

As Global coronavirus death toll tops 300,000

US whistleblower warns premature return to work will bring “unprecedented illness and fatalities”

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Another macabre milestone was passed yesterday as the global coronavirus death toll surged past 300,000, while the number of cases approached 4.5 million. So far, only about 1.7 million of those infected have recovered, leaving nearly 2.5 million men, women and children suffering from the deadly pandemic.

The United States leads the world in the number of infections (1.4 million), deaths (85,000) as well as having the most new infections and deaths each day. However, it lags behind more than three dozen European, Middle Eastern, Asian and island countries in terms of per capita testing for the virus, the first step in containing the disease.

At the same time, several other countries are emerging as epicenters of the disease, including Brazil, Russia, Peru, India and the United Kingdom. While these countries currently have just under 18 percent of the world's total cases, they have about 37 percent of the world's daily new cases. Brazil and the UK also have some of the world's highest death counts, at 13,600 and 33,600 respectively, while fatalities in the other aforementioned countries are beginning to sharply spike.

Amid the expanding pandemic, whistleblower Dr. Rick Bright testified Thursday before the House Committee on Energy and Commerce's health subcommittee that “The world is confronting a great public health emergency which has the potential to eclipse the devastation wrought by the 1918 influenza which globally claimed over 50 million lives.”

Bright, who filed a whistleblower complaint after being abruptly removed last month from his

coronavirus vaccine development post, further stated that there will be “unprecedented illness and fatalities” if the policies of the Trump administration continue as they are now, referring to the ongoing back-to-work drive being pursued by the ruling elite in the US and internationally.

These comments echo testimony from Dr. Anthony Fauci, who warned on Tuesday of “needless suffering and death” if states continue to open up before they are able to contain the virus. The statements from both officials sharply cut across the bipartisan efforts to send workers back into factories, offices and workplaces without the necessary medical equipment to ensure their safety and lives.

Bright is the ousted director of the government agency that oversees the development of vaccines for novel viruses, including the coronavirus. He served as director of the organization, the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), since 2016 and was removed from his appointment on April 21 after he leaked information showing his opposition to the hydroxychloroquine trials being promoted by the White House as a cure for the pandemic.

He was called to Congress the week after his 89-page whistleblower complaint was made public, a document that details how the Trump administration covered up the dangers of the coronavirus as early as January and opposed any coordinated effort to prevent its spread. Bright also cataloged the corruption and insider trading between the government and various drug firms, including those with ties to the Trump family.

Bright's testimony is a further indictment of the

Trump administration's response to the coronavirus pandemic. As he noted in his opening statement, "The American health care system is being taxed to the limit, our economy is spiraling downward—leading to mass unemployment—and our population is being paralyzed by fear stemming from the lack of a coordinated response and a dearth of accurate, clear communication about the path forward."

At the same time, Bright asserted that there is no "national coordinated strategy" to test for and combat the virus, one that draws "on the guidance of the best scientific minds." Without this, Bright made clear, "Our window of opportunity is closing. ... the undeniable fact is there will be a resurgence of the COVID-19 this fall, greatly compounding the challenges of seasonal influenza and putting an unprecedented strain on our health care system. Without clear planning and implementation of the steps that I and other experts have outlined, 2020 will be the darkest winter in modern history."

One of the main problems, Bright noted, is that the supply chain for personal protective equipment (PPE) was "diminishing rapidly" even in the very early stages of the pandemic. He was, however, met with "indifference" by officials at Health and Human Services, including Secretary Alex Azar, when he attempted to raise the alarm. "Lives were endangered, and I believe lives were lost," especially among health care workers, who were not provided with "sufficient protection" against the virus, he said.

The whistleblower also informed the subcommittee that there is "significant concern" for the ability of companies to produce and distribute a vaccine if and when one becomes available. "There's no one company that can produce enough for our country or for the world," he said, and there must be "a strategy and plan in place now," if a potential life-saving inoculation is to be distributed "in a fair and equitable" manner.

It also emerged at the hearing that the federal government knew of these shortcomings thanks to a simulated pandemic situation it ran last year, known as "Crimson Contagion." The exercise studied what would happen if a new, flu-like virus was brought to Chicago by tourists who had traveled to China. It estimated that 110 million Americans would be infected, 7.7 million hospitalized and 586,000 would be

killed.

Bright made clear that "some of the significant findings were the need for improved coordination and communication, and an alignment between the local, state and federal governments with a need for personal protective equipment and a need for funding." It should also be noted that data from the current pandemic indicates that the coronavirus is at least twice as deadly as the simulated contagion.

The Trump administration predictably lashed out at Bright's testimony, with Azar claiming, "Everything he called for was done." White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany repeatedly claimed that Bright wasn't "paying attention," asserting that the federal government has sent out "90 million N95 respirators ... [a] billion gloves" and "many more pieces of PPE." President Trump attempted to marginalize Bright, tweeting that he is just "a disgruntled employee, not liked or respected."

Neither Azar nor McEnany, much less Trump, bothered to reconcile their claims of the administration's actions with the fact that it is now attempting to force the Centers for Disease Control to revise downward its official count of coronavirus cases and deaths. It was revealed last week that the head of the White House Coronavirus Task Force, Deborah Birx, has petitioned the CDC to exclude those who only *may* have died from COVID-19, which would reduce the mortality and case count by as much as 25 percent.

While criticizing the Trump administration, however, neither Bright nor the Democratic Party-controlled hearing questioned the actual response of the president and his cohort, which was to grant corporations, banks and Wall Street speculators some \$8 trillion with no strings attached in March and April, a quarter of which was under the guise of the CARES Act. In doing so, the ruling class fueled a record stock market rise of 35 percent, while at the same time demanding that workers place their lives and the lives of their friends and loved ones at risk of dying from the pandemic.



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