



[White House Adviser Warned of the Potential Impact of a Coronavirus Pandemic](#)

A top White House adviser reportedly warned Trump Administration officials in January about the potential severity of the coronavirus outbreak. Peter Navarro, the trade adviser to the president, circulated a memo to West Wing staff in late January that warned the outbreak could cost the United States trillions of dollars. Navarro warned that a combination of no existing cure or vaccine, and no immune protection could elevate the risk of the virus escalating into a pandemic and severely impacting life in the United States. The memo included a “worst case scenario” in which the virus was not aggressively contained and resulted in the deaths of over half a million Americans.

President Trump formed the coronavirus task force on the same day that the memo was dated, and Navarro is now in charge of supply chain issues for medical equipment needed to deal with the virus. Included in Peter Navarro’s memo were various ideas to slow the spread of the coronavirus. Navarro is known to be a hawk on China policy, and many of his ideas focused on minimizing contact with the source of the outbreak. The title of his January memo was, “Impose Travel Ban on China?” and he argued in favor of immediately restricting travel to and from China in the face of the coronavirus outbreak. This was a step that President Trump was reportedly already considering, and enacted the following day. Navarro advocated for a year-long travel ban on China, but many aides in the administration saw that as unrealistic. Some White House aides believed the memo to be Navarro grandstanding to push anti-China legislation he has long favored, and therefore didn’t take the warnings seriously.

Following the outbreaks of the virus elsewhere in the world, Navarro wrote a second memo in late February and warned that continued inaction could cost up to two million American lives. Navarro wrote the memo anonymously, and addressed it directly to the president with the pretense it had come from the National Security Council. In it, Navarro recommended that the Trump Administration request \$3 billion from Congress to fight the spread of the coronavirus. That money would be used to procure a billion face masks, 200,000 Tyvek suits, 11,000 ventilator circuits, and 25,000 respirators. These numbers were based off projections for 100 million Americans becoming infected with the virus.

President Trump has denied that he has seen the memos until very recently. The president was asked about the correspondence during a news conference on Tuesday and said he had only read them “maybe a day, two days ago.” However, the President enacted unilateral action called for by the initial memo a day after it had been written, such as imposing a travel ban on China. The president characterized the warnings as policy recommendations that Navarro had given to certain people on his staff, but stated that the information was never passed along to him. The President’s response to the coronavirus outbreak has been characterized by a battle to get people to take the virus seriously without inciting total chaos. President Trump said on Tuesday that even if he had seen the memos when they were written, he wouldn’t have wanted to create shock and havoc by divulging worst case scenarios.