

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 9, 2020

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

Dear Vice President Pence:

Thank you for your visit to Washington state last week to review the efforts of our state and local officials in responding to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in our state. Ongoing support at the highest levels of the U.S. government is critical to our state's ability to respond to this epidemic, which is why we are eager to work with you on a coordinated response.

We appreciate that you have pledged to support the state's efforts to combat this serious health crisis and we urge you to expeditiously review the list of requested actions provided by Governor Inslee during that visit (and included with this letter). In addition to the actions outlined by the Governor, we believe there are several other federal actions that the Administration should take to ensure a robust and coordinated federal response to this epidemic.

1. Last week you announced that the COVID-19 test will be deemed an "essential health benefit" and will be covered by Medicaid, Medicare and private insurers. However, the "essential health benefits" requirement does not apply to the majority of Americans, including those covered by Medicare and large employer plans, nor does it ensure that the test is available to patients at low or no cost. We appreciate that the administration has since determined that the COVID-19 test will be covered under Medicare Part B. Please explain how the Administration intends to follow through on your statement and ensure that this test is made available to all Americans, and what steps the Administration is taking to ensure those who need to be tested can readily access it.
2. Because stockpiling food is exceptionally challenging for households that already struggle to put food on the table, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) should give states affected by COVID-19 the flexibility to provide an additional month's worth of food benefits for SNAP households. In addition, the Administration should waive federal requirements that retailers' stock specific food products and a specific amount of those products in order to be certified for the WIC (Women, Infant and Children) Nutrition Program. With uncertainty in how food supply chains may be affected by COVID-19, a waiver of this rule would ensure retailers can continue to serve low-income families without fear of losing WIC certification. Further, the USDA should give states affected by COVID-19 waivers on school meal requirements, including

allowing for meals to be served through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)/Seamless Summer Option (SSO) in non-area eligible locations so that all children impacted by school closures can continue to receive the nutrition they need. Increased flexibility to States in delivering basic food assistance, and administering other social and health services, like TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), WIC (Women, Infants & Children) Nutrition Program, SNAP, SFSP, and SSO, will allow states to determine the best way to meet the needs of families and communities impacted by the outbreak.


3. The impact of COVID-19 extends beyond just the health of our communities. It has an impact on the financial wellbeing of individuals and families, businesses, and the entire economy. Uninsured individuals, hourly wage workers, and those without paid sick leave are likely to experience disproportionate economic impact due to the COVID-19 outbreak. This, in addition to the potential lay-off of employees and reduction of work hours during an economic downturn, may have lasting impact on communities across the state, particularly in rural communities. We strongly encourage the Administration to work across federal agencies to identify ways it can provide direct support to individuals, families, and businesses that are impacted by this epidemic. We also urge the Administration to work with Congress to enact emergency policies to help protect workers, families, and businesses, and further mitigate any economic fallout caused by the outbreak.
4. At college campuses across Washington state, study abroad programs are being scaled back and suspended as COVID-19 spreads across the state and other countries. The impact to Washington state colleges and universities, with a pending loss of thousands of international students, would be significant. We ask that the Administration consider an emergency exception to the restriction on online class time students can take and maintain their student visa status.
5. As the first state to deal with a COVID-19 outbreak, Washington state will need ongoing support for our first responders who may not yet have the proper equipment to protect themselves and quickly respond to assist in urgent health cases. As the testing ground for the U.S. response to COVID-19, we need the Administration to work closely with Members of Congress and Washington state officials to address emerging needs for first responders in real-time in the coming weeks.
6. There are reports of an increase in phishing email attacks capitalizing on fears surrounding the outbreak. Attackers posing as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or the World Health Organization (WHO) are spreading misinformation and in some cases malware. CDC should continue to make information about the COVID-19 outbreak clear and easy to access, and work with the appropriate federal enforcement agencies to protect consumers.
7. The federal government has already approved one request from Washington state for additional supplies and equipment from the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS), including personal protective equipment (PPE) but we know that an additional

request has been made in order to meet growing demand. We encourage the federal government to continue to fulfill these requests from Washington state as the need for supplies continues to rise in both urban and rural communities.

8. As we continue to see this virus spread to other regions of our country, we strongly urge the CDC to continue working to develop an effective serology test that will allow us to determine the full extent of exposure across the entire U.S. population. This, in addition to a long-term strategic plan to rebuild our public health infrastructure, is necessary to help ensure that we can react to future outbreaks more efficiently.
9. We applaud the recent bipartisan effort to finalize a coronavirus emergency supplemental funding package and the initial federal funding released to Washington state for its public health response to COVID-19. State and local health agencies and other health care entities are bearing enormous costs on a daily basis to respond to the outbreak. Should additional federal funding be required, we urge the Administration to work with Congress to support adequate additional funding to continue to fight the outbreak until the end.

Thank you again for visiting Washington state to speak with us, our state and local officials, and to let the American people know that the Administration takes the COVID-19 outbreak threat seriously. We recognize that, as the first state to deal with a COVID-19 outbreak of this magnitude, eyes around the country are closely watching the Washington state response. We thank you in advance for your efforts to mitigate the outbreak in our communities, and across the country, and we look forward to continuing our joint efforts to keep our communities safe.

Sincerely,




Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress



Adam Smith
Member of Congress



Denny Heck
Member of Congress



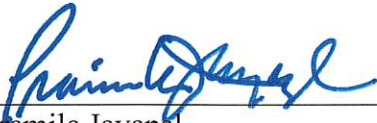
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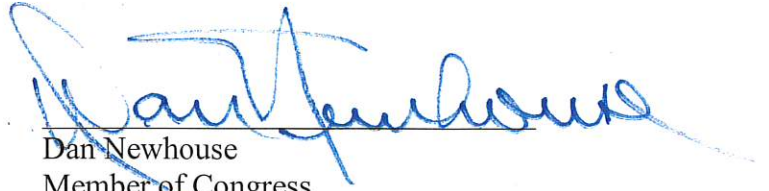
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