

## *Coronavirus crisis: What would happen if Trump administration pulled its majority funding from the WHO?*

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*As the coronavirus pandemic continues its assault across the world, red flags have been raised over the role played by the World Health Organization (WHO) in initially downplaying the virus to appease China and just how effectively its money – funded overwhelmingly by U.S. taxpayers – is spent by the U.N. agency.*

*President Trump last week threatened to withhold funding from the WHO, insisting that his administration would be "looking into" its operations – igniting a blistering response from its controversial chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who warned that "politicizing" the virus would only result in "more body bags."*

*Experts weighed in on the possibility of the U.S. abruptly pulling its majority funding and on the threatened move's impact on the agency.*

*"In the short run, not a lot [would change] because WHO management will hope for a change in leadership in November and/or that other nations fill the void," Dr. Roger Bate, a visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and an expert on public health and emerging markets, told Fox News. "Budgets and fiscal years are months, so they wouldn't feel a problem for a while."*

*In addition to repeating Beijing's flawed theory on Jan. 14 that "there was no evidence of human-to-human transmission" of the novel pathogen and ignoring warnings from Taiwan, the WHO – a heavily centralized outfit – also failed to necessitate that Chinese officials share the viral strains that would have allowed diagnostic tests to have been produced significantly earlier worldwide.*

*Yet many experts also contend that now is hardly the right time for the United States to yank its many millions.*

*The U.S has been the WHO's largest funder since it was founded in 1948 and currently gives almost 10 times the amount of money as China, both in assessed and*

*voluntary contributions and which total more than \$500 million per year compared to Beijing's \$48 million.*

*Brett Schaefer, senior research fellow in international regulatory affairs at the Heritage Foundation, also underscored that the U.S.' total contributions account for 15.9 percent of the organization's overall budget and the impact would not be immediately crushing.*

*"This funding would be unaffected because the decision to pull funding would only apply going forward. Nonetheless, suspending funding immediately would represent a big cut to WHO funds right when developing countries, which depend far more on international assistance to address health issues, are being impacted by COVID-19," he explained. "Although the U.S. is providing significant assistance through other channels, withholding funding to WHO could negatively impact the COVID-19 response in these countries."*

*But even with all the money voluntarily poured in from the U.S., the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and other countries and organizations such as South Korea, Australia, and Japan, there have been murmurs in the sustainable health world that even that is not enough.*

*Many analysts have highlighted that without the U.S., other member states – all of who are battling to contain the crippling virus within their own borders – likely would not be able to step up and fill the financial void anytime soon. Instead, the burden could fall on private donors such as the Gates Foundation, the Gavi Alliance and even the U.N.'s own Emergency Response Fund.*

*A November 2018 report published by BioMed Central underscored that the WHO "continues to experience immense financial stress," and that has consistently illuminated that it is "underfunded," although its need for financial reform was paramount.*

*"The WHO must establish its presence as a trustworthy leader in the global health space," the report stated, acknowledging that member states had declined to dish out more money," for reasons including "a lack of political will and financial commitment of member states especially by the rich donor countries as they found inefficiency, lack of transparency, and minimal accountability within the organization."*

*The report also surmised that the organization has struggled to carry out its mandate as a result of the United States, which "has repeatedly opposed WHO taking any action which might run counter to the interests of transnational corporations," and has created a "conflict of interest" framework with such maneuvers as opposing the Code on the Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, WHO's rational use of medicines initiative, and its ethical criteria for drug marketing to ensure that pharmaceutical companies can profit.*

*According to the WHO's own admission, internal audits are conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services and are "designed to add value and improve the Organization's operations and to enhance the integrity and reputation of the Organization. All systems, processes, operations, functions, and activities of the Organization can be subject to IOS review and oversight."*

*The most recent accountability report, issued in May last year, ranked majority of programs and regional offices – from Ethiopia, Somalia, Chad, Myanmar, Afghanistan and the global malaria headquarters as being "partially satisfactory." Several, such as offices in Yemen and Mongolia and deemed "unsatisfactory," and Ukraine was stamped with a rare "satisfactory."*

*Moreover, the U.N. agency – as revealed in internal rather than published reports obtained by the Associated Press last year – found that in 2018 they spent more on travel expenses – occasionally unauthorized and exploitation on donors' dimes – than on fight some of the biggest problems in public health.*

*In a single year, the "cash-strapped" WHO is alleged to have forked out almost \$200 million on jet-setting, with staffers sometimes breaking the agency's own rules by traveling in business class, booking expensive last-minute tickets, staying in five-star hotels and traveling without approval.*

*By contrast, that same year, the WHO invested \$59 million in curbing tuberculosis and around \$71 million AIDS and hepatitis.*

*"WHO solicits money from countries around the world every year and rarely if ever meets its budget," lamented Curtis Ellis, an economic expert and policy director with America First Policies and former advisor to the Trump 2016 election campaign. "If the U.S. withheld its money, it would have to re-calibrate its actions, and stop its officials from flying business class."*

*Nonetheless, the WHO purports to spend most of its money on communicable diseases, followed by corporate services and enabling functions, health emergencies, health systems, promoting health through the life course, non-communicable diseases; and an array of other areas such as polio eradication, tropical disease research, and research in human reproduction.*

*Of the total \$6.27 billion in WHO financing, only \$554 million – about 9 percent – went to the WHO Health Emergency Program and another \$306 million to preventing and controlling outbreaks under the "Humanitarian Response Plans and Other Appeals" budget category.*

*"In other words, it appears that less than 15 percent of WHO financing in 2018-2019 was directed at detecting and combatting international pandemics. More funds went to Corporate Services and Enabling Functions than to the WHO Health Emergency Program," Schafer noted.*

*Other health issues that the WHO dedicates resources to include: equity, social determinants, gender equality, and human rights (\$21.5 million); reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health (\$230 million); violence and injuries, such as those from road accidents, (\$27.5 million); and mental health and substance abuse (\$50.3 million).*

*"While these are legitimate health concerns, unlike communicable diseases and pandemics, they are primarily a domestic health matter and do not pose a threat to spread from one country to another," Schafer said. "The focus of WHO should be on truly international threats to health."*

*From his lens, instead of ending funding during the current crisis, the U.S. should condition future financing for the approval and completion of an investigation into the WHO response to COVID-19 and the potential influence of China over its decisions, revision of WHO policies to enable it to respond more quickly to emerging pandemics and restructuring WHO financing to concentrate on communicable diseases and responding to international health emergencies.*

*"If WHO refuses, the U.S. should explore setting up a new international organization focused on communicable diseases and responding to international health emergencies," Schafer said.*

*Members of the Trump team are said to be compiling information and crafting options to present to the president with regards to what to do about WHO's funding and working to untangle the multipronged funding stream as it is not submitted to them in a single lump sum. No financial decisions have yet been made.*

*According to Brett Bruen, a former U.S. diplomat who previously served as director of global engagement at the White House and now runs communications firm Global Situation Room, freezing the finances now is akin to "suggesting we pull out of NATO in the middle of the battle against the Taliban."*

*"Sure, we would like them to do more and can get frustrated with multilateral diplomacy. But, they are critical to our fight, and WHO is essential to turning the tide against COVID-19. There is no path out of this epidemic on our own. We need other countries," he stressed. "There is no substitute for the WHO. WHO has its challenges, but for now, it's our best hope for ending this crisis quickly."*