

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 28, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

The Honorable Mark T. Esper
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Mr. Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20229

Dear Secretary Azar, Acting Secretary Wolf, and Secretary Esper,

We write today to inquire about the emerging global threat of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) and the potential implications for our borders in particular. As Members of Congress, some of whom represent southern states, we are obliged to ensure all precautions are being taken to protect our citizens from the spread of the disease across our southern border.

Given the porous nature of our border, and the continued lack of operational control due to the influence of dangerous cartels, it is foreseeable, indeed predictable, that any outbreak in Central America or Mexico could cause a rush to our border. Though today there are no major outbreaks of COVID-19 in Mexico, South, or Central America, there is at least one travel related case in Brazil, and it can be presumed that we will see the virus spread further. Over time, this could impose a new burden at our southern border that will threaten the safety and health of individuals in the United States and could cause a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions along our border and at detention facilities.

Just last month, U.S. Customs and Border Protection apprehended 36,679 people at the southern border, and in FY2019 alone, CBP encountered almost 900,000 people. Considering that the Department of Homeland Security already has its hands full caring for migrants that have not previously carried the COVID-19, we are seeking an understanding of what steps DHS, HHS, and DoD are taking to be prepared to contain the virus while also maintaining law and order, especially if an outbreak happens in areas from or through which migrants historically have come to the United States.

Understanding that travel screenings are currently underway at airports, these screenings are not certain to catch all cases of the virus. It is imperative that DHS and HHS have a plan for containment and treatment of COVID-19 that may be carried by legal and illegal entrants to the United States.

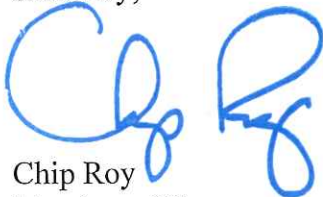
Containing the virus will take a thorough plan that addresses not only the current threat, but future threats as the disease progresses– the non-secure southern border is a liability and should be seen as such in any plan for preparedness response.

Additionally, and to assist us in establishing confidence in the United States' preparedness response, we respectfully request that you provide responses to the below questions pertaining to how DHS, HHS, and DoD plan to address the liability of the southern border in plans to mitigate the threat of COVID-19 to the United States.

1. Aside from airport screenings, what are DHS, HHS, and DoD doing to ensure people crossing legally into the United States are not carrying COVID-19?
2. What are the plans for individuals who cross illegally into the United States, specifically through the southern border?
3. Do DHS and HHS have the necessary testing kits for COVID-19?
4. Do U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers have adequate access to medical protective gear?
5. Do DHS and HHS have necessary resources to handle housing and medical care for legal and illegal migrants who test positive for COVID-19?
6. Are facilities along the southern border sufficiently equipped to ensure proper quarantine procedures both in terms of capacity and safety for migrants and facility personnel?
7. With the already existing crisis at the southern border, how will COVID-19 impact current ability to control the migrant flow at the southern border?
8. What resources may be required as part of a supplemental appropriations bill to ensure adequate physical barriers, all weather roads, and any and all other resources needed to ensure the full security of our border for the protection of both American citizens and the migrants seeking to come to the United States?
9. What support can or should be provided by DoD in such response situations, including infrastructure and personnel?
10. Can the Administration assure us that the federal government will seek adequate input and direction from state authorities in Texas before assuming civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals, would be used in such a situation?

Thank you for your attention to this letter and we look forward to a timely response.

Sincerely,



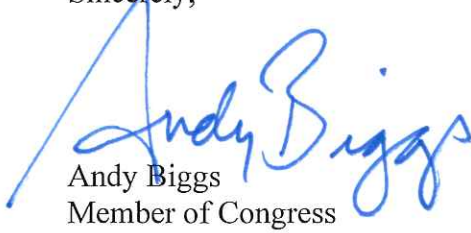
Chip Roy
Member of Congress

Sincerely,



Michael Cloud
Member of Congress

Sincerely,



Andy Biggs
Member of Congress

Sincerely,



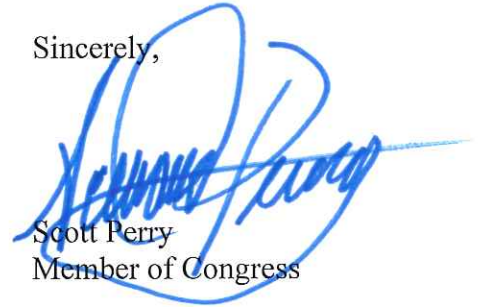
Jody Hice
Member of Congress

Sincerely,



Brian Babin, D.D.S.
Member of Congress

Sincerely,



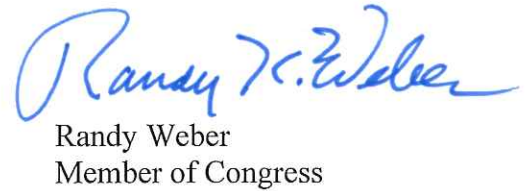
Scott Perry
Member of Congress

Sincerely,



Louie Gohmert
Member of Congress

Sincerely,



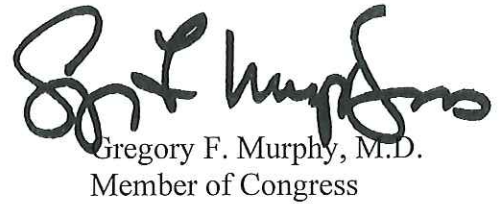
Randy Weber
Member of Congress

Sincerely,



Pete Olson
Member of Congress

Sincerely,



Gregory F. Murphy, M.D.
Member of Congress

Sincerely,



Paul A. Gosar, D.D.S.
Member of Congress

cc: Mr. Mark Morgan
Acting Commissioner
Customs and Border Protection

Robert Kadlec, M.D.
Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response
Health and Human Services