

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 4, 2020

President Donald J. Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

We write regarding the risk of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) spreading within the United States<sup>1</sup> and your administration's handling of this potential public health crisis. The American people need strong, organized leadership at this moment, but the response to date has been dangerously inadequate.

The death toll from the coronavirus is now more than 3,200 worldwide and there have been 93,000 global cases since the outbreak originated in Wuhan, China in December of 2019. As it becomes clear that efforts to contain the virus to mainland China have failed, current and former public health officials have increasingly warned that the spread of the virus to the United States is increasingly likely and a pandemic may be "inevitable."<sup>2</sup>

In the face of such a threat, the American people need to know that there is a strategy being executed by competent leadership with adequate resources. The growing evidence that such a strategy is absent is deeply concerning to us.

Recent statements by top administration officials have given wildly conflicting answers to critical questions, including the prospect of the virus spreading within the United States<sup>3</sup> and the potential timeline for the development of a vaccine.<sup>45</sup> The obvious and inescapable fact is that if multiple Cabinet-level officials give different answers on these topics, at least one of the most important public officials responsible for handling this crisis is ignorant of key facts. Such

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<sup>1</sup> ABC, "CDC warns Americans of 'significant disruption' from coronavirus," Morgan Winsor, Erin Schumaker, Marc Nathanson, Feb. 25, 2020 <https://abcnews.go.com/International/coronavirus-live-updates-cdc-warns-americans-significant-disruption/story?id=69190968>

<sup>2</sup> CNN, "Former CDC director: A coronavirus pandemic is inevitable. What now?" Dr. Tom Frieden, Feb. 25, 2020 <https://www.cnn.com/2020/02/25/health/coronavirus-pandemic-frieden/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> Politico, "Kudlow breaks with CDC on coronavirus: 'We have contained this,'" Eli Okun, Feb. 25, 2020 <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/02/25/kudlow-white-house-coronavirus-117402>

<sup>4</sup> The Hill, "Top health official warns coronavirus spread appears inevitable in US," Nathaniel Weixel, Feb. 25, 2020 <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/484530-top-health-official-warns-coronavirus-spread-in-us-inevitable-its-not-a>

<sup>5</sup> NBC, "Fact checking Trump's comments on coronavirus," Jane C. Timm, Feb. 26, 2020

<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/fact-checking-trump-s-comments-coronavirus-n1143856>

discrepancies reveal a startling lack of information-sharing, which also suggests the absence of interagency coordination, planning, and strategic focus.

On February 26, 2020, you appointed Vice President Pence to take charge of the administration's response to the coronavirus. However, the following day, Ambassador Debbie Birx was appointed as the "White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator," reporting under Pence. Additionally, she will be joining the White House's task force, which is still led by HHS Secretary Azar. It is apparent there is chaos and a lack of clarity among the top levels of leadership regarding who is overseeing not only the dissemination of accurate information, but also the execution of an effective strategy. We believe that a clear chain of command is required for your administration's pandemic response, not just for the public, but across government agencies and leadership, in order to allow the full force of the bureaucracy to efficiently quell the outbreak.

Such a response must also have the resources necessary to succeed. We note that Appropriations leaders from both parties in both chambers of Congress found the administration's funding request unserious.<sup>6</sup> We further note your history of requesting enormous funding cuts to the CDC and NIH, particularly in the area of global health.<sup>7</sup> Protecting the American people will require funding for research and medical supplies than administration officials have sought, and we are committed to making sure such funding is provided, without pulling from important existing programs.

Relatedly, the teams within the White House National Security Council (NSC) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) responsible for responding to global health threats were disbanded nearly two years ago, since which time the office of the head of global health security on the NSC has remained vacant.<sup>8</sup> These teams were permanently established following the 2014 Ebola outbreak in order to rapidly and efficiently respond to global health threats, such as the coronavirus. We believe it is essential to restore this permanent infrastructure within the administration immediately.

The potential of a pandemic is not a matter of economic or political benefit, it is a matter of life and death. We urge you to immediately establish a strong chain of command for the U.S. government's pandemic response with clearly identified authority to coordinate an administration-wide response. We urge you to reestablish the NSC and DHS offices of global health security and appoint qualified experts to lead them. We urge you to abandon planned cuts

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<sup>6</sup> The Hill, "GOP chairman of Appropriations panel worries Trump 'lowballing' coronavirus funding request," Jessie Hellmann, Feb. 25, 2020 <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/484515-gop-senator-worries-trump-administration-is-lowballing-coronavirus-funding>

<sup>7</sup> Foreign Policy, "Trump Has Sabotaged America's Coronavirus Response," Laurie Garrett, Jan. 31, 2020 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/01/31/coronavirus-china-trump-united-states-public-health-emergency-response/>

<sup>8</sup> Washington Post, "Top White House official in charge of pandemic response exits abruptly," Lena H. Sun, May 10, 2018 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2018/05/10/top-white-house-official-in-charge-of-pandemic-response-exits-abruptly/>

to public health agencies and global health initiatives immediately. We urge you to utilize all available resources to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

The level of chaos with which the administration has greeted the spread of coronavirus is unacceptable and frankly frightening. Our constituents are not interested in credit or partisan battles, they just want to know that this problem will be solved.

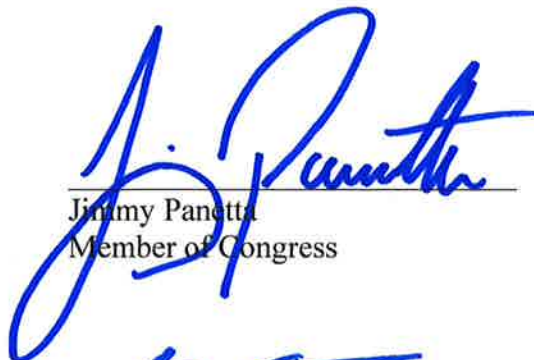
They are counting on you to solve it. We stand ready and willing to help.

Sincerely,



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Donald S. Beyer Jr.  
Member of Congress



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Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress



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Stacey E. Plaskett  
Member of Congress



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David Trone  
Member of Congress



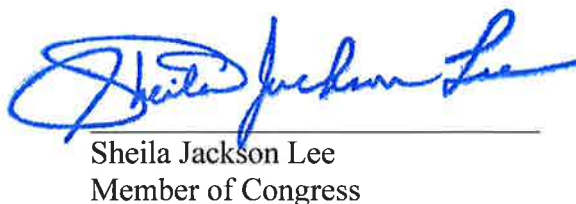
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Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



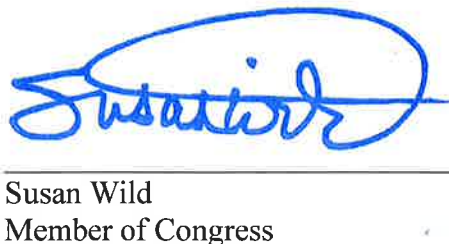
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Debbie Dingell  
Member of Congress



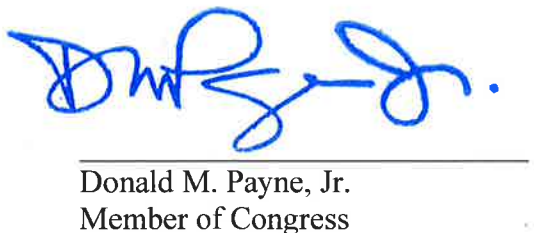
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Sheila Jackson Lee  
Member of Congress



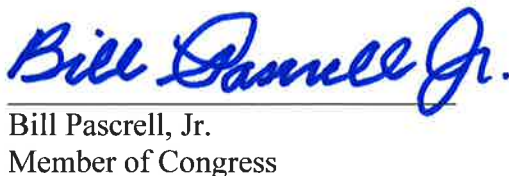
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Susan Wild  
Member of Congress



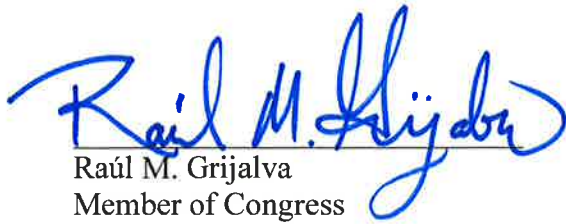
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Member of Congress



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Bill Pascrell, Jr.  
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Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress

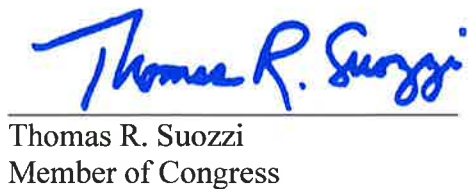
  
Grace F. Napolitano  
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Mary Gay Scanlon  
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Brenda L. Lawrence  
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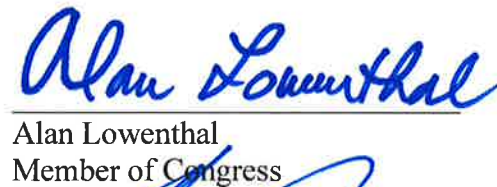
  
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Mike Thompson  
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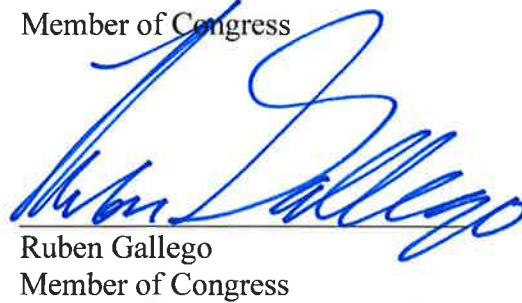
  
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Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress

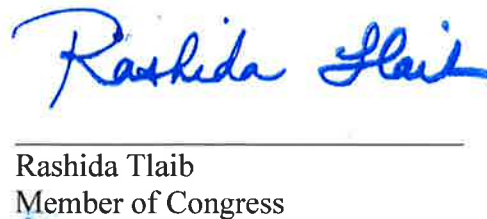
  
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Mike Levin  
Member of Congress

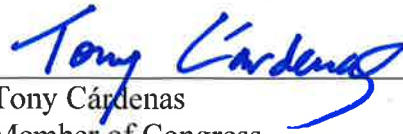
  
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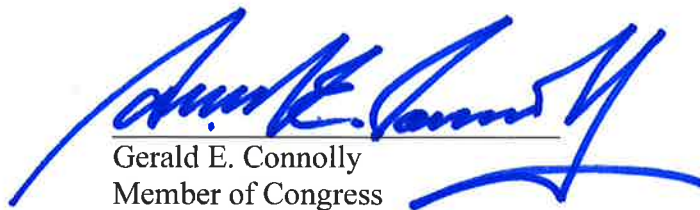


Tim Ryan  
Member of Congress



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Sean Casten  
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Gerald E. Connolly  
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Nanette Diaz Barragán  
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David N. Cicilline  
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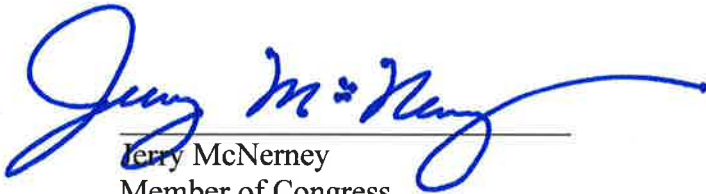
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