



LOUISE M. SLAUGHTER
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
25TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

July 15, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

The United States is falling dangerously behind other developed nations because of this Administration's reckless tolerance for antibiotic overuse. I fear that the Food and Drug Administration and the United States Department of Agriculture have both abdicated their responsibility for food safety and the public health. The World Health Organization's recent global report warned of "very high" rates of infections across 114 countries that are such a serious problem that "it threatens the achievements of modern medicine." Across Europe, countries are strictly limiting antibiotic use in animal agriculture and seeing a corresponding drop in resistance.

As you may know, I have carried legislation for over fourteen years now, the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act (PAMTA), to save eight classes of antibiotics for human health while allowing for the continued treatment of sick animals with antibiotics. This bill is supported by over 450 outside groups, including the World Health Organization, the American Medical Association, the Union of Concerned Scientists, Pew Charitable Trusts, and a host of other respected scientific organizations. Twelve city councils, including your hometown of Chicago, have passed resolutions calling on their Members of Congress to support PAMTA. The New York State PTA is taking a state-passed resolution calling for antibiotic-free meat to be served in schools before the National PTA next year.

Despite broad public support and the dire public health consequences of inaction, my bill has faced an uphill battle in Congress resulting from deep corporate financial interests. Therefore, I was extremely pleased when the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) chose to study antibiotic resistance. I am pleased with the scientific integrity and extent of the discussion on antibiotic resistance at the recent PCAST meeting, and I commend the council for its dedication to this issue.

The extent of dangerous antibiotic resistance already present in the US is terrifying, to say nothing of the future should we not address this crisis immediately. PCAST's recommendation to empower a standing Interagency Task force with White House leadership and next generation DNA sequencing technologies is an important proposal. However, I am concerned that the Task Force would be hampered by limited access to data on antibiotic use in agriculture, which makes up 80% of all antibiotic use in the U.S. Currently, no agency collects detailed data on which antibiotics are used, in what quantities, for which purposes, and in what location. Industry has made the questionable claim that the distribution of such data would violate proprietary interests,

but clearly the public health imperative outweighs those interests should they exist. This data would give us an invaluable picture of how well or poorly our efforts to curb resistance are working and what remains to be done.

In addition to a more effective and comprehensive data collection approach, we both know that we also need to take aggressive action to protect the public. I am disappointed, therefore, with the absence of any plan to reduce antibiotics in agriculture, in as much as it accounts for the overwhelming majority of use in the U.S. PCAST acknowledges that this use causes resistance, that resistant pathogens from animal agriculture can, and do, infect people, and yet there were no recommendations for reducing use on the farm – just a belief that industry will police itself, although it has never shown an indication it will.

PCAST's hope that FDA's voluntary Guidance #213 will work to reduce antibiotic use and that veterinarians will act responsibly and with integrity and only provide antibiotics when absolutely necessary is, I believe, misguided. Veterinarians know animals will get infections when they are weaned too young or are put into barns known to harbor disease, but they have no power or incentive to demand reform from an industry that pays their salaries. They are put in an untenable position where they must either routinely prescribe "preventative" antibiotics to whole herds or to allow the animals to suffer when they contract disease.

We need solutions that will require animal producers to reduce their overall need for antibiotics. We must incentivize a production method that rewards the animal producers using the least amount of antibiotics, prohibits the practice of routine and indiscriminate antibiotic use, and holds industry accountable for practices that increase use. Without this, we will soon face a trade barrier with countries, particularly those in the European Union, who have led the way in reducing antibiotic use in agriculture.

We cannot wait any longer. Strict limits must be implemented, which can only be enforced when current levels of use are known, and the Federal Government must act to demonstrate that only meat raised responsibly, with limited or no use of antibiotics, is acceptable in the food supply. Given the seriousness of the antibiotic resistance crisis, I urge you to draft an executive order to combat antibiotic resistance with the following actions:

- Commit all federal purchases of meat to be meat raised without antibiotics, or certified by a third-party that any antibiotics administered were only used on sick or injured animals.
- Establish an antibiotic use monitoring program with targets for reduction of overall use. Nations like Denmark and Germany require animal producers to use no more antibiotics per pound of meat produced than their neighbors, and if a producer's use is in the top 25%, officials are dispatched to help bring usage down.
- Require the collection and distribution of detailed antibiotic use data, including the type and amount of use, the cause for use, and the geographic location of use.
- Establish PCAST's recommended Interagency Task Force, empowered with genomic data from a nationwide network of next generation sequencing.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Louise M. Slaughter