

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0917

October 14, 2014

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20006

Dear President Obama:

I am writing concerning your efforts to prevent the spread of the Ebola Virus in West Africa and into the United States. I am specifically requesting more information regarding the travel of U.S. citizens to Ebola-stricken West African nations, as well as the nature of West African citizens' travel to the U.S. I am extremely concerned that existing pre-screening procedures at airports in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia and the enhanced entry screening at five U.S. airports fail to restrict travelers not yet exhibiting symptoms of Ebola from entering the US.

Your Administration has assured the American people that it will continuously work to increase the safety of Americans and that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Department of Homeland Security's Customs & Border Protection (CBP) expanded entry screening of travelers will further protect the health of Americans. However, what concerns me is that the Director of the CDC also stated that "nothing we can do will get us to absolute zero risk until we end the Ebola epidemic in West Africa." Rather than stating what the U.S. can't do and issuing an outright refusal on further travel restrictions to and from West Africa, we should be exploring every feasible and available option to get as close to zero risk as possible.

Americans have heard various arguments against a travel ban from your respective Departments and agencies, representatives from the World Health Organization, airlines servicing West Africa, businesses, and various international legal experts including that it would make it harder to stop the outbreak at its source, would be unethical and violate international law, would feed hysteria and isolation, would hamper humanitarian assistance and would further damage the economies of Western African nations. I respect and appreciate the perspective of the many experts with extensive experience in handling international humanitarian health crises. However, I believe further statistical and anecdotal evidence is necessary to support these arguments and to better explain to the American people why issuing travel restrictions, however minimal, is not in our national security interest.

Therefore, I respectfully request your response to the following questions wherever applicable to your portfolio as soon as possible:

- 1) Restricting the issuance of B-2 tourist visas for citizens in Ebola-stricken countries would not appear to impact travel to and from these three countries by international workers and volunteers. The first Ebola patient diagnosed in the U.S., Mr. Thomas Duncan, was by all accounts permitted to travel to the U.S. with a B-2 tourist visa issued in Liberia. Please provide the most up-to-date and comprehensive information available, starting from the onset of the Ebola outbreak, regarding the number of B-2 tourist visa applicants processed in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, the number that have been approved, the number of those rejected, and to the extent possible, the reasons for rejection.

- 2) Please explain current Administration policy for allowing dual citizens and B-2 visa-holders to travel to and from Ebola-stricken countries for strictly tourist-related purposes, including information on the Department of State's decision to not yet utilize its existing authority to limit tourist travel as another measure in preventing the spread of Ebola to the U.S.
- 3) Additionally, I am requesting comprehensive information regarding the total number of individuals who have traveled from the three primary Ebola-stricken countries to the U.S. since the beginning of this year and their method of travel, including the number of dual passport holders, the number of those traveling utilizing a travel visa, and a breakdown of the remaining visa categories that were issued to and used by travelers. Of those individuals who traveled to the U.S. utilizing a B-2 tourist visa this year, please identify how many have overstayed or will reach their visitation limit this year? Of those individuals that are dual citizens of the U.S. and either Guinea, Liberia or Sierra Leone, please include any available information regarding the stated nature of these individuals' travel to and from the U.S. to West Africa.
- 4) Ultimately, while procedures exist for preventing individuals already exhibiting symptoms of the Ebola Virus to travel, it's widely understood that symptoms can occur up to 21 days after initial exposure to the virus. Please explain how you plan to respond and are working to address the obvious gap in preparedness to limit those individuals who are not yet exhibiting Ebola symptoms – but have contracted the virus – from passing through entry screening at U.S. airports and are therefore granted entry into the U.S. Are there procedures in place for tracking these individuals throughout the 21 day incubation period while they're in the U.S.? Would limiting non-essential travel of dual-citizens and those receiving tourist visas alleviate the burden on CBP and CDC personnel charged with entry screening, and would it reduce the risk of allowing individuals with the virus into the U.S.? If not, explain why.

I look forward to your immediate attention and response to these questions, and believe this information is critical to helping the American people and Congress better understand the scope and nature of the Administration's strategy to combat the spread of Ebola. Please contact my Legislative Director, Jessica Moore, by phone or e-mail at (202) 225-5792 or Jessica.Moore@mail.house.gov should you need any additional information or have any questions.

Sincerely,



Thomas J. Rooney

CC: Secretary John Kerry, U.S. Department of State
Secretary Jeh Johnson, U.S. Department of Homeland Secretary
Director Tom Frieden, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention