

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 13, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
301 7th St., SW Mail Stop 0150
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Azar, Secretary Wolf and Secretary Pompeo:

We write regarding the deteriorating conditions aboard the Diamond Princess cruise ship, currently quarantined outside of Yokohama, Japan due to an outbreak of COVID-19, commonly referred to as coronavirus. We commend the administration's acknowledgment of the significant threat posed by coronavirus and your international leadership in addressing this public health crisis. From firsthand accounts, we are concerned about the existing level of care available on the ship, particularly to the 428 U.S. citizens aboard, as well as the national security concerns posed by reported quarantine conditions. While we understand this is a fluid situation because of the fast-moving nature of the outbreak, we are writing to strongly encourage you to test asymptomatic U.S. citizens as soon as possible and evacuate and quarantine those who test negative for the coronavirus in a U.S.-based facility.

Currently, the Diamond Princess Cruise ship hosts the densest coronavirus outbreak outside of China. Of the roughly 3,600 passengers on board, recent reports state there have been 218 positive cases of infection, including a Japanese quarantine officer. Firsthand accounts indicate that current efforts by the ship crew to provide for the safety and comfort of passengers at high personal risk are laudable. However, a lack of medical expertise on the ground is leading to ineffective quarantine conditions. Reports indicate that medical information of outbreaks relies heavily on self-reporting with limited access to diagnostic tools as well as flawed approaches to isolation among passengers.

We understand the U.S. has a multi-agency team comprised of experts from Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control, Department of State, Department of Homeland Security among many others, and that currently a taskforce of trained clinicians is heading to the ship to directly assess conditions. If these reports are found to be accurate, we strongly encourage you to act swiftly to ensure the health and safety of our citizens and evacuate those who are asymptomatic to reduce the possibility the virus spreads further.

We fully recognize this is an extremely complex situation, and we appreciate the efforts of everyone involved to craft an effective response. We in no way doubt the decisions made to this point and we appreciate the efforts on behalf of the government of Japan to ensure our citizens' safety and would like to further reinforce efforts to continue and enhance our international cooperation. However, with reports of conditions worsening, we feel strongly that acting quickly and updating our response to include evacuations of asymptomatic patients from the ship to facilities overseen by the U.S. is the prudent course of action. We stand ready to assist in any way possible to help ensure the health and safety of all the passengers on the ship, and particularly the American citizens aboard.

Sincerely,



David P. Roe, M.D.
Member of Congress



Andy Harris, M.D.
Member of Congress



Roger Marshall, M.D.
Member of Congress



Ralph Abraham, M.D.
Member of Congress



Daniel Webster
Member of Congress



Chuck Fleischmann
Member of Congress



Daniel P. Meuser
Member of Congress



Ed Case
Member of Congress



Tim Burchett
Member of Congress

cc: Dr. Robert R. Redfield, Director of Centers for Disease Controls
Dr. Robert Kadlec, Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response