



Trump's coronavirus experts are Charles Koch and Dr. Macarena

Steve M.

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The New York Times reports that the White House is all in on the idea of what President Trump calls "herd mentality."

The White House has embraced a declaration by a group of scientists arguing that authorities should allow the coronavirus to spread among young healthy people while protecting the elderly and the vulnerable — an approach that would rely on arriving at “herd immunity” through infections rather than a vaccine....

On a call convened Monday by the White House, two senior administration officials, both speaking anonymously because they were not authorized to give their names, cited an October 4 petition titled The Great Barrington Declaration, which argues against lockdowns and calls for a reopening of businesses and schools.

The declaration's architects include Sunetra Gupta and Gabriela Gomes, two scientists who have proposed that societies may achieve herd immunity when 10 to 20 percent of their populations have been infected with the virus, a position most epidemiologists disagree with.

Reputable scientists believe we can achieve herd immunity, in the absence of a vaccine, when we reach an infection rate of 50% to 70%, not 10% to 20%. For America, that would be millions of infections and hundreds of thousands of deaths from now.

We're told:

As of the time of writing, the Declaration claims to be signed by over 5,000 ‘Medical & Public Health Scientists’ and 11,267 ‘Medical Practitioners’, along with over 155,000 members of the general public.

However, the Declaration's website

lists a number of apparently fake names among its expert signatories, including “Dr Johnny Bananas” and “Professor Cominic Dummings”.

(That's a play on "Dominic Cummings." Cummings is a top adviser to British prime minister Boris Johnson.)

The Great Barrington declaration, which was said to have been signed by more than 15,000 scientists and medical practitioners around the world, was found by Sky News to contain numerous false names, as well as those of several homeopaths.

Others listed include a resident at the “university of your mum” and another supposed specialist

whose name was the first verse of the Macarena.

Sky News discovered 18 self-declared homeopaths in the list of expert names and more than 100 therapists whose expertise included massage, hypnotherapy and Mongolian khoomii singing.

So which august scientific body is behind this declaration?

The document grew out of a meeting hosted by the American Institute for Economic Research, a libertarian-leaning research organization.

That would be these guys:

Corporate records filed with the US Internal Revenue Service (IRS) confirm that the AIER operates as part of a Koch-funded network of climate science deniers who see environmental regulation as a threat to its vision of unfettered, deregulated markets....

The AIER has published climate science deniers such as the economist David Henderson, who has rejected the validity of the scientific consensus on climate change.

AIER's President is the leading Austrian school economist Edward P. Stringham, a Research Fellow with The Independent Institute – another market-oriented think-tank that has regularly questioned the science of man-made climate change and received Koch funding, as well as support from ExxonMobil.

... the AIER is not just a free-market think-tank. It receives a large bulk of its funding from its own investment activities, not least in fossil fuels, energy utilities, tobacco, technology and consumer goods. AIER owns a major investment firm, American Investment Services Inc., which harnesses the think-tank's research to help inform investment advice. Security Exchange Commission filings seen by *Byline Times* confirm that AIER's American Investment Services Inc. runs a private fund valued at \$284,492,000.

The most recent SEC document filed in August reveals that the fund's holdings include a wide range of companies including: Chevron, ExxonMobil, General Electric, One Gas Inc, Duke Energy Corp, Northwestern Corp, WEC Energy, Xcel Energy, tobacco giant Philip Morris International, JP Morgan Chase, Visa Inc., Mastercard, Alphabet Inc (the owner of Google), Microsoft, McDonalds, Verizon Communications, Intel Corp, Nike Inc, consumer goods giant Procter and Gamble, Host Hotels & Resorts, Dow Inc., Pepsico, the major stock market advisors Vanguard Group, and many more.

We need to recognize the fact that much of the Republican response to the pandemic -- not Trump's complete aversion to public health measures, but certainly the relentless push for normalization -- is being driven by right-wing plutocrats who want their profits to continue flowing and who don't want the government to spend more money on ordinary people in distress. Remember Richard Epstein, who told us in the spring that the coronavirus would kill only 500 Americans, and then said no, he'd made a mistake, he meant 5,000? (We're well over 200,00 dead now.) Epstein isn't a doctor or scientist -- he's a law professor who wrote the paper with the prediction of 500 dead for the right-libertarian Hoover Institution. He's also, as Kurt Andersen notes, an "early Federalist Society VP, Cato Institute scholar, [and] editor of the Law and Economics movement's main journal." Trump's neuroses aside, this is where the central

strain of Republican thinking on the virus is coming from. And now these guys have Dr. Johnny Bananas on their side, too.