



Speaker of the House of Representatives  
Representative Nancy Pelosi  
H-232, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

Senate Majority Leader  
Senator Mitch McConnell  
S-230, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

House Minority Leader  
Representative Kevin McCarthy  
H-204, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

Senate Minority Leader  
Senator Charles E. Schumer  
S-221, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

June 8, 2020

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer,

Thank you for your leadership during this national crisis. As the Nation continues to grapple with the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we believe that Congress must also take action now to prepare for the next biological event.

Established in 2014, the Bipartisan Commission on Biodefense – formerly known as the Blue Ribbon Study Panel on Biodefense – continually assesses and recommends changes to U.S. policy and law to strengthen the Nation’s ability to defend against naturally occurring infectious diseases and biological attacks. The Commission is bipartisan in both approach and membership, with three Republicans and three Democrats as members: former Senator Joe Lieberman (chair), former Governor Tom Ridge (chair), former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, former Representative Jim Greenwood, former Homeland Security Advisor Ken Wainstein, and former Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Advisor Lisa Monaco.

After a year of investigation, we issued our foundational report in 2015, *A National Blueprint for Biodefense: Leadership and Major Reform Needed to Optimize Efforts*. We concluded then that America was not prepared for a large-scale biological event. Our recommendations addressed the leadership, coordination, collaboration, resource investments, and innovation needed to reduce catastrophic biological risk to the Nation.

Congress, with bipartisan support, addressed a number of our recommendations in statute, including, for example, mandating the formulation of a National Biodefense Strategy in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017. Signed into law by President Obama, the Trump Administration developed and released the Strategy in September 2018. We regret, however, that too few of our recommendations were implemented or funded, and as a result, America was no more prepared when the COVID-19 crisis hit this year than when we issued our baseline report in 2015.

This will not be the last biological crisis this Nation faces. In addition to the potential resurgence of COVID-19 cases this fall, other naturally occurring diseases continue to mutate and work their way around the world, and both state- and non-state actors continue to invest in biological weapons programs that may well come to fruition and threaten us. It is not too early to start examining and learning from the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic, and determining what the public and private sectors need to do next, even as we continue to respond to the current crisis.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Congress established the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, which produced a superb final report in July 2004, almost three years after the attacks. According to experts, another biological event – whether naturally occurring or human generated – is likely to strike our country and the world in the near future. Our country needs answers in months. We cannot, therefore, wait three years before taking action. When it comes to infectious disease, time is not on our side.

Our bipartisan group has spent the past six years examining ways to strengthen our defense against biological threats, and we have well-developed findings and recommendations that are directly applicable to the COVID-19 crisis. As Congress considers different mechanisms for reviewing and improving our Nation’s biodefense, we wish to make ourselves and our bipartisan work available to facilitate and expedite that effort. Each of us on the Commission and our staff would be honored to make such a contribution. We are confident that our involvement would significantly shorten the timeline by which our Nation develops the comprehensive readiness and response capacity needed to address the modern-day threat of infectious disease. We offer our Commission’s support in any way you think we can help.

We have attached three of our previous reports as background on our work. Please do not hesitate to call upon us if you wish to discuss our work or our potential engagement with upcoming COVID-19 review efforts. Your staff can contact Dr. Asha M. George, Commission Executive Director, at [Asha.George@BiodefenseCommission.org](mailto:Asha.George@BiodefenseCommission.org) or (202) 974-2416 with any questions. We are also available if you wish to talk with us directly.

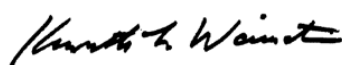
Sincerely,



Joseph I. Lieberman, Chair




Thomas A. Daschle



Kenneth L. Wainstein



Thomas J. Ridge, Chair



James C. Greenwood



Lisa O. Monaco

- Attachments: (1) *A National Blueprint for Biodefense: Leadership and Major Reform Needed to Optimize Efforts*
- (2) *Holding the Line on Biodefense: State, Local, Tribal and Territorial Reinforcements Needed*
- (3) *Budget Reform for Biodefense: Integrated Budget Needed to Increase Return on Investment*