

Julie Vale: Trump administration under criticism for coronavirus response to fill ventilator stockpile

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The coronavirus pandemic hit the U.S. hard, and the Trump Administration stepped up to protect the American people. The outbreak required a quick response from our lawmakers and private industry, who rose to the challenge to produce critical life-saving supplies.

Part of that response included the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) contracting with several medical manufacturers to produce ventilators to fill the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) to capacity. But once that goal was achieved, the contracts were prematurely terminated before the full order was complete. Not only did this save the taxpayers' money, but it was also a testament to the Trump Administration's effective response.

But some Democratic lawmakers in Congress are criticizing the Trump Administration's efforts at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic to guarantee that every American has access to a ventilator. They are using a false narrative to politicize the coronavirus pandemic by claiming that medical device companies overcharged HHS at the onset of a pandemic. This is not true. The House Democrats are politicizing this pandemic, and they are also wasting precious time that should be used to legislate and aid in America's recovery response.

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The House Oversight Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy is planning

to hold a hearing that will focus on the canceled HHS ventilator contracts with Hamilton Medical, Philips, and Vyair Medical Inc. And given the recent national coverage, it is expected the hearing will unfairly focus on the Philips contracts with HHS. Some Democrats are trying to claim that Philips overcharged the federal government for ventilators at \$15,000 per unit, but the company charged a similar and fair market price as other medical companies for the same product – in fact their ventilator was less expensive than what some of the other companies charged.

Additionally, the expedited circumstances of these contracts required companies to hire thousands of highly skilled American workers to manufacture a high quantity in a short period. These HHS contracts got Americans back to work when unemployment rates were increasing due to the effects of coronavirus.

Not to mention, Philips was always transparent about their plans to ramp up and what it would cost.

The so-called evidence to back some Democrats' claim that Philips overcharged the government is a different research and development contract to produce ventilators from 2014 – but like many of these issues, the whole story isn't being told here. HHS invested in Philips to develop and manufacture new ventilators, and in return, they charged a special price taking into account that the federal government would approve this equipment, which finally happened last year. Also, this special price from six years ago does not reflect the cost increases of the rapid production timeline required this year to help Americans who contracted the coronavirus.

Comparing two very different contracts that were entered years apart is unfair, and gravely mischaracterizes the hard work of medical manufacturers and their employees to help combat the coronavirus pandemic. Thankfully, our Congressman Representative Glenn Grothman knows how to push back against this attack against the Trump Administration. We should be thanking, not demonizing, the manufacturers and American workers who stepped up to help during this unprecedented time.

-Julie Vale is the 6th District Chair of the Wisconsin Federation of Republican Women. She lives in Random Lake.