

Amazon offers to aid US government's botched vaccination effort

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Amazon officials made it plain last week that they wished to take part in the White House's efforts to administer the coronavirus vaccine to the United States' population. Dave Clark, Amazon CEO of global operations, addressed newly inaugurated President Joseph Biden last Wednesday, declaring in a letter his company was "prepared to leverage our operations, information technology, and communications capabilities and expertise to assist your administration's vaccination efforts."

On Sunday, Amazon's Seattle headquarters held a day-long vaccination clinic, administering 2,000 shots. The company did another such clinic yesterday at the same location. The corporation has offered to expand its 650 warehouse self-testing sites into full scale vaccination clinics, capable of servicing over 50,000 individuals a day.

Amazon has nearly doubled in market capitalization and in its workforce over the past several years. During the pandemic, the web commerce giant has added over 400,000 new workers, reaching a total employee count of over 1.2 million. Throughout the pandemic, Amazon and other online technology companies have benefited handsomely from the onrush of demand from consumers seeking to avoid shopping for necessities at brick-and-mortar stores. According to Yahoo! Finance, stocks for the web retailer have shot up over 85 percent in the past year.

According to *Politico*, an anonymous administration official stated that the Biden White House was eying the prospect of "public, private and non-profit sectors working together to provide the solutions we need at the scale that we need them." Nancy Foster, vice president of quality and patient safety at the American Hospital Association, stated in the same article that "[w]e welcome announcements like this from Amazon

that will help get more shots into arms across the country," and its "expertise in managing significant logistical challenges."

Amazon and other corporate behemoths have responded to the United States government's disastrous efforts to deliver vaccines. The Biden administration is making plans to purchase over 300 million doses of the various vaccines which have recently come on line. According to CNBC, only half of the country's nearly 49 million vaccine doses have been successfully administered since their initial approval by the Food and Drug Administration in mid-December.

In statements earlier this week, Biden declared that delivery of the vaccine "is going to be a logistical challenge that exceeds anything we've ever tried in this country," adding that the country would achieve "herd immunity" by summer.

In addition to Amazon, other major retailers have also made offers to the Biden administration to assist in the vaccination program. Walmart, whose online retail sales have more than doubled during the pandemic, announced late last month that it was offering to have its "qualified, trained pharmacists and pharmacy staff to partner with community organizations to provide vaccination services at third party locations like churches, stadiums and youth centers." Starbucks and others have also weighed in, seeking opportunities to partner with the US government in the vaccination program.

In addition to aiding the US government's drive to return workers to job sites so that profits can once again begin flowing, Amazon and others are undoubtedly seeking to boost their brand and gain access to the lucrative healthcare and pharmaceutical markets. The deluge of offers from massive tech and retail businesses follows the efforts of logistics giants such as the United

Parcel Service and FedEx, who have already been tapped by the Trump administration to help in the distribution of the vaccine countrywide.

The announcement also comes after Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos' love letter to then-president-elect Biden in November, after the latter had begun forming a transition team packed with corporate representatives, including some from Amazon itself. Amazon's stock has increased by 11 percent since November.

The potential exists for the massive logistical and technical capacity expertise of the retail giant to be used for rapidly distributing vaccines and other public health necessities. However, there are doubts that such gestures will produce significant results. Aside from Amazon proposing that it transform its on-location testing sites into vaccination centers, retailers have offered few details about plans to assist the United States government.

Despite Amazon's efforts to present itself as a caring corporation, driven solely by concerns for public safety, its owners have raked in enormous profits during the last year, primarily at the expense of working people. After months of refusing to report the level of infections at its warehouses, the company admitted in October that nearly 20,000 of its workers had contracted COVID-19, an undoubted understatement.

Similar "offers" for help were made last spring by the auto industry, when the automakers were straining to beat back a rebellion of autoworkers which had shut down the industry for two months. The diversion of a tiny portion of the auto industry's manufacturing capacity to build a small number of ventilators and face shields, far below what was necessary to ramp up capacity in the nation's network to treat the seriously ill, was part of a PR push to get workers back into the plant and producing highly profitable pickup trucks and SUVs.

Many Amazon workers suspect that the company's offer to help with vaccine distributions is part of a similar ploy, a leader of the Amazon BWI2 Rank-and-File Safety Committee said in a public meeting hosted by the *World Socialist Web Site* this weekend.

As with the US government's pitiful response to the first wave last spring, which saw a criminal lack of everything from personal protective equipment (PPE) to breathing devices, the current vaccine rollout has all the markings of a similar botched effort. "[I]t is clear

the United States has not learned from its fractured pandemic response and risks repeating some of the same errors," said the *Washington Post* in a lengthy article describing the current vaccine rollout last month.

In a comment to *Politico*, Alex Harman of Public Citizen stated the job of vaccination delivery "is a governmental function... It might require partnerships here and there, it might entail commandeering of private resources occasionally, but the actual doing of logistics, and figuring out logistics, that's what government is for."

What Amazon and other retailers' gestures amount to is an admittance of American capitalism's inability to respond to any social crisis in a scientifically rational manner. Rather, the ruling class has seized on the pandemic in order to accelerate parasitic financial practices which have led to mass infection and death.



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