

NEWS ALERT



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Homeland Security Committee

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson**

### **“Beyond Readiness: An Examination of the Current Status and Future Outlook of the National Response to Pandemic Influenza”**

July 29, 2009 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “Beyond Readiness: An Examination of the Current Status and Future Outlook of the National Response to Pandemic Influenza”:

“In April 2009, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported two cases of respiratory illness in children caused by a virus.

Those two cases, which occurred less than four months ago, were the first confirmed instances of H1N1 flu within the United States.

By late June, U.S. health officials estimated that there had been more than one million infections in the U.S.

According to the World Health Organization, this virus is travelling the world with “unprecedented speed”. There have been confirmed cases on every continent except Antarctica.

And while this may be troubling, there is no need to panic in the face of this pandemic.

So far, the disease has been mild in most people and treatments are available.

But many scientists and public health officials are predicting that the virus will resurge in the fall. And it is that resurgence which we must be ready to meet.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that as many as 40% of the US population could become infected with H1N1 over the next two years.

The good news is that a vaccine is currently under development and over the last 4 years Congress has provided approximately \$8.6 billion for pandemic planning efforts.

But unfortunately, despite this amount of funding, according to GAO there are still major gaps in pandemic planning and preparedness efforts.

Among the major gaps, is the failure to plan for additional bed space and medical supplies.

Additionally, GAO determined that leadership roles and responsibilities for an influenza pandemic need to be further clarified, tested and exercised.

Given this country’s recent experience with disasters, it is hard to believe that there are those who underestimate the importance of plans and drills.

Our children are taught in school what to do in a fire drill. They are not taught to wait until a fire starts, yell instructions and hope everybody makes it to the exit. We teach them that planning and practice increases their chance of survival. That elementary school lesson still applies.

Finally, we need to understand that the emergency preparedness and response community and the health care community have always shared resources during crises and disasters. These formal and informal partnerships may be strained during a pandemic.

Increased drills and exercises will strengthen these relationships, decrease uncertainty and improve response and recovery.

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