

Budget Cuts ‘Eroded Our Ability To Respond’

On Sept. 16, the U.S. Senate Committees on Appropriations and Health, Education, Labor, and Pension held a hearing to discuss the resources needed to address the Ebola outbreak. Sen Patty Murray (D-Wash.) asked National Institutes of Health (NIH) representative Anthony Fauci about budget sequestration’s effect on the efforts.

“I have to tell you honestly it’s been a significant impact on us,” said Fauci. “It has both in an acute and a chronic, insidious way eroded our ability to respond in the way that I and my colleagues would like to see us be able to respond to these emerging threats. And in my institute particularly, that’s responsible for responding on the dime to an emerging infectious disease threat, this is particularly damaging.” Sequestra-

tion required NIH to cut its budget by 5%, a total of \$1.55 billion. Cuts were applied across all of its programs, affecting every area of medical research.

Dr. Beth Bell, director of the CDC’s National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases, also testified before the committee. Her department, which has led the U.S. intervention in West Africa, was hit with a \$13 million budget cut as a result of the sequestration cuts.

Bell argued that the epidemic could have been stopped if more had been done sooner to build global health security. International aid budgets were hit hard by the sequester, reducing global health programs by \$411 million and USAID by \$289 million. “If even modest investments had been made to build a public health infrastructure in West Africa previously, the current Ebola epidemic could have been detected earlier, and it could have been identified and contained. This Ebola epidemic shows that any vulnerability could have widespread impact if not stopped at the source.”