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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6300

DAVID P. CLEARY, STAFF DIRECTOR
EVAN SCHATZ, DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

<http://help.senate.gov>

November 28, 2018

Robert R. Redfield, MD
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Director Redfield:

I write to express concern regarding the Ebola virus disease outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and to obtain information on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) ongoing response and current capabilities in responding to the outbreak. Ensuring the health and security of our country means having a robust response to public health threats and outbreaks globally. I am watching closely to make sure we are taking appropriate steps to help the families jeopardized by this latest outbreak and doing all we can to ensure it is contained and ended.

The DRC continues to suffer from an Ebola virus disease outbreak that began in August in its North Kivu Province. As of November 26, the World Health Organization (WHO) has confirmed 374 cases and 194 deaths from the virus.¹ The current outbreak is still uncontained, fueled by an active warzone, mistrust in the government, and community resistance to intervention.² These concerns contributed to the evacuation of all CDC infectious disease experts from the area several months ago following an attack in the city of Beni in late August. Contact tracing and other infection control practices remain major challenges. I understand you have expressed concerns that the outbreak could become entrenched in the region, greatly reducing the ability to halt transmission. Earlier this month, the World Health Organization's (WHO) Deputy Director-General of Emergency Preparedness and Response, Peter Salama, estimated that the outbreak could last for at least another six months, in the best case scenario.³

¹ World Health Organization. (2018, November 26). Ebola | Ebola situation reports: Democratic Republic of the Congo. Retrieved November 28, 2018, from <https://www.who.int/ebola/situation-reports/drc-2018/en/>

² Sun, L. H. (2018, November 05). CDC director warns that Congo's Ebola outbreak may not be containable. Retrieved November 15, 2018, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2018/11/05/cdc-director-warns-that-congos-ebola-outbreak-may-not-be-containable/?utm_term=.4ac10a993f28

³ Sun, L. H. (2018, November 14). As Ebola outbreak worsens in Congo, U.S. stays out of war zone. Retrieved November 15, 2018, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/as-ebola-outbreak-worsens-in-congo-us-stays-out-of-war-zone/2018/11/14/e682f448-e845-11e8-b8dc-66cca409c180_story.html?utm_term=.cddefefb9a5b

Despite this dire situation, we are seeing the benefits of key investments in innovation and global health security. Ring vaccination campaigns in the outbreak region and surrounding countries have resulted in almost 30,000 people receiving the Ebola vaccine.⁴ Furthermore, in addition to the experimental vaccine, there are five new therapies available to patients that are being tested on the ground under compassionate use authority.⁵ Additionally, investments in the DRC through longstanding CDC programs in the country and global health security efforts, in combination with the DRC's prior successes in containing Ebola virus disease outbreaks, have shored up resources and capabilities for the country to respond.⁶

I appreciate the steps CDC has taken to respond to the current Ebola outbreak, and I urge the agency to continue its efforts. In order to better understand the agency's current capabilities in responding to the Ebola outbreak, I request your response to the following questions:

1. In light of the ongoing Ebola virus disease outbreak in the DRC, is CDC adequately prepared to respond to this threat? How is CDC's role different than in previous outbreaks including the outbreak in the DRC earlier this year and the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak in West Africa?
2. What is needed in North Kivu and Ituri Provinces to ensure sufficient epidemiological capacity, surveillance capabilities, and laboratory analyses in order to respond to the current outbreak?
3. Given the security concerns, what is CDC doing to support the DRC, international organizations, and humanitarian organizations in these areas?
4. Does CDC have contingency plans in place to respond to the dynamic situation in the DRC? In particular, what planning and preparedness activities are underway to ensure bordering countries are prepared? For what other contingencies is the agency currently planning and/or preparing?
5. How is CDC collaborating with the Department of State and the Department of Defense to develop security strategies that could support the actions described above?

⁴ WHO Regional Office for Africa. (2018, November 13). Ebola Virus Disease | Democratic Republic of the Congo | External Situation Report 15. Retrieved November 15, 2018, from

http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/275855/SITREP_EVD_DRC_20181113-eng.pdf?ua=1

⁵ World Health Organization. (2018, June 06). Ebola | Ebola treatments approved for compassionate use in current outbreak. Retrieved November 15, 2018, from <http://www.who.int/ebola/drc-2018/treatments-approved-for-compassionate-use/en/>

⁶ Michaud, J., & Kates, J. (2018, November 13). The Latest Ebola Outbreaks: What Has Changed in the International and U.S. Response Since 2014? Retrieved November 15, 2018, from <https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/issue-brief/the-latest-ebola-outbreak-what-has-changed-in-the-international-and-u-s-response-since-2014/>

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. I respectfully request a response no later than December 13, 2018. If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Andi Fristedt with my HELP Committee Staff at (202) 224-7675.

Sincerely,



Patty Murray
Ranking Member
United States Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor, and Pensions

cc: The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
United States Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary
U.S. Department of State

The Honorable James N. Mattis
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense

Ambassador John R. Bolton
Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs