

Modern Healthcare

Lawmakers likely to go along with some Ebola emergency funding

By [Virgil Dickson](#)
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The Obama Administration is likely to receive some of the roughly \$6.2 billion in emergency funding it's [requesting from Congress](#) to fight Ebola. How much Republicans will be willing to go along with, though, is still not clear, experts say. What does seem certain is that Republican lawmakers can't ignore the issue after mentioning [Ebola](#) so extensively during recent midterm elections.

“They scared the hell out of everyone and now they have to do something,” said Stan Collender, a former congressional budget staff member and executive vice president of Qorvis MSLGroup, a public relations agency in Washington. “Congress boxed themselves into a corner on this.” However, he feels it's less likely the administration will get the full \$6.2 billion requested.

[HHS Secretary Sylvia Mathews Burwell](#) headed to Capitol Hill on Wednesday to advocate approval of \$6.2 billion in new emergency funds. Also scheduled to testify before the Senate Appropriations Committee were senior officials from the Centers for Disease Control and National Institutes of Health.

The administration wants lawmakers to provide \$4.5 billion in funds for immediate response to the disease and \$1.5 billion in contingency money. Most of the funds will go directly to containment efforts in West Africa. The request was well received by Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.), chairwoman of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

“We face a grave and deadly disease in the ongoing outbreak of Ebola, and I commend the president for acting to address this crisis at home and abroad,” Mikulski said in a statement.

The Senate and House Appropriations Committees are currently assembling a spending package to fund federal programs for the rest of the fiscal year ending Sept. 30, 2015. The Ebola request would be folded into that bill and will have to be headed to the president's desk by Dec. 11 when existing government funds run out.

The hearing is taking place two days after the release of Dr. Craig Spencer, the last confirmed Ebola patient from the U.S., from Bellevue Hospital in New York. But the lack of any current Ebola patients in the U.S. shouldn't cause Congress to reject the funding, Hill watchers agreed.

Burwell and officials from the CDC and NIH will still likely face a some tough questioning, however, because of allegations of questionable spending choices by the agencies, said Michael Cannon, a health policy analyst with the libertarian Cato Institute.

For instance, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act created the prevention and public health fund for the CDC. Of the \$3 billion the agency has received, only 6% or \$180 million has gone toward building epidemiology and laboratory capacity, [according to a Politico op-ed written by GOP governor Bobby Jindal](#).

Instead, the CDC has spent some of the money in that to fund initiatives such as promoting improvements in sidewalks and street lighting to make it safe and easy for people to walk and ride bikes, Jindal wrote.

“The CDC and NIH officials can expect to be raked over the coals for these things,” Cannon said. “But ultimately, nobody wants to be the guy that voted against Ebola funding.”

There's no question that the NIH and other agencies need emergency funds to battle Ebola, said David Reich, a former House Appropriations Committee staffer and consultant to the left-leaning Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

“There is a need to suddenly ramp up what the CDC and the others are doing in a way that's beyond the resources now available for them,” Reich said.