



One Hundred Tenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515

December 12, 2007

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I have long been concerned about the ability of our Nation to respond to and recover from an influenza pandemic. Recent events continue to confirm the spread of H5N1, H3N2, and other influenza variants throughout the world. Additionally, other viruses – such as adenovirus, reported in yesterday's *Washington Post*¹ – are mutating and producing life-threatening illnesses. The spread of these strains will result in ever greater numbers of human and animal deaths, and it is imperative that we complete our preparedness efforts expeditiously.

On May 3, 2006, the Homeland Security Council (HSC) released the Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza. This document contains many deadlines that Federal, State, and local governments must meet to ensure the country is ready to respond to an outbreak. Since then, your Administration has struggled to meet these self-imposed deadlines and report the status of activity execution in a timely fashion. Instead of demonstrating effective leadership, the HSC slid deadlines for sixteen Federal activities, and has not been able to determine how to hold the Federal government accountable for working with and meeting deadlines for at least four tasks that involve State, local and other non-Federal entities. Further, the two status reports that the HSC released to the public thus far have been late – by six² and eleven weeks³ respectively. The status report that should have been released at the eighteen-month mark in early November is now late by five weeks. These delays are unacceptable at a time when significantly virulent strains of influenza are circulating, and the potential for new variants to cause a pandemic is increasing.

We discussed the content of these reports during the September 26, 2007 Subcommittee on Emerging Threats, Cybersecurity, and Science and Technology hearing entitled *Beyond the Checklist: Addressing Shortfalls in National Pandemic Influenza Preparedness*. This hearing also explored insufficiencies in the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza and its Implementation Plan, and identified areas for immediate action to improve the National Strategy and its execution throughout the public and private sectors. One thing your Administration must

¹ Stein, R. (December 11, 2007). Virus Starts Like a Cold But Can Turn Into a Killer. *Washington Post*, p. A1.

² The White House. (December 18, 2006). National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza Implementation Plan: Summary of Progress.

³ The White House. (July 17, 2007). Press Briefing on National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza Implementation Plan One Year Summary

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do immediately is start holding Federal agencies accountable for meeting their deadlines, rather than accommodating lackluster performance. Sliding deadlines to give Federal departments and agencies more time to complete the tasks identified in the Implementation Plan – especially when some of these tasks are as simple as establishing a working group – is irresponsible.

The Administration's unwillingness to provide timely updates suggests indifference when it comes to dealing with the threat of all emerging diseases, including pandemic influenza. Please provide answers to the following questions:

- **Why were deadlines for sixteen activities changed all at once – to eighteen months from when the Implementation Plan was originally released?** It seems highly unlikely that the changes were based on assessments of these different activities, coincidentally and newly determining that they all should be completed within the eighteen month timeframe.
- **Why were the non-Federal public and private sectors not better informed publicly of the changes in these deadlines?** No new versions of the Implementation Plan have been released indicating these changes – in fact, the White House still has the original Plan posted on its own website. In the absence of pandemic influenza strategies provided by each of the Departments and Agencies in the Executive Branch, non-Federal organizations have no choice but to refer to the Implementation Plan in order to determine what they can expect from the Federal government should an influenza pandemic occur.
- **Where is the eighteen-month execution status report for the Implementation Plan?** The September 26 hearing made clear that the departments and agencies are reporting the status of the activities for which they are responsible to the HSC on a near-daily basis.

Please provide a written response by not later than December 26, 2007. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Asha M. George, Committee on Homeland Security, at (202) 226-2616.

Respectfully,



Bennie G. Thompson
Chairman

Attachment: Implementation Plan Tasks and Deadlines

cc: The Honorable Peter T. King, Ranking Member

BGT/amg

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN: TASKS AND DEADLINES

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN TASK	ORIGINAL DEADLINE	NEW DEADLINE
All Federal, State, local, tribal, and private sector medical facilities should ensure that protocols for transporting influenza specimens to appropriate reference laboratories are in place within 3 months (Task 6.2.1.4).	August 3, 2006	Deadline not met
DHS and DOT shall establish an interagency transportation and border preparedness working group, including DOS, HHS, USDA, DOD, DOL, and DOC as core members, to develop planning assumptions for the transportation and border sectors, coordinate preparedness activities by mode, review products and their distribution, and develop a coordinated outreach plan for stakeholders, within 6 months (Task 5.1.1.1).	November 3, 2006	November 3, 2007
HHS, in coordination with DHS, DOT, DOS, DOC, and DOJ, shall develop policy recommendations for aviation, land border, and maritime entry and exit protocols and/or screening and review the need for domestic response protocols or screening within 6 months (Task 5.2.4.1).	November 3, 2006	November 3, 2007
The Federal Government shall, and State, local, and tribal governments should, define and test actions and priorities required to prepare for and respond to a pandemic, within 6 months (Task 6.1.1.1).	November 3, 2006	Deadline not met
All health care facilities should develop, test, and be prepared to implement infection control campaigns for pandemic influenza, within 6 months (Task 6.3.2.6).	November 3, 2006	Deadline not met
State, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies should coordinate with appropriate medical facilities and countermeasure distribution centers in their jurisdictions (as recognized in Chapter 6, security at these facilities will be critical in the event of an outbreak) to coordinate security matters, within 6 months (Task 8.1.4.1).	November 3, 2006	Deadline not met
DOJ, DHS, and DOD shall engage in contingency planning and related exercises to ensure they are prepared to maintain essential operations and conduct missions, as permitted by law, in support of quarantine enforcement and/or assist State, local, and tribal entities in law enforcement emergencies that may arise in the course of an outbreak, within 6 months (Task 8.3.2.1).	November 3, 2006	November 3, 2007
DHS, in coordination with DOT, HHS, and USDA, shall conduct tabletop discussions and other outreach with private sector transportation and border entities to provide background on the scope of a pandemic, to assess current	January 3, 2007	November 3, 2007

preparedness, and jointly develop a planning guide, within 8 months (Task 5.1.3.1).		
HHS, DHS, and DOT, in coordination with DOS, DOC, Treasury, and USDA, shall develop policy guidelines for international and domestic travel restrictions during a pandemic based on the ability to delay the spread of disease and the resulting health benefits, associated economic impacts, international implications, and operational feasibility, within 8 months (Task 5.2.4.2).	January 3, 2007	November 3, 2007
HHS, in coordination with DHS, DOS, DOD, DOL, VA, and in collaboration with State, local, and tribal governments and private sector partners, shall develop plans for the allocation, distribution, and administration of pre-pandemic vaccine, within 9 months (Task 6.1.13.5).	February 3, 2007	November 3, 2007
DHS, DOT, and HHS, in coordination with transportation and border stakeholders, and appropriate State and local health authorities, shall develop aviation, land border, and maritime entry and exit protocols and/or screening protocols, and education materials for non-medical, front-line screeners and officers to identify potentially infected persons or cargo, within 10 months (Task 5.2.4.7).	March 3, 2007	November 3, 2007
DHS and HHS, in coordination with DOT, DOJ, and appropriate State and local health authorities, shall develop detection, diagnosis, quarantine, isolation, EMS transport, reporting, and enforcement protocols and education materials for travelers, and undocumented aliens apprehended at and between Ports of Entry, who have signs or symptoms of pandemic influenza or who may have been exposed to influenza, within 10 months (Task 5.2.4.8).	March 3, 2007	November 3, 2007
DHS and DOT, in coordination with DOD, HHS, USDA, USTR, DOL, and DOS, shall develop detailed operational plans and protocols to respond to potential pandemic-related scenarios, including inbound aircraft/vessel/land border traffic with suspected case of pandemic influenza, international outbreak, multiple domestic outbreaks, and potential mass migration, within 12 months (Task 5.1.1.4).	May 3, 2007	November 3, 2007
DOT and DHS, in coordination with HHS, USDA, and transportation stakeholders, shall develop planning guidance and materials for State, local, and tribal governments, including scenarios that highlight transportation and border challenges and responses to overcome those challenges, and an overview of transportation roles and responsibilities under the NRP, within 12 months (Task 5.1.2.3).	May 3, 2007	November 3, 2007

<p>DOT and DHS, in coordination with HHS, DOD, DOS, airlines/air space users, the cruise line industry, and appropriate State and local health authorities, shall develop protocols¹³ to manage and/or divert inbound international flights and vessels with suspected cases of pandemic influenza that identify roles, actions, relevant authorities, and events that trigger response, within 12 months (Task 5.2.4.5).</p>	<p>May 3, 2007</p>	<p>November 3, 2007</p>
<p>HHS, in coordination with DHS, DOT, DOS, DOD, air carriers/air space users, the cruise line industry, and appropriate State and local health authorities, shall develop en route protocols for crewmembers onboard aircraft and vessels to identify and respond to travelers who become ill en route and to make timely notification to Federal agencies, health care providers, and other relevant authorities, within 12 months (Task 5.2.4.6).</p>	<p>May 3, 2007</p>	<p>November 3, 2007</p>
<p>HHS, in coordination with DHS, shall review and approve State Pandemic Influenza plans to supplement and support DHS State Homeland Security Strategies to ensure that Federal homeland security grants, training, exercises, technical, and other forms of assistance are applied to a common set of priorities, capabilities, and performance benchmarks, in conformance with the National Preparedness Goal, within 12 months (Task 6.1.1.2)</p>	<p>May 3, 2007</p>	<p>November 3, 2007</p>
<p>HHS, in collaboration with State, territorial, tribal, and local health care delivery partners, shall develop and execute strategies to effectively implement target group recommendations, within 12 months (Task 6.1.13.3)</p>	<p>May 3, 2007</p>	<p>November 3, 2007</p>
<p>HHS, DHS, and DOT, in coordination with DOS, State, community and tribal entities, and the private sector, shall develop a public education campaign on pandemic influenza for travelers, which raises general awareness prior to a pandemic and includes messages for use during an outbreak, within 15 months (Task 5.2.4.10).</p>	<p>August 3, 2007</p>	<p>November 3, 2007</p>
<p>DOS, in coordination DHS, DOT, and HHS, in consultation with aviation, maritime, and tourism industry stakeholders as appropriate, and working with international partners and through international organizations as appropriate, shall promote the establishment of arrangements through which countries would: (1) voluntarily limit travel if affected by outbreaks of pandemic influenza; and (2) establish pre-departure screening protocols for persons with influenza-like illness, within 16 months (Task 5.2.4.3).</p>	<p>September 3, 2007</p>	<p>November 3, 2007</p>