

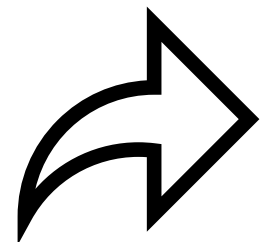
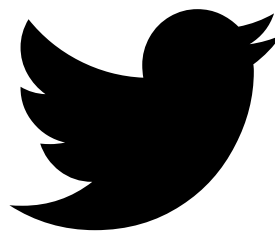
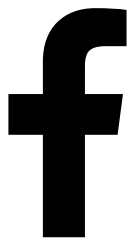
Opinion: Trump is handing anti-vaxxers an invitation to smear coronavirus vaccines



Demonstrators, including some organized by the anti-vaccine group Freedom Angels, protest California's stay-at-home order May 1 in Sacramento. (Carolyn Cole / Los Angeles Times)

By MARIEL GARZA
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Convincing vaccine skeptics to trust any future COVID-19 vaccine is going to be a tough job, even if there are mountains of data from clinical trials showing that it is safe and effective.

It's going to be harder still if there is any reason for them to doubt the motives or the method behind the vaccine.

With that in mind, I can see two potential trouble spots with Operation Warp Speed, President Trump's effort to leverage the full force of military, pharmaceutical industry and government resources to develop a vaccine for COVID-19 by the end of the year.

According to [news reports](#), Trump has tapped Moncef Slaoui, a former executive with giant pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline, along with a top Army general, Gustave F. Perna, to lead the effort.

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Slaoui clearly has the pedigree and connections for such a job. He has a doctorate in molecular biology and immunology and ran the vaccine development program for GlaxoSmithKline, where he worked for 30 years. But he's also a venture capitalist who sits on a number of pharmaceutical company boards, including those of two vaccine makers, SutroVax and Moderna.

Slaoui reportedly intends to step down from the boards to participate in Warp Speed, but that won't erase a career spent deeply embedded in, and enriched by, the pharmaceutical industry. Putting him in charge of this effort gives ammunition to vaccine opponents to shoot holes in the public health campaign that will be needed to successfully immunize the public against the coronavirus.



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One of the most durable myths trafficked by so-called anti-vaxxers is that vaccines are scams developed by greedy pharmaceutical companies, abetted by a corrupt government, to make money from substances that do more harm than good.

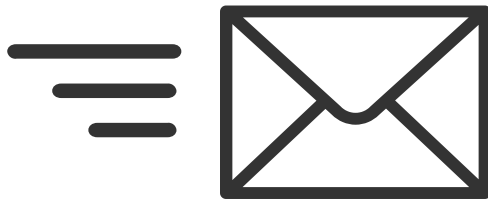
These claims have been repeatedly debunked, and studies show that vaccines are safe and effective. It's also well documented that vaccines have saved untold numbers of humans from suffering and death from disease. Nevertheless, the fiction spread by anti-vaxxers continues to circulate and take hold among well-meaning, if gullible, people. The disinformation campaigns have done real harm, too, helping drive down rates of childhood immunizations and leading to the recent resurgence of measles in the U.S. and other countries.

And lord help us if anything goes wrong with the COVID-19 vaccine itself.

Although vaccines have been protecting people from deadly infectious diseases such as smallpox and influenza for centuries, they aren't always benign and sometimes harm people they are intended to protect. The rush to develop a vaccine against polio in the 1950s had disastrous consequences. Some batches of the vaccine were found to be defective, but only after they had been rolled out in a mass immunization campaign. The bad batches caused 40,000 cases of polio, killing 10 children, leaving dozens more paralyzed and justifiably scaring the public about the safety of future vaccines.

That incident led to much tighter regulation for vaccines, but it should stand as a good reminder that expediting vaccine development comes with risks. And the facts that the White House is calling the effort Operation Warp Speed, not Operation Save Lives, and aiming to produce 100 million doses by November suggest that the motivation is meeting an artificial deadline rather than developing a safe way to protect the public against the coronavirus.

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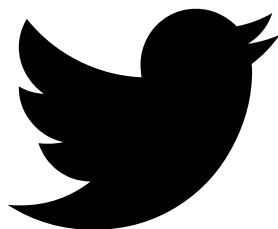
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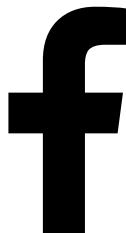
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Mariel Garza is an editorial writer focusing on state government and politics, plastic trash, public health and other topics. Before joining The Times' editorial board in March 2015, she was deputy editorial page editor of the Sacramento Bee and is a former editor of the editorial pages of the L.A. Daily News and Los Angeles News Group. She's a graduate of San Francisco State University.