



China's Lack of Transparency About Epidemic Disease

By Matt O'Brien, Spencer Raley, and Casey Ryan | March 2020

China does not believe in transparency.¹ That is no surprise. It is a totalitarian nation where the interests of the individual are subordinate to those of the state. Accordingly, “eight doctors in the city of Wuhan were punished in December [2019] for raising the alarm about the virus.” These included, “Li Wenliang, the 33-year-old ophthalmologist at the city’s central hospital who was forced to sign a statement apologizing for doing so.”²

After coming clean about the nature and severity of the virus, the Chinese government then finagled its methods for counting fatalities attributable to COVID-19.³ According to unnamed “global health experts” cited by the *Vox* online magazine, due to Chinese dissembling, “the world had less time to prepare and react to the new coronavirus, which has likely worsened the outbreak and increased the risk of a global pandemic.”⁴

And this is not the first time that China has withheld information about a disease outbreak in order to protect its reputation and economic interests. According to *STAT*, this is a case of history repeating itself: China’s handling of the 1997 “bird flu” outbreak and the 2002-2003 SARS epidemic were also marked by “obfuscation and denial” that “delayed response” and led to a “public health trust deficit that persists today.”⁵

China’s history of deception and misdirection relating to incidents affecting global public health raises a significant question for the United States: Should America limit immigration from states that aren’t willing to share information about outbreaks of communicable diseases?

Can The U.S. Limit Immigration from Nations that Refuse to Share Timely, Accurate Public Health Information?

The answer to that question is an emphatic, “Yes!” The United States both can and should limit immigration from any countries that won’t share public health information with our Departments of State and Homeland Security. In *Trump v. Hawaii*, the Supreme Court affirmed the president’s authority to issue proclamations intended to, “improve vetting procedures for foreign nationals traveling to the United States by identifying ongoing deficiencies in the information needed to assess whether nationals of particular countries present a security threat.” It also confirmed the president’s power to impose travel restrictions prohibiting the admission of foreign nationals who cannot be properly vetted.⁶

Those powers are set forth in 8 U.S.C. §Section 1182(f) (also referred to as Section 212(f)) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which clearly grants the president authority to suspend the entry of *any* foreigners whose entry would be detrimental to the interests of the United States. There is no doubt that individuals who might cause an outbreak of deadly disease if admitted to the U.S. are detrimental to America's interests.

Conclusion

Currently, the United States lacks the information required to assess whether individuals from China, Iran and a number of other states present a threat to the public health of the U.S. And, despite criticism from open-borders advocates, President Trump has wisely prohibited the admission of Chinese and Iranian nationals to the United States for the duration of the COVID-19 crisis.

However, it would be an even safer and wiser policy to impose severe limitations on the admission of nationals from *any and all* states that refuse to engage in a transparent exchange of public health information about their citizens.

The U.S. has a legitimate interest in obtaining the data required to conduct public health screening of foreign nationals. Public health security *is* national security.

¹ Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, "Timeline: The early days of China's coronavirus outbreak and cover-up," *Axios*, March 18, 2020, <https://www.axios.com/timeline-the-early-days-of-chinas-coronavirus-outbreak-and-cover-up-ee65211a-afb6-4641-97b8-353718a5faab.html>.

² Carl Gershman, "The coronavirus exposes the lie at the heart of Communist China," *The Globe and Mail*, Updated March 13, 2020, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-the-coronavirus-exposes-the-lie-at-the-heart-of-communist-china/>.

³ Lily Kuo, "Coronavirus outbreak: senior US official accuses China of lack of transparency," *The Guardian*, February 14, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/14/coronavirus-china-not-being-honest-says-us-as-wartime-measures-widened>.

⁴ Julia Belluz, "China hid the severity of its coronavirus outbreak and muzzled whistleblowers — because it can," *Vox*, February 10, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/2020/2/10/21124881/coronavirus-outbreak-china-li-wenliang-world-health-organization>.

⁵ Keith Richburg, "Bird flu. SARS. China coronavirus. Is history repeating itself?" *STAT*, January 27, 2020, <https://www.statnews.com/2020/01/27/bird-flu-sars-china-coronavirus-is-history-repeating-itself/>.

⁶ "Trump v. Hawaii, 585 U.S. ____ (2018)," *Justia*, Accessed March 2020, <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/585/17-965/#tab-opinion-3920355>.