

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**KENNEDY FLOOR REMARKS ON AVIAN FLU AMENDMENT**

(As prepared for delivery)

It's a privilege to join Senator Harkin, Senator Reid, and other Democratic colleagues on this needed proposal to improve the nation's preparedness to deal with the danger of avian flu.

We need to act, because the Administration has failed to prepare adequately for a flu pandemic. The danger of a major hurricane hitting the Gulf Coast was ignored until it was too late. We can't make the same mistake with pandemic flu. We can't afford to leave preparations to chance, or wait until disaster strikes to take action.

The new strain of flu is uniquely dangerous, taking the lives of half the patients who become sick with it. The deadly new strain has heaped from Asia to parts of Europe. Who knows when it could strike America, too? We must hope that the new strain never acquires the ability to pass from person to person, but we cannot base our plans on hope. We cannot allow a deadly flu epidemic to become another failure like the response to Hurricane Katrina.

America can do better. We still have time to avert the serious consequences that a massive epidemic would bring, but only if we act now. The amendment we offer today will provide immediate help to protect American families from this danger.

Instead of taking needed action, the Administration has turned a deaf ear and a blind eye to warning after warning. Basic recommendations for action by the Institute of Medicine. Cries of alarm from public health experts. Reports by GAO and statements by the World Health Organization – all have been ignored for too long.

Now is the time to end the delays and take the actions needed to keep American's families safe.

An effective plan is fundamental. GAO called for a plan over five years ago. I wrote to HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson in January 2004, urging him to release a plan without further delay. Nearly two years later, there is still no final plan. We should have been implementing a flu plan long before now – not waiting to read it for the first time.

Other nations have recognized the urgency of proper planning. Japan issues its pandemic preparedness plan in 1997. Brazil in 1999. Canada, Britain and Australia each came out with their plan long ago. They've been putting their plans into action for some time – but we're still waiting for ours to be released.

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