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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6200

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March 24, 2020

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Ambassador Richard Grenell
Acting Director
Office of the Director of National Intelligence

Dear Ambassador Grenell:

I want to thank you for your service to the Intelligence Community during these challenging times. Our country faces an extraordinary threat from COVID-19 and the administration's all-hands-on-deck public and private sector approach is the exact response that is necessary to defeat the virus and keep the public safe.

During the course of my oversight of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), I have engaged extensively with its Office of National Security (ONS) which protects HHS from numerous threats. For example, ONS provides oversight, policy direction and performance valuations in intelligence, counterintelligence, insider threats, cyber threat intelligence, information security and homeland security. Moreover, ONS functions as the Federal Intelligence Coordination Office for HHS and works to ensure personnel security and the safeguarding of classified information. In addition, the ONS Division of Operations works to identify and combat insider threats and foreign intelligence and economic espionage against HHS assets. Accordingly, ONS is tasked with countering national security threats and has an important role to play in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most recently, I have publicly stated that federal health agencies must have access to all Intelligence Community information that could help combat the COVID-19 pandemic. I've noted that to help with that access, the Intelligence Community must guard against classifying information in such a way that ONS, for example, is unable to access relevant information. I have also noted my concern that ONS was not adequately incorporated into the Intelligence Community's response to the pandemic; however, I have recently been made aware that this issue has been rightfully resolved.

The healthcare landscape has evolved considerably in the past several decades. Threats to healthcare now include cyber, intelligence, and counterintelligence threats. That is why ONS is a critical part of HHS's mission. The COVID-19 pandemic exemplifies the need to have a robust intelligence apparatus that must include HHS, and specifically ONS, as a full partner in the fight and that partnership must extend beyond the current pandemic. The cooperation that you facilitate today between federal health agencies and the Intelligence Community will strengthen ties between them for decades to come and the American people will be better served by the increased communication.

Accordingly, I request that you immediately use your authorities to ensure that ONS is given full, complete, and consistent access to all Intelligence Community information and continues to be fully incorporated into missions involving threats to the nation's healthcare, not just COVID-19. No later than March 31, 2020, please provide me an update on the steps you have taken to resolve these issues. Should you have questions, please contact Joshua Flynn-Brown of my Committee staff at 202-224-4515.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley
Chairman
Committee on Finance