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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
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WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

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March 3, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pence
Vice President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Vice President:

As American citizens and communities across the country prepare for the threat of novel Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19), I write to ask about the information the federal government is providing the American people. News reports, as well as the State Department, have documented significant online misinformation and disinformation that may mislead people about the best ways to protect themselves and their families. As the head of the Administration's Coronavirus response, I urge you to launch a centralized federal website to provide trusted information to Americans about the virus and how they can best prepare.

On February 29, the Washington Post reported on an unreleased State Department report that found "[r]oughly 2 million tweets peddled conspiracy theories about the coronavirus over the three-week period when the outbreak began to spread outside China."¹ Such falsehoods included that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation created the virus or that it was the result of a bioweapon. In response to these disturbing trends, technology companies such as YouTube, Facebook, Amazon, and Twitter have worked to direct people towards credible sources and remove dubious content – actions that have been supported by misinformation and disinformation experts.²

The federal government has assembled a wide variety of resources for Americans to use to educate themselves on the virus and how to prevent its spread. Agencies including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of State, and the Department of Labor have all produced fact sheets to answer questions relevant to their specific responsibilities and programs. This public health threat requires a whole of government response with reliable information accessible to all Americans.

¹ *Millions of tweets peddled conspiracy theories about coronavirus in other countries, an unpublished U.S. report says*, The Washington Post (Feb. 29, 2020) (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/02/29/twitter-coronavirus-misinformation-state-department/>).

² *Tech firms take a hard line against coronavirus myths. But what about other types of misinformation?*, The Washington Post (Feb. 28, 2020) (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/02/28/facebook-twitter-amazon-misinformation-coronavirus/>).

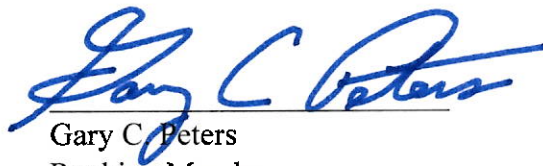
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I request that you launch a website – coronavirus.gov – to serve as a central hub of trusted information. I also ask that you redirect related domain names such as covid19.gov and covid2019.gov to this portal. This would allow Americans to find information on any aspect of the response – whether they own a small business, serve in our armed forces, work with children, are traveling internationally, or develop treatments in a lab. This effort would maximize public accessibility to trusted sources, combat the spread of misinformation and disinformation, strengthen coordination between agencies, and support our communities nationwide as we respond to the virus. I look forward to working with you and senior Administration officials on this matter going forward.

Sincerely,



Gary C. Peters
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs

cc:

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II, Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services

The Honorable Chad Wolf, Acting Secretary, Department of Homeland Security