



Obama Names Ebola Czar, Rejects Travel Ban

As fears rise over Ebola spreading in the United States, President Obama has decided to name an Ebola “czar” to address the threat. However, despite some strong recommendations, he is still rejecting a travel ban on flights from the three affected West African countries of Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone.



On Friday, President Obama appointed Ron Klain — former chief of staff to both Vice President Joe Biden and former Vice President Al Gore — to the position of Ebola Response Coordinator. Klain is currently the president of Case Holdings and serves as the general counsel for Revolution, an investment organization.

Obama had revealed an openness to the idea of naming an Ebola czar while speaking with reporters after a two-hour meeting with top advisers from Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control.

“It may be appropriate for me to appoint an additional person,” Obama replied. Careful not to use the term “czar,” he explained that the person would be there to “make sure we’re crossing all the t’s and dotting all the i’s.”

Some have criticized Obama’s choice for czar because of Klain’s lack of medical or healthcare background, noting that he secured the position simply because he has been a longtime political friend of Obama. Former Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson took to his Twitter to vent his frustration: “Appointing a political #Ebola czar demonstrates administration did not take public health seriously.”

The White House has defended its move by asserting that the outbreak does not require a solely “medical response.” White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest insisted, “That’s why somebody with Mr. Klain’s credentials — somebody that has strong management experience both inside government but also in the private sector — he is somebody who has strong relationships with members of Congress, and obviously strong relationships with those of us who worked with him here at the White House earlier in the administration. All of that means that he is the right person.”

Fox News notes that by naming Klain as the Ebola czar, Obama has “effectively bypassed” Dr. Nicole Lurie — the assistant secretary for preparedness and response (ASPR) at the Department of Health and Human Services since July 2009. As noted by Fox News, Lurie’s position “fit[s] the bill for Ebola coordinator — at least on paper.”

Meanwhile, although several officials have also strongly suggested that the president implement a travel ban from West Africa to the United States, Obama has stated that he does not see the value in such a move.



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“A travel ban is less effective than the measures we are currently implementing,” he claimed — measures including testing travelers as they arrive from countries with Ebola outbreaks.

But critics are not satisfied that such procedures are productive enough to contain the disease.

“The current airline passenger screening at five U.S. airports through temperature-taking and self-reporting is troubling,” declared Rep. Tim Murphy (R-Penn.). “Both CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] and NIH [National Institutes of Health] tell us that the Ebola patients are only contagious when having a fever, but we know this may not be totally accurate. A determined infected traveler can evade the screening by masking the fever with ibuprofen, or avoiding the five airports [where screening is implemented]. Further, it is nearly impossible to perform contact-tracing of all people on multiple international flights across the globe.”

Still the president remains opposed to banning flights from West Africa.

“I don’t have a philosophical objection, necessarily, to a travel ban if that is the thing that is going to keep the American people safe,” he said Thursday, before listing the compelling reasons for his not doing so.

“If we institute a travel ban instead of the protocols that we’ve put in place now, history shows that there is a likelihood of increased avoidance,” he insisted. “People do not readily disclose their information. They may engage in something called broken travel — essentially breaking up their trip so they can hide the fact that they have been to one of these countries where there is a disease in place. As a result we may end up getting less information about who has the disease, they are less likely to get treated properly, screened properly, quarantined properly and as a consequence we could end up having more cases rather than less.”

But critics have pointed out that the federal government is repeating historic mistakes. *The New American’s* Steve Byas observed:

It is clear that travel by diseased individuals is a huge factor in the spread of infectious diseases, whether viral (as with the Spanish Flu), or bacterial (as with the plague [the Black Death]).

Yet, the American government’s medical establishment seems to ignore these basic lessons of the history of the Black Death and the influenza epidemic of 1917-1920. Common sense would seem to dictate that as the Ebola virus is concentrated in three heavily-infected nations of West Africa (Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone), the single most effective way to protect Americans from this deadly illness is simply to prevent any travel into the United States from these countries until the crisis has passed.

Instead, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the U.S. government have opted to simply give travelers from these three nations “additional screening.” As Chip Wood wrote for *The New American* on October 15 in his article “Stopping the Spread of Ebola,” incoming passengers at New York’s Kennedy Airport and four other airports that account for about 95 percent of travelers from the three countries, will only be asked some health questions, have their temperatures checked, and be examined for signs of illness.

Of course, Liberian Thomas Duncan, who carried the disease from Liberia into the United States, and has since died of Ebola, simply lied to health officials in Liberia about his contact with an Ebola patient. He had no fever, and showed no signs of illness when he arrived in the United States.

Though Obama still contends, “Currently the judgment of all involved is that a flat-out travel ban is not



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the way to go,” he has given indication that the conversation is not completely closed on the subject of such a ban, stating:

Now, I continue to push and ask our experts whether, in fact, we are doing what’s adequate in order to protect the American people. If they come back to me and they say there’s some additional things we need to do, I assure you we will do it.

I am asking these questions and if in fact it turns out that I am getting different answers then I will share that with the American people. We will not hesitate to do what is necessary in order to maximize the chances that we avoid an outbreak here in the United States.

Dozens of lawmakers support a ban on travel to the United States from West African countries. According to *The Hill*, 56 members of the House, six of whom are Democrats, and 11 senators (10 Republicans and one Democrat) favor the move. And Republican candidates have been pushing the issue in Senate races in North Carolina, South Dakota, and Iowa.

Likewise, Chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security Michael McCaul told CBS’s *Face the Nation*, “We need to target more the individual themselves and look at the idea of potentially temporarily suspending the 13,000 visas that would be coming out of this region.”

Top officials at the CDC indicate that a travel ban would make it difficult for international aid to reach the Ebola-affected regions of West Africa. Dr. Anthony Fauci, infectious disease expert at the National Institutes of Health, expounded on this idea on *Face the Nation*.

When you isolate a country, you diminish greatly their ability to handle their own epidemic. If that happens, it very likely will spread to other African countries. And the best way to protect Americans is to completely suppress the epidemic in West Africa. If we do that, we wouldn’t be talking about this today. So to isolate them, maybe with good intentions, actually can be counterproductive and make things worse.

The president recognizes that containing the virus involves significant work both domestically and overseas. He stated, “The work we have to do overseas is going to be a lot tougher,” emphasizing that the more workers can do to contain the outbreak in Africa, “the less our people are going to be at risk.” Attempting to allay fears, he claimed that “the risks involved remain extremely low for ordinary folks.”

The American people are not convinced, however. A *Washington Post*-ABC News poll conducted in recent days shows that nearly two-thirds of those polled are concerned about Ebola spreading in this country, despite assurances from public officials. That same poll reveals that 67 percent support restricting entry into the United States from countries with outbreaks of Ebola.

This article was originally published prior to the appointment of Ron Klain as Ebola czar but was updated later in the day to reflect this development.



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