

The coronavirus conspiracy: What did they know, and when did they know it?

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The release by *Washington Post* reporter Bob Woodward of tapes showing that Trump deliberately misled the public over the COVID-19 pandemic has cast light on a massive conspiracy at the highest levels of the American state to cover up the threat posed by the disease.

In the tapes published by Woodward, the president admits to lying to the public as part of a criminal policy that has already taken the lives of nearly 200,000 people. But it is clear that he did not act alone.

Richard Nixon's abortive effort to break into the Watergate hotel to ransack Democratic Party files pales in comparison with the present crime, which involves preventable death on a massive scale. But the bigger the crime, the bigger must be the group of conspirators. Unlike the Watergate conspiracy, which involved just a handful of people, the coverup surrounding the pandemic involves not just the president, but his cabinet, the federal bureaucracy, the intelligence agencies, Congress and the media.

The watchword of the Watergate investigation that led to the resignation of Nixon in 1974 was "What did the president know, and when did he know it?" Today, the same question must be asked of every institution of the American political establishment: "What did they know, and when did they know it?"

January

Throughout the month of January, the number of new COVID-19 cases in the Chinese province of Hubei grew steadily, reaching a peak at the end of the month. The city of Wuhan, with its hospital system totally overrun, was put under lockdown, with residents allowed out only to buy groceries.

As demonstrated by Trump's description of his phone call with Chinese President Xi Jinping, Chinese authorities were as transparent with US officials as they were with the public health community, precisely explaining the disease's method of transmission, its fatality rate and the measures necessary to contain it.

According to subsequent studies, community transmission was likely already occurring in the United States by early January. But despite the availability of a COVID-19 test from the World Health Organization, no tests were conducted in the US during the entire month of January, according to figures from the COVID Tracking Project.

On January 24, the Senate Health Committee and Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a closed-door briefing, open to all senators, on the COVID-19 outbreak. Committee staffers told the WWSW that no records were kept of the content of or attendance at the meeting. However, media reports indicate that Senate Intelligence Chairman Richard Burr and Senator Kelly Loeffler attended.

Emerging from the hearing, Dr. Anthony Fauci told reporters, "I don't think this is something that the United States public should be worried or frightened about." He added, "I think the risk is very low right now for the United States."

Whatever was said in private at the hearing, Loeffler did not get the same message as Fauci communicated publicly. Beginning immediately after the hearing, Loeffler began selling stock in the first of 29 stock

transactions lasting several weeks. While she dumped stocks that lost value, she purchased shares in the online meeting firm Citrix, whose business boomed during the pandemic.

On January 28, according to Woodward's account, Trump was told by his national security adviser, Robert C. O'Brien, "This will be the biggest national security threat you face in your presidency... This is going to be the roughest thing you face."

Woodward's reporting is consistent with an account published in the *Washington Post* on March 20, which reported that lawmakers were repeatedly and extensively briefed about the danger posed by the pandemic.

US intelligence agencies were issuing ominous, classified warnings in January and February about the global danger posed by the coronavirus while President Trump and lawmakers played down the threat and failed to take action that might have slowed the spread of the pathogen, according to US officials familiar with spy agency reporting.

The article continued:

Taken together, the reports and warnings painted an early picture of a virus that showed the characteristics of a globe-encircling pandemic that could require governments to take swift actions to contain it. But despite that constant flow of reporting, Trump continued publicly and privately to play down the threat the virus posed to Americans. Lawmakers, too, did not grapple with the virus in earnest until this month [that is, March]...

Intelligence agencies "have been warning on this since January," said a US official who had access to intelligence reporting that was disseminated to members of Congress and their staffs as well as to officials in the Trump administration, and who, along with others, spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe sensitive information.

February

No systematic testing for COVID-19 took place until the very end of February, despite the fact that the first US fatality had already occurred. During the month, Reuters reported that the Senate Intelligence Committee was receiving "daily" updates "monitoring the spread of the illness around the world."

Between January 31 and February 18, Dianne Feinstein, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, sold between \$1.5 million and \$6 million worth of stock. On February 13, Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Richard Burr sold between \$628,000

and \$1.72 million in stock, unloading shares in hotel chains that would see their stock plunge as a result of the pandemic.

On February 27, Burr secretly told a group of affluent Washington insiders at a private club known as the Tar Heel Circle, who paid as much as \$10,000 per year for membership, that the pandemic would be much more severe than the public was being told. "There's one thing that I can tell you about this: It is much more aggressive in its transmission than anything that we have seen in recent history," he said, according to a secret recording of the remarks obtained by NPR. "It is probably more akin to the 1918 pandemic."

These statements flatly contradicted the tone of a public op-ed he wrote just three days earlier, in which he declared that the US was "better prepared than ever before" to respond to a pandemic. Burr would subsequently resign as chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee in response to the revelation.

As the senators were dumping their stock, there was still no testing occurring, even with widespread community transmission in the US. The first batch of COVID-19 tests occurred on February 29.

Throughout the months of January and February, leading figures within the Democratic Party observed an airtight silence on the pandemic. This was in line with the posture of the *New York Times*, which did not write a single editorial on the subject between January 29 and February 29.

The embargo appears to have been lifted approximately on February 25-27. The Twitter accounts of Nancy Pelosi and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, which had not posted a single statement about the outbreak for the first seven weeks of the year, all tweeted about the virus during that timespan. Joe Biden also tweeted, declaring, "If I were president today, I would not be taking China's word when it comes to the coronavirus."

March

In March, the floodgates opened, as testing began to come online, and the number of documented US cases surged from less than a hundred to more than 200,000. But it was not until approximately March 14 that widespread lockdowns began in the United States. Columbia University estimates that if lockdowns had begun just two weeks earlier, on March 1, 83 percent of the country's COVID-19 deaths could have been avoided.

On March 19, Trump told journalist Bob Woodward that he was deliberately misleading the American public about the danger. Trump said, "I wanted to always play it down. I still like playing it down, because I don't want to create a panic."

On March 14, the Socialist Equality Party published a statement titled, "Shut down the auto industry to halt the spread of coronavirus!" which circulated widely inside the auto plants of the American Midwest.

Over the following week, a series of wildcat strikes forced the shutdown of the entire US auto industry, with Fiat Chrysler announcing the end of production on March 18. Trump's interview with Woodward occurred the next day, as the markets were near their lows for the year after the Dow Jones Industrial Average had dropped close to 10,000 points.

The first procedural vote on what would become the CARES Act took place on March 22. After that vote failed, the Dow futures hit their downward limit. Another procedural vote failed on March 23, after which the markets reached their low for the year.

On March 25, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell announced an agreement on the CARES Act. The Senate unanimously passed the bill that evening, and the House followed with an unrecorded voice vote. The bill was signed by Trump within just five days of the first procedural vote.

On the same day as the first procedural vote for the CARES Act, and within just a week of the beginning of widespread lockdowns, *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman published "A Plan to Get America Back to Work," arguing for letting the virus run rampant through the population and a policy of "herd immunity."

Trump immediately began agitating for an end to the lockdowns, just one week after they had begun in earnest, using Friedman's phrase, "The cure can't be worse than the disease." Immediately, states began the campaign to end lockdowns, aided by media accounts that pointed to relatively small right-wing "reopen the country" rallies and declared that Americans were sick of restrictions and demanding a return to work, despite polls to the contrary.

By mid-May, manufacturing activity had resumed in every state, and over the subsequent months, effectively all restrictions were dropped, culminating with the reopening of indoor dining in New York and gyms in Michigan this week, alongside the nationwide reopening of schools and universities.

Public health officials blamed the major resurgence of the pandemic on the premature ending of lockdowns, which, according to Fauci and others, were far shallower and shorter than they were in Europe.

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By the beginning of next week, more than 200,000 people will have died in the United States from COVID-19. These deaths were the result of a conspiracy to place profits over human lives.

It is clear that everyone was in on this conspiracy except the broad mass of the population. The intelligence agencies warned the politicians, both in the White House and in Congress. The politicians warned their well-heeled backers.

Among those deceived were Trump's deluded followers among sections of the middle class and working class, whom Trump secretly despises and whose lives mean nothing to him. The people now lying in mass graves on Hart Island, the human beings whose bodies were defiled by being piled in refrigerated trucks in the Bronx, or in the spare rooms of Sinai Grace hospital in Detroit—they were left out.

In an editorial published Thursday, the *New York Times*, responding to the Woodward tapes, commented, "Imagine what this picture could look like today had the president been honest with the American public on Feb. 7."

Obviously, Trump was not "honest" with the American people. But neither was the *Times* editorial board. Everything of which they accuse Trump, they themselves are guilty.

The *World Socialist Web Site* was not a party to this conspiracy.

Unlike Congress, we were not receiving daily briefings on the pandemic from the intelligence agencies. But we were able to make the necessary warnings because our aim was to reveal, not to conceal. On January 28, we warned, "The outbreak has exposed the enormous vulnerability of contemporary society to new strains of infectious disease, dangers for which no capitalist government has adequately prepared."

We added, "While the governments of the world, particularly the United States, have made meticulous plans for large-scale war during the past quarter-century, no such resources or forethought have been devoted to combating the rash of epidemics that have plagued the planet over the same period."

The next month, the WSWS rang the alarm louder. "The danger cannot be overstated," the International Committee of the Fourth International warned on February 28. "[T]he US government is completely unprepared for a major outbreak," the statement declared, calling for "a massive allocation of resources for health care and treatment."

Those who lied about the pandemic in January, February and March are still lying to this day. Every claim made by the government, including of an imminent vaccine, must be treated with extreme suspicion.

The conspiracy continues. Students are being herded into classrooms at universities and schools throughout the country, fueling what is universally expected to be a major resurgence of the pandemic. According to one projection from the University of Washington, another 200,000 people are expected to die by the end of the year, doubling the current death toll.

In the coming period, the *World Socialist Web Site* will do everything in its power to avert this catastrophe by arming workers with the knowledge and political consciousness to organize a struggle against the ruling class's homicidal back-to-work campaign.

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To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>