

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 16, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pence  
Vice President of the United States  
The White House  
Office of the Vice President  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Vice President Pence:

I write to express concern regarding recent reports of your Administration's continued interference with the decision making of public health officials at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for political reasons. The Trump Administration's repeated political interference, which has plagued our country's response to the COVID-19 pandemic from the very beginning, threatens to further undermine the public's trust in our scientific agencies and public health systems. President Trump, you, and other senior Administration officials have repeatedly overruled our public health experts for political reasons, exacerbating one of the worst public health crises our country has ever faced. Since March, there have been at least thirty episodes of political interference. This dangerous meddling in public health decision making is putting lives at risk. I urge you and others in the White House and on the Coronavirus Task Force to stop this interference and heed the guidance of our nation's public health experts.

Earlier this month, the Associated Press reported that you directed CDC officials to effectively close the southern and northern borders of the United States by inappropriately utilizing the agency's emergency powers under Title 42 of the Public Health Service Act.<sup>1</sup> Public health experts did not believe these actions would result in meaningful reduction in COVID-19 transmission and stated that the decision was not evidence-based nor grounded in science. Despite this scientific consensus, you urged CDC Director Redfield to issue this order. As a direct result of your order, it is estimated that almost 150,000 people have been expelled from the United States since March, including 8,800 unaccompanied minors.

In a separate incident, the *New York Times* recently reported that the White House blocked proposed CDC guidance that would have required face coverings in transportation hubs and on public and commercial transportation, including buses, trains, airplanes, and subways.<sup>2</sup> According to Dr. Redfield himself, "cloth face coverings are one of the most powerful weapons we have to slow and stop the spread of the virus." Rather than issue this sensible, science-based guidance, however, the Trump Administration shelved it, putting people across the country at greater risk of transmitting or contracting COVID-19 and likely costing lives.<sup>3</sup> This misguided

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<sup>1</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/virus-outbreak-pandemics-public-health-new-york-health-4ef0c6c5263815a26f8aa17f6ea490ae>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/09/health/coronavirus-covid-masks-cdc.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/p0714-americans-to-wear-masks.html>

ensorship of science impedes our response to the pandemic, and, when considered along with the numerous other instances of political interference in this pandemic and attempts to circumvent and sideline public health experts, represents a dereliction of duty to protect public health.

These concerns are further underscored by the recent ProPublica article detailing numerous instances of political interference in the work of the CDC since the start of the pandemic.<sup>4</sup> The public must have trust in our public health experts and agencies in order to effectively combat the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to preserve public trust, you must allow our public health officials to work independently and to take evidence-based actions without political interference. To that end, we ask that the White House and all Trump Administration officials respect these experts and cease politically interfering with their work immediately.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patty Murray". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P".

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Patty Murray  
United States Senator

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.propublica.org/article/inside-the-fall-of-the-cdc>