Politics, Profits & Pandemic Fear Mongering
By Barbara Loe Fisher

Are you grabbing your face mask, stocking up on food and Tamiflu, locking your doors and keeping your TV tuned to the news to find out just how bad the "swine flu pandemic" really is going to get? While Americans are being scared to death, few are noticing how much of their tax money politicians are giving to drug companies and government health officials to grease the skids to create more experimental flu vaccines and drugs and more effective ways to quarantine or force their mass use whenever a "public health emergency" is declared in the future.

Call me cynical but not clueless. The bird's eye view I have had for the past 27 years at the National Vaccine Information Center has taught me one thing: the global alliance between Big Pharma and Big Public Health is a prescription for disaster that could extend far beyond a bout with the flu.

The international drama playing out right now before our eyes is an example of how citizens around the world can be easily manipulated by doctors and politicians engaging in fear mongering in the name of disease control to forward agendas that have more to do with ideology, power and corporate profits than health. When the U.S. Director of Homeland Security is the government official doing the talking rather than the U.S. Director of the Centers for Disease Control, put a copy of the U.S. Constitution in your pocket and take a look at federal and state legislation passed since September 11, 2001 to understand which civil rights you don't have anymore when government health officials declare a "public health emergency."

But before we take a look at the threat to civil liberties that pandemic fear mongering poses, let's take a look at how creation of a global human market for influenza vaccines works. It is a blueprint for Successful Marketing 101 (or perhaps it is all just a coincidence).

In 2006, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued an international call for all nations to do whatever it takes to increase public appetite and demand for annual influenza shots as the main strategy to prepare for an influenza pandemic. In April 2007, the WHO used money donated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to fund the creation of influenza vaccine manufacturing plants in Mexico and other countries one week after the FDA gave Sanofi Pasteur a license to produce an experimental bird flu (H5N1) vaccine. Sanofi Pasteur is just one of many drug companies the U.S. government has given millions of dollars to for the creation of bird flu vaccines.

On February 19, 2009, the FDA's Vaccines & Related Biological Products Advisory Committee (VRBPAC) discussed whether to give approval for the testing of experimental bird flu vaccine on American infants. VRBPAC consumer member, also NVIC's Director of Patient Safety Vicky Debold,PhD, warned that testing of an experimental pandemic bird flu vaccine on infants in the absence of a real epidemic and without assurances that unapproved novel oil based (squalene) adjuvants (AS03, MF59) are safe, could pose unacceptable risks in terms of inducing severe immune dysfunction.

On February 27, 2009 it was confirmed that an influenza vaccine maker, Baxter International, had released a mixture of seasonal influenza viruses mixed with unlabeled live bird flu viruses to facilities in Czechoslovakia, Germany, and Slovenia. Baxter, which is waiting for a license to manufacturer bird flu vaccine, explained it was an "accident" and that no harm was done.

On April 23, 2009, the world heard the first news reports about a mysterious pig (H1N1) and bird (H5N1) and human hybrid influenza virus that was making people sick near a Mexican pig farm. By April 30, the WHO had issued a Phase 5 "Alert" warning that the world was facing an imminent pandemic influenza epidemic on the strength of several hundred cases of "swine" flu and less than 10 confirmed deaths.
The pandemic flu panic that has an especially strong grip on people living in Mexico and the U.S., thanks to the governments of both countries declaring a "public health emergency," has been a good thing for pharmaceutical companies in the pandemic flu business. Wall Street revealed that the pandemic scare sent stock prices soaring for drug companies making anti-viral drugs, rapid flu diagnosis tests and influenza vaccines. Sanofi Pasteur, GlaxoSmithKline, Novavax, Baxter, Johnson & Johnson, Roche, BioCryst, and Vical are among the drug companies likely to benefit from the world pandemic panic.

In all the chaos that has Americans running to drug stores to buy face masks, closing schools to wipe desks down with rubbing alcohol and avoiding public transportation, there is action being taken behind the scenes by politicians and government health officials to prepare the way for implementation of future quarantine and mass vaccination of citizens with experimental vaccines and drugs that have by- passed normal FDA regulations for demonstrating purity and potency of pharmaceutical products. A "public health emergency" has become an excuse to grease the skids and rush to market experimental drugs and vaccines that are not subject to product liability in the civil courts.

The creation of this pharmaceutical company stockholder dream scenario and simultaneous erosion of civil liberties in the name of disease control began in earnest in 21st century America after the tragic events on September 11, 2001. In a time defined by shock, fear, anger and deep sadness, Congress reacted quickly and passed the Homeland Security Act while CDC officials pulled out model state legislation (Model State Emergency Health Powers Act) that gave sweeping new powers to public health officials to use the militia, if necessary, to quarantine citizens and force them to use experimental drugs and vaccines after the U.S. Secretary of Health declares a "public health emergency."

The stampede in 2001/2002 to re-write long standing public health laws in this country was fueled by reports that terrorists were in possession of weaponized smallpox and anthrax, a fear that was fostered by U.S. government officials and New York Times journalists reporting Iraq had secret stockpiles of weaponized smallpox and anthrax. This myth played a role in public support for the U.S.-Iraq War and persuaded Congress to pass Bioshield and pandemic influenza vaccine legislation that gave billions of dollars to vaccine manufacturers, the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to create experimental bioeterrorism and pandemic flu vaccines while protecting drug companies and doctors from liability for vaccine injuries and deaths that will occur.

The mandated, mass use of multiple vaccines has become big business in the last quarter century since the U.S. Congress passed a law in 1986 shielding vaccine makers and doctors from liability for vaccine injuries and deaths and the numbers of vaccines recommended by the federal health officials for American children multiplied from 23 doses of 7 vaccines to 48 doses of 14 vaccines from birth to age six. For older children and adults, there are several dozen more federally recommended or state mandated vaccinations.

All of this liability protection and government vaccine mandating has been a boon for vaccine profit-making and public health agency empire building. In 1986, four drug companies made and sold vaccines in America and, by 2007, after corporate mergers and acquisitions there were six drug company giants making and selling vaccines in the U.S. Today, there are more drug companies seeking to enter the lucrative multi- billion dollar U.S. vaccine market as financial predictions for global profits from the worldwide vaccine business by 2010 have climbed to more than $20B.

A true global influenza pandemic that could take out projected millions of people is something all
nations should prepare for using reasonable strategies to ensure the public health and safety. However, it is a matter of legitimate debate as to whether the primary strategy being urged by the WHO, pharmaceutical companies and government health agencies around the world – ramping up production and use of seasonal influenza vaccine and fast tracking the creation and human testing of influenza vaccines using novel but potentially risky adjuvants and cell substrates – is the way to effectively deal with public health or a future influenza pandemic.

Certainly, the loss of the human right to bodily integrity and informed consent to taking pharmaceutical drugs and vaccines that may pose serious health risks is not justified in the name of controlling pandemic influenza or any other infectious disease outbreak. Politicians should not bow to additional pressure from vaccine manufacturers and public health officials to by-pass normal FDA standards in proving safety and efficacy of pandemic flu vaccines and their components for the purpose of rushing them to market in response to the pandemic panic that has been created. The swine flu debacle of 1976 should have taught Congress that lesson.

A rational perspective that reduces pandemic fear and includes common sense advice for staying healthy in every season is being offered by holistic health doctors, such as Joseph Mercola, D.O. and physician Congressman Ron Paul, M.D. The next time you turn on the TV or the radio or search the Internet for the latest news on the flu pandemic, take a deep breath and consider all the natural ways to stay healthy and resist influenza or any illness: washing your hands; eating nutritious food; drinking plenty of water; getting enough exercise, rest and sunshine, and lowering stress – which includes not walking around filled with fear, anxiety and dread.