NEWS

Obama calls on Congress to fund \$6.2bn emergency Ebola initiative

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At a speech given on 2 December at the US National Institutes of Health, President Barack Obama called on Congress to pass his \$6.2bn (£4bn; €5bn) funding request for emergency Ebola programs before its recess for the holiday period.

“For the most part, people have recognized this is not a Democratic issue or a Republican issue—it’s about the safety and security of the American people. So let’s get it done,” said the president.

Obama noted that, although the Ebola outbreak was no longer dominating the headlines in the United States, the disease will remain a threat to the US and the rest of the world as long as the epidemic continues in west Africa.

“Every hotspot is an ember that, if not contained, could become a new fire,” he said. “So we cannot let down our guard, even for a minute. And we can’t just fight this epidemic; we have to extinguish it.”

The funding request included \$4.64bn to support efforts to combat the epidemics in west Africa, to bolster the public health response in the US, to speed the development of new drugs and vaccines, and to improve the public health capabilities in vulnerable, developing nations not yet affected by the outbreak.

Another \$1.54bn would go to create a contingency fund to ensure that resources would be on hand to tackle any challenges

related to the Ebola outbreaks that may arise domestically or abroad.

Obama said that a great deal of progress has been made in recent months. In the US, for example, the number of hospitals prepared to care for Ebola patients has expanded from four to 35, the number of states with laboratories capable of Ebola testing has risen from 13 to 36, and researchers late last month reported the successful completion of a phase I trial of an expedited Ebola vaccine.

Abroad, said Obama, the US has deployed 3000 civilian and military personnel to construct Ebola treatment units in west Africa, has trained local healthcare workers in Ebola care, and has directly supported local and international relief efforts in the affected nations.

But despite this progress, funding for these projects is running out and Ebola is far from beaten, said the president, who added, “We cannot beat Ebola without more funding.”

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