

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 11, 2020

The Honorable Thomas McCaffery
Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs
The Defense Health Agency
7700 Arlington Boulevard
Suite 5101
Falls Church, VA 22042-5101

General Joseph L. Lengyel
Chief, National Guard Bureau
1636 Defense Pentagon Suite 1E169
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary McCaffery and General Lengyel:

I am writing today concerned about the rapid spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and the increasing number of cases in countries where American servicemembers are stationed, including members of the Wisconsin National Guard currently deployed to Afghanistan.

Members of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 128th "Red Arrow" Infantry Regiment are presently deployed to Afghanistan. My office has received concerns that this unit may be conducting operations in and around villages in Afghanistan where there are active cases of COVID-19 and that members of this unit may not have access to testing kits. I believe servicemembers should have easy access to testing regardless of where they are currently serving.

I was pleased to see that your department included initial guidance to Department of Defense (DOD) personnel in your January 30, 2020 "Force Health Protection Guidance for the Novel Coronavirus Outbreak" and that you are distributing guidance to personnel from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Unfortunately, there is no information regarding the availability of testing kits for personnel based in the United States or overseas. Given the already complex environment in which soldiers deployed to Afghanistan operate, along with a host government that finds itself in a political crisis and tenuous peace process with the Taliban, I write to request more information on DOD actions to ensure that testing kits are made available to deployed service members.

In addition, I request answers to the following questions:

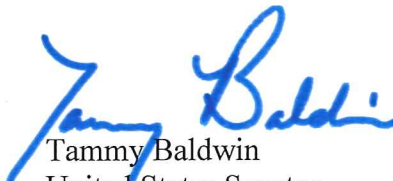
- How is the Department assessing the level of risk of COVID-19, and how are you tailoring protective guidance for each area of responsibility and military installation?
- How are you coordinating protection and preparedness efforts with the Defense Health Agency and the CDC, and how often are you providing updated guidance to combatant commanders, installation commanders, and personnel?
- Do Military Treatment Facilities globally have all necessary equipment- including operational rapid testing kits, supplies, and sterile space- to effectively screen, diagnose,

and treat all suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases, and ensure the safety of health care workers stationed at Military Treatment Facilities?

- Does DOD require any additional resources, authorities, or action from Congress to ensure military preparedness and the safety of Americans during the COVID-19 outbreak?
- Has the National Guard Bureau issued guidance to the Adjutants General regarding changes to weekend drills and annual trainings that have already been scheduled status?

Thank you for your attention to this urgent issue.

Sincerely,



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

CC: General Kenneth F. McKenzie, Jr.
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MacDill Air Force Base, Florida 33621-5101