

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Ranking Member Thompson Field Hearing Statement:*****Ebola in the Homeland: The Importance of International, Federal, State, and Local Coordination***

October 10, 2014 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following opening statement for the full Committee field hearing on *“Ebola in the Homeland: The Importance of International, Federal, State, and Local Coordination”*:

“I want to thank the Chairman for holding this timely hearing on our efforts—both domestic and international—to contain and prevent the spread of the Ebola virus. I also thank the witnesses for appearing today, and I look forward to their testimony. Additionally, I want to thank Chair Biggins and the Board of Directors of the Dallas Fort Worth Airport and the Executive Staff for hosting the Committee today.

I also want to extend my condolences to the family of Thomas Eric Duncan, the first person diagnosed with Ebola on American soil. We are not here to dehumanize Mr. Duncan, but unfortunately his diagnosis and the procedures that followed raise critical questions about our preparedness for highly infectious diseases such as Ebola and how federal, state, and local authorities coordinate in their aftermath.

As Ranking Member of this Committee, I often urge my colleagues not to use our positions of influence to promote fear in the public. Hence, I want to clarify that while it is proper to have serious concerns about the Ebola virus, it would be irresponsible for us to foster the narrative that an Ebola epidemic in the United States is imminent.

Rather, this hearing provides us the opportunity to review our state, local, federal and global public health infrastructure, learn where there are inconsistencies and gaps, and lay the foundation for eliminating these disparities. While the Ebola virus has caused the United States to institute new screening procedures at airports, it is incumbent upon us to work with our international partners to eradicate the virus at its origin in West Africa.

The current Ebola outbreak is the deadliest outbreak of record. According to the Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations, it is also impairing national economies, wiping out livelihoods and basic services, and could undo years of efforts to stabilize West Africa. Eliminating this virus at its source is a surefire way to prevent more Ebola cases in the United States.

As citizens of the global community, it is our moral obligation to not only eradicate this virus that is devastating West Africa, but also ensure that these countries can continue to function and recover. The United States’ response to the current Ebola outbreak will affect the way it works to coordinate international responses to future disease outbreaks. In this case, it seems as if the US and the international community did not act aggressively soon enough.

In March, the World Health Organization issued a notice of an Ebola outbreak in Guinea after the virus spread to Sierra Leone and Liberia. There was a lull in new cases in the spring, and

as a result, efforts waned. In June, Doctors Without Borders, a non-government organization, declared the outbreak out of control. However, the World Health Organization and the international community did not improve on its efforts until August. According to this chart from The Washington Post, the rate of new cases and fatalities appears to have grown exponentially during this time. We must do better, and I want to learn how the international community will be more engaged in the future.

Earlier, I stated that an Ebola outbreak in the United States is not imminent, but what should be discussed post haste is the value of our public health infrastructure and the cost of maintaining it. Many times, public health is used as a pawn for partisan bickering. However, Mr. Chairman, viruses such as Ebola, the flu, and EV-D68 which has affected over 500 children in the United States do not know political parties.

Cuts to public health preparedness grants from the Departments of Homeland Security and Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control, and the Office of the Surgeon General hit already struggling state and local health departments hard. As Members of Congress, we can use our platforms to restore grant funding and support the federal costs of maintaining a public health infrastructure. I hope that our discussions today can yield a step in this direction.”

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