

Administration of Barack Obama, 2015

Remarks During a Meeting With Members of the President's Council of Advisers on Science and Technology

March 27, 2015

I'm having an opportunity to meet with my science and technology advisory group, which has—works on an ongoing basis on a whole range of technology and science and research issues. And we're joined by a couple of Cabinet members, Secretary Burwell and Secretary Vilsack.

The reason I called you guys in here today before the meeting is, I wanted to talk about an issue that is of great importance to America's public health and the world's public health, and that is some of the problems that we're having in antibiotics becoming less effective and the need for us to deal with these drug-resistant bacteria.

This is a major public health issue. Some of you may have been reading and hearing recently about the problem. Drug-resistant bacteria are one of the most serious public health issues that we face today. They cause tens of thousands of deaths, millions of illnesses, and that's just in the United States. And the numbers are sure to climb unless we take some very clear, concrete, and coordinated action.

Last year, I issued an Executive order directing agencies across the Government to create a national action plan for combating antibiotic-resistant bacteria. And today we are releasing that plan. John, give me the plan. *[Laughter]* Just so we have a little prop. *[Laughter]*

This is a product of extraordinary work from some of our top scientists and the private sector, research universities, and practitioners, doctors, and health professionals so that we can figure out how do we approach this problem. It is detailed, it is realistic, it covers the next five years, starting right now.

We've set some aggressive goals. First, we're going to slow the emergence of resistant bacteria and prevent the spread of resistant infections. Second, we're going to include surveillance; we want to know when it's happening and why it's happening. Third, we're going to develop better diagnostic tools. Fourth, we're going to accelerate research into new drugs. And fifth, we're going to improve global coordination, because this is going to end up being a global problem.

Last year, I also called for the creation of an Advisory Council for Combating Antibiotic-Resistant Bacteria to advise me and future Presidents on how to see this mission through, because this is not something that we'll solve just in the next 20 or 22 months. Starting today, we're officially taking nominations for that Council.

The budget that I released earlier this year nearly doubles the investment in fighting antibiotic resistance. This plan spells out exactly where the money would go. So I'm going to be urging Congress to pass a budget that will ultimately help save lives. We can't do this without Congress. But to—in order for us to get it done we're also going to have to educate the public. And this is one of those problems that doesn't always rise to the top of people's day-to-day concerns until somebody in their family is impacted. We take antibiotics for granted for a lot of illnesses that can be deadly or debilitating, and we're extraordinarily fortunate to have been living in a period where our antibiotics work.

If we start seeing those medicines diminish in effectiveness, we're going to have problems. And part of the solution here is not just finding replacements for traditional antibiotics; it's also making sure that we're using antibiotics properly, because part of the problem is that a lot of times we overdiagnose them. They're entering into our food chain through livestock. There are a whole range of reasons why bacteria is becoming more and more resistant to our traditional treatments.

And this is something that we have to take seriously now and invest in now. If we do, then I'm confident we're going to be able to deal with this effectively. If we don't, if we put this off, this is going to be a major public health problem, and it will be a lot harder to solve.

So all right? Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:25 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to John P. Holdren, Director, White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

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