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Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I have been following with great concern the investigations into the cause of the tragic outbreak of illness in Pennsylvania this past week. All Americans join me, I am sure, in their sympathy for the families of the more than 20 people who have died and their hope for the speedy recovery of those people currently under treatment.

I am greatly relieved that these tragic deaths were not the result of swine flu. But let us remember one thing: they could have been. The threat of swine flu outbreak this year is still very genuine. Data from the scientific community still clearly supports the need for a full-scale inoculation program. Clinical tests conducted to date clearly demonstrate that the vaccine is both safe and effective. There is no excuse to let the legislative program that I proposed seven weeks ago -- a program that could safeguard the lives of many, many Americans --- be delayed any longer.

Health, Education, and Welfare Secretary Mathews and the leaders of Congress reported to me on Wednesday that after long hours of hearings, discussions, and negotiations, Congress finally would act yesterday to pass legislation to provide swine flu vaccine to all the American people. Needless to say, I was keenly disappointed to learn last evening that the news from the doctors in Pennsylvania has led to another slowdown in the Congress.

I am frankly dumbfounded that Congress, which took the time and effort to enact ill-advised legislation to exempt its own Members from certain State income taxes, has failed to act to protect 215 million Americans from the threat of swine flu. Drug manufacturers have produced over 100 million doses of swine flu vaccine in bulk form, but the vaccine has not been prepared in suitable dosage form, pending action by the Congress.

Because of these legislative delays, we are, at this moment, at least six weeks away from beginning an effective inoculation program. Had Congress acted promptly after I submitted my proposal, we would have been in a position to dispatch shipments of vaccine today.

As President, I cannot accept any further dilly-dallying by the Congress on this legislation that could be vital to the health and safety of our people.

I call on the Congress to act quickly -- before its next recess --- so that the health of the American people will be fully protected.

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