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U.S. Senators and Representatives Join Civil Society Leaders Delivering Two Million Petitions to Urge Biden: Support COVID-19 WTO Waiver to Hasten the Pandemic’s End, Secure Administration’s Domestic Vaccination Progress

Sens. Sanders and Baldwin, Reps. Blumenauer, Schakowsky and García, and Advocates Urge U.S. to Join 100 Nations Backing Waiver at May WTO General Council

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Biden administration must join 100 other nations in supporting a temporary waiver of World Trade Organization (WTO) rules that now give a few corporations monopoly control over where and how much COVID-19 vaccines and treatments are made, said Sens. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.), Reps. Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.), Chuy García (D-Ill.) and Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.), and leaders of labor, public health, faith and other civil society groups at a news conference today. In advance of the WTO’s May 5 meeting to again consider the waiver, the lawmakers and advocates urged the White House to support an emergency COVID-19 waiver of WTO intellectual property rules, so that greater supplies of vaccines, treatments, and diagnostic tests can be produced in as many places as possible as quickly as possible. The pandemic cannot be stopped anywhere unless vaccines, tests, and treatments are available everywhere, so variants that evade current vaccines do not develop.

Momentum is growing for the waiver, and at today’s press conference, U.S. civil society leaders announced that petitions calling for a waiver of WTO Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) terms have been signed by two million people. The Trump administration recruited a few other WTO members to block even negotiations of a waiver. The new administration has not yet reversed the Trump administration’s self-defeating obstruction, but could do so at the upcoming WTO General Council meeting on May 5.

The petition delivery kicks off an international week of action in support of the waiver. The two million petition signatures add to a deluge of support for the waiver, including from 60% of U.S. voters, ten U.S. senators, 170-plus former heads of state and Nobel laureates, 400-plus U.S. civil society organizations, and 250 international organizations.

To date, the U.S. government has simply refused to engage in negotiations and blocked other countries from doing so. The WTO TRIPS agreement requires countries to provide lengthy monopoly protections for medicines, tests and technologies used to produce them. While there is potential production capacity in every region of the world, WTO rules block timely, unfettered access to the technology needed to boost
manufacturing potential. Unless much greater volumes are made, many people in developing nations may not get COVID-19 vaccines until 2024.

Many COVID-19 vaccine originators have effectively blocked production by refusing licensing requests from qualified manufacturers in developing countries where sales will be less profitable. As a result, global production likely will fall well short of the 10-15 billion vaccines needed in 2021 to confer global herd immunity. Under current production patterns, developing nations will not have vaccines to reach herd immunity until 2024. Existing WTO 2001 “flexibilities” that resulted from a waiver push for HIV/AIDS treatments are insufficient in the COVID-19 context, including because pharmaceutical firms added layers of additional copyright, industrial design and other exclusivities to the patent protections for which the WTO allows compulsory licensing.

Statements From Speakers:

U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.)

“This, in my view, is not a complicated issue. Common sense and morality dictate that we must do everything humanly possible to crush this global pandemic and save millions of people who are in danger of needlessly dying. It’s one thing when somebody dies and there’s nothing you can do about it. But it’s another thing entirely when you have a tool at your disposal that can save a human life and you do nothing about that. … We have the tools to save human lives, and those tools should be readily available to all people. Poor people in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and throughout the world have as much a right to be protected from the virus, to live, as people in wealthier nations. To me, this is not a huge debate, this is common human morality.

That is why I and everybody else in this discussion have been urging the Biden administration to support the proposal to waive vaccine-related intellectual property rights at the WTO in order to expand supplies of vaccines. Ending this pandemic requires collaboration, solidarity, and empathy. It requires a different mindset, that’s the issue here, a different mindset. It’s the mindset that tells the pharmaceutical industry that saving perhaps millions of lives is more important than protecting their already excessive profits… The U.S government, our taxpayers, have invested enormous sums of money into the production of these technologies. As a result, all people in America and around the world should benefit from that investment, and it should not just go to a handful of very profitable drug companies from wealthy countries. President Biden and his foreign policy team have repeatedly made it clear that the United States must play a major role in promoting global cooperation. As we speak, importantly Pres. Biden has brought leaders from countries all over the world to deal with the existential threat of climate change. And I applaud him for doing that. But we have also got to take the lead in terms of the health welfare of people, including poor people, all over the world. And a very good way to get moving in that direction, to make the United States once again the moral leader of the world, not just the most powerful military nation, but the moral leader of the world, is to support this waiver and make sure the innovative technologies for producing vaccines are shared as widely as possible.

Transferring these lifesaving technologies, by the way, is not just about responding to this pandemic, it’s about preparing for the next one. We know the next pandemic is not a matter of if, but when. Experts have been recently sounding the alarm that low vaccine coverage enables growth and spread of vaccine-resistant mutations. This isn’t just about showing global solidarity, as important as that is. It is in our own direct interest to help vaccinate as many people as possible as quickly as possible to prevent the spread of virus mutations that could come back to the United States and force us to shut down again. Once again, on this enormously important health issue, this moral issue, the United States has got to do the right thing.”
**U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.)**

“We’re joined to send a really powerful and unified message to President Biden and Ambassador Tai to support the temporary, targeted TRIPS waiver at the World Trade Organization, so we can develop the most effective and most efficient global response to COVID-19 possible. We all know that we need to use every tool at our disposal to move past this pandemic. We know that we can’t beat COVID-19 unless we are united and unless we work with our global partners in this mission … The TRIPS process itself was born out of the AIDS crisis. How we act will determine whether we’ve learned those lessons. We won’t be safe here until the whole world is safe from COVID. This week has brought deeply concerning news of mutations, variants in India and record case levels across the globe. This targeted waiver would accelerate global COVID-19 vaccine and treatment deployment efforts so we can prevent unnecessary deaths and illnesses and suffering around the world. I want to be clear, we have not yet beaten this pandemic, and people around the world are still struggling. We know that we can’t fully recover unless we all recover. We can’t afford to wait. The Biden administration has a real opportunity to do the right thing, to reverse the damage inflicted by the previous administration on our pandemic response and once again prioritize public health on the global stage.”

**U.S. Representative Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.), Ways and Means Subcommittee on Trade Chair**

“America is not going to be safe, no matter how successful the Biden administration has been in ramping up our own vaccination program, if we have billions of people around the globe who have not been vaccinated. This horrific disease will continue to mutate and ricochet around the globe … This TRIPS waiver doesn’t have to be that complicated. We know that granting the waiver and having American leadership, we can work with the pharma industry and some of these developing countries to produce the vaccines that are necessary … I urge the administration to step up and provide leadership in this regard. I’m a strong supporter of President Biden, he’s done some terrific things. This is one area that calls out for American leadership … This is a matter of life or death, not just for other countries, but for Americans.”

**U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.), Senior Chief Deputy Whip and Energy and Commerce Consumer Protection and Commerce Subcommittee Chair**

“This is an international pandemic, and time is running out … The answer is right in front of our eyes, a waiver at the WTO to allow countries to be able to produce their own pharmaceuticals, vaccines to help people who are sick, to really save the day. We need to do this now. Big Pharma is standing in the way … We have an obligation, I believe, for our own citizens. And the money we’re spending to help the hospitality industry and the airlines, all of that will be for naught if we don’t crush the virus worldwide. In the meantime, China and Russia are stepping into the breach here. We want to be the country that leads the way for this temporary waiver of the TRIPS agreement.”

**U.S. Representative U.S. Rep. Chuy García (D-Ill.)**

“This important policy will allow developing countries to access lifesaving COVID vaccines faster, which keeps us all safe. It’s time to reverse the Trump administration’s obstruction and put human lives first, not pharma company profits … How many have to die? If any of us want to be protected from this virus, from Mexico to South Africa to right here in Chicago, we need to change that now. My colleagues and I are going to keep working and keep fighting for this commonsense policy, because defeating COVID can’t wait, and we’re all in this together.”

**Lori Wallach, Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch, Director**

“The Biden administration has done a great job getting American vaccinated. The only way to secure those gains is to ensure people worldwide also get shots. Absent a major increase in supply, many people in developing countries won’t get shots until 2024, so the pandemic will blaze around the world costing many lives and increasing the risk of a vaccine-resistant or more deadly variant. This waiver is critical to getting more vaccines and treatments made around the world and thus ending the pandemic as soon as possible.”
Sara Nelson, Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, President
“For U.S. aviation to recover, we need to combat the virus around the world. Many countries seeing
unprecedented surges have little access to vaccines at this time. That is why President Biden’s leadership
on an emergency TRIPS waiver is so important. Continuing to increase vaccine production and prioritize
vaccine access and equity is absolutely necessary for the recovery of American aviation, international
travel and the global economy. We will save lives.”

Abby Maxman, Oxfam America, President and CEO
“We have multiple safe and effective vaccines, what we lack now is the political will to increase their
supply and facilitate the distribution of these vaccines everywhere. President Biden must seize this
historic opportunity to mobilize vaccine access to all by supporting the WTO proposal by South Africa,
India, and others to temporarily waive intellectual property rights related to COVID-19 vaccines and
treatments to encourage generic manufacturing in their own markets. We need a people’s vaccine now.”

Pauline Muchina PhD., American Friends Service Committee, Public Education & Advocacy
Coordinator (PEAC) for the Africa Region
“Most nations without COVID-19 vaccines are people of color: African countries, India, and Brazil in the
nightmare now. Black lives matter globally. President Biden, please help end vaccine apartheid. The U.S.
must lead the world in saving humanity from COVID-19 devastation by supporting TRIPS waiver at the
WTO. Sharing the technology to mass and locally produce vaccines is a smart investment and in the self-
interest of the U.S., which needs to protect itself from the new variants that can undermine vaccine
achievements in the U.S.”

Matthew Rose, Health GAP, Director of U.S. Policy and Advocacy
“It’s time the Biden administration stopped dragging their heels and got on board with the millions of
people supporting the TRIPS waiver, which will save lives and help end the COVID-19 pandemic.
Americans are demanding equitable global access to life-saving vaccines. People are turning out to protest
pharma greed and the administration’s obstruction of the TRIPS waiver this week in New York, Boston,
Seattle, San Diego, and Chicago because they know science can’t win until it’s accessible by all of us,
everywhere in the world.”

Tulika Singh MPH, Right to Health Action, PhD Candidate in Virology & Vaccinology
“After 19 agonizing days in a crowded hospital in India, my grandmother died of COVID-19. Thinking
about her last moments in isolation haunts me. We simply cannot afford to delay life-saving vaccines and
allow this virus to take more lives. I am afraid for the health of my 89-year old grandfather, who
continues to be at high-risk of COVID-19. The Biden Administration must waive WTO restrictions that
protect drug corporations at the expense of literally billions, or else my grandfather might not get the
vaccine till 2024. Millions more will die. This pandemic is not over anywhere until the virus is stopped
everywhere.”

Cate Oswald MPH, Partners In Health, Chief Policy and Partnership Officer
“It is beyond critical for the U.S. to reverse its position on the TRIPS waiver and get to the negotiation
table immediately. We need vaccines everywhere to stop COVID-19 anywhere. Today, we can see clearly
that business as usual has failed to create enough vaccines for the world.”

Statements From Organizations Participating in the Petition Campaign:
Brandon Wu, ActionAid USA, Director of Policy & Campaigns
“Our best shot at ending this pandemic is to make sure everyone everywhere has access to Covid-19
vaccines as soon as possible. This will only be possible if rich countries stop blocking a waiver of WTO
rules that would unlock badly needed global cooperation on vaccine production. At the current rate of
distribution, people across developing countries might not get their first dose until 2024. By supporting
the WTO TRIPS waiver, President Biden would help end vaccine apartheid and ensure that the most
vulnerable people in the world – who are already disproportionately impacted by multiple crises not of
their own making – can access Covid-19 vaccines.”

Spyro Limneos, Avaaz, Campaigner
“Millions of people around the world understand that this pandemic has no borders and the vaccine cannot
either. Right now, the US is standing in the way of a global vaccine effort, putting everyone at risk. So the
question is, does President Biden's administration only care about American lives or will they work to
save us all, protecting people in Africa, Asia, and Latin America too? History will remember.”

Arthur Stamoulis, Citizens Trade Campaign, Executive Director
“Supporting the waiver has the potential to save millions of lives, hasten economic recovery, improve
international relations and head off a viral mutation that starts the public health crisis all over again for
everyone. Literally the only thing standing in the way is corporate greed. It’s time to tell Big Pharma
‘no,’ and get on with the business of ending the pandemic.”

Dr. Reshma Ramachandran, Doctors for America, Co-Chair, Drug Affordability Action Team
“President Biden must not sit idly by as COVID-19 continues to devastate patients worldwide. Instead, he
must adopt our creed to "do no harm" and immediately support the TRIPS waiver. Leaving it up to
pharmaceutical corporations who have repeatedly prioritized profits before patients has simply not worked.
By supporting the TRIPS waiver to ensure that everyone, everywhere has access to a COVID-19 vaccine,
President Biden can take a critical step towards ending this global pandemic that knows no borders.”

Evan Greer, Fight for the Future, Director
“You couldn’t ask for a clearer example of the ways that a maximalist approach to intellectual property
benefits big corporations at the expense of the public. Human lives are more important than bonuses for
Big Pharma CEOs.”

Margarida Jorge, Lower Drug Prices Now, Campaign Director
“To restore health and end the destruction caused by this virus across the globe, we need to work together.
Fair and equitable access to a vaccine for Americans and people all over the world is not a job the U.S. can
leave to Big Pharma. Taxpayers supplied billions of dollars to drug corporations to rapidly develop COVID
vaccines and treatments, and there’s no reason those corporations should be given monopoly control over
access to medicines we paid for. By rejecting business-as-usual from drug corporations and supporting the
WTO TRIPS waiver, the U.S. can guarantee affordable, equitable access to these lifesaving vaccines, and
ensure that no country is left behind as we work to end this pandemic.”

Chloe Noël, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, Faith Economy Ecology Project Coordinator
“Maryknoll missioners in El Salvador, Kenya, and Cambodia witnessed the high cost to human life
caused by years of inaction during the HIV/AIDS epidemic. We cannot repeat the same mistake twice.
We urge the Biden Administration to support the TRIPS waiver and ensure that vaccines reach as many
arms as needed to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Mary Novak, NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice, Executive Director
“We have learned over the past year that the COVID-19 pandemic is a communal struggle in need of
communal response. In the United States alone, nearly 570,000 people have died and millions have been
infected. While the U.S. and other wealthy countries are making heroic efforts to get everyone vaccinated
as quickly as possible, countries in the Global South have little to no access to life-saving vaccines and
COVID-19 infections and deaths are rising. The U.S. government invested over $30 billion in taxpayer funds to create life-saving vaccines, but the technology is controlled by a small number of pharmaceutical companies who refuse to share the technology with the global community in order to protect their profits. This is immoral. As Pope Francis said, ‘We cannot let the law of the marketplace and patents take precedence over the law of love and the health of humanity.’ NETWORK calls on the Biden administration to immediately waive the TRIPs agreement for COVID vaccines to save lives.”

John Sellers, Other98, Executive Director and Co-founder
“Big Pharma didn’t invent these vaccines. Science did. Science is funded by billions of our tax dollars. Big Pharma hijacked the vaccines and now they’re holding them for ransom while people in poorer countries die.”

Ben Levenson, People’s Action, Justice is Global Campaign Deputy Director
“This event and the success of these petitions shows that not only is The TRIPS Waiver the right thing to do to end the pandemic everywhere and stop vaccine apartheid, but that it is overwhelming popular. At this point the only thing standing in the way of the Biden administration is their willingness to stand up to the greed of the pharmaceutical industry.

Alan Minsky, Progressive Democrats of America, Executive Director
“While the number of new COVID-19 cases are lowering in countries with widespread access to vaccines, the global numbers are as bad this week as at any time in the past 15 months. This reality is sending us an urgent message: we must do everything we can to limit all barriers to the global production and distribution of vaccines, treatments and tests. The United States must join over 100 other nations in calling for a WTO waiver that will allow for maximum cooperation; and, thus, a clear pathway for ending this pandemic.”

Emma Ruby-Sachs, SumOfUs, Executive Director
“This plan is our best chance to end the crushing vaccine inequality we are facing. If President Biden doesn’t vote for this waiver, millions of people across the world won’t get vaccinated for years. That not only puts millions of lives at risk - it increases the chances of a new deadlier strain of the virus emerging, and could put us all back to square one. We need the US government to support life-saving Covid vaccines for everyone, not just those in countries rich enough to push their way to the front.”

Organizations Participating in the Petition Campaign:
ActionAid USA
Association of Flight Attendants-CWA (AFA-CWA)
American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)
Avaaz
Citizens Trade Campaign
Daily Kos Liberation League
Doctors for America
Drug Prices are Too High
Fair World Project
Fight for the Future
Global Exchange
Health GAP

Hip Hop Caucus
Justice Is Global
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Other98
Oxfam America
Partners In Health
People’s Action
Progressive Democrats of America
R2H Action
Social Security Works
SumOfUs
Win Without War

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