



TFAH COMMENDS U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES FOR PASSING DOWN PAYMENT TO JUMP START PANDEMIC FLU PREPAREDNESS, URGES PRESIDENT TO REQUEST FULL PAYMENT IN FY 07 BUDGET

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WASHINGTON, December 19, 2005 – The following is a statement by Jeffrey Levi, PhD, Senior Policy Advisor at Trust for America's Health (TFAH):

“The passage today by the U.S. House of Representatives of \$3.8 billion for pandemic flu preparedness across several federal agencies is an important down payment to jump start government efforts to protect the public from a pandemic influenza outbreak. The threat of a pandemic requires swift and serious action, and the House should be commended for making this major initial investment. But much remains to be done, including addressing the \$3.46 billion shortfall in funding when compared to the President's original pandemic flu budget request.

We will be closely watching the President's Fiscal Year 2007 budget submission, expected to be released in February 2006, to ensure that full funding is allocated for the critical preparedness efforts outlined in the Administration's pandemic flu plan. Without full funding, there will be insufficient resources for the vital protections, ranging from vaccine development and surge capacity in the U.S. health care system to global disease surveillance, that are needed to identify, contain and treat pandemic flu should an outbreak occur. Funds must also be budgeted to support federal agencies beyond the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to plan for business, transportation, economic and other interruptions that could result from a pandemic.

We are pleased that the House has provided \$350 million for upgrading state and local pandemic flu response capacity, more than double the President's November 1, 2005 request for similar activities. State and local health departments will be on the front lines of a pandemic response. Increased resources are vital to building and testing their capabilities. This is particularly important in light of the ill-advised 14 percent cut in support for state and local bioterrorism and public health preparedness contained in the FY 2006 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

In addition, we are concerned that the bill's sweeping liability protections for the vaccine industry are excessive and that the final legislation fails to fund a compensation program for those adversely affected by pandemic flu vaccines, including health care workers and first responders. The Senate is expected to address the pandemic influenza measure later this week. We urge the Senate to provide a more meaningful and adequately funded vaccine injury compensation fund.”

Trust for America's Health is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority.

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