**Headline:** Jared Kushner Is the Point Man for Private Profiteering on the Coronavirus Response

By Max Moran

**Author Bio:** Max Moran is a research assistant at the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR)’s [Revolving Door Project](https://www.cepr.net/staff-member/max-moran/), which aims to increase scrutiny on executive branch appointments.

**Source:** Independent Media Institute

**Credit Line:** *This article was produced in partnership by the* [*Center for Economic and Policy Research*](https://tinyurl.com/y9rndo4n) *and* [*Economy for All*](https://independentmediainstitute.org/economy-for-all/)*, a project of the Independent Media Institute.*

**Tags:** Health Care, COVID-19, News, Politics

**[Article Body:]**

Hot off of singlehandedly ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, America’s Son-In-Law-In-Chief has put himself in charge of handling half of the White House response to the coronavirus crisis.

Didn’t you know that? No? Oh, well, it seems the White House just decided that, ah, the people didn’t need to hear about this. Oh, and FYI, most of his team are from the private sector. That’s not a problem, Congressional Democrats, is it?

Thanks to some [thorough reporting by Politico](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/01/jared-kushner-coronavirus-response-160553), we now know that Jared Kushner is running a shadow COVID-19 response team alongside the official task force led by Mike Pence. Pence once characterized his group as an “all-of-government response,” but Kushner’s team is an “all-of-private-sector response” full of private equity executives and health care profiteers. That “all-of-private-sector” line isn’t me being snide: it’s how some of the anonymous White House officials in the report characterized their own colleagues.

Of course, in the Trump era, the difference between the government and the private sector is mostly semantic. As the Revolving Door Project has been pointing out [since February](https://prospect.org/health/the-trump-administrations-contemptuous-pro-corporate-response-to-coronavirus/), Trump’s health officials are all ex-Pharma and insurance profiteers. That’s a key reason the response has been so bad: the people in charge have perverse incentives and don’t believe in government. Nor are they all that different than whom one might expect under a Marco Rubio or Chris Christie administration: shoring up CEO’s wallets while leaving the poor and helpless to suffer is [just how the Republican party works in 2020](https://talkingpointsmemo.com/cafe/coronavirus-pence-trump-response-republicanism-2020).

What is unique to a Trump administration response, however, is Kushner. Members of his shadow task force include his former roommate Adam Boehler, a private equity and venture capital bro who was a deputy to Seema Verma ([of Medicaid co-pays infamy](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/dec/04/seema-verma-trump-centers-medicare-medicaid-cms)) before taking charge of the International Development Finance Corporation. Boehler’s replacement, Brad Smith, is also on the Kushner team. Smith, like Boehler, made it big as an entrepreneur by building a home-based palliative care company, which got him a COO job at an Anthem subdivision.

Rounding out the CMS representatives is Andy Slavitt, the last head of Obama’s Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Slavitt’s $115 million venture capital fund [has an undisclosed sum of money invested](https://www.healthcaredive.com/news/hire-of-the-year-adam-boehler-center-for-medicare-and-medicaid-innovation/542155/) in Boehler’s old firm, Landmark Health.

Other Kushner team members include private equity executive David Calouri, a career healthcare investor; and Nat Turner, an online advertising-turned-medtech CEO (Boehler is also considered a Silicon Valley-type within the executive branch).

So we have a group of entrepreneurs and investors who all made their money in healthcare secretly managing the federal government’s response to the greatest healthcare crisis in decades. Some have investments in each other’s businesses. They’re in a position to learn more about the virus, and our health system’s needs, than almost anyone. Indeed, Kushner’s group has been given leeway to work with a broad range of agencies, including FEMA, HHS, and USAID. And they set themselves up in this way without the White House ever telling the public.

One might start to wonder if these savvy businessmen could be looking to profit off of this insider knowledge. One might then ask how the federal government plans to counteract these potential conflicts of interest.

One would be disappointed, if perhaps unsurprised. The only two ethics precautions Kushner’s team have taken are that “people signed voluntary service agreements that were vetted by career legal professionals—and that there is no one doing procurement, outside of government officials,” according to one anonymous official who spoke with Politico. That hardly seems sufficient. For one, it’s not like this White House’s vetting professionals have gotten sterling reviews, [including for Kushner himself](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/whistleblower-seeks-protection-after-sounding-alarm-over-white-house-security-n970586). Plus, is anyone enforcing these voluntary service agreements? What exactly did the team agree to? Even if someone else is managing government procurement, have the team members promised not to convey what they see and hear back to their private-sector colleagues? If so, how would we know?

And there are other concerns. Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington has already [sent a letter](https://www.citizensforethics.org/press-release/kushners-shadow-task-force-violate-multiple-laws/) about the task force members using their private, personal email accounts for government business. That’s a violation of the Presidential Records Act and Federal Advisory Committee Act, as the President who ran on “but her emails” ought to know.

Indeed, word from inside the White House is troubling; insiders told Politico that “plenty of private companies have been trying to profiteer and fence their wares.” One even said, “I don’t know how our government operates anymore.” Now, there’s [a long and petty history](https://www.politico.com/news/2019/11/26/hhs-trump-azar-verma-074149) of Trump HHS appointees gossiping with Politico reporters about their colleagues. Before the coronavirus, it had gotten so bad that one official said (to Politico, of course) that the department was like “[a fucking soap opera](https://www.politico.com/news/2019/12/11/azar-verma-health-care-white-house-081598).” But without investigations and oversight, we won’t know if this is just jilted aides trampling the new dogs to claw back some power, or if Kushner’s clique really is something to worry about.

If we only had an opposition party which could do its constitutional duty of overseeing the executive branch. If only that opposition party controlled half of the legislature, largely thanks to promises to stand up to the president. If only that opposition party hadn’t just given the house away on oversight of the largest bailout bill in the nation’s history.

If only, with stakes of literal life or death, the Democratic party could actually [do as it did during World War II](https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/The_Truman_Committee.htm): conduct deep investigations into government waste and profiteering to hold the bureaucracy accountable. Pundits are right to compare the coronavirus to the Second World War in terms of the scale of government response needed; but not only has the response thus far lacked the required scale or any equitability, it hasn’t had any accountability measures sufficient for such a project. That’s bad enough, but it’s doubly so when the key reason we’ve lacked such accountability is that leaders in the party opposed to the most corrupt president in American history [tell reporters they are afraid of looking too aggressive](https://twitter.com/jeffhauser/status/1245332990454050819). Democrats, you are an opposition party. Being aggressive is your job.

Actually, as the founders of America envisioned Congress, the same adversarial posture is also demanded of Republicans. The Truman Commission in World War II was bipartisan.

Put another way, there is absolutely no reason why we should be learning from Politico that the president’s son-in-law has brought in a bunch of private sector buddies to run the crisis response. We ought to be learning this from subpoenas, witness testimony, and consistent investigatory measures in Congress. The coronavirus has brought out the worst symptoms yet in the Democratic [spinelessness epidemic](https://talkingpointsmemo.com/cafe/coronavirus-congress-democrats-pandemic-spinelessness)—and we might not know the full cost till the graft is long since done.