

The Politics of Ebola

Guyana, Guinea, Papua New Guinea?



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The Ebola virus is giving the world a lesson in geography, politics and fear, or the pandemic of panic.

Congressman Darrell Issa faced the media and said, 'beginning in March 2014 in the West African nation of Guyana the world first learned about another new outbreak of the Ebola virus.' Congressman Issa is a Republican from California and he sits on the 'Oversight and Government Reform Committee.' The Congressman went on to mention Guyana in connection with Ebola a few more times in his speech and even pronounced the disease as 'Eboli.'

In the quest for good journalism we called his Washington office to seek an explanation. Why was Guyana confused with Guinea? The man that answered the phone said that what Congressman meant was actually Papua New Guinea. But Papua New Guinea is not Guinea and in fact has had no reported case of Ebola, just like Guyana. The Washington office was even more confused. They referred us to the California office. Mr. Issa has two offices in California. The lady at the first office said that the Congressman knows the difference between Guyana and Guinea. He was tired on that day. But what about Papua New Guinea? There was a pause. She had to take another call.

The man at the second office wanted us to be specific. When told about the Congressman's inaccuracies he said that was not specific and hung up. For the record Guyana is in South America, Guinea is in West Africa and Papua New Guinea is in Oceania and is next to Indonesia and Australia. Imagine

if a public representative goes on television and says that California is Colorado! The proper and decent response would be for Congressman Issa to apologize, failing which the Guyana government should intervene and demand an apology. The Congressman might also

and swallowing, internal bleeding, red eyes and chest pains. These manifest themselves eight to ten days after a person has been exposed but the period of incubation can take up to three weeks. The virus has been found in semen for up to ninety days.

According to the World Health Organization there is no vaccine and the mortality rate can be as high as 90 per cent. It has declared the Ebola outbreak

gressman Issa getting his geography wrong.

One of the main debating points is which Party can take more effective steps to contain the virus. It has become in some places a Republican versus Democrat issue. The Republicans have injected fear into Americans and have used Ebola for leverage in the mid-term elections. For example, Rep Issa said that it is possible to get the virus by travel-

10,000 new infections weekly with a mortality rate of about 70 per cent. There is urgent need then to improve the medical systems in these and other neighboring countries.

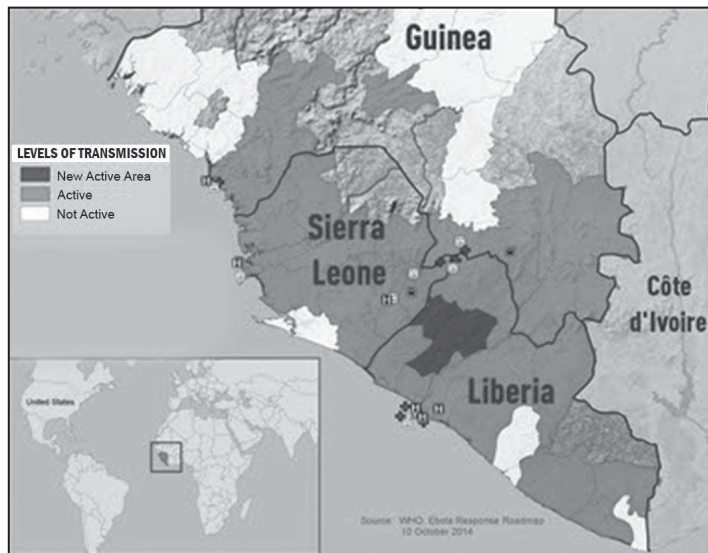
The 'Washington Post' reported that the United States 'is hamstrung by a lack of military medical personnel with expertise in dealing with the virus.' When the Pentagon announced that it would set up a 25-bed field hospital in Liberia it was assumed that this would be for ordinary Liberians. However, it was discovered that the hospital was to provide health care for only foreign workers. There is need for more beds, doctors and nurses and other trained staff. A clinic with 70 beds can cost about \$1m to run each month and the international institutions should be prepared to budget for ordinary people.

One report stated that help for the affected countries is linked to politics in the United States. It says further that the sending of treatment beds and the transporting of health care workers are dependent on the priority of the President of the United States.

In the meantime a study by Oxford University has predicted that the virus will spread to 22 African countries if urgent steps are not taken. The fact that some of these countries are unstable politically will not help.

There is no question that education and information must play key roles in fighting the spread of Ebola. The budgets of African countries need to be increased to include information campaigns that would utilize the media to help in containment. But the same argument could also apply to Western countries. The areas in which the public should be educated ought to include a profile of the virus and steps to avoid infection.

There is no vaccine or drugs to date that are on the market to cure Ebola. The drug ZMapp was used to treat two American aid workers. It proved to be without side effects and it is expected that this drug will be produced in greater amounts in the future.



Map of Africa showing countries with most cases of Ebola.

CDC Image

like to know that at a meeting in Barbados in early November 2104 Caricom has pledged support to West Africa nations in a SETH fund.

The Ebola virus first came to light in 1976. It is named after the Ebola River where it was first identified. People can infect each other through bodily fluids and 'butchering and eating infected animals' can also transmit the virus. The symptoms include fever, diarrhea, pains in the stomach, aches, difficulty breathing

to be a national health emergency. The outbreaks of Ebola have been confirmed in eight African countries as follows: Congo, Gabon, South Sudan, Ivory Coast, Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Guinea and Liberia. The virus has spread to other countries and has caused some of them to take emergency action. In mid-August 2104 the government of Liberia declared a curfew and announced that two communities would be quarantined.

The fatalities in Liberia are so far 2,413 while in Sierra Leone it is 1,500 and Guinea 997 and these figures are expected to rise. The Ebola virus has been given a great deal of publicity in the United States. President Barack Obama has described the outbreak as 'the largest international response in the history of the Center for Disease Control.' What is apparent is that Ebola is tied up with politics and it is not just a case of Con-

ing on a bus while Rep. Pete King of Long Island went on television to say that the virus has mutated to the point where it's unsafe to be out in the public.

David Brooks writing in the 'New York Times' makes the point that, 'We live in a society almost perfectly suited for contagions of hysteria and overreaction.' One of the best ways to fight fear is to present facts and the facts show that the disease can be spread mainly through bodily fluids. The world has become a global village and it is possible to take a plane from Monrovia and arrive in New York in a matter of hours.

What should the global community do then to arrest the decline of Ebola? The most efficient response would be to attack it at the source. The combined population of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone is around 20 million and the WHO estimates that there will be about

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