



One Hundred Sixteenth Congress  
Committee on Homeland Security  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

March 12, 2020

The Honorable Chad Wolf  
Acting Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, D.C. 20528

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

Dr. Robert R. Redfield, M.D.  
Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
1600 Clifton Road  
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf, Secretary Azar, and Director Redfield:

I write today to seek documents and information regarding the ban on travel from certain European countries and additional policy changes announced by President Trump as part of the ongoing effort to combat the coronavirus pandemic. The President's remarks last night did not include any announced plans to increase testing for the coronavirus even though it is clearly spreading within the United States or to ensure hospital surge capacity to treat Americans who become ill. Based on all available data, mitigating the spread of this disease requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses our entire health care system rather than just containment measures targeted at foreign nationals.

Further, although the policies the President announced have enormous and immediate consequences for millions of people, few practical details were explained. And then, almost as soon as the President concluded his remarks last night, statements and guidance contradicting his statements began to be issued, including by the President himself. For example, during his remarks, the President stated that the travel ban "will not only apply to the tremendous amount of

trade and cargo, but various other things as we get approval.”<sup>1</sup> However, the President later tweeted “that trade will in no way be affected by the 30-day restriction on travel from Europe. The restriction stops people not goods.”<sup>2</sup>

Such poor communication only increases the confusion and anxiety that Americans are already experiencing. Rather than calming the public, the President’s address further roiled global markets and led to large crowds converging at European airports—terrible results during a global pandemic.

During his remarks, the President did not clarify the countries encompassed by the term “Europe,” but according to the Proclamation issued by the White House following the President’s address, the term “Europe” encompasses 26 countries belonging to the Schengen area. If, as the Administration believes, it is necessary to ban travel from Europe now that the coronavirus is already being transmitted in the United States, it is unclear why several countries that are located within Europe but that are not part of the Schengen area can be excluded from the travel ban even if there are confirmed cases of COVID-19 in those countries. For example, according to the Department of Health and Social Care in the United Kingdom (U.K.), as of today, there were 590 confirmed positive coronavirus tests in the U.K.<sup>3</sup>

Many other practical questions arise. For example, the Proclamation states that with only a few exceptions such as for U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, or their family members, “The entry into the United States, as immigrants or nonimmigrants, of all aliens who were physically present within the Schengen Area during the 14-day period preceding their entry or attempted entry into the United States is hereby suspended.”<sup>4</sup> How will this ban be enforced at our land borders, including the Northern Border? For example, if a national from the Schengen area does not have a stamp showing the exact date of entry into Canada and prior travel history, will that individual be denied entry?

Airlines were already cutting flights on routes between the U.S. and Europe prior to the announcement of this travel ban.<sup>5</sup> This travel ban will likely cause flight capacity to plummet and significantly raise the cost of travel. Will any special provisions be made for foreign nationals

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<sup>1</sup> The White House, Remarks by President Trump in Address to the Nation (March 11, 2020) (online at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-address-nation/>).

<sup>2</sup> Donald J. Trump, Twitter (March 11, 2020, 10:13 p.m.) (<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1237924658185469954>).

<sup>3</sup> United Kingdom Department of Health and Social Care, Number of coronavirus (COVID-19) cases and risk in the UK (March 12, 2020) (online at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> CNN Business, *American and Delta slash US and overseas flights as coronavirus causes a plunge in bookings* (March 10, 2020) (online at [www.cnn.com/2020/03/10/business/airline-flights-coronavirus/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2020/03/10/business/airline-flights-coronavirus/index.html)).

from the Schengen area who are nearing the end of their authorized stay in the U.S. but are unable to get flights back to Europe?<sup>6</sup>

The President also announced last night that he had “met with the leaders of health insurance industry [*sic.*] who have agreed to waive all copayments for coronavirus treatments, extend insurance coverage to these treatments, and to prevent surprise medical billing.”<sup>7</sup> However, media reports indicate that, in fact, insurance companies may not be waiving copayments for coronavirus treatments.<sup>8</sup> It is also unclear whether copayments or other out-of-pocket costs for coronavirus treatment will be waived for federal employees—such as Transportation Security Officers and other employees of the Department of Homeland Security—who contract COVID-19 as part of their official duties and who receive insurance through the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program (FEHBP).

To ensure that the Committee has complete answers to these urgent questions, I write to request that you provide as soon as possible but no later than March 17, 2020, documents sufficient to show:

1. The rationale for banning travelers from the Schengen area but not travelers from European countries that are not part of the Schengen area or from any other countries;
2. Plans and procedures in place to evaluate and monitor all of the travelers continuing to arrive in the U.S. from all countries outside of the Schengen area where there are confirmed cases of COVID-19;
3. Plans and procedures in place to evaluate and monitor travelers from the Schengen area entering the U.S. at a land port of entry;
4. Plans and procedures in place to evaluate, monitor, and quarantine flight crews and the crews of ocean-going vessels arriving from Europe; and
5. Identification of the insurance companies that have agreed to waive all copayments for coronavirus treatments, including the insurance companies participating in the FEHBP that have agreed to waive all copayments and out-of-pocket costs for federal employees who contract COVID-19 as part of their official duties and their family members.

Sincerely,

  
BENNIE G. THOMPSON  
Chairman

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Visa Waiver Program (accessed on March 12, 2020) (online at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/tourism-visit/visa-waiver-program.html>).

<sup>7</sup> The White House, Remarks by President Trump in Address to the Nation (March 11, 2020) (online at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-address-nation/>).

<sup>8</sup> Business Insider, *Trump made a major misstatement on national TV about how health insurers are paying for coronavirus care, and it reveals the dysfunction of his administration's response* (March 12, 2020) (online at <https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-significantly-misstates-how-health-insurers-pay-for-coronavirus-2020-3>).