Inaction is Inconceivable:

Drafting Letters to the Editor on the Need to Prepare for the Next Pandemic

Here are General Tips for Writing LTEs.

Topline Messages:

Emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases pose an imminent threat to the health, well-being, and livelihoods of Americans and populations across the globe.

COVID-19 has taken more than 1 million lives in the U.S. and engendered nearly $4 trillion in federal spending. *The hard truth is this: the next pandemic could be worse*.

Families across the nation have been forced to exhaust their savings and take on staggering debt to weather the COVID pandemic. Researchers are still working to determine the number of Americans who were forced into homelessness. The long-term impact on our children – the toll of **(**or the consequences of) months of lockdowns, prolonged disruptions in their education leading to declining basic reading skills in the US and globally, and chaotic shifts in their day-to-day lives - is not fully known.

The health and fiscal toll of Long COVID is also uncertain. What we do know is individuals across our nation and around the world are still struggling to overcome a range of debilitating symptoms.

To secure the very survival of Americans and populations around the globe, we must leverage our R&D leadership now.

Decades of foundational research conducted around SARS and other coronaviruses enabled the development of COVID-19 testing, treatments, and vaccines with unprecedented speed. The fact is, we know far more about coronaviruses than about pandemic threats from other viral families. A rapid response simply will not be possible if threats from other viral families emerge…unless we invest in preparedness R&D now.

Related Background and Talking Points:

- Recent studies show that devastating pandemics on the scale of the 1918 influenza outbreak and 2020 COVID-19 crisis are likely to happen again in most people's lifetimes.

- Senators from both sides of the aisle have expressed the need for continued investment in pandemic preparedness.

- Senator Burr has stated that the "central issue facing us today is how we can better anticipate the next threat we will face and innovate quickly enough to rise to the challenge. (The PREVENT Pandemics Act) represents a milestone in our efforts to fill current gaps and build on the successes in our pandemic response."
- Senator Murray has said "Time after time we have seen how our response to this pandemic could have, and should have, been better—and the bipartisan legislation we advanced today will ensure we do respond better in the future. After all our families have been through, we owe it to everyone who has worked so hard to get us through this pandemic to take action so we are never in this situation again."

- We were actually far better prepared for the coronavirus, COVID-19, than for threats from other viral families.

  - The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases invested in research after infectious diseases including SARS-CoV-1, H1N1 influenza virus, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV), Ebola virus, Zika virus were discovered.

  - This preparedness laid the foundation for the timely evaluation of the SARS-CoV2 (COVID-19) pandemic. Spurred by NIAID's COVID-19 response, the National Institutes of Health have released a comprehensive plan to ensure we are prepared for the next pandemic, likely to happen sooner rather than later.

  - NIAID's Pandemic Preparedness Plan proposes to:
    - *"Systematically characterize pathogens of concern and increase research and surveillance to identify threats before they emerge*.
    - *Shorten timelines between pathogen emergence or outbreak onset and authorization/approval of candidate diagnostics and medical countermeasures, such as therapeutics and vaccines.*
    - *Bridge or eliminate existing gaps in research, infrastructure, and technology and expand preclinical and clinical testing capacity."*

- Funding for this work across all viral families of pandemic potential, not just coronaviruses, is of paramount and indispensable importance to our national security, as well as health security worldwide. Without first addressing knowledge gaps that exist for other viral families, we will not be able to develop vaccines and therapeutics in less than year as we did with COVID-19.

- Preparing for the next pandemic is a matter of national security. Viruses know no borders, and neither should our response to them. "These are fundamentally ethical, economic, and national security matters. Concerted U.S. action internationally will strengthen the protection of Americans at home but also lift the threat posed by the pandemic to the world's most vulnerable populations, expedite the reopening of the global economy, and enhance U.S. influence in shaping solutions that align with U.S. values and interests," states a 2021 Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) report.

COVID-19 data that underscores the threat posed by future pandemics: Key message - the toll from the next pandemic could be greater.

- According to the Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center, COVID-19 has taken 1,039,394 million lives in the United States and 6,447,020 million globally. Use this resource to find other salient data points on the impact of COVID-19

- According to this report by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly 30 million adults in the US – 14 percent -- reported that their households were not able to secure sufficient food.

- Use data from this Carsey School of Public Policy study to illustrate the potential jobs impact in your state if another pandemic arises.

- The COVID-19 pandemic had a disproportionate health and economic impact on racial and ethnic minorities.

- Preparing for impending pandemics will reduce the overall necessary investment, health care costs, and toll on human lives. Under the Trump and Biden Administrations, public, private, and nonprofit sector COVID R&D investment has saved over 2.2 million lives in the U.S. and an estimated $900 billion in health care costs.

- We cannot underestimate the havoc the next pandemic may wreak on the U.S. and global economy. This Brookings Institute report delineates the global economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.