conducted by epidemiologists and clinician-researchers at four universities in conjunction with the nonprofit AIDS research organization amFar and PATH’s Center for Vaccine Innovation and Access,” helped to fill in the gap left by Trump’s CDC, which had failed to publish detailed demographic data about COVID-19 deaths. (284)

“The disproportionate toll on African Americans ‘calls for interventions like considering emergency enrollment for [the Affordable Care Act](https://benbosophy.blogspot.com/2012/07/how-much-do-you-really-know-about.html),’ said Dr. Patrick Sullivan, professor of epidemiology at Emory University. ‘And in the longer-term Medicaid expansion in the South.’” As of the article posting, the administration had yet to do anything to help expand healthcare to impacted communities, even as [states were slashing Medicaid](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/05/states-cut-medicaid-programs-239208) rolls due to a lack of funding. (285)

The U.S. passed [70,000 official deaths](https://ummid.com/news/2020/may/06.05.2020/over-70000-dead-1-2-mln-ill-covid-19-ravage-continues-in-united-states.html) and [further carnage](https://philadelphia.cbslocal.com/2020/05/05/coronavirus-latest-new-university-of-penn-model-predicts-350000-deaths-by-end-of-june-if-all-states-fully-reopen/) was predicted in a study conducted by the University of Pennsylvania which projected that 350,000 Americans would die by the end of June if social distancing measures were relaxed countrywide, 233,000 more than were projected to die if social distancing was maintained. (W26)

In another jaw-dropping stat revealed that day, [first quarter consumer debt hit an all-time high](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/05/consumer-debt-hits-new-record-of-14point3-trillion.html). (286)

Bad economic news continued on **Wednesday, May 6**, as it was reported that [the U.S. had lost over 20 million jobs in April](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/06/adp-private-payrolls-april-2020-drop-by-record-20point2-million.html), the most since records had started in 2002: “‘Job losses of this scale are unprecedented,’ said Ahu Yildirmaz, co-head of the ADP Research Institute, which compiles the report in conjunction with Moody’s Analytics. ‘The total number of job losses for the month of April alone was more than double the total jobs lost during the Great Recession.’” (287)

Food insecurity was one of the ramifications of the economic catastrophe made infinitely worse than it otherwise would have been by Trump’s inaction in the first 10 weeks of the pandemic (see #254). According to [a study](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/05/06/the-covid-19-crisis-has-already-left-too-many-children-hungry-in-america/)cited at the Brookings Institution blog, children were “experiencing food insecurity to an extent unprecedented in modern times” and “40.9 percent of mothers with children ages 12 and under reported household food insecurity since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.” (288)

Despite the obvious need to counteract food shortages among millions of Americans, Republicans were [blocking](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/06/us/politics/coronavirus-hunger-food-stamps.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20200507&instance_id=18281&nl=the-morning&regi_id=126380121&segment_id=26779&te=1&user_id=d83df742c3b67c9afcdc1a7c3e05db74) Democratic proposals to increase food stamp benefits. (289)

At a time when people were anxious and steady, transparent, and empathic leadership was more important than ever, Trump continued to blameshift, scold, and brag. During an Oval Office meeting meant to honor National Nurses Day, Sophia Thomas (president of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners) mentioned that she’d had to use the same N95 mask for three weeks due to a shortage of PPE at her place of employment. Throwing Trump a bone that he didn’t deserve, she softened her statement by adding that, “We’re nurses, and we learn to adapt and do whatever, the best thing that we can do for our patients.”

[Trump’s response](https://www.nydailynews.com/coronavirus/ny-coronavirus-trump-nurse-oval-office-protective-gear-20200506-ldawejbkmzbe5fxb3kr27zceb4-story.html?fbclid=IwAR1Dlgg41XGtwkRBSR9Q_B5FvuYr3DPHdXiM8t7ALKE4sR6o3kuhK4ZwrB8) was to talk over Thomas, toss out the baseless anecdotal claim that “I’ve heard the opposite….I’ve heard that they’re loaded up with gowns now,” then blame Obama:  “Initially we had nothing, we had empty cupboards, we had empty shelves, we had nothing because it wasn’t put there by the last administration.”

Asked by ABC’s David Muir why he hadn’t done anything to shore up the national reserves of PPE in the first three years of his administration, Trump [blamed](https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/05/trump-ppe-coronavirus-blame-impeachment-russia.html) the Mueller investigation of [Trump campaign collusion with Russia](https://themoscowproject.org/collusion-timeline/) and the impeachment investigation, and said [the administration’s coronavirus response was “maybe our best work](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/06/trump-praises-his-coronavirus-response-239787).”

More evidence of Trump’s “best work” was revealed on **Thursday, May 7**, when it came out that [the administration had “[buried] detailed CDC advice on reopening](https://benbosophy.blogspot.com/2020/05/the-sustained-clip-of-new-covid-19.html).”

[According to](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/07/admin-shelves-cdc-guide-to-reopening-country-242008) Jason Dearen and Mike Stobbe of the AP, the CDC had put together a detailed plan of safety guidelines for public health officials around the country to follow, but the administration had blocked the report from coming out. The likelihood is that Trump’s people feared that a safe, slow opening could hinder the economic rebound they felt was necessary for Trump to win a second term. (290)

Trump’s preference for spin over public health was [further reviewed](https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-face-mask-fears-wearing-in-public-hurt-reelection-ap-2020-5) in “Trump won’t wear a mask in public because he’s afraid he might look ridiculous and it will harm his reelection chances, report says.” Though [Trump was making his staff wear masks](https://www.rawstory.com/2020/05/all-white-house-officials-will-now-wear-masks-when-close-to-trump-after-president-not-happy-his-valet-tested-positive/?utm_source=&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=4480&recip_id=24770&list_id=1), he refused to follow his own CDC’s guidelines in public appearances because he felt that “wearing a face mask would ‘send the wrong message’ that he is more focused on health than reopening the economy, which aides think is key to his winning in November.” (291)

Though most federal GOP officials publicly agreed with Trump’s re-opening death march, at least in part because of a fear of reprisals, Republican senator Lamar Alexander [was willing to tell the truth](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/07/senate-reopen-coronavirus-243536) because he was about to retire. As reported by David Lim of *Politico*, at a hearing of the Senate HELP Committee that day (which he chaired), Alexander said that the U.S. had not done “nearly enough” testing to safely reopen. Alexander also said, “there is no safe path forward to combat the novel coronavirus without adequate testing.” (W27)

The article went on to state that “The Harvard Global Health Institute released new data Thursday that suggest more than 900,000 coronavirus tests need to be completed daily to consider safely relaxing distancing measures, as a growing number of states are doing.

“That number is significantly higher than the approximately 250,000 tests per day the country is currently running, according to data from The COVID Tracking Project. Premier Inc., a group purchasing organization, released a survey Thursday that found health systems will need to at least triple the current testing capacity to restore nonemergency services even partially.

“Premier’s survey found two factors that are major obstacles to increasing coronavirus testing: not enough chemical reagents needed to perform tests and shortages of swabs to take patient samples.”

The shortage in reagents (292) and swabs was rooted in Trump’s resistance to ordering a national testing plan and revving up the Defense Production Act to the extent necessary. To most observers, this would appear to be a major failure in planning and execution with horrible human costs, but Trump told the press more testing wasn’t necessarily the answer, as it would just increase the official number of infections and deaths: “In a way, [by doing all this testing we make ourselves look bad](https://www.salon.com/2020/05/08/trump-blocks-national-testing-program--why-because-tests-make-us-look-bad/).”

A real world way in which the administration had made itself look bad was explored on **Friday, May 8**, in “Coronavirus: US death toll would have been halved had it acted 4 days sooner, study says.”

[According to the article](https://finance.yahoo.com/news/coronavirus-us-death-toll-halved-093000321.html), “The daily death toll from [Covid-19](https://www.scmp.com/topics/coronavirus-pandemic-all-stories?utm_medium=partner&utm_campaign=contentexchange&utm_source=YahooFinance) in the United States could have been more than halved if authorities had acted more swiftly in recommending self-isolation and the wearing of face masks, according to a new study.

“Several US states began issuing stay-at-home orders in late March, while federal health authorities began recommending the use of face masks for all in early April. However, had such measures been implemented just four days earlier, the roughly 2,000 Covid-19 deaths currently being recorded each day would have been cut to less than 1,000, the study said. (293)

“Furthermore, lifting the measures in a bid to kick-start the economy would almost instantly increase the daily death toll to more than 3,000…”

Despite the knowledge that not acting sooner had doubled deaths, despite the knowledge that reopening too soon would increase the daily death toll significantly, despite the feeling among 2/3rds of Americans ([and 87% of Democrats/informed Americans](https://www.miamiherald.com/news/coronavirus/article242593036.html)) that it wasn’t time to reopen, Trump continued to give false assurances to the American public.

In “[As deaths mount, Trump tries to convince Americans it’s safe to inch back to normal](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/as-deaths-mount-trump-tries-to-convince-americans-it-s-safe-to-inch-back-to-normal/ar-BB13QL8U),” posted on **Saturday, May 9**, four *Washington Post* reporters examined the administration’s campaign strategy:

“In a week when the novel coronavirus ravaged new communities across the country and the [number of dead](https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/national/coronavirus-us-cases-deaths/?itid=hp_rhp__hp-banner-low_web-gfx-death-tracker%3Ahomepage%2Fstory-ans)soared past 78,000, President Trump and his advisers shifted from hour-by-hour crisis management to what they characterize as a long-term strategy aimed at reviving the decimated economy and preparing for additional outbreaks this fall.

“But in doing so, the administration is effectively bowing to — and asking Americans to accept — a devastating proposition: that a steady, daily accumulation of lonely deaths is the grim cost of reopening the nation.” (294)

The article explained that the administration was telling itself the country was more or less good to go because the worst was behind us and hospitals could handle upcoming cases, though [the administration’s own models](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/04/us/politics/trump-coronavirus-death-toll.html) and the multiple waves experienced during [the Spanish Flu](https://www.history.com/news/spanish-flu-second-wave-resurgence) indicated otherwise. Since the administration wasn’t willing to set up national testing (see #292) or contact tracing (295), their focus was on propaganda—convincing gullible Republicans (see #145, #204, #283) and independents that it was safe to ease up on restrictions, even if it wasn’t, even if 10,000+ Americans were dying every week.

Though the country wasn’t ready to re-open, Trump applauded governors who put their constituents at risk by [tweeting](https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1259153410756153350?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1259153410756153350%7Ctwgr%5E&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.vox.com%2F2020%2F6%2F8%2F21242003%2Ftrump-failed-coronavirus-response) the slogan “TRANSITION TO GREATNESS.” (296)

**Sunday, May 10**, as it came out that multiple members of the administration had [contracted COVID-19](https://www.thehour.com/news/article/White-House-aides-rattled-after-positive-15259298.php), Adam Cancryn of *Politico* documented [the conspicuous disappearance of Trump’s top public health officials](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/10/anthony-fauci-deborah-birx-withdrawal-246165), Anthony Fauci and Deborah Birx: “The Trump administration in recent weeks has clamped down on messaging, largely shifting its focus to cheerleading a restart of the nation’s economy even as states and businesses clamor for guidance on how to do so safely.

“Key health agencies remain relegated to the background. Some congressional requests for health officials’ testimony are being rejected. (297) And though the task force is still intact, it has not held a press briefing for 13 days — the longest the public has gone without having Anthony Fauci or Deborah Birx at the White House podium since the briefings began in late February. (298)

“‘It’s a blind spot that the federal government doesn’t see this first and foremost as a public health crisis,’ said Joshua Sharfstein, a public health professor at Johns Hopkins University. ‘This is the public health crisis of the century, and we’re sometimes treating it as anything but.’”

The next morning, **Monday, May 11**, Trump continued to shut the pandemic from his mind and stay on message. Though the coronavirus task force had [reported spikes](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/unreleased-white-house-report-shows-coronavirus-rates-spiking-heartland-communities-n1204751) in infection rates around the country just days earlier, Trump claimed that Democratic governors were making the tough but necessary choice to stay locked down [in order to hurt his campaign](https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-usa-election/trump-an-eye-on-re-election-accuses-democrats-of-reopening-us-states-too-slowly-idUSL1N2CT0Q7), even as he was making his absurd claim purely to serve *his* campaign. (299)

While the Trump administration devoted an ever-increasing share of its time and attention to the upcoming election, it continued to fail at the much more immediate task of governing. [As reported](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/11/coronavirus-vaccine-supply-shortages-245450) by Sarah Owermohle for *Politico*, “Meeting the overwhelming demand for a successful coronavirus vaccine will require a historic amount of coordination by scientists, drugmakers and the government.

“The nation’s supply chain isn’t anywhere close to ready for such an effort.” (300)

Despite this short-sightedness, and the administration’s long list of other failures and shortcomings (see #1-#299), Trump met that day with reporters in the White House Rose Garden to puff up his record and give the American public more false assurances about the advisability of re-opening our economy.

Standing by signs that read “America leads the world in testing,” which was true in total numbers—because of the country’s size and number of infections—but [was false per capita](https://www.statista.com/statistics/1104645/covid19-testing-rate-select-countries-worldwide/), Trump declared “In every generation, through every challenge and hardship and danger, America has risen to the task.” Despite over [80,000 deaths](https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/coronavirus-pandemic-more-than-80-000-dead-due-to-covid-19-in-us-report-2227170) and more than a million infections, many/most due to his administration’s gross negligence, Trump added, “[We have met the moment and we have prevailed](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/11/white-house-instructs-staff-wear-masks-249204?nname=politico-nightly-coronavirus-special-edition&nid=00000170-c000-da87-af78-e185fa700000&nrid=00000166-11bf-d9ac-a967-93bfa7030000&nlid=2670445),” a false claim intended to create the dangerously ignorant impression that COVID-19 was winding down and American life could return to normal. (301)

As reported by Sheryl Gay Stolberg of *the New York Times* the next day, **Tuesday, May 12**, [there was still no evidence that the worst of the pandemic was behind us](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/at-senate-hearing-government-experts-paint-bleak-picture-of-the-pandemic/ar-BB13Zkwl?li=BBnb7Kz).

Stolberg’s “At Senate Hearing, Government Experts Paint Bleak Picture of the Pandemic” discussed the testimony of top administration public health officials Anthony Fauci and Robert Redfield, who “predicted dire consequences if the nation reopened its economy too soon, noting that the United States still lacked critical testing capacity and the ability to trace the contacts of those infected.” (W28)

Fauci told the Republican-controlled Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions that if “states reopen their economies too soon, ‘there is a real risk that you will trigger an outbreak that you may not be able to control,’ which could result not only in ‘some suffering and death that could be avoided, but could even set you back on the road to trying to get economic recovery.’”

“…Dr. Redfield pleaded with senators to build up the nation’s public health infrastructure, even as he acknowledged that the C.D.C. had not filled 30 jobs authorized by Congress last year to expand its capacity to track outbreaks, and had yet to put in place a ‘comprehensive surveillance’ system to monitor outbreaks in nursing homes, which have been hard hit by the pandemic.” (302, 303)

Fauci and Redfield were barred by the administration from appearing before House committees controlled by Democrats who were guaranteed to ask more pointed—and relevant—questions.

The war between Trump and public health officials who want to keep us safe was in the news again on **Wednesday, May 13.**

“Trump deepens rift with top doctor Fauci on US reopening” looked at Trump and Fauci’s conflicting priorities, including [Trump’s insistence that schools re-open in the fall](https://www.barrons.com/news/trump-deepens-rift-with-top-doctor-fauci-on-us-reopening-01589411110), which Fauci felt would put children’s health in danger.

In “Team Trump Pushes CDC to Revise Down Its COVID Death Counts,” published at *the Daily Beast*, it came out that [Trump was badgering CDC officials to obscure the scope of the pandemic](https://www.thedailybeast.com/team-trump-pushes-cdc-to-dial-down-covid-death-counts) (and the scope of [the administration’s failures](https://benbosophy.blogspot.com/2020/03/anatomy-of-man-made-disaster-230-ways.html)) by giving Americans bad data, even as the CDC’s numbers were already [an underestimate](https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/2020/04/27/covid-19-death-toll-undercounted/?arc404=true). (304)

One CDC official told *the Daily Beast*, “The system can always get better. But if we’ve learned anything it’s that we’re seeing some of these individuals who have died of the virus slip through the cracks….It’s not that we’re overcounting.”

Millions more were at risk of slipping through the cracks due to [the Trump administration’s aggressive efforts to cut food stamp eligibility during the biggest economic crisis since the Great Depression](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-foodstamps/trumps-usda-fights-court-ruling-protecting-food-benefits-during-pandemic-idUSKBN22P33J) (305). In December of 2019, the administration had imposed work requirements on food stamp recipients with the excuse that jobs were plentiful. In March, as the coronavirus surged, a district court judge put the rule on hold. Though children were going hungry (see #288), jobs were scarce, there was no sign of a rebound around the corner, and millions of Americans were forced to go to food banks, Trump’s Department of Agriculture vowed to challenge the court ruling.

Republicans were also making their constituents’ lives much more challenging than they needed to be by [opposing vote-by-mail options](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/13/vote-mail-poll-255281) proposed by House Democrats. Three out of five voters supported Democratic efforts to “provide mail-in ballots to all voters for elections occurring during the coronavirus pandemic,” and the dangers of forcing voters to show up at polling places during a pandemic were obvious, but congressional Republicans saw a political advantage in suppressing the vote by keeping voters scared—especially in high-density Democratic cities—as low-turnout races are favorable to the GOP. (306)

Mail-in balloting has been shown to be [safer, less expensive, and more secure](https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/5/27/15701708/voting-by-mail), and has worked like a charm in states in which it has been implemented, but Republican voters in the poll opposed the practice 48-42%, a reflection of the brute effectiveness of Trump’s hyper-partisan messaging, his GOP allies’ lockstep adherence to counterfactual talking points, and the negative impact of his base’s cult-like ignorance on public policy. (307)

The theme of [Republican disinformation campaigns](https://www.heraldmailmedia.com/news/nation/battle-over-coronavirus-rules-and-reopenings-across-us-is-increasingly-partisan-and-bitter/article_c1005f31-9887-5f8c-ac8e-91287c7b0e2d.html) was revealed again in “Battle over coronavirus rules and reopenings across US is increasingly partisan, and bitter,” a column by Melissa Etehad of *the Los Angeles Times* which dropped on **Thursday, May 14.**

Though [social distancing had been proven to save lives](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/one-simple-chart-explains-how-social-distancing-saves-lives) and the pandemic was still going strong—with 85,000 dead and 1.4 million infected—Republican politicians around the country were following Trump’s lead, forcing states and localities to open before it was safe to do so. In Wisconsin, Republicans on the state Supreme Court overturned the Democratic governor’s shelter-in-place order, to which Trump tweeted “The Great State of Wisconsin, home to Tom Tiffany’s big Congressional Victory on Tuesday, was just given another win. Its Democrat Governor was forced by the courts to let the State Open. The people want to get on with their lives. The place is bustling!” (308\*)(\*The state would go on to have a huge spike in infections directly tied to the premature re-opening.)

Unwilling to do what was necessary to slow down the pandemic, Trump fell back on his favored tool of deflection, claiming that the U.S. [had more cases](https://www.vox.com/2020/5/15/21259888/trump-coronavirus-testing-very-few-cases) because we did more testing (309) and feigning reverence for the medical personnel whose lives had been made miserable by his inaction. At that day’s briefing, he said that [the image of medical staff “running into death just like soldiers run into bullets….is a beautiful thing to see](https://www.rawstory.com/2020/05/trump-horrifies-health-workers-by-saying-its-beautiful-to-watch-them-running-into-death/?utm_source=&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=4540).”

On **Friday, May 15**, the day after Trump waxed poetic about putting doctors and nurses in proximity to death and dying and horrible human suffering, two jaw-dropping statistics came out.

It was reported that “[Nearly 40% of low-income workers lost their jobs in March](https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/14/economy/low-income-layoffs-coronavirus/index.html)” (310) and Robert Redfield announced that the U.S. would have [100,000 deaths](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/15/us-on-pace-to-pass-100-000-covid-19-deaths-by-june-1-cdc-director-says-261468) by June 1. Shocking as it was, the latter number was an underestimate, as the U.S. would actually reach 100,000 deaths well before the end of May, and the official numbers were far lower than the actual death tolls.

Though the administration’s own models showed [a doubling of cases with premature re-openings](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/04/cdc-daily-deaths-coronavirus-234377), though [only two states had met the CDC criteria to re-open](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/15/stay-at-home-order-coronavirus-259041), though Dr. Fauci and most voters opposed it, Trump [continued to push schools to reopen](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/19/trumps-push-to-reopen-schools-and-day-care-gets-chilly-reception-from-voters-269430) in the fall, a move that would put children and teachers and their families at risk so that Trump’s failure to contain the pandemic wasn’t so evident at election time. (311)

On **Saturday, May 16**, Trump received [the honor](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736%2820%2931140-5/fulltext)of a write-up in one of the world’s oldest and most prestigious medical journals, *The Lancet*.

The authors of “Reviving the US CDC” opened by referring to “the inconsistent and incoherent national response to the COVID-19 crisis,” as the U.S. had dozens if not hundreds of plans, depending on the location, and no broad national strategy. (312)

Later on, the article read “only a steadfast reliance on basic public health principles, like test, trace, and isolate, will see the emergency brought to an end, and this requires an effective national public health agency,” but this wasn’t happening.

In fact, the administration’s actions indicated that Trump was downright indifferent to the mass suffering of his constituents. The following day, **Sunday, May 17**, Burgess Everett of *Politico* reported that “[Congress [was] nowhere close to a coronavirus deal as unemployment spikes](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/17/congress-coronavirus-deal-unemployment-260737).”

Though Trump and his Republican allies had passed an enormous and totally unnecessary $2+ trillion tax cut [heavily tilted to the wealthy](https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/12/18/16791174/republican-tax-bill-congress-conference-tax-policy-center) and rammed through [huge increases](https://www.cnbc.com/2017/09/18/senate-passes-700-billion-defense-policy-bill-backing-trump-call-for-steep-increase-in-military-spending.html) to the [already gargantuan defense budget](https://www.pgpf.org/chart-archive/0053_defense-comparison), the HEROES Act, a bill passed by House Democrats which [extended vital aid to state and local governments, and provided money for unemployment benefits, business payrolls, mortgage relief, and front line medical workers](https://www.vox.com/2020/5/12/21254397/next-coronavirus-stimulus-package-democrats-heroes-act), was languishing in the Republican Senate, as Mitch McConnell and his ringmaster—Donald Trump—chose the worst possible moment to stonewall tens of millions of Americans.

The top story on **Monday, May 18**, the day the U.S. [passed 90,000 deaths](https://tekdeeps.com/the-united-states-rounds-90000-dead-and-1-5-million-infected-with-corona-2/) due to administration negligence (see #1-#312), was [Trump’s claim that he was taking hydroxychloroquine](https://www.axios.com/trump-hydroxychloroquine-e594e81b-c35a-47f8-878d-67f84ce421ea.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiospm&stream=top), despite health warnings from his own FDA and studies showing that use of [the drug could be fatal](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/12/health/chloroquine-coronavirus-trump.html). Sure enough, Trump’s self-medication was later [aped by Trumpanzees](https://www.thedailybeast.com/republicans-use-potentially-lethal-drug-hydroxychloroquine-as-trump-bait). (313)

Back in the real world, on **Tuesday, May 19**, a memo leaked from a Pentagon source [put the lie to two of Trump’s repeated claims](https://taskandpurpose.com/news/coronavirus-vaccine-pentagon-memo).

Written by Defense Secretary Mark Esper, the memo stated that contrary to Trump’s insistence that the worst of the pandemic was behind us, the U.S. armed forces had to maintain disaster readiness because “We have a long path ahead, with the real possibility of a resurgence of COVID-19….Therefore, we must now re-focus our attention on resuming critical missions, increasing levels of activity, and making necessary preparations should a significant resurgence of COVID-19 occur later this year.”

And though Esper had told the media just days earlier that “the Pentagon would ‘deliver by the end of this year a vaccine at scale to treat the American people and our partners abroad,’” his memo stated that “The Defense Department should prepare to operate in a ‘globally-persistent’ novel coronavirus (COVID-19) environment without an effective vaccine until ‘at least the summer of 2021.’”

More evidence of the danger in reopening too soon was revealed **Wednesday, May 20**. A model from the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School predicted that [a premature relaxation of social distancing guidelines around the country could lead to 5.4 million infections and 290,000 deaths by July 24](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8340325/5million-Americans-infected-COVID-19-July-model-shows.html). (W29)

The CDC was the one agency whose actions could keep those death rates down, but the CDC had not been allowed to do its job. As reported by Robert Kuznia, Curt Devin, and Nick Valencia of CNN.com, [public health officials had been diminished from early in the pandemic](https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/20/politics/coronavirus-travel-alert-cdc-white-house-tensions-invs/index.html): “In the early weeks of the US coronavirus outbreak, staff members in the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had tracked a growing number of transmissions in Europe and elsewhere, and proposed a global advisory that would alert flyers to the dangers of air travel.

“But about a week passed before the alert was issued publicly — crucial time lost when about 66,000 European travelers were streaming into American airports [every day](https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2020/03/13/travelers-europe-will-face-additional-scrutiny/).” (314)

“…In interviews with CNN, CDC officials say their agency’s efforts to mount a coordinated response to the Covid-19 pandemic have been hamstrung by a White House whose decisions are driven by politics rather than science. (315)

“The result has worsened the effects of the crisis, sources inside the CDC say, relegating the 73-year-old agency that has traditionally led the nation’s response to infectious disease to a supporting role.

“‘We’ve been muzzled,’ said a current CDC official. ‘What’s tough is that if we would have acted earlier on what we knew and recommended, we would have saved lives and money.’

“…A senior official inside the CDC told CNN that the agency also alerted the White House to the virus’s rapid spread across Europe, but that ‘the White House was extremely focused on China and not wanting to anger Europe … even though that’s where most of our cases were originally coming from.’” (see #43)

The administration’s disregard for public health continued into the present, as [Dr. Fauci had been taken off the air](https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/20/media/anthony-fauci-tv-interviews/index.html) (see #297) and Republicans were “recruiting ‘extremely pro-Trump’ doctors to go on television to prescribe reviving the U.S. economy as quickly as possible, without waiting to meet safety benchmarks proposed by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to slow the spread of the new coronavirus.” (316)

While [recruiting quack doctors to push fake news](https://apnews.com/4ee1a3a8d631b454f645b2a8d9597de7), Trump continued [the GOP’s campaign to suppress the Democratic vote](https://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/politics-government/election/article242863131.html) in the fall by “[threatening] over Twitter…to pull federal funding from Michigan and Nevada for mail-in-voting efforts.” (317)

Another example of the fallout from the Trump administration’s shockingly inadequate response to COVID-19 and the economic shock waves it had created was reported by Jessica Menton at *USA Today* on **Thursday, May 21**. According to the dispatch, “Mortgage delinquencies surged by 1.6 million in April, [the largest single-month jump in history](https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2020/05/21/coronavirus-mortgage-delinquencies-surge-1-6-m-april/5231835002/).” (318)

“…At 6.45%, the national delinquency rate nearly doubled from 3.06% in March, the largest single-month increase recorded, and nearly three times the prior record for a single month during the height of the financial crisis in late 2008.”

“…The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act, passed in March, allows homeowners to suspend their mortgage payments for up to a year on federally backed mortgages. It doesn’t protect mortgages that aren’t backed by the government, which make up about half of all mortgages in the USA.”

Though the need for more government relief to homeowners, renters, and the unemployed couldn’t have been clearer, and [was prescribed by none other than Trump’s own hand-picked Federal Reserve chairman Jerome Powell](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/13/business/economy/fed-chair-powell-economy-virus-support.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20200514&instance_id=18463&nl=the-morning&regi_id=126380121&segment_id=27760&te=1&user_id=d83df742c3b67c9afcdc1a7c3e05db74), Trump ally Mitch McConnell continued to ignore the HEROES Act passed by House Democrats and made no counter proposals of his own that could be negotiated between the House and Senate, claiming there was “no immediate need” to address the desperation of tens of millions of Americans.

As of **Friday, May 22,**the U.S. had [lost 39 million jobs](https://apnews.com/900aa1955a82b7bbe2e028a8bc1a4be7) since the start of the pandemic.

In a misguided effort to reverse this slide, [red states were opening up more aggressively than blue/purple states and seeing increases in infections](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/05/07/as-states-reopen-covid-19-is-spreading-into-even-more-trump-counties/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=sendto_newslettertest&stream=top). As reported on the Brookings Institution blog, “for four weeks running, counties newly designated with a high prevalence of COVID-19 cases were more likely to have voted for Trump than for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election.”

“…COVID-19’s spread is continuing southward and westward from its northeastern concentration at the end of March. Counties identified in the most recent week are heavily located in the South (80 counties) and Midwest (68). There is also a high representation in smaller areas, as 159 of the 176 newly identified high-prevalence counties lie in outer suburbs, small metropolitan areas, or outside of metropolitan areas.”

“…Among new high-prevalence counties from the week of May 11 to May 17, Trump won 151 of them in the 2016 election. Clinton was the victor in just 25.

“…Over the four-week period between April 20 and May 17, 697 new high COVID-19 prevalence counties voted for Trump, compared with just 127 that voted for Clinton.”

One might think the direct connection between lax social distancing and an increase in infections would be obvious, and that the credibility of public health officials would be reinforced by this inescapable conclusion, but Trump’s months of misinformation had disconnected tens of millions of Americans from reality. [A recent Pew poll](https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2020/05/21/trust-in-medical-scientists-has-grown-in-u-s-but-mainly-among-democrats/?fbclid=IwAR0VujNUymHIMiIHFiBm7ARPQeHVnbSYob9Jhz36v_eKXT45lhDsVpBAASA) showed that Democrats were more likely than Republicans to trust scientists (319) and think scientists should have an active role in forming policy (320), much more likely to grasp the value in social distancing (321), much more likely to grasp the importance of testing in mitigating the damage of the virus (322), and much more likely to know that the U.S. had had far more cases than any other country.

Republican voters’ COVID-19 ignorance was also evident in an ABC poll published Friday which showed that [89% of Republicans approved of Trump’s handling of the coronavirus](https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/black-americans-latinos-times-died-covid-19-poll/story?id=70794789), despite an endless and unceasing list of administration failures (see #1-#322).

The insidious impact of Trump’s lies was reviewed again on **Saturday, May 23**in[a *Mediaite* piece](https://www.mediaite.com/politics/bill-gates-bioweapons-and-bad-data-poll-shows-fox-news-viewers-believe-covid-conspiracies-misinformation-in-big-numbers/) by Caleb Howe. According to a Yahoo/YouGov poll, 50% of Fox News viewers thought Bill Gates wanted to use a COVID-19 vaccination campaign to implant a microchip in their heads as a tracking device, 65% thought the virus was “engineered in a lab in China,” 46% thought it was “intentionally created” as a “biowarfare weapon,” and 55% thought the official COVID-19 death tallies were too high. (323)

The impact of Trump’s appeals to lockstep stupidity on the right were also explored in “[Key swing state warns of November election nightmare](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/24/pennsylvania-election-nightmare-275410).” Because of the GOP’s refusal to help fund mail-in voting, Pennsylvania was facing a nightmare scenario for their upcoming primary, with thousands of voters not receiving ballots on time and districts lacking the staff to count the ballots when they came in. With Pennsylvania likely to be one of the central states in determining who would win the presidential election, there was a possibility that Republicans’ laser focus on suppressing the vote (served by not funding mail-in voting during a pandemic) could leave the world waiting days—if not weeks—to find out who won Pennsylvania, and therefore, the presidency itself. (324)

As Trump undermined the sacred process of voting, the administration continued to fail to govern. On **Sunday, May 24**, Loveday Morris and Luisa Beck of *the Washington Post* [compared](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/while-us-struggles-to-roll-out-coronavirus-contact-tracing-germany-has-been-doing-it-from-the-start/ar-BB14yvg1) the responses of Germany and the United States in relation to contact tracing. While Germany had begun contract tracing since their first COVID-19 cases were confirmed, the U.S. still had no national system in place nearly five months after first being notified of COVID-19’s threat, creating predictably divergent results: “Epidemiologists say the effort [in Germany] has been essential to the country’s ability to contain its coronavirus outbreak and avoid the larger death tolls seen elsewhere, even with a less stringent shutdown than in other countries.”

Because the administration had failed to get behind the practice of contact tracing, Republican voters were once again in the dark, showing a Pavlovian resistance to something they didn’t understand. On Memorial Day, **Monday, May 25**, Will Sommer of *the Daily Beast* posted “[Trumpsters Are Already Revolting Against COVID Contact Tracing](https://www.yahoo.com/news/trumpsters-already-revolting-against-covid-083852347.html)”: (325)

“Donald Trump’s allies in conservative media have a new villain in the coronavirus fight: contact tracing, the rigorous efforts to track the virus’s spread that public health experts say is essential to safely restarting society.”

“…A wide range of public health officials and experts have insisted that the country needs to vastly expand contact tracing, with one Johns Hopkins study calling for the hiring of at least 100,000 [additional contact tracers](https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/pubs_archive/pubs-pdfs/2020/200410-national-plan-to-contact-tracing.pdf). Dr. Anthony Fauci, the head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, [said](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-second-wave-fauci-4fea926c-485d-4ea4-8c63-ebae73c533fc.html) earlier this month that coronavirus deaths will ‘of course’ increase without additional tracing and testing.”

“…But much of the fearmongering about contact tracing seems to be driven by ignorance of what it actually is. Failed Republican congressional candidate and [QAnon conspiracy theorist](https://www.thedailybeast.com/qanon-the-crazy-pro-trump-conspiracy-melts-down-over-oig-report) DeAnna Lorraine Tesoriero, whose call to ‘#FireFauci’ Trump retweeted in April, has urged her fans to not get tested for COVID-19. She also appears to misunderstand contact tracing, claiming that contact tracers go through phone ‘contact’ lists, rather than in-person contacts.”

Dropping the ball on contact tracing was just one of the administration’s many failures of governance. The administration had also failed to provide the resources necessary for nursing home staff to be tested on a deadline recommended *by the administration itself*. According to Alan Suderman of the Associated Press, the “lack of testing and other resources [have left [nursing homes] nearly powerless](https://apnews.com/681479be1d9f1a0fea4d64b1a44d5b9e) to stop the virus from entering their facilities because they haven’t been able to identity silent spreaders not showing symptoms.” (326)

During the day’s [dueling Memorial Day events](https://www.ctpost.com/news/article/Memorial-Day-offers-contrasts-as-Biden-and-Trump-15293738.php), Joe Biden and his wife wore masks, while Trump did not. (327)

That evening, white Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin murdered African-American George Floyd over a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill.

The details of the murder weren’t widely known the following day, **Tuesday, May 26**, so coronavirus continued to get a lot of news coverage. Among other stories, Trump once again displayed and encouraged ignorance among his fan base by calling a reporter “[politically correct](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-calls-mask-wearing-politically-correct-biden-calls-him-a-fool/2020/05/26/a58025e6-9f9c-11ea-81bb-c2f70f01034b_story.html)” for not removing his mask while asking a question. (328)

Another one of Trump’s false talking points—that mail-in voting was rife with fraud—was finally called out by Twitter with a warning label about [misinformation](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/26/twitter-fact-checks-trump-slaps-warning-labels-on-his-tweets-about-mail-in-ballots.html?fbclid=IwAR2k22JzR2l3NqPcpFQ24ZeRRgHis7I4KbdSTqTDI_dXhBCewtH-baRpxn8) attached to two of Trump’s tweets. (329)

The results of Trump’s months of lies and the parroting of his lies by Republican allies and media surrogates were reflected in a Gallup poll which again showed [the stone ignorance of Republican voters](https://news.gallup.com/poll/311408/republicans-skeptical-covid-lethality.aspx) (see #145, #204, #283, #307, #313, #s 319-323. #325). Only 40% of Republican voters (as opposed to 87% of Democrats) understood that COVID-19 was [far more lethal](https://www.livescience.com/new-coronavirus-compare-with-flu.html) than seasonal flu (330). Half of Republicans falsely believed official death counts were overstated, *ten times*’ the number of Democrats.

The magical thinking of Trump supporters and other low-information citizens was evident in the huge crowds that came out on Memorial Day, despite the fact that coronavirus was still going strong. (331)

In the reality-based world, indications showed that the U.S. was still “[early in this outbreak](https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/05/26/862230065/as-the-u-s-heads-toward-100-000-covid-19-deaths-we-re-early-in-this-outbreak),” hospitalizations were increasing across much of the U.S. (332), the World Health Organization was warning of [a second peak](https://www.lmtonline.com/news/article/WHO-warns-of-second-peak-discourages-swift-15296366.php) resulting from a premature relaxation of safety guidelines, and millions of American children were going hungry because of the [slow rollout](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/26/us/coronavirus-live-updates.html) of the Pandemic-EBT program (333) and the GOP’s resistance to expanding food stamps (see #289).

In addition to shortchanging children of basic human needs, in part because they refused to come up with a coordinated federal response to food insecurity (334), the administration was setting many states up to fail by not creating a coordinated federal testing program, even as the need for a national testing program was becoming clearer all the time. (335)

As [reported](https://www.boston.com/news/coronavirus/2020/05/26/trump-coronavirus-testing-strategy) by Apoorva Mandavilli and Catie Edmondson of *the New York Times*, the administration’s official “plan”—released in a report—was to outsource testing to the states, though states lacked the resources to test at a capacity necessary to keep citizens safe:

“The [administration] proposal also says existing testing capacity, if properly targeted, is sufficient to contain the outbreak. But epidemiologists say that amount of testing is orders of magnitude lower than many of them believe the country needs.

“The report cements a stance that has frustrated governors in both parties, following the administration’s announcement last month that the [federal government should be considered ‘the supplier of last resort’](https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/27/politics/white-house-testing-blueprint/index.html) and that states should develop their own testing plans.”

“[Scott Becker, executive director of the Association of Public Health Laboratories] and others said it’s reasonable to expect states to implement some aspects of the testing, such as designating test sites. But acquiring tests involves reliance on national and international supply chains — which are challenging for many states to navigate.

“‘That’s our biggest question, that’s our biggest concern, is the robustness of the supply chain, which is critical,’ Becker said. ‘You can’t leave it up to the states to do it for themselves. This is not the Hunger Games.’”

The administration’s report also greatly underestimated the number of tests necessary, pegging it at 300,000/day, roughly 1/10th of what the Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics at Harvard said was needed. (336)

[Trump passed his personal milestone of 100,000 dead Americans](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/27/coronavirus-death-toll-100000-285043) on **Wednesday, May 27**.

As incomprehensible as the number was, [it was an underestimate](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/27/bad-state-coronavirus-data-trump-reopening-286143?nname=politico-nightly-coronavirus-special-edition&nid=00000170-c000-da87-af78-e185fa700000&nrid=00000166-11bf-d9ac-a967-93bfa7030000&nlid=2670445), perhaps even a major underestimate, as many states were failing to report accurate death counts. Trump’s response to this horrible human tragedy of his own making was to [tweet-brag](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/for-a-numbers-obsessed-trump-theres-one-he-has-tried-to-ignore-100000-dead/2020/05/27/0a9c58ee-9f63-11ea-9590-1858a893bd59_story.html): “For all of the political hacks out there, if I hadn’t done my job well, & early, we would have lost 1 1/2 to 2 Million People, as opposed to the 100,000 plus that looks like will be the number.”

In other news, the United States, under Trump’s leadership, had had not only 3X as many deaths as any other country, but [the biggest increase in unemployment](https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-effects-of-covid-19-on-international-labor-markets-an-update/?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20200528&instance_id=18874&nl=the-morning&regi_id=126380121&segment_id=29399&te=1&user_id=d83df742c3b67c9afcdc1a7c3e05db74) among comparable developed countries (337), which was about to lead to an “[avalanche of evictions](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/27/us/coronavirus-evictions-renters.html),” predominantly in red states with limited tenant protections. (338)

Trump’s failures to ramp up testing, tracing, and PPE from early in the pandemic also exerted a toll on American citizens’ health and medical services. According to [a Kaiser Family Foundation study](https://www.kff.org/report-section/kff-health-tracking-poll-may-2020-health-and-economic-impacts/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosvitals&stream=top), “Nearly half of adults (48%) say they or someone in their household have postponed or skipped medical care due to the coronavirus outbreak.” (see #152-#154)

Despite how much more gravely the impacts of COVID-19 were felt in the United States than other developed countries due to Trump’s failures of leadership, between 80-90% of Republicans continued to approve of his handling of coronavirus (339). A key to this steadfast support of a president who had so obviously failed us was discussed in a study released by two political scientists.

In [an article](https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/trump-effect-new-study-connects-white-american-intolerance-support-authoritarianism-ncna877886?fbclid=IwAR3DpjF9r7FZmV8mYe2FDyGbQJjoAgHKyQzdApxo6CZMcCrdX4WwLtszfVQ) titled “The Trump effect: New study connects white American intolerance and support for authoritarianism,” Noah Berlatsky discussed the findings, the key one being that “when intolerant white people fear democracy may benefit marginalized people, they abandon their commitment to democracy.”

“…For instance, people who said they did not want to live next door to immigrants or to people of another race were more supportive of the idea of military rule, or of a strongman-type leader who could ignore legislatures and election results.”

While racist Trump supporters cheered on their toxic strongman, the four Minneapolis police officers responsible for George Floyd’s death were fired and protests around the country continued to flare.

**Thursday, May 28** was a bad day for America. It was reported that [the economy had contracted by 5%](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/28/us-economy-shrank-at-5-annual-rate-in-q1-287717) in the first quarter of 2020, and the second quarter was likely to be worse. 2.1 million Americans had lost their jobs and bankruptcies were “[soaring](https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/05/jobless-claims-bankruptcies-coronavirus-recession.html).” (340) Millions of Americans who were unemployed and unlikely to find work any time soon were [fearing the end of their federal benefits](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/28/business/economy/coronavirus-stimulus-unemployment.html), as Trump’s Republican allies in the Senate continued to ignore the House Democrats’ stimulus bill, passed two weeks earlier, or come up with a counter bill.

[ICU bed use was increasing](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/05/28/rising-icu-bed-use-red-flag-287552?nname=politico-nightly-coronavirus-special-edition&nid=00000170-c000-da87-af78-e185fa700000&nrid=00000166-11bf-d9ac-a967-93bfa7030000&nlid=2670445) in hot spots around the country (341) and [only six states](https://www.vox.com/2020/5/28/21270515/coronavirus-covid-reopen-economy-social-distancing-states-map-data) met the minimum (which is not to say *adequate*) standards for re-opening, even as virtually the whole country had re-opened to one extent or another, largely at Trump’s prodding.

As coronavirus and protests raged, Trump picked petty fights with imaginary foes. Though Trump had used Twitter for years as his primary source of messaging, Twitter’s 11th hour decision to fact-check Trump’s misleading tweets about mail-in voting gave the president a hissy fit and prompted him to sign a [legally void](https://www.wired.com/story/trump-social-media-executive-order/) executive order limiting social media companies’ practices while claiming to “defend free speech from one of the gravest dangers it has faced in American history.”

Early on **Friday, May 29**, Trump got [another rebuff from Twitter](https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2020/05/28/twitter-fact-checks-trump-facebooks-mark-zuckberberg-disputes-move/5272584002/) when he expressed his feelings about the George Floyd protests by reviving a line uttered by [a racist Miami police chief](https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2020/05/trump-looting-shooting-racist-history.html) in 1967. Tweeting at 12:53 a.m. for some reason, Trump said “when the looting starts, the shooting starts” while threatening to send the military out to handle civilian affairs in Minneapolis. Twitter noted that the message violated their rules about “[glorifying violence](https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/28/politics/trump-twitter-social-media-executive-order/index.html).”

At a news conference that day, Trump went after another imaginary foe, announcing that he would “[terminate](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/trump-says-u-s-will-be-terminating-relationship-who-n1218441?cid=sm_npd_nn_fb_ma&fbclid=IwAR1swxOwFnVeDUA50edmyGgQ4Wgv_lUHHiAyS2xuUfprFBL3scwCDkh2tTw) America’s relationship with the [World Health Organization].” (342) Trying to deflect attention from his own catastrophic failures of governance, Trump once again blamed China for the first-in-the-world rates of deaths and infections in the U.S., then blamed the WHO for not forcing China’s hand, though the organization had had no means to do so.

[According to](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/what-a-us-exit-from-the-who-means-for-covid-19-and-global-health/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=health&utm_content=link&utm_term=2020-06-01_top-) Amy Maxman of *Nature* magazine, due to Trump’s decision, “experts in health policy are contending with repercussions that could range from a resurgence of polio and malaria, to barriers in the flow of information on COVID-19. (343) Scientific partnerships around the world would also be damaged, and the United States could lose influence over global health initiatives, including those to distribute drugs and vaccines for the new coronavirus as they become available, say researchers.” (344)

“…Proposals for new US-led initiatives for pandemic preparedness abroad do little to quell researchers’ concerns. Some say these efforts might even add incoherence to the world’s response to COVID-19, and global health more generally, if they’re not connected to a fully-funded WHO.”

“…The rift is poorly timed, given the need for international coordination and cooperation to contend with the coronavirus. ‘In this pandemic, people have said we’re building the plane while flying,’ [Rebecca] Katz [director of the Center for Global Health Science and Security at Georgetown University] says. ‘This proposal is like removing the windows while the plane is mid-air.’”

That evening, [Wisconsin](https://benbosophy.blogspot.com/2020/04/wisconsin-republicans-make-mockery-of.html), a state which had been forced to re-open by right-wing Republican judges on the state Supreme Court, announced that it had a [record one-day spike](https://www.wisn.com/article/state-sets-new-record-for-most-coronavirus-cases-reported-in-one-day/32714669) in reported cases.

On **Saturday, May 30**, David Pitt of the AP [reported](https://apnews.com/54f1efe0afa71b0a939fda91cf917366) that the U.S. had just experienced its largest monthly increase in food prices in 46 years. (345)

Trump wasn’t about to get distracted by trifling matters like food prices or the mass protests all across the country which were amplified by his divisive rhetoric. His attention instead went into gushing over the empty pageantry around Elon Musk’s spaceman vanity project and [petulantly demanding](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-republican-national-convention-north-carolina-coronavirus-masks-social-distancing-roy-cooper-a9540051.html?fbclid=IwAR1ymyAsoLDiB2QlbJd2Hbx0twehafTN8oZIk_6vb_7-PDXJ3NE6Gmm642g) that North Carolina allow a GOP convention with no masks or social distancing. (346)

**Sunday, May 31**, it was reported that Florida, a state whose Republican governor (Ron DeSantis) had been dismissive of the pandemic, was seeing a major increase in COVID-19 deaths, even as the reported numbers were an [undercount](https://www.thedailybeast.com/floridas-seen-a-statistically-significant-uptick-in-pneumonia-deaths-the-cdc-says-its-likely-covid?ref=home) masked by COVID deaths attributed to pneumonia or influenza. New deaths in Florida were overwhelmingly happening in [nursing homes](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/as-florida-reopens-the-deaths-quietly-keep-piling-up-in-nursing-homes/ar-BB14Qelu).

A number of substantive pieces about COVID-19 dropped on **Monday, June 1**.

Sam Baker of *Axios* [pointed out](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-lockdown-lessons-2f2e28cb-848b-42e2-a9da-b2d31fb8bda6.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosvitals&stream=top) that “The national lockdown is easing and the pandemic is no longer the single dominant storyline of our lives, but nothing has really changed — we didn’t develop a treatment and the virus didn’t get naturally weaker. It’s just as contagious as it ever was.” (W30)

A *Washington Post*-ABC poll found that [Trump’s unceasing demagoguery had created sharp partisan divides in accepting this reality](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/despite-widespread-economic-toll-most-americans-still-favor-controlling-outbreak-over-restarting-economy-post-abc-poll-finds/2020/06/01/3e052ec0-a27b-11ea-81bb-c2f70f01034b_story.html): “57 percent of Americans overall and 81 percent of Democrats say trying to control the spread of the coronavirus is most important right now, even if it hurts the economy. A far smaller 27 percent of Republicans agree, while 66 percent of them say restarting the economy is more important, even if it hurts efforts to control the virus. Nearly 6 in 10 independents say their priority is trying to control the virus’s spread.” (347)

In a rare interview, with the medical site statnews.com, Anthony Fauci said that his meetings with Donald Trump to discuss the federal COVID-19 response had “[dramatically decreased](https://www.mediaite.com/trump/dr-fauci-says-his-meetings-with-trump-have-dramatically-decreased/).” (348)

What was the president up to in the middle of a pandemic?

Threatening to [sic the military on protesters](https://apnews.com/a2797b342b4fc509e43f404817a56aa9), calling governors “fools” and “jerks” in a [conference call](https://www.mediaite.com/trump/trump-reportedly-berates-governors-as-fools-jerks-in-conference-call-demands-they-dominate-protesters-with-force/) because they weren’t using force on protesters, and [having demonstrators tear-gassed](https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2020/06/police-tear-gas-protesters-before-a-trump-photo-op-with-a-bible/) so that he could walk across the street to St. John’s Church and hold a Bible for an awkward photo op.

On **Tuesday, June 2**, [Trump had a temper tantrum](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/02/north-carolina-governor-rejects-gops-demand-for-full-fledged-convention-296566?nname=playbook&nid=0000014f-1646-d88f-a1cf-5f46b7bd0000&nrid=00000166-11bf-d9ac-a967-93bfa7030000&nlid=630318) over the refusal of North Carolina’s Democratic governor to allow a GOP convention without COVID precautions on the same day that Deborah Birx [warned](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/02/deborah-birx-coronavirus-outbreak-summer-296490) at a public event that “None of us can be lulled into this false sense of security that the cases may go down this summer.” (349)

While Trump fixated on staging a [super-spreader](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/super-spreader-coronavirus/) convention, it was reported that his inactions had contributed to [the loss of 1.4 million healthcare jobs](https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/06/01/americans-are-delaying-medical-care-its-devastating-health-care-providers/?arc404=true) in the U.S. (350) and that many of the most vulnerable Americans were not getting the COVID-related care they needed, in no small part because the administration had [failed to disburse emergency funds](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/02/emergency-health-aid-coronavirus-297701) approved by Congress. (351) The scale of the pandemic caused by Trump’s mis-governance had also left nearly a hundred million Americans to delay healthcare procedures in order to clear facilities for COVID-19 patients. (see #152-#154)

The vast impact of the administration’s failures to act sooner and more aggressively were revisited the following day, **Wednesday, June 3**, when Chris Arnold of NPR [reported](https://www.npr.org/2020/06/03/867856602/millions-of-americans-skipping-payments-as-tidal-wave-of-defaults-and-evictions-) that “Millions Of Americans Skip Payments As Tidal Wave Of Defaults And Evictions Looms.” (352)

Government aid was keeping many Americans afloat, but the administration had failed to get benefits out to millions (353), and even those who had received benefits were unlikely to be able to make the money stretch more than a couple months, at which time there would be no jobs available.

Another one of the Trump administration’s shortcomings was reported again on **Thursday, June 4**in “CDC head apologizes for lack of racial disparity data on coronavirus.” Speaking to a House Appropriations subcommittee, Robert Redfield apologized for [the CDC’s continued failure](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/04/coronavirus-robert-redfield-racial-disparity-cdc-301223) (see #284) to collect race-related COVID-19 data, which was “[hampering] the public health response in communities of color disproportionately affected by the virus.”

The administration and their Republican allies in Congress were also [shortchanging cities](https://www.axios.com/cities-budgets-worsen-coronavirus-george-floyd-protests-4fed7c83-7436-4744-9a47-2937ffb1f90a.html). Due to a lack of tax revenue and federal aid, cities were being forced to make steep cuts to essential services (354). The situation was dire, but the GOP had no plans to act until July, and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said any future stimulus bill would “be narrow in scope and focus on short-term economic relief, not longer-term recovery.”

In addition to cities bleeding revenue, [food bank demand was still high](https://apnews.com/44eacc05b3ceb43897418ccfe96645e2) (355), as reported on **Friday, June 5**.

But none of this concerned Trump, who seized on a better-than-expected jobs report to puff up his ego. At a press conference that day, Trump referred to the [second worst](https://cdn.newseum.org/dfp/pdf6/NY_NYT.pdf) unemployment rate since the Great Depression as the “greatest comeback in American history,” a “great day” for George Floyd, and “a great, great day in terms of equality.”

While Trump and his Republican allies gushed about double digit unemployment and pretended that the virus was behind us—Trump [hadn’t allowed](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/fauci-virus-task-force-vanish-with-trump-all-in-on-reopen/ar-BB154Otf) the virus task force to brief reporters since April 27 (356)—[20 states](https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2020/are-coronavirus-cases-increasing-again/) had seen increases in cases over the prior five days, largely because of the premature economic re-opening Trump was celebrating. (357)

On **Saturday, June 6** the U.S. [passed 110,000](https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/live-blog/2020-06-06-coronavirus-news-n1226456) official deaths and it came out that Trump’s triumphalism on Friday over the jobs numbers had been premature, as the Bureau of Labor Statistics had [underestimated](https://www.stamfordadvocate.com/business/article/The-May-jobs-report-had-misclassification-error-15320999.php) the unemployment rate by at least three percentage points.

Discussing the jobs report in an interview with Nancy Cook of *Politico*, former director of the National Economic Council Gene Sperling said, “Considering that this was a return of a small percentage of the jobs that were lost only due to Trump’s inexplicably slow and weak response to the Covid crisis, he should be far more measured….Trump surely knows he is on track to be the first president since Herbert Hoover to lose net jobs during their presidency, and he may just be overcompensating.”

Republicans used the initial, overinflated job numbers—which received far more media attention than the corrected, real numbers—as [rhetorical cover](https://rollcall.com/2020/06/05/gop-renews-go-slow-approach-on-virus-aid-after-jobs-report/) for continuing to stonewall on more stimulus. (358) The Democratic House had passed a stimulus bill on May 18.

Within the job numbers was the news that African-American unemployment rates had actually gone up, something that Republicans didn’t talk about much. (359) African-Americans were also dying from COVID-19 in disproportionate numbers. A **Sunday, June 7** [post](https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/voices/racism-not-genetics-explains-why-black-americans-are-dying-of-covid-19/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=health&utm_content=link&utm_term=2020-06-08_featured-this-week) at *Scientific American* showed that this was systemic, not genetic.

According to author Clarence Gravlee, African-Americans were dying at 2.4X the rate of whites, one of the reasons it was so easy for Trump supporters in white-majority areas to ignore the crisis. Discussions around this disparity too often fell back on theories about a genetic disposition to hypertension and high blood pressure among African-Americans, while more convincing environmental factors didn’t get the attention they deserved: “The conditions in which we develop—including limited access to healthy food, exposure to toxic pollutants, the threat of police violence or the injurious stress of racial discrimination—influence the likelihood that any one of us will suffer from high blood pressure, diabetes or serious complications from COVID-19.”

The role of environmental factors in coronavirus transmission came up again on **Monday, June 8**. According to a [study](https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/06/08/shutdowns-prevented-60-million-coronavirus-infections-us-study-finds/?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most) published in *Nature* magazine, shutdown orders in the United States had spared 60 million Americans from contracting COVID-19.

One country which had addressed coronavirus early and aggressively, New Zealand, reported that they had [no active cases](https://news.trust.org/item/20200608004114-98xz5). By contrast, the U.S., who had acted slowly and inadequately, had almost [two million infections and 104,400 deaths](https://www.medicaleconomics.com/news/coronavirus-case-numbers-united-states-june-8-update).

Having followed Trump’s lead of inaction and indifference to public health, [red states](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/08/texas-reports-a-record-high-number-of-hospitalized-coronavirus-patients-after-state-reopened-early.html) continued to be hit especially hard by coronavirus.

And as had been the case all along, America’s first-in-the-world numbers were [a significant undercount](https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/cdc-wants-states-to-count-probable-coronavirus-cases-and-deaths-but-most-arent-doing-it/2020/06/07/4aac9a58-9d0a-11ea-b60c-3be060a4f8e1_story.html?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most), because thousands of Americans had died from COVID-19 before being diagnosed and only half of the states were following CDC guidelines in reporting.

Trump continued to degrade the office of the presidency and act as if the pandemic was over, issuing an order to have 9,500 American troops removed from Germany (in retaliation for Angela Merkel’s refusal to attend a G7 summit with Trump and Vladimir Putin) and announcing that he would re-start crowded campaign rallies which were certain to be [super-spreader events](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/super-spreader-coronavirus/). (360)

The reality TV presidency continued full throttle the next day, **Tuesday, June 9**, when Trump [tweeted](https://www.mediaite.com/trump/beyond-deranged-commentators-across-political-spectrum-condemn-trumps-claim-elderly-man-attacked-by-police-is-antifa/) that Martin Gugino, a 75-year-old protester with cancer who had sustained a fractured skull after being pushed down by a Buffalo police officer, “could be an ANTIFA provocateur,” an assertion which was [completely unfounded](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/09/nyregion/who-is-martin-gugino-buffalo-police.html).

Back in the real world, [premature re-openings](https://www.stamfordadvocate.com/news/article/Coronavirus-hospitalizations-rise-sharply-in-15328752.php) fueled by Trump’s campaign strategy were contributing to spikes in cases around the country, with 12 states posting their biggest single-day increases. Texas, a state under complete Republican control for over two decades which had done little to combat COVID-19, had its [second consecutive day](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/09/texas-reports-two-consecutive-days-of-record-coronavirus-hospitalizations-weeks-after-reopening.html) of record hospitalizations.

Farm laborers around the country were especially vulnerable to infection due to the administration’s [unwillingness](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/09/farm-workers-coronavirus-309897) to enact adequate safety regulations or disburse money for testing. (361)

People working long hours under the hot sun to harvest our food are invisible to most Americans, so their problems were easy for Trump to ignore as part of the administration’s tactic of pretending that COVID-19 didn’t matter anymore. On **Wednesday, June 10**, Dan Diamond of *Politico* [reviewed](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/10/white-house-stops-talking-about-coronavirus-309993) this P.R. thrust in “White House goes quiet on coronavirus as outbreak spikes again across the U.S.”

As revealed by Diamond, though cases continued to surge throughout much of the country, around 1,000 Americans were dying daily, and hospitalizations in Texas had gone up 42% since Memorial Day, the administration had largely stopped communicating with the public about the virus for over a month, since the last task force briefing (362). After being ever present in the media through March and April, Anthony Fauci had long since been sidelined. (see #297, #348) The CDC had mostly stopped providing guidance to state public health officials. (363) The FDA was turning back to lesser priorities, including tobacco regulations. (364)

[According](https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-nightly-coronavirus-special-edition/2020/06/10/dont-call-it-a-second-wave-489488) to reporter Ranuka Rasayasam, not only was COVID-19 not remotely through with us, we weren’t even out of the first wave. The U.S. was “uniquely vulnerable to Covid” due to the number of people without health insurance and the Trump administration’s handling of the pandemic, specifically the lack of a national strategy for dealing with coronavirus and the resistance to public health guidelines fueled by Trump’s anti-science rhetoric.

Though the U.S. had only 4% of the world’s population, it accounted for more than a quarter of COVID 19-related deaths. Making matters worse, the administration’s unwillingness to force insurance companies’ hands was allowing major insurers such as BlueCross BlueShield and United Healthcare to [deny full coverage](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-testing-payment-insurers-b5206ee2-3eff-4023-bfed-a33450113547.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top) of testing unless it was deemed “medically necessary,” leaving millions of Americans untested, uncertain of whether or not they were infected, and likely to infect others. (365)

Trump had more important things on his mind, including his [opposition](https://www.axios.com/trump-confederate-generals-ecc596fe-5d37-4d8a-8a12-42656886446f.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiospm&stream=top) to renaming military bases named after Confederate generals and planning for his first super-spreader campaign rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The event was scheduled for Juneteenth (June 19), a holiday celebrating the freeing of the last slaves, in a town known for “the single worst incident of [racial violence in American history](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mass_racial_violence_in_the_United_States).” In 1921, white mobs had killed hundreds of African-Americans, incarcerated thousands, left 10,000 African-Americans homeless, and destroyed 35 square blocks of “Black Wall Street”—one of the wealthiest black neighborhoods in the country at the time.

Red, anti-science states that had followed Trump’s lead continued to lead the pack in infections on **Thursday, June 11**.

[Florida](https://www.miamiherald.com/news/coronavirus/article243452186.html) had its highest daily total of (reported) new cases and Arizona was [running out of hospital beds](https://www.thedailybeast.com/covid-is-so-bad-in-arizona-theyre-running-out-of-beds). (366, 367)

A doctor at the Harvard Global Health Institute was projecting [100,000 more deaths](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8410159/100-000-people-die-coronavirus-September.html) in the U.S. by September 1 due to the premature re-opening of the economy and the surge in cases which was following.

As the ranks of the unemployed increased, with [1.5 million new filings](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/11/business/economy/unemployment-claims-coronavirus.html) (368), Trump’s Small Business Administration was [refusing](https://www.pressherald.com/2020/06/11/trump-administration-wont-say-who-got-511-billion-in-taxpayer-backed-coronavirus-loans/) to meet their legal responsibility (under the Cares Act) to disclose how $660 billion of taxpayer money had been disbursed. Due to the administration’s lack of oversight of applicants, and lack of direction to the banks disbursing funds, big businesses had capitalized while many small businesses had been [left in the lurch](https://www.commondreams.org/news/2020/04/21/big-banks-sued-putting-large-corporations-ahead-main-street-small-business-owners). (369)

The administration and state officials were also [ignoring requests](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/11/native-american-coronavirus-data-314527) from Native American epidemiologists asking for “access to data showing how the coronavirus is spreading around their lands, potentially widening health disparities and frustrating tribal leaders already ill-equipped to contain the pandemic.”

“…The communication gaps threaten to hinder efforts to track the virus within Native populations that are more prone to illness, disability and early death and have fragile health systems. Tribal authorities say without knowing who’s sick and where, they can’t impose lockdowns or other restrictions or organize contact tracing on tribal lands (370). The lack of data also is weighing on epidemiologists who track public health for the nearly three-quarters of Native Americans who live in urban areas and not on reservations.” (371)

“…Native American organizations have repeatedly run into roadblocks trying to get data from federal officials over the past month. The CDC has denied a series of requests from the nation’s 12 tribal epidemiology centers for raw coronavirus data — even though state health departments are allowed to freely access the information.”

“‘…If you can’t measure [the coronavirus,] you can’t manage it,’ said Stacy Bohlen, the executive director of the National Indian Health Board, which provides policy expertise to the 560 federally recognized Native American tribes. ‘It’s another chronic failing of what Indian people experience across the health system. We know it’s happening across the country.’”

The administration was also pretending not to notice the public health necessity of universal access to mail ballots in the fall. During the recent Georgia primary, voters had waited up to [six hours](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/11/deep-partisan-divide-over-in-person-mail-in-voting-312290) to vote, not unlike what had happened in Wisconsin in April, when Republican judges refused to extend deadlines for absentee ballots. Republicans looked the other way because voters of color (overwhelmingly Democrats) were disproportionately impacted in both instances. (372)

Something that *was* a priority for the administration was avoiding legal accountability for its upcoming super-spreader campaign rally in Tulsa. As [reported](https://www.westport-news.com/news/article/Trump-s-Tulsa-campaign-rally-sign-up-page-15334187.php) by Felicia Sonmez of *the Washington Post*, “The sign-up page for tickets to President Donald Trump’s campaign rally in Tulsa next week includes something that hasn’t appeared ahead of previous rallies: a disclaimer noting that attendees ‘voluntarily assume all risks related to exposure to COVID-19’ and agree not to hold the campaign or venue liable should they get sick.” (373)

It was a savvy legal decision by the Trump administration. The next day, **Friday, June 12**, it was reported that just a week before the rally, a Tulsa Whirlpool plant [had closed](https://www.tulsaworld.com/news/local/whirlpool-plant-in-tulsa-temporarily-shuttered-after-covid-19-outbreak/article_4909b32f-59bf-5d00-ab9a-c415c613ede9.html) due to a COVID-19 outbreak. It was also reported that “Tulsa County now has its highest seven-day average of coronavirus cases since the outbreak began in March.”

Holding the rally in a COVID-19 hot spot was of a piece with Trump’s strategy of pretending coronavirus was behind us. Trump’s economic advisor Lawrence Kudlow (see #70) stayed on message that day when he [told](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/12/larry-kudlow-coronavirus-second-wave-314904) “Fox & Friends” that the virus was “contained” and “They are saying there is no second spike. Let me repeat that. There is no second spike.” (374)

In the real world, Houston was on the “[precipice of disaster](https://finance.yahoo.com/news/houston-precipice-disaster-virus-cases-210423072.html)” due to Republican governor Greg Abbott’s lockstep following of Trump’s edicts (375) and Florida had another daily [record in infections](https://www.miamiherald.com/news/coronavirus/article243482076.html), a number that was a significant undercount, according to Florida’s “[top coronavirus data scientist](https://theweek.com/speedreads/919739/fired-florida-scientist-goes-rogue-publishes-covid19-data-grimmer-outlook-than-states).”

At a briefing that day, the administration again demonstrated mixed messaging when CDC officials [suggested](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/12/cdc-warns-large-gatherings-315521) that Americans maintain social distancing, wear masks when out in public, and “warned that large gatherings in confined places pose the highest risk for spreading the coronavirus, a day after President Donald Trump’s campaign announced his first post-lockdown rally.” (376)

Appearing on ABC News, Anthony Fauci said more or less the same thing: “The best way you can avoid either acquiring or transmitting infection is to avoid crowded places, to wear a mask whenever you’re outside and if you can do both, avoid the congregation of people and do the mask, that’s great.”

A [study](https://www.sfgate.com/science/article/Study-100-face-mask-use-could-crush-second-15333170.php) by Cambridge and Greenwich universities repeated this guidance, showing that the universal use of face masks could significantly mitigate the damage of a second or third wave of COVID-19.

Florida, one of the states that had most aggressively flouted public safety recommendations, had a record total of new cases for the [third day in a row](https://www.miamiherald.com/news/coronavirus/article243513417.html) on **Saturday, June 13**.

Oklahoma, another deep red state that had taken Trump’s misinformation at face value, continued to experience a spike in infections (377). Deborah Birx and Anthony Fauci had both counseled against holding the rally, a feeling that was shared by Bruce Dart, the Tulsa County health director. As reported on **Sunday, June 14**, Dart [told](https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/502640-tulsa-health-department-director-i-wish-we-could-postpone-trump-rally) a local newspaper, “COVID is here in Tulsa, it is transmitting very efficiently….I wish we could postpone this to a time when the virus isn’t as large a concern as it is today.”

As of **Monday, June 15**, the United States had gone to hell in a handbasket, saddled with a pandemic, the worst economic decline since the Great Depression, and mass protests over systemic police brutality, all of which would have been far less pronounced with a competent and empathic leader. Trump’s breathtaking failures were reflected in a Gallup poll which showed that the number of Americans who were proud of their country was at [a record low](https://news.gallup.com/poll/312644/national-pride-falls-record-low.aspx).

On **Tuesday, June 16**, a separate poll, conducted by the University of Chicago, found that “[Americans are the unhappiest they’ve been in 50 years](https://apnews.com/0f6b9be04fa0d3194401821a72665a50).” (378)

Contributing to Trump’s dubious achievement of creating record amounts of unhappiness was the [stress of health workers](https://apnews.com/8a490dd827bc37a655dd4c0f8a133253) who felt the brunt of Trump’s failures most acutely, in the sheer scope of the pandemic in the States, the lack of PPE, the fear of getting sick themselves and getting their families sick (379), and the trauma of regular exposure to sickness and death. (380)

Healthcare workers in Republican-led states which had downplayed public safety recommendations at Trump’s behest were feeling his shortcomings as a leader and a human being daily. Cases in Alabama (381), South Carolina (382), Oklahoma (see #377), and Arizona were [increasing rapidly](https://news.trust.org/item/20200616101601-zwjb3); Arizona’s spike was [directly attributed](https://www.rawstory.com/2020/06/health-experts-link-rise-in-arizona-covid-cases-to-end-of-stay-at-home-order/?utm_source=&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=4785) to Republican governor Doug Ducey’s decision to let a stay-at-home order expire. Texas had [new highs](https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/503005-texas-hits-new-high-for-coronavirus-cases-hospitalizations) in cases and hospitalizations.

Trump continued his happy talk about the economy, but Jerome Powell, Trump’s appointed Fed chairman, [told](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/16/powell-pandemic-trump-323312) the Senate Banking Committee that “Significant uncertainty remains about the timing and strength of the recovery….Much of that economic uncertainty comes from uncertainty about the path of the disease and the effects of measures to contain it. Until the public is confident that the disease is contained, a full recovery is unlikely.”

More grim news came the next day, **Wednesday, June 17**. A model created by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (at the University of Washington) which had been previously used by the White House now forecast that the U.S. would have in excess of [200,000 deaths](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/coronavirus-white-house-model-prediction-200000-deaths-october/) by October 1.

People of color, the vast majority of whom hadn’t voted for Trump, were being victimized by Trump’s inaction at inordinate rates. (383) An analysis done by the Brookings Institution showed that people of color ages 35-44 were dying at [10X the rate](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-racial-disparities-age-ea4730ce-52aa-4a17-a02c-5817da4245c5.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top) of Caucasians of the same age. The report’s authors wrote that “Race gaps in vulnerability to Covid-19 highlight the accumulated, intersecting inequities facing Americans of color (but especially Black people) in jobs, housing, education, criminal justice – and in health.”

Another group of color who was shortchanged by the Trump administration was Native American tribes who were waiting on $679 million promised in the congressional stimulus passed months earlier. The administration was [holding up the funding](https://www.yahoo.com/huffpost/tribes-covid-relief-treasury-department-033604920.html) (384), compounding the administration’s earlier delays in disbursing money to tribes. (385) A federal judge ruled that the administration had to pay up within the week as “Continued delay in the face of an exceptional public health crisis is no longer acceptable.”

Also on Trump’s pay-n0-mind list was Anthony Fauci. (see #297, #348) Interviewed by NPR, Fauci revealed that he hadn’t spoken to Trump [for two weeks](https://www.mediaite.com/radio/dr-fauci-says-he-hasnt-spoken-to-trump-about-the-coronavirus-pandemic-for-two-weeks/). (386) Asked if he would like to join thousands of Caucasian yahoos crammed together elbow-to-elbow with no masks in Tulsa, Fauci replied, “I’m in a high-risk category. Personally, I would not. Of course not.”

The lack of masks was largely driven by Trump’s modeling. Despite the [clear scientific basis](https://theconversation.com/masks-help-stop-the-spread-of-coronavirus-the-science-is-simple-and-im-one-of-100-experts-urging-governors-to-require-public-mask-wearing-138507) for wearing a mask during a pandemic, despite the fact that Trump’s own surgeon general had [recommended](https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/14/health/us-surgeon-general-coronavirus-masks/index.html) that Americans wear masks, despite the threat that not wearing a mask posed to their families, co-workers, and others in their communities, [many Republicans](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/necessary-or-needless-three-months-pandemic-americans-are-divided-wearing-n1231191) refused to use masks out of a misguided solidarity to Trump and a desire to “stick it to the libs.” (387)

Trump’s influence in seeding opposition to masks and other aspects of the administration’s COVID-19 failures were explored in depth in “With the Federal Health Megaphone Silent, States Struggle With a Shifting Pandemic,” which focused on [the administration’s abandonment of a federal response](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/17/us/politics/coronavirus-pandemic-federal-response.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20200618&instance_id=19492&nl=the-morning&regi_id=126380121&segment_id=31211&te=1&user_id=d83df742c3b67c9afcdc1a7c3e05db74).

The piece looked at the contradiction between the increasing rate of infections through much of the country and the administration’s messaging, including Mike Pence’s claim in a recent *Wall Street Journal* editorial that concern about a second wave was “overblown” (388) and Trump’s comment to Sean Hannity the night before that COVID-19 was “[fading away](https://www.foxnews.com/media/trump-hannity-coronavirus-fading-away-tulsa-rally).” (389)

Former CDC acting director Dr. Richard Besser, who had done regular briefings in 2009 during the H1N1 pandemic, pointed out that “As states are moving to reopen the economy, as people are increasing their social activities, it becomes even more important that the public understand the critical value in following public health guidance — wearing masks, social distancing, washing hands, staying home if you’re sick….without that daily reinforcement, you have what is happening around the country — people not believing the pandemic is real, cases rising in some places and the possibility that some communities’ health care systems will get overwhelmed.” (390)

The coronavirus task force was no longer speaking publicly, which “has left the country with no singular public voices updating citizens, businesses and state and local governments on best practices. Where once there were voices, now there are just echoes — a promising study in Britain about a steroid that may save the lives of the sickest patients, new evidence of the benefits of staying outdoors. But there is no clarion federal guidance. (391)

“Past pandemics, and simulations conducted by the federal government to prepare for new ones, all teach the same lesson: Having clear, consistent and regular communication with the public is essential to managing any infectious disease outbreak. The C.D.C. has a [462-page manual](https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/manual/index.asp) for crisis communications, which it uses to [train state and local health officials](https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/training/index.asp).

“’It’s a great guide, and it’s just been tossed out the window,’ said Joshua M. Sharfstein, an expert in public health communications at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health.”

Even as Trump appeared indifferent to the impact of COVID-19 on the people he was supposed to serve, the pain was real. As [reported](https://www.wsj.com/articles/americans-skip-millions-of-loan-payments-as-coronavirus-takes-economic-toll-11592472601) by AnnaMaria Andriotis of *the Wall Street Journal*, on **Thursday, June 18**, “Americans have skipped payments on more than 100 million student loans (392), auto loans (393) and other forms of debt since the coronavirus hit the U.S., the latest sign of the toll the pandemic is taking on people’s finances.”

Trump was more focused on himself, telling *the Wall Street Journal* that some people wore masks just to “signal disapproval of him.”

Meanwhile, Oklahoma, the site of Trump’s upcoming rally, was among the handful of hot spots in the country, showing a [91% increase](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-pandemic-south-arizona-oklahoma-trump-dbd813f7-52a8-4474-872d-624212bd257c.html) in cases in the past week.

On **Friday, June 19**, The Republican-controlled states of Texas, Florida, and Arizona continued to lead the way, posting [record numbers of infections](https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/503588-arizona-texas-florida-again-report-record-high-covid-19-cases). By contrast, Democratic governors and mayors were pushing constituents to [wear masks](https://news.trust.org/item/20200619003042-1a2ye) through laws or public recommendations.

Trump again showed his contempt for democracy, saying in an interview that mail-in voting (high turnout) was the [biggest threat](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/03/trump-2020-election-legal-battle-coronavirus-162152) to winning a second term and [tweeting](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/19/trump-threatens-protesters-the-day-before-his-tulsa-rally.html) that “Any protesters, anarchists, agitators, looters or lowlifes who are going to Oklahoma please understand, you will not be treated like you have been in New York, Seattle, or Minneapolis. It will be a much different scene!”

The psychological impact of the chaos Trump lives and breathes and had inflicted on American life was reflected in [polling](https://www.studyfinds.org/land-of-the-worried-83-of-americans-very-stressed-over-nations-future/) done by the American Psychological Association which found that 72% of Americans polled “believe [this is the lowest point](https://www.studyfinds.org/political-polarization-peaking-in-america-voters-embrace-all-or-nothing-mentality-along-party-lines/) in the country’s history that they’ve ever been alive to see.” Another key finding was that “66% of respondents say that the government’s ongoing response to the coronavirus continues to stress them out on a daily basis. Among that group, 84% are mostly worried about the federal government’s response.” (394)

The anemic federal response was mind-boggling to public health experts overseas, whose countries had handled the pandemic much more aggressively, resulting in a fraction of the deaths and infections seen in the United States. [According to](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/06/19/countries-keeping-coronavirus-bay-experts-watch-us-case-numbers-with-alarm/?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most) Rick Noack of *the Washington Post*, “As coronavirus cases surge in states across the South and West of the United States, health experts in countries with falling case numbers are watching with a growing sense of alarm and disbelief, with many wondering why virus-stricken U.S. states continue to reopen and why the advice of scientists is often ignored.

“‘It really does feel like the U.S. has given up,” (395) said Siouxsie Wiles, an infectious-diseases specialist at the University of Auckland in New Zealand – a country that has confirmed only three new cases over the last three weeks and where citizens have now largely returned to their pre-coronavirus routines.”

A [piece](https://www.statnews.com/2020/06/19/faster-response-prevented-most-us-covid-19-deaths/?utm_source=pocket&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=pockethits) at statnews.com looked at how things could have gone differently in the U.S. if a competent leader—say, [Hillary Clinton](https://benbosophy.blogspot.com/2016/10/178-reasons-hillary-clinton-is.html)—had been president when COVID struck:

“Had American leaders taken the decisive, early measures that several other nations took when they had exactly the same information the U.S. did, at exactly the same time in their experience of the novel coronavirus, how many of these Covid-19 deaths could have been prevented?

“That isn’t a hypothetical question. And the answer that emerges from a direct comparison of the fatalities in and policies of the U.S. and other countries — South Korea, Australia, Germany, and Singapore — indicates that between 70% and 99% of the Americans who died from this pandemic might have been saved by measures demonstrated by others to have been feasible.” (396)

Based on a study by Oxford University students, “14 days from the date of the 15th confirmed case in each country — a vital early window for action — the U.S. response to the outbreak lagged behind the others by miles.” (397)

**“…**Due to exponential viral spread, [America’s] delay in action was devastating. In the wake of the U.S. response, [117,858 Americans](https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/us/) died in the four months following the first 15 confirmed cases. After an equivalent period, Germany suffered only [8,863](https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/germany/) casualties. Scaling up the German population of 83.7 million to America’s 331 million, a U.S.-sized Germany would have suffered 35,049 Covid-19 deaths. So if the U.S. had acted as effectively as Germany, 70% of U.S. coronavirus deaths might have been prevented.

“Seventy percent, though, is the most conservative estimate. Scaled-up versions of South Korea, Australia, and [Singapore](https://www.statnews.com/2020/03/23/singapore-teach-united-states-about-covid-19-response/) would have experienced 1,758, 1,324, and 1,358 deaths, respectively, in the four months after 15 cases were confirmed in each country. Had we handled the coronavirus as effectively as any of these three countries, roughly 99% of the 117,858 U.S. Covid-19 deaths might have been averted.”

Trump’s mis-governance had impacted state governments too:

“Often [taking cues](https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/04/politics/republican-governors-stay-at-home-orders-coronavirus/index.html) from the president’s words, state by state measures were rolled out [piecemeal](https://www.npr.org/2020/03/12/815200313/what-governors-are-doing-to-tackle-spreading-coronavirus). Florida and Georgia, for example, waited until April 3 to issue stay-at-home orders while South Carolina held off until April 7.”

Late Friday night, an opportune time to bury important news, Trump [fired Geoffrey Berman](https://www.thehour.com/news/article/Barr-says-at-his-request-Trump-has-removed-15354618.php), the U.S. Attorney of the Southern District of New York. Not coincidentally, Berman was the top federal prosecutor in a number of sticky cases involving Trump and his associates.

On **Saturday, June 20**, it was reported that the U.S. had [30,000 new COVID-19 cases](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/20/us-reports-his-number-of-daily-coronavirus-cases-since-may-1.html), the biggest one-day totals since May 1.

Trump had a [super-spreader rally](https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/politics/100000007202247/trump-tulsa-rally.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20200621&instance_id=19590&nl=the-morning&regi_id=126380121&segment_id=31491&te=1&user_id=d83df742c3b67c9afcdc1a7c3e05db74) in Tulsa, Oklahoma (398) to an arena that was two-thirds empty. During his speech, Trump said “I have done a phenomenal job” managing COVID-19 and stated emphatically that he had asked underlings to “slow the testing down” (399) because increasing infection numbers made him look bad. He also called coronavirus the “kung flu” as a dog whistle to his racist supporters.

On **Sunday, June 21**, Trump reached his personal milestone of [120,000 dead Americans](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/u-s-coronavirus-death-toll-surpasses-120-000-china-south-n1231663), a staggering number which was 5X higher than the death totals of any other developed country—and yet still a significant undercount of actual COVID-related deaths.

Among the most vulnerable victims of Trump’s failures were residents and employees (400) of nursing homes, particularly residents with limited financial resources.

[As reported](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/21/business/nursing-homes-evictions-discharges-coronavirus.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosvitals&stream=top) by Jessica Silver-Greenberg and Amy Julia Harris of *the New York Times*, “More than 51,000 residents and employees of nursing homes and long-term care facilities have died (401), representing more than 40 percent of the total death toll in the United States.” In order to boost profits, nursing homes were taking in lucrative COVID-19-infected patients (covered by Medicare or private plans) while “kicking out old and disabled residents [covered by Medicaid] — among the people most susceptible to the coronavirus — and shunting them into homeless shelters, rundown motels and other unsafe facilities, according to 22 watchdogs in 16 states, as well as dozens of elder-care lawyers, social workers and former nursing home executives.” (402)

Medicaid recipients in nursing homes were far from alone in feeling the devastation wrought by the Trump administration’s grossly inadequate response to COVID-19. As reported on **Monday, June 22**, companies providing mental health and addiction services were flooded with new patients but were being [shortchanged](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/22/coronavirus-bailout-mental-health-334588) by the administration’s Health and Human Services Department, who had failed to disburse stimulus money which could keep operations going. Three months after the CARES Act had been passed, a third of providers had not received their money, forcing them to get rid of staff (403) and leaving them short of PPE (404), and many didn’t know how long they would be able to stay open, potentially leading to even greater shortfalls in services down the road. (405)

Countrywide, new cases increased 24% from the week before, primarily in red states who had death-marched along with Trump’s election plans. The failures of the Republican leadership of Arizona and Texas to heed the power of the pandemic were increasingly obvious, as the Children’s Hospital in Houston [opened up](https://www.khou.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/texas-childrens-hospital-admitting-adult-patients-as-covid-19-cases-continue-to-rise/285-5aa0a132-a318-4a41-81b3-6659086c2ef7) space for COVID-infected adults (406) and Arizona [reported](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/22/coronavirus-hospitalizations-grow-in-arizona-and-texas.html) that “83% of inpatient beds and 85% of intensive-care unit beds were in use.” (407)

As bad as things were, the administration’s Health and Human Services Department was making matters worse by [holding up](https://finance.yahoo.com/news/dems-trump-sitting-billions-coronavirus-221008162.html) billions of dollars for testing (408) and contact tracing (409), perhaps because Trump had ordered them to “slow the testing down.”

Though COVID-19 cases were skyrocketing in the U.S., the impact of the virus had been blunted in continental Europe. The reasons for this stark contrast were reviewed by Dan Diamond and Sarah Wheaton in “‘The U.S. has hamstrung itself’: [How America became the new Italy on coronavirus](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/22/united-states-italy-traded-places-coronavirus-333122).”

The key distinction between the U.S. response and the response in Europe was that Europe had focused on public health (mandatory masks, leaving lockdowns in place longer) rather than short-term campaign considerations. Italy, the first epicenter in Europe, had had just 264 new cases on Sunday. Spain and France had had under 500 new cases per day. The U.S. was seeing over 30,000 new cases per day, a number that was rising sharply.

Trump’s politicization of the virus had contributed to Republican leaders in individual states failing to protect their constituents and Trump’s decision to outsource the COVID-19 response had left states to fight a pandemic with woefully inadequate resources.

Texas outdid itself on **Tuesday, June 23**, with over [5,000 new infections](https://dfw.cbslocal.com/2020/06/23/texas-surpasses-5k-new-cases-coronavirus-spreading/), a record. Right-wing libertarian governor Greg Abbott, who had dismissed the virus in the recent past, [increased regulations](https://www.dallasnews.com/news/public-health/2020/06/23/spread-is-so-rampant-texas-hits-all-time-high-of-more-than-5k-new-covid-19-cases-gov-greg-abbott-says/) for childcare centers and “gave local officials more powers to limit public gatherings during the upcoming Fourth of July weekend.”

Arizona, the sight of Trump’s second super-spreader rally that day (410), reported a [record single-day increase](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/23/arizona-reports-record-single-day-increase-in-coronavirus-cases-ahead-of-trumps-visit.html) in coronavirus cases ahead of Trump’s visit. The rally itself had no public health requirements; people sat next to each other with barely a mask in sight (411) and Trump said COVID-19 was “[going away](https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewsolender/2020/06/23/its-going-away-trump-plays-down-coronavirus-at-arizona-rally-as-cases-surge-in-the-state/%22%20%5Cl%20%226070e6a42b3b).” (412)

Things were so bad in the States that the European Union was considering [a ban on travelers from America](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/23/world/europe/coronavirus-EU-American-travel-ban.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiospm&stream=top). (413) The direct connection between the administration’s poor policy-making and the uniquely horrible results in the States were revealed again when Anthony Fauci told a House Energy and Commerce committee hearing that the administration had given an order for the National Institutes of Health to [cancel a study](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/23/fauci-nih-white-house-bat-study-336452) looking at the transmission of viruses from bats to humans, which is likely [how COVID-19 had started](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/2020/05/anthony-fauci-no-scientific-evidence-the-coronavirus-was-made-in-a-chinese-lab-cvd/%22%20%5Cl%20%22close). (see #22)

Trump fiddled while the U.S. burned, focusing on campaigning rather than governing. Topmost in Trump’s mind was finding ways to deflect his COVID-19 failures onto other entities, including [his own CDC](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/23/trump-cdc-overhaul-coronavirus-335039) and [governors](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/23/trump-governors-2020-328085) who lacked the resources and information that the federal government had had to mitigate the virus. He made a visit to the border wall to show his commitment to [keeping brown-skinned people out of the country](https://www.westport-news.com/news/article/Trump-visits-border-wall-to-drive-immigration-15361294.php), went to the mat for monuments of [despicable men from our ugly past](https://news.trust.org/item/20200623133258-dobya)—including Civil War traitors—and received a [warning](https://www.axios.com/twitter-flags-trump-tweet-for-violating-rules-on-abusive-behavior-726d9326-9f6b-4008-be15-ffae9ac3b87b.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiospm&stream=top) from Twitter after threatening D.C. protesters with “serious force.”

While Trump raged against the feeling that he was losing control of the country, COVID-19 surged. On **Wednesday, June 24**, the U.S. had a [one-day record](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/24/us-hits-highest-single-day-of-coronavirus-cases-at-36358-breaking-april-record.html) of new cases, 36,358, which was forcing state and local officials to [consider shutting down again](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/virus-surges-across-us-throwing-reopenings-into-disarray/ar-BB15SSck?li=BBnb7Kz).

Among the many, many victims of the administration’s mishandling of COVID-19 were Americans who were having long-term medical complications, including kidney failure and heart and lung damage, from coronavirus. The administration had vowed to keep medical costs down for these patients, but was [failing to do so](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/24/trump-pay-coronavirus-symptoms-338924), leading to staggering medical bills. (414)

According to Susannah Luthi of *Politico*, “A spokesperson for the Department of Health and Human Services declined to say whether the administration is talking to health plans about a solution. The government hasn’t issued guidance on billing for post-virus conditions, citing ongoing research and the many unknowns about the long-term effects of Covid-19.”

As much damage as the administration had already done, they were far from finished, announcing that they were about to [close drive-through testing sites](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/24/trump-administration-drive-through-coronavirus-testing-338217) even as cases spiked. (415)

The insidious impact of Trump’s months of lies, and right-wing media’s propaganda offensive on his behalf, were weighed by Christopher Ingraham of *the Washington Post* on **Thursday, June 25**.

Ingraham [looked at](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/06/25/fox-news-hannity-coronavirus-misinformation/) “three studies…focused on conservative media’s role in fostering confusion about the seriousness of the coronavirus. Taken together, they paint a picture of a media ecosystem that amplifies misinformation, entertains conspiracy theories and discourages audiences from taking concrete steps to protect themselves and others.

“The end result, according to one of the studies, is that infection and mortality rates are higher in places where one pundit who initially downplayed the severity of the pandemic — Fox News’s Sean Hannity — reaches the largest audiences.”

Another study “found that people who got most of their information from mainstream print and broadcast outlets tended to have an accurate assessment of the severity of the pandemic and their risks of infection. But those who relied on conservative sources, such as Fox News and Rush Limbaugh, were more likely to believe in conspiracy theories or unfounded rumors, such as the belief that taking vitamin C could prevent infection, that the Chinese government had created the virus, and that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention exaggerated the pandemic’s threat ‘to damage the Trump presidency.’”

In whole, the studies went a long way toward explaining the startling ignorance of many/most Republicans (see #145, #204, #283, #307, #313, #319-323, #325, #330, #339, #347, #387) and the ramifications of that ignorance—no masks, no social distancing, increased infection rates, and the chaos, death, and disruption associated with those higher rates. (416)

As bad as things seemed on the surface, they were even worse in reality, as Trump’s CDC estimated that COVID-19 had infected [10X as many Americans as had been reported](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-cases/coronavirus-may-have-infected-10-times-more-americans-than-reported-cdc-says-idUSKBN23W2PU). (417)

Trump’s response was continued indifference. [According to](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/trump-ignores-virus-spike-as-us-cases-surge-toward-records/ar-BB15YpgG) reporter Josh Wingrove, “President Donald Trump has paid little heed to a resurgence in U.S. coronavirus cases — which on Thursday hit a record level — announcing no new steps to curb the outbreak and continuing with a normal schedule of meetings and travel as hospitals fill with sick patients.” (418) Trump that day tweeted that cases were “way down,” though the opposite was true. (419) For good measure, Trump’s Department of Justice sided with the plaintiffs in a [lawsuit](https://www.blogger.com/) against Hawaii’s quarantine on out-0f-state travelers. (420)

The administration showed just how much they cared again on **Friday, June 26**.

Since the pandemic had begun, enrollments in the Affordable Care Act (ACA) [had increased 46%](https://www.axios.com/aca-enrollment-coronavirus-b94f8171-d9ad-4070-99cf-c9259fd92c74.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top) from 2019 due to mass job losses. In all, 23,000,000 Americans had coverage through the ACA and 130,000,000 were protected by the pre-existing condition clause. Ignoring the potential fate of more than half of the U.S. population, the administration filed a brief with the Supreme Court to [overturn the ACA](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/26/us/politics/obamacare-trump-administration-supreme-court.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20200626&instance_id=19769&nl=the-morning&regi_id=126380121&segment_id=31917&te=1&user_id=d83df742c3b67c9afcdc1a7c3e05db74). (421)

Though Trump was unconcerned about trifling matters like healthcare security, he was happy to go to bat for his political allies. When Texas’s Republican governor and senators complained about the administration’s plan to stop funding drive-through testing sites, Trump’s HHS [extended the money](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/26/trump-texas-coronavirus-testing-sites-341795) for two more weeks for five of Texas’s seven sites. Drive-through sites in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Colorado, and Illinois were left to close as scheduled.

The spike in cases brought The Coronavirus Task Force out of hiding for the first time in two months. Unfortunately, Mike Pence treated the important public health gathering as a campaign event. While the U.S. posted a record number of new infections for the third day in a row, Pence gave a [rose-colored-glasses](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/26/coronavirus-task-force-returns-341675) presentation, claiming that the increases were limited to “specific communities,” (422) that “We have made truly remarkable progress in moving our nation forward,” that “[We flattened the curve](https://www.businessinsider.com/first-coronavirus-task-force-briefing-in-two-months-pence-national-accomplishment-flatten-the-curve-2020-6?amp&utmSource=twitter&utmContent=referral&utmTerm=topbar&referrer=twitter&__twitter_impression=true&fbclid=IwAR08ClISR9RmjVTPAxNiXcWhHm8M_sKdewdXAhTjTjiJs1YfmDPNbuuuO1Q). (423) We saved lives.”

The vice president put far more energy into rhetoric than reality. [According to](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/26/coronavirus-task-force-returns-341675) David Lim and Alice Miranda Ollstein of *Politico*, “Pence did not announce any new initiatives, resources or strategies in response to the new outbreaks — or even recommend the public wear masks. (424) Instead, he emphasized that the federal government stood ready to assist states if they ask for help on anything from hospital capacity to protective equipment and generally urged Americans to remain vigilant, pray and exercise ‘personal responsibility.’”

Pence couldn’t sustain his lies for more than a single sleep cycle.

As of **Saturday, June 27**, the daily tally of new infections had [climbed 65%](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/27/world/coronavirus-updates.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20200628&instance_id=19825&nl=the-morning&regi_id=126380121&segment_id=32064&te=1&user_id=d83df742c3b67c9afcdc1a7c3e05db74%22%20%5Cl%20%22link-3631c3c5) in the span of two weeks. (425) As mind-blowing as this number was, it likely [undercounted](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/27/health/coronavirus-antibodies-asymptomatic.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20200628&instance_id=19825&nl=the-morning&regi_id=126380121&segment_id=32064&te=1&user_id=d83df742c3b67c9afcdc1a7c3e05db74) infections by 90%, according to Trump’s own CDC. In response, Pence [cancelled campaign events](https://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/watch/pence-cancels-trips-to-arizona-florida-due-to-concerns-over-spike-in-coronavirus-cases-86142021953?cid=sm_npd_ms_fb_ma&fbclid=IwAR18RF5oYGjPGvaX7ev4BsJyNTcIELmWVsVhutzRg78H4DYOULcdkrdHbqw) in Florida and Arizona he had defended at the previous day’s press conference.

The gulf between actions and words was even more pronounced with Donald Trump. Though he had been coaxing Americans to risk their health by consistently minimizing the severity of COVID-19 in public, holding super-spreader rallies, refusing to wear a mask, lying to reporters when asked about the pandemic, and pressuring states to re-open their economies prematurely, behind the scenes Trump was taking extraordinary precautions.

[According to](https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/26/politics/donald-trump-coronavirus-protocols/index.html) Kevin Liptak and Kaitlin Collins of cnn.com, “[President Donald Trump](https://www.cnn.com/specials/politics/president-donald-trump-45) appears ready to move on from a still-raging [coronavirus pandemic](https://www.cnn.com/2020/02/06/health/wuhan-coronavirus-timeline-fast-facts/index.html) — skipping the [first White House task force briefing](https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/26/politics/mike-pence-trump-rallies-coronavirus/index.html) in months (426) and moving the event out of the White House itself. But the measures meant to protect him from catching the virus have scaled up dramatically.”

“…When he travels to locations where the virus is surging, every venue the President enters is inspected for potential areas of contagion by advance security and medical teams, according to people familiar with the arrangements. Bathrooms designated for the President’s use are scrubbed and sanitized before he arrives. Staff maintain a close accounting of who will come into contact with the President to ensure they receive tests.

“While the White House phases out steps such as temperature checks and required mask-wearing in the West Wing — changes meant to signal the country is moving on — those around the President still undergo regular testing.”

“…After Trump told aides at the beginning of the outbreak he must avoid getting sick at all costs, efforts to prevent him from contracting the virus have progressively become more intensive and wide-ranging. Early steps such as keeping more hand sanitizer nearby eventually evolved into an intensive safety apparatus, including the testing regimen requiring dozens of staffers.”

Though he’d been successful to date at avoiding infection, Trump’s failures to keep millions of his constituents safe were becoming more and more obvious to the U.S. public. The connection between the administration’s incompetence and the increase in infections [was reviewed](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/with-trump-leading-the-way-america-s-coronavirus-failures-exposed-by-record-surge-in-new-infections/ar-BB162SAS?li=BBnb4R7) in “With Trump leading the way, America’s coronavirus failures exposed by record surge in new infections” by Toluse Olorunnipa, Josh Dawsey, and Yasmeen Abutaleb of *the Washington Post*.

Among the key points: “Trump’s public mentions of the coronavirus [declined by two-thirds](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-coronavirus-pandemic-jobs-law-and-order/2020/06/05/3248ce5e-a747-11ea-b619-3f9133bbb482_story.html) between April and early June. (427) When he did discuss the pandemic, it was often to float misinformation about treatments, masks and testing — science-defying views that have been embraced by his supporters and top Republican lawmakers.” (428)

Anthony Fauci had been blocked from public appearances because he had trouble “staying on message” (see #297, #348) and the administration had had weeks of internal debate over whether to hold Friday’s task force briefing or pretend infections weren’t increasing.

Max Skidmore of the University of Missouri at Kansas City pointed out that Trump’s decision to ignore public health in service to his campaign was unique: “We’re the only country in the world that has politicized the approach to a pandemic.” (429)

Despite the surge in infections, “The president has dramatically scaled back the number of coronavirus meetings on his schedule in recent weeks, instead holding long meetings on polling and endorsements, his reelection campaign, the planned Republican National Convention in Jacksonville, Fla., the economy and other topics, according to two advisers, who, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.” (430)

Lacking any direction or directives from the top due to Trump’s focus on the campaign to the exclusion of all else, the administration continued to fail states: “Some states are still struggling to procure testing kits and supplies for the kits, including swabs, and have pleaded for the federal government to play a larger role in coordinating purchases, resolving supply shortages and distributing the tests. Doctors and health-care facilities are still grappling with shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE), including private doctors’ offices that cannot perform routine procedures safely because they do not have the necessary equipment, according to the American Medical Association.” (431)

As before (see #237), what limited federal resources *were* being allocated were given out based on pull, not need: “More than five months after the first test for the coronavirus was conducted in the United States, testing equipment is still being doled out based on which states manage to get federal officials on the phone to press their case. After a recent weekend that saw demand for testing outstrip capacity, the governor’s office in Arizona placed a call to the White House and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said Daniel Ruiz, Ducey’s chief operating officer. Within 24 hours, they had secured expedited access to a rapid Roche testing machine, he said.”

Ironically, Trump’s shortcomings continued to be felt most acutely by [his fan base in the Superstition Belt](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/27/southern-states-coronavirus-surge-342267). Four states with Republican control of the governor’s mansion and the legislature recorded their highest totals of new infections: Georgia, South Carolina, Florida, and Arizona, and as of **Sunday, June 28**, “[only two US states](https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/28/health/us-coronavirus-sunday/index.html) [were] reporting a decline in new coronavirus cases.”

The Trump campaign’s lack of concern for the safety of their sheep-like supporters was looked at in [a cnn.com story](https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/27/politics/social-distancing-stickers-trump-campaign-tulsa-rally/index.html) about the super-spreader rally in Tulsa. Before the event, Bank of Oklahoma Center employees had placed thousands of stickers stating “Do Not Sit Here, Please!” throughout the arena to encourage social distancing. Trump campaign staff swept in before the rally and removed the stickers. (432) As could be expected, Trump supporters sat next to each other without masks, setting in motion a [record-breaking](https://tulsaworld.com/news/local/connect-the-dots-tulsa-county-covid-19-cases-soaring-weeks-after-trump-rally-large-scale/article_7c6dfef3-230a-5314-94bc-bab491189960.html) batch of new infections for the other citizens of Tulsa.

That evening, “60 Minutes” ran a [segment](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/coronavirus-antibody-testing-inaccurate-data-60-minutes-2020-06-28/) which showed that the Trump administration had taken “the unprecedented step of allowing COVID antibody tests to flood the market without review.”

“…Over the course of a three-month investigation, 60 Minutes has learned that federal officials knew many of the antibody tests were seriously flawed but continued to allow them to be sold anyway. Now, as Coronavirus surges in parts of the country, that government failure is complicating efforts to know the reach of the Coronavirus.”

“60 minutes” interviewed Robert Castañeda, a clinic owner in Laredo, Texas. Castañeda told of buying 20,000 test kits which were flawed, leaving the community uncertain of true infection rates. This scenario was playing out around the country due to the administration’s unwillingness to regulate the sale of antibody tests. (433)

Earlier in the day, Trump had shown just how seriously he took leaving a little ol’ Laredo clinic owner out of [half a million dollars](https://www.theeagle.com/news/state-and-regional/a-laredo-er-spent-500-000-on-coronavirus-tests-health-officials-say-they-re-unreliable/article_5c14fba3-9deb-5565-bf2e-cf573e516c1f.html) by tweeting a video of a Trump supporter yelling “White Power” before he went golfing with Lindsey Graham.

COVID-19 continued to wreak havoc in anti-science Republican states on **Monday, June 29**.

[According to](https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-nightly-coronavirus-special-edition/2020/06/29/covid-swamps-trump-country-489670) Patterson Clark and Ryan Heath of *Politico*, “On the pandemic’s first peak in early April, the states that voted for Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton accounted for 67 percent of new Covid-19 cases. For the newest peak, which we’re still climbing, the states that voted for President Donald Trump have an even larger share: They accounted for 73 percent of new cases on June 28.”

States and local jurisdictions were being forced to backtrack. Arizona Republican governor Doug Ducey, [a Trump ally who had re-opened to soon](https://www.thedenverchannel.com/news/national/coronavirus/arizona-governor-orders-shutdown-of-bars-pools-gyms-as-covid-19-spreads-through-state), “ordered bars, gyms, movie theaters, water parks, and tubing operators to close for at least 30 days.”

Another Trump ally who’d failed to take COVID-19 seriously was Ron DeSantis, the governor of Florida. On May 20, in an event with Mike Pence, DeSantis had declared victory over the virus with the words “we succeeded.” (434) Now, as Florida set records for new infections almost daily, there was some question as to whether Trump would be able to have his dreamed-of, [public safety-free Republican convention](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/floridas-coronavirus-outbreak-complicates-republican-convention-trumps-reelection-bid/ar-BB167QTS) in Jacksonville, his backup choice after North Carolina’s Democratic governor had refused to allow a super-spreader convention in his state.

In news that actually mattered, the pandemic’s ripples were being felt far and wide. As had been foreseen many months earlier by [public health officials who were ignored](https://theintercept.com/2020/05/07/coronavirus-whistleblower-hhs-n95-ppe/), hospitals were [getting slammed](https://www.wsj.com/articles/coronavirus-latest-news-06-29-2020-11593420521) (435). The pandemic had also “[put on hold](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/29/pandemic-unleashes-a-spike-in-overdose-deaths-345183) a billion-dollar research program focused on new forms of addiction treatment” (436) and contributed to an increase in overdose deaths brought on by “anxiety, social isolation and depression.” (437) The administration had done virtually nothing to offset the loss of treatment options for many addicts, and the potential death of the Affordable Care Act at the hands of the administration (see #421) would only make matters worse.

The steep economic slump [continued](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/29/nearly-half-the-us-population-is-without-a-job-showing-how-far-the-labor-recovery-has-to-go.html)—just 52.8% of American adults were working, a decrease from 61.2% before the pandemic (438)—but Trump ally Mitch McConnell had yet to lift a finger to negotiate a new stimulus deal with the Democrats, who had [passed a relief bill](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/29/schumer-pelosi-to-mcconnell-move-on-coronavirus-relief-344211) in the House of Representatives 45 days earlier “which included over $3 trillion in aid for states and local governments, hospitals and front-line workers.” McConnell said he wouldn’t address the matter until after the Senate’s two-week July 4th vacation.

While Mitch McConnell enjoyed a lengthy vacation at taxpayers’ expense, millions of Americans waited for tax refunds or stimulus checks from his allies in the Trump administration (439), [as revealed](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/irs-tax-refund-millions-waiting/) by cbsnews.com on **Tuesday, June 30**.

Amid widespread economic desperation, COVID-19 continued to surge. And as high as infection rates were, they were destined to climb further, potentially much higher. Dr. Fauci told a Senate committee that the States could soon have [up to 100,000 new infections](https://www.axios.com/fauci-senate-testimony-coronavirus-9d0204a8-f8e5-4deb-a8f7-07dcbd41d11c.html) daily.

Soaring infection rates had prompted many high-ranking Republican public officials, including Mike Pence and congressional leaders Mitch McConnell and Kevin McCarthy, to [wear masks](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/republican-leaders-now-say-everyone-should-wear-a-mask--even-as-trump-refuses-and-mocks-those-who-do/2020/06/30/995a32d0-bae9-11ea-80b9-40ece9a701dc_story.html) and to advocate mask usage in public statements. Trump continued to hold out, and many of his followers mimicked his stupidity, as reflected in an Axios-Ipsos poll which showed that Democrats were twice as likely as Republicans to wear a mask “at all times,” (440) though the science behind masks was clear—the World Health Organization had concluded that masks alone could [reduce infections by 85%](https://www.livescience.com/face-masks-eye-protection-covid-19-prevention.html).

To this end, the federal government had started an “America Strong” project in which they would send “reusable cotton face coverings to critical infrastructure sectors, companies, healthcare facilities, and faith-based and community organizations across the country to help slow the spread of COVID-19.” Unfortunately, due to [poor planning and a lack of follow through](https://news.yahoo.com/federal-government-runs-out-of-free-face-masks-tsa-also-faces-shortage-215241857.html), the administration could no longer accept new requests. (441)

In addition, “the Transportation Security Administration, whose agents oversee security checkpoints at the nation’s airports, also faces a potential shortfall in face coverings” and other PPE due to “strain and unreliability [in] the supply chain.” (442)

Amid a national disaster for which the fixes were obvious but unaddressed, the bulk of the U.S. public was fed up with the administration’s dithering. According to Pew polls, only 12% of Americans felt “satisfied with the way things are going in the country” and [just 17% were proud of “the state of the country](https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/06/30/publics-mood-turns-grim-trump-trails-biden-on-most-personal-traits-major-issues/).”

A [Reuters/Ipsos poll](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-poll/americans-concerns-about-coronavirus-jump-as-cases-surge-reuters-ipsos-poll-shows-idUSKBN2425B8) reported the following day, on **Wednesday, July 1**, “found that 81% of American adults said they are ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ concerned about the pandemic, the most since a similar poll conducted May 11-12.” Nine of out of ten Democrats were concerned, seven out of ten Republicans.

Americans had good cause to be concerned, as the U.S. had had [over 50,000 new daily infections](https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/07/01/coronavirus-live-updates-us/?fbclid=IwAR3LQd0H8-ylryv7eBh8HUGrZy6x1SYJCpY5jQjCGO5hOP1uIvQppJB7o_E) for the first time. 45 states had seen an increase in weekly infections. And as high as the totals of new infections were, they were being undercounted by about 90%, according to Trump’s former FDA head, Scott Gottlieb (see W20, #265), who pegged actual new daily infections at [half a million](https://www.axios.com/scott-gottlieb-fda-coronavirus-infections-117194af-bd6e-4c92-8d96-3f9253a76d2f.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiospm&stream=top).

Deaths were being undercounted too. According to a Yale study, [122,000 more Americans had died from COVID-19](https://www.france24.com/en/20200701-pandemic-caused-18-pc-rise-in-deaths-in-us-study) than had been reported.

As cases escalated along with Americans’ anxiety, Trump continued to [divide America](https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/trump-hole-digs-deeper-racial-200758877.html), calling a Black Lives Matter stencil scheduled to be inscribed in front of Trump Tower in Manhattan a “symbol of hate,” threatening to veto measures to remove the names of Confederate generals from military bases, and threatening to get rid of anti-segregation housing rules.

**Thursday, July 2**, it was reported that the U.S. had had its [biggest single-day jump](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/02/us-coronavirus-cases-soar-by-more-than-50600-in-record-single-day-jump.html) in infections. COVID-19 cases were “[flat or growing in 48 states](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-map-cases-rising-most-states-1d3ec8d8-af4c-418e-8f9b-2360b917f91a.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top).” Cases in Republican-run Florida had [increased 109%](https://news.trust.org/item/20200702133857-sz3ql) over the prior week and Thursday hit a record, with over 10,000 new (reported) infections.

Republican-controlled Texas continued to bear horrible human costs because of governor Greg Abbott’s earlier indifference to the COVID threat, reaching new highs of daily infections. Texas was such a mess that the far-right, anti-science, anti-government Abbott was [requiring](https://www.axios.com/texas-governor-face-masks-order-fed3a449-b9fa-4439-9c39-38676da43b0c.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiospm&stream=top) that face masks be worn in any county with 20 or more confirmed infections.

State and local governments were feeling the brunt of the coronavirus, but were getting little help from the federal government. As revenue dried up, public sector jobs [were being slashed](https://www.axios.com/state-local-government-workers-budget-coronavirus-e58846e4-18c5-4144-8f5e-960b4dac1358.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axioscities&stream=cities) (443), with many more public employees susceptible to layoffs in the future. Trump ally Mitch McConnell’s delays were making matters worse, leaving state and local leaders in limbo as the new fiscal year started July 1. (444)

At a briefing with reporters that day, Trump [said](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-jobs-numbers-report-2/) the States was getting the coronavirus “under control.”

It was reported on **Friday, July 3** that the U.S. had achieved [a global high](https://news.yahoo.com/u-reports-55-000-covid-035453811.html) of 55,000 new cases on Thursday, with 37 of 50 states seeing an increased rate of infections. (445)

Rather than try to mitigate the growing public health crisis stemming directly from Trump’s refusal to take the pandemic seriously for 70 days (see #254) and then pushing states to re-open prematurely, the administration’s new message was, in effect, “Learn to live with it.” (446)

[According to](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/we-need-live-it-white-house-readies-new-message-nation-n1232884) Carol E. Lee, Kristen Welker, and Monica Alba of nbcnews.com, “Administration officials are planning to intensify what they hope is a sharper, and less conflicting, message of the pandemic next week, according to senior administration officials, after struggling to offer clear directives amid a crippling surge in cases across the country.”

“…At the crux of the message, officials said, is a recognition by the [White House](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/unreleased-white-house-report-shows-coronavirus-rates-spiking-heartland-communities-n1204751) that the virus is not going away any time soon — and will be around through the November election.”

Key to the messaging would be minimizing the sky-high infection rates by highlighting the low death rates among recent infections relative to April infections (a result of young people contracting the disease) and emphasizing quack medical fixes (447).

As administration campaign hacks crafted their latest snake oil P.R. strategy, Trump held [another super-spreader campaign rally](https://apnews.com/e4725ee4f6c777273a4b5dc83ab57823). Though he was considered the [worst president in American history](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-worst-president-presidential-greatness-survey-presidents-day-obama-george-washington-a8218721.html) by 200 political scientists in 2018, Trump chose Mount Rushmore, located on land stolen from Native Americans. As with Trump’s other rallies, no social distancing or masks were required (448), and Trump [aimed low](https://chicago.suntimes.com/columnists/2020/7/9/21319147/mona-charen-donald-trump-mount-rushmore-speech-racism), playing to his followers’ racism and decrying attacks on monuments to false idols.

While the clown show continued on high beam, the Biden campaign hired [600 lawyers](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2020/07/02/joe-biden-600-lawyers-ready-battle-trump-election-chicanery/5362546002/) to pre-empt the Trump campaign’s aggressive attempts to keep Democrats from voting.

America celebrated Independence Day, **Saturday, July 4**, by [setting a record](https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-07-covid-cases-hours-tracker.html) for new daily infections: 57,683. [Texas](https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/505889-texas-hits-new-record-of-coronavirus-cases) and [Florida](https://news.trust.org/item/20200704142842-m73rh) continued to serve as cautionary tales of what not to do in the middle of a pandemic; both states reported daily records.

Meanwhile, every other developed country around the world was seeing a fraction of the number of cases of the U.S., the [laughingstock of the first world](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/do-americans-understand-how-badly-they-re-doing/ar-BB16fK5n).

Trump hit his milestone of [130,000 dead Americans](https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2020/jul/06/coronavirus-live-news-india-sees-record-new-cases-as-texas-warns-of-overwhelmed-hospitals) on **Monday, July 6**.

[In just the first few days of July](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/states-mandate-masks-begin-to-shut-down-again-as-coronavirus-cases-soar-and-hospitalizations-rise/ar-BB16pmw8?li=BBnb7Kz), America had had over 300,000 new infections. 12 states had seen new highs in seven-day infection totals. Arizona’s ICU beds were 89% full. Miami-Dade County was shutting back down. West Virginia was requiring face masks in public buildings. Jared Kushner’s claim that the U.S. would be “really rocking again” in July (see #273) had taken on a whole new meaning.

Trump and other administration figures attributed the steep rise in infections to increased testing, but the data proved otherwise. (449) As [shown](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-cases-testing-growth-62d6256b-33e2-491d-b94e-91110a74bc85.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top) by Caitlin Owens and Andrew Witherspoon of *Axios*, areas such New York and D.C. actually had more new tests than new cases, while Florida had 9X the number of new cases as tests, a pattern that played out throughout the country in areas that had failed to take the virus seriously.

As tens of millions of Americans struggled to pay their bills, facing eviction and worse as government benefits were set to expire at the end of the month, Brian Slodysko of the AP [reported that](https://apnews.com/2edf8670a491a702ecfb7312f507f83a) “Forty lobbyists with ties to President Donald Trump helped clients secure more than $10 billion in federal coronavirus aid, among them five former administration officials whose work potentially violates Trump’s own ethics policy, according to a report.” (450)

Mike Tanglis, one of the authors of the report, said “The swamp is alive and well in Washington, D.C…..These (lobbying) booms that these people are having, you can really attribute them to their connection to Trump.”

Uninterested in the swamp he’d made far more pestilent, Trump continued to deflect from issues that mattered to everyday Americans’ lives (451) with [racist tweets](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/06/us/politics/trump-bubba-wallace-nascar.html?action=click&campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20200707&instance_id=20070&module=Top+Stories&nl=the-morning&pgtype=Homepage&regi_id=126380121&segment_id=32782&te=1&user_id=d83df742c3b67c9afcdc1a7c3e05db74) showing his displeasure with the renaming of the Washington Redskins, making a dog whistle reference to the “China virus,” attacking NASCAR for removing the confederate flag from race tracks, and suggesting that Bubba Wallace—the only black NASCAR driver—should apologize for inheriting “the only garage pull out of 1,684 stalls at 29 inspected NASCAR tracks to be fashioned as a noose.”

The impact Trump’s racist demagoguery was having on the U.S psyche was reflected in polling. [A Gallup poll](https://news.gallup.com/poll/313454/trump-job-approval-rating-steady-lower-level.aspx) showed “the largest partisan gap Gallup has ever measured for a presidential approval rating in a single survey.” The same poll showed that Trump’s approval rating among Republicans had gone up several points to 91% in the past month as the resident of the United States had poured gasoline on the fire lit by George Floyd’s murder.

Partisan divides in critical thinking skills (see #145, #204, #283, #307, #313, #s 319-323. #325, #330, #339, #347, #387, #440) were [further reviewed](https://www.axios.com/axios-ipsos-poll-coronavirus-index-15-weeks-e4eb53cc-9bc8-4cac-8285-07e5e5ef6b2b.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top) on **Tuesday, July 7**, by Margaret Talev of *Axios*. Based on four months of data, Talev [found](https://www.axios.com/axios-ipsos-poll-coronavirus-index-15-weeks-e4eb53cc-9bc8-4cac-8285-07e5e5ef6b2b.html) that young Republican men without degrees took the pandemic “the least seriously” of all demographic groups (452) and that Republicans were half as likely as Democrats to wear a mask “at all times,” in no small part because of Trump’s messaging.

The latest example of Trump’s brainwashing had come out that morning when he’d tweeted that “We have the lowest Mortality Rate in the World. The Fake News should be reporting these most important of facts, but they don’t!” As Anthony Fauci [said](https://www.axios.com/fauci-coronavirus-death-rate-c763343d-15d2-4bef-bd7f-38109926c229.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiospm&stream=top) at a public event later in the day, “it’s a false narrative to take comfort in a lower rate of death….There’s so many other things that are dangerous and bad about the virus. Don’t get into false complacency.”

Fauci was proven right, again, when the U.S. [set a record](https://www.barrons.com/news/us-posts-new-daily-virus-case-record-of-60-209-johns-hopkins-01594169104) of new infections that day, hitting 60,209. At the rate things were going, the University of Washington projected that the U.S. would have over [208,000 COVID-related deaths](https://www.cnn.com/webview/world/live-news/coronavirus-pandemic-07-07-20-intl/h_c5c9c0b1f6e8db4ffbd3dc5dcca35387) by November due to the administration’s colossal incompetence.

Other victims of the administration’s failures included millions of Americans who were [being shortchanged](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-food-aid-exclusive-idUSKBN248184) in the Farmers to Families Food Bank program.

The program “aimed to take food from farmers typically produced for restaurants and deliver it to the millions of people who lost their jobs or were otherwise hit by the coronavirus lockdown,” but the delivery targets weren’t being met because Trump’s USDA had chosen inexperienced contractors who weren’t up to the task. According to reporter Christopher Walljasper, as of early June, rates of food insecurity had doubled since the beginning of the pandemic, but only 63% of the money allocated for the program had been used, shortchanging food banks and the struggling Americans who rely on them. (453)

Trump was more focused on imaginary foes than starving constituents. As part of his ongoing effort to remove attention from his COVID-19 failures (see #1-#453), shift the blame to China, and blame the World Health Organization (WHO) for China’s lack of transparency, the administration [officially notified](https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/07/07/888186158/trump-sets-date-to-end-who-membership-over-its-handling-of-virus) the WHO that the U.S. would be leaving the organization—and the billions of people who benefit from it—high and dry.

On **Wednesday, July 8**, America’s public health crisis continued to escalate.

Trump reached his personal milestone of [three million official infections](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2020/07/08/covid-19-us-3-million-cases-florida-new-jersey/5391309002/) as his adopted home state of Florida continued to be the poster boy for mis-governance, with [56 ICUs at full capacity](https://www.newsbreak.com/news/0PXriWxO/live-updates-dozens-of-fla-hospitals-run-out-of-icu-beds-as-us-approaches-3-million-coronavirus-cases) and cases increasing.

As high as the numbers were, they weren’t capturing the true extent of the pandemic because the U.S. still wasn’t testing at an adequate capacity. “‘[A hot mess’: Americans face testing delays as virus surges](https://apnews.com/52e57911691a332630a3c93a6e76612a)” by Christopher Weber and Acacia Coronado of the AP looked at America’s continued testing shortcomings, six months after the administration was first notified of the virus.

According to Weber and Coronado, “Four months, 3 million confirmed infections and over 130,000 deaths into the coronavirus outbreak in the U.S., Americans confronted with a resurgence of the scourge are facing long lines at testing sites in the summer heat or are getting turned away. (454) Others are going a week or more without receiving a diagnosis. (455)

“Some sites are running out of kits, while labs are reporting shortages of materials and workers to process the swabs. (456, 457)

“Some frustrated Americans are left to wonder why the U.S. can’t seem to get its act together, especially after it was given fair warning as the virus wreaked havoc in China and then Italy, Spain and New York.”

Dr. Ashish Jha of Harvard’s Global Health Institute pinpointed the culprit: “I am stunned that as a nation, six months into this pandemic, we still can’t figure out how to deliver testing to the American people when they need it….It is an abject failure of leadership and shows that the federal government has not prioritized testing in a way that will allow us to get through this pandemic.”

The abject failures at the federal level extended to PPE. Six months after the administration had become aware of the virus, the U.S. was still shortchanging the brave men and women at the front lines of the crisis.

[According to](https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/07/08/ppe-shortage-masks-gloves-gowns/) William Wan of *the Washington Post*, “Nurses say they are reusing N95 masks for days and even weeks at a time. (458) Doctors say they can’t reopen offices because they lack personal protective equipment. (459) State officials say they have scoured U.S. and international suppliers for PPE and struggle to get orders filled. (460). Experts worry the problem could worsen as coronavirus infections climb, straining medical systems.

“‘A lot people thought once the alarm was sounded back in March surely the federal government would fix this, but that hasn’t happened,’ said Deborah Burger, a California nurse and president of National Nurses United, a union representing registered nurses. Like many health-care workers, Burger blamed the Trump administration for the lack of equipment, noting the administration has insisted the responsibility falls to state and local officials, with the federal government playing only a supporting role.

“The specter of equipment shortages comes as other issues that plagued the country’s early response to the pandemic return: surging cases, [overwhelmed hospitals](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/as-coronavirus-rebounds-more-patients-are-being-hospitalized-thats-a-bad-sign/2020/07/02/62f60720-bc4f-11ea-80b9-40ece9a701dc_story.html?itid=lk_inline_manual_8), [lagging testing](https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/as-cases-surge-lines-for-covid-19-tests-sometimes-stretch-miles-in-the-summer-heat/2020/07/01/f0951586-ba4b-11ea-80b9-40ece9a701dc_story.html?itid=lk_inline_manual_8) and contradictory [public health messages](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/06/25/trumps-dumbfounding-refusal-encourage-wearing-masks/?itid=lk_inline_manual_8). But the inability to secure PPE is especially frustrating, health-care workers say, because it is their main defense against catching the virus.”

Because of the federal government’s unwillingness to regulate vendors or provide adequate assistance to the states, private for-profit companies were gouging businesses and local and state governments which were already dealing with huge budget shortfalls: “Demand for protective equipment has soared, but unlike in March, when efforts focused on getting PPE for major hospitals — especially in New York, Detroit and Chicago — supplies now are desperately needed by primary care offices, nursing homes, prisons and psychiatric and disability facilities. As many states continue to reopen their economies, demand has also surged from the construction industry and other sectors. With soaring demand, prices have skyrocketed.”

The big story of the day was Trump’s [insistence that schools open](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/08/trump-reopen-schools-353245?nname=politico-nightly-coronavirus-special-edition&nid=00000170-c000-da87-af78-e185fa700000&nrid=00000166-11bf-d9ac-a967-93bfa7030000&nlid=2670445) in the fall so that America could play a game of charades in which we pretend we aren’t in the middle of a pandemic during the height of campaign season in order to help Donald Trump win a second term.

Trump cited school re-openings in other developed countries, but those countries had a tiny fraction of the infection rates the U.S. would likely have this fall.

And as Caitlin Owens and Marisa Fernandez of *Axios* [pointed out](https://www.axios.com/trump-schools-coronavirus-reopen-67467f4b-bd63-4c3b-b1d9-6097bf3282e2.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top), maintaining social distancing and consistent usage of masks in schools across the country would require resources that struggling local governments lacked, and the administration had yet to offer up the scale of federal aid needed to bridge the gap. Forcing schools to re-open without these measures in place would lead to millions of children around the country serving as vectors of infection to older and more vulnerable Americans. (461)

Trump’s real incentive to open schools was to prime the pump so he could campaign on his “management of the economy” (a.k.a. his [inheritance of Barack Obama’s record sustained growth](https://www.forbes.com/sites/chuckjones/2020/02/17/obamas-2009-recovery-act-kicked-off-over-10-years-of-economic-growth/)). Lily Eskelsen García, president of the National Education Association, said “He’s hoping some indicator goes up that people are going back to work….and he is saying, ‘Sacrifice your children, sacrifice their teachers, sacrifice their families that they could infect, because I need something to sell in November.’” (462)

The administration was playing chicken with peoples’ lives by [threatening to withhold federal money](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/08/trump-schools-reopening-federal-funding-352311) to schools which refused to play along (463), and Trump’s advocacy [directly contradicted](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/08/trump-white-house-reopening-schools-352236) the safety guidelines put out by his own CDC (464). To narrow the gulf between Trump’s selfish desires and public safety, Mike Pence vowed to [water down](https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/07/pence-cdc-change-school-guidelines-after-trump-complaint.html) the CDC’s guidelines. (465)

Part of Trump’s challenge in convincing schools to follow his lead was that he had no credibility when it came to COVID-19. He’d recently said that 99% of coronavirus cases were “[totally harmless](https://www.factcheck.org/2020/07/trumps-false-claim-on-coronavirus-harm/)” though 4.5% of people who caught the disease died, “14% of confirmed coronavirus cases led to hospitalizations — including 2% in intensive care units,” and even those who weren’t hospitalized were subject to serious [brain degeneration](https://news.yahoo.com/brain-problems-linked-even-mild-virus-infections-study-102940044.html). (466)

He had demanded that churches re-open and [rescinded limitations](https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/white-house-and-cdc-remove-coronavirus-warnings-about-choirs-in-faith-guidance/2020/05/28/5d9c526e-a117-11ea-9590-1858a893bd59_story.html) on crowded church choirs in order to kowtow to his evangelical base, which was contributing to the [spikes](https://dnyuz.com/2020/07/08/churches-were-eager-to-reopen-now-they-are-a-major-source-of-coronavirus-cases/) around the country. (467)

He had insisted on a rally in Tulsa even as the city’s main public health official had warned against it, which was leading to [a surge in cases](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/08/tulsa-trump-rally-coronavirus-353708) there. (468)

Miraculously, [80% of Republicans](https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/coronavirus-polls/) still approved of Trump’s “handling” of the coronavirus.

Trump continued to build on his record of failure the following day, **Thursday, July 9**, as the U.S. hit a new record of daily infections—[over 65,000](https://www.barrons.com/news/us-posts-new-record-daily-virus-caseload-of-more-than-65-000-johns-hopkins-01594341905)—shattering the record set earlier in the week. 42 states were showing an increasing number of infections.

The missteps of Trump’s political allies in the sun belt were especially obvious, as hospitals across the South and Southwest were swamped with new cases. Laz Gamio of *the New York Times* presented [the hard data](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/09/us/coronavirus-cases-reopening-trends.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top). Since prematurely re-opening their economies with Trump’s prompting, Florida had seen a 7-day increase in infections of 1,393% (469), South Carolina a 999% increase (470), Arizona an 858% increase (471), Texas a 680% increase (472), and Georgia a 245% increase (473). New York, which had ignored Trump’s bad advice, had seen a decrease of 52% in the same time frame.

The spike in infections caused by the Trump administration’s anti-science rhetoric and astonishing failures of governance continued to depress the economy. 1.3 million more Americans had [filed for unemployment](https://news.trust.org/item/20200709134449-nkejb) (474). Long term, the pandemic was [accelerating the trend](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/07/09/after-covid-19-giant-corporations-chains-may-be-only-ones-left/?arc404=true&utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most) of small businesses going under and being replaced by corporations and soulless, faceless chains with minimal concern for their customers and no connections to the communities they operated in, a process certain to lead to increasing concentrations of wealth at the top, fewer choices for consumers, and lower wages for workers. (475-477)

At the root in the spike of infections was [mixed messaging](https://www.msn.com/en-us/finance/other/americans-are-bewildered-by-patchwork-of-social-distancing-rules/ar-BB16wRvc) from Trump and his state-level allies, who had spent months contradicting public health officials, which had led to tens of millions of scientifically-illiterate Americans ignoring guidelines and infecting others in the process.

The Centers for Disease Control had the resources and know-how to educate the public, but were being handcuffed by Trump. As reported in [a deep dive](https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/trump-sidelines-public-health-advisers-in-growing-rift-over-coronavirus-response/2020/07/09/ad803218-c12a-11ea-9fdd-b7ac6b051dc8_story.html) (“CDC feels pressure from Trump as rift grows over coronavirus response”) by Lena Sun and Josh Dawsey of *the Washington Post*, the agency’s use of evidence-based practices was creating friction with Trump’s political handlers, who were largely rendering the agency “invisible.”

As Tom Frieden (Obama’s CDC head) put it, the CDC was “not being allowed to guide policy, not being allowed to develop, standardize, and post information that would give, by state and county, the status of the epidemic and of our control measures.” (478)

In one example of many, Sun and Dawsey cited an instance were senior adviser Paul Alexander had sent a rage email to CDC principals accusing the agency of “undermining the President”—because they’d had the audacity to publish [a report](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6925a1.htm) showing the risks COVID-19 posed to pregnant women. (479)

Trump’s war on science was in the news again on **Friday, July 10**, as it came out that Dr. Fauci [hadn’t briefed Trump in two months](https://theweek.com/speedreads/924772/fauci-says-hasnt-briefed-trump-covid19-2-months) (480) and [hadn’t seen him since June 2](https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/10/politics/donald-trump-anthony-fauci-coronavirus/index.html) (481). Fauci told *the Financial Times*, “I have a reputation, as you probably have figured out, of speaking the truth at all times and not sugar-coating things….And that may be one of the reasons why I haven’t been on television very much lately.”\* (\*Fauci, the government’s top infectious disease expert, had not been physically present at that week’s coronavirus task force briefing with reporters, having been asked to dial in by phone instead, 482)

Asked on Wednesday about Fauci’s comment that the U.S. was “knee-deep in the first wave” of the virus, Trump had said, “I think we are in a good place. I disagree with him.”  Two days after Trump’s “good place” comment, the U.S. notched a new record of daily infections—[over 67,000](https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/07/10/coronavirus-live-updates-us/?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most)—and an increase in the weekly death toll. (483)

Infections were spread all over, but [states which had re-opened too soon](https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-nightly-coronavirus-special-edition/2020/07/10/its-everywhere-489766), or never taken the virus seriously, continued to have most of the hot spots. Wisconsin, which had been forced to open up when Republican judges overruled the Democratic governor’s stay-at-home order, had seen a doubling in positive tests over the prior two weeks and a record number of new infections on Thursday and Friday.

The five biggest hospitals in [far-right](https://ballotpedia.org/Mississippi_state_executive_offices) Mississippi were [full up](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8510917/Mississippis-five-largest-hospitals-run-ICU-beds-infections-soar-state.html) and four other hospitals had only 5% of their beds left.

[75% of the hospital beds](https://www.thedailybeast.com/south-carolinas-coronavirus-outbreak-is-worse-than-most-countries) in South Carolina (a state [without a single statewide Democratic officeholder](https://ballotpedia.org/South_Carolina_state_executive_offices)) were full, even as infections were on the way up. According to a *New York Times* analysis, South Carolina had the third worst outbreak rate per capita *in the world*, behind only Florida and Arizona, two other states under complete Republican control.

One district in Phoenix—the location of Trump’s June 23 super-spreader rally—had so many deaths that the [morgues were at 96% of capacity](https://www.abc15.com/news/coronavirus/phoenix-mayor-abrazo-nearly-out-of-morgue-space-may-be-requesting-refrigerated-trucks) and the city was looking to rent refrigerated trucks. (484)

Because of the administration’s failures to act in a timely fashion, or in an adequate fashion, or to even give a shit, the U.S. was moving toward a herd immunity strategy “[by default](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-herd-immunity-united-states-4fa3a3bd-f92f-4619-b0ec-06182521186f.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top).” Yet the country wasn’t ready for that either (485):

“Letting the virus spread while minimizing human loss is doable, in theory. But it requires very strict protections for vulnerable people, almost none of which the U.S. has established.

“Cases are skyrocketing, with hospitalizations and deaths following suit in hotspots. Not a single state has ordered another lockdown, even though per capita cases in Florida and Arizona have reached levels similar to New York and New Jersey’s in April.”

“…Separating older, sicker people from younger, healthier ones while the virus burns through the latter group could be a way to achieve herd immunity — assuming immunity exists — without hundreds of thousands of people dying.

“But the U.S. hasn’t adopted such a strategy with any planning or foresight. Although younger people make up a larger portion of coronavirus cases now than they did earlier in the pandemic, vulnerable people still go to work or live with non-vulnerable people.”

All told, the U.S. was looking at 250,000 dead by the end of the year, [according to](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/zeke-emanuel-covid-deaths-250000-americans/) Dr. Zeke Emanuel, a bioethicist at the University of Pennsylvania.

Most human beings who had brought horrible suffering on millions of people through their own actions (and inactions) would feel a degree of remorse, or maybe even humility, but Trump fell back on self-pity. In “[Trump the victim: President complains in private](https://www.thehour.com/news/article/Trump-the-victim-President-complains-in-private-15398859.php),” by Ashley Parker, Philip Rucker, and Josh Dawsey of *the Washington Post*, it came out that “Callers on President Donald Trump in recent weeks have come to expect what several allies and advisers describe as a ‘woe-is-me’ preamble.

“The president rants about the deadly coronavirus destroying ‘the greatest economy,’ one he claims to have personally built. He laments the unfair ‘fake news’ media, which he vents never gives him any credit. And he bemoans the ‘sick, twisted’ police officers in Minneapolis, whose killing of an unarmed black man in their custody provoked the nationwide racial justice protests that have confounded the president.”

“…The president has cast himself in the starring role of the blameless victim – of a deadly pandemic, of a stalled economy, of deep-seated racial unrest, all of which happened to him rather than the country.”

“‘…We had the greatest economy in the world,’ Trump said in an Oval Office meeting last month, talking about how good the statistics were before the coronavirus, said one adviser. An outside adviser in frequent touch with the White House offered a similar recollection, saying that Trump simply keeps on repeating, ‘I had this great economy and they made me shut it down.’”

“…Ruth Ben-Ghiat, a history professor at New York University and author of the forthcoming book, Strongmen, a history of authoritarian leaders, said Trump’s victimization complex fits a pattern of authoritarian leaders past and present.

“They have no empathy, and they only see the world through how things affect them personally,’ Ben-Ghiat said. ‘They’re not there to govern. They’re there to enrich themselves, they’re there to plunder the nation, and they’re there to be world historical.’”

On **Saturday, July 11**, while Trump wallowed in self-pity, it was reported that the U.S. had a record number of new cases—[over 69,000](https://news.trust.org/item/20200711041631-sbox5)—for the third day in a row.

Saddled with bad news of their own making, the administration targeted the one official under the Trump umbrella who actually had any integrity, Anthony Fauci. As reported by *the Washington Post*, administration officials [circulated](https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-white-house-made-a-list-of-all-the-times-fauci-has-been-wrong-on-the-coronavirus) “a list of all the times he ‘has been wrong on things,’” hoping to damage his public credibility as he undermined Trump’s propagandistic talking points with factual analysis. (486)

Someone who had swallowed Trump’s propagandistic talking points whole was Ron DeSantis, the Republican governor of Florida. DeSantis’s failures led news on **Sunday, July 12**, as infections continued to skyrocket in Florida, with a one-day total of [over 15,000](https://www.politico.com/states/florida/story/2020/07/12/florida-reports-15k-new-cases-smashing-national-record-1299981?nname=playbook&nid=0000014f-1646-d88f-a1cf-5f46b7bd0000&nrid=00000166-11bf-d9ac-a967-93bfa7030000&nlid=630318) official cases. As [reported](https://twitter.com/GloriaFallon123/status/1282637847590305793) at *Axios*, “NBC Nightly News’ pointed out that if Florida were a country, it would have the world’s fourth-highest tally of new COVID-19 cases (a record 15,300) for the 24 hours ending yesterday, after the U.S. (66,281), Brazil (45,048) and India (28,637).”

In competition with Florida for the least effective response to COVID-19 were the Republican-run states of Texas and Arizona; Arizona’s situation was deemed “[the worst in the entire country](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/arizona-coronavirus-cases-worst-in-united-states/)” by a top public health official. On **Monday, July 13**, it came out that Texas—like Arizona—was [renting refrigerated trucks](https://www.fox5ny.com/news/refrigerated-trucks-requested-in-arizona-texas-as-morgues-reach-capacity-amid-covid-19-surge) to handle the overflow of deaths from morgues. (487)

Many Americans who got infected but didn’t end up on the wrong side of a meat truck would be susceptible to long-term heart damage, according to [a study](https://www.newsweek.com/scans-reveal-heart-damage-over-half-covid-19-patients-study-1517293) co-authored by Marc Dweck of the University of Edinburgh. As many Americans were facing heart damage, [lung damage](https://www.healthline.com/health-news/lifelong-lung-damage-the-serious-covid-19-complication-that-can-hit-people-in-their-20s), and [brain degeneration](https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-brain-damage/a-54111054) which could have been avoided with a competent federal response, [5.4 million Americans had lost their health insurance](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/13/world/coronavirus-updates.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage) (488), a fraction of the number who could lose coverage if the administration’s legal challenge to the Affordable Care Act was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court. (see #421) Many of those who had lost health insurance were out of work and [still waiting](https://www.greenwichtime.com/business/article/Workers-are-pushed-to-the-brink-as-they-continue-15403810.php) for their unemployment benefits. All told, 18 million Americans were on unemployment and [50 million](https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2020/07/09/nearly-50-million-americans-have-filed-for-unemployment-heres-whats-really-happening/%22%20%5Cl%20%224dc714b827d3) had applied since the virus began. (489)

Overwhelmed by the waves of bad and totally objective news, Trump [shared a tweet](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/13/trump-questions-public-health-experts-twitter-359388?nname=politico-nightly-coronavirus-special-edition&nid=00000170-c000-da87-af78-e185fa700000&nrid=00000166-11bf-d9ac-a967-93bfa7030000&nlid=2670445) (490) from former game show host Chuck Woolery that read “Everyone is lying. The CDC, Media, Democrats, our Doctors, not all but most, that we are told to trust. I think it’s all about the election and keeping the economy from coming back, which is about the election. I’m sick of it.” Just days later it would come out that Woolery’s son had [contracted COVID-19](https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/16/us/chuck-woolery-son-covid-19/index.html), prompting the game show host to deactivate his Twitter account.

While Woolery accused the CDC, the media, Democrats, and doctors of lying, Trump reached another personal milestone with [20,000 “false or misleading claims](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/07/13/president-trump-has-made-more-than-20000-false-or-misleading-claims/?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most).”

As of **Tuesday, July 14**, the United States had what Helen Branswell of statnews.com called “[a raging dumpster fire](https://www.statnews.com/2020/07/14/fix-covid-19-dumpster-fire-us/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosvitals&stream=top)”:

“Where a number of countries in Asia and Europe have managed to dampen spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus to the point where they can consider returning to a semblance of normalcy…many international borders remain closed to Americans. (see #413)

“On Sunday, Florida reported more than 15,000 cases — in a single day. South Korea hasn’t registered 15,000 cases in the entire pandemic to date.”

“…The website [Covidexitstrategy.org](https://www.covidexitstrategy.org/) has updated its previously tri-colored U.S. map, which showed states as either green, signifying they are trending better; yellow, making progress; or red, trending poorly. A fourth designation, called ‘bruised red,’ signals states with uncontrolled spread; criteria for this category includes hospitals nearing capacity both in terms of overall beds and ICU space. Already 17 states are wearing bruised red.” (491)

This was an ugly reality that Trump wanted to obscure, so his henchman (trade adviser Peter Navarro) went after the one official willing to tell it like it is in [an op-ed in *USA Today*](https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/todaysdebate/2020/07/14/anthony-fauci-wrong-with-me-peter-navarro-editorials-debates/5439374002/) which claimed that “Fauci has been wrong about everything I have interacted with him on.” (492)

Trump’s contempt for science was also demonstrated that day by the news that the administration’s CDC would no longer be in control of collecting and disseminating coronavirus death and infection information.

[According to](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/14/us/politics/trump-cdc-coronavirus.html) Sheryl Gay Stolberg of *the New York Times*: “The Trump administration has ordered hospitals to bypass the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and send all Covid-19 patient information to a central database in Washington beginning on Wednesday. The move has alarmed health experts who fear the data will be politicized or withheld from the public.

“The new instructions were posted recently in a [little-noticed document](https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/covid-19-faqs-hospitals-hospital-laboratory-acute-care-facility-data-reporting.pdf) on the Department of Health and Human Services website. From now on, the department — not the C.D.C. — will collect daily reports about the patients that each hospital is treating, the number of available beds and ventilators, and other information vital to tracking the pandemic.”

The move was designed to withhold information from the public: “…the Health and Human Services database that will receive new information is not open to the public, which could affect the work of scores of researchers (493), modelers and health officials who rely on [C.D.C. data](https://www.cdc.gov/nhsn/covid19/report-patient-impact.html)to make projections and crucial decisions. (494)

“‘Historically, C.D.C. has been the place where public health data has been sent, and this raises questions about not just access for researchers but access for reporters (495), access for the public to try to better understand what is happening with the outbreak,’ (496) said Jen Kates, the director of global health and H.I.V. policy with the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation.”

“…Centralizing control of all data under the umbrella of an inherently political apparatus is dangerous and breeds distrust,” said Dr. Nicole Lurie, who served as assistant secretary for preparedness and response under former President Barack Obama. “It appears to cut off the ability of agencies like C.D.C. to do its basic job.” (497)

Cutting off the ability of the CDC to do its job had been the administration’s practice from early in Trump’s presidency. A bipartisan group of four former CDC directors explained [the damage this had done](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/07/14/cdc-directors-trump-politics/?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most) in “We ran the CDC. No president ever politicized its science the way Trump has” for *the Washington Post*.

The opening line told the tale: “…The four of us led the CDC over a period of more than 15 years, spanning Republican and Democratic administrations alike. We cannot recall over our collective tenure a single time when political pressure led to a change in the interpretation of scientific evidence.”

Politicization had caused confusion, division, and ultimately, more infections: “…Unfortunately, [the CDC’s] sound science is being challenged with partisan potshots, sowing confusion and mistrust at a time when the American people need leadership, expertise and clarity. These efforts have even fueled a backlash against public health officials across the country: Public servants have been [harassed](https://www.dispatch.com/news/20200615/first-came-pandemic-then-came-politics-why-amy-acton-quit), [threatened](https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/amid-threats-and-political-pushback-public-health-officials-leaving-posts/2020/06/22/6075f7a2-b0cf-11ea-856d-5054296735e5_story.html?itid=lk_inline_manual_8) and [forced to resign](https://minnesota.cbslocal.com/2020/06/09/2-wisconsin-health-dept-officials-resign-in-middle-of-covid-19-pandemic/) [when](https://www.ctpost.com/news/coronavirus/article/CT-health-official-resigns-in-midst-of-15172791.php) we need them most. (498) This is unconscionable and dangerous.

“We’re seeing the terrible effect of undermining the CDC play out in our population. Willful disregard for public health guidelines is, unsurprisingly, leading to a sharp rise in infections and deaths. America now stands as a global outlier in the coronavirus pandemic…The United States is home to a quarter of the world’s reported coronavirus infections and deaths, despite being home to only 4.4 percent of the global population.

“Sadly, we are not even close to having the virus under control. Quite the opposite, in fact.”

One of the biggest reasons the virus wasn’t even close to being under control in the U.S. was the Trump administration’s decentralization of the COVID-19 response to states that were unprepared to handle a pandemic. [As reported](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/14/states-look-to-trump-for-a-national-plan-to-fight-coronavirus-361906?nname=politico-nightly-coronavirus-special-edition&nid=00000170-c000-da87-af78-e185fa700000&nrid=00000166-11bf-d9ac-a967-93bfa7030000&nlid=2670445) by Dan Goldberg and Alice Miranda Ollstein, “Leaving the nation’s coronavirus fight to individual states has created gaping holes in the public health response that have allowed the infection rate to soar and death rates to rise once again. (499)

“While countries like New Zealand and Germany have taken a unified national approach to fighting the virus — and are enjoying the fruits of a successful mitigation strategy — the Trump administration’s federalist philosophy has helped create chaos across the South and West.

“Cash-strapped cities and states trying to create their own testing, tracing and public awareness campaigns from scratch are desperate for federal support as they grapple with questions about whether it’s safe for people to return to school and work, along with bars and beaches.” (see #391)

Cash-strapped cities and states were again being forced to compete against each other for supplies (see #173) because the administration had refused to ramp up the Defense Production Act to the extent necessary, and the lack of a national contact tracing plan was leaving us with only one-third the number of tracers needed to get COVID-19 under control.

David Eisenman of the UCLA Center for Public and Health Disasters summed up the lack of planning and execution that brought us to this point: “We shut down the country for three months and we could have used that time for all kinds of planning and preparing, and we did not use it at all.” (500)

Planning, preparation, and thinking ahead were clearly not the Trump administration’s forte, as several stories on **Wednesday, July 15** showed.

Maggie Severns of *Politico* reported that the administration had [reduced training requirements](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/15/coronavirus-nursing-homes-361510) for caregivers in nursing homes *after* the pandemic had made its way to American shores. Previously, nurses’ aides had been required to have 75 hours of training; acting on the wishes of the nursing home industry, the administration had lowered the requirement significantly, allowing nursing homes to hire people whose sum total of training was eight hours online. (501)

And the online training wasn’t actually eight hours long. According to Severns, “There is no requirement that students watch the required videos or download the assignments during the training, and there is only one untimed assessment. A POLITICO reporter was able to register for the eight-hour program and obtain a temporary nurse’s aide certificate, using the internet to look up test answers, in less than 40 minutes.”

As a result, inexperienced workers were being put in charge of eldercare during the middle of a pandemic. Jesse Martin (the SEIU vice president in Connecticut) told Severns, “Working in nursing homes is complicated….You have PPE, you have infection control procedures. Putting someone brand new into the care setting with Covid is a recipe for disaster.” (502)

Other victims of the administration’s short-term thinking included constituents of Republican governors who had taken Trump’s advice. Writing for *the Hill*, James Zirin reviewed the [red state missteps](https://thehill.com/opinion/healthcare/507398-listening-to-trump-gave-sunbelt-governors-a-new-covid-19-headache):

“The temperatures are [soaring this week](https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2020/07/13/heat-wave-south-coronavirus/) in seven Sunbelt states of Florida, Georgia, Arizona, Texas, South Carolina, Arkansas and Tennessee. So are the number of [new cases of COVID-19](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/14/us/coronavirus-united-states.html), and the pro-Trump Republican governors of these states have much to answer for.

“In the spring, when the weather was more temperate, the spread figures seemed to be under control in these states. And the governors, all Trump loyalists, largely [followed the president’s lead](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/southern-governors-who-initially-downplayed-coronavirus-threat-ease-into-reopening-of-their-states/2020/04/29/92d9d122-8a3d-11ea-9dfd-990f9dcc71fc_story.html) in suggesting that once the weather got warmer, the coronavirus would, as Trump put it, [‘disappear…like a miracle.’”](https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/505487-trump-maintains-coronavirus-will-just-disappear-at-some-point)

Far from disappearing like a miracle, daily infections were hitting [a record national high](https://news.yahoo.com/coronavirus-cases-fatalities-continue-rise-across-us-001801216.html) of 67,632.

Renuka Rayasam reviewed [the frazzled state of the nation](https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-nightly-coronavirus-special-edition/2020/07/15/how-scared-should-you-be-489808) in “How scared should you be?”:

“Halfway through July, the situation is actually worse in many parts of the country than at the start of the pandemic…”

“…About 7 to 9 percent of the population, or 23 million people, have been infected to date, estimates Michael Osterholm, an infectious disease researcher at the University of Minnesota. He said transmission won’t slow until at least half of the population becomes infected. If cases continue growing at today’s pace, even with a lower death rate, he projects that about 800,000 people will die before any sort of herd immunity kicks in.”

“…Unlike [other countries](https://www.politico.eu/article/commission-summer-is-for-coronavirus-second-wave-prep-not-vacation-travel-restrictions-borders/) now comfortably opening businesses and schools, the U.S. wasted valuable time during its lockdown (503), said Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security. The positive test rate is in double digits in many states, a sign that the virus is spreading faster than it can be controlled through testing and contact tracing. ‘What I am continually seeing in these states is that they keep making the same mistake in not being able to do the core elements of public health,’ he said. The problem, in his view: Testing supplies are limited, test results are too slow to be useful in guiding behavior, there are still too few contact tracers and many states don’t have a handle on who is actually infected. Until state or federal officials can fix those problems, hotspots will continue to emerge around the country.”

Because of these countless failures, the U.S. was looking at a projection of [224,000 dead](https://news.yahoo.com/us-covid-19-epidemic-projected-worsen-151435022.html) by election day.

In addition to a staggering, first-in-the-world death toll, the Trump virus was causing headaches for elections workers. As of **Thursday, July 16**, New York had [yet to finish](https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/07/new-york-primary-results-still-waiting.html) counting the vote from the June 23rd primary because of the volume of mail ballots.

Due to the lack of a vigorous national testing and tracing system, this scenario was likely to play out again in the presidential election, as many of those who could would avoid voting in person. [As reported](https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/national-covid-19-testing-and-tracing-action-plan/) by the Rockefeller Foundation, the U.S. was doing just a fraction of the amount of testing necessary to counteract the coronavirus, a problem which promised to get worse with the flu season. The keys to containing COVID-19 were more and cheaper testing, faster test results, widespread contact tracing, and targeted isolation. The foundation’s plan being ignored by the White House could be implemented for $75 billion, roughly 1/30th of the amount the GOP had spent on [Trump’s tax cut for the rich](https://www.politico.com/story/2018/02/28/tax-cuts-trump-gop-analysis-430781).

Making up for the mistakes of the past was not a priority for the administration, which was engaged in a full-court press to force schools to re-open in the fall. As cases were [increasing in 37 states](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-cases-increase-map-37-states-pandemic-b5e91376-1543-40a0-99fb-556c535c0842.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top) and 45% of counties nationwide were experiencing “[uncontrollable spread](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8529781/Data-map-shows-45-counties-seeing-epidemic-spread-COVID-19.html),” White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany [told reporters](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8531199/White-House-vows-not-let-science-stand-way-Donald-Trumps-push-reopen-schools.html) that the administration would not “let the science [public health concerns] stand in the way” of prying schools open. (504)

Putting children and teachers in harm’s way was seen as necessary in order to goose the economy as unemployment filings increased “by more than 1 million for [[the] 17th straight week](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/16/weekly-jobless-claims.html).” (505)

Coronavirus refused to cooperate with Trump’s artificial timeline. On **Friday, July 17**, it was reported that the U.S. had hit [a new high of daily infections](https://news.trust.org/item/20200717011211-17cr2)—77,217. 969 Americans died in the same time frame, the biggest one-day totals since June 10. Though the administration wasn’t saying it publicly (506), a Coronavirus Task Force report obtained by the Center of Public Integrity recommended that 18 states with the highest infection rates should [reverse their re-openings](https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/17/politics/white-house-states-hot-spots-task-force/index.html).

Among the troubling data points in the rising numbers was a [big increase](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-07-16/childhood-covid-19-infections-mount-with-schools-eyeing-openings) in infections among Americans under 18, which made up around 6.4% of cases nationally, including nearly 10% of the total cases in California and Mississippi. In Florida, 31% of children tested positive for COVID-19. The increase in infections among children made the danger of opening schools prematurely even clearer.

Though these concerns were at the forefront of public dialogue, the administration continued to censor public health officials asked to provide guidance for school officials. As reported by Bianca Quilantan, CDC head Robert Redfield (or a “designee”) had been invited by Bobby Scott (the Democratic chair of the Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education Subcommittee) “to discuss the immediate needs of K-12 public schools as many districts look to reopen in the fall.” Redfield [had been blocked](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/17/education-democrats-cdc-director-congress-367935) from appearing even as the CDC was delaying safety guidelines for schools. In a statement, Scott said “It is alarming that the Trump Administration is preventing the CDC from appearing before the Committee at a time when its expertise and guidance is so critical to the health and safety of students, parents, and educators….This lack of transparency does a great disservice to the many communities across the country facing difficult decisions about reopening schools this fall.”

While the administration took a libertarian approach to protecting American children and their families from the pandemic, Trump ordered an [authoritarian crackdown](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/17/us/portland-protests.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage) in Portland, unleashing soldiers from the Department of Homeland Security on unsuspecting protesters.

On **Saturday, July 18**, it was reported that the U.S. had had its second consecutive day of over [70,000 new infections](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/18/us-reports-more-than-70000-new-coronavirus-infections-for-second-day-in-a-row.html) and Trump reached his personal milestone of 140,000 dead Americans. Coinciding with this startling—[and yet still lowball](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/01/official-us-coronavirus-death-toll-is-a-substantial-undercount-of-actual-tally-new-yale-study-finds.html)—number, an all-star team of reporters at *the New York Times* [published](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/18/us/politics/trump-coronavirus-response-failure-leadership.html) “Inside Trump’s Failure: The Rush to Abandon Leadership Role on the Virus,” a long read explaining why the U.S. had had by far the steepest human costs of any developed country.

The piece revealed that even in April, as 2,000 Americans were dying daily from COVID-19, the administration was secretly planning on pawning the problem off onto state governments which were ill-equipped to handle the pandemic (507). According to the authors, “Over a critical period beginning in mid-April, President Trump and his team convinced themselves that the outbreak was fading, that they had given state governments all the resources they needed to contain its remaining ‘embers’ and that it was time to ease up on the lockdown.

“In doing so, he was ignoring warnings that the numbers would continue to drop only if social distancing was kept in place, rushing instead to restart the economy and tend to his battered re-election hopes.

“…Mr. Trump’s bet that the crisis would fade away proved wrong. But an examination of the shift in April and its aftermath shows that the approach he embraced was not just a misjudgment. Instead, it was a deliberate strategy that he would stick doggedly to as evidence mounted that, in the absence of strong leadership from the White House, the virus would continue to infect and kill large numbers of Americans.” (508)

The administration’s virus response had been a comedy of errors in many instances, the blind leading the blind: “Key elements of the administration’s strategy were formulated…by aides who for the most part had no experience with public health emergencies and were taking their cues from the president.” (509)

When the administration did seek scientific advice, they relied on the rosy assessments of Deborah Birx rather than the hard-headed (and accurate) views of Dr. Fauci, as Birx’s advice would enable Trump to do what he already wanted to do—re-open the economy (510). On April 16, voluntary public safety guidelines had been issued and Trump had told governors, “You’re going to call your own shots,” effectively allowing state leaders to re-open prematurely.

Around the same time, there was a marked shift in Birx’s communications with the University of Washington, which was providing data models: “‘We made clear that to get the epidemic under control and bring it down to effectively zero transmission required the social distancing mandates to be in place,’ said Christopher J. L. Murray, the director of the modeling program. ‘April 22 — somewhere around that period. That’s when the tone shifted. They started to ask questions about what will be the trajectory and where with the lifting of mandates?’” (511)

Birx predicted that cases would peter out, but “Dr. Birx’s belief that the United States would mirror Italy turned out to be disastrously wrong. The Italians had been almost entirely compliant with stay-at-home orders and social distancing, squelching new infections to negligible levels before the country slowly reopened. Americans, by contrast, began backing away by late April from what social distancing efforts they had been making, egged on by Mr. Trump.

“The difference was critical. As communities across the United States raced to reopen, the number of daily cases barely dropped below 20,000 in early May. The virus was still circulating across the country.”

“…Other nations had moved aggressively to employ an array of techniques that Mr. Trump never mobilized on a federal level, including national testing strategies and contact tracing to track down and isolate people who had interacted with newly diagnosed patients.

“‘These things were done in Germany, in Italy, in Greece, Vietnam, in Singapore, in New Zealand and in China,’ said Andy Slavitt, a former federal health care official who had been advising the White House.

“‘They were not secret,’ he said. ‘Not mysterious. And these were not all wealthy countries. They just took accountability for getting it done. But we did not do that here.’”

The administration’s lack of accountability—specifically their fear of a more accurate accounting of the true extent of deaths and infections—showed up again in negotiations with Congress over the relief package. As [reported](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/trump-administration-pushing-to-block-new-money-for-testing-tracing-and-cdc-in-upcoming-coronavirus-relief-bill/ar-BB16UnyK?li=BBnb7Kz) by Erica Werner and Jeff Stein of *the Washington Post*, “The Trump administration is trying to block billions of dollars for states to conduct testing (512) and contact tracing (513) in the upcoming coronavirus relief bill, people involved in the talks said Saturday.

“The administration is also trying to block billions of dollars that GOP senators want to allocate for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (514), and billions more for the Pentagon and State Department to address the pandemic at home and abroad, the people said. (515)

“…One person involved in the talks said Senate Republicans were seeking to allocate $25 billion for states to conduct testing and contact tracing [1/3rd the amount sought by House Democrats], but that certain administration officials want to zero out the testing and tracing money entirely.”

Administration resistance was tied to their P.R. effort to shirk responsibility for the crisis: “Trump and other White House officials have been pushing for states to own more of the responsibility for testing and [have objected to creating national standards](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-plays-down-coronavirus-testing-as-us-falls-far-short-of-level-scientists-say-is-needed/2020/05/08/d9241454-913f-11ea-a9c0-73b93422d691_story.html), at times seeking to minimize the federal government’s role.”

More results of the administration’s abdication of duty were reported on **Sunday, July 19**.

As bad as Trump’s official unemployment numbers were, they only told part of the story. Four to seven million Americans had experienced cuts in wages (516), several million had seen their wages capped (517), and millions more had seen their hours cut back (518). Overall, [one in eight employed Americans were coping with reduced incomes](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/19/wage-cuts-economy-crisis-368508), which meant less spending, which impacted revenues for already-struggling businesses.

This was just one way in which the U.S. population, under Trump’s mis-leadership, continued to feel the pandemic far more acutely than the citizens of other developed countries. The failure of the U.S. federal government to effectively mobilize its vast financial and medical resources was[probed](https://www.msn.com/en-us/health/health-news/the-crisis-that-shocked-the-world-americas-response-to-the-coronavirus/ar-BB16WaBS?li=BBnb7Kz) in “The crisis that shocked the world: America’s response to the coronavirus.”

The disaster movie vibe was unique to the United States: “Many countries have rigorously driven infection rates nearly to zero. In the United States, coronavirus transmission is out of control. The national response is fragmented, shot through with [political rancor and culture-war divisiveness](https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/the-battle-over-masks-in-a-pandemic-an-all-american-story/2020/06/19/3ad25564-b245-11ea-8f56-63f38c990077_story.html). Testing shortcomings that revealed themselves in March have become acute in July, with week-long waits for results leaving the country blind to real-time virus spread and rendering contact tracing nearly irrelevant.”

America’s failings could be tied directly to core elements of Trump’s governance:

“The fumbling of the virus was not a fluke: The American coronavirus fiasco has exposed the[country’s incoherent leadership](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-coronavirus-pandemic-no-plan/2020/07/15/7581bea4-c5df-11ea-a99f-3bbdffb1af38_story.html), self-defeating [political polarization](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/01/16/trump-is-most-polarizing-president-record-almost-nobodys-opinion-him-is-changing/), a [lack of investment](https://thenationshealth.aphapublications.org/content/50/2/1.2) in public health, and persistent socioeconomic and racial inequities that have left millions of people vulnerable to disease and death.

“…While other countries endured some of the same setbacks, few have suffered from all of them simultaneously and catastrophically. If there was a mistake to be made in this pandemic, America has made it.”

The “single biggest miscalculation was rushing to reopen the economy while the virus was still spreading at high rates through much of the country” and the “death rate from covid-19 in the United States looks like that of countries with vastly lower wealth, health-care resources and technological infrastructure.”

The key takeaway: “…Future historians will not treat kindly Trump’s efforts to divide (519) and confuse, said James Grossman, executive director of the American Historical Association.

“‘You look at the Great Depression and how Roosevelt made a concerted effort to unite the country — the fireside chats, the New Deal. That is the instinctive reaction of almost every president in crisis. Even if you don’t succeed, you try to convince people that they’re all in this together,’ Grossman said. ‘This presidency is the exception and anomaly.’”

Dan Primack and Nicholas Johnston of *Axios* picked up this theme again on **Monday, July 20**, with “[We blew it](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-america-blew-it-b3d84ea3-78b3-4fe0-8dce-1c4ed0ec0a4c.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top).”

Due to the Trump administration’s lack of foresight and execution, test results were taking a week and longer, allowing asymptomatic carriers to continue to transmit the virus (520), and since the U.S. had little contact tracing in place, test results would be late and often not followed up on to the extent they should be (521). Stimulus funds dedicated to K-12 education had been just enough to cover basic costs; the U.S. had yet to pony up anything approaching the amount of money necessary to keep schools safe. Stimulus money to keep millions of Americans afloat was about to run out due to the failure of Trump and his GOP Senate allies to respond to a second stimulus bill passed by the Democratic House on May 15. The Paycheck Protection Program, intended to help small businesses, was also about to run out due to GOP negligence, and the administration still hadn’t even disbursed all of the funds authorized by the original bill.

Nowhere were the human consequences of this [hyper-partisan stupidity and recklessness](https://news.trust.org/item/20200720140811-wyc7i)more evident than Florida, which had more than 10,000 official infections for the sixth consecutive day, part of a national trend showing that America’s 7-day average had increased for [41 consecutive days](https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/07/20/covid-live-updates-us/?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most). (522)

Despite the costs of his divisive and dishonest tactics, Trump [doubled down on lies and distortions](https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/07/trump-interview-chris-wallace-cognitive-dementia-fox-news.html) in an interview with Fox’s Chris Wallace. In the space of just 4o minutes, Trump made false claims that increased testing explained the rise in cases (523), that the U.S. had “the best testing in the world,” that mail-in voting would “rig” the 2020 election, that the U.S. had the lowest COVID-19 mortality rates in the world (524), that the administration wasn’t trying to discredit Anthony Fauci (see #492), that masks “cause problems,” (525) and that Democrats opposed re-opening schools just to hurt him politically. (526)

One of the major impacts of Trump’s months of disinformation was explored on **Tuesday, July 21**. In “Why masks are (still) politicized in America,” Anna North of *Vox* examined just how [out of step](https://www.vox.com/2020/7/21/21331310/mask-masks-trump-covid19-rule-georgia-alabama?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Sentences%2072120&utm_content=Sentences%2072120+CID_89812755617cb793e8aecddf38c0f6c0&utm_source=cm_email&utm_term=How%20Trump%20started%20the%20culture%20war%20over%20masks) the U.S. was with other developed countries:

“More than five months into the [Covid-19](https://www.vox.com/coronavirus-covid19) pandemic, the evidence for masks keeps getting stronger.

“[One study in Germany](https://ftp.iza.org/dp13319.pdf) found that mask mandates reduced the growth of infections by about 40 percent. [Another](https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.2020.00818) estimated that mask rules in 15 US states and Washington, DC, may have prevented as many as 230,000 to 450,000 cases.”

Despite the obvious public health necessity of wearing a mask, “The words of Trump and other [Republican] public figures appear to be having an impact on the behavior of ordinary people, whose mask-wearing habits break down along party, racial, and gender lines. The result is that one of the cheapest and simplest ways to curb the spread of Covid-19 has been turned into a political football — and it’s costing people their lives.” (527)

“…The effects of this politicization can be seen in recent polling on mask use. In a [Pew poll](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/06/23/most-americans-say-they-regularly-wore-a-mask-in-stores-in-the-past-month-fewer-see-others-doing-it/) conducted June 4 to 10, 76 percent of Democrats and Democratic-leaning voters said they wear a mask in stores all or most of the time. Just 53 percent of Republicans and Republican-leaning voters said the same. Men are also less likely to prioritize mask-wearing than women — in [another Pew poll](https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/06/25/republicans-democrats-move-even-further-apart-in-coronavirus-concerns/), conducted in mid-June, 42 percent of men said people in their community should wear masks in public places, while 53 percent of women said the same. The disconnect could reflect the fact that more men identify as Republican, as well as the fact that Trump and others have implicitly or explicitly linked [a refusal to wear a mask](https://www.vox.com/2020/5/12/21252476/masks-for-coronavirus-trump-pence-honeywell-covid-19) with toughness and masculinity.

“White Americans are also less likely than other racial groups to routinely wear masks, according to the early June Pew data. In that poll, 78 percent of white people said they wear masks in stores at least some of the time, compared with 86 percent of Black respondents, 87 percent of Latinx respondents, and 89 percent of those of Asian descent. While there are many possible reasons for the racial gaps, including party affiliation and the fact that many Black and Latinx communities have been especially hard hit by Covid-19, racist rhetoric by Trump and others may play a role in convincing some white people not to wear masks.”

Murtaza Akhter of the University of Arizona College of Medicine summed up just how out of touch anti-maskers were with the rest of the civilized world: “We just really need a cultural shift….This isn’t even a debate in other places.”

Due in no small part to self-centered young people and [low-information Republicans](https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/news-polls/axios-ipsos-coronavirus-index?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top) ignoring public health guidelines, the U.S. saw [over 1,000 reported deaths](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-deaths-thousand-may-a10e174a-9cdc-4148-93e1-dfe55c1f03e4.html) for the first time in nearly two months.

As high as the official death and infection totals were, they were a major undercount. Trump’s own CDC estimated that infection rates could be anywhere from [six to 24 times higher than reported](https://www.axios.com/cdc-coronavirus-cases-could-be-13-times-higher-5354be41-bc97-43c4-adbf-eab4bb54b14a.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiospm&stream=top).

One of the reasons we didn’t have better data was continued delays in getting test results. As [reported](https://apnews.com/969fbbf44dd2ba1acea130f95b21ef62) on **Wednesday, July 22**, “Laboratories across the U.S. are buckling under a surge of coronavirus tests, creating long processing delays that experts say are undercutting the pandemic response.

“With the U.S. tally of confirmed infections at nearly 4 million Wednesday and new cases surging, the bottlenecks are creating problems for workers kept off the job while awaiting results (528), nursing homes struggling to keep the virus out (529) and for the labs themselves as they deal with a crushing workload.

“Some labs are taking weeks to return COVID-19 results, exacerbating fears that people without symptoms could be spreading the virus if they don’t isolate while they wait.

Tom Frieden, who had led the CDC under Barack Obama, told reporters “There’s been this obsession with, ‘How many tests are we doing per day?’ but ‘The question is how many tests are being done with results coming back within a day, where the individual tested is promptly isolated and their contacts are promptly warned.’”

Public health experts pointed out that “Test results that come back after two or three days are nearly worthless…because by then the window for tracing the person’s contacts to prevent additional infections has essentially closed.”

As with the administration’s many other failures, the lack of a national testing program (or sufficient aid to states to run their own tests) was [hitting people of color the hardest](https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/white-neighborhoods-have-more-access-to-covid-19-testing-sites/). According to Soo Rin Kim, Matthew Vann, Laura Bronner and Grace Manthey of 538.com, “[testing] sites in communities of color in many major cities face higher demand than sites in whiter or wealthier areas in those same cities. The result of this disparity is clear: Black and Hispanic people are more likely to experience longer wait times and understaffed testing centers. (530)

“…An assessment of city and state health department websites also revealed, over and over, fewer testing sites in areas primarily inhabited by racial minorities.”

People of color were also [disproportionately impacted](https://www.cbpp.org/research/full-employment/the-impact-of-the-covid19-recession-on-the-jobs-and-incomes-of-persons-of) by the economic collapse resulting from Trump’s failures to contain the pandemic. The latest jobs numbers were grim. On **Thursday, July 23**, it came out that [1.4 million new unemployment claims](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/23/unemployment-claims-numbers-coronavirus-379729) had been filed in the prior week, an increase of 100,000 from the week before, bringing the total to [30 million Americans without work](https://www.nytimes.com/live/2020/07/23/business/stock-market-today-coronavirus). As one example of many, Yelp estimated that “more than half of the restaurants temporarily closed are now [permanently shuttered](https://mashable.com/article/yelp-restaurants-temporary-permanent-closures/).” (531)

Against a backdrop of mass misery, [the GOP continued to play games with peoples’ lives](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/22/congress-unemployment-aid-cliff-378871?nname=politico-nightly-coronavirus-special-edition&nid=00000170-c000-da87-af78-e185fa700000&nrid=00000166-11bf-d9ac-a967-93bfa7030000&nlid=2670445). As reported by Sarah Ferris and Andrew Desiderio, “Tens of millions of unemployed Americans are about to lose their economic lifeline during the worst recession in 80 years, with eviction protections set to expire (see #338) at the same time.” (532)

“…Without quick action from Congress, the still-growing ranks of America’s unemployed will receive their final round of an extra $600 benefit within days, with no certainty about when more help might arrive.”

The benefits were about to expire because Trump’s key congressional ally, Republican Mitch McConnell, hadn’t bothered to address the issue until more than [two months](https://www.vox.com/2020/5/15/21258854/house-three-trillion-stimulus-bill) after House Democrats—who had been thinking ahead—had passed a stimulus bill. Due to McConnell’s delay, even fast-tracked negotiations would leave millions hanging, as states tasked with administering the benefits would take weeks to catch up with the likely changes to federal policy.

[According to](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/23/gap-unemployment-heres-why-379267) the reporters, thanks to the uncertainty caused by McConnell’s delay, “Any changes could create an accounting disaster for the state systems, which are still struggling to keep up as the number of new workers applying for unemployment benefits each week remains at nearly two times the peak seen during the Great Recession.”

While Mitch McConnell single-handedly screwed tens of millions of Americans, Ron DeSantis, Republican governor of Florida, proved that he thoroughly deserved the COVID-19 dunce cap. That day, it was reported that Florida had had [173 coronavirus deaths](https://www.miamiherald.com/news/coronavirus/article244430452.html), a new record, which amounted to [one death every 11 and ½ minutes](https://news.yahoo.com/covid-19-death-every-8-044632133.html). [DeSantis had been warned](https://news.yahoo.com/a-public-health-employee-predicted-floridas-coronavirus-catastrophe-then-she-was-fired-this-is-everything-i-was-trying-to-warn-184810565.html) of the threat of resurgence months earlier by Rebekah Jones (then-manager of Florida’s coronavirus dashboard), but the data she was presenting didn’t align with his Trumpian desire to re-open the economy, so he fired her and had underlings rig the data to undercount deaths and infections once she was gone. DeSantis’s maneuvers were proving shortsighted, and ironically, hurt his mentor; Trump announced that infection rates were so severe in Florida that he would have to [cancel](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/23/trump-moves-to-cancel-parts-of-gop-convention-set-for-florida-citing-coronavirus.html) his dreamt-of super-spreader convention.

And there weren’t many other spots around the country he could move the event to. Nationwide, [2,600 new infections](https://news.trust.org/item/20200723091312-956hb) were being discovered on the hour, “the highest rate in the world.”

One thing Trump wouldn’t budge on was his insistence that American children go back to school in the fall so that the severity of the pandemic (and his colossal failures to mitigate it) wouldn’t be quite so obvious in the crucial weeks before the election. Bowing to Trump’s perception of his short-term political interests, the CDC [released safety guidelines](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/cdc-guidelines-school-reopening-puts-heavy-emphasis-having-students-back-n1234770) which placed more emphasis on the costs of keeping children out of school than the far grimmer consequences of forcing them into classrooms with insufficient public safety resources. (533)

And the truth was that we weren’t prepared. As pointed out by reporters Ryan Heath and Myah Ward, “most schools in most countries are still closed” and the U.S., due to structural factors and infection rates, was [unsuited to re-open](https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-nightly-coronavirus-special-edition): “the administration is missing key context when it points to European countries with open schools as a model to follow.

“A combination of three factors exist in Europe, [New Zealand](https://www.instagram.com/p/CC9mu7gAKEp/?igshid=unhnw4xwmotp), Australia and other countries, which enabled them to re-open their schools.

1. The virus is under control because of widely adhered nationwide pandemic rules. We’re talking daily deaths in the single digits.

2. They have functional safety nets of universal health care and public schools with enough funds to adapt to hybrid learning or other teaching models.

3. Teachers unions have typically been involved in planning from the get-go. That’s essential, because teachers are the only viable enforcers of new safety rules.

Everywhere else is missing at least one of these ingredients, and in the U.S. all three ingredients are missing in most states and at the federal level.”

Most Americans grasped this in part or in whole, but many Republicans, unable to see through Trump’s self-serving rhetoric, continued to demonstrate [ignorance of the human stakes](https://apnews.com/b133f482b2eba88f8bd733e2d15d13ae), as shown in polling done by the AP in conjunction with the NORC Center for Public Affairs. (534)

Forty-three percent of Republicans felt that K-12 schools could “open as usual” or “open with minor adjustments,” while only six percent of Democrats believed this. Forty-four percent of Democrats said schools should “not open at all,” while only 14% of Republicans felt this way. Nine of ten Democrats knew that re-opening should be contingent on students and teachers wearing masks, while half of Republicans didn’t think masks were necessary. Twice as many Democrats as Republicans understood that “schools should use a mix of in-person and virtual instruction to reduce the number of students in buildings.”

**Friday, July 24**, marked the [4th consecutive day](https://twitter.com/COVID19Tracking/status/1286793355742126080?s=20) that the U.S. officially posted over 1,000 deaths from COVID-19. [Thirty-seven states](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20200724&instance_id=20585&nl=the-morning&regi_id=126380121&segment_id=34251&te=1&user_id=d83df742c3b67c9afcdc1a7c3e05db74) had experienced increases in infections over the prior two weeks and Trump reached his personal milestone of four million infections nationally. [A graphic](https://twitter.com/mlitwack/status/1286617475765993473/photo/1) flashed on CNN showed that “It took the U.S. a little more than three months to get to 1 million coronavirus cases, then two weeks to add the most recent 1 million.”

The rapid increase was coming primarily from Republican-led states whose governors had [marched in lockstep with Trump’s commands](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-surveymonkey-republican-governors-75a1f938-754d-4144-a1ba-56d3b1ec891b.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top). Trump allies were encouraging him to [come up with a national strategy](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/24/trump-backers-plead-virus-plan-381316) to combat COVID-19, but all they were getting was mechanical news conferences and a lot of spin.

While Trump was focused on his campaign to the exclusion of all else, small businesses were struggling. According to a survey done by the National Federation of Small Businesses, 45% of the businesses that had gotten loan approval through the $360 billion Economic Injury Disaster Loan program (EIDL) [had yet to receive their money](https://www.propublica.org/article/thousands-of-small-business-owners-have-not-gotten-disaster-loans-the-government-promised-them?utm_source=sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=majorinvestigations&utm_content=river) from Trump’s Small Business Administration (535). And the $660 billion Payment Protection Program (PPP), established by Congress to prop up small businesses, was running out of money, leading to a wave of closures and an increase in unemployment (536). [As detailed](https://www.adn.com/nation-world/2020/07/23/a-band-aid-on-a-bullet-wound-workers-are-getting-laid-off-anew-across-us-as-ppp-program-runs-out/) by Eli Rosenberg of *the Washington Post*, “A recent report from Goldman Sachs found that only about one in six businesses that received loans said they felt confident they could pay their employees without further assistance.”

Western Europe “had used a different model: universal payroll aid that saw governments paying as much as 80 percent of workers’ salaries to keep them on payroll for a longer time, which has kept more businesses afloat and less people out of work.”

Europe’s success was based not only on the stimulus model they chose, but on their ability to contain the virus so much more effectively than Trump had.

Robert Reich, Labor Secretary under Bill Clinton, told *the Post* that the failure of the PPP to achieve long-term success “basically says the same thing as our outlier status in the numbers of death and infections: We blew it….Other countries managed to both contain the coronavirus after three months, and also keep large numbers of workers on payrolls. We didn’t do either.”

As much as Trump had screwed things up so far, he was far from finished. Looming on the horizon was potentially the most chaotic and hazardous American election since the Civil War. Garrett Graff [previewed the horror show](https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/07/24/2020-election-disaster-perfect-storm-372778) in “8 Big Reasons Election Day 2020 Could Be a Disaster.”

Graff went through election highlights from 2020 so far—vote tally failures at the Iowa caucuses, [mass confusion](https://benbosophy.blogspot.com/2020/04/wisconsin-republicans-make-mockery-of.html) in the Wisconsin primary due to GOP lawsuits, the long lines in Georgia—and pointed out that use of the analogy of a perfect storm to describe the upcoming election was misplaced, as just about all of the problems expected in the presidential election could be predicted (and prevented) in advance.

The threats to a functional election included the lack of safety for elections workers and Americans who were voting in person, confusion and long lines as a result of the reduction in and relocation of polling places, onerous requirements for the use and validation of absentee ballots, a lack of staff to respond to absentee ballot requests, slow delivery times for the ballots due to the struggles of the U.S. Postal Service, and 50,000 “poll watchers” hired to harass voters, particularly voters of color in inner cities.

The common thread in these scenarios was Republican malfeasance or negligence. In order to reduce turnout, Republicans had filed lawsuits across the country to oppose mail-in balloting and force voters to [risk their health](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/03/trump-2020-election-legal-battle-coronavirus-162152) by voting in person (537). The lack of resources for local elections officials was a result of Senate Republicans [only agreeing to $400 million](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/senate-stimulus-package-includes-400-million-to-help-run-elections-amid-the-pandemic/2020/03/25/4d0db91e-6ebe-11ea-b148-e4ce3fbd85b5_story.html) in funding after House Democrats had asked for 9X as much money, then refusing to negotiate in good faith (538). The 50,000 poll watchers were [hired by the GOP](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/18/us/Voting-republicans-trump.html) after harassment of voters was deemed legal by Republican Supreme Court judges who gutted a key section of the Voting Rights Act in the 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* decision. The sorry state of the U.S. Postal Service stemmed from years of Republican budget cuts and the actions of Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, a former Trump donor who was [dismantling the agency](https://apnews.com/59c25efd4d325c4895f8ba85517f9bfd?utm_source=Twitter&utm_medium=AP&utm_campaign=SocialFlow) without regard for how it would [impact service](https://www.marketwatch.com/story/expect-mail-delays-as-trumps-new-postal-service-chief-pushes-cost-cutting-2020-07-15) (539).

On **Saturday, July 25**, the U.S. had [over 1,000 official deaths](https://abcnews.go.com/US/coronavirus-updates-hundreds-texas-bar-owners-pledge-defiance/story?id=71982262) for the fifth consecutive day. Hospitals were jammed in Florida and Texas, leading to [shortages](https://www.chron.com/news/article/Houston-Miami-other-cities-face-mounting-health-15433996.php) in key medical staff.

*The Washington Post* had a [lengthy feature](https://www.thehour.com/news/article/Coronavirus-ravaged-Florida-as-Ron-DeSantis-15434450.php) about the policies of Ron DeSantis, governor of Florida, whose COVID-19 response had been driven by the short-term interests of Donald Trump, with “decision-making…increasingly shaped by politics and divorced from scientific evidence.”

Florida had been used by Trump to drive other states off the cliff:

“…the crisis in Florida has been particularly acute, infectious-disease specialists say, because politics have dictated the response at crucial junctures – never more so than with the state’s reopening, which was cast by the governor as a return to normal rather than as a new and even more precarious phase of the pandemic.

“Trump told aides that Florida’s early success gave other states a justification to reopen, according to three administration officials. Meanwhile, DeSantis quickly turned presidential rhetoric into gubernatorial orders, all while rejecting measures, including a statewide mask mandate and an extended stay-at-home order, that helped other states contain their outbreaks.”

The results were in: “One out of every 52 Floridians has been infected with the virus. The state’s intensive care units are being pushed to the brink, with some over capacity. Florida’s unemployment system is overwhelmed and its tourism industry is in shambles.”

Asked about DeSantis’s response to the pandemic, a spokesman for Trump told *the Post* “Ron DeSantis is doing a great job and will go down in history as a great governor of Florida.”

Ron Desantis’s failures of leadership were demonstrated again on **Sunday, July 26** when [Florida passed New York](https://news.trust.org/item/20200726135648-ec1xb) for total number of COVID-19 infections, making it second only to California, a state twice its size. Due to Democratic governor Andrew Cuomo’s competent and aggressive response to the coronavirus, New York now had the pandemic [under control](https://newyork.cbslocal.com/2020/08/03/gov-andrew-cuomo-touts-new-lows-in-coronavirus-hospitalizations-icu-admittance-and-deaths-the-progress-is-even-better-than-we-expected/). Florida was among the states on [New York’s travel advisory list](https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/covid-19-travel-advisory).

Across the country, the U.S. had over [1,000 official deaths for a 4th consecutive day](https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/26/health/us-coronavirus-sunday/index.html), contributing to Trump posting his [lowest COVID-19 approval ratings](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/26/support-for-trumps-coronavirus-strategy-dips-381509) to date—32%.

On **Monday, July 27**, Ashley Parker and Philip Rucker of *the Washington Post* [asked the obvious question](https://www.chron.com/news/article/One-question-still-dogs-Trump-Why-not-try-harder-15436174.php). Given that Trump’s election hopes were tied to getting the pandemic under control, or at least *appearing* to get the pandemic under control, “Why not try harder to solve the coronavirus crisis?”

Based on the far lower death and infection rates in the rest of the developed world, the route to success was obvious: channeling America’s vast resources through a coordinated federal response. Yet Trump continued to dither and impose sickness, death, and misery on tens of millions because of his personal shortcomings:

“People close to Trump, many speaking anonymously to share candid discussions and impressions, say the president’s inability to wholly address the crisis is due to his almost pathological unwillingness to admit error; a positive feedback loop of overly rosy assessments and data from advisers and Fox News; and a penchant for magical thinking that prevented him from fully engaging with the pandemic.” (540)

Former White House communications director Anthony Scaramucci elaborated further:

“‘His operating style is to double- and triple-down on positions and to never, ever admit he’s wrong about anything….His 50-year track record is to bulldog through whatever he’s doing, whether it’s Atlantic City, which was a failure, or the Plaza Hotel, which was a failure, or Eastern Airlines, which was a failure. He can never just say, ‘I got it wrong and let’s try over again.’”

Trump had shown little concern for the mass suffering he had unleashed until it had impacted Republicans: “In the past couple of weeks, senior advisers began presenting Trump with maps and data showing spikes in coronavirus cases among ‘our people’ in Republican states, a senior administration official said. They also shared projections predicting that virus surges could soon hit politically important states in the Midwest – including Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin.”

The results of Trump’s pathologies manifested in [over a dozen states](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8564627/New-COVID-19-cases-hit-fresh-highs-DOZEN-states.html) reporting record numbers of infections, which was taking a toll on small businesses. Already shortchanged by the administration’s slow disbursement of money from the EIDL program (see #535) and indifference to replenishing funds for the Payment Protection Program (see #536), small businesses were “[drowning in](https://www.axios.com/small-business-coronavirus-expenses-87b59746-7a44-45e8-b1d9-3c6e56735b1a.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top)” expenses tied to COVID-19 safety features that would not be necessary if the coronavirus were under control. (541)

But Trump was unwilling to acknowledge the severity of the pandemic. Incredibly, he [advocated that more states re-open](https://edition.cnn.com/world/live-news/coronavirus-pandemic-07-27-20-intl/h_fe7a6127cb063cdb9414b3fb1d5a0fe7) their economies fully (542) and took to Twitter to share a video from [right-wing quack doctor](https://www.thedailybeast.com/stella-immanuel-trumps-new-covid-doctor-believes-in-alien-dna-demon-sperm-and-hydroxychloroquine) Stella Immanuel (543), known for pimping hydroxychloroquine, dismissing the irrefutable science behind wearing masks, and other bizarre claims. The video was [removed](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8566907/Donald-Trump-goes-Twitter-binge-retweets-posts-praising-hydroxychloroquine.html) from Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

Grim realities made it all too clear why Trump wanted to hide behind his Twitter account. Despite Trump’s [assertion](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/28/world/coronavirus-covid-19.html) that much of the country was “corona-free,” on **Tuesday, July 28** it was reported that 21 states (an increase from the week prior) [were still in the red zone](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/28/world/coronavirus-covid-19.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20200729&instance_id=20734&nl=the-morning&regi_id=126380121&segment_id=34620&te=1&user_id=d83df742c3b67c9afcdc1a7c3e05db74%22%20%5Cl%20%22link-1e0e9a70), with more than 100 new cases per 100,000 people.

Infection spread caused by a premature re-opening of the economy and a lack of federal response was continuing to hamper the economy. [Consumer confidence dropped](https://apnews.com/f7141aab14400d4fcd7f47a88e3b8e44) even further from the low numbers in June. (544)

Most of this damage could have been avoided with a competent federal effort. As pointed out in a paper by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group, “More than 117,000 Americans had died of COVID-19 by mid-June. If our response had been as effective as Germany’s, estimates show that we would have had only 36,000 COVID-19 deaths in that period in the United States. If our response had been as effective as South Korea, Australia, or Singapore’s, fewer than 2,000 Americans would have died. We [could have prevented 99%](https://uspirg.org/resources/usp/shut-it-down-start-over-do-it-right) of those COVID-19 deaths. But we didn’t.” (see #397)

The contrast between the focused pandemic responses overseas and the indifference of the U.S. federal government was highlighted again on **Wednesday, July 29**, when Trump reached his personal milestone of [150,000 dead Americans](https://www.wsj.com/articles/coronavirus-latest-news-07-29-2020-11596011647). As mind-blowing as the number was, it was [a significant undercount](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/01/official-us-coronavirus-death-toll-is-a-substantial-undercount-of-actual-tally-new-yale-study-finds.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22%3A~%3Atext%3DAt%20least%20127%2C425%20have%20died%2Cexcess%20deaths%20varied%20by%20states.). Included in this total were [1,400 deaths that day](https://twitter.com/COVID19Tracking/status/1288603954985578498?s=20), the most since May.

Despite the premature re-opening of the economy, it came out that the second quarter contraction of America’s gross domestic product showed “[the biggest drop](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/29/trump-v-shape-rebound-gone-387425) in more than seven decades of records.”

The combination of the [worst economy in seven decades](https://www.msn.com/en-us/money/markets/us-is-about-to-unveil-the-ugliest-gdp-report-ever-recorded/ar-BB17jsXO) and the administration’s refusal to increase SNAP benefits (see #289) was leaving the richest country in history “with almost [30 million Americans](https://www.msn.com/en-us/finance/markets/almost-30-million-in-us-didn-e2-80-99t-have-enough-to-eat-last-week/ar-BB17ldBN) reporting that they’d not had enough to eat at some point in the seven days through July 21.”

Absent federal action, high levels of food insecurity (see #288, #289, #305, #333, #334, #345, #355, #453) were guaranteed to continue, as roughly [half of the jobs](https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2020/07/29/almost-half-of-all-jobs-lost-during-coronavirus-may-be-gone-permanently/112446072/) lost during the pandemic were unlikely to return. (545)

The economic devastation was causing a [rise in crime](https://apnews.com/f84604913630146a6e4d174e581ae615) around the country (546). Remarkably, though the state of the economy and the rise in crime were directly tied to the administration’s failure to combat COVID-19, Trump tried to [scare gullible white people](https://apnews.com/344477113461be394548f8ce775313dc) into believing that crime would be even worse if Joe Biden were president. Robert Spitzer of the State University of New York College at Cortland told the AP, “Irony is way down the list of things that President Trump worries about.”

One of the biggest ironies was that with all of Trump’s concern for the economy, he apparently exerted no pressure on his Republican Senate ally Mitch McConnell to keep federal stimulus flowing to his constituents. On **Thursday, July 30**, in the midst of an [increase in unemployment filings](https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/30/weekly-jobless-claims.html) to 1.4 million—the 19th straight week with one million or more new filings—all signs showed that $600 of additional weekly unemployment benefits for 30,000,000 Americans and an eviction moratorium protecting the 25-33% of Americans who were short of rent would expire because of [months of inaction by McConnell](https://www.salon.com/2020/07/31/republicans-would-rather-destroy-the-country-than-ease-up-on-brutal-class-war/). (547)

Another result of McConnell’s delay was that K-12 schools starting in-person instruction in August [wouldn’t have](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/30/stimulus-schools-restart-387420) anywhere near the amount of money and resources needed to open safely (548). And federal assistance in the Republican stimulus plan (when or if it was ever acted on) was predicated on school districts maintaining the same level of funding they’d had previously, an impossibility given [revenue reductions](https://www.ncsl.org/research/fiscal-policy/coronavirus-covid-19-state-budget-updates-and-revenue-projections637208306.aspx) due to the contraction of the economy.

Few governors were more gung-ho about [marching schoolchildren into the buzz saw](https://www.politico.com/states/florida/story/2020/08/10/in-florida-a-coronavirus-showdown-as-desantis-rejects-tampa-area-schools-plan-1306786) of the pandemic than Ron DeSantis of Florida, whose state had had a record of [217](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/florida-reports-217-more-people-have-died-from-covid-19-the-highest-of-pandemic/ar-BB17l3VS) official COVID-19 deaths the day prior—the [third consecutive day](https://news.trust.org/item/20200730134919-dqydg) of record fatalities—and whose ICUs in Miami-Dade County were at [146% of capacity](https://news.yahoo.com/miami-dade-ic-us-at-146-percent-capacity-with-coronavirus-patients-151222876.html).

Florida’s failures were extreme, but deaths were trending upward across the country. [1,529 Americans died](https://twitter.com/COVID19Tracking/status/1288970515344842753?s=20) from COVID-19 on Thursday, [one every minute](https://news.trust.org/item/20200730001802-03zgs). Public health guidelines put out by Harvard University’s Global Health Institute and Edmond J. Safra Center recommended that [13 states lock down immediately](https://news.yahoo.com/these-are-the-13-states-that-need-to-lock-down-now-according-to-harvard-coronavirus-experts-162201179.html); all but Nevada were red states which had voted for Trump. The institute found that infections in 22 other states were at “dangerous levels” and said that “stay-at-home orders are advised.” (W31)

Asked how it was that infections and deaths were so much worse in the United States than in every other developed country, Anthony Fauci said, “Other, certainly Asian countries, and certainly the European Union, when they so-called locked down — shut down, shelter in place, whatever you want to call it — they did it to about 95 percent of their countries….Some countries got hit badly, but once they locked down and turned things around, they came down to a very low baseline — down to tens or hundreds of new cases a day, not thousands. They came down and they stayed down.

“Now, in the United States, when we shut down, even though it was a stress and a strain for a lot of people, we only did it to the tune of about 50 percent of the country shutting down….Our curve goes up and starts to come down. But we never came down to a reasonable baseline. We came down to about 20,000 new infections per day, and we stayed at that level for several weeks in a row. Then we started to open up — getting America ‘back to normal’ — and started to see the cases go from 20,000 a day to 30,000, 40,000. We even hit that one point last week of 70,000 new cases a day.”

Trump’s response to the crisis of his own making was largely window dressing. As reported by Alayna Treene and Jacob Knutson of *Axios*, the administration had concocted a P.R.-based “[Embers Strategy](https://www.axios.com/trump-ember-strategy-coronavirus-hotspots-bf80b55a-889a-4d61-985c-fae3b57b1a10.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top)” in which they focused on hot spots (while ignoring infections in the vast majority of the country, 549) and Trump hyped vaccines that wouldn’t arrive until early 2021 under the best-case scenario.

The shortcomings of a targeted (as opposed to a comprehensive) federal approach to fighting the pandemic were [reviewed](https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2020/7/30/21331369/london-breed-coronavirus-covid-san-francisco-california-trump) by German Lopez of *Vox* in “San Francisco’s lonely war against Covid-19.”

As reported by Lopez, San Francisco had had one of the most aggressive responses to the pandemic in the country. San Francisco mayor London Breed had declared a state of emergency on February 25, the day Trump [told reporters](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-press-conference-4/) “You may ask about the coronavirus, which is very well under control in our country. We have very few people with it, and the people that have it are…getting better. They’re all getting better….As far as what we’re doing with the new virus, I think that we’re doing a great job.”

The city had closed down even before the state of California, which had been the first state to shut down, and had stayed closed after the state re-opened. Residents had tended to wear masks and follow social distancing guidelines. Relative to other American cities its size, San Francisco had kept infections low, but there was no guarantee this would continue due to the Trump administration’s failure to provide local governments with adequate PPE and testing resources.

Grant Colfax, who heads San Francisco’s Department of Public Health, told *Vox*, “We are not isolated; we are interconnected….The virus exploits that very interconnectedness of our society. Without a consistent, robust, and sustained federal response that is driven by science … eventually things cannot be sustained.”

The U.S. could have had a robust and sustained federal response, and had been working on one in March and April, but the effort was aborted for short-sighted political reasons, as revealed in “How Jared Kushner’s Secret Testing Plan ‘Went Poof Into Thin Air,’” [a blockbuster *Vanity Fair* piece](https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2020/07/how-jared-kushners-secret-testing-plan-went-poof-into-thin-air) by Katherine Eban. (550)

According to Eban, on March 31, the administration secretly acquired one million COVID-19 tests for a task force headed by Jared Kushner, part of “a secret project to devise a comprehensive plan that would have massively ramped up and coordinated testing for COVID-19 at the federal level.”

“…Inside the White House, over much of March and early April, Kushner’s handpicked group of young business associates, which included a former college roommate, teamed up with several top experts from the diagnostic-testing industry. Together, they hammered out the outline of a national testing strategy.”

“…Rather than have states fight each other for scarce diagnostic tests and limited lab capacity, the plan would have set up a system of national oversight and coordination to surge supplies, allocate test kits, lift regulatory and contractual roadblocks, and establish a widespread virus surveillance system by the fall, to help pinpoint subsequent outbreaks.”

“…The plan crafted at the White House, then, set out to connect the dots. Some of those who worked on the plan were told that it would be presented to President Trump and likely announced in the Rose Garden in early April. ‘I was beyond optimistic,’ said one participant. ‘My understanding was that the final document would make its way to the president over that weekend’ and would result in a ‘significant announcement.’”

The turning point came when “the effort ran headlong into shifting sentiment at the White House. Trusting his vaunted political instincts, President Trump had been downplaying concerns about the virus and spreading misinformation about it—efforts that were soon amplified by Republican elected officials and right-wing media figures. Worried about the stock market and his reelection prospects, Trump also feared that more testing would only lead to higher case counts and more bad publicity. Meanwhile, Dr. Deborah Birx, the White House’s coronavirus response coordinator, was reportedly sharing models with senior staff that optimistically—and erroneously, it would turn out—predicted the virus would soon fade away.

“Against that background, the prospect of launching a large-scale national plan was losing favor, said one public health expert in frequent contact with the White House’s official coronavirus task force.

“Most troubling of all, perhaps, was a sentiment the expert said a member of Kushner’s team expressed: that because the virus had hit blue states hardest, a national plan was unnecessary and would not make sense politically. ‘The political folks believed that because it was going to be relegated to Democratic states, that they could blame those governors, and that would be an effective political strategy.’”

All these months later, as red states were getting hit harder by COVID-19 than blue states, the catastrophic miscalculation couldn’t be more obvious. Dr. Rajiv Shah of the Rockefeller Foundation told *Vanity Fair*, “We know what has to be done: broad and ubiquitous testing tied to broad and effective contact tracing….It takes about five minutes for anyone to understand that is the only path forward to reopening and recovering.” Without testing and tracing, “Our country is going to be stuck facing a series of rebound epidemics that are highly consequential in a really deleterious way.”

On **Friday, July 31**, the bills for the administration’s strategy to let blue states suffer came due as it was reported that there had been [25,000 COVID-19 deaths](https://news.trust.org/item/20200801004545-71yqc) in July, a record number of monthly infections, and a [record number of hospitalizations](https://twitter.com/COVID19Tracking/status/1289327679666188288?s=20). Leading the way, as usual, was Florida, with a record [257 deaths](https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2020-07-31/florida-daily-coronavirus-death-toll-jumps-40-in-four-days) on Friday.

Trump’s “economic miracle” continued to disintegrate, with economic contraction projected to be [more severe this year than in 1932](https://www.politico.com/newsletters/global-translations/2020/07/31/tanking-economies-tanking-reputations-489936), during the lowest point of the Great Depression. The failures of the administration to control the pandemic had “[wiped] out five years of economic growth,” [according to](https://static01.nyt.com/images/2020/07/31/nytfrontpage/scannat.pdf) *the New York Times*(551), and Fitch Ratings “revised its outlook on the country’s credit score to negative from stable, citing a “[deterioration in the U.S. public finances](https://www.msn.com/en-us/money/markets/united-states-outlook-revised-to-negative-from-stable-by-fitch/ar-BB17qy05) and the absence of a credible fiscal consolidation plan.”

Among the many, many victims of the economic collapse were small businesses who were [running up credit card debt](https://www.msn.com/en-us/money/other/small-business-owners-are-leaning-on-credit-cards-to-survive/ar-BB17q2Mg) just to stay alive (552) and medical non-profits who were [in the red](https://www.statnews.com/2020/07/31/jdrf-medical-nonprofits-pandemic-fundraising/?utm_source=STAT+Newsletters&utm_campaign=7a30ec45b3-Daily_Recap&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_8cab1d7961-7a30ec45b3-152815530) because donations had slowed down and they were unable to have the fundraisers they normally relied on. (553)

Further nightmares were on the horizon. A graphic shared by *the New York Times* showed that most of the Southern half of the United States—and especially Trump’s bedrock of support, the Deep South—[wasn’t ready to re-open schools](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/31/us/coronavirus-school-reopening-risk.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20200731&instance_id=20861&nl=the-morning&regi_id=126380121&segment_id=34885&te=1&user_id=d83df742c3b67c9afcdc1a7c3e05db74), though the traditional start of K-12 classes was just weeks away. And Pilar Melendez of *the Daily Beast* [reported](https://www.thedailybeast.com/a-summer-camp-took-almost-every-precaution-the-majority-of-kids-still-got-covid-19) on a summer camp in Georgia where “76 percent of campers who were tested came back positive” after just one week, “despite the organizers following most state guidelines set by the governor and the CDC.”

Another nightmare-to-come was the November election. Trump [said](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/31/trump-greatest-election-disaster-2020-389712) we were facing “the greatest election disaster in history” due to the avalanche of mail-in ballots that would be cast. This was likely true, but the disaster was directly tied to Trump’s policies, from [underfunding](https://washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/april-may-june-2019/congress-is-sabotaging-your-post-office/) the post office (see #539) to [blocking overtime for carriers](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/31/us/politics/trump-usps-mail-delays.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20200802&instance_id=20914&nl=the-morning&regi_id=126380121&segment_id=35036&te=1&user_id=d83df742c3b67c9afcdc1a7c3e05db74) (leading to [delays](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-postoffice/u-s-postal-service-reorganization-sparks-delays-election-questions-idUSKCN258197) in service) to failing to fund state and local governments who would be severely short of elections workers due to the reluctance of elderly volunteers to come out in the middle of a pandemic. [A lack of volunteers](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/31/coronavirus-election-worker-shortage-389831?nname=politico-nightly-coronavirus-special-edition&nid=00000170-c000-da87-af78-e185fa700000&nrid=00000166-11bf-d9ac-a967-93bfa7030000&nlid=2670445)—and a lack of federal aid to make up for those lost volunteers—was certain to lead to the relocation and reduction of polling places, causing chaos and long lines at the polls, particularly in cities, just as Republicans hoped. (554)

The folly of sending children back to school prematurely was revealed again on **Saturday, August 1**. [As reported](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/01/us/schools-reopening-indiana-coronavirus.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20200802&instance_id=20914&nl=the-morning&regi_id=126380121&segment_id=35036&te=1&user_id=d83df742c3b67c9afcdc1a7c3e05db74) in *the New York Times*, “Just hours into the first day of classes… a call from the county health department notified Greenfield Central Junior High School in Indiana that a student who had walked the halls and sat in various classrooms had tested positive for the coronavirus.

“Administrators began an emergency protocol, isolating the student and ordering everyone who had come into close contact with the person, including other students, to quarantine for 14 days.”

A history teacher at Greenfield-Central High School told *the Times*, “I most definitely felt like we were not ready….Really, our whole state’s not ready. We don’t have the virus under control. It’s just kind of like pretending like it’s not there.”

These feelings were mirrored by Jeff Gregorich, a superintendent of public schools in Arizona for 20 years who was [profiled by Eli Saslow](https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/08/01/schools-reopening-coronavirus-arizona-superintendent/?arc404=true&utm_content=con_TzB_Enterprise_ArizonaSuperintendent&utm_medium=email&utm_source=acquisition&utm_campaign=pw_acq_con_080520) for *the Washington Post*. Gregorich oversees a district where 90% of the children receive free or reduced lunch; in Gregorich’s words, “these kids need every dollar we can get.”

But infection rates in the community, and among staff, were so high that it didn’t make sense to re-open, certainly not when they weren’t being provided the resources to re-open safely—as just one example, Gregorich mentioned having to rely on shower curtains because Plexiglass barriers hadn’t been received. And Arizona’s Republican governor, Trump ally Doug Ducey, had effectively ransomed Arizona’s public schools, telling them they would lose 5% of their funding if they didn’t do in-person learning. As Gregorich told Saslow, “it feels like there’s a gun to my head.” Gregorich desperately wanted to re-open, but it wasn’t safe. Claims to the contrary were “a fantasy.”

In effect, Trump’s failure to contain the virus had created [a lose-lose situation](https://apnews.com/1bd44b60f9bb9ea769146c97e5fcd0f1) for parents of school-aged children (555). Keep kids out of school and they would miss out on in-person instruction, school lunches, and other resources, and one of their parents would have to stay home or send them to daycare, draining the family income. Send the kids to school and risk infection and death.

As much as many Americans wanted to go back to normal, as much as Trump wanted to pretend that we could go back to normal, the pandemic wasn’t cooperating. Over 450,000 new infections had been reported in the past week and 37 states were projected to see an uptick in deaths.

And the spread was all over. Ohio’s Republican governor Mike DeWine told a *Washington Post* reporter, “There are fewer and fewer places where anybody can assume the virus is not there….It’s in our most rural counties. It’s in our smallest communities. And we just have to assume [the monster is everywhere](https://www.expressnews.com/news/article/Coronavirus-threat-rises-across-U-S-We-just-15451292.php).”

[A report](https://www.aamc.org/covidroadmap) from the Association of American Medical Colleges said that “If the nation does not change its course – and soon – deaths in the United States could be well into the multiple hundreds of thousands.” (W32)

On **Sunday, August 2**, it was [reported](https://www.axios.com/state-coronavirus-infection-records-dacd090e-3fa3-4e1b-9aa7-76e1a2690418.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosvitals&stream=top) that nine states had seen record single-day infection records in the week that ended on July 31.

Following in the footsteps of their Republican brethren in Texas and Arizona, who had relied on Donald Trump for public safety guidance, morgues in beet-red Mississippi were at capacity, forcing the state to utilize public refrigeration units (556). Other than Arizona, Mississippi had the highest per capita COVID-19 death rate in the country. Due to a woeful lack of resources in Mississippi—“just [two medical examiners](https://www.thedailybeast.com/amid-a-mississippi-coronavirus-surge-morgues-are-overflowing-and-coroners-are-scared) and a single tech statewide”—coroners would be certain to miss COVID-related causes of death among many of the deceased.

In the middle of a pandemic that had exploded because of the administration’s push to re-open the economy prematurely, Trump’s economic advisor Stephen Moore again put short-term economic growth and political considerations over public safety, [telling a radio interviewer](https://thehill.com/homenews/sunday-talk-shows/510131-trump-economist-calls-for-no-more-lockdowns-no-more-shutting-down), “We’ve got to get America back up and running….No more lockdowns. No more shutting down businesses.” (557)

Among the consequences of the administration’s focus on short-term economic growth at the expense of public health was an increase in psychiatric disorders. As reported on **Monday, August 3**, [a study](https://news.trust.org/item/20200803145104-mqgw9) done in Italy showed that “COVID-19 survivors suffer higher rates of psychiatric disorders including post-traumatic stress (PTSD), anxiety, insomnia and depression.” The numbers were grim: “physicians found PTSD in 28% of cases, depression in 31%, anxiety in 42% of patients and insomnia in 40%, and finally obsessive-compulsive symptoms in 20%.” (558-562)

Stress and anxiety were rational responses to a pandemic that continued to rage. Even Trump toady Deborah Birx [told CNN](https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/02/politics/birx-coronavirus-new-phase-cnntv/index.html) that “What we are seeing today is different from March and April….It is extraordinarily widespread. It’s into the rural as equal urban areas.”

On cue, Trump took to Twitter to [deride Birx for her flash of honesty](https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-criticizes-health-adviser-deborah-birx-after-her-coronavirus-warning-11596469424), but his craven lies (563) and distortions were no match for reality. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the dollar had lost [10% of its value](https://www.msn.com/en-us/finance/markets/dollar-e2-80-99s-slide-is-a-warning-that-us-has-lost-grip-on-virus/ar-BB17uloo) (564) and Trump’s premature re-opening had only led to more infections, which was causing the economy to stall. Neel Kashkari, a self-described “free-market Republican” and president of the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank, penned a *New York Times* op-ed which said that the only way to revamp the economy, long term, was to do what public health officials had long advocated: [shut the economy down](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/07/opinion/coronavirus-lockdown-unemployment-death.html) until the virus was under control. (W33)

Trump had no interest in long-term thinking. As reported by Alice Miranda Ollstein, Trump reauthorized money for the National Guard to assist states with COVID-19 responses, but he [slashed aid by 25%](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/08/03/trump-national-guard-coronavirus-mission-391085), creating reductions in funding for “running testing sites, assisting with contact tracing, building field hospitals, sanitizing nursing homes and stocking food banks as the virus surges across more states.” (565)

Though Trump shortchanged 48 states of badly-needed assistance, he left full funding in place for his [political allies in Texas and Florida](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/08/04/trump-texas-florida-national-guard-funds-391535). The director of the Democratic Governors Association, Noam Lee, told *Politico*, “While the coronavirus doesn’t discriminate between ‘red’ states or ‘blue’ states, it is disturbingly clear that our president does.”

Trump’s soft spot for Florida came up again on **Tuesday, August 4**.

Though Trump ([who votes by mail](https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/06/every-trump-ally-who-has-voted-by-mail-list.html)) had spent months attacking mail voting, months suing to force Americans to vote in person during a pandemic, and was doing everything in his power to ensure that the U.S. Postal Service would fail to get ballots out to constituents or return them in time to be counted, on Tuesday he tweeted “Whether you call it Vote by Mail or Absentee Voting, in Florida the election system is Safe and Secure, Tried and True.” There was no concrete evidence that Florida’s system was safer than any other, but the president and his political hacks were concerned that his months of attacks on voting by mail had created a [big disparity](https://apnews.com/19ade6dafb5b6f82f324e4be9b12a7a0) in absentee ballot requests in Florida: Democrats had requested 1.9 million ballots, while Republicans had requested just 1.3 million ballots.

The incident showed how gullible many of Trump’s followers were and are, both how [willing they were to believe](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/08/05/voting-by-mail-elections-poll-391318) Trump’s baseless claims that mail balloting was somehow corrupt and that voting in person during a pandemic was perfectly safe (566). This bedrock ignorance (see #145, #204, #283, #307, #313, #s 319-323. #325, #330, #339, #347, #387, #440, #452, #534) and the denial of most Republican voters about the extent of the coronavirus and Trump’s role in it were also reflected in [a study](https://apnews.com/4d27d2b01e6e4bb3c9dd2050e5afd70e) done by Gallup and the Knight Foundation which found that Trump had succeeded in making the mere act of reporting the news hyper-partisan.

According to the study, “71% of Republicans have a ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ unfavorable opinion of the news media, while 22% of Democrats feel the same way.” The distrust of the media was rooted in conservatives’ belief that a president who had lied [over 20,000 times](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/07/13/president-trump-has-made-more-than-20000-false-or-misleading-claims/) was more trustworthy than a press corps that is consistently adversarial to presidents of both parties. It manifested in tens of millions of conservatives flouting public safety measures and helping the virus spread several months after the dangers of transmission had been obvious. (567)

Emboldened by the fact that his base never held him accountable, Trump made a number of misstatements in [an interview](https://www.mediaite.com/tv/you-cant-do-that-watch-the-most-stunning-exchanges-from-president-trumps-interview-with-axios-jonathan-swan/) with Jonathan Swan of *Axios*. Asked about the wisdom of having held his super-spreader rally in Tulsa during a spike in cases there (see #373), a rally which was “[likely](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/08/us/politics/coronavirus-tulsa-trump-rally.html)” shown to have made community spread worse in the area, Trump bragged about the ratings the rally produced at Fox. Asked when Americans could have testing with same-day results, as he had promised, Trump said, “there are those that say you can test too much. You do know that.” (568) Asked about the state of the pandemic in the U.S., Trump said it was under control; when Swan pointed out that over a thousand Americans were dying daily, Trump said, “They are dying, that’s true, it is what it is.”

In the real world, [23 states](https://twitter.com/zubakskees/status/1290664357123194885?s=20) (18 of which had supported Trump in 2016) were in the red zone, Americans were being hit with the [steepest increase](https://www.msn.com/en-us/money/personalfinance/for-the-unemployed-rising-grocery-prices-stretch-budgets-even-more/ar-BB17z6H8) in grocery prices in decades (see #345), millions of low-income Americans were [unable to pay their energy bills](https://www.axios.com/low-income-families-energy-bills-pandemic-8f6dbddf-26c6-4fb7-9807-50b91440c76f.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axioscities&stream=cities) (569), 40% of Americans were [delaying medical care](https://www.axios.com/census-americans-delayed-medical-care-coronavirus-99913086-58d5-4200-9fc3-6fab08030aba.html), and [200,000 or more medical workers](https://www.propublica.org/article/nobody-accurately-tracks-health-care-workers-lost-to-covid-19-so-she-stays-up-at-night-cataloging-the-dead?utm_source=sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=majorinvestigations&utm_content=feature)—including one of every four nursing home employees—had contracted the virus because of Trump’s failure to get a handle on the pandemic. (570)

As much damage as he had already inflicted on his constituents, Trump was far from done. His desire to force schools open (so the extent of the pandemic wasn’t so obvious during the crucial final two months of the election) received a failing grade when Gwinnett County Public Schools in Georgia [sent 260 employees home](https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/08/04/school-outbreaks-reopening-georgia/?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most) in the first week because they had tested positive for COVID-19 or been exposed to someone who had.

As [reported](https://www.axios.com/children-coronavirus-community-spread-ec749389-9873-4a95-9ab1-de87c3c0cd98.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosvitals&stream=top) by Caitlin Owens at *Axios*, “The more we learn about kids and the coronavirus, the riskier reopening schools for in-person learning appears to be, at least in areas with high caseloads,” which is why Deborah Birx herself [had advocated](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/08/04/daily-202-birx-argues-privately-against-trumps-push-reopening-schools-major-coronavirus-flashpoint/?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_most) for online education in communities with a “high caseload and active community spread.”

Trump [referred](https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/510246-trump-criticizes-birx-over-pelosi-covid-19-remarks-pathetic) to Birx’s comments as “pathetic” and continued to double down on dangerous lies. On **Wednesday, August 5**, the Trump campaign posted claims that children were “virtually immune” to the coronavirus on Facebook and Twitter. Both posts were considered [misinformation](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/08/05/facebook-removes-trump-post-for-spreading-misinformation-on-coronavirus-392014) and forced down. (571)

That same day, Trump praised Arizona’s response to COVID-19 as [a “model” approach](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/08/05/trump-arizona-coronavirus-doug-ducey-392019) though Arizona had “the fifth-highest number of current hospitalizations in the country, the fifth-highest number of new cases in the last week, and the fifth-highest rate of tests that come back positive” and a “positivity rate of about 18 percent — far higher than the 5 percent that the CDC says indicates sufficient testing and control of the virus.” (572)

Trump also [told Fox News](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/trump-says-surging-virus-e2-80-98will-go-away-like-things-go-away-e2-80-99/ar-BB17BcbL) that the U.S. was in “very good shape” and that “This thing’s going away. It will go away like things go away.” (573)

One state where COVID-19 wasn’t going away was Florida, which officially passed [half a million infections](https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/96dd742462124fa0b38ddedb9b25e429?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosvitals&stream=top), more than any developed country outside the U.S. Elderly nursing home residents were [hit especially hard](https://www.wsj.com/articles/floridas-elder-care-facilities-buckle-as-virus-deaths-climb-11596628812).

Republican stonewalling on the stimulus negotiations figured prominently in news coverage on **Thursday, August 6**.

Having ignored the House Democrats’ stimulus bill from its passage on May 15 until well into July, thereby intentionally missing the deadlines for both the eviction moratorium and the expiration of additional unemployment benefits (574), Republicans were now severely low-balling necessary funding.

[Sticking points](https://www.politico.com/newsletters/playbook/2020/08/05/you-admit-you-dont-know-what-youre-talking-about-489987) included aid for strapped cities and states, money for the struggling U.S. Postal Service, funding for childcare, and a resumption of enhanced unemployment benefits that had died as a result of Republican inaction. In all instances, Republicans were far less generous than Democrats to Americans in need, even as the figures being discussed were a fraction of the two trillion-dollar tax cut ([which went overwhelmingly to millionaires](https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/12/18/16791174/republican-tax-bill-congress-conference-tax-policy-center)) Republicans had passed two years earlier on [a party-line vote](https://www.axios.com/republicans-pass-historic-tax-cuts-without-a-single-democratic-vote-1515110718-8cdf005c-c1c9-481a-975b-72336765ebe4.html).

[Economic numbers](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/08/06/trump-economic-recovery-election-392497?nname=politico-nightly-coronavirus-special-edition&nid=00000170-c000-da87-af78-e185fa700000&nrid=00000166-11bf-d9ac-a967-93bfa7030000&nlid=2670445) only magnified the GOP’s moral leprosy in shortchanging their constituents during a time of national desperation. More than a million Americans had filed new unemployment claims for 20 straight weeks. Thirty-two million Americans were receiving either state or federal unemployment, an increase of eleven million from pre-pandemic levels. Several million Americans’ jobs had simply vanished, never to return; a study in May projected that [42% of the jobs lost would be gone permanently](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/08/06/coronavirus-permanent-unemployment-392022). Just 167,000 new jobs had been created in July, a fraction of the expected rebound, and the U.S. leapt ahead of 25 other countries in the annual [Bloomberg Misery Index](https://www.bloombergquint.com/global-economics/misery-ranking-will-show-u-s-getting-worse-versus-rest-of-world).

Mark Zandi, an economist for Moody’s Analytics, told *Politico*, “The economy has largely gone sideways since mid-June, as the re-intensification of the virus has forced about half the nation’s states to either backtrack or pause their business re-openings….It is critical that lawmakers agree to another substantial fiscal rescue package before Congress goes away on its August recess for the fragile economy to avoid backsliding into recession.”

Unlikely to help the sluggish economy was news that the U.S. had recorded [over 2,000 deaths](https://www.barrons.com/news/us-tops-2-000-deaths-in-24-hours-for-first-time-in-three-months-johns-hopkins-01596761106?tesla=y) in a day for the first time since May 7. As high as these numbers were, as always, they were an undercount. Data was poor due to state systems being overwhelmed, a lack of consistency in how the data was collected and reported among states and local governments, insufficient testing and contact tracing, slow test results, and the Trump administration’s decision to hide the data from the public (see #493-497).

The lack of accurate real-time data was robbing public health officials, schools, and businesses of the information they needed to drive sound policy and contain the virus. [As reported](https://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2020/8/5/21351766/covid-19-testing-tracking-hospitalizations-schools-reopening) by Brian Resnick of *Vox*, “The best data we have on community spread of Covid-19 is weeks out of date when it arrives. And schools won’t necessarily be able to monitor the consequences of their decisions in real time. With a virus capable of exponential growth, these lags in data can result in catastrophe.” (575)

The lags in test data were one of the many factors looked at in a *New York Times* deep dive by David Leonhardt titled “[The Unique U.S. Failure to Control the Virus](https://www.boston.com/news/coronavirus/2020/08/07/the-unique-u-s-failure-to-control-the-virus).” Drawing on a trove of data, Leonhardt explored why it was that the U.S. was “the only affluent nation to have suffered a severe, sustained outbreak for more than four months.”

The contrasts to the rest of the developed world were startling: “Over the past month, about 1.9 million Americans have tested positive for the virus…That’s more than five times as many as in all of Europe, Canada, Japan, South Korea and Australia, combined.” Spain’s 50,000 new infections were high by European standards, yet Florida—with half of Spain’s population—had had 300,000 infections in the same time frame.

Despite America’s vast resources, “When it comes to the virus, the United States has come to resemble not the wealthy and powerful countries to which it is often compared but instead far poorer countries, like Brazil, Peru and South Africa, or those with large migrant populations, like Bahrain and Oman.” (576)

America’s failures were due in part to a national emphasis on individualism and libertarian economic philosophies, the former leading to millions unwilling to follow public health guidelines, the latter allowing for a healthcare system that often fails people on the lower rungs of the economic ladder, particularly people of color who are impacted by COVID-19 at [inordinate rates](https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/covid-19-crisis-continues-have-uneven-economic-impact-race-and-ethnicity).

But the lion’s share of the discrepancy between deaths and infections in the U.S. and in every other developed country was attributed to Donald Trump’s failures of leadership (see #1-#576): “In no other high-income country — and in only a few countries, period — have political leaders departed from expert advice as frequently and significantly as the Trump administration. President Trump has said the virus was not serious; predicted it would disappear; spent weeks questioning the need for masks; encouraged states to reopen even with large and growing caseloads; and promoted medical disinformation.”

Trump’s tack had been mimicked by many of his Republican political allies around the country, with devastating results, and the U.S. had never had a federal plan to clean up the mess. Caitlin Rivers of the John Hopkins Center for Health Security told *the Times*, “In many of the countries that have been very successful they had a much crisper strategic direction and really had a vision….I’m not sure we ever really had a plan or a strategy.”

The numbers told the story: “the American death toll is of a different order of magnitude than in most other countries. With only 4 percent of the world’s population, the United States has accounted for 22 percent of coronavirus deaths. Canada, a rich country that neighbors the United States, has a per capita death rate about half as large. And these gaps may worsen in coming weeks, given the lag between new cases and deaths.”

Not only were deaths significantly higher in the U.S., but “the normal activities of life — family visits, social gatherings, restaurant meals, sporting events — may be more difficult in the United States than in any other affluent country” (577) and the U.S. had vastly more COVID-19 survivors, leading to millions who would be subject to a whole host of physiological problems ([heart damage](https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/07/brain-fog-heart-damage-covid-19-s-lingering-problems-alarm-scientists), kidney damage, lung scarring, blood clots, strokes, [chronic fatigue](https://www.cnn.com/2020/08/07/health/chronic-fatigue-syndrome-covid-19-survivors-wellness/index.html), [hair loss](https://news.yahoo.com/freaking-covid-19-survivors-hair-153850699.html)) and neurological problems ([brain fog](https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/07/brain-fog-heart-damage-covid-19-s-lingering-problems-alarm-scientists), headaches, insomnia, lack of mood regulation, [loss of taste](https://nypost.com/2020/07/31/covid-19-survivors-may-lose-hearing-sense-of-smell-and-taste/), [loss of smell](https://nypost.com/2020/07/31/covid-19-survivors-may-lose-hearing-sense-of-smell-and-taste/)). (578)

Policy failures included loopholes in the China travel ban that had allowed [40,000 people](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-trump-china-travel-ban-45a2da12-8063-4ad9-ba28-61cdeb1ce0b3.html) into the country in February and March, delays in banning travel from Europe until March, after which travel was still allowed from the U.K. (which had high infection rates, 579), and a lax approach to quarantining people who entered the country (580). Australia, which had had rigorous regulations around travel, had less than 300 official COVID-19 deaths—total—not much more than Florida had recently had [in a single day](https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2020-07-31/florida-daily-coronavirus-death-toll-jumps-40-in-four-days).

The U.S. had insisted on developing its own tests, rather than use WHO tests that were ready to go, but created flawed tests which had to be fixed, leaving the U.S. with very limited testing well into March, creating the false impression that infections were low and allowing the virus to spread.

Months later, a lack of federal investment was forcing many Americans to wait in [long lines](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2020/07/11/covid-19-test-results-delayed-labs-struggle-cases-surge/5406936002/) to be tested and wait up to two weeks for a test result. By contrast, “In Belgium recently, test results have typically come back in 48 to 72 hours. In Germany and Greece, it is two days. In France, the wait is often 24 hours.”

The failure of U.S. officials to advocate for masks early and often was also a major contributor to the pandemic’s death grip on America. Due to the anti-mask messaging of Trump, Fox, Sinclair Broadcasting, and many other anti-science Republican politicians and media outlets, masks became just another victim of political polarization: “Throughout much of the [Democratic] Northeast and the West Coast, more than 80 percent of people wore masks when within six feet of someone else. In more conservative areas, like the Southeast, the share was closer to 50 percent.” (see #452)

Europe had waited until infection rates were low before re-opening their economy, but most of the U.S. had barged ahead while the pandemic was still active, largely at Trump’s urging. America had seen a brief uptick in job growth, but ultimately this led to an upsurge in infections and an economy that was little better than before the re-openings, with states that opened earliest seeing the biggest spikes in new cases. Georgia, led by hard-right Republican Brian Kemp, was one of the first states to re-open: “In June and July, Georgia reported more than 125,000 new virus cases, turning it into one of the globe’s new hot spots. That was more new cases than Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Australia combined during that time frame.”

By contrast, New York, which had been the COVID-19 epicenter early on, brought infections way down through the aggressive mitigation efforts of Democratic governor Andrew Cuomo. New York’s experience showed that America’s failures were caused by a lack of leadership, not a lack of resources or know-how. Dr. Thomas Frieden, who headed the CDC under Barack Obama, told *the Times*, “This isn’t actually rocket science….We know what to do, and we’re not doing it.”

The failures of Trump and his state-level Republican allies continued to drive the pandemic on **Friday, August 7**. [A 13% reduction in testing](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-testing-positivity-midwest-64e2dcc9-c969-4831-b0c2-235fb75bcffe.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&stream=top) over the prior week had obscured infection numbers nationally, but as reported by Caitlin Owens and Andrew Witherspoon of *Axios*, “A cluster of states in the Midwest are seeing more of their coronavirus tests coming back positive — potentially an early indicator of a growing outbreak.” States outside of the Midwest continued to have high rates of positive tests too, including Nevada and the Republican-run states of Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Arizona, and Florida.

Countrywide, the U.S. was projected to [lose 300,000 citizens](https://news.trust.org/item/20200806221829-76we1) to COVID-19 by December 1.

The following day, **Saturday, August 8**, the 300,000 projection—based on the official death tally of 162,000—was shown to be an underestimate as *the New York Times* [reported](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/05/05/us/coronavirus-death-toll-us.html) that “there have been 200,700 excess deaths in the United States during the coronavirus pandemic, much higher than the current total of 161,000 confirmed deaths.”

With stimulus negotiations stalled because of chief of staff Mark Meadows’ lack of concern for tens of millions of Americans in need, Trump signed executive orders. Trump’s action looked good to Republicans and other low-information voters, but was [insufficient to the moment](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/09/business/trump-executive-orders-unemployment.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20200810&instance_id=21130&nl=the-morning&regi_id=126380121&segment_id=35682&te=1&user_id=d83df742c3b67c9afcdc1a7c3e05db74) and problematic on legal grounds, as [Congress typically disburses funds](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/trump-attempts-to-wrest-tax-and-spending-powers-from-congress-with-new-executive-actions/ar-BB17JjQI). Trump low-balled unemployment extensions from the $600 of additional weekly funding Democrats had proposed to $400 (581) and pawned 25% of this benefit off onto states which were already deep in debt (582). Even if the measures withstood court challenges, it could take months for state unemployment systems to adjust to the funding reduction. Payroll taxes were set to be deferred from September through December, but there was no guarantee that employers would comply and if they did comply, revenue for Medicare and Social Security would be cut.

The other issues Democrats had brought up in stimulus negotiations—money for testing, election security, small businesses, the U.S. Postal Service, state and local governments, childcare assistance, and public safety funds for schools about to re-open—were left unaddressed. (583-589)

Trump’s abdication of duty was a consistent theme. Philip Rucker, Yasmeen Abutaleb, Josh Dawsey, and Robert Costa of *the Washington Post* looked at the administration’s [indifference to the human costs](https://www.adn.com/nation-world/2020/08/08/a-lost-summer-how-trump-fell-short-in-confronting-the-virus/) of the pandemic in “A lost summer: How Trump fell short in confronting the virus.”

The administration had nothing to show for the month of June and had only acted when they felt it was in their political interest to do so: “Under mounting pressure to improve the president’s reelection chances as his poll numbers declined, the White House had what was described as a stand-down order on engaging publicly on the virus through the month of June, part of a deliberate strategy to spotlight other issues even as the contagion spread wildly across the country (590). A senior administration official said there was a desire to focus on the economy in June.

“It was only in July, when case counts began soaring in a trio of populous, Republican-leaning states – Arizona, Florida and Texas – and polls showed a majority of Americans disapproving of Trump’s handling of the pandemic, that the president and his top aides renewed their public activity related to the virus.”

Mark Meadows was in charge of coordinating the executive branch response to the coronavirus. Meadows’ libertarian mindset had torpedoed the stimulus talks and undermined public health experts inside the administration: “Meadows no longer holds a daily 8 a.m. meeting that includes health professionals to discuss the raging pandemic. Instead, aides said, he huddles in the mornings with a half-dozen politically oriented aides – and when the virus comes up, their focus is more on how to convince the public that President Donald Trump has the crisis under control, rather than on methodically planning ways to contain it.” (591)

The pandemic was not remotely under control, and administration projections showed that things would only get worse, but they weren’t sharing this information with the public: “the virus rages coast to coast, making the United States the world leader, by far, in the number of confirmed coronavirus cases and deaths. An internal model by Trump’s Council on Economic Advisers predicts a looming disaster, with the number of infections projected to rise later in August and into September and October in the Midwest and elsewhere.” (592)

On **Sunday, August 9**, Trump hit his personal milestone of over five million infections.

[According to](https://apnews.com/2a03a4e685316eb7d5a6e7181000fbfe) Nicole Winfield and Lisa Marie Paine of the AP, “With confirmed coronavirus cases in the U.S. hitting 5 million Sunday, by far the highest of any country, the failure of the most powerful nation in the world to contain the scourge has been met with astonishment and alarm in Europe.”

The differences between the extent of the pandemic in America and Europe were especially shocking considering the timing of initial infections and respective resources: “…Much of the incredulity in Europe stems from the fact that America had the benefit of time, European experience and medical know-how to treat the virus that the continent itself didn’t have when the first COVID-19 patients started filling intensive care units.

“Yet, more than four months into a sustained outbreak, the U.S. reached the 5 million mark, according to the running count kept by Johns Hopkins University. Health officials believe the actual number is perhaps 10 times higher, or closer to 50 million, given testing limitations and the fact that as many as 40% of all those who are infected have no symptoms.”

Dr. David Ho, from Columbia University’s Irving Medical Center, summed up America’s sorry state of affairs:

“There’s no national strategy, no national leadership, and there’s no urging for the public to act in unison and carry out the measures together….That’s what it takes, and we have completely abandoned that as a nation.” (593)

In sum, we have the absolute worst leader at the absolute worst time.

Amid the greatest crisis this country has faced since World War II, America is rudderless, our fate in the hands of a hollow, ignorant, self-centered, mercurial man with no empathy (594) or sense of honor (595) who has neutered or fired the experts who could mitigate the impacts of the pandemic while empowering sycophants and political hacks.

Because of the Trump administration’s colossal dereliction of duty, human misery will continue in the United States for the foreseeable future as the informed-and-sensible quarantined continue to suffer separation anxiety from friends and family, as the still-employed (and anyone buying groceries) risk contracting the virus every time they step out their door, as modern record levels of unemployment continue and millions are unable to meet basic financial and food security needs, as hospitals overflow, as cities and states slash social services to procure supplies the feds should have provided, as [5,500,000 plus-and-counting](https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/%22%20%5Cl%20%22countries) Americans get infected and hundreds of thousands die horrible and premature deaths.

Human beings are fallible. No presidential administration is perfect.

But it didn’t have to be this way. Had the Trump administration heeded [advice from the outgoing Obama administration](https://www.stamfordadvocate.com/news/article/Once-again-government-is-caught-unprepared-15179581.php), or kept a competent disaster management team in place, or acted aggressively from the moment they were notified of the virus on January 3, or used World Health Organization test kits, or recommended social distancing sooner, or maintained consistent and transparent messaging, or leveraged the formidable resources of the federal government early and often, or put public health ahead of campaign concerns, or formed anything resembling a coherent national response, or had even a modicum of concern for the human impact of their decisions, we would be in a radically better situation, as seen in Germany, South Korea, and every other developed country, all of whom have a fraction of the deaths and infections the U.S. has experienced.

[Asked](https://www.npr.org/2020/03/12/814881355/white-house-knew-coronavirus-would-be-a-major-threat-but-response-fell-short) by NPR’s Terry Gross what went wrong with the test kits, *Politico* reporter Dan Diamond quoted an administration official whose answer could apply to all of Trump’s failures:

“Terry, the question might not be what went wrong; it’s what went right?”