



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

October 7, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

I write today to express my deep concern regarding the spread of the Ebola virus and its entry into the United States. Just this past week, it was reported that Thomas Eric Duncan, who entered the United States from Liberia, tested positive for Ebola. In spite of his exposure, his travel was not stopped and he arrived in Dallas, Texas, by plane. On behalf of my constituents and the American people, I request a detailed explanation for the lack of action by your administration to prevent the spread of Ebola to our nation. I also request a thorough explanation of your administration's strategy going forward to combat the Ebola virus from becoming a global pandemic.

As your administration is well aware, Ebola poses a very real and serious threat to public health worldwide. The virus spreads through human-to-human transmission and is often deadly for those infected. The average case fatality rate is over 50 percent and has reached as high as 90 percent in previous outbreaks. As of the date of this letter, there is no question that Ebola is spreading at an alarming pace. While previous outbreaks have been contained in remote villages in Central Africa, the current outbreak that we are confronting in West Africa has crossed national borders, affecting Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, among others. While precautions and supportive care can be useful, the World Health Organization (WHO) reports that there is "as yet no licensed treatment proven to neutralize the virus." At this time, there are also no Federal Drug Administration (FDA)-approved Ebola vaccines. The very nature of this deadly virus demands a serious and proactive strategy.

Just weeks ago, you stated that it was "unlikely" that an individual infected with Ebola would come to the U.S. Regrettably, that unlikely scenario has become a reality and our nation is in need of a serious solution. Your appraisal of the situation was likely based on the history of previous outbreaks. However, Peter Piot, who was a member of the team that discovered the Ebola virus in 1976, has stated that it has been clear to him since this past June that there is something fundamentally different about this outbreak.

According to Mr. Piot, the virus can only be curtailed by isolating those infected and closely monitoring those who had contact with them. However, with an incubation period that can last

weeks, it is difficult to accurately screen individuals at the airport, as the case of Mr. Duncan demonstrates.

The case of Mr. Duncan, coupled with the fatal nature and spread of this disease, demonstrates the need for a proactive and comprehensive response from the United States. For this reason, I am requesting an answer to the following questions:

1. A rule proposed in 2005 by President George W. Bush's administration would have empowered the federal government to detain sick airline passengers and passengers exposed to certain diseases. The rule was abandoned by your administration in 2009. Can you elucidate the rationale driving the decision to abandon the rule and address whether, in light of the case of Mr. Duncan, the 2009 decision should be reevaluated?
2. Does your administration have the authority, under the Immigration and Naturalization Act, to halt travel to nations on account of public health concerns? If so, does your administration think such an action would be prudent now or at some future juncture?

I believe your administration agrees that Ebola is an actualized threat that has become an epidemic and humanitarian catastrophe. The U.S. must lead in arresting its spread while taking proactive measures to protect our nation and its people from the potential of devastating impact. For this reason, it is my position that you should utilize your authority halt all commercial flights from the affected nations until the outbreak is contained. You should also use your position of leadership to encourage other nations to do the same. It should be clear to all knowledgeable parties that containment of Ebola will not be possible as long as there is a constant flow of individuals arriving and leaving the nations that have the highest incidence.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I would appreciate a timely response to this letter, which will help Congress determine how it can best facilitate the actions that will form a strong U.S. response to the spread of Ebola.

Sincerely,


Mike Kelly
Member of Congress