

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 14, 2020

Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Alex Azar II
Secretary of Health and Human Services
Department of Health and Human Services
301 7th St. SE
Washington, D.C. 20229

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Secretary Azar:

We write to express our serious concern over the Trump administration's reckless approach to U.S.-international health cooperation that reversed long-standing successful policies advocated on a bipartisan basis by previous administrations. Your actions limited American cooperation with the European Union and removed American experts from the ground in China, where the outbreak began. This impeded the ability of American public health officials to receive timely and accurate information about the pandemic, delaying our response and likely costing American lives. We urge you to immediately reestablish common-sense cooperation with the global community and to explore additional measures that could further strengthen our domestic and international capacity to control the virus and save lives.

The initial response to the COVID-19 outbreak by the Chinese government was demonstrably flawed and seriously problematic. However, prior to this outbreak, your Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) dramatically downsized the U.S.' global epidemic prevention activities. This led to both the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health reducing U.S. personnel in China as well as the closure of the National Science Foundation office there. This deprived the U.S. of early and accurate information on the novel coronavirus outbreak and impeded our ability to prepare and respond.

Numerous actions taken by the administration are cause for alarm. The decision to halt funding and announce a withdrawal from the World Health Organization has further isolated the U.S. from the world, and even from close allies. The U.S. reportedly did not even participate in the

international efforts organized by the EU Commission that were supported by U.S. allies and partners, including Canada and Japan. The opposition to any global initiative for voluntary patent pools has hampered global efforts to ensure that coronavirus treatments and vaccines, when developed, will be distributed to all who need them. In addition, your administration's promotion of rampant misinformation about the virus has contributed to the rise in racist violence against Asians and Asian Americans in the United States.

Despite our current failures, the U.S. has a history of successfully combating disease outbreaks through broad international collaboration. During the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak, for example, the U.S. worked side by side with an international coalition that included numerous member states of the African Union, Canada, China, Cuba, members of the European Union, Haiti, Russia, and South Korea. This type of international cooperation helped contain the spread of Ebola both in West Africa and around the world to a fraction of what the CDC had originally predicted.

Earlier in 2003 with the SARS outbreak, the Bush Administration offered its support to China in establishing a strong pandemic response system. It established a partnership with the Chinese Ministry of Health, including an agreement to help build China's capacity to respond to influenza outbreaks. In response to both the swine flu epidemic (H1N1) in 2009 and the avian flu outbreak (H7N9) in 2013, the American CDC collaborated with international partners, including China, by sharing key necessary data and conducting joint research. Despite having spread to more than two dozen countries in North America, South America, Europe, and Asia, these outbreaks were successfully contained in significant part due to these efforts. Rather than building on these successes, the administration has turned its back on years of successful health cooperation with the entire international community. While the virus currently appears largely contained in several countries, it is still far from under control in the U.S. and other parts of the world. Not only have we failed to lead the global pandemic response, we are now failing to take the actions necessary to stop the spread of the virus within our borders. We urge the Departments of State and HHS to collaborate where possible with international partners on COVID-19 research and vaccine and treatment development.

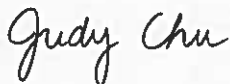
It is imperative that the U.S. immediately reverse course and begin to work with all major powers and relevant international organizations to coordinate a global response that simultaneously contains the pandemic and lays the foundation for more resilient and sustainable health infrastructure worldwide. Beyond restoring previous forms of cooperation, the scale and urgency of the coronavirus pandemic require exploration of a more ambitious agenda. We urge you to pursue additional initiatives, including:

- Joint research and production to ensure that a COVID-19 vaccine and treatment is available as quickly as possible;
- Equitable distribution of essential medical equipment in the U.S. and around the world;
- Funding for jobs programs to support contact tracing, care for the sick, and economic recovery;
- Investment to establish basic public health systems in every country, particularly in the Global South; and
- Commitment to promoting international coordination to establish resilient supply chains.

Reviving cooperation with the international community on global health is not only crucial to defeating a virus that knows no borders, it would also provide a model for further cooperation on the other enormous challenges facing humanity: rebuilding the economy, reducing inequality, addressing climate change, and preparing for future pandemics.

Thank you for your attention to this critical and urgent matter.

Sincerely,



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Member of Congress



BRAD SHERMAN
Member of Congress



JAMES MCGOVERN
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