

U.S. SENATOR BEN CARDIN



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December 26, 2020

Dear Fellow Marylander:

This has been a roller coaster of a year – physically, mentally and emotionally.

More than 18.5 million Americans have been infected with COVID-19 and the list of related deaths stands at 326,000 and growing. Currently, we are losing more people in one day to COVID-19 than our nation lost on 9/11.

Tens of millions lost their livelihood and schools were transformed, seemingly overnight. Even with vaccines starting to reach frontline health care workers and others at risk, we have many more months of challenges to come before our nation, and the world, might emerge from the darkness of the current global pandemic.

We all have seen everyday moments and life events changed or canceled because of the precautions put in place to keep us safe from harm. Hugs have been postponed or replaced with elbow bumps and Zoom calls, which we all know really are not the same.

Next week, I will offer an overview of my policy priorities heading into the 117th Congress, which begins on January 3, 2021. For today, I want to share my personal priorities and what I hope for all Marylanders.

To start, I would like to see all of us rally around the idea that keeping each other safe and healthy is as important as keeping ourselves safe. Respect for others should replace selfishness as we keep up the basic steps we can take to remain safe: wear a mask, maintain six feet of space from people not in your household, and wash your hands frequently. Receiving the vaccine does not eliminate the need for these personal health measures, at least not yet, so keep at it.

I am hopeful that we can return to a level of what we might call “normal” at some point in 2021. For this to happen, it will take all of us following those basic steps to defeat this virus. We saw what happened this summer when we rushed ahead of the science. At the very moment we thought we were “flattening the curve” and breaking the first wave of infections, people grew lax and started to take liberties that we weren’t ready for. Super-spread events, including family gatherings, caused the trends to reverse themselves quickly. Yes, there were many who tried to say this pandemic was a hoax and walked right into risky situations. Most of those folks have learned better by now. Hopefully, the others will begin to understand the seriousness and act accordingly.

When we do find ourselves emerging from the weight of this pandemic, I hope we can keep up the spirit of neighbors helping neighbors. As more individuals and families found themselves vulnerable and wondering what their next meal might be or if they were going to be able to pay the rent, others who were in more stable positions stepped up to provide community support. Our nonprofits and faith groups, as well as local governments and school systems, expanded the safety net to provide meals and groceries to a wider universe of those in need. Even the federal government made it easier for families to get assistance.

Like you, I am looking forward to the day when we can safely enjoy a meal at a cozy restaurant or have friends and family over for a celebration without fear. I’d like to be on the sidelines cheering at my granddaughter’s lacrosse game again without wondering if I was standing too close to others. Zoom Thanksgiving and Zoom funerals can happily stay in 2020, although, admittedly, these events did bring together people from far distances who may not have otherwise been able to gather in person pre-COVID.

Life will be different post-COVID. We aren’t there yet, but as we reach the end of a life-altering 2020, I would ask you to think about how you were forced to do things differently this year. What worked better than you thought it would and what would you want to do more of in the future?

Consider what we all can do better and what absolutely should end. All of us, working together and as individuals, can move us forward to a place where the good grows stronger, the system changes to expand opportunities where some may have never existed, and the bad fades into the background.

For those who have experienced pain and loss over the last year, I grieve with you and hope 2021 brings you comfort and healing.

Thank you to all who have contributed to keeping our communities safer and helped others get through these very tough times.

Together, we can say good riddance to 2020 and welcome to 2021!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping "B" and a cursive "en".

Ben Cardin

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