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U.S. manufacturing contracts; private payrolls post first drop since 2017



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CORONAVIRUS SCAMS SPREADING AS FAST AS THE VIRUS ITSELF, FTC WARNS

by Mark Hedin



Not only has the corona virus wrought havoc worldwide, it’s also become a new pretext for fraudsters trying to take advantage of people’s trust to steal their money. According to the United States Federal Trade Commission, COVID-19-related crimes are being reported by the thousands, have doubled in just the past week and are growing faster still. The FTC has received more than 10,000 complaints so far this year, (<https://tinyurl.com/FTC-coronavirusreports>), with losses approaching \$7 million and a median of more than \$500. More than half of those reports arrived in just the past 10 days. Complaints describe perpetrators claiming to represent the government or a business, and who often take advantage of travel and vacation-related reports about cancellations and refunds. Other complaints reported problems with online shopping and mobile texting.

The federal government agency is updating the numbers the exponential growth of coronavirus-related complaints at its Explore Data web page, and offers information on types of scams and how to avoid them at <https://www.ftc.gov/coronavirus/ftc-in-action>.

If you have been targeted by a fraudulent operation, please report it to the FTC: [FTC.gov/complaint](https://www.ftc.gov/complaint).

As a general rule, don’t click on links in emails that claim to be from the government or a bank, even if they look legitimate, and don’t respond to those emails. The criminals are good at copying the look of those institutions’ correspondence. It’s better to call the government agency or bank directly. But even there, be careful to find out the correct phone number on your own, and don’t trust the number in any unsolicited call or email.

Also, most phone calls trying to defraud people are “robo-calls” — calls made by machines — so even though some are made by individual people, if you pick up a call and there’s no person on the other end of the line, just hang up.

Because the government has passed legislation offering various kinds of financial relief to consumers, some scammers are trying to take undue advantage of that, too. In one effort to combat this type of crime, the Small Business Administration is asking people to contact them directly, either by phone or at the [sba.gov/coronavirus](https://www.sba.gov/coronavirus) website to find out what kind of help is legitimately available.

Similarly, be wary of people or callers offering a fast-track to such financial help. And never give your Social Security, tax ID, bank account numbers or any other such highly personal information to someone you don’t know.

Even if you’ve received a check in the mail, proceed with

caution. Not all “coronavirus relief” checks can be trusted. The FTC has a blog with advice about how to spot a bogus relief check.

In recent weeks, the FTC has had to notify numerous technology companies such as internet service providers(<https://tinyurl.com/FTC-coronavirus-fraud-warning>) that they are helping illegal telemarketing and “robocalls” involved with coronavirus-related scams.

Those companies included: VoIPMax, SipJoin Holding, Corp., iFly Communications, Third Rock Telecom, Bluetone Communications, LLC, VoIP Terminator, Inc., also known as BLMarketing, J2 Web Services, Inc., VoxBone US LLC and Comet Media, Inc.

“It’s never good business for VoIP (Voice Over Internet Protocols) providers and others to help telemarketers make illegal bad when your company is helping telemarketers exploiting fears about the coronavirus to spread disinformation and perpetrate scams.”

Another company, Globex Telecom, is being prosecuted by the FTC for this kind of activity, the agency reports, as is? software provider James B. Christiano (unclear: is FTC also prosecuting the software provider? If so, see revised paragraph below). The Department of Justice is prosecuting two VoIP companies for “committing and conspiring to commit wire fraud by knowingly transmitting robocalls that impersonated federal government agencies.”

The FTC and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration have warned other companies about selling unapproved products that may be falsely claiming to be helpful in treating or curing COVID-19.

These include Gaia’s Whole Healing Essentials, LLC, Health Mastery Systems/Pure Plant Essentials, Homeomart Indibuy, Neuro XPE, FullerLifeC60, LLC, Halosense, Inc., JRB Enterprise Group Inc., Carahealth, Corona-Cure, Vital Silver, Quynessence Aroatherapy Ltd., N-ergetics, GuruNanda, LLC, Vivify Holistic Clinic, Herbal Amy LLC and the Jim Bakker Show.

Although the FTC strongly recommends against communicating with ANY unknown person or business, the opposite is true when it comes to notifying friends and family to be careful.

“Share these tips with your co-workers, family and social networks,” the agency says.

MARK HEDIN
Reporter

Mark Hedin is a reporter for Ethnic Media Services. He has previously written for the Oakland Tribune, the Central City Extra, the San Francisco Chronicle, El Mensajero, the San Francisco Examiner and other papers.

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Top U.S. watchdog vows ‘aggressive’ oversight of Trump administration after intel firing

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The top U.S. federal watchdog vowed on Saturday to continue to conduct “aggressive” independent oversight of government agencies, after President Donald Trump fired the inspector general of the U.S. intelligence community late Friday night.

FILE PHOTO: Intelligence Community Inspector General Michael Atkinson arrives to testify at a House Intelligence Committee closed-door hearing on a whistleblower complaint about President Donald Trump’s dealings with Ukraine, on Capitol Hill in Washington, U.S., October 4, 2019. REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst/File Photo
Michael Horowitz, chair of the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE), an independent agency in the executive branch and the inspector general at the Department of Justice, said in a statement that Michael Atkinson was known for his “integrity, professionalism, and commitment to the rule of law and independent oversight.”

President Donald Trump wrote in a letter to Congress Friday night that Atkinson, who was involved in triggering an impeachment probe of the president last year, will be removed from his position in 30 days.

The firing comes as U.S. inspectors general, who are charged with independent oversight of federal agencies, were recently tasked with broad surveillance of the government’s response to the coronavirus, including the historic \$2.3 trillion fiscal package to mitigate its economic impact.

“The inspector general community will continue to conduct aggressive, independent oversight of the agencies that we oversee,” said Horowitz.

“This includes CIGIE’s Pandemic Response Accountability Committee and its efforts on behalf of American taxpayers, families, businesses, patients, and health care providers to ensure that over \$2 trillion dollars in emergency



FILE PHOTO: Intelligence Community Inspector General Michael Atkinson arrives to testify at a House Intelligence Committee closed-door hearing on a whistleblower complaint about President Donald Trump’s dealings with Ukraine, on Capitol Hill in Washington,

federal spending is being used consistently with the law’s mandate.”
Democrats have expressed concerns about how the fiscal package will be doled out through the U.S. Treasury, headed by Steven Mnuchin. “We’re not here to create a slush fund for Donald Trump and his family, or a slush fund for the Treasury Department to be able to hand out to their friends,” said U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts.

The watchdogs’ role in the coronavirus over-

sight is to examine the decision-making process, and provide the public information about where the taxpayer dollars and other resources go.
Atkinson, a Trump appointee, had determined that a whistleblower’s report was credible in alleging Trump abused his office in attempting to solicit Ukraine’s interference in the 2020 U.S. election for his political benefit.

Trump said Friday Atkinson no longer

had his “fullest confidence.”

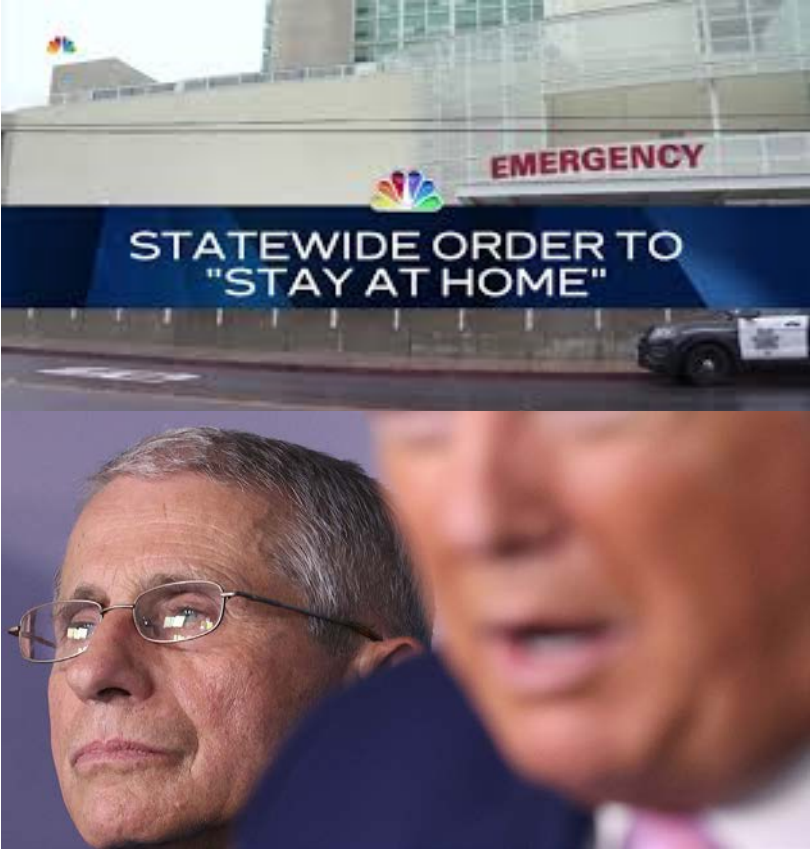
Atkinson expressed concern that Trump potentially exposed himself to “serious national security and counter-intelligence risks” when he pressed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to investigate Democratic presidential hopeful Joe Biden and his son during a July 25 phone call, according to a Justice Department legal opinion.

Stay healthy!

BUSINESS

Stay safe!

Fauci Advises All States Issue Stay-At-Home Orders



Dr. Anthony Fauci listens to President Trump speak during a briefing on April 1. Photo: Win McNamee/Getty Images

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Dr. Anthony Fauci recommended last Thursday that all states across the U.S. implement stay-at-home orders, at a CNN town hall.
Why it matters: The recommendation stands in contrast to President Trump’s calls for “flexibility.” Nearly 40 states have issued stay-at-home orders to promote social distancing as a way to combat the novel coronavirus — but the orders vary in strictness and duration.
• Trump said at the White House coronavirus task force briefing on Wednesday that in states with fewer infections, “it’s awfully tough to say close it down.”
What he’s saying: “I don’t understand why that’s not happening,” Fauci said, per CNN, of a nationwide stay-at-home

order. “As you said, the tension between federally mandated versus states rights to do what they want is something I don’t want to get into. But if you look at what is going on in this country, I do not understand why we are not doing that. We really should be.”

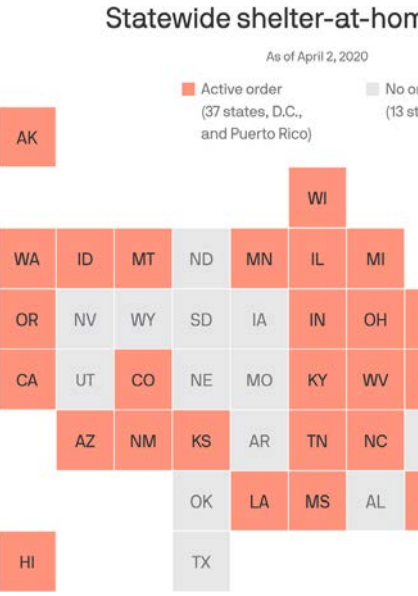


Background: The Trump administration has directed Americans to “work or en-

gage in schooling from home whenever possible” for roughly a month, to “avoid discretionary travel, shopping trips, and social visits,” and to “avoid social gatherings in groups of more than 10 people.”

More States Issue Stay-At-Home Orders As Coronavirus Crisis Escalates

Florida and Georgia governors ordered all residents to stay at home late Wednesday, with exceptions for those engaged in essential services, including health care and government functions.



The big picture: In a matter of weeks, the number of states that issued orders nearly quadrupled, affecting almost 300 million Americans.

Data: Axios reporting; Map: Danielle Alberti/Axios

The state of play: Governors that were originally against stay-at-home orders, like those in Georgia and Florida, finally succumbed this week after COVID-19 cases in their states increased rapidly.
• Florida is the third biggest state in the U.S. and one of the highest-risk for coronavirus. Yet Gov. Ron DeSantis’ response lagged well behind other populated states.
• States that still don’t have such orders have a number of local directives suggesting residents stay indoors.
California Gov. Gavin Newsom, the first state to issue a shelter-in-place order, had a message on CNN Wednesday to governors who have not mandated its residents stay

home:
“What are you waiting for? What more evidence do you need? ... There’s no greater intervention, period, full stop, none, than physical distancing.”

The big picture: The orders allow citizens to leave their homes for “essential” reasons like grocery shopping, pharmacy pick-ups or trips to restaurants for take-out only. They also permit people to assist others in obtaining supplies, as well as to walk their dogs and be in nature — as long as they keep 6 feet between themselves and others.
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California Governor, Gavin Newsom
• Some excursions deemed essential in North Carolina include traveling to and from places of worship and volunteering.
• “Many people want to know how they can help right now, and for most people this is how — by staying home,” Washington, D.C. Mayor Bowser said Monday.
• There is no doubt in my mind that we

have to ratchet down what we are doing in society,” Amy Acton, director of Ohio’s Department of Health, said. “Listen to Italy begging us not to make mistakes — you’re hearing it from folks who are ahead of us in this curve. We don’t have a day to spare.” (Courtesy axios.com)



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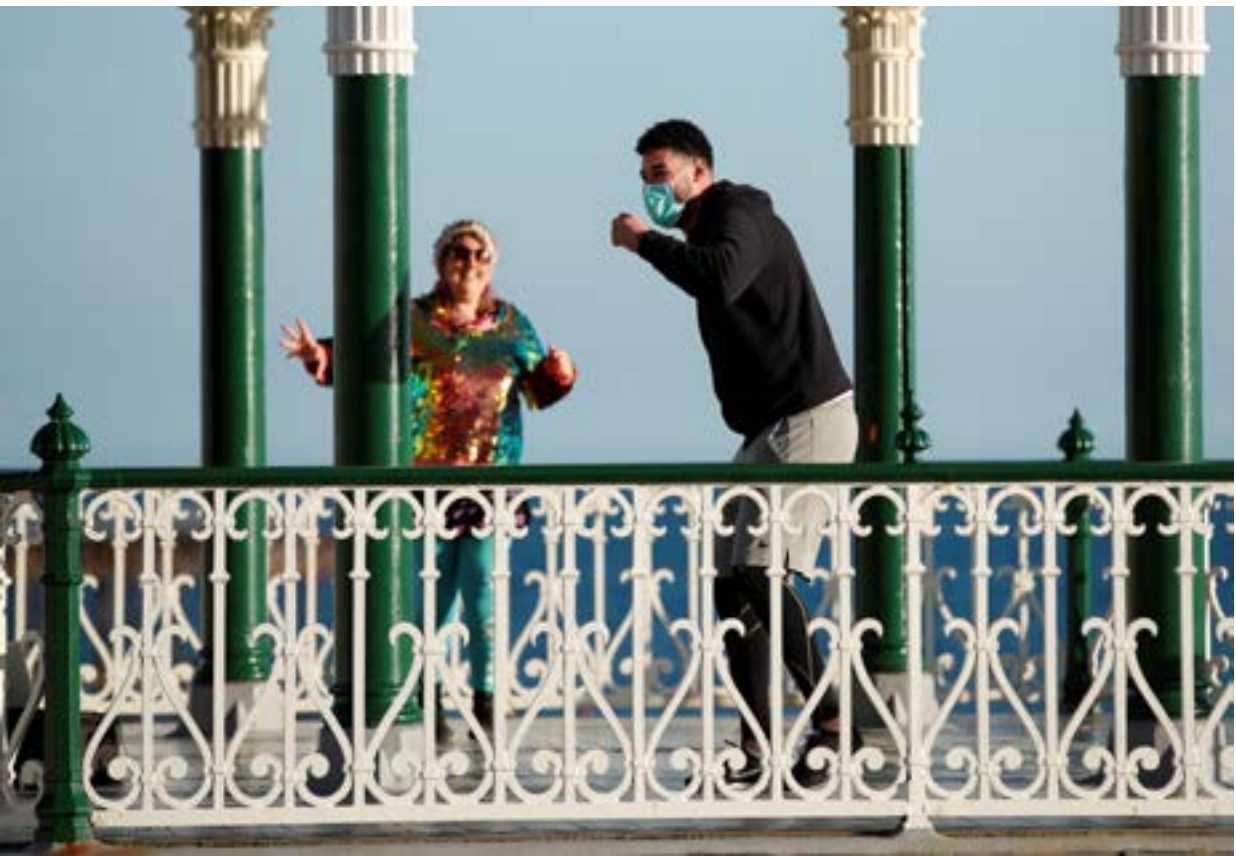


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Editor's Choice



A man takes a picture of a sheep at a beach, during a lockdown to prevent the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Algiers, Algeria April 4, 2020. REUTERS/Ramzi Boudina



A man wearing a protective mask dances with Cara Brennan, as the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues, Brighton, Britain, April 4, 2020. REUTERS/Peter Cziborra



People are seen at a service station, as the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues, Antrim, Northern Ireland, April 4, 2020. REUTERS/Jason Cairnduff



A custodian cleans the lectern before an expected briefing by U.S. President Donald Trump on the administration's response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak at the White House in Washington, U.S., April 4, 2020. REUTERS/Joshua Roberts



A flight attendant waits for the departure of a one-passenger flight between Washington and New Orleans as the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues, in Washington, U.S., April 3, 2020. Picture taken April 3, 2020. REUTERS/Carlos Barria



Medical officers rest during a rapid test amid the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak in Bandung, West Java province, Indonesia, April 4, 2020 in this photo taken by Antara Foto. Antara Foto/Novrian Arbi/ via REUTERS ATTENTION EDITORS - THIS IMAGE WAS



Iacopo Mastrangelo poses with his father Fabio in front of Piazza Navona, as Italians remain under lockdown to prevent the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Rome, Italy, April 4, 2020. REUTERS/Alberto Lingria



People walk at Tempelhofer Feld, during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, in Berlin, Germany, April 4, 2020. REUTERS/Michele Tantussi

COVID-19 Crisis Has Created A New
“Golden Age” For Vaccine Research
With Philadelphia As Its Epicenter



Entrance to a Johnson&Johnson laboratory facility.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

The coronavirus pandemic has exposed gaps in U.S. medical manufacturing and distribution. Cheap foreign materials and “just in time” shipping have made it tough to meet the sudden demand for cleaning agents, protective gear, and ventilators — even as sick patients are filling hospital ICUs. And yet U.S. companies that make vaccines — the kind of low-priced, one-dose commodity product that drugmakers often leave to foreigners — have stepped up. Last Friday, President Donald Trump signed the \$2 trillion CARES Act, including \$27 billion for vaccines and protective gear. On Monday, drug giant Johnson & Johnson said it was joining the CARES-enriched Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) to spend more than \$1 billion developing anti-coronavirus vaccines. J&J said the first “emergency” shots should be available on a “not-for-profit” basis early next year — well in advance of the usual five- to seven-year timetable — and an eventual billion doses will be made in a new U.S. factory at an

unnamed location. J&J’s Janssen unit, which includes the company’s vaccines business, has labs in Belgium, central New Jersey, and Horsham.



The Philadelphia area is the historic center of vaccine science. Maurice Hilleman’s labs at Merck developed preventives for measles, mumps, meningitis, hepatitis, pneumonia, and flu, among others. Hilary Koprowski and colleagues at the Wistar Institute on the Penn campus developed vaccines against polio, rabies, and more. Scientists at Merck and GlaxoSmithKline labs in the western suburbs and start-ups in University City remain focused on new generations of vaccines. And specialized firms such as Fort



Washington-based Inovio Pharmaceuticals have lately announced accelerated coronavirus vaccine schedules, also armed with federal funding — from the U.S. military, in Inovio’s case. The fact that U.S. vaccine capability hasn’t withered along with other commodities once made here is no accident, but a result of steady lobbying, medical initiative, and government foresight, advocates say. Washington has funded vaccine development and other pandemic preparation in uneven doses. But the framework of a national vaccine policy has endured between crises and into periods of neglect — and will now be flush with new anti-coronavirus billions. “We are very pleased to see the government’s increased appreciation for vaccines, which save both lives and substantial costs to the U.S.,” said Amy Pisani, executive director of Vaccinate Your Family, a Washington-based advocacy network backed by the CDC, vaccine makers, and charitable groups. “Our country has an amazing brain trust of scientists who are aware of the potential threats to the world from future viruses,” but they need R&D funding, as well as support from better public health education. “There are still some who believe coronavirus is a conspiracy,” Pisani added.



In the emergency preparedness climate that followed the 2001 terrorist attacks

on Washington and New York, the federal government rolled out Project BioShield, a \$5.6 billion pandemic preparedness program funding testing and vaccines, initially designed to run from 2003 to 2013. When the H5N1 flu hit hard in early 2005, President George W. Bush, joined by the CDC’s top infectious disease expert, Anthony Fauci, summoned executives from Baxter, GSK, Wyeth, and other vaccine makers to the White House. “Bush said, ‘Where’s the flu vaccine? This should make you a lot of money,’” recalls Berwyn lawyer Frank Rapoport, who prepped the GSK executives for the meeting. “And they said, ‘Sir, we won’t make money, but we will get sued.’” Bush and Congress responded with the federal PREP Act, which extended legal protections from plaintiff lawsuits to vaccine, testing, and antiviral makers building medicines for pandemics, said John Clerici, a founder of pharma consulting firm Tiber Creek Partners in Washington.



Clerici worked to draft PREP with then-Republican Senate aide Robert Kadlec, whom Trump in 2017 named assistant secretary for preparedness and response, overseeing BARDA and its vaccine funding, and the Strategic National Stockpile of medical supplies — making Kadlec a key leader in the coronavirus fight. Without legal liability protections, Clerici says companies such as J&J would be “100%” against developing vaccines in the U.S. In 2013, when the original BioShield funding ran out, Congress began a series of annual appropriations totaling about \$1.5 billion a year to fund BARDA vac-

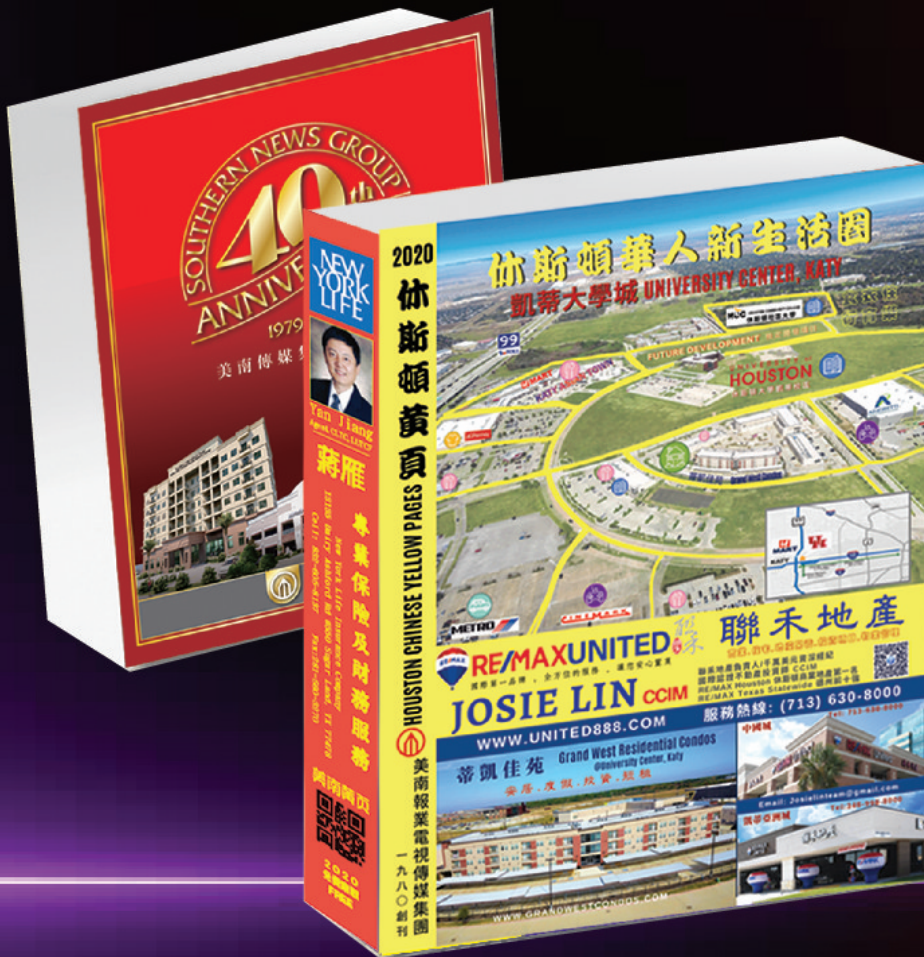
cine development efforts and to build up the emergency medical stockpile. A special \$5 billion was appropriated for the multinational Ebola virus fight in 2015. But flu planning has been stuck at about \$250 million a year in each of the last three federal budgets — “extremely underfunded,” in Clerici’s view. The CARES Act has multiplied those resources, splitting \$27 billion between rebuilding the depleted medical stockpile and BARDA vaccine funding — on top of \$6 billion appropriated for those purposes in the first anti-coronavirus bills last winter.



Clerici said BARDA also has the power to bypass “very burdensome” federal purchasing regulations, and speed vaccine development by paying companies for mass-producing vaccines and antivirals while their clinical trials are not yet concluded, even if they end up proving unsuitable. He said the agency has remained “very conservative” about using such powers, preferring the “National Institutes of Health style” of sequencing development, then animal, and finally human trials, rather than the more expensive but faster approach of attempting different stages at the same time. Pisani says this new attention to vaccines should lead to permanent higher funding. She’d like to see higher appropriations for the CDC and state, city, and tribal health departments, as well as higher vaccine and antiviral R&D spending. “The coronavirus stimulus packages to date have provided critical funding for the immediate emergency,” she said. And there will be others. (Courtesy <https://www.inquirer.com/>)

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