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Media, Democrats Ran With False Claim Trump 'Disbanded' Pandemic Office



Alex Griswold - MARCH 17, 2020 11:45 AM

The official who once ran the White House pandemic program dismissed a false Democratic talking point that Trump eliminated the pandemic-response team and criticized reporters for parroting the claim in news stories.

"No, the White House didn't 'dissolve' its pandemic response office. I was there," wrote former National Security Council adviser Tim Morrison for the *Washington Post* on Monday.

"It has been alleged by multiple officials of the Obama administration, including in *The Post*, that the president and his then-national security adviser, John Bolton, 'dissolved the office' at the White House in charge of pandemic preparedness," Morrison wrote. "Because I led the very directorate assigned that mission, the counterproliferation and biodefense office, for a year and then handed it off to another official who still holds the post, I know the charge is specious."

Presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden said in a March 1 interview that Trump "eliminated that office." Journalists soon began taking up the former vice president's talking point as fact. The *Boston Globe* picked up the narrative, running a piece titled, "Trump attacks CDC over coronavirus preparedness, though he eliminated an office dedicated to pandemic prevention." The accusation was a particular favorite of the *Washington Post*, which furthered the narrative by running an *op-ed* from former Obama NSC staffer Beth Cameron headlined, "I ran the White House pandemic office. Trump closed it." Not including Cameron and Morrison's *op-eds*, the *Post* mentioned the accusation in *five other op-eds or pieces*.

As part of an effort to slim down the historically bloated National Security Council, the directorate of global health and biodefense was merged with two other positions—not eliminated—according to Morrison.

"If anything, the combined directorate was stronger because related expertise could be commingled," he wrote.

The accusation that Trump eliminated the pandemic team was spread by several other prominent Democrats. DNC chairman Tom Perez *said* on CNN before Sunday's debate that President Barack Obama "created an office of preparedness in the White House. And what does this president do? He eliminates it." The DNC Twitter account likewise *tweeted* that Trump "eliminated the government's pandemic response team."

"Would be good to have a pandemic response team at the NSC right now. Like we did before Trump eliminated it," Sen. Jeff Merkley (D., Ore.) *said* on Twitter.

"Two years ago, President Trump fired the entire global health security team at the White House. Their job? Managing pandemics," *tweeted* Sen. Sherrod Brown (D., Ohio).

Morrison, who testified in the House impeachment inquiry, said media figures and politicians have acted in bad faith to attack the White House.

"It is this reorganization that critics have misconstrued or intentionally misrepresented," Morrison wrote.

Former Obama Ebola czar Ron Klain **claimed** in interviews that Trump "abolished" the program and "there was a whole bunch of people who were supposed to be getting ready for this event, and we got rid of them." Klain seemingly backtracked in a tweet **responding** to the publication of Morrison's op-ed, saying instead that "the idea that biodefense thinking would protect us from natural pandemics has always been flawed."

When asked to defend his claim that Trump "got rid of" a "whole bunch of people," Klain told the *Free Beacon* in an email, "They got rid of the key people including [NSC global health security director Rear Admiral Timothy Ziemer]— which is the point I made in 2018 when they did this. This was a horrible decision by the president and we have seen the consequences."

Biden also spread other false accusations about the Trump administration's response to coronavirus, **falsely claiming** in Sunday's debate that the White House turned down a World Health Organization offer for testing kits. The Biden campaign did not respond to a request for comment.