

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3203

April 2, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As the Coronavirus spreads rapidly into every corner of our nation and its terrible, grim toll grows more severe with each passing day, the tardiness and inadequacy of this Administration's response to the crisis becomes more painfully evident. Well-documented shortages of protective equipment, tests, and medical supplies are now beyond acute in my home state of New York and other hard-hit areas, and similar shortages are expected soon in many other parts of our country.

While companies that volunteer to produce ventilators and PPE are to be commended and are appreciated, America cannot rely on a patchwork of uncoordinated voluntary efforts to combat the awful magnitude of this pandemic. It is long past the time for your Administration to designate a senior military officer to fix this urgent problem. That officer should be given full authority under the Defense Production Act (DPA) to complete and rapidly implement a plan for the increased production, procurement and distribution of critically-needed medical devices and equipment.

The existing federal leadership void has left America with an ugly spectacle in which States and cities are literally fending for themselves, often in conflict and competition with each other, when trying to procure precious medical supplies and equipment. The only way we will fix our PPE and ventilator shortage is with a data-driven, organized and robust plan from the federal government. Anything short of that will inevitably mean this problem will remain unsolved and prolong this crisis.

As it stands today, you have charged Dr. Peter Navarro, an academic economist, to be the leader of this effort. With all due respect to Dr. Navarro, whose expertise is in other areas, he is woefully unqualified for this task. The existence of a separate "shadow" effort elsewhere in the White House has made the Administration's response even more confused and uncoordinated.

As you may know, there are many logistics professionals in the United States military. These are trained experts who have spent their careers ensuring that every service member from the foxhole to headquarters have everything they need in peacetime and wartime, regardless of whether they are in the middle of a desert; at sea; or providing support to civilian authorities in the wake of a natural disaster. The crisis our nation is in the midst of today demands this kind of seasoned expertise immediately.

It must also be pointed out that while you continue to dismiss the Defense Production Act as not being needed, it is clear that the capacity of American industry has not yet been fully harnessed, either in prioritizing and allocating urgently needed medical supplies and equipment, in rapidly expanding domestic manufacturing efforts to produce them, or in providing certainty to manufacturers – through purchase orders, purchase guaranties, or other mechanisms – that the US will use and distribute all of the medical equipment and supplies they can produce. This is a failure that must be addressed quickly for the sake of our health care professionals and the people that are vulnerable to and already sick with this deadly disease.

This is a matter of the utmost urgency for the health of every American. Regrettably, our national response is far behind where it should be. But by acting now, there is still time to help protect our medical professionals, reduce suffering and save lives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charles Schumer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator