US edits National Stockpile website after Kushner claims it’s not for states

Enlarge / President Donald Trump speaks as Jared Kushner, senior White House adviser, listens during a Coronavirus Task Force news conference at the White House on Thursday, April 2, 2020.
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The Trump administration changed the Strategic National Stockpile website’s description of the program yesterday after White House adviser Jared Kushner falsely claimed that the medical-supply stockpile is not meant to be used to help states. The description was changed to minimize the stockpile’s role in helping states through crises like the current pandemic, but other portions of the official website still make it clear that Kushner was wrong.

> *After Jared Kushner’s comment about how the Strategic National Stockpile is not supposed to be for states, lots of people pointed to the fact that its own website says it is.*
>
> *The language on the website has now been changed.*
>
> *My screenshot from last night vs. one from today: pic.twitter.com/UwJFAr7uoV*
>
> *— Daniel Dale (@ddale8) April 3, 2020*

Kushner, President Trump's son-in-law, claimed in a news conference Thursday that "the notion of the federal stockpile was it's supposed to be our stockpile, it's not supposed to be state stockpiles that they then use." Kushner made the remark while discussing ventilators and masks. (See transcript.)

Kushner acknowledged that the federal government is giving ventilators and other equipment to states, even though he argued that the stockpile isn't meant to be used by states. But the Strategic National Stockpile website homepage, maintained by the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), previously made it clear that the stockpile is for the entire country. Before Kushner's remarks, the page said:

> *Strategic National Stockpile is the nation's largest supply of life-saving pharmaceuticals and medical supplies for use in a public health emergency severe enough to cause local supplies to run out.*
>
> *When state, local, tribal, and territorial responders request federal assistance to support their response efforts, the stockpile ensures that the right medicines and supplies get to those who need them most during an emergency.*

All of that text, which you can see in an Internet Archive snapshot of the page from earlier today, was deleted sometime today after Kushner faced criticism for making the false claim. The new version of the page provides a vaguer description and stresses that states have their own stockpiles:

> *The Strategic National Stockpile's role is to supplement state and local supplies during public health emergencies. Many states have products stockpiled, as well. The supplies, medicines, and devices for life-saving care contained in the stockpile can be used as a short-term stopgap buffer when the immediate supply of adequate amounts of these materials may not be immediately available.*

Stockpile is used to “resupply state… agencies”

If the goal was to completely remove all traces of the stockpile’s role in helping states, the effort was not thorough enough. An “About the Stockpile” link on the homepage still leads to a fuller description that says it is supposed to “resupply state and local public health agencies in a catastrophic health event.”

When contacted by Ars, the HHS said the website change was in the works for a week, even though it was just deployed today.

“This is language we have been using in responding to inquiries for weeks now,” an HHS spokesperson told Ars. “ASPR [Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response] first began working to update the website text a week ago to more clearly explain to state and local agencies and members of the public the role of the SNS [Strategic National Stockpile].”

According to Politico, “A White House spokesperson had no comment when asked whether the White House ordered the change to the stockpile’s webpage.”

Kushner: States are asking for too much

At yesterday’s press conference, Kushner said the federal government uses “a simple formula” based on utilization-percentage data submitted by states to determine where to send ventilators.

Kushner said that “all over the country, a lot of people are asking for things that they don’t necessarily need at the moment,” and he urged reporters to be skeptical of states’ claims that the federal government isn’t providing enough

ventilators and other medical supplies:

> *I would just encourage you, when you have governors saying that the federal government hasn't given them what they need, I would just urge you to ask them, "well have you looked within your state to make sure that you haven't been able to find the resources."*

Originally known as the National Pharmaceutical Stockpile, the stockpile was created in 1999 "to assemble large quantities of essential medical supplies that could be delivered to states and communities during an emergency within 12 hours of the federal decision to use the stockpile," another federal webpage says.

That webpage lists numerous instances of the stockpile being deployed over the past 20 years to respond to natural disasters and public-health emergencies. The page had already been updated for the current pandemic, saying that as of March 31, "More than 10,308 tons of cargo [has been] shipped to support US repatriation efforts and state PPE [personal protective equipment] needs" related to COVID-19.

Trump said at yesterday's press conference that the national stockpile has almost 10,000 ventilators. "The states should have been building their stockpile," Trump said, calling the federal supply "a backup." The federal government has already distributed half of its ventilators, The Wall Street Journal wrote.

The stockpile "has been overwhelmed by urgent requests for masks, respirators, goggles, gloves and gowns in the two months since the first US case of COVID-19 was confirmed," a Washington Post article said last week. The Post article said the stockpile "was never intended for an emergency that spans the entire nation." That doesn't mean it isn't to be used by states, but rather that it is stocked well enough for multiple regional emergencies.

“The response contains enough for multiple emergencies,” former CDC acting director Richard Besser said. “Multiple does not mean 50 states plus territories and, within every state, every locality.”

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