

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 19, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

As the Department of State prepares to release an advisory instructing all Americans abroad to return to the United States, I am writing to express my grave concerns about the thousands of American citizens stranded abroad in countries that have restricted travel due to the coronavirus outbreak. My office has received hundreds of urgent inquiries on behalf of constituents in Argentina, Cambodia, Guatemala, Honduras, Japan, Morocco, Peru, Uzbekistan, and El Salvador. In most cases, the Department of State has provided no assistance, or clear guidance, to facilitate their safe travel back to the United States. The Department's anticipated advisory, absent meaningful support from the U.S. government, will only contribute to existing panic and confusion.

My constituents range from students on international programs to elderly Americans with serious underlying health conditions. For instance, a 68 year-old American citizen, with cancer and diabetes, is stranded in Morocco and may soon run out of medication. A 70 year-old American citizen with grave respiratory issues, who requires regular physician monitoring, is similarly unable to return home. When my office inquired on behalf of these individuals, we received a generic response several days later urging American citizens to contact commercial airlines directly.

The disparity between the U.S. response to this crisis, and that of some of our European allies, is striking. Germany has made more than \$50 million available to bring home the thousands of German citizens abroad.^[1] The French government has asked airlines to repatriate its citizens and, in the case of Morocco, is facilitating dozens of commercial flights to bring back scores of tourists.^[2] The U.S. Embassy in Morocco thanked the British Embassy on Twitter for securing 30 emergency commercial flights to London. However, these flights were rapidly booked and the United States offered no alternative. The decisive leadership taken by these European governments underscores the lack of U.S. leadership in repatriating Americans.

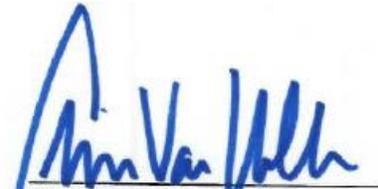
^[1] <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-germany-implements-non-eu-travel-ban/a-52802039>

^[2] <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-morocco-france/france-asks-airlines-to-help-citizens-stuck-in-morocco-idUSKBN212003>

The Department of State must prioritize the safety and security of Americans abroad. I recognize that our State Department personnel stationed abroad are under enormous pressure. However, their strain is exacerbated by the lack of clarity on U.S. policy to repatriate American citizens. Therefore, I request that you take the following actions immediately:

- Facilitate emergency flights to repatriate American citizens in countries that have imposed travel restrictions due to the coronavirus and clearly communicate U.S. policy regarding the repatriation of Americans
- Increase the Department of State's travel advisory to level 4, "do not travel," and consistently convey the risk of travelling abroad during the coronavirus pandemic
- Ensure safe accommodations for Americans under quarantine abroad
- Assist Americans abroad in obtaining medication and medical services as needed

Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator