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**Wyden Statement at Finance Committee Hearing on the Reliability of U.S. Medical Supply Chain During COVID-19**  
*As Prepared for Delivery*

This week the Finance Committee will hold two hearings looking at why state governments and health care providers have struggled to get the PPE and gear they need to fight the coronavirus.

Some members want this to be all about counterfeits and China. In my view, that story is way off the mark. If you want to know what's contributing most to the PPE shortage, you have to start with Donald Trump shirking his responsibility to lead, causing states and hospitals to compete against each other for supplies they need, and exposing them to scammers on the PPE grey market.

From the very beginning to this day, the president is blowing off his number one responsibility, which is to keep Americans safe. The pandemic has claimed 150,000 American lives and counting, but instead of focusing on that, the president is launching paramilitary occupations of American cities, including my hometown of Portland. It's all a big campaign-season deflection from the enormous human and economic toll the pandemic is taking.

So Oregon is a perfect example of how the Trump administration's priorities are totally out of whack. Let me explain why. Back in the spring, the president was in full-on denial mode that he was responsible for helping our doctors and nurses and caregivers and other front-line workers find the PPE and other equipment they needed.

In mid-March, during one of his infamous coronavirus press briefings, he said the federal government is, quote, "not a shipping clerk" and that when it came to acquiring PPE, quote "governors are supposed to be doing it."

His disinterest in leading any kind of coordinated effort to acquire and distribute PPE forced the states to compete against each other on the open market. It gave room for a whole lot of sketchy suppliers and scam artists to rip off the American taxpayer and endanger front-line public health workers with unsafe and sub-standard PPE.

The state of Oregon, for example, purchased close to one million N-95 masks from a supplier in China. After those masks arrived, they were de-certified because they could not pass a key safety screening. The U.S. agency that tests respirators, NIOSH, now says that some of the Chinese respirators they rejected could have been counterfeit, but no one knows for sure.

The fact that Oregon, like so many other states and medical providers, had to go out on its own and buy critical safety equipment in the middle of a global pandemic is a disgrace. And the pandemic is continuing to rage there. But Donald Trump isn't trying to find new ways to help Oregon deal with this pandemic.

Instead, he is terrorizing my friends and neighbors in Portland with a secret police force of hundreds of paramilitary units. Night after night, they have tear-gassed a "Wall of Moms," including my friend Sharon Meieran, a county commissioner and ER doc who was out protesting peacefully and was gassed without provocation. They've shot peaceful protesters with impact munitions that are unquestionably capable of killing somebody. They have snatched people off the streets into unmarked vans, holding and interrogating them without justification or charges. Trump is deploying these forces to other cities. He wants to take this violence nationwide.

So what's happened in Oregon over the last few weeks and months is just one example of how Donald Trump is neglecting his responsibilities when it comes to the pandemic and abusing his office to try to get reelected.

He ought to be attacking this virus, not peaceful protesters in my hometown. And then he could actually contribute to the effort to get PPE into the hands of all the Americans who need it.

So there's a lot to talk about today. I want to thank our witnesses for joining the committee. They are a group of career officials – not political appointees – from agencies within the Department of Homeland Security. I wish the people who ran that department shared their focus on fighting the pandemic instead of using their authority to abuse Portlanders.

I also want to thank Chairman Grassley for working with us to arrange the second hearing on Thursday, when the committee will be able to speak with representatives from the medical community, including the head of the American Nurses Association. They'll also have important testimony for the committee.

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