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United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510–1304

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
COMMITTEE ON RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

March 10, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Francis Collins, M.D., Ph.D.
Director
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Secretary Azar and Director Collins:

Thank you for your efforts to protect the public health and address the coronavirus outbreak, including through research efforts to identify potential vaccines and therapeutics. Last week, Congress provided $7.8 billion in emergency supplemental appropriations, including for the development, testing, and procurement of vaccines and therapeutics for COVID-19. This spending bill also includes provisions to ensure that these taxpayer-funded medications will be affordable to American patients. I write to ask for information on federal taxpayer investments into coronavirus research and for plans on how your agencies will promote affordable coronavirus vaccines and therapeutics for patients.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is the world's premier research agency, and is the nation's biggest funder of biomedical innovations. From 2010 to 2016, all 210 drugs approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) had benefited from NIH funding. I believe that the NIH's unparalleled work in fostering breakthroughs reaches its full potential when American patients can access the benefits of this research. However, we know that American patients pay the highest prices in the world for most drugs, prices that have skyrocketed in recent years.

I commend your agencies for the swift action to enable multiple COVID-19 vaccine and therapeutic candidates to prepare to enter clinical trials. To understand the public input toward coronavirus research and development, I request an assessment of taxpayer-funding and government contribution to the current coronavirus vaccine and therapeutic candidates.

Further, I request an explanation of how your agencies will implement the provisions in the emergency supplemental appropriations act to promote the affordability of any coronavirus vaccine or therapeutic. If applicable, please describe specific authorities or actions, including use of procurement terms, certain patent rights, information disclosure requirements, insurance coverage determinations or cost-sharing arrangements, or whether such plans include grant, contracting, or licensing terms related to reasonable pricing and access.

Thank you for your dedication to protecting public health and addressing this challenge.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

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