

Trump wages war against science and Dr. Fauci, not coronavirus

Patrick Martin
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President Donald Trump has stepped up his war of words against Dr. Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) since 1984 and the leading government expert on the coronavirus pandemic. Trump criticized Fauci during two television interviews last week and then had his White House staff leak a hostile memorandum to the media listing Fauci's supposed mistakes during the COVID-19 crisis.

Most of the statements listed in the memorandum concerned Fauci's recommendations on specific public health measures, which changed from month to month depending of the scope of the danger. For example, in the early stages of the pandemic he urged people not to wear masks because there were shortages and he thought the limited supply should go to health care workers first.

It requires a considerable degree of political hubris to raise the accuracy of Fauci's statements and predictions to defend the biggest liar in modern American history. It is only a few months since the American public witnessed President Trump suggesting that the injection of bleach might be a useful measure to combat the coronavirus, to say nothing of his shilling for discredited "cures" like hydroxychloroquine and his suggestion that the virus would disappear "like a miracle" once the weather turned warm.

This dirty tricks campaign—and it deserves that label, as the memorandum was characterized by the *Washington Post* and several television networks as similar to the "opposition research" conducted against a rival candidate during an election—is aimed at undermining Fauci's increasingly blunt criticism of the colossal failure of the Trump administration and various state governments in stemming the pandemic.

Dan Scavino, deputy White House chief of staff for

communications, went so far as to place a cartoon on his Facebook page Sunday night depicting Fauci as "Dr. Faucet," flushing the US economy down the drain, demanding schools remain closed and even (a real grievance for Trump) suggesting that there would be no professional football season this fall because of the coronavirus.

Trump embraces such childish smear tactics, rather than simply firing Fauci, in part because the doctor has extensive job protection under civil service rules and could be removed only by his direct superiors, Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar and Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health, and only for cause.

More importantly, firing Fauci, the administration's only voice on COVID-19 with any credibility with the public, would undoubtedly generate a political backlash against Trump of major proportions. The 79-year-old Fauci has headed the NIAID under six administrations, Republican and Democratic, and clearly continues to serve in a demanding position, long after he could have retired, because of his devotion to public health.

Tensions between Fauci and the White House have been mounting over the past two weeks as the disease expert let it be known that he did not agree with Trump's claims that there was no connection between the reckless campaign to reopen the US economy and the subsequent surge in coronavirus infections. In congressional testimony, Fauci warned that the country could soon face 100,000 new infections each day—triple the peak rate of April and May.

Fauci has contradicted some of Trump's more ignorant public statements, such as his assertion that "99 percent" of coronavirus cases are harmless, and his claim that the number of US coronavirus cases is going up because more people are being tested, not because

more people are falling ill. He also disagreed with Trump's claims that the lower death rate of the past two months meant that the virus was weakening or even "going away." He told one interviewer, "It's a false narrative to take comfort in a lower rate of death."

Two interviews last week seem to have brought Fauci to the brink of a public rupture with the White House. In a podcast with the election website FiveThirtyEight.com, Fauci said that "as a country, when you compare us to other countries, I don't think you can say we're doing great. I mean, we're just not."

This directly contradicts the incessant claims by Trump that the US response to the coronavirus is an unparalleled success—claims that are ludicrous given that the US leads the world in both deaths and total cases. Fauci went on to say that he could understand why the European Union would continue to ban US citizens from entering, on public health grounds.

In an interview Friday with the *Financial Times*, Fauci revealed that he had not briefed Trump on the pandemic for at least two months and had not spoken with the president at all since early June. He explained that the White House had blocked most requests for television interviews with him and that his "honesty" was probably the reason.

"I have a reputation, as you probably have figured out, of speaking the truth at all times and not sugar-coating things," he told the British newspaper. "And that may be one of the reasons why I haven't been on television very much lately."

On Monday, after the White House effort to trash his professional reputation over the weekend, Fauci warned that the US hasn't "even begun to see the end" of the pandemic, although he expressed some optimism about progress in the development of vaccines and potentially therapeutic drug treatments.

Trump responded later Monday, during a brief question-and-answer session with reporters at the White House, by deflecting any discussion of Fauci in particular but reiterating his most absurd and discredited statements about the "great progress" the United States is making against the COVID-19 pandemic.

In response to a reporter who pressed him on his repeated claims that the coronavirus is not actually increasing in the United States, and that the rising number of positive cases is the product of greater

testing, Trump replied, "We're doing great with testing... We've done 45 million tests. If we did half that number, we'd have half the cases."

Even this piece of stupidity was not the crudest statement coming from the Trump administration. That prize goes to Admiral Brett P. Giroir, assistant secretary of health and human services, who was the White House-approved spokesman making the rounds of the Sunday television talk shows. Asked on "Meet the Press" about the White House attack on Fauci, Giroir said, "Dr. Fauci is not 100 percent right, and he also doesn't necessarily—and he admits that—have the whole national interest in mind... He looks at it from a very narrow public health point of view."

These are words that should be branded on his backside. Trump, of course, according to the sycophantic admiral, has "the whole national interest in mind." In other words, he upholds the global position of American imperialism and the profits of the giant corporations, which are being undermined as long as workers cannot be herded back into the factories and other workplaces because of the threat of COVID-19.

As for Dr. Fauci, his "very narrow public health point of view" consists of the sincere desire to save millions of people from a serious illness that means death for hundreds of thousands, if not many more, and significant health consequences even for many of those who are fortunate enough to survive. In a contest between those two outlooks, there is little doubt which would be preferred by the working people who make up the vast majority of the country.



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