

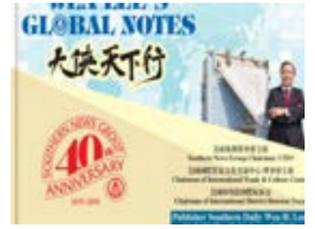


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Top Georgia election official says White House pushed him to take Trump call



WASHINGTON, Jan 4 (Reuters) - Georgia's Republican top election official said on Monday the White House had pushed him against his better judgment to take a call from President Donald Trump in which he pressured the state to overturn his November presidential election defeat there.

In the call on Saturday, Trump told Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger to "find" enough votes to overturn his election loss in the southern state, according to a recording published by U.S. media.

"I never believed it was appropriate to speak to the president but he pushed out, I guess he had his staff push us. They wanted a call," Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger told ABC's "Good Morning America."

A state Democrat has called for a probe into whether Trump had violated Georgia election law on the call. Raffensperger and his office's general counsel rejected Trump's assertions of electoral fraud in the hour-long conversation.

"We took the call, and we had a conversation. He did most of the talking, we did most of the listening," Raffensperger said.

"But I do want to make my points that the data that he has is just plain wrong. He had hundreds and hundreds of people he said that were dead that voted. We found two. That's an example of just his bad data."

Trump for two months has been claiming contrary to evidence that his loss to Democratic President-elect Joe Biden was the result of widespread fraud. Multiple state and federal reviews, as well as courts, have rejected those claims as unsupported.

Biden won the state-by-state Electoral College by 306-232 and carried the popular vote by more than 7 million ballots.

The only Democrat on Georgia's election board, David Worley, asked Raffensperger to investigate whether the president had violated state law that prohibits solicitation to commit election fraud.

"To say that I am troubled by President Trump's attempt to manipulate the votes of Georgians would be an understatement," Worley wrote on Sunday in a letter to Raffensperger that was seen by Reuters.

Raffensperger said the district attorney in Fulton County, home to Atlanta, might be the appropriate authority to carry out such an investigation. The county's district attorney, Fani Willis, did not immediately return a request for comment.

In another blow to Trump, staunch conservative U.S. Senator Tom Cotton refused to sign on to a long-shot campaign by nearly a dozen other fellow Republicans in the U.S. Senate this week to challenge Biden's victory, warning it was outside of Congress' power and would "establish unwise precedents."

In a statement on Sunday, Cotton said he would not join his colleagues Ted Cruz, Josh Hawley and others in defying Republican Party leaders by objecting on Jan. 6 when lawmakers meet to tally the votes in the Electoral College - a largely symbolic act of certification.

Cotton noted that limited, symbolic role in his statement, saying any such refusal to carry out its duty "would take away the power to choose the president from the people, which would essentially end presidential elections and place that power in the hands of whichever party controls Congress."

Cotton, Cruz and Hawley are among those considered possible 2024 presidential candidates. Trump, who has not conceded defeat, has also floated the idea of running again in 2024.

Several moderate Republicans have also joined Democrats in criticizing Cruz, Hawley and others for undermining the of the voters and planning to object -- a move they say will not succeed in installing Trump but will erode confidence in U.S. democracy.

It was not immediately clear how the release of Trump's call with Raffensperger could impact the Republicans' objection plan.

"This call was not a helpful call," Republican U.S. Senator Marsha Blackburn, who is among those planning to object to the certification, told Fox News in an interview on Monday.

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The Darkest Page In Our Democratic History

The Washington Post obtained a stunning one-hour phone call Saturday. It was reported that in the conversation President Trump pushed Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger to find votes to overturn the election results after his loss to President-elect Joe Biden.

In the recorded conversation Trump lambasted his fellow Republican for refusing to say he was the one who won the election in Georgia. Trump said, "The people of Georgia are angry, the people in the country are angry and there's nothing wrong with saying that you know that you're recalculating." But Raffensperger responded that, "Mr. President,

the challenge that you have is that the data you have is wrong." Trump later said, "So look, all I want to do is this: I just want you to find 11,780 votes which is one more than we have because we won the state. You should want to have an accurate election and you are a Republican."

The post also reported that President Trump's lawyer, Cleta Mitchell, and other Republican allies of the president were also on the call.

Sunday evening all ten living former U.S. Secretaries of Defense declared in a forceful letter that the U.S. presidential

election is over, as President Trump continues to deny his election loss to Joe Biden. The letter stated that, "Our elections have occurred, recounts and audits have been conducted, appropriate challenges have been addressed by the court and the Electoral College has voted. The time for questioning the results has passed. The time for the formal counting of the Electoral College votes as prescribed in the Constitution and statute has arrived."



t see it?

This is really unbelievable that the political fighting is still going on in Washington. All of us as ordinary people just want to have peace and prosperity for our nation.

These are the darkest days of our democratic history.

We feel very sorry that there are still almost three thousand of our countrymen losing their lives every day because of the coronavirus pandemic. Is it that the politicians do not care, or they just don't



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China Approves Homegrown COVID-19 Vaccine For Widespread Use

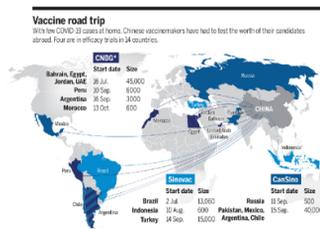


A staff member checks a COVID-19 vaccine package in Beijing. China has approved Sinopharm's vaccine after clinical trials showed it has a 79% efficacy against COVID-19. (Photo/Zhang Yuwei/Xinhua News Agency/Getty Images)

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

China's medical products agency has given market approval to the country's first COVID-19 vaccine, made by state-owned Sinopharm. The conglomerate says its vaccine has a 79% efficacy rate — surpassing the widely accepted standard of 50% efficacy. The approval is conditional, requiring Sinopharm to continue collecting data about the vaccine and its long-term effects. But the arrival of another mass-produced vaccine could provide relief in countries that have been unable to secure doses of the vaccines made by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna. China's approval came one day after the U.K. approved a vaccine made by AstraZeneca and Oxford University. The Sinopharm vaccine uses inactivated coronavirus that causes the body to produce antibodies, a more conventional approach to inoculation. Pfizer's and Moderna's vaccines use a revolutionary gene-based platform. The Chinese vaccine requires two injections. It was created by a Sinopharm subsidiary, the China National Biotec Group, or CNBG. The drugmak-

er says it has been conducting clinical studies in China as well as in other countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Peru, Argentina and Morocco. "During the summer, Beijing gave a green light for emergency use of the Sinopharm vaccine and several others," NPR's John Ruwitch reported for our Newscast unit. "State media say that millions of doses have already been administered, including to front-line medical staff and people going abroad for work. Emergency use is set to expand."



Both Bahrain and the UAE — where large-scale trials of the Sinopharm vaccine took

place — approved the vaccine earlier this month. China's new approval for widespread use moves the country closer to its goals of vaccinating millions more people in the coming months. To protect itself from COVID-19, China must vaccinate at least 700 million residents, CNBG Chairman Yang Xiaoming told Chinese state-run media. Yang also said that he and hundreds of other CNBG employees were inoculated with a version of the company's vaccine in March — the same month COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic. Along with the efficacy rate, a vaccine's ability to protect public health is tied to another figure: vaccine coverage — the number of people who get the shot and develop antibodies to the virus. "The percentage of people who need to have antibodies in order to achieve herd immunity against a particular disease varies with each disease," the World Health Organization says. It notes that for measles, around 95% of a population must be vaccinated to achieve herd immunity, while for polio, the threshold is much lower: about 80%. In addition to those differences, a vaccine's efficacy rate directly affects the amount of coverage a population must have to prevent or curtail an epidemic. Researchers have been studying how high an efficacy rate must be to protect the public without any other interventions. One study recently concluded that a vaccine, "has to have an efficacy of at least 70% to prevent an epidemic and of at least 80% to largely extinguish an epidemic without any other measures (e.g., social distancing)." (Courtesy npr.org) Related Chinese Vaccine 86% Effective, UAE Health Ministry Says Health officials in the United Arab Emirates announced Wednesday that a Chinese vaccine provides 86% efficacy against COVID-19 infection. Subsequently, the UAE's Ministry of Health and Prevention officially pushed for a registration of the Sinopharm vaccine following several health agencies' analysis of late-stage trials in the country, officials said in a release on the state-run WAM news agency. "The announcement is a significant vote of confidence by the UAE's health authorities in the safety and efficacy of this vaccine," the health

ministry said. The country approved the vaccine for emergency use in September for certain groups. It conducted a trial of the vaccine involving 31,000 volunteers from 125 nationalities in the UAE. The study reflected "no serious safety concerns," according to the health ministry, but no detailed data from the study was publicly available. The United Arab Emirates announced Wednesday that the Chinese Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine provides 86% protection from the virus. The UAE said it has registered the vaccine following analysis by health officials. (Zhang Yuwei/Xinhua News Agency via Getty Images) It's unclear, based on this latest development however, what the UAE's next steps will be. There was no elaboration on the progression toward a potential nationwide deployment of the Sinopharm vaccine. The Chinese state-owned company is still conducting late-stage clinical trials in 10 countries, including Egypt, Jordan and Argentina. Later this month, Morocco says it plans to implement an ambitious COVID-19 immunization program using the Sinopharm vaccine. The country is aiming to vaccinate 80% of adults, according to The Associated Press. News of UAE's approval of the vaccine comes just a day after the United Kingdom launched its own nationwide immunization program. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration also said Tuesday that the COVID-19 vaccine from Pfizer and its partner BioNTech presented "no specific safety concerns" to preclude an emergency use approval, paving the way for an expected green light later this month. The UAE said as of Tuesday there were 8,260 confirmed new COVID-19 cases in the country. Beijing Reports Tens Of Thousands Inoculated In 1st Days Of COVID-19 Vaccine Campaign

Beijing says it inoculated more than 73,000 people in the first two days after China's first domestic COVID-19 vaccine was approved for commercial use. China's capital has set up 220 vaccination centers around the city to dole out the two-step vaccine. The elderly and front-line medical workers will receive the first doses. A staff member checks the packaging quality of COVID-19 inactivated vaccine products at a packaging plant of the Beijing Biological Products Institute Co. in Beijing last month. (Zhang Yuwei/Xinhua News Agency/Getty Images) The shots are made by a subsidiary of Chinese state vaccine-maker Sinopharm, which said on Thursday that its vaccine is 79% effective overall. The company has not yet released more detailed clinical data that might explain why that rate is lower than results from human trials it conducted in the United Arab Emirates, where the vaccine was deemed 86% effective. However, Chinese state regulators cleared the vaccine for broader public use in China on the same day. The UAE was the first to approve Sinopharm's vaccine for commercial use in early December. Bahrain quickly followed, and a handful of countries have already placed orders for Sinopharm's vaccines, including Pakistan and Ukraine. Since summer, Sinopharm and another vaccine-maker, Sinovac, have already injected millions of Chinese citizens, many of them state employees, under emergency use guidelines. (Courtesy npr.org)



Editor's Choice



A traditional large puppet figure known as "Ondel-ondel" performs on a sidewalk of the main road in Jakarta, Indonesia. REUTERS/Willy Kurniawan



Nurse Sandra Lindsay receives the second dose of the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine, at Long Island Jewish Medical Center in the Queens borough of New York City. REUTERS/Shannon Stapleton/Pool



People celebrate after a British judge ruled that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange should not be extradited to the United States, outside the Old Bailey, the Central Criminal Court, in London, Britain. REUTERS/Henry Nicholls



Elderly people, who are 65 and over, wait in line at the Department of Health Sarasota COVID-19 vaccination clinic in Sarasota, Florida. REUTERS/Octavio Jones



A South Korean-flagged tanker vessel which was seized by Iran is seen in the Gulf. Seoul confirmed the seizure of a South Korean chemical tanker by Iranian authorities in the waters off Oman, and demanded its immediate release. IRGC/WANA



A lorry drives towards the border control at the Port of Dover, following the end of the Brexit transition period, in Dover, Britain. REUTERS/Toby Melville



Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Rev. Raphael Warnock waits to be introduced to speak at a campaign rally ahead of Senate runoff elections in Augusta, Georgia. REUTERS/Mike Segar



A woman gestures towards Turkish riot police as they clash with students of Bogaziçi University who protest against President Tayyip Erdogan's appointment of a new rector, in Istanbul, Turkey. REUTERS/Kemal Aslan

Scientists Around The World Are Now Fighting The Next Pandemic



By improving water sanitation, we can reduce the spread of antibiotic resistant bacteria. Image: Riccardo Mayer/Shutterstock.com

KEY POINTS

Children in developing countries are acquiring an anti-biotic-resistant infection due to their regular contact with poor sanitation and limited clean water.

This means, when they do fall ill, there is more than a 50% chance an antibiotic treatment will fail.

The practice known as WASH is vital to reduce the spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

It is also crucial countries do more to treat sewage, improve sanitation and develop sufficient infrastructure.

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

If a two-year-old child living in poverty in India or Bangladesh gets sick with a common bacterial infection, there is more than a 50% chance an antibiotic treatment will fail. Somehow the child has acquired an antibiotic resistant infection - even to drugs to which they may never have been exposed. How? Unfortunately, this child also lives in a place with limited clean water and less waste management, bringing them into frequent contact with faecal matter. This means they are regularly exposed to millions of resistant genes and bacteria, including potentially untreatable superbugs. This sad story is shockingly common, especially in places where pollution is rampant and clean water is limited. For many years, people believed antibiotic resistance in bacteria was primarily driven by imprudent use of antibiotics in clinical and veterinary settings. But growing evidence suggests that environmental factors may be of equal or greater importance to the spread of antibiotic resistance, especially in the de-

veloping world.



This article focuses on antibiotic resistant bacteria, but drug resistance also occurs in types of other microorganisms - such as resistance in pathogenic viruses, fungi, and protozoa (called antimicrobial resistance or AMR). This means that our ability to treat all sorts of infectious disease is increasingly hampered by resistance, potentially including coronaviruses like SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19. Overall, use of antibiotics, antivirals, and antifungals clearly

must be reduced, but in most of the world, improving water, sanitation, and hygiene practice - a practice known as WASH - is also critically important. If we can ensure cleaner water and safer food everywhere, the spread of antibiotic resistant bacteria will be reduced across the environment, including within and between people and animals. As recent recommendations on AMR from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), and World Health Organization (WHO) suggest that "superbug problem" will not be solved by more prudent antibiotic use alone. It also requires global improvements in water quality, sanitation, and hygiene. Otherwise, the next pandemic might be worse than COVID-19.

Bacteria under stress

Over 70% of the world has no community wastewater treatment or even sewers; and most faecal matter, containing resistant genes and bacteria, goes directly into surface and groundwater, often via open drains. This means that people who live in places without faecal waste management are regularly exposed to antibiotic resistance in many ways. Exposure is even possible of people who may not have taken antibiotics, like our child in South Asia.



How antibiotic resistance spreads Image: WHO Antibiotic resistance is everywhere, but it is not surprising that resistance is greatest in places with poor sanitation because factors other than use are important. For example, a fragmented civil infrastructure, political corruption, and a lack of centralized healthcare also play key roles. As an example of antibiotic resistance, the "superbug" gene, blaNDM-1, was first detected in India in 2007 (although it was probably present in other regional countries). But soon thereafter, it was found in a hospital patient in Sweden and then in Germany. It was ultimately detected in 2013 in Svalbard in the High Arctic. In parallel, variants of this gene

appeared locally, but have evolved as they move. Similar evolution has occurred as the COVID-19 virus has spread. Relative to antibiotic resistance, humans are not the only "travellers" that can carry resistance. Wildlife, such as migratory birds, can also acquire resistant bacteria and genes from contaminated water or soils and then fly great distances carrying resistance in their gut from places with poor water quality to places with good water quality. During travel, they defecate along their path, potentially planting resistance almost anywhere. The global trade of foods also facilitates spread of resistance from country to country and across the globe.

Resistant bacteria are not the only infectious agents that might be spread by environmental contamination. SARS-CoV-2 has been found in faeces and inactive virus debris found in sewage, but all evidence suggests water is not a major route of COVID-19 spread - although there are limited data from places with poor sanitation and each case differs. But there are common roots to disease spread - pollution, poor water quality, and inadequate hygiene. Using fewer antibiotics is critical to reducing resistance. However, without also providing safer sanitation and improved water quality at global scales, resistance will continue to increase, potentially creating the next pandemic. Such a combined approach is central to the new WHO/FAO/OIE recommendations on AMR.



Simple steps

It is clear we must use a holistic approach (what is now called "One Health") to reduce the spread of resistance across people, animals, and the environment. But how do we do this in a world that is so unequal? It is now accepted that clean water is a human right embedded in the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. But how can we achieve affordable "clean water for all" in a world where geopolitics often outweigh local needs and realities? Simple is more sustainable. As an obvious example, we need to reduce open defecation in a cheap and socially acceptable manner. This is the best immediate solution in places with limited or un-

used sanitation infrastructure, such as rural India. Innovation is without doubt important, but it needs to be tailored to local realities to stand a chance of being sustained into the future. Strong leadership and governance is also critical. Antibiotic resistance is much lower in places with less corruption and strong governance. Resistance also is lower in places with greater public health expenditure, which implies social policy, community action, and local leadership can be as important as technical infrastructure.

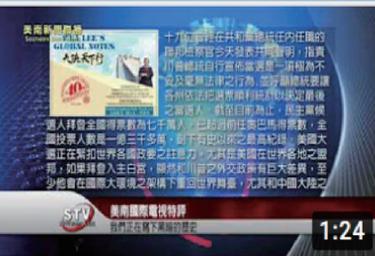


Richer countries must work with poorer ones. But, actions against resistance should focus on local needs and plans because each country is different. We need to remember that resistance is everyone's problem and all countries have a role in solving the problem. This is evident from the COVID-19 pandemic, where some countries have displayed commendable cooperation. Richer countries should invest in helping to provide locally suitable waste management options for poorer ones - ones that can be maintained and sustained. This would have a more immediate impact than any "toilet of the future" technology. Antibiotic resistance will also impact on the fight against COVID-19. As an example, secondary bacterial infections are common in seriously ill patients with COVID-19, especially when admitted to an ICU. So if such pathogens are resistant to critical antibiotic therapies, they will not work and result in higher death rates. Regardless of context, improved water, sanitation, and hygiene must be the backbone of stemming the spread of AMR, including antibiotic resistance, to avoid the next pandemic. Some progress is being made in terms of global cooperation, but efforts are still too fragmented. Some countries are making progress, whereas others are not. Resistance needs to be seen in a similar light to other global challenges - something that threatens human existence and the planet. As with addressing climate change, protecting biodiversity, or COVID-19, global cooperation is needed to reduce the evolution and spread of resistance. Cleaner water and improved hygiene are the key. If we do not work together now, we all will pay an even greater price in the future. (Courtesy weforum.org)

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