



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

### “Real-Time Assessment of the Federal Response to Pandemic Influenza”

October 27, 2009 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats, Cybersecurity, and Science and Technology hearing entitled “Real-Time Assessment of the Federal Response to Pandemic Influenza”:

“Pandemic influenza is not a new phenomenon. Historically, there have been others, and by the time the H1N1 pandemic began this year, we were well overdue.

Although the disease caused by the H1N1 strain of influenza is not as severe as it could have been, we remain concerned. It is already infecting human beings. Pediatric deaths are increasing. Pregnant women are also dying. We realize that if further mutations occur – as often happens with influenza viruses – the death rate could become much higher.

As it is, every country in the world has been affected, and global society has changed. Prior to April 2009, work was underway to prepare for pandemic influenza.

However, even though we knew that an influenza pandemic was coming and that we feared the consequences of such a disease– we were not prepared as a Nation. This Committee knew that pandemic influenza would greatly affect the security of our Nation and homeland. It is for this reason that I made oversight of pandemic preparedness a priority, and the oversight of pandemic response a requirement.

Coming into this pandemic, it was clear to the Committee that:

- Early warning, detection, and biosurveillance were inadequate;
- Execution of key pandemic planning activities was incomplete;
- A different standard of care under pandemic conditions had not been identified;
- Triage rules under pandemic conditions had not been modified;
- Pharmaceutical interventions were limited;
- Recommendations for the use of personal protective equipment and other non-pharmaceutical interventions were lacking;
- Pandemic preparedness was poorly measured; and
- The Federal Departments and agencies were not working together as well as they could have been.

However, the pandemic did start in April, and no matter how prepared we were or were not, the Nation and the world stopped preparing and started responding. In January of this year, before the pandemic started, I instructed the Majority staff of this Committee to release a report – *Getting Beyond Getting Ready for Pandemic Influenza*. In that report, we made a number of key recommendations for the Nation to become prepared.

Some of these have been implemented. For example: We have seen Federal Departments and agencies work better together to respond to the pandemic. The CDC is issuing new health care delivery guidance, and a number of response plans have been completed.

However, we are also seeing predictable problems occur during the pandemic response:

- Many public and private sector entities are having difficulty reporting how the disease is

- affecting them or what resources they need;
- We do not have a truly accurate picture of how the disease is affecting the Nation or the world; Coordination between among agencies still needs to occur, even within Departments such as Homeland Security and Health and Human Services;
  - Hospitals are still determining what the acceptable level of care should be under pandemic conditions;
  - We are still hobbled by the limitations of egg-based vaccine production;
  - Criminals are infiltrating the pharmaceutical system and trying to sell counterfeit antivirals and vaccine; and
  - Confusing messages are still going out to the public.

The Obama Administration is working to address these shortcomings while the response to the H1N1 pandemic is occurring. We know how hard that it is to do, and this Committee stands ready to work with the Administration in this important endeavor. As leaders, we all share in the responsibility to address this threat and fight this pandemic.”

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