

U.S. Sen. Baldwin, Rep. Pocan: Introduce legislation to guarantee Coronavirus testing kits for American service members in Middle East

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin and Representative Mark Pocan introduced bicameral legislation to require the Defense Department to make testing kits for COVID-19 available to all American service members deployed to the Middle East.

Senator Baldwin and Representative Pocan received calls from Wisconsin military families concerned that Wisconsin Guard members deployed to Afghanistan were in areas with confirmed COVID-19 cases, and did not have testing kits available. [On March 11, Senator Baldwin wrote to the National Guard and the Defense Department Health Agency requesting more information](#) and Representative Pocan also [sent a letter](#) requesting information from Sec. Esper. Late last week, the Defense Department confirmed there is no ability to test service members in the countries they are serving, and instead samples are currently being sent from the Middle East to Germany to be processed.

“It is unacceptable that testing kits aren’t immediately and readily available for service members in the Middle East where there are confirmed cases of COVID-19 and this legislation will fix that,” **said Senator Baldwin.** “We owe it to our men and women in uniform to protect their health while they are working to protect our national security.”

“In the midst of a global pandemic, no one should be left to fight this virus on their own—especially not our military personnel serving

overseas,” **said Representative Mark Pocan.** “When troops abroad are suffering from coronavirus-like symptoms, they should be tested, not ignored. The lack of responses and answers we have received from the Department of Defense and Secretary Esper on their preparedness has been disappointing to say the least. I am increasingly less confident that the leaders at the Pentagon are prioritizing the health of our military personnel despite repeated calls to do so. Sen. Baldwin and I cannot wait for Pentagon inaction any longer, we are taking the necessary steps to protect our military personnel now.”

Baldwin and Pocan’s bill would require the Secretary of Defense to make testing for COVID-19 available for service members in the Middle East within one week of enactment. It would also require a report from the Defense Department on its formal policies or protocols provided to all service members regarding how to be tested for COVID-19.

Text of the legislation is available [here](#).