

Bolsonaro's chief of staff admits his boss is wrong on COVID

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Brasilia, April 28 (RHC)-- The Brazilian president's chief of staff didn't realize his comments were being livestreamed on Tuesday when he dismissed his boss' approach to the coronavirus and said he feared for the life of Jair Bolsonaro because he hasn't yet been vaccinated.

"I am involved, personally," said government minister and chief of staff to the president Luiz Eduardo Ramos at a recorded meeting for Brazil's Supplementary Health Council. In the livestream, which was shared by Brazilian radio station CBN, Ramos said that he had been desperately "trying to convince our president, regardless of [his] positions," to take the vaccine.

"We cannot lose the president to such a virus. His life, at the moment, is at risk. He is 65 years old," he said of Bolsonaro, who tested positive for the virus in July of last year.

The Brazilian president, who once joked that the vaccine could turn people into crocodiles and cause women to grow beards, has previously declared that he will only decide on getting the jab "after the last

Brazilian [is] vaccinated,” in order to set an example. He became eligible for vaccination in Brazil on April 1st.

Bolsonaro’s response to the pandemic -- and his tendency to downplay the virus -- have been heavily criticized over the past year. Despite his claims that “Brazilians should be studied” because “they don’t catch anything,” Brazil is now one of the worst places in the world for COVID, thanks in part to a highly infectious variant and frequent superspreader events that have been taking place all across the country.

“In my understanding, the issue of the coronavirus is more of a fantasy,” Bolsonaro said in a meeting with President Donald Trump in March last year. Weeks later, he reflected on how he thought his own body would react should he be infected with COVID: “In my particular case, because of my history as an athlete, in case I were contaminated by the virus, I wouldn’t need to worry. I wouldn’t feel anything or it would be, at most, similar to a little flu, or a little cold.”

In the Tuesday meeting, Ramos, who disclosed that he had discreetly gotten vaccinated, struck a drastically different tone. He described the virus as a “plague” that “attacks all of us.”

“I am not ashamed, no,” said the minister. “I’ll be honest. I, like any human being, want to live. I have two wonderful grandchildren, a beautiful woman. I still have dreams. I fucking want to live. If science, medicine, is [telling us] to get the vaccine, who am I to oppose it?”

While it’s unclear how attendees at the Health Council meeting didn’t realize their discussion was being streamed online, Ramos wasn’t the only one to say things he may have wanted to keep from the public.

Minister of Economy Paulo Guedes remarked during the meeting that “the Chinese invented the virus and [their] vaccine is less effective than that of the American.” Most of the vaccines administered in Brazil come from China.

Nearly 400,000 people in Brazil have died from the novel coronavirus so far. On Tuesday, Brazil’s senate launched a probe into the federal government’s handling of the pandemic, the outcome of which could threaten Bolsonaro’s chances for re-election next year.

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