

US pandemic funding dries up as BA.2 Omicron subvariant spreads uncontrolled

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On Wednesday, the US House of Representatives passed a record \$1.5 trillion omnibus spending package which includes nearly \$800 billion in military spending and nothing for the COVID-19 pandemic, the most significant public health crisis in over a century.

At the last minute, \$15.6 billion in federal pandemic funds was completely removed from the bill due to opposition from over a dozen Democratic representatives from Michigan, Wisconsin, Florida, Ohio, Kansas, Missouri, Maine and other states after they learned that the COVID funds were not actually new money, but would be drawn from pandemic monies previously allocated to their states. The \$15.6 billion diversion of funds was secretly negotiated by the House Democratic leadership, whose own states would not have been impacted, likely in coordination with the White House.

While the \$15.6 billion would not have been new funding per se, its removal marks the cutoff of all federal funding for key components of the fight against the pandemic, including continued testing and the purchase of the anti-viral drug produced by Pfizer. This takes place just as the more infectious, immune-resistant and virulent BA.2 Omicron subvariant is spreading across the US and globally and causing surges in infections, hospitalizations and deaths in Hong Kong, England, Denmark and other countries. It also transpired the day before the “Deltacron” variant, a recombination of Delta and Omicron which has been detected in France, Denmark and the Netherlands, was officially recognized by the World Health Organization.

Summarizing the significance of the collapse of US pandemic funding, the Associated Press reported, “This could be the end of the line for congressional funding to fight COVID-19. What started a month ago as a \$30

billion request from the White House to prepare for the next phase of the pandemic has been slashed, reduced and fallen apart on Capitol Hill.”

A White House official told AP that the situation will be “dire,” adding, “Simply put, failing to take action now will have severe consequences for the American people.”

The official stated that COVID-19 testing capacity will decline in March. Funding to test and treat people who are uninsured will dry up in April. By May, the federal supply of monoclonal antibodies will run out. Preventative treatments for immunocompromised people will only last until July. The federal stockpile of antiviral pills such as Pfizer’s Paxlovid, which is highly effective at reducing hospitalizations, will be empty by September or earlier.

The Biden administration will now be unable to purchase further vaccine doses if a fourth shot is deemed necessary due to waning immunity. Already limited vaccine donations to other countries will be further hampered. Funding will not materialize to mass produce a much-hyped “pancoronavirus” vaccine which is currently in Phase 1 trials. By early summer, there will no longer be funding for federal studies on new coronavirus variants, treatments such as antivirals, and other measures to prepare for future surges.

The Biden administration’s “National COVID-19 Preparedness Plan,” released last week, which made grandiose claims that all of the above programs and more would be expanded in the coming weeks, stands exposed as so much hot air.

It is widely acknowledged that any standalone bill to provide additional federal funding for the pandemic and Biden’s “Preparedness Plan” will not pass the 60-vote threshold required in the Senate, where Republicans are cynically demanding that all prior pandemic funding be

fully accounted for before any new appropriations.

The “Preparedness Plan,” previewed by Biden in his State of the Union address, was always window dressing meant to provide cover for the Democrats’ complete capitulation to the pandemic revealed most sharply during the Omicron surge. Since mid-December, nearly 30 million Americans were officially infected with COVID-19 (not counting infections detected by at-home rapid tests) and over 160,000 have succumbed to the disease, with an average of 1,120 continuing to die each day. By the end of March, the official death toll in the US will surpass 1 million.

The Democrats will now blame the cutoff of federal pandemic funds on Republicans, but in reality, there is bipartisan agreement that the pandemic should be erased from public consciousness and all internal social tensions diverted outwards towards war with Russia.

Since mid-January, as the surge of infections from the BA.1 Omicron subvariant began to subside, the entire political establishment and corporate media have sought to present the pandemic as over. They have propagated the myth that COVID-19 is now “endemic” and that a “new normal” of stability and predictability now exists.

In reality, the pandemic continues to rage globally, with the BA.2 Omicron subvariant now dominant throughout much of the world and causing another surge in global daily new cases. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has analyzed, the “new normal” will be one of unending mass infections, deaths and long-term debilitation, forced upon society by a rapacious ruling elite that subordinates public health to private profit.

As a result of this propaganda effort, American society is once again totally unprepared for the next surge of the pandemic. Misled by the pro-corporate Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), millions of people have removed their masks and fully resumed pre-pandemic activities. Vaccination rates in the US have completely stalled, with only 65 percent of the population having received two doses of vaccine and only 28 percent having received a necessary third dose of vaccine.

While average daily new cases have declined significantly from the peak of 821,888 infections reached on January 13 to an average of 38,684 daily new cases this Wednesday, they are clearly plateauing and could begin surging once again in the coming

weeks. According to the CDC, as of March 5 the BA.2 subvariant accounted for 11.6 percent of all variants circulating in the US, nearly double the figure the week prior of 6.6 percent, meaning that by the end of March it will likely be dominant. In the Northeast states, BA.2 now accounts for 24 percent of all cases.

The disastrous pandemic policies of the entire American political establishment stem from the subordination of public health to the capitalist ruling class, which adamantly opposes lock-downs that would suspend the flow of profits and sees the decline in life expectancy as a positive good. Both the Democrats and Republicans are impervious to appeals from below and will only deepen their criminal and reckless pandemic policies.

The bipartisan support for the unprecedented military budget sharply expresses the nature of US imperialism, which is preparing for a direct confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia and China. The American working class must develop a powerful mass movement to both stop the drive to World War III and stop the pandemic, both of which require the socialist reorganization of world society.



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