



March 29, 2020

Thomas J. Donohue
Chief Executive Officer
U.S. Chamber of Commerce
1615 H Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20062

Dear Mr. Donohue:

As our nation faces a public health and economic emergency, it is outrageous that frontline healthcare workers who are heroically caring for our loved ones during this crisis are facing a severe shortage of the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) they need to keep themselves, the people they care for, and their families safe and healthy.

It is immoral that frontline healthcare workers are forced to reuse masks and other PPE because employers and states have been forced to scavenge for protective equipment, with the market value of masks now selling for up to five times the production price.

Today, millions of workers are on the job providing healthcare and essential services without the safety protections they need—when we put frontline workers at risk, we put our entire population's health and safety in jeopardy .

Right now, nurses are assessing high-risk patients, school janitors are deep cleaning classrooms, teachers' aides are delivering meals to children at home, home care providers are caring for the most vulnerable, public service workers are maintaining essential services, and cashiers are scanning groceries—all at greater risk of contracting the coronavirus without enough PPE to lessen exposure. It's those same workers who, after a long shift, return home to their families and community not knowing what they were exposed to that day. It's clear: our country can't safely get back to work without first protecting those who are currently working on the front lines.

On behalf of the eight million healthcare, service, education, and public service workers represented by our unions, we demand that the U.S. Chamber of Commerce join with us to prioritize the health and safety of working Americans as a way to restore the financial well-being of our country during the COVID-19 crisis.

We condemn the Chamber's efforts to lobby President Trump against using the Defense Production Act to direct emergency production of life-saving PPE and medical equipment such as ventilators. In times of extreme national crisis, we must put politics and profits aside, and we must come together to do what's best for people: that means producing and distributing more equipment, quickly, by any means necessary. Lives literally depend on it.

In order to combat the spread of coronavirus, we must increase the supply of life-saving medical equipment and PPE, including gloves, N95 masks, face shields and gowns, to provide the highest standards of safe care and protect workers. As part of the Defense Production Act, President Trump has the power to prioritize the distribution of existing supplies and accelerate the production of certain products, like the ventilators used to treat the sickest patients with coronavirus and other serious illnesses. But rather than supporting the use of his authority as Commander in Chief to get vitally needed supplies and protective gear, President Trump at the urging of the Chamber of Commerce is delaying action. The idea that the Chamber would put bottom-line profits and adherence to some mistaken principle of capitalism ahead of the safety of American workers and the public at large is difficult to fathom.

President Trump's decision to use the Defense Production Act to compel GM to manufacture ventilators shows what is possible. It should be only the beginning, not a one-off action done out of spite. The president must use his powers to ensure that every frontline worker has enough PPE to protect themselves and others for the duration of this crisis.

Every day we delay the production and distribution of vital PPE is costing lives and livelihoods and may drive the eventual collapse of businesses, from Main Street to Wall Street. While your organization insists that the Defense Production Act imposes “red tape on companies precisely when they need flexibility to deal with closed borders and shuttered factories,” imagine the respiratory therapist who must track down a ventilator while also managing a patient’s every last breath.

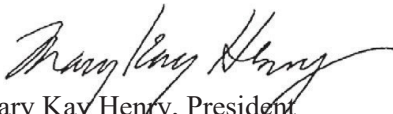
The lack of PPE has further amplified this crisis because we don’t have clear guidance for workers in critical jobs based on science; rather it is driven by the lack of PPE and insufficient testing. Guidance has become cloudy and less stringent because there simply isn’t enough PPE or testing for people to do the jobs that are critical for our country to function.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, representing the largest, most powerful corporations, can do what’s right for all working people—Black, white, brown and Asian Pacific Islander—who keep your businesses running and your doors open.

We, as presidents of four of the largest unions representing working people in America, urge you to join us in calling on President Trump to exercise all his powers to fight the war against COVID-19 by speeding the production of urgently needed Personal Protective Equipment and ensure it is routed to states for distribution across healthcare and other front-line service industries.

We are inspired by the front-line workers who are putting their lives on this line for the American people, and by the can-do spirit of cooperation evident in families and neighborhoods across the country. We are a nation that mobilized all of our resources to win World War II, created the Marshall Plan to rebuild war-torn Europe, and put a man on the moon. We can do anything we put our minds to, together. But we need national leadership from the Trump Administration and the business community to work with working people to defeat this pandemic and protect all workers.

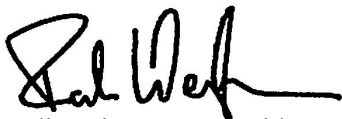
Sincerely,



Mary Kay Henry, President
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)



Lee Saunders, President
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)



Randi Weingarten, President
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)



Lily Eskelsen García, President
National Education Association (NEA)

CC: Suzanne P. Clark, U.S. Chamber of Commerce President