

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 23, 2020

The Honorable Vice President Pence
The White House
Office of the Vice President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Vice President,

Thank you for the work that you and your team are undertaking to address this ongoing crisis. Your work on the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is critical to ensure that all Americans are protected. Given the unprecedented nature of this disease and its massive damage to the wellbeing of Americans, our economy, and the rest of the global community, we urge you to establish two temporary and specialized task forces. One to expedite and coordinate the development of COVID-19 vaccines, diagnostics, and treatments, and another to coordinate medical supply shortages and the development of innovative solutions to address these shortages.

Working with members of your Administration, Congress is working to pass legislation that would inject funding into curtailing this pandemic, in part to ensure Americans can be tested and treated for COVID-19 and to enable a robust and adequate public health and economic response to mitigate the health, social, and economic damage caused by this virus. We need to do more to protect Americans during this crisis. With such enormous costs, we cannot afford any delays because of medical supply shortages or barriers to finding safe and effective vaccines, diagnostics, and treatments for this disease. We believe coordinating task forces focused on the following issues should be a priority and will further advance efforts to end the pandemic.

The first task force should coordinate global research to rapidly develop and deploy effective point-of-care- diagnostics, treatments, and vaccinations. It should include leadership and expert representation from all major Federal agencies or departments with a role in research, development, and regulation. This includes but is not limited to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Biomedical Advance Research and Development Authority (BARDA), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In addition, these organizations should be joined by senior leadership and experts from the private sector, including; both large and small pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies, clinical research organizations, payer groups, academia, patient advocacy groups, and innovative health developers. The task force should ensure any expedited approval processes, including compassionate use, are accessible in both rural and urban regions and to patients receiving care in all facility types, including critical access hospitals and IHS and tribal facilities. Additionally, they should be able to offer guidance on what information companies must provide for each stage of the approval process and how companies can expedite this process. This task force

should also identify steps to leverage existing detection and research infrastructure to develop needed medical products and to prepare for potential waves of the pandemic.

The second interagency task force should coordinate with all fifty states, including tribes and territories, to determine (1) where shortages in supplies and medical technology exist and (2) guide and support domestic manufacturers to alleviate the shortage of critical medical supplies. This task force should also coordinate with the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Indian Health Services (IHS), and all the United States Military, to determine where supplies are and how best to distribute them within states that are experiencing a shortage. This task force should exhaust all creative and innovating solutions to address medical shortages, production capacity issues, and other shortcomings in the health care infrastructure. They should actively offer suggestions to the Congress and the administration about alternative opportunities to address immediate shortages as well as more long-term shortages.

Without a central collaboration empowered to reduce as many barriers to medical product development and the distribution of supplies, the nation risks siloed efforts that could prolong our overall biomedical response to the global pandemic. We are asking you to be intentional in developing this collaboration and we stand ready to partner with them moving forward.

Sincerely,

Senator Dan Sullivan
Senator Lisa Murkowski
Senator M. Michael Rounds
Senator Ben Sasse
Senator Susan M. Collins
Senator Cory Gardner
Senator Shelley Moore Capito
Senator Steve Daines
Senator John Kennedy

Senator Thomas R. Carper
Senator Michael F. Bennet
Senator Catherine Cortez Masto
Senator Doug Jones
Senator Chris Van Hollen
Senator Kyrsten Sinema
Senator Joe Manchin III
Senator Gary C. Peters
Senator Chris Coons