

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 21, 2020

President Donald Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump:

We write today with alarm and deep concern over your decision to officially withdraw the United States from the World Health Organization (WHO). We believe this action threatens to upend efforts to implement a collective international response to the COVID-19 pandemic, putting American lives and economic interests at risk.

As it is now grimly clear, diseases do not respect borders. This is a crisis of global proportions, one that has painfully exposed the vulnerabilities and deficiencies of even the strongest economies and most competently governed societies. No country, no matter how wealthy or powerful, can defeat this virus alone. And since no American will truly be safe from the ravages of COVID-19 until it is controlled everywhere, it is in our interest to work collaboratively with the international community.

This means in part continuing to collaborate and support the WHO, which is coordinating the global response to COVID-19. Currently, for example, the WHO is using its convening power to undertake an unprecedented effort to identify effective treatments and vaccines. The organization's "Solidarity Trial," which includes more than 100 countries, enables research on potential therapeutics to be collected much faster and more efficiently than individual country efforts, dramatically reducing the amount of time to determine effectiveness. And U.S. companies could especially gain from the results – depending on what treatments are shown most effective – since we have some of the most well respected and capable pharmaceutical companies in the world. On the other hand, withdrawing from the organization and pulling our funding could disrupt this and other global clinical trials that are critical to developing vaccines and medicines that benefit people all over the world, including Americans.

Over the years, the WHO has been a strong partner of the U.S. and a force-multiplier for U.S. global disease surveillance and immunization efforts, particularly related to malaria, polio, and HIV/AIDS. For instance, with funding from USAID, WHO implements global disease surveillance for the polio virus in areas which U.S. agencies do not have the ability to reach, including polio hotspots like Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also second immunization personnel to WHO, some of whom work with the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI), of which WHO is a founding partner. Over the past 30 years, GPEI has decreased the number of wild poliovirus cases by 99.9%, from an estimated 350,000 cases in 1988 to just 176 in 2019. WHO leads surveillance, immunization, and technical support and without these detection capabilities, polio could surge to 200,000 cases annually within a decade.

Closer to home, ending our involvement will, for the first time, cut the U.S. government out of the development of the seasonal influenza vaccine for the Southern Hemisphere, a process coordinated by the WHO but in partnership with the U.S. It remains unclear how or if the U.S. would maintain access to the most up to date information needed to develop the vaccine.

As it stands, a decision to end our engagement and funding of the WHO may be interpreted as abandoning vulnerable countries in their hour of need, further weakening their ability to identify and stop diseases at their source, before they become difficult and costly to contain. It also plays into the hands of countries, like China, who would seek to distract from their role in the outbreak and could be used to portray the United States as uninterested in helping other countries deal with COVID-19. In short, withdrawing from the WHO makes our country less safe and empowers China within the organization.

Certainly, we agree that there should be a robust examination of how the WHO responded in the early weeks and months of the pandemic, with an eye towards evaluating what they could have done better and developing a set of “lessons learned” to inform our response to future health crises. No organization is above scrutiny and accountability, and the WHO itself has welcomed a review of its record on this issue and discussion of possible reforms. In May, during the annual World Health Assembly, the WHO signaled its support for an independent external evaluation and on July 9, the WHO Director-General announced the formation of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response (IPPR). We strongly believe that the U.S. will have the most leverage to advocate and enact necessary reforms to respond to this and future crises by remaining a Member in good standing. The fact remains that we are currently in the midst of a global health emergency that is unprecedented in our lifetimes; now is not the time to take our eyes off the ball and engage in attacks on the one global institution that is working day-in and day-out to counter the threat posed by this disease.

We therefore urge you to reverse this short-sighted and dangerous decision, and to commit to reengagement with the World Health Organization – and Congress – on collective efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,



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Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

**/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand**

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Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

**/s/ Chris Van Hollen**

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Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

**/s/ Richard J. Durbin**

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Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

**/s/ Christopher A. Coons**

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Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator

**/s/ Doug Jones**

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Doug Jones  
United States Senator

**/s/ Angus S. King, Jr.**

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Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator

**/s/ Ron Wyden**

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Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

**/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley**

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Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

**/s/ Richard Blumenthal**

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Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

**/s/ Thomas R. Carper**

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Thomas R. Carper  
United States Senator

**/s/ Bernard Sanders**

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Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

**/s/ Sherrod Brown**

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Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator

**/s/ Edward J. Markey**

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Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

**/s/ Elizabeth Warren**

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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

**/s/ Mark R. Warner**

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Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator

**/s/ Mazie K. Hirono**

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Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator

**/s/ Jack Reed**

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Jack Reed  
United States Senator

**/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.**

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Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator

**/s/ Catherine Cortez Masto**

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Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator

**/s/ Maria Cantwell**

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Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator

**/s/ Martin Heinrich**

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Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator

**/s/ Tom Udall**

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Tom Udall  
United States Senator

**/s/ Tina Smith**

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Tina Smith  
United States Senator

**/s/ Brian Schatz**

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Brian Schatz  
United States Senator

**/s/ Sheldon Whitehouse**

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Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator

**/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin**

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Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

**/s/ Michael F. Bennet**

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Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator

**/s/ Tammy Baldwin**

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Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

**/s/ Amy Klobuchar**

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Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

**/s/ Christopher S. Murphy**

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Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator

**/s/ Jeanne Shaheen**

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Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator

**/s/ Jacky Rosen**

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Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator

**/s/ Margaret Wood Hassan**

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Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator