

**Senator Alexander Floor Remarks**  
**Preparing for the Next Pandemic Act**  
**July 20, 2020**

Our great country has developed a dangerous habit when it comes to pandemics. Public health experts call it: “Panic. Neglect. Panic.”

In 2007, after the emergence of H5N1 avian flu, Former Utah Governor Mike Leavitt who was then Secretary of Health and Human Services put it this way: “Everything we do before a pandemic will seem alarmist. Everything we do after a pandemic will seem inadequate. This is the dilemma we face, but it should not stop us from doing what we can to prepare.”

Fifteen years ago, then Majority Leader of the Senate, Dr. Bill Frist, made 20 speeches predicting that a viral pandemic was no longer a question of if, but a question of when. He recommended what he called a “6 point public health prescription to minimize the blow — communication, surveillance, antivirals, vaccines, research, stockpile/surge capacity.”

Four presidents and several congresses have done some of what needed to be done to prepare for pandemics, but not enough of it. There is substantial agreement on all sides about what to do. And there is even more agreement that if we wait until this pandemic is over we will fall again into the familiar cycle of “Panic. Neglect. Panic.”

So the obvious thing for this Congress to do now, this month, while we are in the middle of this pandemic, while we have our eye on the ball, before we lose our focus, while we are spending \$4 trillion or more, mostly to repair the damage caused by this pandemic—we should authorize and spend the few extra billion it takes to be prepared for the next pandemic.

That is why I am introducing today the Preparing for the Next Pandemic Act that would take three of the most obvious steps about which there is near universal agreement: One, make certain that we have sufficient manufacturing capacity within the United States to produce tests, treatments and vaccines, so that we do not have to rely on manufacturing plants in China or India or any other foreign country.

Two, make sure that the federal and state stockpiles have sufficient protective equipment: masks, gowns, ventilators and other absolutely essential supplies so that we don’t run out during the rest of this pandemic or the next one.

Three, create more authority for the federal government to work with private companies to maintain more supplies and manufacturing capacity for products that are needed during a public health emergency.

The act also would do the one thing that all of the experts with whom we have talked say is essential: Make sure there is a steady stream of money for the next ten years so that there is no lapse in preparedness. I would propose that we do this with ten years of advance

appropriations. In other words, appropriate \$15 billion now, spend it over 10 years so Congress may continue its oversight and make certain that manufacturing plants are kept up to date and that state stockpiles are not depleted during tough budget times—which are as sure to come as the next pandemic is sure to come.

On June 9, I released a white paper on steps that Congress should take before the end of the year in order to get ready for the next pandemic. The main purpose of the white paper was to elicit recommendations that Congress could consider and act on this year, so we asked experts to share their suggestions by June 26.

I asked for recommendations in these five areas:

1. Tests, Treatments, and Vaccines – Accelerate Research and Development
2. Disease Surveillance – Expand Ability to Detect, Identify, Model, and Track Emerging Infectious Diseases
3. Stockpiles, Distribution, and Surges – Rebuild and Maintain Federal and State Stockpiles and Improve Medical Supply Surge Capacity and Distribution
4. Public Health Capabilities – Improve State and Local Capacity to Respond
5. Who Is on the Flagpole? – Improve Coordination of Federal Agencies During a Public Health Emergency

The Committee received over 350 responses from leading public health experts around the country. They had many recommendations of short term and long-term proposals to address future pandemics. As my staff and I reviewed these proposals and other feedback I received, I asked to focus on targeted ideas that would generate broad, bipartisan consensus, and help address some of the most pressing issues facing our country.

That led us to these three strategic areas: Sustaining onshore manufacturing (22 responses); Creating and sustaining State stockpiles (19 responses); and, Improving the Federal stockpile (24 responses).

These are recommendations from public health experts and from bipartisan leaders who have convened experts to gather their advice. Some of those from whom we have heard on some of these issues include: former Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, M.D.; former Governor Mike Leavitt, former Secretary of Health and Human Services; former Governor Tom Ridge, co-chair of the Bipartisan Commission on Biodefense; former Senator Joe Lieberman, co-chair of the Bipartisan Commission on Biodefense; Dr. Julie Gerberding, former Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and, Andy Slavitt, former Acting Administrator, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Specifically, the Preparing for the Next Pandemic Act which I introduced today has three parts:

1. **ONSHORE MANUFACTURING** — Provides new, sustained funding – \$5 billion over 10 years – to maintain sufficient onshore manufacturing capacity for tests, treatments and vaccines so that when a new virus emerges, we have a facility that is ready to manufacture those products as quickly as possible.
2. **STATE STOCKPILES** — Provides new, sustained funding – \$10 billion over 10 years – so states can create and maintain their own stockpiles of supplies like masks and ventilators with help from the federal government.
3. **FEDERAL STOCKPILES** — Finally, this legislation improves the federal Strategic National Stockpile, by allowing the Federal government to work with private companies to maintain additional supplies and manufacturing capacity so we are even better prepared for the next pandemic.

And there's more to do, but these are three steps we ought to do right now, this month, as a part of whatever COVID-19 Phase 4 legislation we can agree on.

At our Senate health committee hearing on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, this is what former Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist had to say about the need for sustained funding to better prepare for the next pandemic: “We do have to keep a revenue stream out there, that is dependable, it is sustainable, and it is long term, and it is flexible...What we're dealing with is a rare but certain event... And the rarity is hard for Congress to deal with because of the attention span of Congress... And that's where it's important to have timelines that are 10 years or 15 years [for funding]. Markets tend to look day to day. And therefore, this...means that we have to have...some sort of public funding that will guarantee a market over that 10, 15 year period when that certain event, that certain pandemic will occur.”

There is precedent for what I am proposing. In 2003, Senator Judd Gregg, who was then the Chairman of the Senate health committee, also recognized the need for a clear, long-term commitment from the federal government to prepare for public health emergencies, like COVID-19. That year, Congress passed, with the leadership of Senator Gregg, Congressman Hal Rogers, Senator Cochran, and others, legislation that provided over \$5 billion in advanced appropriations to be used over the next 10 years to buy treatments and vaccines for threats like anthrax and smallpox. Reflecting on that experience in an editorial earlier this year, Senator Gregg said, “In this instance, Congress actually anticipated a serious issue and began addressing it effectively.”

At our June 23 hearing, speaking about federal efforts to build manufacturing capacity to respond to a pandemic flu, former Health and Human Services Secretary and Governor Mike Leavitt said, “What I think we did not do adequately as a country, over the course of time, is maintain them in a way that they were warm and could be stood up quickly.”

Regarding stockpiles, former Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist said that we need, “not the incremental improvement of stockpiles and means of distribution, but the creation of great and secure stores and networks, with every needed building, laboratory, airplane, truck, and vaccination station, no excuses, no exceptions, everywhere, and for everyone.”

Former Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Julie Gerberding, said at our June 23 hearing, "In the face of an unprecedented public health crisis like the coronavirus, we have seen the Strategic National Stockpile deliver some promising innovations but at the same time discovered areas where there is room for improvement... The COVID-19 pandemic provides us an opportunity to make pragmatic changes; we must act now to avoid becoming complacent and finding ourselves in the same position when the next pandemic occurs."

There is also broad agreement about additional steps Congress needs to take to prepare for the next pandemic including improving disease surveillance, restoring support for our state and public health systems which Governor Leavitt and others describe as being badly underfunded for the last 30-40 years, and better coordination of pandemic response.

I intend to keep legislation to better prepare for future pandemics on the top of the congressional to-do list until it's done. In this internet age, attention spans are short. Even with an event as significant as COVID-19, memories fade and attention moves quickly to the next crisis. That makes it imperative that Congress act on needed changes this year in order to better prepare for the next pandemic.

Let us not succumb to the familiar dangerous habit of "Panic. Neglect. Panic." At least Congress can take these three steps to keep vaccine manufacturing on shore and stockpiles supplied, now, while the pandemic has our attention, while we have our eye on the ball.

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