

‘China Was Not Truthful’: Ex-FDA Chief Scott Gottlieb Explains How Beijing Misled The World About Coronavirus

Chuck Ross



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Dr. Scott Gottlieb, the former commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, criticized the World Health Organization and the Chinese government on Sunday, saying that both stymied the global response to the novel coronavirus, likely allowing it to spread more dramatically across the globe.

“China was not truthful with the world at the outset of this,” Gottlieb said in an interview on CBS’s “Face the Nation.”

“Had they been more truthful with the world, which would have enabled them to be more truthful with themselves, they might have actually been able to contain this entirely.”

Gottlieb, who left the Trump administration last year, said that the Chinese government delayed sharing two vital pieces of information that would have allowed other nations to prevent the spread of coronavirus: evidence that coronavirus could transmit through human-to-human contact and live samples of the virus, which began spreading from a wet market in Wuhan in November 2019.

“There is some growing evidence to suggest that as late as January 20th [Chinese officials] were still saying there was no human-to-human transmission, and the WHO was validating those claims on January 14th, sort of enabling the obfuscation of China,” Gottlieb said.

Gottlieb expanded on that same point in a separate interview Friday. He told National Review’s Rich Lowry that Chinese officials were tracking outbreaks of coronavirus in Wuhan in December 2019 and knew that the virus displayed human-to-human transmission.

Had international officials known that the virus transmitted in that manner, they likely would have been better prepared for a possible pandemic.

“If they would have instituted steps then and been more forthcoming about what was happening then, this might have been an entirely avoidable world event,” he told Lowry in a podcast interview.

Dr. Deborah Birx, the White House coronavirus task force coordinator, offered a similar critique of the Chinese government in a press conference on March 31.

“The medical community interpreted the Chinese data as, this was serious, but smaller,” she said. “Because, I think, probably we were missing a significant amount of the data.”

Gottlieb also said Beijing refused to share live strains of the virus, which delayed development of a test that could diagnose patients with COVID-19.

“The WHO should have made them do that,” Gottlieb said. “Had they done that earlier, we could have developed a diagnostic test earlier.”

Gottlieb called on WHO to produce an after-action report examining “what China did or didn’t tell the world, and how that stymied the global responses.”

Despite that litany of grievances, Gottlieb said that he does not believe that the U.S. government should stop funding the WHO. President Donald Trump said last week that he is considering pulling funding for the organization. The U.S. contributes 15% of WHO’s budget, the largest by far of any country.

“I don’t think this is a time to de-fund the WHO, given the fact that I think this is going to become epidemic in the southern hemisphere,” said Gottlieb. He said that the WHO would be useful in helping nations in the southern hemisphere that don’t have the resources to deal with a pandemic.