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[The Coronavirus Big Pharma Money Scam](#)

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The Pharma-lobby spent over \$460 million in DC last year--so as Coronavirus fears spike, drug companies prepare to line their pockets, as they regularly do.

With the climbing death toll and incidence of COVID-19, it may appear tempting to throw money into the hands of all-too-eager pharmaceutical executives, whilst hoping the virus dissipates at the sight of the almighty taxpayer dollar.

It's the Coronavirus Big Pharma Money Scam.

Before we line Big Pharma's coffers once again, let's at least make sure most of that money finds its way back to the people footing the bill.

The problem taxpayers face with every disease scare, e.g Bird flu, SARS, Swine flu, Ebola, is a familiar cycle. First, we allow speculation-based terror to strangle the public discourse; as a result, gargantuan sums of cash get funneled into pharmaceutical conglomerates on the taxpayer dime--which then results in vaccines sold at a massive profit to a population that reaps minimal return.

This is not to suggest that the Coronavirus is benign and/or harmless. Not at all.

However, the pharmaceutical industry has a vested interest in profiting off government funds that results when fear overcomes reason and the voices of scientists are drowned out by pharma reps. When experts are ignored in lieu of pharma-lobby induced terror, we risk an egregious waste of taxpayer dollars.

While we chew our nails over the 70 U.S deaths so far, it should be stressed that 20,000 Americans have died from the flu alone this season. Last year over 34,000 Americans died from influenza, and that is only half as much as the year before.

For comparison, for H1N1, we poured \$8 billion into that scare. To no one's surprise, the pharma industry walked away with a healthy payday.

Congress is currently pouring billions into a vaccine effective over a year from now for a disease that is barely affecting America, and will unlikely be made affordable to the general public in time. Simultaneously the flu vaccine, which almost every American is recommended to take, is still running on 70 year old technology which health officials have stressed is due for a major update.

But as it happens, virus scares are quite profitable. The flu shot, not so much. The growing vaccine market is thought to be valued at upwards of \$20 billion.

Thus, Big Pharma's influence over Capitol Hill tightens as it sinks its tendrils into various administrative departments responsible for amounts of funding to be allocated, where, and how much of said vaccine will be stockpiled.

For instance, Donald Trump's first response was a meeting with pharmaceutical representatives to discuss a potential COVID-19 vaccine. Only a week later did he announce his intention to visit the CDC. Why?

Trump's foremost consultation should be with a team of qualified scientists and advisors, not pharma reps. Pharma reps are not concerned with the health or betterment of America, their dedication lies in bolstering their bottom line.

Trump is meeting with these pharma reps because they know that they can squeeze a healthy sized grant out of him and the rest of Congress.

It is no coincidence that our HHS Secretary is a former pharmaceutical executive, who's ties to his former companies have made watchdog organizations cry foul.

When drug companies exploit fear to pressure governments into funding them on the taxpayer dime, they win both ways: socialized funding, with privatized profits.

Thus, Congress's ambiguous \$8.3 billion plan should be alarming for taxpayers. Why should they have to pay twice? And where is the outrage to fund heart disease, which kills 650k Americans per year?

Congressional allocation of funding should be guided by qualified experts which possess no conflict of interest or vested ties to the pharmaceutical companies. In order to de-incentivize profiteering and of virus fears and panic. Virus vaccination, whenever it is ready, if we are genuinely still afraid of the spreading illness, must be free.

It is time for striking a delicate balance of financial prudence that lies between caution and hysteria.

Robert Weiner is a former spokesman for the White House Office of National Drug Policy and the U.S. House Committee on Narcotics. He was Chief of Staff of the House Committee on Aging and the Subcommittee on Health, senior staff for Congressman John Conyers, Charles Rangel, Claude Pepper, Ed Koch, Sen. Edward Kennedy; and 4-Star Gen. Barry McCaffrey.

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Bob Weiner, a national issues and public affairs strategist, has been spokesman for and directed the public affairs offices of White House Drug Czar and Four Star General Barry McCaffrey, the House Government Operations Committee and Chairman John Conyers (D-MI), Congressman Charles Rangel (D-NY) and the House Narcotics Committee, and was Chief of Staff for the House Aging Committee and Chairman Claude Pepper (D-FL). He also was Legislative Assistant to Ed Koch of New York and a political aide to Ted Kennedy (D-MA) for his Presidential and Senate races. Bob worked at the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate as youth voter registration director in 1971-1972 when the constitution was amended to allow 18-year olds the vote.

Since he left the White House in 2001, Bob heads up a public affairs and issue strategies company, Robert Weiner Associates. He is a regular political analyst on Radio America and has appeared on Bill Maher, CNN Crossfire, Today, Good Morning America, and the CBS, NBC, and ABC evening news. He is widely published in columns he writes on national issues in major papers throughout the country including recently the Washington Post, Denver Post, Miami Herald, Christian Science Monitor, New York Daily News, Baltimore Sun, Boston Globe, Cleveland Plain Dealer, Atlanta Constitution, New York Post, Washington Times, Sacramento Bee, Palm Beach Post, Salt Lake Tribune, Minneapolis Star Tribune, and Adweek. He is also regularly quoted in key media coast-to-coast, including the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, USA Today, AP and Reuters, concerning the presidential campaign and national issues.

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