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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Because of the looming threats of biological terrorism and pandemic disease, the U.S. needs clear strategies and dependable resources for defending against and responding to potential public health emergencies resulting from acts of terror or communicable disease outbreaks.

Yesterday, Reps. Mike Rogers, R-Mich., and Anna G. Eshoo, D-Calif., introduced a bipartisan measure that ensures development of the necessary strategies and resources to help protect the public against the dangers of bioterrorist attacks or illnesses such as avian flu, if and when they occur.

"Americans live each day under the threat of bioterrorist attacks and naturally occurring diseases that could cause a pandemic, such as avian flu. We need to reinvent our response to the threat of deadly pandemics and infectious diseases," Eshoo said.

"America needs to accelerate its development of drugs and vaccines to protect our nation's families from deliberate, accidental or natural medical emergencies that involve biological pathogens or chemical or radiological agents," Rogers added. "We need action to prevent a bioterrorism or pandemic disaster."

The Biodefense and Pandemic Vaccine and Drug Development Act of 2006 would:

- Create the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA) within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to establish a single point of federal authority for advanced research and development of medical countermeasures, including drugs and vaccines to respond to bioterrorism and natural disease outbreaks.

- Motivate academic researchers, drug and vaccine manufacturers, and other possible partners to commit substantial resources to accelerate development of medical countermeasures and bring new and improved products to the market more quickly.

Eshoo and Rogers both serve on the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health and on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. The Rogers-Eshoo legislation will be considered by the Energy and Commerce Committee, under the leadership of Chairman Joe Barton, R-Texas, and Health Subcommittee Chairman Nathan Deal, R-Ga.

"I look forward to working with Congressman Rogers, Congresswoman Eshoo, and Chairman Deal this year to ensure America is properly prepared for the biological attack or pandemic outbreak we all fear," Chairman Barton said. "I

applaud Congressman Rogers for tackling an issue so important for America's national security and well being."

The Rogers-Eshoo measure is the companion bill to BARDA legislation pending in the U.S. Senate and sponsored by Sen. Richard Burr. "I am pleased Congressman Rogers and Congresswoman Eshoo introduced this legislation in the House," said Burr, R-N.C. "We need to improve our ability to prepare for and respond to national threats, be they accidental, deliberate, or naturally occurring. This bill will ensure faster development of better medical countermeasures to protect the country from these threats."

"Our bill enables the Department of Health and Human Services to coordinate the advanced research and development of countermeasures in the event of a public health emergency. This makes the public sector more dynamic, nimble and accountable by bringing more and better medical countermeasures to the public faster in case of emergency," Eshoo said.

"Our nation lacks protection now and will remain vulnerable until Congress acts," Rogers said. "More must be done in advance of a bioterrorist attack or pandemic outbreak to minimize illness and death, as well as catastrophic social, economic and political disruption."

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