

OPINION > INTERNATIONAL

THE VIEWS EXPRESSED BY CONTRIBUTORS ARE THEIR OWN AND NOT THE VIEW OF THE HILL

Biden's vaccine diplomacy embraces global solidarity — but there's more to be done

BY LISA ECKENWILER AND NICOLE HASSOUN, OPINION CONTRIBUTORS - 06/17/21 11:00 AM ET



Getty Images

When the [Biden administration](#) announced its decision to [donate 500 million COVID-19 vaccine doses](#) to 100 countries over the next two years, it demonstrated its commitment to returning the U.S. to a position of credibility and leadership in global health. This move, along with Vice President Harris's recent trip to Mexico and Guatemala in the name of

THE HILL

Instead of organizing health policy around the idea that countries should be self-sufficient, we're witnessing a resurgence of a recognition that people are interdependent and, moreover, linked by a shared vulnerability to illness and frailty. And what's more, we cannot survive, much less flourish, without collective action.

Even if this donation was also motivated by prudence and a pressing concern to protect public health, that requires recognizing the interdependence of the health of populations around the world. Either way, resisting a narrow nationalism is the right move for the U.S. and the world to fully recover from the pandemic.

But this is not enough. While some might call distributing doses to lower income countries a matter of justice, the U.S. must resist a narrative of good will or charity and commit to a meaningful shift in our advancement of global health equity. That requires thinking well beyond the current pandemic.

The current distribution of health resources around the world is woefully inadequate. In rich countries, average health spending is \$2,937 per capita, while many poor countries cannot afford more than \$41 per capita as of 2017. Moreover, research and development dollars do not align with global need. Most of the funding goes towards chronic diseases of rich patients because pharmaceutical companies find these to be the most lucrative investments. So people like us can choose from a great number of allergy medicines that we'll continue to pay for every year.

At the same time, there are few medicines for many of the world's worst killers — including many diseases that pose serious pandemic threats, from SARS to antibiotic resistant strains of tuberculosis. It was only when Ebola — which kills half of the people it infects (unlike COVID-19, which kills closer to 1 percent) — started to reach rich countries that any medicines were developed.

Biden has a unique opportunity to change the game by supporting a global pandemic preparation and response treaty at the World Health Assembly this November. A treaty should include two things: First, we should put in place basic health systems for everyone — ensuring that we can vaccinate people against a host of preventable diseases well beyond COVID-19 — that will let us respond quickly in pandemic times.

This includes investing in global manufacturing, transportation and distribution capacity. It is a great thing, for instance, that the international community is investing in vaccine manufacturing capacity in Africa. But we also need to put cold chains and other basic infrastructure in place.

THE HILL

global health impacts. Tying these rewards to requirements for these companies to put resulting products in the public domain would delink profits from sales volumes and allow for generic competition on prices so people in poor countries can access essential medicines for a host of deadly global diseases.

Moreover, this requirement is justified given increasingly large public investments in new drug development. We should not transfer this wealth to the private sector unconditionally at the expense of public and global health.

It is imperative that global solidarity continues to guide Biden's efforts to respond to global public health crises. But even for those who are more narrowly self-interested, investing now in basic health systems and providing new incentives for pharmaceutical research and development is a wise move.

The Biden administration should act now by leading the effort to create a treaty for better pandemic preparation and response this fall. Doing so will not only show the world our country's commitment to global solidarity but also help save millions of lives before the next pandemic starts.

Lisa Eckenwiler, Ph.D., is professor of philosophy at George Mason University, vice president of the International Association of Bioethics and a member of the Independent Resource Group for Global Health Justice. Nicole Hassoun is a visiting scholar at the Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies at Cornell University, professor at Binghamton University and author of "Global Health Impact: Extending Access to Essential Medicines."

TAGS CLINICAL TRIALS COVID-19 VACCINE GLOBAL HEALTH HEALTH POLICY JOE BIDEN PRESIDENCY OF JOE BIDEN VACCINATION VACCINE DIPLOMACY WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Copyright 2025 Nexstar Media Inc. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.



More International News



Can Britain's prime minister hold on?

INTERNATIONAL / 1 DAY AGO



Milei's Argentina is at a crossroads — the US can help ensure its success

INTERNATIONAL / 1 DAY AGO



Trump's Gaza deal may have a better chance than you think

INTERNATIONAL / 1 DAY AGO



Panama 1989 is not a good model for dealing with Venezuela

INTERNATIONAL / 2 DAYS AGO

[See All](#)

Video/Hill.TV

THE HILL



Rising: October 3, 2025

THE HILL TV / 1 DAY AGO



Rising: October 2, 2025

THE HILL



Rising: October 1, 2025

RISING / 3 DAYS AGO

[See all Hill.TV](#)

[See all Video](#)

Top Stories

THE HILL



Deep distrust hinders path to shutdown deal

HOUSE / 4 HOURS AGO

[See All](#)

**THE
HILL**

Opinion

How to submit an op-ed.

Most Popular

1 **Hegseth fires top Navy official**

THE HILL

3 **Noem: NFL ‘won’t be able to sleep at night’ over Bad Bunny Super Bowl ...**

4 **House GOP leaders urge unity in shutdown canceled-votes strategy**

5 **Judge sets 14-day deadline for new prosecutor in Trump Georgia case or it will ...**

What Do You Think?

Loading survey...



**DON'T MISS A BRIEF.
SIGN UP FOR OUR DAILY EMAIL.**

Your Email

Send



Resources

[SITEMAP](#)

[THE HILL APPS](#)

[PEOPLE](#)

[RSS](#)

[PRINT EDITION](#)

Other Areas

[GALLERIES](#)

[THE HILL JOBS](#)

[NATIONAL JOBS](#)

Contributors

[SUBMIT OPINION CONTENT](#)

About Us

[WORK FOR THE HILL](#)

Follow Us On



Get the App



THE HILL

PRIVACY POLICY | 09/30/2025 |

TERMS & CONDITIONS

CONTACT

ADVERTISE

NEWSNATION

BESTREVIEWS

NEXSTAR DIGITAL

JOURNALISTIC INTEGRITY

YOUR PRIVACY CHOICES 

THE HILL 400 N CAPITOL STREET NW, SUITE 650 WASHINGTON DC 20002

© 1998 - 2025 NEXSTAR MEDIA INC. | ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.