

The outbreak of COVID-19 in the United States has pushed the health system in all 50 states to its limit. Hospitals are struggling to keep up with the demand for ventilators and protective equipment, but at the same time are forced to furlough employees who perform other medical tasks. While the invoking of the Defense Production Act has helped direct federal efforts to relieve struggling states, it has left the country's largest healthcare system in the dust. The Veterans Affairs hospitals are struggling to care for both their workers and patients as protective gear continues to run out, partially due to the efforts of FEMA to help hospitals in specific states. Dr. Richard Stone, Executive in Charge of the Veterans Health Administration, directly addressed the shortage in an interview with the Washington Post, after weeks of VA officials denying the possibility of an equipment shortage. The fact that FEMA has diverted equipment orders from the VA is troubling, as it proves that the Veterans Administration is not as supplied as previously thought and gives an example of mixed priorities from the executive branch. The VA and its associated hospitals and medical centers should not be placed on the backburner as the federal government ramps up its support efforts in areas that need help. While the cases in the VA system are relatively low, a computer model showed around 200,000 of the 9 million veterans in VA care getting sick with COVID-19. As of now, almost 2,000 healthcare workers contracted COVID-19, with an additional 3,600 quarantined due to possible exposure. VA hospitals should not be left behind in the race to supply the healthcare system, and while the signs are not particularly encouraging, they seem to be improving. It is still not enough. The Trump administration won an election partially based on the principle of supporting our veterans, and that needs to continue throughout the pandemic. The VA has expanded its mission to help support veteran homes in individual states, despite the fact those homes are not run by a federal government. The ultimate bond of the VA is its unwavering dedication to and support of veterans, and the VA is doing more than its fair share. It is time that the Trump administration direct more supplies towards VA facilities, especially the supplies that FEMA had redirected. Those who have provided their lives to us should not be left behind as we race to help America.