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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 28, 2020

The Honorable Mark T. Esper
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Esper,

I write to you today regarding the threat of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) to our servicemembers and military families worldwide. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that coronavirus has been detected in more than 40 locations internationally, which includes countries where our military is stationed or deployed. As a U.S. Senator representing America's tip of the spear when it comes to global threats, I have questions about the current status of the Department of Defense (DoD) response and infection prevention efforts.

I understand that a 23-year old U.S. servicemember stationed in South Korea became the first U.S. servicemember to contract the coronavirus. This particular incident was reported as a contained and isolated incident. DoD personnel and their families are understandably very concerned. US Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines conduct rotational deployments to Japan, South Korea, Italy, Afghanistan, Bahrain, Iraq, Norway, Romania, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, all locations with CDC confirmed COVID-19 cases. On February 26, 2020, the number of coronavirus cases in Italy has jumped to 400, a 25 percent surge in a 24-hour period. Reportedly, several European countries, which includes those hosting our military forces, announced new cases traced to Italy.

This global outbreak is concerning and presents an enduring and uncertain threat. The anxieties and concerns I am hearing from our servicemembers and their families are justified. To that end, could you please address the Department's actions in regard to the following four areas:

- (1) The existing risks of infection to military personnel: What is the Department doing to assess current risks and project the scale of future risks?
- (2) Emergency preparedness and action plans: Has the Department developed plans to treat wide-spread infection? Does the Department have access to enough medical supplies, medical personnel, and materials to properly treat people, should the infection spread to a

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larger than anticipated number of people? How will the Department overcome any transportation and logistical challenges? Has any protocol been developed to address a pandemic threat of this nature?

- (3) Preventative practices: What is the Department doing to mitigate risks of infection? What is the Department doing to prevent the spread of this virus to bases in the United States and to military personnel stationed abroad? Are there any screening measures in place to ensure civilian employees and returning servicemembers are not spreading the disease back home? What is being done to prevent the soldier in South Korea from spreading the infection? How will the Department alter its operations to reduce the risk of infection?
- (4) Commander's priorities to educate troops: How are you educating those at risk abroad and at home on both preventative measures and protocols should someone display symptoms of infection?

I expect your leadership in reassuring our servicemembers, their families, and the American public on the steps being taken to reduce risk of infection among our DoD personnel and their families. I appreciate your attention to this very important matter.

Sincerely,



Thom Tillis
United States Senator

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