



What Trump did about coronavirus in February

For the most part, he downplayed the threat.

By **Philip Bump**

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During the White House’s daily [coronavirus](#) news briefing Sunday, President Trump took a shot at the presumptive Democratic nominee for this year’s presidential election, former vice president [Joe Biden](#).

“I do want to read something that I just saw today on television,” Trump said. “I was looking and I just said, ‘That’s an interesting statement.’ We talk about the Democrats, and it was a statement made by Bret Baier, good guy, smart.”

“‘On February 19th, there was a Democratic debate in Las Vegas,’ Trump read. “That was February 19th. That’s way after I closed entrance from China into our country. So Bret goes, ‘On February 19th there was a Democratic debate in Las Vegas. Three words weren’t said during the debate — virus, coronavirus or covid-19. Those three words never came up.’”

“That was — I just thought it was a very interesting,” Trump added, “because, you know, you hear these people, some of the people, the Democrats said, oh, this, that. It never even was a part of their dialogue.”

It was the date that was particularly important to Trump. The president has struggled to explain what his administration did in February as the virus quietly spread in the United States — and as Trump publicly suggested that there was nothing to worry about.

When CBS News’s Paula Reid first asked Trump what his administration did during that month last week, his reelection campaign put out a bulleted list attempting to answer the question. When CBS’s Weijia Jiang asked Trump later on Sunday why he was not actively telling Americans to prepare that month, the president snapped at her — and didn’t answer the question.

Given the emerging importance of the month, we decided to catalogue everything Trump did from Jan. 31 — when his administration announced a limit on travel from China, where the virus first emerged — to the end of February. We’ve included Trump’s public events, any public comments and components of a timeline released by his campaign. Most of the items on that timeline, you’ll note, have little to do with Trump himself.

The timeline

Jan. 31. Speaking from the news briefing room at the White House, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar announced that the coronavirus presented a public health emergency.

He also announced new limits on travel from China to the United States. Among the stipulations was a ban on the entry of noncitizens who had traveled in China in the preceding two weeks. Subsequent analysis by the New York Times determined that 43,000 people traveled from China to the United States after the restrictions were put in place.

“The risk of infection for Americans remains low,” Azar said. “And with these and our previous actions, we are working to keep the risk low.”

Trump didn't attend the briefing. Half an hour after it ended, he boarded Marine One on his way to his private resort Mar-a-Lago.

Feb. 1. Trump headed to his private golf course in Florida.

Feb. 2. From the campaign timeline: “The CDC expanded enhanced entry screening to eight major airports across the nation.”

Trump again played golf, after which he sat for an interview with Fox News’s Sean Hannity. Hannity asked how concerned Trump was about the virus.

“Well, we pretty much shut it down coming in from China,” Trump said. (The travel restrictions hadn’t yet gone into effect when Trump and Hannity spoke.)

He boasted of his relationship with Chinese President Xi Jinping and said that the United States was offering China help.

“We have the best in the world for that,” Trump said. “We’ve done a tremendous job in many other instances also on that even recently.” The Post reported on Saturday that the United States had sent millions of dollars’ worth of protective equipment to China even as cases of the virus were emerging domestically.

That evening, Trump attended a Super Bowl watch party at Mar-a-Lago before heading back to the White House.

Feb. 3. There are two items on Trump's calendar: a lunch with Vice President Pence and the second part of his interview with Hannity.

From the campaign timeline: “The CDC had a team ready to travel to China to obtain critical information on the novel coronavirus, but were in the U.S. awaiting permission to enter by the Chinese government.”

Feb. 4. During his State of the Union address, Trump mentioned the outbreak.

“We are coordinating with the Chinese government and working closely together on the coronavirus outbreak in China,” he said. “My administration will take all necessary steps to safeguard our citizens from this threat.”

It was part of a lengthy section focused on health care, beginning with a promise to protect preexisting conditions — despite the administration supporting a lawsuit that would end that protection — and ending with his awarding the Presidential Medal of Freedom to conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh.

Feb. 5. Trump had lunch with Defense Secretary Mark T. Esper and participated in meetings with Venezuelan opposition politician Juan Guaidó.

On Capitol Hill, the Senate voted to acquit Trump in his impeachment trial.

From the campaign timeline: “The Trump Administration and health officials briefed lawmakers on the Federal Government's coronavirus response efforts.”

Here was Sen. Chris Murphy's (D-Conn.) reaction to that briefing.



Chris Murphy 
@ChrisMurphyCT



Just left the Administration briefing on Coronavirus.
Bottom line: they aren't taking this seriously enough.

Notably, no request for ANY emergency funding, which is a big mistake. Local health systems need supplies, training, screening staff etc. And they need it now.

7:09 AM · Feb 5, 2020



Feb. 6. From the campaign timeline: “The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] began shipping CDC-developed test kits for the 2019 Novel Coronavirus to U.S. and international labs.”




Those tests, The Post has reported, were flawed, delaying the ability to track the virus.



In the morning, Trump attended the National Prayer Breakfast, attacking the “very dishonest and corrupt people” who had supported his impeachment. Later in the day, he held a lengthy event in which he similarly criticized his political opponents. He didn’t mention the virus.

That afternoon, he had a scheduled meeting with the coronavirus task force in the Oval Office. It is the only such meeting on his public schedule during February.

That evening, he spoke with Xi by phone.

Feb. 7. Early in the morning, Trump tweeted about the call.

 **Donald J. Trump**  @realDonaldTrump · Feb 7, 2020 
Just had a long and very good conversation by phone with President Xi of China. He is strong, sharp and powerfully focused on leading the counterattack on the Coronavirus. He feels they are doing very well, even building hospitals in a matter of only days. Nothing is easy, but...

 **Donald J. Trump**  @realDonaldTrump
....he will be successful, especially as the weather starts to warm & the virus hopefully becomes weaker, and then gone. Great discipline is taking place in China, as President Xi strongly leads what will be a very successful operation. We are working closely with China to help!

2:31 AM · Feb 7, 2020 

On his way to North Carolina for an event, Trump told reporters about the conversation.

“We talked about — mostly about the coronavirus. They’re working really hard, and I think they are doing a very professional job,” he said. “They’re in touch with World — the World Organization. CDC also. We’re working together.”

He reiterated that he thought China was “doing a very good job.”

Asked about the potential effect on the global economy, Trump replied, “I think that China will do a very good job.”

At the event in North Carolina, Trump again described his call with Xi.

“I just spoke to President Xi last night, and, you know, we’re working on the — the problem, the virus,” he said. “It’s a — it’s a very tough situation. But I think he’s going to handle it. I think he’s handled it really well. We’re helping wherever we can.”

Later that evening, Trump participated in an event for the Republican Governors Association.

Feb. 8. Over the weekend, Trump had no public events scheduled save one: attending the Governor’s Ball at the White House.

In his comments, he didn’t mention the virus.

Feb. 9. From the campaign timeline: “The White House Coronavirus Task Force briefed governors from across the nation at the National Governors’ Association Meeting in Washington.”

Feb. 10. Trump hosted a number of governors at the White House. He was asked by Gov. Pete Ricketts (R-Neb.) what was next on his trade agenda.

“We’ve done great on the trade. It’s going to have a tremendous impact,” he said as part of his response. “Now, the virus that we’re talking about having to do — you know, a lot of people think that goes away in April with the heat — as the heat comes in. Typically, that will go away in April. We’re in great shape though. We have 12 cases — 11 cases, and many of them are in good shape now.”

In response to a later question, Trump revealed the source of the April assertion: Xi.

The Chinese leader “feels very confident,” Trump said. “And he feels that, again, as I mentioned, by April or during the month of April, the heat, generally speaking, kills this kind of virus. So that would be a good thing.”

“But we’re in great shape in our country,” he added. “We have 11, and the 11 are getting better.”

That evening, Trump traveled to New Hampshire for a campaign rally — timed to step on the Democratic primary the following day.

“The virus, they’re working hard,” he said of China. “Looks like by April, you know, in theory, when it gets a little warmer, it miraculously goes away. I hope that’s true. But we’re doing great in our country. China, I spoke with President Xi, and they’re working very, very hard. And I think it’s going to all work out fine. Rough stuff, I tell you, rough, rough stuff. But I think it’s going to work out good. We only have 11 cases, and they’re all getting better.”

He went on to talk about the trade deal with China.

While in New Hampshire, Trump spoke with Trish Regan, then a host on Fox Business.

“I really believe they are going to have it under control fairly soon,” Trump said of China. “You know in April, supposedly, it dies with the hotter weather. And that's a beautiful date to look forward to. But China I can tell you is working very hard.”

“We’re working with them. You know, we just sent some of our best people over there, World Health Organization and a lot of them are composed of our people. They’re fantastic,” he added. “And they’re now in China, and we’re helping them out. We’re in very good shape. We have 11 cases, and most of them are getting better very rapidly.”

“I think the virus is going to be — it’s going to be fine,” he added later. “They’re working very hard, and we are in communication with them.”

On his way back to D.C., Trump stopped in Dover, Del., to pay his respects to two soldiers killed in Afghanistan.

Feb. 11. Trump had two things on his public calendar: an intelligence briefing and a bill signing.

From the campaign timeline: “The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) expanded a partnership with Janssen Research & Development to ‘expedite the development’ of a coronavirus vaccine.”

Feb. 12. After several meetings with the president of Ecuador, Trump went to the Trump Organization hotel in Washington for a political fundraising event.

From the campaign timeline: “The U.S. shipped test kits for the 2019 novel coronavirus to approximately 30 countries who lacked the necessary reagents and other materials.”

The timeline also reiterated the item from Feb. 2 that CDC officials were awaiting approval to travel to China. Note that Trump spoke with Xi in the intervening period, but approval was still denied.

Feb. 13. Fox News's Geraldo Rivera interviewed Trump for a radio program.

“Mr. President, are you worried that the stock market and the big economic boom are in peril because of this coronavirus spreading epidemic,” Rivera asked, pointing to the lockdown then underway in China.

“Well, we’re working on it very closely. I spoke to President Xi two days ago. They’re working on it very professionally. It’s a problem, we think and we hope, based on all signs that the problem goes away in April because — which is not too far down the road, because he kills this virus,” Trump said. He added that the United States was “sending a lot of people and CDC has been great, but it is — it’s a problem in China. Has not been spreading very much. In our country, we only have, basically, 12 cases, and most of those people are recovering and some cases fully recovered. So it’s actually less.”

A bit later, he again praised Xi.

“I think they’ve handled it professionally, and I think they’re extremely capable, and I think President Xi is extremely capable, and I hope that it’s going to be resolved,” Trump said. “Again, the April date is very important. But you know this is a big thing. The April date is very, very important because if that’s the case, if he does, in fact, kill that’s when it starts getting hot and this virus reacts very poorly to heat and dies. So we’ll see what happens.”

Trump visited his campaign headquarters in Virginia. Later that afternoon, he spoke by phone with New York Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo (D). The conversation centered on the administration’s efforts to pressure New York to change its immigration laws by blocking New Yorkers from a federal travel program.

Feb. 14. At an event with the Border Patrol Council, Trump touted what he described as his successes — including on the virus.

“Sixty-one percent of the voters approve of Trump’s handling of the coronavirus,” Trump said, pointing to a poll from the Morning Consult. (That figure is now at 45 percent.) “And, you know, we did a very early move on that. We did a — I was criticized by a lot of people at the beginning because we were the first. We’d never done it before. We closed our borders through certain areas. It’s never happened before where we did that. We never closed our borders. But we did it, and we actually did it early, and we took some criticism. Now everyone is saying we did a good job.”

He again said that only 12 people in the country had been infected, praised Xi and suggested that the virus would fade in April.

The only other events on Trump’s calendar were his intelligence briefing — and his late-afternoon departure for Mar-a-Lago. From the campaign timeline: “The CDC expanded enhanced entry screening to eight major airports across the nation.”

Feb. 15. Trump played golf and then attended a political fundraiser in Palm Beach.

Feb. 16. Trump and first lady Melania Trump attended the Daytona 500. He didn’t mention the virus. Two months later, the racetrack was a drive-through testing site.

Trump headed back to Washington, attending adviser Stephen Miller's wedding at Trump's D.C. hotel.

Feb. 17. Trump had no events scheduled, given the Presidents’ Day holiday.

Feb. 18. Trump left D.C. for a series of events on the West Coast.

During a briefing on the 2020 Olympics, the subject of the virus didn't come up. A month later, the Games were postponed until 2021. Trump then attended several fundraising events in Southern California before heading to the Trump hotel in Las Vegas for the night.

From the campaign timeline: "HHS announced it would engage with Sanofi Pasteur in an effort to quickly develop a coronavirus vaccine and to develop treatment for coronavirus infections."

Feb. 19. Trump headed from Las Vegas back to California for more fundraising events and an event focused on water issues in California's Central Valley. That evening, he traveled to Phoenix for a campaign rally.

At the rally — held the same day as the Democratic debate discussed by Baier — Trump did not mention the virus.

Trump participated in an interview with a local television station while in Phoenix.

"How confident are you that China is being 100 percent honest with us when it comes to this scary virus?" the reporter asked.

"I'm confident that they're trying very hard," Trump replied. "I mean, I know President Xi — I get along with him very well. We've just made a great trade deal, which is going to be a lot of business for Arizona and every other place. But, they are trying very, very hard, and I think the numbers are going to get progressively better as we go along."

He reiterated his assumption that the virus would recede in April.

Feb. 20. After again overnighting at his hotel in Vegas, Trump attended an event hosted by the city's police department. He then traveled to Colorado for another campaign rally.

At neither event did Trump mention the virus.

Feb. 21. For the third time in three days, Trump held a campaign rally, this time in Las Vegas. (Here, again, the point was in part to try to drown out the next day's Democratic caucuses.)

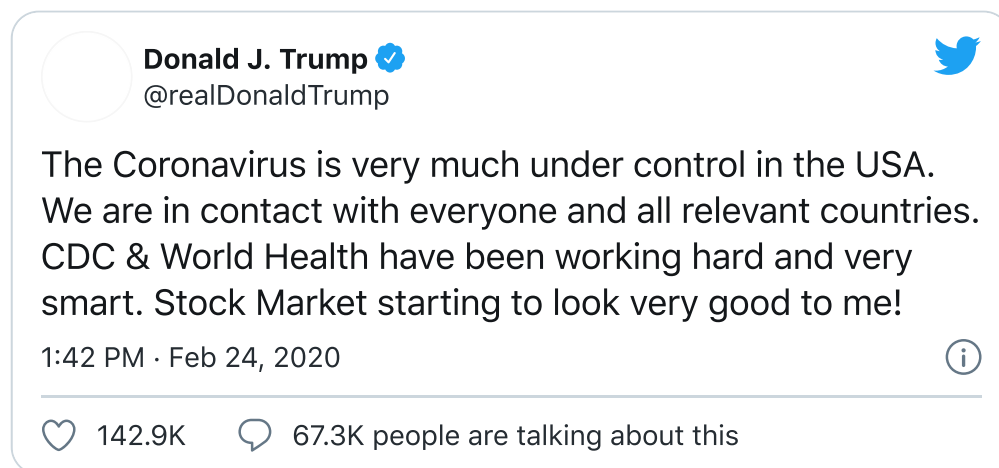
Trump didn't mention the virus. That evening, he traveled back to Washington.

Feb. 22. Trump's calendar was empty.

From the campaign timeline: "A WHO team of international experts arrives in Wuhan, China." The team of international investigators apparently included Americans.

Feb. 23. The president left D.C. for a multiday trip to India.

Feb. 24. While in India, and with markets tumbling, Trump tweeted about the virus.



From the campaign timeline: "The Trump Administration sent a letter to Congress requesting at least \$2.5 billion to help combat the spread of the coronavirus."

Feb. 25. Speaking to reporters from India, Trump offered comments about the virus.

“You may ask about the coronavirus, which is very well under control in our country,” Trump said. “We have very few people with it, and the people that have it are — in all cases, I have not heard anything other. Maybe there's something new, because for two days, I haven't been seeing too much of that news, of very much news, because [the India trip] has been very all-encompassing.”

He was later asked whether his decision to allow a number of Americans infected with the virus to return to the United States conflicted with his 2014 criticism of President Barack Obama for allowing Ebola patients into the United States. Trump said that it wasn't contradictory, given the comparative mortality rates from the two viruses.


He returned to the subject a bit later.

Xi “is working very hard. He is very capable. The country is very capable. And it snuck up on him, but I think he's going to do well,” Trump said. “Now you see it's going to South Korea, it's going to Italy, and it's going to other places. But I spoke to all of them. They're all working very, very hard on it.”

“I think it was a good decision [to limit travel from China] because we have very few people,” Trump added a bit later. “And you can add to it a few people that we took in because they're Americans. I mean, what are we going to do? And they were almost in between countries, where people weren't going to take them, and they're Americans. But they're fully quarantined. They call it 'fully quarantined.' So, you know, we did the right thing.”

Between events, Trump tweeted a disparagement of Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) after Schumer said that Trump's funding request for fighting the virus was too low.



Donald J. Trump 
@realDonaldTrump



Crvin' Chuck Schumer is complainina. for publicity

purposes only, that I should be asking for more money than \$2.5 Billion to prepare for Coronavirus. If I asked for more he would say it is too much. He didn't like my early travel closings. I was right. He is incompetent!

6:02 AM · Feb 25, 2020



123.7K 43.8K people are talking about this

Later, during a roundtable event in New Delhi, Trump blamed the previous day's stock-price drop on concern about the virus.

“Other than yesterday — which was something pretty bad, with respect to the virus, and we'll see what happens — I see the futures are up today, up fairly substantially,” he said. “But that's a very serious thing, but we think we're in very good shape in the United States. We've essentially closed the border to areas where we had to close them.”

While en route back to the United States, Trump tweeted.



Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump · Feb 25, 2020



CDC and my Administration are doing a GREAT job of handling Coronavirus, including the very early closing of our borders to certain areas of the world. It was opposed by the Dems, “too soon”, but turned out to be the correct decision. No matter how well we do, however, the.....



Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump

....Democrats talking point is that we are doing badly. If the virus disappeared tomorrow, they would say we did a really poor, and even incompetent, job. Not fair, but it is what it is. So far, by the way, we have not had one death. Let's keep it that way!

6:29 PM · Feb 25, 2020



67.2K 23.8K people are talking about this

From the campaign timeline: “HHS Secretary Azar testified before the Senate HELP committee on the Administration's coronavirus response efforts.”

Feb. 26. Hours after returning from India, Trump participated in the first of his now-regular daily briefings about the virus. Much of the briefing was centered on providing political support for Trump.

After beginning by praising his limits on travel from China, Trump and his team articulated that the risk posed by the virus is small. He claimed that the government was screening people from affected areas such as South Korea and Italy but that no additional travel restrictions were being imposed at the time. He held up a graph identifying the United States as one of the best-prepared countries in the world for an epidemic.

At several points, he compared the threat to the seasonal flu, which, he had been told, kills tens of thousands of people a year. (“That was shocking to me,” Trump said.)

“It is a little bit different, but in some ways it's easier and in some ways it's a little bit tougher,” he said of the coronavirus relative to the flu. “But we have it so well under control. I mean, we really have done a very good job.”

The president also offered one of the defining lines of his administration’s handling of the outbreak.

“When you have 15 people, and the 15 within a couple of days is going to be down to close to zero, that's a pretty good job we've done,” Trump said.

He was asked to respond to an assertion by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) that he “didn’t know what he was talking about” in regard to the virus. After calling Pelosi incompetent, Trump’s messaging on the virus shifted.

“Instead of making a statement like that, she should be saying we have to work together, because we have a big problem, potentially,” he said. “And maybe it's going to be a very little problem. I hope that it's going to be a very little problem. But we have to work together.”

As the news conference was underway, The Post reported that the first case of “community spread” of the virus had been confirmed — that is, the first case of an infection that was not immediately attributable to contact with someone who had traveled overseas.

Feb. 27. After receiving his intelligence briefing, Trump participated in two events related to African American History Month.

At an event focused on black leaders and sitting next to Lynnette Hardaway, a conservative media personality known as “Diamond,” Trump talked about his administration’s efforts.

“We have a situation with the virus. We've done a great job,” he said. “The press won't give us credit for it. We have — in a world that has some big problems — you look at China and you look at industry between the two countries. And I did something that had never been done before — because it had never been done before: I closed our borders to certain areas of the world.”

He again touted his efforts a bit later.

“We have done an incredible job. We’re going to continue,” he said. “It’s going to disappear. One day — it’s like a miracle — it will disappear. And from our shores, we — you know, it could get worse before it gets better. It could maybe go away. We’ll see what happens.”

At the second event, Trump said that the virus was unexpected.

“I will say that things happen in life that are — if they would have said, ‘What are — give me 10 bad things that you think could happen,’ that wouldn’t have been on the list, right?” Trump said. “But you never know. But it’s working out very professionally. We’re doing a tremendous job and our people are doing a tremendous job.”

In reality, Trump was warned about the threat of a pandemic repeatedly.

Feb. 28. Trump left D.C. for a political rally in Charleston, S.C.

“Now the Democrats are politicizing the coronavirus,” he told the audience. “You know that, right? Coronavirus. They’re politicizing it. We did one of the great jobs.”

“One of my people came up to me and said, ‘Mr. President, they tried to beat you on Russia, Russia, Russia.’ That didn’t work out too well. They couldn’t do it,” he added a bit later. “They tried the impeachment hoax. That was on a perfect conversation. ... And this is their new hoax.”

“But you know we did something that’s been pretty amazing,” he continued. “We have 15 people in this massive country, and because of the fact that we went early, we went early, we could have had a lot more than that.

“We’re doing great,” he added. “Our country is doing so great.”

Feb. 29. From the campaign timeline: “The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) allowed certified labs to develop and begin testing coronavirus testing kits while reviewing pending applications.”

At that day’s coronavirus press briefing — the second in which he participated — new travel restrictions were announced. Trump was also asked about his “hoax” comments. He insisted that the “hoax” was “referring to the action that they take to try and pin this on somebody, because we’ve done such a good job.”

He admitted that the number of cases was likely to increase.

“Additional cases in the United States are likely, but healthy individuals should be able to fully recover,” Trump said. “And we think that will be a statement that we can make with great surety now that we’ve gotten familiar with this problem. They should be able to recover should they contract the virus. So, healthy people, if you’re healthy, you will probably go through a process and you’ll be fine.”

He then returned to his administration’s response.

“Since the early stages of the foreign outbreak, my administration has taken the most aggressive action in modern history to confront the spread of this disease,” he said. As evidence, he pointed to the previous month’s travel restrictions.

“Whatever the circumstance is, we’re prepared,” he said later.

On that day, there were 15 confirmed cases in the United States. As of this writing, there are more than 760,000, with more than 40,000 dead.

