

U.S. Sens. Johnson, Peters: Ask DHS for strategy for containing the Coronavirus

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WASHINGTON — U.S. Sens. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.) and Gary C. Peters (D-Mich.), chairman and ranking member of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs committee, sent a letter Tuesday to Acting Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Chad F. Wolf to request information about DHS's strategy for containing the spread of the Coronavirus.

The senators wrote, **“We write today to inquire about your Department’s strategy to contain the spread of the emerging 2019 Novel Coronavirus (Coronavirus). On January 21, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed the first case of Coronavirus in the U.S. The CDC now reports that there are multiple Coronavirus cases inside the U.S.**

“In a January 2016 report, the Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Inspector General concluded that insufficient interagency coordination in the 2014 Ebola response exposed system-wide gaps in ensuring all airport travelers received full health screenings. We want to ensure that these deficiencies have been addressed.

“To understand the Department’s actions and interagency coordination to limit the spread of the Coronavirus, we respectfully request that you

provide the following information...”

Full text of the letter is below, and it can also be viewed [here](#).

January 28, 2020

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
246 Murray Lane, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf:

We write today to inquire about your Department’s strategy to contain the spread of the emerging 2019 Novel Coronavirus (Coronavirus). On January 21, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed the first case of Coronavirus in the U.S.^[1] The CDC now reports that there are multiple Coronavirus cases inside the U.S.^[2]

In China, the Coronavirus quickly infected thousands of people and caused multiple deaths in less than a month.^[3] As of January 27, 2020, the virus has infected close to 3,000 people and caused at least 81 deaths.^[4] The CDC is investigating 110 other potential cases that span 26 states in the U.S.^[5] Additional

reports indicate that the virus has spread to other locations, including Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Australia, Cambodia, Canada, France, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam.^[6]

In a January 2016 report, the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General concluded that insufficient interagency coordination in the 2014 Ebola response exposed system-wide gaps in ensuring all airport travelers received full health screenings.^[7] We want to ensure that these deficiencies have been addressed.

To understand the Department's actions and interagency coordination to limit the spread of the Coronavirus, we respectfully request that you provide the following information:

1. Does the Department currently have a Coronavirus response plan?
 1. If so, please describe and provide documentation regarding your response plan, including the process used to determine where to implement airport traveler screening.
 2. How do you plan to detect infected travelers entering the U.S. through ports of entry that do not employ screening?
 3. How are you ensuring that front-line screeners and responders are properly trained and complying with implemented screening requirements?
 4. How are you ensuring that front-line screeners and responders have access to the proper supplies to provide the required screenings?

1. How is your Department coordinating the response between other relevant federal agencies, as well as state, local, territorial, and tribal (SLTT) authorities?
 1. Is this construct governed by a memorandum of understanding or other agreement? If so, please produce it.

2. Which federal agency is the lead for this coordination?
3. Are you providing updates to SLTT public health and safety officials? If so, please describe that process.

Your response is requested as soon as possible, but no later than 5:00 p.m. on January 31, 2020.

The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs is authorized by Rule XXV of the Standing Rules of the Senate to investigate “the efficiency, economy, and effectiveness of all agencies and departments of the Government.”^[8] Additionally, Senate Resolution 70 (116th Congress) authorizes the Committee to examine “the efficiency and economy of operations of all branches of the Government.”^[9]

If you have any questions about this request, please contact Charles Carroll and Barrett Percival with Chairman Johnson’s staff at (202) 224-4751 or Christopher Mulkins with Ranking Member Peters’ staff at (202) 224-2627.

Sincerely,

Ron Johnson
Peters

Chairman
Ranking Member

Gary C.

cc:

The Honorable Alex Azar II

Secretary

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

200 Independence Avenue, S.W.

Washington, D.C. 202

[1] *First Travel-related Case of 2019 Novel Coronavirus Detected in United States*, CDC (Jan. 21, 2020), <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/p0121-novel-coronavirus-travel-case.html>.

[2] *2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) in the U.S.*, CDC (Jan. 27, 2020), <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-in-us.html>.

[3] *Coronavirus Live Updates: Alarm Grows as Death Toll Rises and Markets Tumble*, N.Y. Times, Jan. 27, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/27/world/asia/china-coronavirus.html>.

[4] *Id.*

[5] *2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV)*, CDC (Jan. 27, 2020), <https://www.cdc.gov/media/dpk/diseases-and-conditions/coronavirus/coronavirus-2020.html>.

[6] *Confirmed 2019-nCoV Cases Globally Global Map*, CDC (Jan. 27, 2020), <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/locations-confirmed-cases.html>.

[7] U.S. Dep't of Homeland Security, Office of the Inspector General, *DHS' Ebola Response Needs Better Coordination, Training, and Execution* (Jan. 6, 2016), <https://www.oig.dhs.gov/assets/Mgmt/2016/OIG-16-18-Jan16.pdf>.

[8] S. Rule XXV(k); see also S. Res. 445, 108th Cong. (2004).

[9] S. Res. 62 § 12, 115th Cong. (2017).

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