

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 27, 2014

The Honorable Barack Obama
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

The ongoing Ebola epidemic in three West Africa countries, and the diagnosis of two nurses in Texas with Ebola, has alarmed many Americans about our government's ability to protect U.S. citizens from the spread of this virus. Over the past week, the general public has grown even more concerned about possible exposure to the virus when one of the Dallas nurses who contracted the virus, but was asymptomatic, travelled to Cleveland, Ohio shortly before testing positive for Ebola. We have also heard from our constituents since a case of Ebola was confirmed in New York City.

We write to you yet again to strongly urge the Administration to take more decisive action to protect and prevent American citizens from further exposure to the deadly Ebola virus. The Administration needs to institute a temporary travel ban by immediately restricting travel visas for individuals from the West African countries hardest hit by Ebola, enhance airport screening for all U.S. airports, and institute a mandatory quarantine of individuals who have been in direct contact with the Ebola virus.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), individuals who have been exposed to Ebola likely will show signs of the disease within 21 days of exposure, but not necessarily before then. So, not only are we at risk from travelers showing symptoms of the disease, but also asymptomatic travelers who harbor the disease and become symptomatic and contagious after travel.

We urge you to instruct the State Department to restrict travel visas issued to citizens of the West African countries experiencing this epidemic, until these countries have defeated the epidemic. Such a restriction should be instituted by suspending earlier-issued visas until further notice, halting the issuance of such visas, and denying entry to the nationals of such countries upon presentation of a passport at our ports of entry.

You have suggested that you will not take such action until the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends it. We specifically call on you not to “pass the buck” on this crucial issue. The WHO is an organization of unelected bureaucrats and political appointees of foreign countries—many of whom are not aligned with U.S. interests, including Iran, Russia, China and Cuba. It has no duty to protect the lives and well-being of Americans, as you do. The responsibility for this decision is yours, not theirs. Nearly every African country, British Airways and Air France have already instituted travel bans to protect their own citizens, but the United States inexplicably has not.

The announcement that the CDC and the Department of Homeland Security’s Customs & Border Protection (CBP) have started enhanced levels of screening at five U.S. airports for all people entering the U.S. from Ebola affected countries is a positive step in the right direction. The further step to have all passengers enter the United States through these designated airports is also welcome, but it is not a complete solution. Given individuals may not show signs of infection for 21 days, they may enter these airports without symptoms and then be free to travel to other destinations throughout America.

Additionally, the CDC should also consider a mandatory quarantine for any individual who has been in direct contact with the Ebola virus within the dormancy period, to ensure that they have not contracted Ebola and are not contagious themselves.

Furthermore, we support continued efforts to provide humanitarian relief to the stricken countries in question, and the measures that we propose should not be misconstrued as a substitute for such relief. Additionally, such measures are meant to protect Americans from individuals who, wittingly or unwittingly, harbor the disease, and these measures are not meant to constrain American citizens in any manner not already in effect under our health laws. Finally, we do not intend that such measures impede trade with any of the countries in question, nor that they last for any period beyond the current crisis.

Because of its extraordinary and unprecedented death rate, the current Ebola outbreak is, by far, one of the most challenging global health epidemics that the world has faced in decades. It is of the utmost importance that your Administration take these commonsense steps to protect U.S. citizens from this Ebola epidemic.

Sincerely,



Robert Pittenger
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



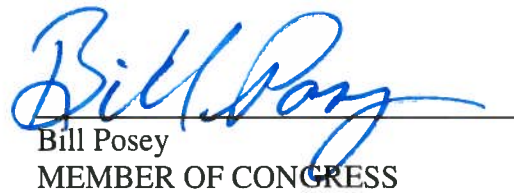
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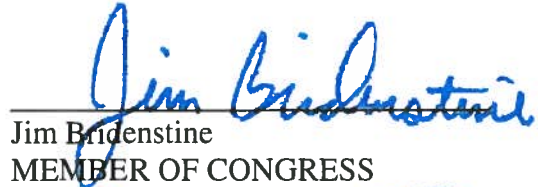
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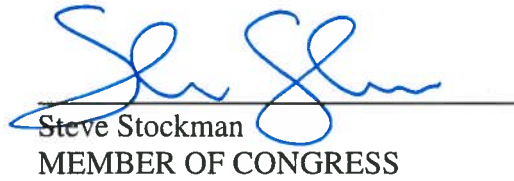
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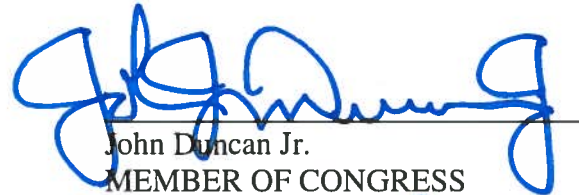
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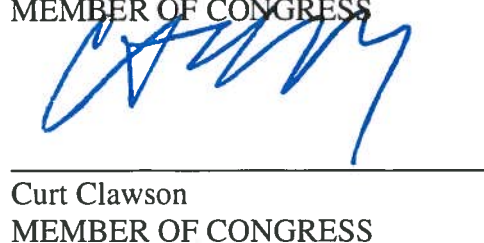
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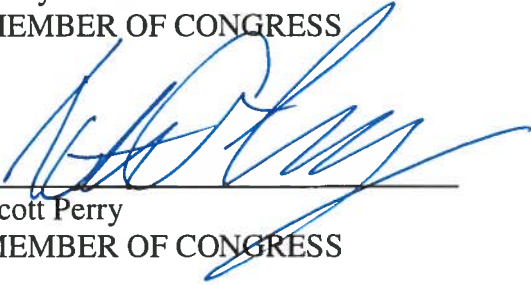
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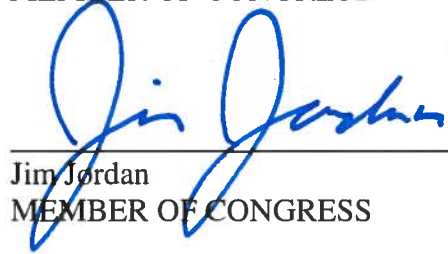
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CC: Secretary John Kerry, U.S. Department of State
Secretary Jeh Johnson, U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Director Tom Frieden, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Mr. Ron Klain, Ebola Response Coordinator