

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 22, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Mr. President,

I write today to urge you to take all steps necessary to provide assistance to Americans abroad who wish to return to the United States during the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic.

With the State Department having issued a level 4 travel advisory, commercial airlines cancelling numerous flights, and many countries now imposing travel restrictions and border closures, tens of thousands of American citizens are stranded, unable to return to the United States without the direct intervention of their government.

While I agree in theory that commercial flight options are preferable for all citizens wishing to return, as your administration has argued, that is not a feasible solution because there are insufficient commercial flights available due to the current crisis, especially in countries that have closed their borders. More forceful government action, including an aggressive approach by the State Department in arranging charter flights, invoking Civil Reserve Air Fleet (CRAF) authorities to make additional aircraft available for evacuations, and directing the Department of Defense to explore making military aircraft, where appropriate, available for this vital mission are all essential.

Moreover, individuals who may face financial hardship must be provided with appropriate assistance if they face additional costs to return home. The scope and scale of this unparalleled challenge—and the obligation we owe our fellow citizens—demands an “all of the above” response.

Furthermore, at a time when U.S. commercial carriers are seeking unprecedented financial assistance from U.S. taxpayers—and while much of the airline fleet is otherwise idle—we would expect that U.S. airlines, including those participating in the CRAF program, will be willing and able to step into the breach and work with the Department of State to provide the necessary support to bring American citizens home.

Mr. President, no American should ever have to worry that they might be abandoned abroad by our government. As we work together to confront this unprecedented pandemic, we must provide Americans overseas the support that they need.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
United States Senator