

Baldwin, Senate Colleagues: Trump decision to reopen meat processing facilities without clear safety standards puts workers, nation's food supply at risk

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin is urging President Trump to take immediate action to amend his Executive Order and mandate that meat processing facilities closed down by state or local health authorities or of their own accord are permitted to reopen *only* after they have met all of the health and safety guidelines issued by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

President Trump recently used the Defense Production Act (DPA) to compel meat processing facilities to remain open despite poor safety and health standards at those facilities, which have led to documented COVID-19 infections and worker fatalities. This is particularly troubling in light of the administration's persistent refusal to issue and enforce vital safety standards from the OSHA to protect workers from exposure to COVID-19.

The grueling work of the industry already makes meat processing one of the most hazardous work environments in the country. Its workers, who are predominantly black and brown – groups that are already disproportionately impacted by this

pandemic – experience some of the highest injury rates. Coronavirus has made this work even more dangerous. In a letter to President Trump led by Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH), the Senators demanded the Trump administration do more to protect these workers, the public health of their communities, farmers and livestock producers, and the nation’s food supply chain.

“Without immediate, comprehensive intervention by the federal government to ensure the health and safety of workers at these plants, workers in the meat processing industry will remain at extremely high risk of contracting the virus and the plants will continue to be a major vector of significant infection. Failure to take action to protect these workers is not only a threat to their lives, but also to the public health of their communities,” the Senators wrote.

The Senators continued, **“Despite urgent calls from worker advocates and Members of Congress, your Administration has refused to use its existing authority to issue enforceable OSHA safety standards that employers are required to meet to keep their workers safe. In light of the woeful lack of federal standards and enforcement, state and local officials have recently taken action to close several unsafe meatpacking plants that put workers and their communities at risk. Your use of DPA to mandate the reopening of these plants could prevent State and local authorities from compelling companies to provide workers with essential protections, and thus being able to keep their communities safe. In doing so, you have effectively signaled to the meat processing industry that they can continue business as usual, without taking further action to protect their workers or public health.”**

Baldwin and Brown were joined on the letter by Senators Patty Murray (D-WA), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Bob Casey (D-PA), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Jack Reed (D-RI), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Patrick

Leahy (D-VT).

Baldwin, and her colleagues Senators Duckworth, Murray and Brown, have introduced legislation to protect U.S. workers from COVID-19 in response to disturbing, widespread reports of unsafe workplaces leading to preventable illnesses and deaths. The [*COVID-19 Every Worker Protection Act*](#) would require OSHA to issue an Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) that [establishes a legal obligation for all workplaces to implement comprehensive infectious disease exposure control plans to keep workers safe](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite repeated calls, including in this letter, the administration has failed to issue the needed ETS.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 9,000 U.S. health care workers have been infected with COVID-19. Outbreaks have been reported at a wide range of workplaces across the country, including one meat processing plant where more than 500 workers were infected with the virus.

The *COVID-19 Every Worker Protection Act* directs OSHA to issue an Emergency Temporary Standard within seven days that sets requirements for how workplaces must safeguard workers against the spread of the coronavirus. The legislation expands on a previous proposal, the *COVID-19 Workers First Protection Act* (S. 3584), by requiring OSHA to issue a standard covering all U.S. workers, including workers in health care facilities, warehouses, grocery stores, and food processing plants.

The *Occupational Safety and Health Act* gives the Department of Labor the authority to issue an Emergency Temporary Standard if employees are exposed to grave danger from new hazards. However, despite repeated calls from Committee Democrats to issue an Emergency Temporary Standard, the Trump administration has made no effort to establish enforceable safety standards to protect workers from COVID-19.

A copy of the letter can be found below and [HERE](#).