ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225–2927 Minority (202) 225–3641

May 5, 2014

The Honorable Fred Upton Chairman Committee on Energy and Commerce 2125 Rayburn House Office Building Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Joe Pitts Chairman Subcommittee on Health Committee on Energy and Commerce 2125 Rayburn House Office Building Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Tim Murphy Chairman Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Committee on Energy and Commerce 2125 Rayburn House Office Building Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Upton, Chairman Pitts, and Chairman Murphy:

We are writing to urge you to hold a hearing on federal initiatives to protect Americans from global health threats. On Friday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced that the first confirmed case of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) infection has been reported in a traveler to the United States. This is the latest example of how, in our increasingly global community, infectious diseases can spread to the United States.

MERS-CoV is a novel human virus that causes respiratory illness. It was first reported in Saudi Arabia two years ago, and the 401 confirmed cases so far originated in the Arabian

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Media Briefing: First case of MERS-CoV in the United States (May 2, 2014).

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Peninsula.² To date, community-wide spread of MERS-CoV has not been a great concern; however, this virus has been spread between people who are in close contact and from infected patients to health care personnel.³ There are no specific treatments or approved vaccines for MERS-CoV. And according to CDC, "Most people who have been confirmed to have MERS-CoV infection developed severe acute respiratory illness....About 30% of these people died."⁴

We have improved our capability to respond to disease outbreaks in the decade since the emergence of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). But with 80% of the world's nations still unprepared to deal with new pandemics, more can and should be done.⁵

Earlier this year, CDC in collaboration with other federal and international partners, launched a Global Health Security Initiative. This initiative will help ensure that all countries have the capacity to prevent, detect, and rapidly address emerging public health threats and reduce the spread of outbreaks from one country to another. The CDC continues to monitor MERS-CoV and other diseases that pose a threat to our nation.

The emergence of MERS-CoV in the United States should serve as a wakeup call, and, given our Committee's bipartisan record of oversight on public health risks, we should hold a hearing to examine federal efforts to respond to infectious diseases like MERS-CoV and to strengthen our global health security. We urge you to hold this hearing as quickly as possible.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Henry A. Waxman Ranking Member

n Frank Pallone, Jr. Ranking Member

Subcommittee on Health

Diana DeGette Ranking Member

Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *CDC announces first case of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus infection (MERS) in the United States* (May 2, 2014) (online at http://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2014/p0502-US-MERS.html).

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) Frequently Asked Questions and Answers (online at: http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/mers/faq.html).
⁴ Id

⁵ John Kerry, Kathleen Sebelius, Lisa Monaco, *Why global health security is a national priority*, CNN Opinion (February 12, 2014) (online at: http://www.cnn.com/2014/02/12/opinion/kerry-sebelius-health-security/).