

**Statement of
Jonathan M. Moore, Acting Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and
Scientific Affairs, U.S. Department of State,
Before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on
Asia, the Pacific, and Nonproliferation, and the House Committee
on Armed Services Subcommittee on Intelligence and Emerging
Threats and Capabilities**

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Introduction

Good morning Chairmen Bera and Langevin, Ranking Members Yoho and Stefanik, and other esteemed Members. It is an honor to be here today with my distinguished colleagues from the Department of State and the Department of Defense; I look forward to discussing how the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs addresses biological threats. I intend to focus my remarks on our efforts to prevent, detect, and respond to infectious disease outbreaks.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the importance of U.S. leadership to advance global health security and pandemic preparedness. This is crucial to stopping outbreaks at their source and protecting U.S. health and safety, promoting economic prosperity, and defending national security interests. Our team in OES is working through the current pandemic, like all of us, while working with our interagency partners to advance U.S. government priorities through diplomacy. Beyond COVID-19, OES combats a range of other public health threats, including Ebola, influenza, dengue, polio, and antimicrobial resistance.

Pandemic Response

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global challenge, and the Department of State remains committed to working closely with our partners as part of

a collective global response. We are using all of our means to slow and stop the pandemic. U.S. health diplomacy has three primary areas of efforts: promoting transparent information sharing and disease surveillance; and encouraging a multisectoral approach to building global health security capacity that includes other nations, nongovernmental organizations, international organizations, and the private sector.

We appreciate Congress' appropriation of over \$1.6 billion in COVID-19 supplemental funding to the State Department and USAID. We have used these funds to provide a broad range of assistance specifically aimed at helping governments, international organizations and nongovernmental organizations fight the pandemic. The assistance is saving lives by strengthening public health education; improving the quality and cleanliness of healthcare facilities; and increasing laboratory, disease-surveillance, and rapid-response capacity in more than 120 countries; as well as providing humanitarian and economic support to mitigate impacts of the pandemic.

The United States has invested more than \$10 billion to bring safe and effective vaccines to the global market faster.

OES helps develop State Department messaging, including global public health, on countering malign influence. As the first to know about the coronavirus, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had a special responsibility to inform the rest of the world about this threat. Instead, they withheld information and censored medical professionals, scientists, and journalists. The CCP has since used the pandemic to further its geopolitical agenda by highlighting its donations of masks and other supplies to reshape the narrative and distract from its role in this crisis. Both Russia and the CCP have made grandiose and irresponsible claims about the creation of vaccines, raising serious questions about quality and efficacy, that we are addressing through active public diplomacy.

Preparing for the Next Pandemic – Global Health Security

“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” is a proverb that is as familiar as it is true. If we prioritize health security investments, we can contain outbreaks before they become pandemics and mitigate and prevent second and third order impacts. OES plays a key role in pandemic prevention, with one of our most prominent contributions being our support for the Global Health Security Agenda. The GHSA is a partnership of nearly 70 nations, international organizations, and non-governmental stakeholders that uses a whole-of-government, multisectoral approach to address outbreaks. OES annually coordinates U.S. expert implementing agencies to provide carefully targeted programming in priority countries to make global health security improvements along specific metrics. It’s approach to combatting outbreaks is reflected in the United States 2017 National Security Strategy, 2018 National Biodefense Strategy (NBS), and the 2019 Global Health Security Strategy (GHSS). OES leadership has been fully engaged in coordinating interagency GHSA investments helping 19 U.S. partner countries prevent, detect, and respond to a range of infectious disease threats at their source. In many cases, these GHSA investments have served as a strong foundation for partner countries to better prepare for and respond to COVID-19. Just this week, the White House released our most recent GHSA annual progress report that highlights the continued commitment of this impactful initiative.

Conclusion

These are just a few examples of OES’s wide-ranging engagement on infectious disease risks, which are crucial to countering biological threats. We greatly appreciate your support and interest. I thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.