

Trump halts US funding to WHO, says none of this is his fault

Enlarge / President Donald Trump speaks during a news conference in the Rose Garden of the White House on Tuesday, April 14, 2020.

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President Donald Trump today said the United States will stop funding the World Health Organization until his administration completes a review of the group's response to the coronavirus pandemic.

"Today, I am instructing my administration to halt funding of the World Health Organization while a review is conducted to assess the World Health Organization's role in severely mismanaging and covering up the spread of the coronavirus," Trump said at a press conference today.

The US gives the WHO \$400 million to \$500 million per year and "has a duty to insist upon full accountability," Trump said. Trump said his administration will talk "with other countries and global health partners" about what to do with the US funding that would normally go to the WHO. The US provides about 15 percent of the WHO's budget. "Administration officials signaled the [funding] suspension would be for 60 days," according to Bloomberg, which noted that the US has "contributed \$893 million to the WHO's operations during its

current two-year funding cycle.”

While “Congressional Democrats say Mr. Trump can’t cut WHO funding on his own,” the “White House budget office has concluded the president has several options to withhold money from the WHO without congressional approval,” such as by “order[ing] agencies to reroute the money to other related purposes,” The Wall Street Journal reported.

Trump argued today that “the outbreak could have been contained at its source with very little death” if the WHO had pushed back against China’s claims. He said:

The WHO failed to investigate credible reports from sources in Wuhan that conflicted directly with the Chinese government’s official accounts. There was credible information to suspect human-to-human transmission in December 2019, which should have spurred the WHO to investigate immediately. Through the middle of January, it parroted and publicly endorsed the idea that there was not human-to-human transmission happening, despite reports and clear evidence to the contrary. The delays the WHO experienced in declaring a public health emergency cost valuable time, tremendous amounts of time.

As The Washington Post wrote today, the WHO “declared a global health emergency [by January 30], after which the president continued to downplay the outbreak and compare it to the flu.” The Trump administration finally recommended social distancing in mid-March.

Trump praised China in January, said virus was under control

Despite claiming the WHO should have known China was lying by mid-January, Trump himself praised China on January 24 for its “transparency.”

“China has been working very hard to contain the Coronavirus,” Trump tweeted at the time. “The United States greatly appreciates their efforts and transparency. It will all work out well. In particular, on behalf of the American People, I want to thank President Xi!”

The United States announced its first confirmed coronavirus case on January 21. On January 22, Trump said “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.”

But today, Trump said that the WHO in December and January should have “done its job to get medical experts into China to objectively assess the situation on the ground and to call out China’s lack of transparency... this would have saved thousands of lives and avoided worldwide economic damage. Instead, the WHO willingly took China’s assurances at face value and... defended the actions of the Chinese government, even praising China for its so-called transparency.”

Trump says his travel ban saved many lives

Trump further argued that his China travel ban announced on January 31 saved “thousands and thousands” of lives while the WHO was “very much opposed to what we did.”

“The WHO pushed China’s misinformation about the virus, saying it was not communicable and there was no need for travel bans,” Trump said. “They told us when we put on our travel ban, there was no need to do it, don’t do it, they actually fought us.”

A USA Today article said “there is no public record of WHO at any point actively criticizing the US or any other country for deciding to implement a coronavirus-related travel ban” and that the WHO “opposes all travel bans during a pandemic, not

just Trump's." Health experts say Trump's travel ban had little effect on the pandemic's spread. The WHO on January 24 said it "advises against the application of any restrictions of international traffic based on the information currently available on this event."

Trump today said the pandemic would have been less severe if other countries had imposed travel bans like the US did. "Fortunately, I was not convinced [by the WHO], and I suspended travel from China, saving untold numbers of lives," Trump said. "Had other nations likewise suspended travel from China, countless more lives would have been saved... the WHO's attack on travel restrictions put political correctness above life-saving measures."

According to The Washington Post, 38 countries imposed travel bans before Trump's took effect on February 2.

"It would have been so easy to be truthful," Trump said of the WHO, arguing that "the WHO has not addressed a single one of these concerns nor provided a serious explanation that acknowledges its own mistakes, of which there were many."

As the coronavirus continues to spread throughout the US, states have shut down schools and businesses to limit disease and death. Trump wants to get moving on reopening the economy, claiming yesterday that he has "total" authority to override governors and force states to rescind shutdown orders. But coalitions of governors on the East and West Coasts yesterday announced pacts to follow science, not politics, in their decisions on when to reopen economies.

Trump today said he will speak to all 50 governors and "authorize" each individual governor to "implement a reopening plan of their state at a time and in a manner as is most appropriate."

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