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COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY - RANKING MEMBER
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United States Senate

January 15, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

I write regarding recent reports that a new deadly coronavirus linked to a pneumonia outbreak in China has traveled internationally and to ask what steps your department is taking to ensure that the United States is fully prepared for the potential of a wider outbreak.
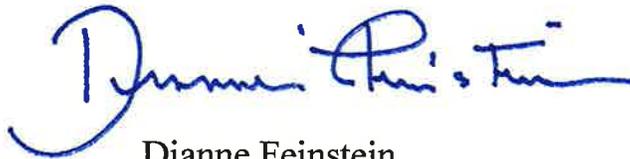
Currently, more than 40 cases of pneumonia linked to the new virus in Wuhan, China, have been reported, and one patient has died. It has also been reported that a Chinese traveler with the virus has been hospitalized in Thailand. The World Health Organization has now said there may have been limited human-to-human transmission, and there is the possibility of a wider outbreak.

We saw during the 2014 Ebola outbreak that we were not ready when the virus first arrived in our country. Although the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had issued detailed guidelines for hospitals, not all health providers were ready to fully comply with proper infectious disease control protocols and procedures to the level needed in treating Ebola patients.

According to a 2019 report by the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board, the risk of disease has increased due to global trends, including climate change, and there is a very real threat of a catastrophic global pandemic that could kill up to 80 million people and wipe out nearly 5% of the world's economy.

As we begin 2020 already facing a new threat to global health, I ask what steps your department is taking so that Americans are protected from world health emergencies that threaten us all. Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to working with you on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

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