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OPINION | REVIEW & OUTLOOK

# No Good Vaccine Deed

The Biden team shows no gratitude to the man who sped up the Covid shots.

By [The Editorial Board](#)

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Dr. Moncef Slaoui, chief science adviser to Operation Warp Speed, speaks during a news conference on Operation Warp Speed and COVID-19 vaccine distribution, Tuesday, Jan. 12, 2021, in Washington.

PHOTO: PATRICK SEMANSKY/PRESS POOL



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[Johnson & Johnson](#) and [Novavax](#) this week reported that their vaccines were effective in clinical trials, and what fortunate timing. The U.S. urgently needs a supply boost. But at this juncture it's also worth noting how former Operation Warp Speed chief Moncef Slaoui positioned the Biden Administration for a vaccine triumph.

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One of Mr. Slaoui's inspired ideas was to diversify the federal government's vaccine bets with six manufacturers when nobody knew which, if any, would work. The vaccine candidates used different technologies—Moderna and Pfizer -BioNTech (mRNA), J&J and AstraZeneca (adenovirus), and Novavax and Sanofi -GSK (recombinant protein).

The J&J and AstraZeneca vaccines were hobbled by trial delays in the fall. But J&J reported Friday that its vaccine was 66% effective at protecting people from moderate to severe disease in a global trial, and 85% against severe illness. Early trial data from AstraZeneca suggests similar efficacy. Novavax reported Thursday its shot appears to be nearly 90% effective.

The Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines are about 95% effective, so it's fortuitous that their trial results came first so their shots could inoculate the elderly and others most at highest risk. But even if somewhat less effective, the other vaccines may be good candidates for young people and boost supply this spring.

Operation Warp Speed removed the financial risk for drug makers by financing trials and manufacturing in advance so vaccines could roll out as soon as they are approved. This is the reason some 20 million Americans have already been inoculated. President Biden this week ordered another 200 million doses from Pfizer and Moderna to be delivered this summer.

These extra doses may or may not be needed if other vaccines are approved—J&J could add 100 million this spring—but the reason they will be available is com

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more. We point this out because White House officials have been griping that they are “starting from scratch.”

That’s false. Operation Warp Speed created the incentives for vaccine development, and assisted with rapid approvals and distribution infrastructure, which Mr. Biden will undoubtedly claim credit for as the rollout gains speed and breadth. The Biden team showed its gratitude by deposing Mr. Slaoui via a nasty news leak that criticized his good work.

Mr. Slaoui graciously agreed to remain on the job for a few weeks as a consultant. He deserves praise for his excellent public service, all the more because the Biden Administration so ungraciously won’t acknowledge it.

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