

Power Up: Here's why Trump keeps pushing hydroxychloroquine's false hope

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with *Brent D. Griffiths*

Good Thursday morning. Do read the late Rep. John Lewis's (D-Ga.) parting words, penned shortly before his death: “Though I may not be here with you, I urge you to answer the highest calling of your heart and stand up for what you truly believe.” Thanks for waking up with us.

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Coming this morning: Economists and markets are bracing for some of the worst GDP numbers since the Great Depression when the Commerce Department releases its estimate for how much the economy shrank between April and June, Rachel Siegel and Andrew Van Dam report.

- **It comes as the U.S. death toll from the novel coronavirus hit nearly 150,000:** “Experts warn that the GDP release shouldn’t just be seen in the rear view mirror, but should stand as a cautionary tale of what’s at stake if the recovery slips away,” our colleagues write.

At The White House

TILTING AT MEDICINES: As the American death toll from the novel coronavirus continues rising, President Trump is stubbornly clinging to the unproven benefits of an anti-malarial drug that his own government and health advisers say shouldn't be used to treat the virus.

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With his attacks on masks seemingly behind him, Trump has latched onto hydroxychloroquine as the latest cudgel in the culture war fueling the politicization of the pandemic.

- “I happen to be a believer in hydroxy. I used it. I had no problem. I happen to be a believer. Many, many people agree with me. A great test just came out from the Ford clinic in Michigan — very respected. We’ll see how it is,” Trump told reporters before his Marine One Departure for Texas yesterday.
- The comments came after Trump on Tuesday defended his praise of a controversial Houston doctor who believes the drug is a cure for covid-19, and touted the dangers of “demon sperm.”
- There is no solid scientific evidence hydroxychloroquine should be used to treat covid-19 and the Food and Drug Administration last month revoked an emergency use authorization for it.

Why is this happening? “I think it has turned into an argument within the broader culture war,” a Trump campaign source told Power Up of Trump's obsession with the therapeutic, claiming the debate over the drug underlined **“the politicization of approved medication, both from some in the media and people from the left.”**

This aide argued Trump's thinking about the unproven drug is similar to his views of “Right to Try,” a 2018 law championed by religious conservatives that gives terminally ill people the ability to seek access to experimental treatments. Vice President Pence signed a state Right to Try law as Indiana's governor and was a strong proponent of the federal legislation

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- “The way [Trump] has described [hydroxychloroquine] has always been in line with how he talks about Right to Try, legislation that has been almost universally praised,” the source explained.

A senior administration official pushed back on the argument that Trump's unfounded attachment to the drug is simply a talking point for the president looking for a silver lining in the crisis. The official argued the anti-malarial only became a political battle “because Trump wrapped his arms around it.”

- “His intention was to give America hope and wrap his hands around how to cure people,” the official said. “You don’t see him grabbing onto convalescent plasma, which has more

doctors behind it — he's not getting close to that because he knows what will happen," the official argued, predicting the media and liberals would pan the therapy if Trump embraced it. "It is indeed a political fight."

- The FDA is "nearing a decision to authorize emergency use of antibody-rich blood plasma from recovered Covid-19 patients for treating those infected with the coronavirus, people familiar with the matter said," the [Wall Street Journal's Amy Dockser Marcus and Thomas Burton report](#).
- **However:** "Preliminary studies have found convalescent plasma is generally safe to use and appears to improve the survival of hospitalized patients."

Team science: Some of the president's top doctors and allies maintain that no matter what the president says, the scientific evidence shows hydroxychloroquine is not an effective treatment for coronavirus.

- **"I'm very explicit and unambiguous when we say we've got to follow the science,"** Anthony S. Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases who Trump has sidelined as the pandemic worsens, said during an interview with [NBC News's Andrea Mitchell](#). "If a study that's a good study comes out and shows efficacy and safety for hydroxychloroquine or any other drug that we do — if you do it in the right way you accept the scientific data. But right now today, the cumulative scientific data that has been put together and done over a number of different studies has shown no efficacy."
- **"I think at this point, we can definitively say hydroxychloroquine doesn't work. I'm not sure what more we need to do,"** former FDA commissioner Scott Gottlieb, who served under Trump, told [MSNBC's Stephanie Ruhle](#).

Not so fast: White House trade adviser Peter Navarro, a vocal proponent of hydroxychloroquine, told CNN yesterday the administration is "sitting on millions of doses" of the drug. Citing a [study from Detroit's Henry Ford Medical Center](#) scientists have widely criticized as flawed, Navarro continues to champion the medicine.

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- "We're in the middle of a pandemic where over 1,000 Americans died today. 1,000 Americans died yesterday. And if you have a medicine that there's relatively little or no downside risk and possible upside; why would you not let the American people have it?" Navarro said yesterday.

Navarro has continued to pressure the FDA to reverse course on its decision to rescind emergency authorization for hydroxychloroquine. Earlier this week, the administration tapped Eastman Kodak, the iconic photography company, to produce ingredients for generic drugs – including hydroxychloroquine. The company won a \$765 million government loan under the Defense Production Act to “help expedite domestic production of drugs that can treat a variety of medical conditions and loosen the U.S. reliance on foreign sources,” per the Wall Street Journal's Rachael Levy.

Some Republicans on Capitol Hill have also embraced hydroxychloroquine, including Texas Rep. Louie Gohmert (R) who confirmed yesterday that he tested positive for coronavirus. He told Fox New's Sean Hannity that he was taking the anti-malarial.

- **“My doctor and I are all in,” Gohmert said Wednesday evening, adding that he would start taking the drug “in the next day or two.”**
- “I feel okay. I’m a little tired,” he said. “But if you know the symptoms of covid-19, I don’t have any of them,” he added.

Hydroxychloroquine also became a flash point during yesterday's blockbuster hearing in the House with the nation's top tech CEOs.

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Both parties delivered a tongue lashing to the heads of Facebook, Twitter, Google and Amazon (Jeff Bezos, Amazon's owner, also owns The Washington Post.) But Republican lawmakers repeatedly steered the conversation toward alleged anti-conservative bias on the tech platforms and questioned why companies are increasingly removing from their sites disinformation and conspiracy theories.

Twitter and Google stoked the ire of conservatives — including Donald Trump Jr. and his dad, who amplified the information — after removing a viral video showing doctors propagating unsubstantiated information about the novel coronavirus. Rep. Greg Steube (R-Fla.) pressed Google's Sundar Pichai on why YouTube, which is owned by Google, “thinks it's appropriate to silence physicians” who are providing “their opinion on what can help and cure people” afraid of or suffering from the coronavirus.

- “Congressman, we believe in freedom of expression and there's a lot of debate on YouTube about effective ways to deal with covid-19,” Pichai responded. “We allow robust debate. But during a pandemic, we look to local health authorities — so for example, in the U.S., the CDC for guidelines around medical misinformation that could cause harm in the real world.”

And Rep. F. James Sensenbrenner Jr. (Wis.), the ranking Republican on the House Judiciary panel's antitrust subcommittee, asked Facebook head Mark Zuckerberg to explain why Donald Trump Jr.'s Twitter account was suspended for sharing a viral video promoting hydroxychloroquine.

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- “Congressman, first, to be clear, I think what you might be referring to happened on Twitter, so it's hard for me to speak to that,” Zuckerberg said. “Stating that there's a proven cure for covid — when there is in fact none — might encourage somebody to take something which could have adverse effects ... So we do take that down. ”