

Kushner's "frat party" coronavirus team used personal email and FreeConferenceCall.com: officials

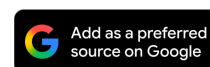
One official described the team as a "frat party" that "descended from a UFO and invaded the federal government"

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White House adviser Jared Kushner speaks about the coronavirus in the James Brady Press Briefing Room of the White House, Thursday, April 2, 2020, in Washington. (AP Photo/Alex Brandon)



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administration officials told **The New York Times** that they expect White House adviser and President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner's **coronavirus team** to come under congressional scrutiny after a series of questionable moves stunned government officials.

Kushner has recruited friends with business and start-up backgrounds to create what he calls an "impact team," but administration officials describe it as "the Slim Suit Crowd" and the **"shadow" White House coronavirus task force**.

Kushner has enlisted Adam Boehler, a former start-up founder who now heads the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, and software entrepreneur Nat Turner, who founded the technology company Flatiron Health. Turner has brought his own former employees into the fold, some of whom have "issued orders to health agencies," leading to "resentment" among senior officials, The Times reported.

One senior official described Kushner's team as a "frat party" that "descended from a UFO and invaded the federal government," according to the report. Officials have also been alarmed by the group's use of personal email account in "delicate policy exchanges" and their decision to use FreeConferenceCall.com to "arrange high-level meetings."

Their indifference to government protocols has led to criticism from the government watchdog group Citizens for Ethics and Responsibility in Washington (CREW).

"There is no excuse for hiding information from the public that affects their lives in an extraordinary time," CREW chief Noah Bookbinder told The Times.

Administration officials told the outlet that they expect Kushner's role to become a focus of a new select committee **announced Thursday** by Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif.

Officials have also grumbled that the inexperienced Kushner has "added another layer of confusion" to the administration's disjointed response while "taking credit for changes already in progress and failing to deliver on promised improvements."

Kushner was behind Trump's news conference promoting a nationwide testing website that **did not exist** and a network of drive-through testing sites around the country that similarly has **failed to come to fruition**.

FEMA officials told the outlet The Times that Kushner's team has ordered supplies to be delivered to locations where the agency feels they are not most needed. But the agency's spokesperson said Kushner's team was playing a key role.

"Mr. Kushner and his team, from the White House Office of American Innovation, have played an integral role by facilitating close coordination between the federal government and the private sector during this critical time," FEMA spokeswoman Lizzie Litzow told the outlet.

A breakdown is evident, according to Democrats.

"There is some kind of communications failure between FEMA and the White House," House Homeland Security Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., told The Times. "FEMA was brought into the response to provide logistics support and the White House should let them do their work. There is no reason for Jared or any other inexperienced person to be getting in the way of that."

Kushner defended his role, arguing that his team has helped deliver supplies by going around the existing bureaucracy.

"From the White House, you can move a lot faster," he told the outlet. "I've put members of my team into a lot of components. What we've been able to do is get people very quick answers."

Despite having failed at past overzealous projects, including **bringing peace to the Middle East**, Kushner insisted that he was a problem-solver.

"I learned very early on that when you try to work around an existing government structure, it rarely works," Kushner said. "You have to take the machinery that exists and empower it rather than recreate it."

But officials said Kushner has added to the administration's bungled response by reinforcing Trump's worst instincts.

"Mr. Kushner early on agreed with his father-in-law that the news media was hyping the coronavirus to attack the president, according to several officials," The Times reported.

“Although people close to him deny that he failed to take the virus seriously at first, Mr. Kushner shares the president’s view that governors are driving their residents into a panic by airing worst-case projections of medical needs.”

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