



All the Best Podcast

Episode 48: “Looking Forward: Avoiding a Vaccine Cold War”

A recap featuring world renown scientists and doctors discussing the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic

Dr. Murphy: The 41st president, George H. W. Bush, was known for many things, but one of which was truly the leader of a team, the assemblage of a team, the inspiration of a team. He had three aspects that he shared with me. He said in crucial things, unity, in important things, diversity and in all things generosity.

George: In the first place, I believe that character is a part of being President.

Barbara: And life really must have joy.

Sam: This is "All the Best." The official podcast of the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. I'm your host, Sam LeBlond, one of their many grandchildren. Here, we celebrate the legacy of these two incredible Americans through friends, family, and the foundation. This is "All the Best."

George: I remember something my dad taught me. He said, write your mother, serve your country, and he said, tell the truth. And I've tried to do that in public life. All through it.

Barbara: You are a human being first and those human connections with children, with friends are the most important investments you will ever make.

George: We stand tonight before a new world of hope and possibilities for our children. A world we could not have contemplated a few years ago.

Sam: On behalf of our family and the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. This is "All the Best."

Welcome to "All the Best." I'm your host, Sam LeBlond. Thirty years ago, my grandfather, George H.W. Bush was instrumental in the end of the Cold War by working closely and collaboratively with allies around the world. In that Cold War, world superpowers controlled nuclear warheads, which then wielded tremendous influence on the less powerful world. Fast forward to today and we're now facing a different kind of cold war. In the last nine months, the global pandemic of COVID-19 has turned into one of the greatest challenges our world has faced in the 21st century.

In this cold war, super powers continue to wield influence over the less powerful world, but this time by controlling life-saving vaccines. To prevent this future from becoming a reality, our charge is not only a nation but as a global society, is to avert countries from devolving into a vaccine cold war by building a coalition through a coordinated worldwide effort. On September 17th, the George and Barbara Bush Foundation, together with the George Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M, hosted a discussion called "Looking Forward: Avoiding a Vaccine Cold War," which featured the world's leading authorities to discuss the realities of addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, which was moderated by former "All the Best" guest, Dr. Martin Murphy.

On today's episode, we're going to share some of our favorite moments from this discussion, hearing from leading world experts and their incredible work on the road to a vaccine and their fight against COVID-19. All this while embodying my grandparents' spirit of service and cooperation. Here's Sir Jeremy Farrar, the director of "Wellcome Trust," a London-based medical research charity. He starts things off with the reality of the current state of COVID-19.

Jeremy: I still think that the world is underestimating where we stand. This is a human endemic infection, now it's not going away. It will reverberate around the world for many, many years to come. It will damage health, of course, but I like to phrase this in four overlapping circles. The direct impact on health is tragic as we've seen in every country in the world. There's the indirect consequences of COVID on all of the other health issues; vaccination, cancer care, care of the elderly, diabetics have suffered during this. The third one is it's discombobulated economies; trade, education, trust in government. And then the fourth is the impact on geopolitics, which of course this foundation has been so important over many years in arguing for multi-lateralism. We run the risk of COVID turning us into another polarized cold war and epidemics, which we must avoid and which I'd implore the George and Barbara Bush Foundation to

push forward. So I think we mustn't underestimate where we are or the challenges of getting out of this.

Sam: But how did we get here? Here's Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, Chief Scientist for the World Health Organization.

Dr. Swaminathan: The global preparedness monitoring board presented their report. It's called "A World in Disorder." And essentially at the same time, last year, they presented a report which actually warned the world about such a thing happening, the possibility of a pandemic and the fact that the world is not prepared. Unfortunately, this happened all too soon and within a few months of them presenting that report, which said the world was ill-prepared, we were in the midst of a massive pandemic with this new virus, which has many properties, which make it quite difficult to contain and control.

Sam: So then, how do you address a virus that's so difficult to contain and control?

Dr. Swaminathan: So now we have only one way forward. Solidarity is the only way out of this situation because the virus doesn't respect borders, it doesn't respect nationalities or politics. It looks for vulnerabilities and it exploits them. And where it sees division, where it sees discord, that's where the virus is going to spread. On the positive side, I've seen tremendous global cooperation, collaboration, and the willingness to work together among scientists, among doctors, among healthcare workers, researchers coming together to develop the tools that are going to help us end this pandemic, whether it's new diagnostics, better drugs and treatments, and of course, vaccines that eventually are the best hope for us to put an end, at least, to the acute phase of the pandemic. And that's where, WHO I think was quite instrumental in bringing together the R&D blueprint, which is a framework for how to do research on novel pathogens.

And so very quickly in February, we convened about 400 scientists and came up with a research roadmap that already laid out what the knowledge gaps were at that point. This is a new virus, we knew very little about it and what the top priorities were. We've come a long way since then. There's been open sharing of knowledge, all journals have basically removed paywalls so that knowledge is freely available. And I think that's our hope, and that is what people would like to see. Now, if we had the same thing happening at the political level, then of course it would be I think, a win-win for all. But I do think that on the science side, including the establishment of The ACT Accelerator, there's been a tremendous coming together and a willingness to bring our complimentary

strengths in order to achieve the goal much faster than if we had all continued to work in our silos.

Sam: You may be wondering what exactly is The ACT Accelerator. Here's Dr. Swaminathan again.

Dr. Swaminathan: The ACT Accelerator was launched on the 24th of April by the President of European Commission, the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, Director-General, Dr. Tedros, and a host of other world leaders. And the accelerator has two big goals. One is to accelerate the development of these new tools that we just talked about; the diagnostics, the drugs, and the vaccines, but also to ensure equitable access because all too often in the past, the rich countries, and those who have been able to afford for these technologies, get them decades ahead of people living in poor countries or poor people living in high income countries. So the quest is not only to get those new tools developed, but to ensure that they actually get to people who need them, regardless of where they live. We've achieved a lot. It's only been four months, but already there have been several successes. And the next few months are really going to be very, very critical if this is to succeed.

Sam: The ACT Accelerator has, in fact, accomplished a lot. And that's exactly the type of coalition that I know would have made my grandparents proud. But what is our status in achieving a successful vaccine? Here's Dr. Richard Hatchett, the CEO for The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, or CEPI.

Dr. Hatchett: When COVID-19 emerged in late December, CEPI went on high alert and we very rapidly moved to develop vaccine candidates. And within a few weeks in early January, we realized that we would have to actually develop these candidates, not just to have them in the freezer, but to take them into clinical trials and to scale them up because of the threat that we were facing. It was very apparent by January 24th, 25th, that we were likely facing an incipient pandemic. Over the last nine months, CEPI as an organization has provided funding for nine vaccine candidates. Eight of those are now in human clinical trials, two are in phase three, the last stage of testing. And we have also focused our efforts, especially over the last five or six months on the problem of access. Ending the pandemic will require two things. It requires the fruits of science in terms of developing vaccines and other medical countermeasures, but it will also require global collaboration. You cannot end the pandemic in a single country. You have to provide the tools to end the pandemic to all countries. You need to do that simultaneously if you don't want to extend the pandemic and lead to greater loss of life, greater economic devastation. The entire world

is experiencing those effects and we can envision a pandemic lasting several years, or we can work together and try to bring it to an end by the end of next year.

Sam: You cannot end the pandemic in a single country. You have to provide the tools to end the pandemic in all countries. It's this sort of global collaboration that has led to COVAX.

Dr. Hatchett: COVAX, the COVID 19 Vaccines Access Facility. What CEPI has done with our partners at WHO, with Wellcome Trust, the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, with Gavi and with other partners, is to think about how we can coordinate a global response and CEPI's main contribution to that has been to establish COVAX. And this is an effort to bring countries together, to share the risk of developing vaccines, and also share the benefits of pooling their procurements so that they can buy at scale and so those vaccines can then be allocated through a globally fair allocation system. This is not only the right thing to do from a moral perspective, but it is also the right thing to do from an efficiency perspective, because it is only by sharing what will be a scarce resource for at least the next 18 months to two years and making sure that we get the vaccine to those who need it most; to healthcare workers and to those with the greatest risk of suffering the severe illness or death from the virus, that we will be able to take the edge off of the pandemic and make it something that human societies can live with and thus something that they can begin to restore their normal activity.

Sam: And in order to return to normal activity, Sir Jeremy Farrar encourages us to embody the idea of enlightened self-interest.

Jeremy: This is the exemplar of enlightened self-interest. This is an infection which is reverberating around the world. There is no exit for any country, rich or poor, until all of the countries are safe from this pandemic. It would be much better to vaccinate some people in all countries than all people in one country. That's both a public health message, but also a financial and economic and educational. It affects everything in society. And this is the coming together of true public health and enlightened self-interest to get your country back on its economic feet again, get your children back into school, your students back into universities and people back into the workplace. It is the only way out. And I think this actually also defines what we want from the 21st century. If you look at all of the great challenges we're gonna face in this century, many, many of them have the same characteristics. They don't represent borders, epidemics, climate change, drug-resistant infections, whatever we talk about, they will all need this approach. And whilst our focus is on COVID and COVAX and the

ACT Accelerator, etc., actually, this will define the sort of way we want the world in the 21st century. And we'll reverberate through many other issues for many, many years to come.

Sam: But this vision of the 21st century needs funding in order to power it. Here's Dr. Hatchett again, with the state of what it takes to fund the successful vaccine, and beyond.

Dr. Hatchett: When we set out in January, we tried to estimate what the cost for research and development would be to produce a portfolio of candidates that produced a high likelihood that three or four of those candidates would be successful. And that we would be able to produce them at scale. We estimated that we would need at least \$2 billion in the first 12 to 18 months to support the research and development. And that does not include the manufacturing. And it does not include the scaling up or scaling out of the manufacturing. We've estimated those cost probably in the range of another \$5 billion or so, and the cost to then procure a vaccine and to distribute that vaccine globally takes it up into the tens of billions, probably north of \$20 billion for that undertaking. The COVAX facility that I was describing earlier, countries will pay for the vaccine that is delivered to them if they are high-income countries or upper/middle income countries, but we also need to raise a tremendous amount of money to support vaccine procurement and delivery for the 92 countries that are not in a position to buy their own vaccine.

If I had to say one thing to the audience, it would be please encourage your political leaders to contribute to this global effort. It is enlightened self-interest. Contributing to this effort will help in the pandemic, and will help end it sooner. \$20 billion is an enormous sum of money until you compare it with the damage to the global economy that is being done every single month. The IMF has recently released an estimate of that damage and it amounts to about \$17 billion a day. And that's what we should bear in mind as we think about bringing the resources together to support this effort.

Sam: This cost to support global collaboration initiatives like COVAX and the act accelerator are nothing compared to the economic damage COVID-19 is doing every single day. Here's Sir Jeremy Farrar, once more.

Jeremy: But there is only one way out of this and that is through the appliance of science, the equitable access to the benefits of that science and critically towards vaccination. The \$12 trillion that we're losing at the moment in lost economies will only be replaced. Our children will only go back to school when it's safe for them to do so and they can trust the environment in which they're in.

And we can only bring about that by using science to push forward the agenda, make sure that nobody is left behind, and that makes sure that we have the vaccines, both research, developed, manufactured, and distributed around the world. But we can only get there if we come together as a world, we share what we're doing, we make sure what we're doing is distributed equitably all around the world. This is a moment of critical political leadership, a moment where political leadership will reverberate for years to come and we will talk about in 100 years time that that leadership was there. And at the moment we're lacking that global leadership and we desperately need it.

Sam: As the panel discussion came to a close, interim CEO of the George and Barbara Bush Foundation, Andy Card delivered some exciting news about a critical piece in the pandemic recovery process.

Andy: You know, as this program came together we knew that we were fortunate to have a phenomenal partner in the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University because they've had a long-standing expertise and focus on pandemics and it had already earned them respect around the globe for their scholarship and thought leadership. And then less than two months ago, the U.S. Government gave Texas A&M University itself a quarter-billion dollar contract to mass produce vaccines once the green light is given.

Sam: This is fantastic news, and I could not be more proud of how the George and Barbara Bush Foundation's family at Texas A&M is going to serve not only our nation, but the world. Here's Bush School Fellow, Dr. Glen Laine followed by Senior Vice President of Texas A&M Health Greg Hartman with more exciting details.

Dr. Laine: Texas A&M University have been preparing for this inevitable day for over a decade actually. The physical facilities that have been constructed here on campus for vaccine development and production have all been in preparation to support the path forward in dealing with pandemic diseases like COVID-19, but also the many other pandemic diseases which will visit us in the future.

Greg: Thanks to A&M, has this contract to produce the antigens for the vaccine. Ultimately, we could produce as much as a half a billion of the core components of the vaccine here in the Bryan College Station area. That facility, they're doing day and night construction, getting it ready for preparation for this. And our goal is to be prepared, to begin to actually start manufacturing the antigen part of the vaccines by probably January 1st or so. I think we'll be ready

up and running able to do it by then. Everything's on track now to be able to do this.

Sam: At the beginning of this episode, we heard Dr. Martin Murphy recall the most important aspects my grandfather considered when it came to building a team; unity, diversity and generosity. Everyone we heard from today embodies those qualities and I cannot be more encouraged about the fight against COVID-19 and the prevention of a vaccine cold war. I am confident that both my grandparents are smiling right now, knowing that their legacy is inspiring such world changing action. As we come to a close, one final thanks to Sir Jeremy Farrar, Dr. Swaminathan, Dr. Richard Hatchett, Dr. Glen Laine, Greg Hartman, Dr. Martin Murphy and the honorable Andy Card. And thanks to you all for listening. We'll see you next time.

Sam: I'm Sam LeBlond reminding you to listen, share, and subscribe to "All the Best" on Apple podcasts, Spotify and everywhere great podcasts are found. Thank you for joining me as we celebrate All the Best.

Barbara: Both George and I believe that while the White House is important, the country's future is in your house. Every house, all over America.

George: Preparedness, strength, decency, and honor. Courage, sacrifice, the willingness to fight, even die for one's country. America, the land of the free and the brave. And God bless the United States of America. The greatest country on the face of the Earth.