

Sen. Cornyn: China to blame for coronavirus, because 'people eat bats'

Speaking to reporters Wednesday, the Republican senator from Texas spread misinformation about the coronavirus and incorrectly cited China as a source of MERS and swine flu.

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By Julian Shen-Berro

As President Donald Trump receives backlash for comments Wednesday about the coronavirus outbreak that were widely perceived as xenophobic, his allies in Congress have risen to his defense – with one senator in particular embracing his rhetoric.

"China is to blame," Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, said Wednesday of the virus, which was first identified in Wuhan, China. "Because the culture where people eat bats and snakes and dogs and things like that."

He proceeded to identify the consumption of such animals as the source of the virus, echoing [a since debunked myth](#) that the outbreak began with a woman eating bat soup. The origins of the virus remain a mystery to health officials, even as it continues to spread globally.

The senator also incorrectly cited China as the birthplace of two other previous outbreaks: Middle East respiratory syndrome, or MERS, and the swine flu pandemic.

"China has been the source of a lot of these viruses like SARS, like MERS, the swine flu and now the coronavirus," he said. "So I think they have a fundamental problem, and I don't object to geographically identifying where it's coming from."

But MERS was [first detected](#) in Saudi Arabia in 2012, and the swine flu was [discovered](#) in the United States back in 2009.

Cornyn's statement comes just hours after the president doubled down on his use of the term "Chinese Virus," despite public backlash against the term.

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"It's not racist at all," Trump told reporters Wednesday. "It comes from China, that's why."

Since 2015, [the World Health Organization](#) has warned against using geographic or national terms to describe disease outbreaks in order "to minimize unnecessary negative effects on nations, economies and people." And in recent weeks, the fears over the virus have led to an uptick in reports of [harassment and assault](#) of Asian Americans, as well as [decimating Chinese and Asian American businesses](#).

Still, when asked about the prospect of his rhetoric fueling discrimination or hostility toward Asian Americans, Cornyn said he did not see the connection.

"We're not talking about Asians," he said. "We're talking about China, where these viruses emanate from and which has created this pandemic."

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