

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927
Minority (202) 225-3641

September 12, 2014

The Honorable Sylvia Burwell
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Burwell:

Pursuant to Rules X and XI of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Committee on Energy and Commerce is examining the federal response to the ongoing Ebola epidemic, which has already claimed the lives of thousands and rendered thousands more severely ill.¹

While U.S. public health officials have offered assurances – both publicly and during briefings with committee staff – that the Ebola outbreak can be controlled, they are expressing increasingly dire warnings about its growth and the need for quick, decisive action.²

In recent days, officials have warned that the emergency response thus far has not contained the outbreak³ and must be “vastly increased and accelerated” immediately to avoid missing a closing “window of opportunity” to control the deadly virus.⁴ Last week, Dr. Thomas Frieden, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), warned that the Ebola virus is “spiraling out of control”⁵ and “moving faster than anyone anticipated.”⁶

In a September 5, 2014, briefing for congressional staff, Dr. Frieden characterized the ongoing crisis as the world’s first Ebola epidemic. He reported that the situation in West Africa is “much worse than we feared,” telling staff that it is “not possible to be overly concerned about this [epidemic].” Other federal officials at the briefing made similar comments.

¹ Reuters, WHO urges use of survivors’ serum, backs vaccine trials (Sept. 5, 2014).

² See, e.g., CDC Newsroom, CDC warns Ebola epidemic in West Africa is outpacing current response (Sept. 2, 2014).

³ USA Today, Ebola outbreak racing out of control, officials say (Sept. 3, 2014).

⁴ CDC Newsroom, CDC warns Ebola epidemic in West Africa is outpacing current response (Sept. 2, 2014).

⁵ CBS News, Ebola is “spiraling out of control,” CDC director says (Sept. 2, 2014).

⁶ Reuters, U.S. CDC says Ebola threatens stability of stricken countries (Sept. 2, 2014).

Also on September 5, the White House submitted a \$30 million funding request to Congress, bringing the total amount of supplemental Ebola spending requested this fiscal year to approximately \$88 million⁷ and the total U.S. commitment thus far to approximately \$263 million.⁸ According to the White House, these supplemental funds would support accelerated Ebola drug development and production, as well as additional personnel, lab supplies, and equipment.

To assist in our review and understanding of the Ebola outbreak and preparedness and response efforts in the United States and internationally, please provide the following information to the committee no later than September 26, 2014.

1. Identify the factors involved in the administration's assessment of the outbreak, including recent warnings about its worsening scope and threat, and the failure thus far to contain it.
2. Describe any emergency preparedness and response efforts that have or will be made in the U.S. to protect against the Ebola virus. Please indicate the implementation status of these efforts. If strategies for domestic preparedness and response have been modified over the last year, please explain why.
3. Describe existing protocols for Ebola screening, containment and post-recovery monitoring within the United States, at United States ports of entry, and within West Africa. Also describe the process by which these protocols were developed. If any process or protocol is being reevaluated, or if any process or protocol has been modified within the last year, please explain why.
4. Describe any emergency planning or response execution challenges/failures that have affected the United States' domestic and international emergency efforts, any related consequences regarding containment, and how these obstacles have been addressed. Please include any incidents relating to the immediate Ebola crisis in which HHS or one of its component agencies was involved.
5. Describe the federal dollars spent on Ebola preparedness and response to date, and additional funding necessary to successfully address the current Ebola epidemic. Please indicate which agencies within your Department, if any, have an immediate need for additional resources and why. Also explain any additional resources your Department anticipates will be necessary to support ongoing emergency preparedness and response efforts, when they will need these additional funds, and the specific purpose for which these funds would be used.
6. Explain the role of national and international public health agencies in ensuring that adequate plans are in place to control the epidemic going forward.

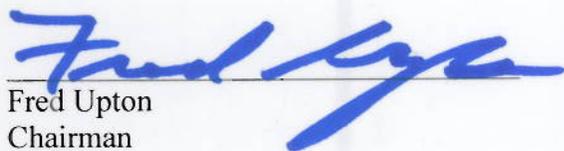
⁷ USA Today, White House asks for \$30M for CDC's Ebola efforts (Sept. 5, 2014).

⁸ The Washington Post, U.S. military to help fight Ebola in Africa (Sept. 8, 2014).

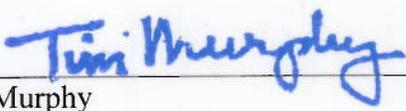
7. Explain the current risk that this Ebola epidemic poses to the United States and whether it is still the position of the U.S. government that it does not pose a "significant risk" to the United States.
8. Please provide your assessment as to whether hospitals and other institutions in the United States have appropriate plans, resources and capacity to address cases of Ebola that may appear in the United States, including stockpiling. Also include a description of any heightened precautions that have or should be taken at American educational institutions to protect students, faculty, staff and surrounding communities. If no additional precautions have been taken, please explain why.
9. Please provide the status of efforts to rapidly test, develop, produce and use Ebola vaccines and therapies.

Please contact Karen Christian, Alan Slobodin, Sean Hayes or Emily Newman with the Majority committee staff at (202) 225-2927 with any questions about this urgent request.

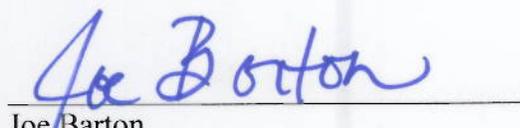
Sincerely,



Fred Upton
Chairman



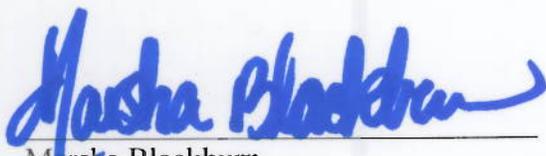
Tim Murphy
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations



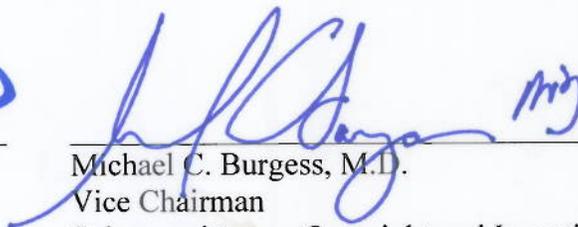
Joe Barton
Chairman Emeritus



Joe Pitts
Chairman
Subcommittee on Health



Marsha Blackburn
Vice Chairman



Michael C. Burgess, M.D.
Vice Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Subcommittee on Health

Letter to the Honorable Sylvia Burwell

Page 4

Attachment

cc: The Honorable Henry A. Waxman, Ranking Member

The Honorable Diana DeGette, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

The Honorable Frank Pallone Jr. Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Health