

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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### Opening Statement Ranking Member Tammy Duckworth

#### Hearing on “The Zika Virus: Coordination of a Multi-agency Response” February 24, 2016

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our expert witnesses for being here today.

Today’s hearing is an important opportunity to examine the effectiveness of our current efforts to combat the Zika virus, and ensure that the interagency response is efficiently coordinated. There have been 82 reported cases of Zika in the United States, including 4 cases in my home State of Illinois. To date, these cases have been limited to travelers returning to the U.S. from affected countries or individuals who have had sex with returning travelers.

As a new mother, I deeply understand the public’s concern over Zika virus. The recent outbreak of this public health threat in Brazil has shed light on a disease of which most Americans were not aware. And as the head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Tom Frieden, recently explained, even in the scientific community, there is an astounding lack of literature examining the Zika virus.

Fortunately, our public health community is working hard to change this. Since the last major Zika outbreak in 2007, the CDC developed a test to detect Zika in the first week of an illness or in a sample taken from an affected child. More recently, the CDC activated its emergency operations center last month in response to the Zika outbreak, and on February 1<sup>st</sup>, the World Health Organization designated the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

Our public health system has acted quickly to increase its surveillance and diagnosis capabilities in affected areas – and to ramp up what had been very limited scientific research on the Zika virus. I want to thank CDC and NIH for their hard work.

However, much work remains to be done so that we can better understand the Zika virus and develop proven strategies to treat affected individuals, contain the virus’ spread and, ultimately, develop effective therapies and vaccines that neutralize the threat entirely. Further, we must work diligently to assess every available control measure and adopt the most effective policies to prevent the virus from entering the mosquito population in the continental United States.

Equally important, in light of what appears to be the Zika virus’ capacity to cause severe birth defects, we must also provide safe, effective and affordable contraception to individuals living in

areas of risk for Zika transmission. This includes taking action to strengthen healthcare services in areas where mosquito populations are already carrying Zika, such as Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

Zika, like pandemics before it, knows no boundaries. Our contributions to public health efforts in central and South America are, first and foremost, the right thing to do. But they are also critical to controlling the spread of this disease.

That is why I fully support the President's proposal for \$1.9 billion in emergency funding for the domestic and international response to Zika.

I also emphasize that continued, consistent investment in public health remains critical in periods of crisis as well as in periods of calm. Our public health agencies are able to mobilize with agility today because they have built on decades of institutional knowledge, capacity and lessons learned to anticipate and better respond to emerging threats.

The emergence of Zika should serve as a warning that we must continue to invest in our world-class public health infrastructure to defend us both against this threat and the viruses that will surely appear in the future.

Until we have more answers, we all must remain vigilant against Zika. We must all take reasonable precautions so that we give the next generation the best chance at full, healthy lives.

This requires the cooperation of both men and women to prevent transmission – to other humans or to mosquitoes in the continental U.S. I urge everyone to proceed with caution to protect themselves, their partners, their families, and their communities.

I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses and thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing today. I yield back.

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