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Ready to Combat Coronavirus

February 19, 2020 | Weekly Columns

The worsening spread and global impact of the coronavirus continues to be at the center of news coverage. While there is certainly cause for concern, I am encouraged that the United States is better prepared than it has been in recent memory to combat this mysterious infectious disease. And that is thanks to the bipartisan foresight of Congress and preparations made over the last five years to ensure our public health defenders are equipped and ready to respond at a moment's notice.

Also known as COVID-19, this new strain of the coronavirus originated in Wuhan, China. Though the majority of those infected with the disease are in China, cases have been confirmed in other countries around the world, including 15 people in the United States.

This isn't the first time an infectious disease somewhere else in the world has posed a public and global health threat. In recent years, our dedicated public health defenders have been on the front lines of rapidly

monitoring and responding to disease outbreaks of the Ebola and Zika viruses. It was amid such outbreaks that Congress began shaping policies and prioritizing investment in public health readiness and infectious disease response resources, including consistently boosting overall funding each year for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Strategic National Stockpile. It's worth noting that the very weapons that were immediately deployed last month by the CDC to defend the public health against the coronavirus were the result of bipartisan congressional collaboration with those on the front lines.

When Republicans controlled the House, the House Appropriations Subcommittee responsible for funding the Department of Health and Human Services led the way in anticipating future needs and investing in resources for disease readiness. I am proud that lawmakers worked across the aisle and across the Capitol to deliver both policy and funding solutions. Of critical importance in the wake of the coronavirus was the establishment of the Infectious Disease Rapid Response Reserve Fund – to be ready and available for the CDC to quickly respond to a future or imminent infectious disease crisis that could endanger American lives. During my tenure as Chairman, I was proud to advocate for the start of this fund, first proposing its creation in fiscal year 2017 with an initial investment of \$300 million.

Within a couple of years, the fund was ultimately approved by Congress in fiscal year 2019 to the tune of \$50 million and with the ability for unspent funding to accumulate over time like an emergency fund. In the most recent full-year funding approved by a politically divided Congress and signed into law at the end of December, I was greatly encouraged that an additional investment of \$85 million was made to replenish and bolster the fund, reaffirming lawmakers' bipartisan and bicameral commitment to disease readiness and emergency response. Because of this fund, the CDC had more than

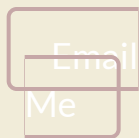
\$100 million immediately available to rapidly respond in the critical first days.

As we continue to monitor the coronavirus and determine the additional needs for resources to protect American lives and ultimately help eradicate the disease worldwide, I greatly appreciate the Trump Administration keeping Congress informed and leading America's public health response – including formation of the President's Coronavirus Task Force. During a congressional briefing last week with Administration officials, I was encouraged to hear that there are still resources available for our public health defenders to do their work and that the NIH is rapidly working to develop a vaccine to protect lives. As additional funding resources are needed, I am confident Congress will move quickly to provide them.

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