Coronavirus: Anti-Science Activism Is a Luxury for the Privileged

By Alex Berezow, PhD — April 27, 2020

*Being anti-science and anti-technology is a luxury for when times are good. In times of crisis, people beg for help from scientists, doctors, and pharmaceutical companies.*

With coronavirus still sweeping the globe and racking up a substantial death toll, it’s hard to find much to be happy about. But here’s one thing: Anti-vaxxers, anti-GMO(rons), and Big Ag and Big Pharma bashers are no longer in fashion, hopefully permanently.

The biggest change may be in regard to the anti-vaccine movement. No matter what, these people will never go away entirely. (They’re sort of like cockroaches after a nuclear war.) But they can lose credibility and influence, and that appears already to be happening. Major media outlets have been providing updates on possible coronavirus vaccines, but curiously absent from the global conversation are the activists who claim that vaccines are dangerous. Their voice has been minimized.

Even more poetic is the fact that some of the vaccines are GMOs [2]. Johnson & Johnson is working on a vaccine that genetically modifies a harmless adenovirus to resemble coronavirus. The biotech firm Medicago [3] is using genetically modified tobacco plants to create a vaccine. (It’s also using them to create antibodies. Tobacco plants are used because, like mice and fruit flies, scientists know a lot about them.) Others are using novel DNA- or RNA-based technologies.
Instead of being demonized, biotechnology is now seen as a potential savior. The same goes for Big Pharma, which is routinely used as a whipping boy by politicians. The same pharmaceutical industry that is derided for "profiting off of people's health" and was blamed (somewhat fairly, but mostly unfairly [4]) for the opioid crisis is now being begged to develop life-saving antivirals against coronavirus.

Anti-Science Activism Is a Luxury for the Privileged

People often forget how bad things used to be. There were no "good ole days." Before the advent of modern agricultural technology, people were impoverished and sometimes starved to death. Before the advent of modern biomedical technology, people routinely died of infectious diseases.

When times are good, people complain about the alleged excesses of capitalism and the greed of the healthcare system. But when times are bad, the very same people come begging for help from scientists, doctors, and pharmaceutical companies, proving once and for all that anti-science activism is a luxury for the privileged.

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