

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 30, 2020

The Honorable Mark Green
Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
Ronald Reagan Building
Washington, D.C. 20523

Dear Administrator Green,

The deadly coronavirus that emerged in Wuhan, China has spread to the United States,¹ and its advance appears to be accelerating. Addressing and preventing the spread of coronavirus and potential pandemic disease outbreaks is a serious matter that requires adequate resources for and cooperation between experts throughout the federal government. That is why we write today to request information about the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) recent decision to shutter PREDICT, a program established to identify and combat viruses with the capacity to generate global pandemics.²

In early January, Chinese officials began reporting a novel virus originating in Wuhan, China. Researchers soon identified the virus as a new coronavirus strain, known as 2019-nCoV.³ To date, the virus has infected thousands of people and killed over 100.⁴ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is in the process of testing potential virus samples from 36 states, and there are five confirmed U.S. cases to date.⁵ Though the World Health Organization (WHO) has yet to declare the outbreak a public health event of international concern, officials remain concerned about the virus and its potential to spread from human to human and across borders.⁶

The USAID PREDICT program—launched in 2009 after the 2005 H5N1 bird flu sparked global fears of an epidemic—was designed to help identify and combat emerging pandemic threats like

¹ USA Today, "A second US case of deadly coronavirus has been confirmed, this time in Illinois, Ryan W. Miller, January 24, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2020/01/24/coronavirus-wuhan-china-lockdown-quarantine-us-cases/4562257002/>.

² New York Times, "Scientists Were Hunting for the Next Ebola. Now the U.S. Has Cut Off Their Funding," Donald G. McNeil Jr., October 25, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/25/health/predict-usaid-viruses.html>.

³ New York Times, "The Wuhan Coronavirus: Symptoms, Spread, and What Scientists Know," January 21, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/24/world/asia/china-coronavirus.html>; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Human Coronavirus Types," <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/types.html>.

⁴ New York Times, "Coronavirus Live Updates," accessed January 27, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/24/world/asia/china-coronavirus.html>.

⁵ NBC, "Coronavirus in the U.S.: Map of where the virus has been confirmed across the country," Sara G. Miller and Jiachuan Wu, January 28, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/coronavirus-u-s-map-where-virus-has-been-confirmed-across-n1124546>.

⁶ Axios, "WHO: The Coronavirus outbreak is not yet a global emergency," Eileen Drage O'Reilly, January 23, 2020, <https://www.axios.com/who-china-coronavirus-not-global-emergency-yet-69e9f3ea-28f1-4897-a98c-24e9d86b2762.html>.

coronavirus.⁷ PREDICT, part of USAID’s Emerging Pandemic Threats program, was tasked with “strengthen[ing] global capacity for detection and discovery of zoonotic viruses with pandemic potential,” such as “coronaviruses...; paramyxoviruses...; influenza viruses; and filoviruses.”⁸ PREDICT scientists worked with health officials in 31 countries, including China, to “build platforms for disease surveillance”; train “more than 2,500 people...in biosafety, field epidemiology and surveillance, laboratory diagnostics, social sciences and behavioral risk investigations, and modeling and analytics”; develop “detection protocols”; and facilitate information sharing among nations to combat zoonotic viruses.⁹ From 2009 to 2019, the PREDICT program identified nearly 1,000 new viruses, including a new strand of Ebola; trained roughly 5,000 people; and improved or developed 60 research laboratories.¹⁰

Despite its success—and just months before the emergence of 2019-nCoV—USAID announced that it would cease funding the PREDICT program. After years of support from Congress, the Bush Administration, and the Obama Administration, the program was “collapsed into hibernation” by January 2019 and reached the end of its second 5-year funding cycle on September 30, 2019.¹¹ USAID provided the program with a 6-month funding extension—until March 2020—to complete a series of studies on “virus spillover, spread, and countermeasures.”¹² Though USAID says it will build upon PREDICT’s success and will “keep working to detect pathogens with pandemic potential,”¹³ global health experts have expressed concern about the loss of PREDICT’s unique, cutting-edge role in combating epidemics.¹⁴

In November 2019, Senator King sent a letter to USAID highlighting the critical importance of global health security and requesting information on the agency’s decision to not renew PREDICT.¹⁵ In response, the agency stated that, while PREDICT “is scheduled to end,” the “Bureau for Global Health at USAID is planning a successor project, which [the agency] intend[s] to award through a competitive procurement process in 2020.” The new program “will have a focus on both research and capacity-development...such as building workforce capacity in key health-security topics and preventing and preparing for infectious-disease outbreaks with

⁷ New York Times, “Scientists Were Hunting for the Next Ebola. Now the U.S. Has Cut Off Their Funding,” Donald G. McNeil Jr., October 25, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/25/health/predict-usaid-viruses.html>.

⁸ USAID, “Predict: Reducing Pandemic Risk, Promoting Global Health,” <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1864/predict-global-flyer-508.pdf>.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Vox, “A crucial federal program tracking dangerous diseases is shutting down,” October 29, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2019/10/29/20936921/usaid-predict-pandemic-preparedness>; New York Times, “Scientists Were Hunting for the Next Ebola. Now the U.S. Has Cut Off Their Funding,” Donald G. McNeil Jr., October 25, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/25/health/predict-usaid-viruses.html>.

¹¹ New York Times, “Scientists Were Hunting for the Next Ebola. Now the U.S. Has Cut Off Their Funding,” Donald G. McNeil Jr., October 25, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/25/health/predict-usaid-viruses.html>; American Veterinary Medical Association, “Pandemic prevention program ending after 10 years,” January 2, 2020, <https://www.avma.org/javma-news/2020-01-15/pandemic-prevention-program-ending-after-10-years>.

¹² American Veterinary Medical Association, “Pandemic prevention program ending after 10 years,” January 2, 2020, <https://www.avma.org/javma-news/2020-01-15/pandemic-prevention-program-ending-after-10-years>.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ New York Times, “Scientists Were Hunting for the Next Ebola. Now the U.S. Has Cut Off Their Funding,” Donald G. McNeil Jr., October 25, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/25/health/predict-usaid-viruses.html>.

¹⁵ Letter from Senator Angus S. King Jr., to Administrator Mark Green, November 21, 2019.

ministries of health and agriculture.”¹⁶ “The design process for the new procurement” has, according to USAID, already “begun.”¹⁷ However, additional details on this successor program have yet to emerge publicly, leaving the possibility that PREDICT could sunset in March 2020 without an adequate replacement.

The rise of 2019-nCoV heightens the need for a robust, coordinated, and proactive response to emerging pandemics—one of the roles that PREDICT played. We are concerned that, as the 2019-nCoV “Wuhan coronavirus” threatens public health in the U.S. and abroad, programs like PREDICT are winding down rather than ramping up. We request answers to the following questions no later than February 13, 2020:

1. Why did USAID decide not to renew the PREDICT program?
2. What is the current status of the PREDICT program during its 6-month extension phase? What are the specific studies and activities that the program is conducting?
3. USAID says that, despite the closure of PREDICT, the agency will continue to work to detect emerging zoonotic pathogens.
 - a. Please provide a detailed description of USAID’s current and planned efforts to identify and combat the emergence of zoonotic threats. Do these efforts replicate the work of the PREDICT program? What aspects of the PREDICT program, if any, are no longer being conducted at USAID? Has USAID cut the budget for or the number of scientists working to identify and address zoonotic threats?
 - b. Please provide an update on the status of the PREDICT successor project. How many entities are currently competing for funding? How much funding is USAID allocating to this new project? When in 2020 do you expect to announce the successor program?
4. According to reports, certain PREDICT projects “will be taken over by other government agencies, such as the Pentagon’s Defense Threat Reduction Agency or the National Institutes of Health.” However, these agencies “do not share USAID’s goal of training poor countries” to combat threats.¹⁸
 - a. Are these reports accurate, and if so please provide a list of the PREDICT projects that have been or will be taken over by external agencies, including to which agency they have been assigned.
 - b. Will these agencies continue to provide the on-the-ground training to foreign health workers that PREDICT provided? If not, why not?

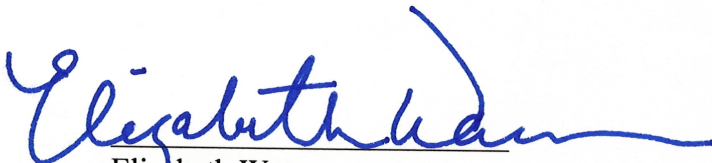
¹⁶ Letter from Richard C. Parker, Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs, USAID, to Senator Angus S. King, Jr., December 31, 2019.

¹⁷ *Id.*

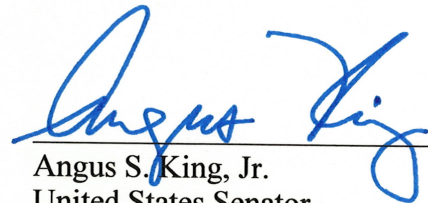
¹⁸ New York Times, “Scientists Were Hunting for the Next Ebola. Now the U.S. Has Cut Off Their Funding,” Donald G. McNeil Jr., October 25, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/25/health/predict-usaid-viruses.html>.

5. What role, if any, is the PREDICT program currently playing in the detection and response of 2019-NCoV and other coronaviruses? Does this response differ in any way from how the program would have responded previous to USAID's decision to not renew the program before its successor was in place?

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator