

Final House COVID panel report exposes reckless Trump pandemic response

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Dr. Deborah Birx, then the White House's coronavirus response coordinator, tries not to laugh -- and National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Dr. Anthony Fauci gives Donald Trump the eye, March 20, 2020 in (Photo: Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post via Getty Images)

Washington, December 10 (RHC)-- A U.S. Congressional panel has published its final report on the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the Trump administration's "failed stewardship" and detailing how a "persistent pattern of political interference undermined the nation's ability to respond" to a crisis that has claimed more than a million lives in the United States.

The House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis report notes that "the United States was underprepared for a major public health crisis for years before the coronavirus pandemic," and that

"chronic underfunding and long-standing health disparities put many Americans at heightened risk of becoming infected and developing severe illness as a result of the coronavirus."

"The Trump administration's reckless pandemic response resulted in devastating and lasting harm," the Democrat-controlled subcommittee contended. "The toll of the coronavirus fell hardest on those who were already most vulnerable. Communities of color suffered disproportionately high rates of coronavirus infection, hospitalization, and death. Nursing home residents suffered high levels of infections and deaths, exacerbated by understaffing and meager wages and benefits for their workers."

The publication continues: "The United States had long failed to invest in measures necessary to prepare for a global pandemic, including failing to maintain the Strategic National Stockpile and to adapt to indications that federal agencies were likely to be stymied by a lack of cooperation and communication failures in the event of a major public health calamity. These factors were exacerbated by the Trump administration's disastrous initial response in 2020. The Trump administration failed to recognize the looming threat as reports of a novel pathogen emerged in early January and failed to take sufficient measures to prepare the country by developing adequate testing or acquiring sufficient personal protective equipment and other critical supplies."

The paper accuses high-ranking members of the Trump administration, including advisers Peter Navarro and Dr. Steven Hatfill, of waging a "knife fight" with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration over the immunosuppressive COVID-19 treatment hydroxychloroquine. According to the report, Navarro and Hatfill relied upon advice from "known extremists and prolific conspiracists like former White House Chief Strategist Steve Bannon, Dr. Jerome Corsi, and the Association of 40 American Physicians and Surgeons, which, among other radical conspiracies, propagated the theory that [former] President Barack Obama used a covert form of hypnosis to win the 2008 presidential election."

In contrast, the report notes the "historic" vaccination campaign launched during the tenure of President Joe Biden, an effort resulting in 200 million vaccine doses administered in 100 days.

However, "the rampant spread of misinformation has led to damaging distrust in public health expertise," while contributing "to harassment, threats, and attacks on public health officials working on the coronavirus response," the document adds. This misinformation "convinced far too many Americans to decline lifesaving coronavirus vaccines—resulting in hundreds of thousands of preventable deaths."

According to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, more than 99 million people have contracted COVID-19 in the United States, and over 1,084,000 have died—more than the population of San Jose, the nation's 10th-largest city. The report also highlights the pandemic's economic toll, including "20 million Americans losing their jobs in April 2020 alone, pushing the unemployment rate from 2.5% to 14.7% in just two months."

"This devastation fell hardest on low-income workers and their families, who were disproportionately women and people of color and were more likely to work in hard-hit sectors that experienced closures and disruptions," the paper states.

Rep. James Clyburn (D-S.C.), who chairs the subcommittee, said in a statement that "as this final report shows, in many instances, the Trump administration's poor management of relief programs left them particularly vulnerable to waste, fraud, and abuse. The report also lays out in detail how the previous administration prioritized politics over public health in its pandemic response, engaging in an unprecedented campaign to undermine federal agencies responsible for protecting Americans' health and lives."

"I have emphasized during the select subcommittee's tenure that our oversight work must ultimately be forward-looking; the coronavirus crisis will not be the last public health emergency or economic crisis that we confront," Clyburn added. "The report's recommendations, informed by 42 hearings and member

briefings and 37 staff analyses, will ensure the nation is better suited to face future threats while also enacting public health and economic policies that will serve us well in good times as well as bad."

The report comes a few weeks before the GOP is set to take control of the House and potentially end the subcommittee. According to Politico, "Republicans are planning to spread their Covid-19 investigations across multiple committees—largely focusing on the virus' origins and misspent pandemic funds."

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