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Incremental Progress Not Enough To Handle Biological Emergencies, Let Alone Catastrophic Events

*Blue Ribbon Study Panel on Biodefense Releases New Report on Biodefense Indicators;
Renews Call for New Administration and Congress to Assert Leadership Roles*

WASHINGTON, D.C. (Dec. 13, 2016) – While acknowledging some positive efforts over the past year by the White House and Congress, the bipartisan Blue Ribbon Study Panel on Biodefense (Panel) says the incremental progress is not enough to defend against biological emergencies, let alone catastrophic events. The [report, **Biodefense Indicators - One Year Later, Events Outpacing Federal Efforts to Defend the Nation**](#), states that while the biological threat is real and continues to grow, our nation remains woefully under-prepared for dangerous biological incidents.

During remarks today before the National Healthcare Coalition Preparedness Conference, Co-chair Tom Ridge, the nation's first Secretary of Homeland Security, said the Panel welcomes the opportunity to work with President-Elect Trump and leaders of the 115th Congress to make biodefense a national priority.

"The fact is that the federal government continues to be much better organized and able to address threats posed by other weapons of mass destruction than biological weapons," said Governor Ridge. "And emergent diseases obviously challenge our country and the world. Zika revealed weaknesses in U.S. resilience to outbreaks and the health of the U.S. population. We do not sufficiently prioritize funding in advance, we are unable to rapidly develop, approve, and field the medical countermeasures we need, and we politicize our responses to these events. All of this renders us weak, even while biological events increasingly threaten the nation."

"The burden now falls on the new Administration and Congress to take up – and overcome – this challenge. Nevertheless, they do not need to start from scratch. We have for them a blueprint for biodefense and welcome the opportunity to work together to put it into action."

The Panel assessed biodefense efforts across the spectrum from prevention to recovery, and developed detailed recommendations for the federal government to improve and optimize these efforts. In its [first report](#), released one year ago, the Panel put forward 33 recommendations and 87 action items that, if implemented, would dramatically and

quickly improve biodefense. They addressed the need for enhanced federal coordination, optimized collaboration with non-federal partners (particularly in the private sector), and timely adoption of innovative solutions for technological and governance challenges.

The Panel determined that the government could achieve these actions in one, three, or five years. It directed each item toward the White House, a department or agency within the Executive Branch, the Congress, or a combination of these. Today's report provides an assessment of how much progress has been made in implementing the short-term, one-year action items.

Of the 46 actions expected to be acted upon within one year, only 2 were completed, and 17 saw partial action, leaving 27 unaddressed. The most significant positive development was that Congress included the requirement for a comprehensive national biodefense strategy in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2017.

The majority of the recommendations required action by the White House or by the departments and agencies that comprise the Executive Branch. The single most important, given the absence of centralized coordination, was for the President to appoint the Vice President as the leader of federal biodefense efforts. This is the single best action the Administration can take to resolve the continued challenges in biodefense.

Panel Co-Chair Senator Joe Lieberman stated, "Our call for the Vice President to be the leader of federal biodefense efforts may be unconventional, but other efforts to date simply have not worked. To ensure the mission receives proper oversight and authority, the nation needs the overarching leadership of the Vice President."

Senator Lieberman added, "Alone, each of our recommendations facilitates some degree of positive change. However, together, they provide a blueprint for biodefense capable of addressing 21st Century biological threats and meeting public expectations of the government to deal with them. We urge the incoming Administration and Congress to review and implement our recommendations in their entirety."

The report concludes by calling upon the next President to institutionalize leadership of biodefense at the White House in the Office of the Vice President, and calling upon Congress to establish a joint oversight agenda for biodefense.

Senator Lieberman noted that in its November 2016 letter to President Obama, the [President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology](#) detailed recommendations to the President that were either consistent with, or the same as, those made by the Panel.

"As Panel Members of the Blue Ribbon Study Panel on Biodefense, we remain committed to addressing the biological threat," said Governor Ridge. "We look forward to collaborating with the White House, Congress, federal government, and private sector on this urgent issue. In the coming year, we will continue to assess implementation, examine pressing topics, and address new issues demanding attention."

In addition to the requirement for a comprehensive national biodefense strategy in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2017, Congress also recently advanced several

other legislative proposals to meet a number of the Panel's recommendations, including the [21st Century Cures Act](#) and the [First Responder Anthrax Preparedness Act](#).

About the Blue Ribbon Study Panel on Biodefense

The [Blue Ribbon Study Panel on Biodefense](#) released its report, *A National Blueprint for Biodefense: Leadership and Major Reform Needed to Optimize Efforts*, in October 2015. The report identified capability gaps and recommended changes to U.S. policy and law to strengthen national biodefense while optimizing resource investments. The panel is co-chaired by former Senator Joe Lieberman and former Governor Tom Ridge, who are joined by former Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala, former Senator Tom Daschle, former Representative Jim Greenwood, and the Honorable Ken Wainstein. [Hudson Institute](#), [Potomac Institute for Policy Studies](#), and the [Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies](#) are the Panel's institutional sponsors.

Editor's Note: Please find the attached Quote Sheet featuring comments on this report made by fellow Panel members. You are invited to incorporate these quotes into your coverage.

QUOTE SHEET FEATURING PANEL MEMBERS DASCHLE, SHALALA, GREENWOOD AND WAINSTEIN

Panel Member Tom Daschle, who served as the Senate Majority Leader during the attacks on September 11, 2001 and the anthrax attacks later that autumn, stated, “We have seen some progress this last year, but really not enough to ensure that we are fully prepared for the next big event. We need to do a much better job on standards for remediation of buildings, businesses, and the environment following an event like an anthrax attack, and the onus to ensure that this is a priority is really on the Administration and Congress. While the federal government is finally funding the network of state animal diagnostic labs, we need to better protect the livestock and agriculture industries that are the backbone of our economy. The Panel will spend time in the coming year unearthing what we suspect to be fairly major vulnerabilities to these sectors.”

Panel Member Donna Shalala, who served as Secretary of Health and Human Services for President Bill Clinton, cited the opportunity that the incoming Administration and Congress have to improve global response to public health crises. “Ebola revealed weaknesses in global readiness and capacity to respond to major public health crises. The United States needs to be much more aggressive in proposing and leading the development of a new approach to the global management of infectious diseases, one that is firmly rooted in public-private partnerships and based on a business model that provides effective incentives for stakeholders to participate.” Secretary Shalala added, “In our progress report, we describe some progress with the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. We should use the partnerships we build through this process to inform our global health diplomacy efforts.”

Panel Member Jim Greenwood, President and CEO of the Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO) and a former congressional Representative from Pennsylvania stated, “Over the last two years, our Panel worked to provide oversight over federal biodefense efforts. In 2016, Congress advanced positive reforms toward the creation of a comprehensive biodefense strategy and the establishment of a White House biodefense coordination council. In recent weeks, with the passage of the 21st Century Cures Act, Congress has also provided several key measures to improve the private sector’s partnership with the federal government to enhance our nation’s biodefense preparedness, including important programs to stimulate private investment in the development of life-saving medical countermeasures. The passage of these measures signal a commitment from Congress to bolster our national health security. However, it is important to understand that these improvements are incremental and there remains much work to be done. I look forward to working with Congress and the incoming Administration to advance the urgently needed reforms that will ensure the security of America from biological threats.”

Panel Member Ken Wainstein, former Homeland Security Advisor to President George W. Bush, added, “In the years since the President issued major directives on biological defense in 2004, a proliferation of additional policies and laws has led to increasingly fragmented biodefense efforts by over a dozen different agencies working on tracks that are sometimes parallel and sometimes not. This situation has resulted in wasted resources and insufficient progress on national biodefense, and it will only be fixed with strong, determined leadership from the White House.”