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April 2, 2020

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

The Honorable Chad Wolf
Acting Secretary of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20528

Mr. President and Acting Secretary Wolf:

I write to request that you designate a senior official of the National Security Council (NSC) responsible for coordinating the interagency domestic and global pandemic response. I also ask that the Department of Homeland Security immediately resume updating its models on the effects of pandemics on America's critical infrastructure. As this global crisis evolves, the United States urgently needs to reclaim leadership in responding to the pandemics at home and abroad.

First, I ask you to immediately designate a senior National Security Council official as responsible for global health security. In May 2018, following the departure of Rear Admiral Timothy Ziemer, the administration failed to re-fill this position, leaving vacant a National Security Council position focused on global health security. According to news reports, former National Security Advisor John Bolton disbanded Ziemer's team as part of an NSC restructuring. Without a lead official responsible for global pandemic response and without a dedicated team to interagency coordination, the United States was found flat-footed at the advent of the outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Additionally, following the Ebola outbreak in 2014, the National Security Council developed the Playbook for Early Response to High Consequence Emerging Infectious Disease Threats and Biological Incidents. According to news reports, this playbook was discarded by the current team, further contributing to the ad hoc nature of the federal response to COVID-19. I am concerned that without a dedicated position on the National Security Council, the U.S. government will not be able to coordinate a sustained interagency response effectively, lead the international response with partners and allies, and internalize lessons learned from the experience of COVID-19.

Second, I ask you to immediately resume Department of Homeland Security modeling of pandemic effects on critical U.S. infrastructure. News reports suggest that while modeling had been performed from 2005 to 2017, it came to an abrupt stop when it was determined there was not a need for this type of reporting. These computer simulations, had they been maintained, likely would have been able to predict to a certain degree the needs of various sectors of the economy likely to be impacted by a severe pandemic. This would have assisted the federal government anticipate the needs of states and local government and provide early and clear guidance and resources.

While reestablishing these initiatives now may not address immediate needs, they will be necessary as this crisis continues and evolves and will ensure that the United States is able to learn from the structural weaknesses exposed by COVID-19 and better prepared to address the next pandemic effectively.

Thank you for your urgent consideration of this critical matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael F. Bennet". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" being the most prominent part.

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator