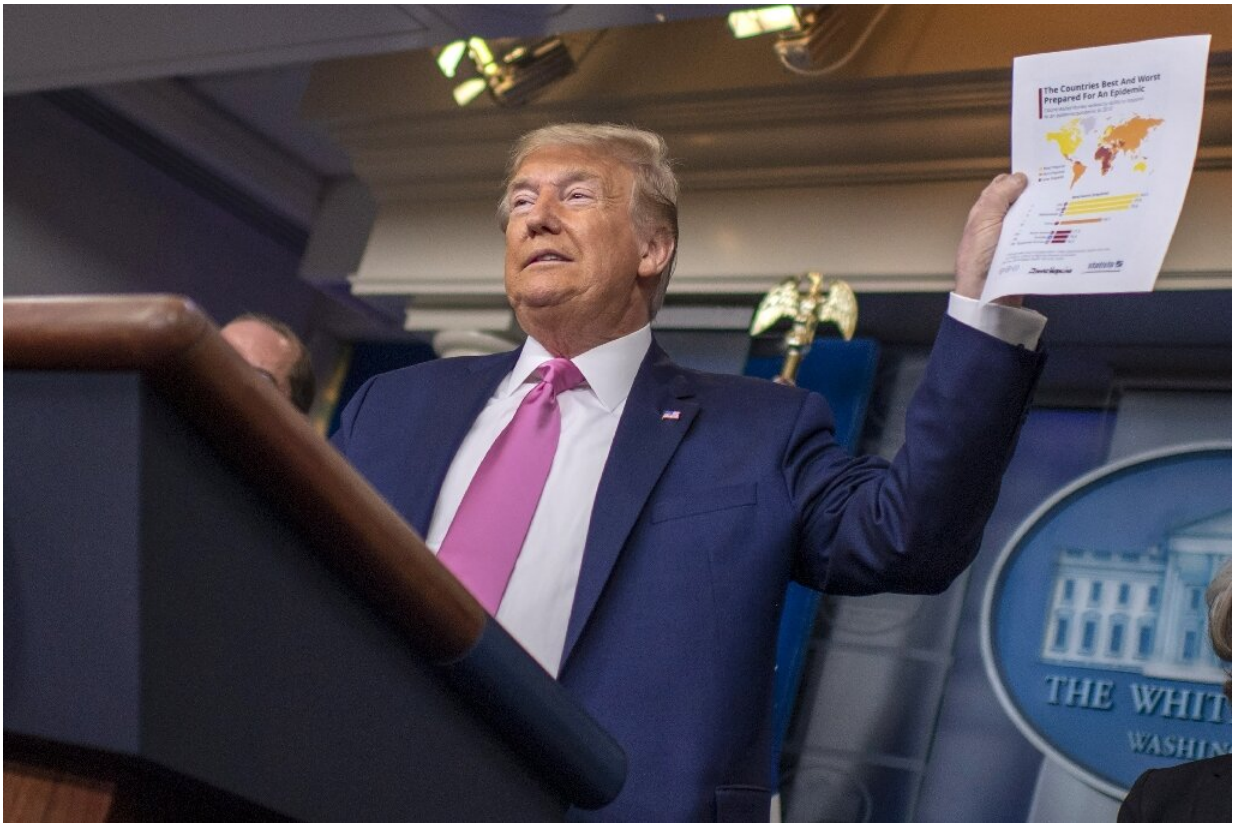


Trump mulls travel bans on Italy, S. Korea over coronavirus

February 27 2020, by Issam Ahmed



US President Donald Trump holds up a document showing "countries best and worst prepared for an epidemic" during a news conference on the COVID-19 outbreak at the White House on February 26, 2020

Donald Trump said Wednesday he was considering travel restrictions on

Italy and South Korea over coronavirus fears, as he sought to reassure Americans worried about the epidemic.

But a short while after an upbeat press conference by the US president, [health authorities](#) said they had detected the first case of unknown origin in the country, signaling that the virus may be spreading within communities.

"I think that there's a chance that it could get worse, a chance it could get fairly substantially worse, but nothing's inevitable," Trump told reporters at the White House.

He appointed Vice President Mike Pence to lead the response to the disease.

Trump's messaging was a step back from a senior health official who a day earlier had urged Americans to be prepared to cancel mass gatherings and said schools and businesses should look at developing teleworking plans.

"It's not so much a question of if this will happen anymore, but rather more a question of exactly when this will happen," the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Nancy Messonnier said on Tuesday, citing the global spread of the virus that has now infected 80,000 people and killed more than 2,700, mostly in China.

As of Wednesday, there were 60 cases in the United States—15 detected through the public health system and 45 repatriated from abroad, either from a cruise ship off Japan or from Wuhan, the Chinese city where the first cases were identified.

The CDC said the latest case in California "did not have relevant travel history or exposure to another known patient"—meaning it could

represent the first instance of "community spread" in the US, though this was not yet confirmed.

Community spread means spread of an illness for which the source of the infection is unknown.

'We may do it'

Foreign nationals traveling from China within the past two weeks are currently banned from entering the US, and Trump said more countries could be added to the list.

"At the right time we may do it, right now it's not the right time," he said in response to a reporter's question about South Korea and Italy.



Trump's briefing came after US lawmakers accused the administration of downplaying the crisis and underfunding the response

South Korea has almost 1,600 cases, the highest outside China, while Italy has 400. Both countries have reported 12 deaths.

"Italy is, you know, a deeper problem, and we're checking people coming in very, very strongly from those and at some point we may cut that off," Trump added.

On Wednesday night the State Department raised its travel advisory caution level for South Korea to the second-highest, now urging Americans to reconsider traveling there.

Trump added that Vice President Mike Pence had been assigned to lead coordination of the government's response and would report back to him, taking over the role from Health Secretary Alex Azar.

Extra funding

The president's briefing came after US lawmakers accused the administration of downplaying the crisis and underfunding the response.

On Monday, the White House asked Congress to make at least \$2.5 billion available for preparedness and response, including developing treatments and vaccines and buying equipment for a strategic national stockpile.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said the figure was "too little and too late," proposing \$8.5 billion instead. Trump later told reporters

he would be happy to accept more money.

The president also took to Twitter earlier in the day to insist his administration is "doing a GREAT job," blaming the media for trying to stoke fear in a tweet in which he spelled the name of the virus incorrectly.

"Low Ratings Fake News MSDNC (Comcast) & @CNN are doing everything possible to make the Caronavirus look as bad as possible, including panicking markets, if possible," he wrote, using a derogatory acronym for the MSNBC network.

Wall Street stocks finished mostly lower Wednesday, stabilizing somewhat after a two-session rout, with worries growing over the economic impact of the [coronavirus](#) epidemic.

US officials have also voiced fears for the supply of drugs because a high proportion of ingredients used to make medicine comes from China.

In addition, personal protective equipment, such as face masks, respirators and gowns, have been identified as being among products at risk of shortages because of potential panic buying.

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