

U.S. SENATOR BEN CARDIN



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January 2, 2021

Dear Fellow Marylander,

Happy New Year! We've scraped through what possibly was the longest and most consequential year of our lives.

As we look at 2020 in the rearview mirror, we also look to the year ahead with optimism tinged with the knowledge that things likely will get worse before they get better.

Our nation is facing record-high deaths, hospitalizations, and COVID-19 cases in our country. Our hospitals are being stretched to capacity. We are now on track to surpass [400,000 lives lost](#) to the virus before the end of January.

Unfortunately, because not everyone has followed the basic public health guidelines of wearing a mask, staying six feet from someone outside your household and washing hands frequently, we have to anticipate that infections from [holiday outings and gatherings](#) soon will produce growing case counts – and a soaring death toll. Even though we are beginning to roll out the revolutionary vaccines that the scientific community has delivered in an incredibly short time, it may not be until spring that we begin to see significant improvements in our overall public health threshold.

Our highest priority for 2021 is finally to execute a comprehensive, coordinated federal response to turn the tide against COVID-19. I know this

is the [highest priority for President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris](#), both of whom will be sworn into office on January 20

The Biden-Harris administration will need to clean up the deadly mess left behind by President Trump. For starters, the current [plan to distribute vaccines is falling behind](#) so badly that we are [nowhere near 20 million vaccinations by the end of the year](#), as promised.

As the new Congress is sworn into office tomorrow (January 3), my colleagues and I should be ready to work with the new administration and support its efforts to confront this virus fully and properly. The rapid, widespread distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine is quite possibly the [greatest operational challenge](#) we have faced as a nation. Congress must give the new administration the resources it needs to save American lives.

This country cannot achieve an economic recovery, or make needed progress on countless other pressing issues, until we course-correct toward a public health recovery. But delivering that will take far more than getting appropriate amounts of vaccines, distributed equitably and free of charge, to every community in the country.

Emerging from the pandemic also will require a massive public education campaign to amplify the importance of getting vaccinated. Not only do we need to overcome the natural hesitation to get a needle in the arm, we must combat the effects of the [chronic misinformation](#) from those who diminish the lethality of the virus or dismiss it as “just the flu.”

We also must encourage and embrace bold executive actions, like the use of the [Defense Production Act](#), to meet the pandemic’s continued public health and economic challenges. Similar to the regional problems faced in March and April, currently, many frontline medical personnel nationwide are dealing with critical day-to-day shortages of personal protective equipment and therapeutic supplies; shortfalls in testing continue to delay diagnoses; and there are acute needs in the realm of vaccine materials that need to be addressed immediately.

While President Trump primarily used the Defense Production Act to [shield companies from the threat of lawsuits](#) from workers who may become infected, my sincere hope is that the new Biden-Harris administration will use the tools they have to truly elevate the public health, not corporate liability protections

Like so many other things, the Trump administration also has been erratic in its consultation with all governors nationwide, leading to [critical communication breakdowns](#) in several states that are slowing vaccine and medical supply distribution. This often-partisan dynamic must cease immediately. I am heartened to see a series of bipartisan conversations

underway between President-Elect Biden and governors from across the country, and I trust that these essential exchanges will continue.

We must inject a renewed spirit of action for the collective good. Wearing a mask must be automatic. Social distancing, however challenging, has to be our continued *modus operandi*. And “wash your hands” must remain our mantra.

This pandemic is not insurmountable. Its effects have been devastating, and its shadow long. But we can emerge from it. I know we can. Finally having a true partner and leader in the White House will go a long way toward easing America’s suffering.

This will be in the front of my mind next week when the House and Senate will meet in a joint session to officially receive and count the electoral votes that confirm the election of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris.

I’ve likely never welcomed a new year – or a new administration – quite so fervently.

Thank you for joining me in helping to change the momentum of this pandemic, and this nation.

Your friend and public servant,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a large initial "B".

Ben Cardin

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