



COMMITTEE ON

SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

REPUBLICANS

Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frank Lucas

Full Committee Hearing - Coronaviruses: Understanding the Spread of Infectious Diseases and Mobilizing Innovative Solutions

March 5, 2020

Good morning and thank you Chairwoman Johnson for holding this important hearing as we deal with an emerging and rapidly evolving situation with the spread of the coronavirus COVID-19.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), at this time most people in the United States have little immediate risk of exposure to the virus. However, public health experts also advise us a pandemic is likely, so we must gather the facts and be prepared.

Today I hope our expert witnesses can provide important information we can share with our constituents. I also hope we can learn what tools are needed to detect, predict, and prevent the next pandemic.

Covid-19 was first identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019. Since then the World Health Organization has reported nearly 90,000 confirmed cases and over 3,000 deaths spread throughout 76 countries. In the United States, the CDC has reported 152 confirmed cases and 11 deaths. We know that for most individuals the illness is not serious, but we are still getting information on the death rate. The impact on vulnerable populations is particularly concerning though, and my thoughts are with the individuals and families that have been affected.

This is not the first global pandemic in modern times, and I am certain it won't be the last. Just over a hundred years ago the world faced one of the deadliest pandemics in history – the 1918 avian flu pandemic, also known as the “Spanish flu.” It killed an estimated 50 million people worldwide, including over 600,000 people in the United States.

Since 1980, outbreaks of emerging infectious diseases have been occurring with greater frequency and have been causing higher numbers of human infections that in

the past. The vast majority of these infections are initially caused by the spread of disease from animals to humans.

A SARS outbreak in 2003 and an Avian flu outbreak in 2006 were wake-up calls for the American public health system, and Congress made considerable investments to improve our nation's capabilities to detect and respond to pandemics. We would be in a much worse position today without those investments.

I am confident the U.S. government has the tools necessary to deal with this. We have the best scientists in the world at NIH, CDC, and in our universities. Their work has yielded considerable advancements in health technology, disease surveillance and predictive modeling, as well as medicine, drugs, and vaccine development.

With the integration of technology like artificial intelligence and the greater availability of data, researchers are now able to identify and track outbreaks faster. Last Congress, we also modernized the Pandemic All-Hazards Preparedness Act to set up a framework to deal precisely with this type of an outbreak. But while significant progress has been made, gaps remain, and a severe pandemic like the novel coronavirus could be devastating to the global population.

As the human population has grown, so has the livestock, swine and poultry populations needed to feed us. This expanded number of hosts provides increased opportunities for viruses from birds, cattle and pigs to spread, evolve, and infect people.

To better understand how zoonotic diseases like avian and swine flu, Ebola, Zika, SARS, and now COVID-19 spread and operate, we must invest in basic research to learn more about the interconnection between people, animals, and plants in shared environments.

Yesterday the House passed a supplemental appropriations bill to fund the response to COVID-19 and the development of a vaccine. I supported the bipartisan bill. But I hope my colleagues and I can work together on a long-term strategy to prepare for any global pandemic we may face in the future.

Our top priority is the health and welfare of the American people. I am pleased the President has created the Coronavirus Task Force. This interagency group is working to monitor, contain, and mitigate the spread of the novel coronavirus while ensuring the American people have access to accurate and up-to-date health and travel information. The best thing Americans can do right now is follow the guidance of the CDC. Many of their recommendations are simple ones you learned from your mother, wash your hands thoroughly and frequently, cover your cough or sneeze, avoid touching your face, and stay home if you are sick.

I want to thank the witnesses for taking the time to be here to share your expertise and insights with us during this crucial time to help keep Americans safe, healthy, and secure. I yield back the balance of my time.