

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 26, 2007

The Honorable Michael Chertoff
Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Julie Louise Gerberding, MD, MPH
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Rd
Atlanta, GA 30333

Dear Secretary Chertoff and Director Gerberding,

My colleagues and I write to express serious concern with the spread of illness and disease brought to the United States by illegal immigrants. The federal government and the American people were shocked by the case of Andrew Speaker, an American who traveled to and from the United States while infected with a dangerous strain of tuberculosis ("TB"). At the same time, little is being done about the thousands of illegal immigrants who run across our borders every day – individuals who are not screened for tuberculosis or other communicable diseases.

Immigrants who come to the United States legally are subject to a health examination as part of the process for obtaining a green card. This includes screenings for tuberculosis and other threatening diseases. Unfortunately an estimated 4 million or more illegal border crossings occur each year in the United States. When these illegal border crossers circumvent border ports of entry and the legal immigration process, there is no way to determine if they are infected with potentially dangerous diseases like TB. If we are outraged that one infected U.S. citizen crossed our borders unchecked, shouldn't we be outraged that thousands of persons sneak into the country each day without any health screening at all?


Experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ("CDC") have acknowledged that immigration is linked to the spread of diseases, stating "immigration is a major force that sustains the incidence of tuberculosis" in the United States and other developed countries. In a March 23, 2007 report, the CDC found that "the proportion of TB cases among foreign-born persons has increased each year since 1993." While the rate of TB infections among U.S. born persons is 2.3 cases per 100,000, the rate of infection for foreign born persons is nearly nine times higher, with 21.9 cases per 100,000 individuals. CDC experts also reported that "for the third consecutive year, more TB cases were reported among Hispanics than any other racial/ethnic population."

While the CDC and other entities often do not distinguish between illegal and legal immigrants in their studies, we know that illegal immigrants now comprise a significant proportion of the foreign-born population – perhaps one-third or more. It is not a surprise that the rate of TB infections is highest in the states that attract the most illegal immigrants. For example, the highest rates of TB infections are in such states as California, Texas, Florida, New York, and the District of Columbia.

In addition to TB, we should be concerned about the many other diseases thought to be nearly eradicated in the United States that could be brought back through unchecked immigrants, including hepatitis B, polio, and avian flu, just to name a few.

Diseases don't respect borders. Thus illegal immigration is a serious health threat to American citizens. We hope that the incident last week involving Mr. Speaker will serve as a stark reminder to the Department of Homeland Security and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the need to ensure that millions of people who lack sufficient health screenings are unable to continue to enter and reside in the United States.

Sincerely,


Rep. Phil Gingrey, MD



Rep. Duncan Hunter


Rep. Tom Price, MD

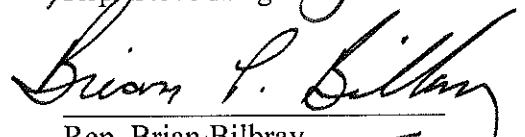

Rep. Tom Tancredo

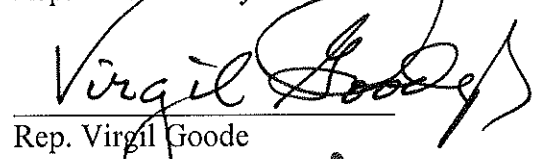

Rep. Sue Myrick

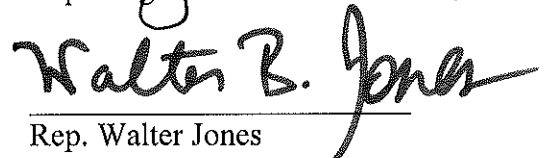

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