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Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

Southern Daily News is published by Southern News Group Daily

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Thursday, May 26 2022

Minutes before rampage, Texas school gunman sent message warning of attack

UVALDE, Texas, May 25 (Reuters) - The Texas gunman who murdered 19 children and two teachers warned in an online message that he was going to shoot up an elementary school minutes before his rampage, Governor Greg Abbott said on Wednesday, as harrowing details about the attack emerged a day after the massacre.

The gunman, 18-year-old Salvador Ramos, also sent a message saying he was going to shoot his grandmother and another one confirming he had done so, Abbott said at a news conference. Ramos' grandmother, whom he shot in the face shortly before attacking the school, survived and called police.

Ramos fled the home they shared and crashed his car near Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. A school police officer approached him outside the building, according to officials, but no gunfire was exchanged. Authorities did not offer further details on that engagement.

Ramos then entered the school through a back door carrying an AR-15 style rifle and made his way to a fourth-grade classroom, where all of the victims were killed, authorities said.

Police surrounded the building, breaking windows to help children and staff escape. Members of the elite Border Patrol Tactical Unit also responded and entered the building to confront the shooter, a U.S. Customs and Border Protection official told Reuters, requesting anonymity to discuss internal information.

Ramos was shot and killed by law enforcement. One agent was hit in the leg and grazed in the head, the official said.

The online messages were the only advance warning, Abbott said. He said Ramos, a high school dropout, did not appear to have any criminal record or history of mental health problems. Investigators have not publicly identified a motive.

Abbott said the posts were made on Facebook,



but spokespeople for Facebook's parent company, Meta Platforms (FB.O), said they were private one-to-one messages discovered after the shooting. The company declined to say who received the messages or which of Meta's platforms, such as Messenger or Instagram, was used to send them.

Ramos legally purchased two rifles and 375 rounds of ammunition just days before the shooting, according to authorities.

GUN CONTROL DEBATE
 The attack, 10 days after an avowed white supremacist shot 13 people at a supermarket in a mostly Black neighborhood of Buffalo, New York, has reignited a national debate over U.S. gun laws.

In a sign of the charged political atmosphere, Beto O'Rourke, the Democratic candidate challenging Abbott in a November election, interrupted the news conference to confront Abbott for the state's permissive gun laws. [read more](#)

Several officials yelled at O'Rourke. "You're a sick son of a bitch who would come to a deal like this to make a political issue," one said, though it was not clear who.

O'Rourke was escorted out of the building and spoke to reporters outside, calling it "insane" that an 18-year-old was legally permitted to acquire a semi-automatic rifle and vowing to pursue gun restrictions.

"We can get that done if we had a governor that cared more about the people of Texas than he does this own political career or his fealty to the NRA," he said, referring to the National Rifle Association, a gun-rights advocacy organization.

People gather at Robb Elementary School, the scene of a mass shooting in Uvalde, Texas, U.S., May 25, 2022. [REUTERS/Nuri Vallbona](#)

Abbott said stringent gun laws do not prevent violence, citing states such as New York, and said policymakers should instead focus on mental health treatment and prevention.

In a prime-time address on Tuesday evening, President Joe Biden called for new gun safety restrictions.

"As a nation, we have to ask when in God's name we're going to stand up to the gun lobby," he said, his voice rising.

Funcionário carrega saco de farinha de trigo em centro de distribuição de alimentos em Sanaa, no Iêmen 11/02/2020 [REUTERS/Khaled Abdullah](#)

[read more](#)

But new legislation appeared unlikely to pass in Washington. Virtually all Republicans in Congress oppose gun restrictions, and there was no sign the massacre would alter that position.

White House officials were planning a trip to Texas for Biden, a senior administration official said.

The NRA's annual meeting starts on Friday in Houston, where Republicans including Abbott, Texas U.S. senators Ted Cruz and John Cornyn and former President Donald Trump are all scheduled to speak.

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WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

05/25/2022

Another Tragedy Happens Again



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Two days before the start of summer, a 18-year-old young man opened fire at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, on Tuesday killing 19 students and one teacher. Local police said there also were multiple injuries including the mass casualties.

U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona issued a

statement saying, "that my heart is aching for all the families in Uvalde, Texas, who are living through every parent's greatest fear and worst nightmare—a shooting in their children's school. We must be united as a country against this senseless cycle of violence and act immediately to protect our children and make sure that every child

and every educator feels safe in our schools."

In the U.S. Senate today senators were furious on the floor over the elementary school shooting and repeatedly questioned, "What are we doing?! Our kids are living in fear. We do nothing. Why are you here if not to solve these problems? It only happens in this country!"

Former President Obama said, "Our country is paralyzed not by fear, but by a gun lobby and political party."

President Biden addressed the nation saying that, "I am sick and tired of it!" Why are we willing to live with this carnage? Why do we keep letting this happen? Where in God's name is our backbone to have the courage to deal with and stand up to the lobbyists?"

Today our nation is really facing serious challenges in all areas. We have to make it clear to all politicians that in this country it's time to act now!

This is another massacre. We need to call on everybody to pray for the victims and stand up against the gun lobby

We urge the White House to call an urgent national meeting and invite community leaders to discuss this tragic crisis.



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Editor's Choice



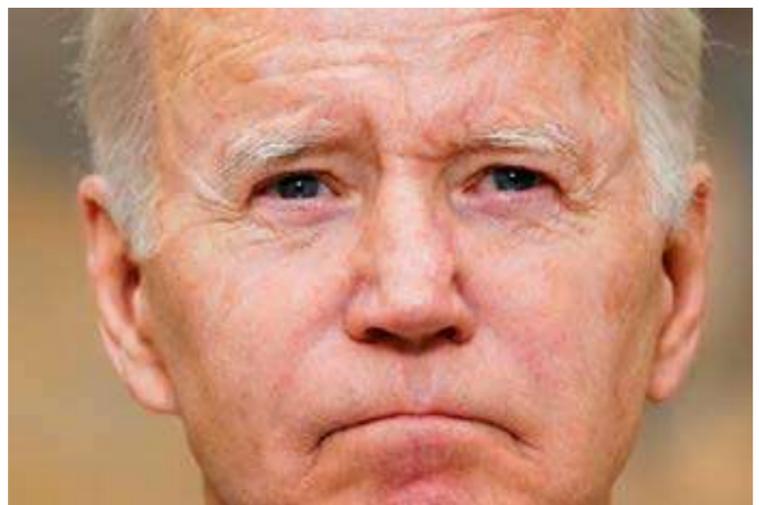
People react outside the Ssgt Willie de Leon Civic Center, where students had been transported from Robb Elementary School after a shooting, in Uvalde, Texas. REUTERS/Marco Bello



Police officers block activists during a protest denouncing the proclamation of the new Philippine president and vice president, in front of the Commission on Human Rights, in Quezon City, Metro Manila, Philippines, May 25, 2022. REUTERS/Lisa Marie David



A child sits on the ground during the weekly general audience held by Pope Francis at the Vatican. REUTERS/Yara Nardi



U.S. President Joe Biden reacts as he makes a statement about the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas shortly after Biden returned to Washington from his trip to South Korea and Japan, at the White House in Washington. REUTERS/Kevin Lamarque



A one-month-old baby is carried by his mother, a migrant from Guatemala, after being expelled from the U.S. and sent back to Mexico under Title 42 along with his mother, in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, May 23. REUTERS/Jose Luis Gonzalez



South Korean Air Force F-15K fighter jets taxi into a position during an "elephant walk" at an unidentified air base, South Korea, May 24. Joint Chiefs of Staff/Yonhap via REUTERS

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

BUSINESS

A Texas Research Team Has Developed A COVID-19 Vaccine That Could Be A Global Game Changer



Dr. Peter Hotez and Dr. Maria Elena Bottazzi of Texas Children's Hospital and Baylor College of Medicine have developed a COVID-19 vaccine that could prove beneficial to countries with fewer resources. (Photo/Max Trautner/Texas Children's Hospital)

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

A vaccine authorized in December for use in India may help solve one of the most vexing problems in global public health: How to supply lower-income countries with a COVID-19 vaccine that is safe, effective and affordable. The vaccine is called CORBEVAX. It uses old but proven vaccine technology and can be manufactured far more easily than most, if not all, of the COVID-19 vaccines in use today. "CORBEVAX is a game changer," says Dr. Keith Martin, executive director of the Consortium of Universities for Global Health in Washington, D.C. "It's going to enable countries around the world, particularly low-income countries, to be able to produce these vaccines and distribute them in a way that's going to be affordable, effective and safe." The story of CORBEVAX begins some two decades ago. Peter Hotez and Maria Elena Bottazzi were medical researchers at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., where they worked on vaccines and treatments for what are called neglected tropical diseases, such as schistosomiasis and hookworm. When a strain of coronavirus known as SARS broke out in 2003, they decided to tackle that disease. After moving to Houston to affiliate with Baylor College of Medicine and the Texas Children's

Center for Vaccine Development, they created a vaccine candidate using protein subunit technology. This involves using proteins from a virus or bacterium that can induce an immune response but not cause disease. "It's the same technology as the hepatitis B vaccine that's been around for decades," Hotez says. Their SARS vaccine candidate looked promising, but then the SARS outbreak petered out. No evidence of disease, no need for a vaccine. When a new strain of coronavirus triggered the COVID-19 pandemic, Hotez and Bottazzi figured they could dust off their old technology and modify it for use against COVID-19. After all, the virus causing COVID-19 and the virus causing SARS are quite similar. Hotez says they tried to interest government officials in the vaccine, but they weren't impressed. "People were so fixated on innovation that nobody thought, 'Hey, maybe we could use a low-cost, durable, easy-breezy vaccine that can vaccinate the whole world,'" Hotez says. "We really honestly couldn't get any traction in the U.S., but our mission is always to enable technologies for low- and middle-income countries production and use," Bottazzi recalls.

So they turned to private philanthropies. A major donor early on was the JPB Foundation in New York. "The rest were all Texas philanthropies: the Kleberg Foundation, the [John S.] Dunn Foundation, Tito's Vodka," Hotez says. The MD Anderson Foundation also chipped in. "When people say, 'Why did we move [from Washington, D.C.] to Texas?' Well, we knew that this was a great philanthropic environment. So this is really very much a Texas vaccine," although there were other, smaller donors from all over the country.



Hotez says that unlike the mRNA vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna, and the viral vector vaccine from Johnson & Johnson, protein subunit vaccines like CORBEVAX have a track record. So he and Bottazzi were relatively certain CORBEVAX would be safe and effective. "And it's cheap, a dollar, dollar fifty a dose," Hotez says. "You're not going to get less expensive than that."



Clinical trials showed they were right to be confident CORBEVAX would work. An unpublished study conducted in India involving 3,000 volunteers found the vaccine to be 90% effective in preventing disease caused by the original COVID-19 virus strain and 80% against the delta variant. It's still being tested against omicron.

But CORBEVAX is already entering the real world. Last month, the vaccine received emergency use authorization from regulators in India. An Indian vaccine manufacturer called Biological E Ltd is now making the vaccine. The company says it is producing 100 million doses per month and has already sold 300 million doses to the Indian government. "The real beauty of the CORBEVAX vaccine that Drs. Hotez and Bottazzi created is that intellectual property of this vaccine will be available to everybody," Keith Martin says. "So you can get manufacturers in Senegal, and South Africa and Latin America to be able to produce this particular vaccine." By contrast, the makers of Pfizer and Moderna, for example, are not sharing their recipe. One drawback to the CORBEVAX technology is that it can't be modified as quickly as mRNA vaccines can to adjust to new variants. That forces public health officials to make difficult choices. "Something which can be adapted the fastest versus something that can be adapted relatively quickly, but then more importantly can be

manufactured at a large global capacity and at a cost of production which is much lower," says Prashant Yadav, senior fellow at the Center for Global Development in Washington, D.C. The thought is some protection may be better than no protection. Of course, the ideal vaccine would have both qualities, and Peter Hotez is at work trying to develop technologies that can do that.



"There's no issue with pushing innovation," he says. "I think that's one of the really positive features of the U.S. vaccination program for COVID. The problem was it wasn't balanced with a portfolio of oldies but goodies." Hotez is hoping his oldie but goodie will usher in a brighter future for the world. (Courtesy npr.org)

Related: Wants To Break Into The U.S. Market For Now The Team Focuses Its Efforts Abroad Where COVID-19 Variants Surface More Quickly



Maria Bottazzi, left, and Peter Hotez at the Tropical Medicine Lab at Texas Children's Hospital Center for Vaccine Development in Houston on Oct. 5, 2021. (Photo/J. Rex/The Texas Tribune)

The day before COVID-19 claimed its first Texas victim in 2020, Dr. Peter Hotez was a guest on the popular Austin-based podcast "The Drive." After 10 years of research into coronavirus vaccines, Hotez and his Houston team needed an infusion of cash to build on their past work and make a vaccine that could, as Hotez told listeners then, "rescue the world" from the deadly emerging coronavirus pandemic. "You'd think that people would be pretty eager to support us to move this forward, but so far it hasn't happened," the Houston pediatrician and vaccine scientist told the host, Dr. Peter Attia, on March 14, 2020. By the following week, major cities in Texas began to shut down to avoid widespread community outbreaks. But Hotez's plea worked. The donations started coming in support of efforts in the deadly new pandemic at the Baylor College of Medicine at the Texas Children's Hospital Center for Vaccine Development, co-directed

by Hotez and Dr. Maria Elena Bottazzi in Houston — both of whom are celebrated pioneers in the area of vaccines for neglected tropical diseases like chagas and schistosomiasis.



Maria Bottazzi replaces vials of the RBD-based SARS-CoV-2 vaccine into a freezer at the Tropical Medicine Lab at Texas Children's Hospital Center for Vaccine Development in Houston on Oct. 5, 2021. (Photo/J. Rex/The Texas Tribune)

Among the gifts was a \$1 million infusion of cash in May 2020 by the philanthropic arm of Texas-based Tito's Handmade Vodka, whose director of global impact and research, Sarah Everett, was tuned in when Hotez asked for help in reviving their research.

"We decided that somebody should help restart that work immediately," Everett said. Now, nearly 18 months later, the Houston team's vaccine, called Corbevax by its maker in India, is cheap, has no patent, can be made by many vaccine producers globally — including those in low- and middle-income countries — and is poised to receive approval for widespread global use.

The Indian government has promised the biopharmaceutical company Biological E Limited, which is making the vaccine in that country, that it will buy 300 million doses with the potential for more. A halal version of the vaccine, for use in Islamic countries because it doesn't contain animal-based ingredients, is also about to start clinical trials in Indonesia.

And later this year, the company hopes the vaccine will be endorsed by the World Health Organization for use globally, which could open the doors to quicker authorization in several countries that need it.

But here in the United States, this "truly Texas vaccine," as its creators like to call it, has no home.

A Texas-style vaccine The fact that the vaccine even exists can be traced to a lot of Texas money, including funds from The Robert J. Kleberg, Jr. and Helen C. Kleberg Foundation and the M.D. Anderson Foundation. Several high-level and anonymous individual donors pitched in, as well as the JPB Foundation in New York. Those donations funded a vaccine prototype with the initial doses mixed in the Houston lab and transferred to Biological E in India in May 2020. By November, BioE began clinical trials of the vaccine in India, where the delta variant was first identified and which has one of the lowest vaccination rates in the world. Total cost from creation to market was between \$5 million and \$7 million, Bottazzi said.

(Article Continues Below)

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

COMMUNITY

(Article Continues From Above)

A Texas Research Team Has Developed A COVID-19 Vaccine That Could Be A Global Game Changer

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



The U.S. government has yet to get on board. Operation Warp Speed, the public-private partnership created by the federal government to accelerate treatments and vaccines for COVID-19, spent none of its billions at the Houston lab. Most experts, including Hotez and Bottazzi, agree that's because most of the funding and the attention — and the bets — are on the vaccines made earliest in the pandemic, and with the newest technology, by Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson and a few others. "We're pushing the new ways because they're better and faster," said Dr. Benjamin Neuman, a Texas A&M University virologist who has been doing coronavirus research since 1996, though he was not involved in any of the approved vaccines' development. "Why wouldn't you want to have it all?"



Left: Maria Bottazzi holds a vial of the RBD-based SARS-CoV-2 vaccine at the Tropical Medicine Lab at Texas Children's Hospital Center for Vaccine Development in Houston on Oct. 5, 2021. Right: A lab worker works on a project at the Texas Children's Hospital Center. (Photo/J. Rex/The Texas Tribune)

Competition from new tech The mRNA vaccines by Pfizer and Moderna use messenger RNA, a molecule the virus needs to produce a "spike protein" and bind to human cells, to prompt the immune system to produce antibodies against that

protein. Five years ago, Neuman said, that process hadn't been made effective yet. But by the time Hotez was making his plea on Attia's podcast, Moderna was already starting up clinical trials of its mRNA vaccine in partnership with the National Institutes of Health, the biomedical research arm of the U.S. government and the largest center of its kind in the world. And by late 2020, when BioE was rolling out its phase I clinical trials with Corbevax in India, Pfizer was already getting emergency use authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The Bottazzi and Hotez vaccine relies on a production process very similar to the way the Hepatitis B vaccine is made that's been produced and used around the world for decades. The two argue that the familiarity with the process and the ease with which the materials can be gotten makes it easier to quickly ramp up global production compared to the newer vaccines, even if they came onto the market a little later. But aside from a handful of philanthropies who can see the value of the domino effect — more vaccinations outside this country help lower infections around the world and here — Hotez and Bottazzi have heard nothing about producing or distributing here at home. "Why weren't conventional vaccine technologies given the opportunity of being at the same table as all these other technologies?" Bottazzi said. The answer, Neuman says, is that while conventional technologies — or what he jokingly derided as "the obvious answer" — have a role in global vaccine development, the newer vaccines are stronger than the traditional types that Bottazzi, Hotez and other scientists around the world are developing. Newer vaccines also have a quicker production process than the conventional vaccines, said Neuman, a member of the international committee that named SARS-CoV-2, the virus behind the COVID-19 pandemic.



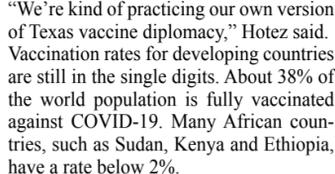
Peter Hotez at the Tropical Medicine Lab at Texas Children's Hospital Center for Vaccine Development.

Development in Houston on Oct. 5, 2021. (Photo/ Justin Rex for The Texas Tribune)

But Neuman agrees that the newer vaccines have distribution challenges: the tangles of intellectual property patents, the availability of materials to produce billions of doses in a short period of time and the logistics of a more complicated transport and storage process. Those challenges can be solved, Neuman said, but until then, the majority of the planet should be vaccinated "by any means necessary," including with conventional vaccines like the one created by Bottazzi and Hotez, if it proves to be safe and effective. "Whatever gets the job done the fastest as long as it's safe for everybody involved," he said.

'One plane flight away' While the Houston team waits for a production and distribution partner, the team fields calls every week from other countries asking them for help getting access to the vaccine, Bottazzi said. They ask if they can get the spare doses that Americans are declining or if they can get connected to BioE to export to them from their Indian-made stocks — or if the scientists will share the formula for the prototype.

The scientists share the formula with any country or lab who asks for it and help in other ways, however they can. "We're kind of practicing our own version of Texas vaccine diplomacy," Hotez said. Vaccination rates for developing countries are still in the single digits. About 38% of the world population is fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Many African countries, such as Sudan, Kenya and Ethiopia, have a rate below 2%.



The vaccine team at the Tropical Medicine Lab at Texas Children's Hospital Center for Vaccine Development in Houston.

In India, where nearly a billion doses of three different vaccines — Covishield, Covaxin and Sputnik V — have been distributed, more than 80% of the population remains unvaccinated. In Brazil, less than a third of the country is inoculated. "We're one plane flight away from seeing a variant that developed in a country

that has very little vaccine end up on our shores and set off a new wave of the pandemic," said Dr. James Cutrell, an infectious disease expert at UT Southwestern Medical Center.

Right now, the World Health Organization is already monitoring several variants that have been traced to developing countries including Indonesia (21% fully vaccinated), Peru (with one of the highest COVID-19 mortality rates in the world), Colombia, the Dominican Republic and South Africa.

"Much of sub-Saharan Africa, large swaths of Latin America and other places like that — they really don't have access to the [mRNA] vaccines," said Cutrell, an associate professor in the department of internal medicine. "That makes it really important and attractive to have some of these cheaper, easier-to-distribute — but hopefully similarly effective — vaccines with more traditional technology, which I think this vaccine and other vaccines like it can contribute."



Dr. Peter Hotez and Dr. Maria Elena Bottazzi of Texas Children's Hospital and Baylor College of Medicine.

American problem, international solution As the world scrambles for doses to meet the vaccination demand elsewhere, this nation's vaccination effort has flagged, hitting a wall of hesitation by a significant portion of the American public that is declining the new vaccines, although they have proven to be safe and effective. Hotez and Bottazzi believe their vaccine would likely be more accepted by those who don't trust a vaccine that is unfamiliar to them, like those by Pfizer and Moderna. But from the start, inoculating reticent Americans was never the Houston team's first priority. Bottazzi and Hotez began their work developing coronavirus vaccines as part of their mission at the National School of Tropical Medicine, where Hotez is dean

and Bottazzi is associate dean, to inoculate developing nations against tropical viruses.

Fast forward to January 2020, when SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, was setting off alarms in the U.S. medical community. Bottazzi and Hotez began working to repurpose their coronavirus research program to develop a vaccine against the new virus and distribute it to the same countries they'd focused on throughout their careers.



The speed with which the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines were developed and the fact they used newer formulas seemed to spook some Americans and helped fuel politically motivated misinformation campaigns that chipped away at public acceptance. And as this nation's vaccination rate hovers around 57%, it's a matter of debate what is needed to achieve a higher level of immunity as a country. Neuman said he isn't so sure that a more familiar vaccine formula would change a lot of minds in the United States, where the resistance appears to be more political than scientific.

"I think that comes from a lot of different places, and I think the main place is sort of, 'You're not the boss of me,'" he said. "Who says you get to tell me what to do?" And I don't think it matters what it is." Even if it would make a difference, the path to emergency use authorization for a COVID-19 vaccine in this country starts with money — for research, for trials, for materials — and ends with firm commitments from the U.S. to support its mass production. The Bottazzi-Hotez shot, at this point, has neither.

And so Hotez, who is an internationally known and outspoken warrior against the anti-vaccine movement, and Bottazzi redouble their attention abroad to protect Americans who can't or won't protect themselves. If they can get more of their vaccine overseas within a few months, they can keep the variants from percolating and landing on U.S. soil.

"It's a pretty ambitious, audacious goal," Hotez said. "But I think we could get there." (Courtesy texastribune.org)