

Interview: Concerns over reelection among reasons for U.S. tardy handling of COVID-19, says U.S. scholar

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WASHINGTON, May 2 (Xinhua) -- Concerns over reelection and "the natural tendency to think foreign problems are not American problems" are among the factors behind the U.S. government's early delay in handling the COVID-19 pandemic which has now killed over 63,000 Americans, said a renowned public intellectual.

"To analyze why the U.S. has, by far, the largest number COVID-19 cases and deaths is a legitimate inquiry, indeed an essential inquiry, that will be discussed and debated for years," Robert Lawrence Kuhn, chairman of the Kuhn Foundation, told Xinhua in an interview on Friday.

"Some facts are generally accepted," he said. "Trump's initial reluctance to heed early warnings of the American intelligence community about the then-coming epidemic was likely rooted in his concern that tanking the economy would tank his re-election."

Kuhn noted that Trump was relying on the strength of the U.S. economy, especially historic highs of the stock market and historic lows in unemployment, to "carry him through a campaign that demographically would favor his Democratic opponent," and "he wasn't about to throw away that advantage when the number of cases was still very low."

"Moreover, Trump has shown preternatural confidence in his own intuitions, even if contrary to the expert advice of scientists, economists, and other professionals," he said.

The senior expert said he cannot say "all is Trump's fault," noting "To be fair, Trump did early on impose restrictions on travel from China and, at the time, he was criticized for it, though in retrospect, he is criticized for doing too little too late."

Kuhn added that "another, less dramatic reason" for the U.S. delay in handling of the COVID-19 pandemic is "a natural tendency to think foreign problems are not American problems, believable at the time due to the small handful of domestic cases."

"This early hesitation proved deadly," Kuhn said, due to the exponential growth of a contagion with a long infectious period, which has differentiated impact on different classes of infected patients, especially those with underlying conditions and co-morbidity issues.

Kuhn expressed his hope that the question concerning the origin of the COVID-19 virus be left for scientists to solve, and the United States and China, as the world's two largest economies, better cooperate in leading the global efforts to win over the virus.

"The increasing focus on blaming China in the U.S., and blaming the U.S. in China, is deeply worrisome: first, because the blame-game diverts attention from focusing on containment and prevention, and second, because only by the U.S. and China working together can this common enemy of all humanity be best fought," he noted.

"To be sure, discerning the origin of the pandemic is essential in order to mitigate future pandemics," said the expert, while noting that the question "has become wildly politicized," though it "can and should be addressed only by epidemiology and genomic sciences."

"Powerful forces in both countries seem spoiling for a fight, in trying to control the narrative as it plays out in the global media," he added.

However, Kuhn said: "I see a ray of hope. American and Chinese healthcare professionals and medical scientists are working well together, under the radar, not making noise. We should all pause, let them do their jobs, thank them and praise them."

A recently revealed 57-page memo sent by the National Republican Senatorial Committee to GOP campaigns has advised blaming Beijing to distract from Trump's errors in predicting and handling the pandemic, according to a recent Politico report.

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