

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

March 15, 2021

Jeffrey Zients
Response Coordinator
White House Coronavirus Task Force
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Zients,

We applaud the Administration's decision to donate surplus doses to low- and middle-income countries that lack access to COVID-19 vaccines. We write to you today to urge the Administration to develop a plan for donating those surplus doses equitably that includes working through the COVAX initiative. This not only will serve a humanitarian purpose by saving lives worldwide, but it is essential for protecting Americans from the possible proliferation of COVID variants as the virus continues to spread.

The United States has secured 1.3 billion doses of vaccine, enough to vaccinate 750 million people—more than twice the U.S population.¹ We recognize that the Biden Administration's first priority is to ensure that all people in the United States who want a vaccine are able to get one as quickly as possible. The Administration is making good progress on meeting this objective. As of March 11, 2021, over 98.2 million doses have been administered, and 10 percent of the U.S. population is fully vaccinated, while 19 percent have received at least one dose.² The President projects that the United States will have enough vaccine to immunize all American adults by the end of May.

The story is vastly different across the low- and middle-income world, where only a small fraction of people has been vaccinated. This is largely due to profound disparities in the number of vaccines purchased by high-income countries and the rest of the world. As of March 8, 2021, high-income countries had purchased 63 percent of the total COVID-19 vaccines that had been purchased worldwide, despite representing only 16 percent of the world's population.^{3,4} Meanwhile, low- and middle-income countries lag far behind, securing only 37 percent of vaccine despite representing 84 percent of the world's population.

¹ Simi V. Siddalingaiah, "Operation Warp Speed Contracts for COVID-19 Vaccines and Ancillary Vaccination Materials," Congressional Research Service, March 1, 2021. [Operation Warp Speed Contracts for COVID-19 Vaccines and Ancillary Vaccination Materials \(crs.gov\)](#)

² The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "COVID Data Tracker," Updated: March 11, 2021. [CDC COVID Data Tracker](#)

³ Launch and Scale Speedometer, "Mapping COVID-19 Vaccine Pre-Purchases Across the Globe," [COVID-19 | Launch and Scale Speedometer \(launchandscalefaster.org\)](#)

⁴ Mary Brophy Marcus, "Ensuring Everyone in the World Gets a COVID Vaccine," Duke University Global Health Institute, January 20, 2021. [Ensuring Everyone in the World Gets a COVID Vaccine \(duke.edu\)](#)

This disparity in vaccine access can have profound humanitarian costs. It also threatens global pandemic recovery efforts. As emphasized by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, “if the virus is allowed to spread like wildfire in the global South, it will mutate again and again...prolong[ing] the pandemic significantly, enabling the virus to come back to plague the global North.”⁵ The longer it takes for all countries to vaccinate their populations, the more variants will emerge.

Inequitable global vaccination efforts will also negatively impact the economy. If governments do not ensure low- and middle-income countries have equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, the global economy could lose \$1.2 trillion a year.⁶ For every \$1 spent on supplying vaccines to low-income countries, high-income countries would see a return of \$4.80, according to one estimate.

We recognize and applaud the Administration’s efforts to date to expand access to COVID-19 vaccines in low- and middle-income countries, in particular the \$4 billion contributed to COVAX.⁷ To stave off further loss of life and suffering and end this pandemic for good, more must be done to ensure the battle against COVID-19 is won globally.

For these reasons, we believe it is imperative that the Administration begin to chart its plan for donating surplus vaccine supply to low- and middle-income countries. To ensure equitable distribution of the surplus doses to the countries that need it most, we strongly recommend that the Administration’s plan include donating the surplus vaccine to COVAX.

As your partners in Congress, we look forward to working with you and the rest of the Biden Administration to ensure national and global pandemic recovery efforts are as equitable and effective as possible.

Sincerely,



DON BEYER
Chairman-designate, Joint Economic
Committee
Member of Congress



MARK POCAN
Member of Congress

⁵ United Nations, “Secretary-General Calls Vaccine Equity Biggest Moral Test for Global Community, as Security Council Considers Equitable Availability of Doses,” February 17, 2021. [Secretary-General Calls Vaccine Equity Biggest Moral Test for Global Community, as Security Council Considers Equitable Availability of Doses | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases](#)

⁶ Marco Hafner, “The Global Economic Cost of COVID-19 Vaccine Nationalism,” RAND Europe, 2020. [The global economic cost of COVID-19 vaccine nationalism | RAND](#)

⁷ The White House, “Fact Sheet: President Biden to take Action on Global Health through Support of COVAX and Calling for Health Security Financing,” February 18, 2021. [Fact Sheet: President Biden to Take Action on Global Health through Support of COVAX and Calling for Health Security Financing | The White House](#)

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Scott Peters", written in a cursive style.

SCOTT PETERS
Member of Congress