Delivered via Email

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden  
President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President:

The tragedy of the COVID-19 pandemic has touched the lives of every American, but it has also revealed some of America’s greatest strengths. In 2020, American scientists and biopharmaceutical industry achieved a success on par with the Manhattan Project and the Apollo Program. It was called Operation Warp Speed, and it saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of Americans and millions around the world.

The original COVID-19 vaccines were quickly developed, tested, approved and delivered — not by chance, but by a coordinated policy effort of your predecessor’s administration. This effort cut regulatory red tape, reduced risk and uncertainty, mobilized military operational capacity, and set a clear target for the private sector to hit.  

Unfortunately, the original vaccines have limitations: they do not successfully prevent transmission of new COVID variants, and the protection they offer vaccinated Americans against severe COVID cases is declining. Most worrying: since early 2021, the pace with which new variants emerge has increased substantially, and the likelihood that the existing vaccines will be ineffective against a future variants is constantly growing.

This is why we need a Warp Speed 2.0 to develop updated vaccines. In particular, intranasal products that reduce transmission and pan-coronavirus approaches that provide durable protection against the emergence of new variants could let us turn the page completely on COVID-19 and help other countries do the same. There are promising efforts to achieve these goals, led by American scientists, businesses and the military, but your administration has neither prioritized them nor charted a clear path for their delivery.

The team that led Operation Warp Speed has been disbanded, and the federal government is not reacting with sufficient urgency to new variants of COVID-19. We strongly urge your Administration provide to Congress by the end of this year a concrete proposal for an “Operation Warp Speed 2.0.” This would rapidly accelerate the development and deployment of the next generation of medical products needed to defend America from COVID-19 and future pandemics.
We believe such a proposal should include:

1. A review of the essential components that made Operation Warp Speed so successful, along with lessons learned;

2. A plan for replicating Warp Speed’s process of accelerated regulatory consideration to make sure FDA review does not delay the development process;

3. A clear description of both how the Departments of Defense and Health and Human Services could be utilized to execute the program and how Warp Speed approaches can be applied to pandemic and biodefense priorities in the future; and

4. A structure for a public-private partnership that effectively mobilizes funding from philanthropic and other outside sources to ensure the burden of development does not fall disproportionately on the American taxpayer.

Bottom line: Operation Warp Speed was the most successful public health program since smallpox. It saved millions of lives, and it should be resurrected as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Richard Burr                         James M. Inhofe
Ranking Member                       Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Health,     U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee
Education, Labor and Pensions

CC: The Honorable Xavier Becerra, Secretary of Health and Human Services
    Dr. Ashish Jha, White House COVID-19 Response Coordinator