



America's Short Memory – The Need to Maintain & Grow Funding for Emergency Preparedness

FSI News / By Graham Conron

Graham Conron May 5, 2020

9/11 to 2020

With this post titled as such, there should be no need to continue – but onward we plod.

Remember 9/11 – the horrors of that day helped see a 2002 Federal Hospital Preparedness Program created to help hospitals pre-plan for public health emergencies and terrorist attacks.

Till late 2006 America remembered, and funds were appropriated to have the products needed for Not if but When.

As America forgot, the program was steadily cut. Not only were new emergency preparedness products not purchased but aging products were not replaced or updated as needed. In 2007 alone, Washington cut some \$44 million from the program's budget.

Then came FEAR in 2009 as a frightening epidemic called the H1N1 swine flu swept across the globe. With the cuts from 2006-2009, do you think the USA was prepared? Not a chance.

Across the country, hospitals were sent scrambling to bring on extra emergency staff, and for a short time it seemed they would be overwhelmed. Isolation chambers/shelters/rooms, medical field cots, and PPE were quickly sourced with limited funds – and the FEAR grew.

Thankfully, the “worst did not materialize. The lesson, though, was clear: The nation needed larger caches of standby medical supplies and hospitals that were better prepared to handle a surge of infected patients.” *

Surely America had learned and would fund these much needed caches of medical supplies. From 2009-2014, funding was not cut but it did not grow – and then came 2014 and a further \$120 million cut in the Federal Hospital Preparedness Program.

“Overall, money for the program has been slashed by about half since 2003, said John Auerbach, chief executive of the Trust for America's Health. Auerbach, who was Boston health commissioner for nine years, said he and other public health officials routinely pleaded with Congress to restore the

spending. He said lawmakers frequently offered the same response: “Do we still need that?”** On top of government funding cuts, hospital staff also are constantly pressured to maintain and grow profit margins – and two things that go right to the bottom line are reducing spending on staff and supplies that aren’t used all the time. Guess what supplies those are.

Tick tock tick tock – a decade passes, it’s 2020 and a new pandemic sweeps out of China and rears it’s ugly head in the United States – COVID-19.

A primer first – funding is constantly cut – purchases of emergency equipment made after 9-11 and then the 2009 SARS outbreak are not upgraded or replaced as needed – stockpiles of critical PPE are allowed to be drawn down at all levels – warnings at all levels are ignored – poor planning abounds at all levels – basic PPE for first responders is woefully less than needed.

Tick tock tick tock – COVID-19 lands in America and moves worldwide.

We all know how things have gone in the last few months. Rather than going through what everyone knows here are a few keywords to remind – ventilators – PPE – N95 – shelter in place – social distancing – quarantine – shut downs – unemployment – PPP – death – pandemic – face masks – field hospitals – wash your hands – nursing homes – a new line of first responder heroes the Medical Community – Dr Fauci – Dr. Birx – Trump – Pelosi – empty streets – no sports – no movies – no restaurants – home schooling.....

There will be a future – a changed one to be sure – but a future once we finally beat this pandemic back – and we will. But surely this time America will never forget – the fear – the loss – the lack of preparedness. America must listen to the lessons learned.

Never again let the supply of the following run low or not be replaced when needed or upgraded or retrofitted as required: PPE, ventilators, N95 stock piles, mobile field hospitals, Isolation Chamber/Shelters/Rooms, Decontamination Shower Systems, Drive thru virus test/vaccine shot shelters, field cots, etc.

Only time will tell.

– Mark Conron

*and ** LA Times By [Noam N. Levey](#),

[Kim Christensen](#), [Anna M. Phillips](#)

March 20, 2020

<https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2020-03-20/disaster-foretold-shortages-ventilators-medical-supplies-warned-about>



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