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## United States Senate

OFFICE OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-7010

December 6, 2005

Dear Senate Colleagues,

The United States needs to broaden the way it approaches public diplomacy. Promoting democracy around the world, improving our image among the citizens of lower-income countries, and winning the Global War on Terror require a vigorous and creative effort, and I believe that a focused plan that combines diplomacy with public health can help us do that. This letter outlines my proposal to establish a Global Health Corps to advance both public diplomacy and public health objectives.

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The United States plays an essential role in an increasingly interconnected world. People, products, services and information travel the globe at unprecedented speeds and in enormous volumes.

While globalization brings us many benefits, it also carries costs: disease can spread much more quickly and widely than it could in the past. One can argue, indeed, that global pandemics—whether naturally occurring or intentionally spread—pose a greater threat than most man-made weapons of mass destruction. Avian Flu and SARS may represent the vanguard of a new wave of “superbugs” that could potentially kill millions. Many of these diseases spread first from animals to humans, and current global monitor-

ing and relief efforts aren't adequate to stop them. Nearly all of these diseases emerge and spread most quickly in areas where public health systems are inadequate or nonexistent. Arresting this trend calls for a concerted effort to bring advanced disease surveillance and improved public health to potential "hot zones." And as the deplorable conditions in New Orleans in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina show, these types of threats can emerge on our own soil as well as in remote locations.

Efforts to fight and win the Global War on Terror, while simultaneously promoting democracy around the world, also require an improved and creative campaign of public diplomacy. We can do only so much by sending foreign aid checks, financing educational campaigns, and putting out press releases. The most effective types of public diplomacy help ordinary people—not just elites and institutions—and assist them on an individual level. Everybody needs medical care; providing it is one of the most powerful ways of demonstrating the generosity, compassion and character of the American people. We have to think creatively; we can use medicine as a currency for peace.

The Peace Corps and USAID already bring immense credit to America's image wherever they go. We need to build upon and extend these efforts while simultaneously drawing on the skills of individual Americans and private relief groups. That's why we should create a Global Health Corps.

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The Global Health Corps, as outlined in my legislation (S. 850), would consist of three components:

- an Office of the Global Health Corps within the Department of Health and Human Services;
- a volunteer Corps composed of private-sector experts, government employees with medical skills and Peace Corps volunteers who want to do public health work; and
- a rapid response capability of medical "SWAT teams" to deal with public health emergencies around the world.

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This legislation would neither create large new bureaucracies nor require lots of money. Instead, it would establish a small office to improve strategic planning, coordination, and response from existing resources within the U.S. government. Organized as such, the Corps would tap into the compassion and volunteer spirit of America's private sector.

First, the new Office of the Global Health Corps would manage the Corps and serve as a central planning and coordinating body within the government. It would work to expand the availability of health care personnel, equipment and services all around the world. As the nation's coordinating body for improving global public health, it would maintain close relationships with the State Department, USAID, the U.S. Public Health Service, the Peace Corps, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other government entities. This office would also work with secular private organizations, faith-based relief groups, other NGOs and ad hoc volunteer groups drawn from the public and private sectors. Finally, it would form partnerships with regional organizations, international organizations and foreign governments.

Second, the Global Health Corps itself would consist of doctors, nurses and other medical professionals drawn from the private sector, government agencies and the Peace Corps. Some would serve long-term commitments abroad or agree to deploy annually to hot spots, while others would remain on call to respond to crisis situations. The Corps would draw on a wide variety of expertise. Veterinarians would play a major part, given that animals provide important sources of transportation, food, labor and commerce in many underdeveloped countries. Engineers, hydrologists and epidemiologists would likewise work to improve the public health infrastructure, provide clean water (an important building block in any public health system), and detect and prevent infectious diseases. Health educators might play a role in training public health workers and in teaching the local population how to prevent common maladies and keep children healthy.

Finally, the Corps would have a rapid response capacity—a medical SWAT team—drawn from the commissioned ranks of the U.S. Public Health Service. This unit would be able to deploy to crisis areas around the world on short notice and set up a full-service field hospital. While it would primarily work overseas, responding to disasters such as the tsunami that hit the Indian Ocean region last December or the South Asian earthquake of early October 2005, it could also deploy within our own borders after major natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina. For many of the sick and wounded, this team would be the first help on the scene. Likewise, during infectious disease outbreaks, the unit could, in cooperation with international health organizations, deploy to treat the sick and, just as important, to identify a disease and halt its spread before it can inflict widespread casualties.

Neither the threats of injury and disease, nor the need for the United States to improve its image to achieve its objectives around the globe, will go away anytime soon. We need to act and we need to act now. Used and deployed properly, medical care and public health expertise can not only improve public health abroad, but can also serve as strong currencies of peace and diplomacy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William H. Frist". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "W".

William H. Frist, M.D.  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate