

March 5, 2020

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

The undersigned organizations representing healthcare providers, patients, public health experts, workers, people of faith, and consumers are committed to promoting public health. We write to ask you to ensure that vaccines or treatments for coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) developed with U.S. taxpayer dollars are reasonably priced and available to everyone. The U.S. government must not allow pharmaceutical corporations to price-gouge us for a federally-funded treatment or vaccine by giving away monopolies.

Last week, Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar refused to guarantee that vaccines or therapeutics developed with public support would be affordable for all.¹ The following day, Secretary Azar tried to backtrack:^{2,3}

“We will work to ensure, because this is a joint venture that will be under contract with HHS, we will work to ensure that there are appropriate protections to ensure the affordability of any vaccine produced out of joint-venture work that taxpayers are funding as part of these cooperative ventures through our BARDA.”

Vague assurances are not enough. We need clear and firm commitments across all funding agencies, and for all types of products. Specifically, we call on your administration to require open, non-exclusive licenses. All manufacturers who can produce high-quality products and commit to reasonable pricing should be allowed to develop vaccines and treatments. At a minimum, your administration must require reasonable pricing globally through clear and well-defined conditions in all coronavirus government grants, contracts and licensing arrangements.

¹ House Committee on Energy and Commerce. “Hearing on the Fiscal Year 2021 HHS Budget and Oversight of the Coronavirus,” February 26, 2020. <https://energycommerce.house.gov/committee-activity/hearings/updated-hearing-on-the-fiscal-year-2021-hhs-budget-and-oversight-of-the>

² House Committee on Ways and Means. “Proposed Fiscal Year 2021 Budget with Health and Human Services Secretary Azar,” February 27, 2020. <https://youtu.be/CCuukfMskHU>

³ Secretary Azar reiterated this claim in a letter to Rep. Schakowsky, stating “[g]overnment scientists invented some of the vaccine’s critical aspects and, as part of any agreement with our private sector partners, we intend to work with them to ensure the price that they charge the government for the vaccine is affordable for taxpayers and patients.”

Public funding has played a pivotal role in biopharmaceutical research and development (R&D) to combat coronaviruses. Since 2002, taxpayers have spent nearly \$700 million.⁴ This substantial public investment has been instrumental in laying the groundwork for the COVID-19 response. Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), has said “[e]verything we’ve learned with working with coronaviruses, with SARS and MERS, are helping us very rapidly get a jump on things with regard to this new virus.”⁵ Since the outbreak, the government has provided new subsidies to Regeneron, Johnson & Johnson, and Sanofi for COVID-19.^{6,7,8} Your administration is now asking for more than a billion dollars more to accelerate vaccine development.⁹

Taxpayers should not have to pay twice.

The imperative of requiring reasonable pricing and access is not just a matter of avoiding profiteering, it’s a matter of public health urgency. If monopoly pricing of pharmaceutical companies inhibits access around the world, it will hinder our response to what could turn into a global pandemic.

We look forward to your response and hope that you will not allow pharmaceutical corporation price gouging to threaten public health at this critical moment.

Sincerely,

National and International Organizations

Public Citizen

1,000 Days

Action Center on Race & the Economy (ACRE)

Affordable Insulin Now

Alliance for a Just Society

Alliance for Retired Americans

American Federation of Teachers

American Medical Student Association (AMSA)

American Muslim Health Professionals (AMHP)

Americans for Democratic Action

Caring Across

Center for Popular Democracy

⁴ Public Citizen, “Blind Spot: How the COVID-19 Outbreak Shows the Limits of Pharma’s Monopoly Model,” February 20, 2020. <https://www.citizen.org/article/blind-spot/>

⁵ Bloomberg Law. “Coronavirus Vaccine Candidate Eyed for Human Trials by April,” January 22, 2020. <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/health-law-and-business/coronavirus-vaccine-candidate-eyed-for-human-trials-by-april>

⁶ U.S. Government, Department of Health and Human Services. “HHS, Regeneron Collaborate to Develop 2019-nCoV Treatment,” February 4, 2020. <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2020/02/04/hhs-regeneron-collaborate-to-develop-2019-ncov-treatment.html>

⁷ U.S. Government, Department of Health and Human Services. “HHS, Janssen Collaborate To Develop Coronavirus Therapeutics,” February 18, 2020. <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2020/02/18/hhs-janssen-collaborate-to-develop-coronavirus-therapeutics.html>

⁸ U.S. Government, Department of Health and Human Services. “HHS Engages Sanofi’s Recombinant Technology for 2019 Novel Coronavirus Vaccine,” February 18, 2020. <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2020/02/18/hhs-engages-sanofis-recombinant-technology-for-2019-novel-coronavirus-vaccine.html>

⁹ Nancy Cook & Caitlin Emma. *Politico*. “Trump sending coronavirus budget request to Congress,” February 24, 2020. <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/02/24/trump-coronavirus-budget-request-117275>

Coalition on Human Needs
Community Catalyst
Consumer Action
Doctors for America
END AIDS NOW
Families USA
Health Care for America Now (HCAN)
Health Care Voter
Health GAP (Global Access Project)
Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR)
Justice in Aging
Knowledge Ecology International
Lower Drug Prices Now
MoveOn
National Association of Social Workers

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Niskanen Center
Other98
Oxfam America
People's Action
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Shriver Center on Poverty Law
Social Security Works
The Democracy Collaborative
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
Treatment Action Group
Universal Health Care Action Network (UHCAN)
Universities Allied for Essential Medicines (UAEM)
Voices for Progress

State and Local Organizations

Action North Carolina
Battle Born Progress
Big Sky55+
Black Women Rising
Children's Defense Fund - Texas
Citizen Action New York
Citizen Action of Illinois
Citizen Action of Wisconsin
Faith in Indiana
Florida Black Women's Roundtable
Granite State Progress
Hometown Action
Hoosier Action
Jane Addams Senior Caucus
Keystone Research Center
Main Street Alliance

Maine People's Alliance
Missouri Jobs with Justice
New Jersey Citizen Action
Pennsylvania Budget & Policy Center
Pennsylvania Health Access Network (PHAN)
Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada
Rights and Democracy Vermont
Tennessee Citizen Action
The 99% Pennsylvania campaign
United Action for Idaho
United Vision for Idaho
Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut
Washington CAN
West Virginia Citizen Action Group

CC: The Honorable Michael R. Pence, Vice President of the United States
The Honorable Alex M. Azar II, Secretary of Health and Human Services
The Honorable Dr. Francis Collins, Director of the National Institutes of Health
The Honorable Dr. Robert Kadlec, Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response
Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
Dr. Rick Bright, Director of the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority