

Future funding for COVID-19 testing and treatment “probably dead”

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The June 16 hearing on the federal response to COVID-19 made clear that Congress will not pass further funding for measures to blunt the impact of the pandemic, despite evidence of the growing dominance of the latest contagious and deadly B5 subvariant of Omicron in the United States.

The expiration of funding means that uninsured Americans may soon be forced to pay for testing, treatment, and vaccines out of pocket.

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Rochelle Walensky lamented during the hearing, “I’m deeply concerned that a lack of additional funding for other response activities will end or substantially scale back critical COVID response work.”

Republican Senator Mitt Romney of Utah’s remarks were seen as the death knell of the negotiations over continued COVID response funding.

The initial proposal of \$80 billion late last year was reduced to \$30 billion, by March to \$22 billion, and more recently to just \$10 billion, “but the deal collapsed as Democrats raised questions about the removal of international aid from the package and lawmakers of both parties objected to a separate plan to lift pandemic restrictions at the border,” according to the *Washington Post*.

Romney said, “I and a number of other members have worked over a number of months with members of this party and across the aisle to develop a supplemental bill to provide the \$10 billion to address this inability to purchase these things ... you can imagine my surprise when I find out that on June 8 the federal government did in fact prioritize \$5 billion for the purchase of additional vaccines and \$4.9 billion for therapeutics and \$300 million for additional monoclonal antibodies.”

He added, “But it chose not to do so in February, March, April, or May, citing the inability to do so. So, the administration has recklessly and unilaterally spent taxpayers’ money, we have runaway inflation, but instead of taking an accurate inventory of the funds they had at their disposal ... For the administration to provide information to

us that was patently false is something which dramatically attacks that trust that I have, members of my party and both parties have.”

Democratic Senator Patty Murray of Washington, the panel’s chair, had explained in her opening remarks, anticipating the criticism: “The fact the administration has had to resort to allocating resources from our long-term needs to keep our short-term response afloat—that’s not a solution. That’s a stopgap.”

Topher Spiro, associate director for health of the White House Office of Management and Budget, had said on Twitter, “To be clear, we were forced to divert dollars from next-generation vaccines and therapeutics, vaccine production, testing capacity, and PPE. These tradeoffs were necessary because Congress failed to act.”

What would happen if this funding were not secured?

Funding for next-generation vaccines, including mucosal and intranasal vaccines, which can potentially offer sterilizing immunity against infection, would fall aside. Research into therapeutics would suffer irrevocably. Testing capacity would implode while immune-evading new variants are ripping across the globe, even as global deaths begin to inch up again.

Research into the impact of Long COVID on the population and critical studies in pediatrics and MIS-C and long-term post-COVID surveillance of pregnant mothers would stall. The uninsured and underinsured would be left out of the arsenal of therapeutics that exist. The ability to purchase life-saving monoclonal antibody treatment, especially for immunocompromised individuals, would collapse. In short, it is the complete implosion of the fragmented public health infrastructure.

The working class must heed the warnings that the federal government and the politicians in both parties are incapable of any legitimate response to the pandemic. They have, from day one, discredited themselves by basing their strategy not on saving lives but on preserving and expanding corporate profits.

An internal analysis by the Biden administration’s

scientific advisory panel has warned that the fall and winter may bring a massive wave of infections and deaths. Meanwhile, Long COVID continues to afflict millions, leading to a mass disabling social crisis, which will have significant health consequences for the population and the crumbling health infrastructure.

Raymond James Financial Services, a premier investment management firm, sent a note to their clients after the hearings stating, “New COVID Funding Probably Dead: We are very skeptical more COVID money will be made available and believe the Administration will now need to move more quickly toward a system where COVID vaccines, treatments, and testing are provided through the traditional supply chain and purchasing apparatus in the US health system.”

During the hearing, no effort was made to place the pandemic in its appropriate social context and consider the clear, compelling case for a strategy of elimination of the virus, the only viable solution. The dominant policy of “learn to live with the virus” was never challenged and enjoyed bipartisan support. Not one senator or expert witness entertained to consider the lessons offered by China’s response to the pandemic in Shanghai. Instead, they persisted in their efforts to tarnish the country and allude to lab leak theories.

During the proceedings, CDC Director Rochelle Walensky, FDA Head Dr. Robert Califf, and the entire committee membership including Senators Bernie Sanders and Tim Kaine, who now suffers from Long COVID, spoke and participated in the nearly three-hour event without a mask, potentially making it another high visibility super spreading event.

At one point, Walensky, even after informing Republican Senator Susan Collins of Maine that numerous studies have demonstrated that mask mandates have decreased the number of infections, made everyone aware that no one was wearing a mask. One could have asked her why she ever rescinded previous mask mandates if they proved so effective?

Just one month ago, every media outlet and the Biden administration acknowledged that more than one million Americans had perished in less than two years of the pandemic. Walensky also informed the committee that cases across the country had been climbing. Currently, 67 percent of the population resides in counties with medium to high COVID transmission levels, twice the levels from a month ago.

The fact that President Biden’s chief medical adviser and director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, Dr. Anthony Fauci, was online and isolated at home because he had tested positive for COVID, was not

missed by the committee members who all sent him well wishes for a speedy recovery.

Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Xavier Becerra has tested positive for COVID twice in less than one month and is isolating at home. Should Walensky and Califf in the next two or three days test positive, it would mean that the entire leadership of public health would be positive for COVID simultaneously.

David North, chairman of the Socialist Equality Party, said on Twitter, “I will not be sending them get-well cards. They are deserving victims of the criminally irresponsible policies they have foisted upon the public. The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic is raging out of control, thanks to the deliberate dismantling of all anti-COVID measures.”

Throughout the hearing, Republican Senator Richard Burr of North Carolina, the ranking member of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, barraged the witnesses to provide him a plan, asking, “What is the end game?” He meant, when would HHS declare the emergency phase of the pandemic over.

Burr observed, “Let me say, we have removed all the mask requirements and eliminated testing requirements to enter the country. Title 42 is a CDC decision, and you said in your response to your letter to me that you were lifting it because... we have the tools, tests, and vaccinations; therefore, there is no longer a public health emergency.”

HHS must give a 60-day warning before it rescinds the emergency declaration. The implications would be considerable for the population, affecting coverage, costs and payment for COVID-19 testing, treatment and vaccines. Access to medical countermeasures like vaccines, tests, and treatments through FDA emergency use authorization would be affected, and coverage to health systems and providers would be removed.

It was made clear that there is no money for a pandemic that has killed millions across the globe and will continue to kill, but the billions to prosecute a dangerous war in Ukraine against a nuclear-armed Russia can be made readily available at the drop of a hat, with an unlimited purse string at their disposal and no questions asked. Burr speaks for Wall Street and the financial oligarchs when he asks what the endgame is. Clearly, the answer is, “Declare the pandemic over and get back to work!”



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