

MICHAEL B. ENZI, WYOMING
RICHARD BURR, NORTH CAROLINA
RAND PAUL, KENTUCKY
SUSAN M. COLLINS, MAINE
BILL CASSIDY, M.D., LOUISIANA
PAT ROBERTS, KANSAS
LISA MURKOWSKI, ALASKA
TIM SCOTT, SOUTH CAROLINA
MITT ROMNEY, UTAH
MIKE BRAUN, INDIANA
KELLY LOEFFLER, GEORGIA

PATTY MURRAY, WASHINGTON
BERNARD SANDERS (I), VERMONT
ROBERT P. CASEY, JR., PENNSYLVANIA
TAMMY BALDWIN, WISCONSIN
CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY, CONNECTICUT
ELIZABETH WARREN, MASSACHUSETTS
TIM KAINE, VIRGINIA
MARGARET WOOD HASSAN, NEW HAMPSHIRE
TINA SMITH, MINNESOTA
DOUG JONES, ALABAMA
JACKY ROSEN, NEVADA

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6300

DAVID P. CLEARY, STAFF DIRECTOR
EVAN SCHATZ, DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

<http://help.senate.gov>

March 2, 2020

The Honorable Eugene Scalia
Secretary of Labor
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Secretary Scalia:

As public health officials warn about the likely spread of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the United States, we write to understand how the Department of Labor (the Department) is preparing for the spread of the virus and ensuring the safety, health, and economic security of workers and their families. It is important agencies across the federal government keep in close coordination, rely on science and public health experts to drive decision-making, and communicate with the public in a clear and timely way. We therefore seek to understand how the Department is accomplishing these goals.

On January 29, 2020, President Trump announced the formation of the President's Coronavirus Task Force led by Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar and coordinated through the National Security Council.¹ The Task Force is charged with "leading the United States Government response to the novel 2019 coronavirus and with keeping [President Trump] apprised of developments." On February 26, 2020, President Trump announced Vice President Pence will oversee the Administration's response to the outbreak.² On February 27, 2020, Vice President Pence appointed Ambassador-at-Large Deborah Birx to be the White House coronavirus response coordinator and a member of the President's Task Force.³

Earlier this week, Dr. Nancy Messonnier, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, urged communities to prepare for the potential spread of COVID-19. Dr. Messonnier said that businesses should create plans for how they will respond if the virus spreads in their community, including potentially replacing in-person meetings with teleconferences or providing opportunities for workers to work from home.⁴

As businesses work to develop plans to respond to COVID-19, it is critical we ensure they are taking the best interests of workers into account. Businesses and workers must be provided with

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-press-secretary-regarding-presidents-coronavirus-task-force/>

² <https://www.cnn.com/2020/02/26/politics/trump-coronavirus-stock-market/index.html>

³ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/vice-president-pence-announces-ambassador-debbie-birx-serve-white-house-coronavirus-response-coordinator/>


⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/t0225-cdc-telebriefing-covid-19.html>


up-to-date information so they can base decisions on facts and science. And the Department must ensure the needs of workers and their families are considered as public health officials provide guidance to communities, including the needs of low-income workers whose families rely on every paycheck, and workers who may not have options to work remotely.

In order to understand whether these concerns are being taken into account and about the Department's role in this process, we request a response to the following questions no later than March 9, 2020:

- 1) How many Department officials are currently working on a response to COVID-19? Who at the Department is tasked with leading that effort?
- 2) How is the Department communicating with federal public health officials about issues related to COVID-19 that particularly impact workers?
 - a. From what agencies and which officials are you receiving guidance or direction about the necessary steps to respond?
 - b. Have you been directed to seek approval or to report all decisions, including guidance, through an individual federal government agency or official?
 - c. What communication have you had so far with the CDC or other federal agencies about responding to COVID-19?
 - d. What communication have you had so far with the President's Coronavirus Task Force?
- 3) Has the Department directly provided any guidance to employers and workers about how they can prepare to respond to COVID-19?
 - a. What guidance has the Department provided?
 - b. How is the Department communicating guidance and other information with employers and workers about responding to COVID-19?
 - c. How frequently does the Department intend to provide information to employers and workers?
- 4) What steps has the Department taken to ensure the safety and health of workers during the government's response to COVID-19, particularly those workers on the front lines of the response to COVID-19 such as health care workers and federal and state employees?
- 5) In light of the danger of exposure to COVID-19 faced by health care workers, will the Occupational Safety and Health Administration issue an emergency temporary Infectious Disease Standard?

Sincerely,


PATTY MURRAY
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor & Pensions


TAMMY BALDWIN
United States Senator



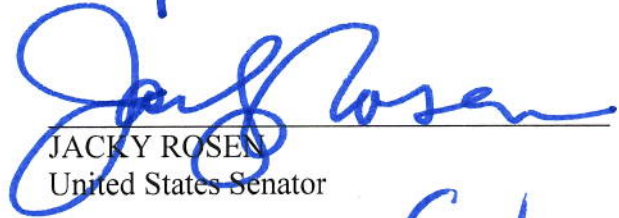
MARGARET WOOD HASSAN
United States Senator



ELIZABETH WARREN
United States Senator



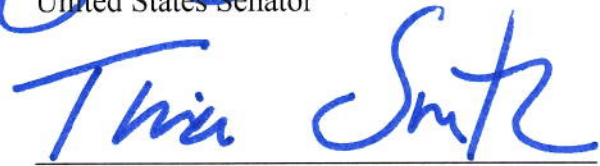
ROBERT P. CASEY, JR.
United States Senator



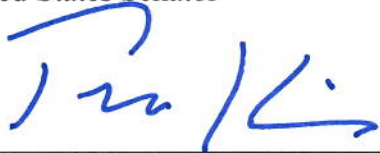
JACKY ROSEN
United States Senator



BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator



TINA SMITH
United States Senator



TIM Kaine
United States Senator