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**Bipartisan Panel States Nation in Need of Centralized Leadership and Major Reform to Strengthen Biodefense**

- Report recommends Office of the Vice President of the United States assume authority over biodefense efforts, calls for comprehensive strategy and unified budget
- Panel co-chaired by former Senator Joe Lieberman (I-CT) and former Governor Tom Ridge (R-PA)

WASHINGTON, D.C. (October 28, 2015) — Today, the bipartisan Blue Ribbon Study Panel on Biodefense, co-chaired by Senator Joe Lieberman (I-CT) and former Governor and Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge (R-PA), released the first comprehensive examination of U.S. biodefense efforts in over a decade, calling for major reforms to strengthen America's ability to confront intentionally introduced, accidentally released, and naturally occurring biological threats.

The report, *A National Blueprint for Biodefense: Leadership and Major Reform Needed to Optimize Efforts*, details America's vulnerability to bioterrorism and deadly outbreaks and emphasizes the need to transform the way our government is organized to confront these threats. Biodefense recommendations include centralizing leadership in the Office of the Vice President; establishing a White House Biodefense Coordination Council; strengthening state, local, territorial, and tribal capabilities; and promoting innovation through sustained biodefense prioritization and funding.

"The U.S. government has worked to address myriad security challenges since September 11, 2001," said Senator Joe Lieberman. "Unfortunately, biological threats are not given the same level of attention as are other threats, leaving us significantly underprepared – but this does not have to be the case. Dramatic improvements are within our reach if we follow a national blueprint for biodefense, demand strong leadership, and build on the good work already underway."

"The U.S. is vulnerable to biological threats because we lack strong centralized leadership at the highest level of government," said Governor Tom Ridge. "We need one person – a leader with the charge, authority, vision, and expertise – to pull together more than a dozen departments and agencies, as well as the private sector, to defend against biological threats to the Nation. Biodefense touches many aspects of society and as such, requires a complex enterprise approach, something we currently lack."

The comprehensive report includes specific and pragmatic legislative, programmatic, and policy actions in the form of 33 urgent recommendations and close to 100 action items. The panel scrutinized the status of prevention, deterrence, preparedness, detection, response, attribution, recovery, and mitigation – the spectrum of activities deemed necessary for biodefense by both Republican and Democratic Administrations, and many policy experts. They identified substantial achievements, but also found serious gaps that continue to leave the homeland vulnerable to biological threats.

### **Leadership and Achieving Coordination**

One of the main areas addressed by the panel is the need for leadership and coordination in biodefense. This could be addressed in part by institutionalizing biodefense in the Office of the Vice President of the United States and establishing a Biodefense Coordination Council at the White House, as well as developing and implementing a comprehensive national biodefense strategy. The panel also concluded that the nation needs to unify biodefense budgeting, determine a clear congressional agenda for biodefense, and improve management of the biological intelligence enterprise. Authors also emphasized the need for a One Health approach, aligning and prioritizing medical countermeasures, improving biological attribution capabilities, and establishing an environment decontamination and remediation capacity.

### **Elevating Collaboration**

Many of the actions items detail the need to elevate collaboration, including optimizing and implementing national biosurveillance, supporting emergency preparedness, improving information sharing between federal and local governments, and fully funding the Public Health Emergency Preparedness cooperative agreement. Additionally, the panel suggests creating incentives for hospital preparedness and implementing a Medical Countermeasure Response Framework. The panel also makes recommendations to secure pathogens against cyber attacks, reengage with the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, and increase military-civilian collaboration for biodefense.

### **Driving Innovation**

The panel recommends prioritizing innovation over incrementalism in medical countermeasure development, and fully funding medical countermeasure efforts. The panel emphasizes the nation must reinstate Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) contracting authorities, provide an advance appropriation to authorized levels for the BioShield Special Reserve Fund, and better incentivize development of countermeasures. The report strongly encourages renewed focus on the need for rapid diagnostics, and prioritization of the development of a fully functional environmental detection system to replace BioWatch. The panel also recommends a review and overhaul of the Select Agent Program and urges the U.S. to lead the way toward establishing a functional and agile global public health response apparatus.

The report's findings will be further discussed at a panel event held in Washington, D.C., this morning.

### **About the Blue Ribbon Study Panel on Biodefense**

The panel was formed to recommend changes to U.S. policy and law to strengthen national biodefense while optimizing resource investments. Former Senator Joe Lieberman and former Governor Tom Ridge co-chair the panel, joined by panel members Former Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala, former Senator Tom Daschle, former Representative Jim Greenwood, and the Honorable Kenneth Wainstein. Hudson Institute and the Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies of the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies are institutional sponsors. The Panel is financially supported through donations from foundations, coalitions, industry, and academia.

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