

United States Senate

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COMMITTEES:
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RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

March 2, 2020

Vice President Mike Pence
The White House
Office of the Vice President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Vice President Pence:

I am writing to convey my concerns over how the U.S. government has mobilized to combat the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), including how the Administration is communicating with state, local and federal officials responding to the virus and Americans at large impacted by the virus. As you take over the leadership of the U.S. government's response to the coronavirus, I ask that you devote the resources, expertise and manpower needed to prevent this virus from spreading and that you improve the U.S. government's communication with Congress and the American public.

As you well know, the novel coronavirus has sickened more than 90,000 people around the world, and killed more than 3,000 people to date. While there have only been 88 confirmed cases in the U.S. and two fatalities, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has stated that the virus is expected to spread within the U.S. I am concerned that the Administration's response to date has not been aggressive enough to effectively combat the virus and fails to underscore the threat posed by this virus.

Earlier this month, I wrote to the Administration asking them to redirect available public health funds to combat this virus and to inform my colleagues and me of any additional resources that are needed. This week, the Trump Administration asked Congress for only \$2.5 billion dollars in order to contain the coronavirus and to try to prevent it from spreading in the U.S. A number of independent public health experts have expressed concern that this amount will not be enough to effectively prepare, and both Republican and Democratic Members of the House and Senate have publically agreed this request is likely insufficient.

In addition, I have been deeply frustrated with the U.S. government's communication with Congress, my constituents and their family members impacted by the virus, and the American people more broadly. I understand that individuals at the State Department, including in embassies around the world, the CDC and other federal agencies, have been working around the

clock. Yet despite this flurry of efforts, the U.S. government has not established an effective communication plan that tracks specific cases and communicates out guidance to individuals, their family members and Congressional offices working to get them help. Nor has it effectively pushed back on disinformation around the coronavirus or given adequate information to the American public.

For example, since the outbreak of the coronavirus, I have been in frequent communication with a number of Virginians, who were traveling in Asia and were unable to return home. The U.S. government's task force was unable to provide these folks with basic information on a timely basis about what they could expect for the next 24 hours and how they could be medically cleared. Questions such as where they would sleep the following night, whether they should book a hotel or flight, and how they could be reunited with their spouses in country, went unanswered for far too long. In addition, my office, despite repeated outreach to numerous government entities, struggled to get the basic information these constituents needed. This process was opaque, time-consuming and ultimately unsatisfactory for my constituents. We must do better. We need to put better systems in place, especially as the virus continues to spread.

I urge you to prioritize implementing an effective and reliable mobilization effort to support our nation's response to the threat of coronavirus. This response – at minimum – should include an emergency appropriations request to Congress with sufficient funding levels based upon recommendations from public health experts on the front lines of this outbreak. In addition, I urge you to establish an organized and reliable communications strategy that ensures state, local and federal officials and the American public have the most up-to-date information they need to remain prepared and safe. Thank you in advance for you attention to this letter, and I look forward to working together on this critical issue moving forward.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

cc: Secretary Alex Azar
Secretary Mike Pompeo