

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Call for administration to fully utilize Defense Production Act & protect veterans from COVID-19

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – In order to better protect veterans, health care professionals and all Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic, U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) joined Senator Jon Tester (D-MT), Ranking Member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, and 14 of their colleagues in calling on the Administration and its Coronavirus Task Force to make full use of the *Defense Production Act (DPA)*.

The depletion of medical supplies nationally and a broken federal procurement and distribution process has left the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)—the nation's largest health care system—scrambling to secure Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), test kits, ventilators, and supplies necessary to combat the ongoing public health crisis. In a letter to Vice President Mike Pence, the Senators implored the Administration to fully invoke the DPA to address the nation's staggering shortage of supplies, VA's broken supply chain, and support the Department in its critical mission to protect veterans, health care workers, and communities from the virus.

*"With the fate of VA's ability to procure supplies now in the Supply Chain Task Force's hands, the Administration must act quickly to fix this problem," **the Senators wrote.** "During this time of crisis, it is unconscionable that VA is having to compete for supplies to protect its health care providers and veterans. This Administration must prioritize VA's sacred mission to care for our nation's veterans who are especially vulnerable during this pandemic. Working in a more coordinated manner would result in a better outcome for veterans and all Americans."*

The Senators noted that the Administration's procurement and distribution system has [forced VA to implement austerity measures](#) that have left health care workers on the front lines scrambling to protect themselves and veterans in the community. The Senators urged the Supply Chain Task Force, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to work in a coordinated manner to support VA in its unique mission to serve as the nation's back-up health care system in times of emergency.

The Senators highlighted, *"Our nation made promises to provide the care our veterans earned through their service to defend the freedoms we all hold dear. The Administration's slow response and lack of a coordinated nationwide effort undermines the services the VA can provide veterans. As such, the Administration must act aggressively to better utilize all the tools at hand to bring all Americans through this crisis. We must recognize that we share the same goal—to save lives. Making better use of the DPA is one way to do just that."*

In addition to Baldwin and Tester, the letter was signed by Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO), Jack Reed (D-RI), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Gary Peters (D-MI), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Kamala Harris (D-CA), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), and Bernard Sanders (I-VT).

The Senators' letter to Vice President Pence is available [here](#).