

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 13, 2020

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

Mr. President:

We write to urge you to use the powers afforded by the Defense Production Act of 1950 (50 U.S.C. §§4501 et seq.) to begin the mass production of supplies needed to address the ongoing Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

The need for supplies to properly address the pandemic is acute. According to the CDC, “manufacturers of select types of [personal protective equipment] are reporting increased volume of orders and challenges in meeting order demands. Specific challenges are being reported for N95 respirators and facemasks.”¹ These manufacturing problems have posed serious challenges for health care providers. The CDC has reported that “some healthcare systems have begun reporting that orders for N95 respirators and facemasks are not being filled or are only being partially filled by distributors”; as such, the CDC is “encouraging healthcare systems to implement strategies to conserve supplies.”² We are extremely concerned that such “strategies” could force frontline health care workers to use protective equipment improperly, or go without it altogether.

Insufficient testing for cases of COVID-19 in the U.S. has been widely reported. On March 13th, the CDC reported 1,629 total cases across 46 states and the District of Columbia.³ However, *PBS News Hour* reported on March 12th, “public health experts say the only reason why those numbers have not exploded is that the nation has far too few diagnostic test kits. Lagging inventory has slowed testing.”⁴ It is critical that we massively increase testing capacity to identify cases and, accordingly, slow the spread of COVID-19.

Reporting also indicates that supplies needed to treat Americans with COVID-19 could become scarce. On March 8th, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that, in Europe, experts had advised “that intensive-care beds and breathing equipment such as ventilators to keep severely sick patients alive could be in short supply if the virus spreads at its current rate.”⁵ Indeed, on March 9th, Italian doctor Daniele Macchini shared a disturbing account of the outbreak in

¹ [“Healthcare Supply of Personal Protective Equipment.” U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\).](#)

² [“Healthcare Supply of Personal Protective Equipment.” U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\).](#)

³ [“Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) in the U.S.” U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\).](#)

⁴ [Santhanam, Laura. “The reason U.S. COVID-19 numbers aren’t higher? Not enough tests.” *PBS News Hour*. March 12, 2020.](#)

⁵ [Pancevski, Bojan. “Growing Coronavirus Epidemic Is Straining Europe’s Health-Care System.” *Wall Street Journal*. March 8, 2020.](#)

northern Italy, saying, "every ventilator becomes like gold."⁶ Experts suggest that the United States could face similar challenges. Last month, the *New York Times* reported that a 2005 federal study estimated that mechanical ventilators for 740,000 critically ill people would be necessary in the event of a severe flu pandemic.⁷ According to the same *Times* report, "today, as the country faces the possibility of a widespread outbreak of a new respiratory infection caused by the coronavirus, there are nowhere near that many ventilators, and most are already in use."⁸

These reports are extremely disturbing and merit immediate action to massively upscale the supplies available to protect Americans, test for new cases of COVID-19, and treat people who test positive. Failure to act now could result in even more severe shortages that force health care workers to make harrowing choices and endanger American lives. Consequently, we urge you to use the presidential authorities granted by the Defense Production Act to mitigate these shortages without delay. These authorities could be used to direct the domestic production of equipment currently in short supply, like personal protective equipment and ventilators. This would ensure we have the materials we need at the ready, rather than wait for disruptions in the global supply chain to subside.

During World War II, our country adapted to the demands of the time to produce mass quantities of bombers, tanks, and many smaller items needed to save democracy and freedom in the world. We know what the demands of this time are, and we must act now to meet these demands. We urge you to invoke the Defense Production Act without delay.

Sincerely,

Andy Levin
Member of Congress

A. Donald McEachin
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

Abby Finkenauer
Member of Congress

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress

Adam Schiff
Member of Congress

Angie Craig
Member of Congress

Al Green
Member of Congress

Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

⁶ [Lemon, Jason. "DOCTOR IN CORONAVIRUS-STRICKEN ITALY DETAILS WHAT'S HAPPENING IN HIS HOSPITAL: 'EVERY VENTILATOR BECOMES LIKE GOLD'." *Newsweek*. March 10, 2020.](#)

⁷ [Jacobs, Andrew and Fink, Sheri. "How Prepared is the U.S. for a Coronavirus Outbreak?" *New York Times*. February 29, 2020.](#)

⁸ [Jacobs, Andrew and Fink, Sheri. "How Prepared is the U.S. for a Coronavirus Outbreak?" *New York Times*. February 29, 2020.](#)

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