

US Conference of Mayors survey shows severe lack of equipment to combat coronavirus pandemic

By Bryan Dyne
2 April 2020

A survey conducted by the US Conference of Mayors and released on Friday documents the urgent need by cities across the country for medical equipment and supplies to care for those infected by the coronavirus and for testing kits to contain the accelerating pandemic. With coronavirus cases in the United States topping 210,000 and the death toll approaching 5,000, including more than 800 deaths just in the last day, the survey makes clear that there is no region in any state prepared to deal with the crisis.

The exponential spread of the pandemic is underscored by comparing the situation as of Wednesday with the situation just one month ago. At that time, the US had suffered two deaths and the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases was 89. Virtually all projections, moreover, say that the country is only on the cusp of an acceleration whose apex is still several weeks away.

New York State continues to be the most hard-hit region, with 83,712 cases (now more than China) and 1,941 deaths. This includes 7,729 new cases and 227 new reported deaths.

The survey covered 213 cities in 42 states and territories, which are home to a total of 42 million people and include areas with populations ranging from 2,000 to 3.8 million people. This includes 45 cities with a population below 50,000 and six with populations greater than one million. Among the cities surveyed are some of the most inundated metropolitan regions, including Detroit, New Orleans, San Francisco and Las Vegas.

In summary, the responses from the cities show that:

- 92.1 percent do not have enough test kits to trace and contain the pandemic in their region
- 91.5 percent of cities do not have enough masks for either first responders or medical personnel
- 88.2 percent do not have enough other personal protective equipment for these workers
- 85 percent do not have enough ventilators to keep severely and critically ill patients alive
- 62.4 percent have received no emergency supplies from their state

This snapshot of the utter failure of the richest country in the world, with by far the greatest collection of billionaires, to mount an effective and coordinated response to the virus is an unanswerable indictment of the entire political and economic system of capitalism. The naked indifference, ignorance and

cruelty of the president, Donald Trump, is only the most concentrated and odious expression of the outlook that prevails within the ruling elite and both of its political parties.

Some cities provided estimates of what they need to fight the disease outbreaks in their cities. These include:

- 28.5 million face masks
- 24.4 million other PPE items
- 7.9 million test kits
- 139,000 ventilators

New York City, the current epicenter of the contagion in the US, did not respond to the survey, meaning the actual need across the country could be double or more what is reported.

What cities and states are being promised by the Trump administration is a mere fraction of these needs, and the majority of urgently needed supplies are still weeks if not months away.

These numbers are an indication of what is to come in cities across the country. The Trump administration is currently projecting a “best-case” scenario of between 100,000 and 240,000 coronavirus deaths in the US—already a human and social catastrophe—and calling this a “good” outcome. But the disastrous lack of medical supplies around the country suggests that many times that figure will die as cities and states are overwhelmed by the disease and are unable to provide even basic medical care to those infected, or protection to doctors, nurses, medical staff and first responders.

The survey also sheds light on the chaotic distribution of goods from the federal to local and state governments. When asked about its materials on hand, Montgomery, Alabama responded that the masks it received had expired despite having been approved by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Of these, 13 percent were dry rotted.

Los Angeles has separately reported that the 170 ventilators it received from the federal government arrived broken and had to be fixed. Illinois Governor J. B. Pritzker announced that instead of getting a shipment of 300,000 N95 respiratory masks, his state was instead sent thousands of surgical masks, which are far less effective in preventing infection.

Moreover, mayors and governors are complaining that they are being forced to bid against one another as well as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to buy equipment on the market, resulting in price gouging that pushes up costs by

factors of five-fold, ten-fold or more.

None of this information on the dire situation facing the American people made its way into yesterday's White House Coronavirus Task Force briefing. The event opened not with the state of the pandemic, but with "Commander in Chief" Donald Trump, flanked by Defense Secretary Mark Esper, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley, other uniformed military brass and Attorney General William Barr, announcing an "enhanced counter-narcotics operation" in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific Ocean, targeting Venezuela.

During the second part of the press conference, Trump continued to make the false claim that, "Nobody could have known a thing like this could happen," despite the fact that his administration was well aware of the possibility. It is reported, for example, that Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar altered the National Security Council as early as January 3 of the dire implications for the US of the coronavirus outbreak in China.

Vice President Mike Pence in an interview earlier Wednesday on CNN claimed that Trump never underestimated the threat represented by the virus and instead blamed the delay in responding on the CDC and China. He said that "in mid-January the CDC was still assessing that the risk of the coronavirus to the American people was low," and added, "The reality is that we could've been better off if China had been more forthcoming."

At no point during the press conference did Trump express sympathy for the families of the dead or the hundreds of thousands infected. Instead, he boasted of the "11 companies making ventilators right now," singling out Ford and GM. No mention was made of the unsafe and virus-infected conditions being imposed on their workers. He went on to tout a new "big order from WalMart" for medical supplies and the purchase of "2.2 million gowns for the national stockpile from [Ohio-based] Cardinal Health."

As the survey of the country's mayors shows, 2.2 million gowns are about a tenth of what is actually needed to keep medical workers safe from the virus. But none of the members of the servile press even brought up the damning report by the US Conference of Mayors, or any other the other multitudinous and tragic facts that expose the absurd and lying presentations given out daily by the White House.

Instead, Anthony Fauci and Deborah Birx, the medical figureheads aiding and abetting the criminal indifference of the task force, continued to promote the newly expanded "social distancing" guidelines from the White House. What they did not say is that while such actions can slow the spread of the virus, they do nothing to ultimately stop the pandemic from continuing.

As the World Health Organization has repeatedly stressed, "measures that increase social distancing such as canceling sporting events may help to reduce transmission," but the only way to properly fight the pandemic and prevent a resurgence of the virus is to "find, isolate, test and treat every case, to break the chains of transmission."

Fauci said that at some point, "I think it makes sense that you are going to have to relax social distancing. The one thing we hopefully would have in place, and I think we will have in place, is a much more robust system to be able to identify someone

who's infected, isolate them and do contact tracing. Because if you have a really good program of containment, that prevents you from ever having to get into mitigation."

In other words, there will "hopefully" be in the future the infrastructure needed to know exactly who is infected and isolate and treat those individuals. In the meantime, however, the government has essentially given up on testing and contact tracing. Its guidelines themselves tell people to stay home if they are sick, rather than get tested, and local health officials are testing only those who require hospitalization.

Fauci is arguing, in effect, that instead of training new workers for the public health system and providing them the tools necessary to track the virus, tens or hundreds of millions of people should accept the fact that they will get infected and possibly die.

Nor was any mention made of the colossal sums of money, more than 6 trillion dollars, to be handed over to the corporations and banks under the massive bailout bill passed by Congress last week in a near-unanimous bipartisan vote. In contrast, a mere pittance has been allotted to hospitals under siege from the pandemic and only temporary and completely inadequate aid to workers who face the loss of their jobs and livelihoods.

This must be categorically rejected by the working class. Alongside the urgent need for the medical equipment and personnel to provide the necessary care for those infected, there must be a clear plan that includes a robust, well designed and international strategy to test broadly and identify the silent movement of the infection deep in the community.

The resources exist to combat the pandemic and save untold numbers of lives. But the allocation of those resources requires the independent, mass mobilization of the working class in opposition to the ruling elite that monopolizes the wealth produced by the workers. The struggle against the pandemic is inseparable from a struggle against capitalism.

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