
Trump Dismissed Intel, Warned in January of COVID-19 Threat

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23/03/2020



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United States President Donald Trump ignored reports from U.S. intelligence agencies starting in January and February that warned of the scale and danger of the new coronavirus outbreak in China, The Washington Post reported Friday.

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“Donald Trump may not have been expecting this, but a lot of other people in the government were — they just couldn’t get him to do anything about it,” a U.S. official who had access to intelligence reporting said. “The system was blinking red.”

The intelligence reports didn’t predict when the virus was expected to

reach the U.S. nor recommend particular steps that public health officials should take, issues outside the purview of the intelligence agencies.

Yet within the administration, Trump's aides tried in vain to convince him of the virus's seriousness, according to the Post.

Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar was unable to discuss the virus with Trump until Jan. 18, two senior administration officials confirmed, at which point the president interrupted him to ask when sales of flavored vaping products would resume, senior administration officials told the paper.

While a source familiar told CNN that the congressional intelligence committees were briefed on the threat coronavirus posed in January and February.

As the pandemic takes its toll in the U.S., as of Sunday it has become the third country in the world with more cases with over 38,000, the bigger problem the U.S. faces now is what many experts criticize as unpreparedness for an emergency of this scale.

"The federal government's Strategic National Stockpile of medical supplies includes 12 million medical-grade N95 masks and 30 million surgical masks -- only about one percent of the 3.5 billion that the Department of Health and Human Services estimates would be needed over the course of a year if the outbreak reaches pandemic levels," according to The New York Times on March 9.

While COVID-19 first appeared in the U.S., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has, as of March 17, together with other public health laboratories, carried out just 32,000 tests, while countries like South Korea carried over 7.5 times that amount.
