

Pentagon Used Taxpayer Money Meant for Masks and Swabs to Make Jet Engine Parts and Body Armor

Shortly after Congress passed the Cares Act, the Pentagon began directing pandemic-related money to defense contractors.

By [Aaron Gregg](#) and [Yeganeh Torbati](#)

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“A \$1 billion fund Congress gave the Pentagon in March to build up the country’s supplies of medical equipment has instead been mostly funneled to defense contractors and used to make things such as jet engine parts, body armor and dress uniforms.”

The change illustrates how one taxpayer-backed effort to battle the novel [coronavirus](#), which has killed more than 200,000 Americans, was instead diverted toward patching up long-standing perceived gaps in military supplies.

The Cares Act, which Congress passed earlier this year, gave the Pentagon money to “prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus.” But a few weeks later, the Defense Department began reshaping how it would award the money in a way that represented a major departure from Congress’s intent.

The payments were made even though U.S. health officials think major funding gaps in pandemic response still remain. Robert Redfield, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [said in Senate testimony last week](#) that states desperately need \$6 billion to distribute vaccines to Americans early next year. Many U.S. hospitals still face a [severe shortage of N95 masks](#). These are the types of problems that the money was originally intended to address.

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“We are thankful the Congress provided authorities and resources that enabled the [executive branch] to invest in domestic production of critical medical resources and protect key defense capabilities from the consequences of COVID,” Ellen Lord, the Pentagon’s undersecretary for acquisition and sustainment, said in a statement. “We need to always remember that economic security and national security are very tightly interrelated and our industrial base is really the nexus of the two.””

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