

Trump declares all-out war on public health and science

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In the first week of his return to power, Donald Trump has declared all-out war on science and public health as a core component of his fascist agenda in the service of the American oligarchy. The initial architect of the horrific “herd immunity” mass infection policy towards the COVID-19 pandemic, Trump is picking up where he left off four years ago and escalating far further.

Just in the past four days, Trump has withdrawn the US from the World Health Organization (WHO), imposed an unprecedented gag order on all 13 agencies that comprise the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and threatened to adjourn Congress to ensure that his numerous anti-public health nominees are installed through recess appointments.

These reckless actions, only a foretaste of what is to come, dramatically heighten the risk of future pandemics. At present, this danger emanates above all from the US, where the highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1 “bird flu”) has been spreading unchecked among poultry and dairy cattle for over a year, likely infecting hundreds of farmworkers across the country due to the Biden administration’s criminally negligent response.

While Trump and his fascist allies are spearheading the attacks on science and public health, this policy has bipartisan support. Just three days before Trump’s inauguration, the Biden administration cut off all funding and formally debarred EcoHealth Alliance Inc. for five years, as part of the fascist-led witch hunt of the organization’s former head Dr. Peter Daszak.

Both capitalist parties support the eugenicist policy of lowering life expectancy and clawing back all the social gains won by the working class in the 20th century. Alongside the destruction of public health, a central aim of the incoming administration is to gut all social spending, including plans to cut Medicaid by as much as \$2.3 trillion, which the Democrats will facilitate so long as Trump continues to fund the war against Russia in Ukraine. Already, Trump’s orders are estimated to have revoked or affected health insurance for upwards of 20 million

Americans.

His renewed assault on public health began within hours of his inauguration. Among the flurry of executive orders signed Monday, which centered on attacking immigrants, reversing environmental protections and erecting the scaffolding of a police state in the US, Trump also withdrew the US from the WHO, the world’s top public health agency.

This move will have far-reaching consequences, as the US supplies roughly 15 percent of the funding for the WHO, whose work is critical in tracking emerging infectious diseases and potential spillover events globally that could spark the next pandemic. Furthermore, once the withdrawal takes effect the US will no longer be obligated to report such outbreaks that occur domestically, effectively creating blackout conditions that will allow any and all pathogens to spread freely from the United States to other countries in the world.

This blackout greatly endangers the American population as well. The following day the Trump administration imposed the sweeping gag order upon all 13 HHS agencies, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and other pivotal agencies that monitor, research and report on infectious diseases.

The order, which will last at least through the end of the month and potentially far longer, has vast implications. The CDC has suspended publication of all science reports, including on the spread of bird flu, the crucial Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) and reports on COVID-19 wastewater levels, among the last available data sources to track the spread of the ongoing pandemic.

At present, the US is mired in its tenth COVID-19 wave, with the most recent wastewater estimates indicating that over 500,000 Americans are being infected each day. Hospitals across the country are currently slammed with a “quad-demic” of patients infected with COVID-19, seasonal flu, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and norovirus.

An anonymous federal health official told the *Washington*

Post that before the gag order was imposed, the CDC planned to publish several MMWR reports this week, including three pertaining to the H5N1 bird flu outbreak.

The timing could not be worse. Last year, the US reported 66 official H5N1 bird flu cases, the second-highest figure historically for any country. Due to inadequate testing, it is likely hundreds of cases went undetected. For months, scientists have repeatedly warned of the growing danger that people could be infected at the same time by seasonal flu and bird flu. This co-infection could cause the reassortment of genes and enable bird flu, currently transmissible to humans only from infected animals and birds, to gain the seasonal flu's capability for human-to-human transmission. This evolutionary process could very well be taking place now without anyone knowing, and if such spread were to take place, under Trump's new rules, no public health agency would even be able to report it.

On June 15, 2020, Trump infamously summarized his administration's contempt for public health, stating, "If we stop testing right now, we'd have very few cases, if any." Under Biden, this ethos of covering up the ongoing pandemic was entrenched, culminating in the scrapping of the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) declaration in May 2023. Over 1 million excess deaths took place under Biden's watch, roughly doubling the 500,000 that took place under Trump.

This bipartisan criminal cover-up has now reached its logical conclusion in Trump's efforts to suppress all public health data reporting. The mantra of Trump 2.0 is: "If we stop all reporting on infectious diseases right now, no one will know what is killing them."

Significantly, Trump's executive order cutting off WHO funding shifts responsibility for managing future pandemics to the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, his fascist ally Michael Waltz, who will "establish directorates and coordinating mechanisms within the National Security Council apparatus as he deems necessary and appropriate to safeguard public health and fortify biosecurity." In other words, the next pandemic will be addressed with police state measures and the deployment of the military.

The next volley of the new regime's assault on public health came on Thursday, during the Senate confirmation hearings for Trump's nominee to head the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Brooke Rollins. A close ally of Trump who headed his America First Policy Institute, Rollins is a longtime shill for the agribusiness, meat and dairy industries, whose leading business associations collectively endorsed her nomination last week.

Like her Democratic predecessor Tom Vilsack, Rollins will do nothing to prevent the deepening spread of bird flu

among poultry or cattle across the US, as this would impinge on the profits of her industry allies. At her confirmation hearing, Rollins was praised by senators from both parties and faced no serious questioning about how she would handle the spread of bird flu among farmworkers, poultry and cattle.

The worst is yet to come. Next Wednesday, Senate confirmation hearings will begin for Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Trump's pick for HHS Secretary. Kennedy is one of the "Disinformation Dozen," those identified by public health groups as most responsible for spreading anti-vaccine disinformation on social media throughout the pandemic and well before. He is culpable in the deaths of millions globally. When in power, he will spout pseudoscience, denigrate vaccines, and encourage the consumption of raw milk, known to hasten the spread of bird flu.

In the off chance that Kennedy's appointment is delayed by the Democrats or actually defeated (a possibility mainly because of Christian fundamentalist opposition to his past support for reproductive rights), Trump has already threatened to make recess appointments to push Kennedy and his other public health nominees, along with fascists like Pete Hegseth. While this would likely trigger legal appeals, these would eventually wind up in the far-right Supreme Court, which last July effectively overturned the Constitution and granted the president dictatorial powers.

The coming shocks of the Trump administration in the domain of public health, including the growing threat of a bird flu pandemic, the resurgence of long eliminated pathogens like measles, and the ongoing impact of COVID-19, will profoundly destabilize American society and accelerate the radicalization of the working class.

The very survival of humanity depends upon the building of a socialist movement, uniting workers, youth and principled layers of the middle class, including scientists and other healthcare professionals. Only the revolutionary transformation of society on the basis of economic planning can ensure the expansion of public health, the prevention of future pandemics and the defense of science.



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