

**Testimony of Dr. William A. Walters, Acting Deputy Chief Medical Officer
for Operations, Bureau of Medical Services
U.S. Department of State
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and Nonproliferation
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Chairman Bera, Ranking Member Yoho, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. As my colleagues have stated, the Department of State is committed to taking all necessary steps to promote the well-being of U.S. citizens around the world. Between January 28, 2020 and February 16, 2020, the Department executed the largest non-military evacuation of U.S. citizens in its history. The safe and efficient evacuation of 1,174 people from Wuhan, China and people onboard the *Diamond Princess* cruise ship in Japan is a testament to the agility, proficiency, and dedication of our workforce to accomplishing our core mission – advancing the interests of the American people.

Following the SARS outbreak in 2004, the U.S. Government Accountability Office recommended that the Department work with interagency partners and the private sector to develop capabilities to support the medical evacuation and transport of U.S. citizens from areas impacted by the sudden outbreak of infectious disease. The 2014 Ebola Virus Disease Outbreak again served as a reminder that

the Department must have a standing crisis response aviation capability to protect U.S. employees and citizens when emergency situations arise.

Such a prompt repatriation of U.S. citizens from quarantined conditions could not have been possible had it not been for the Bureau of Medical Services' existing Multi-Mission Aviation Support Services (MMASS) Contract. The MMASS Contract is the Department's only standing crisis response aviation support and critical care medical evacuation capability, and the U.S. government's only standing biocontainment transport capability. Upon receipt of the mission directives, we managed the configuration and simultaneous choreography of five aircraft, including the coordination of all flight clearances, overflights, and other required logistics. Department personnel onboard these aircraft were trained and equipped to manage these operations. The first mission for Wuhan was staged and ready within 36 hours' notice, the second and third missions for Wuhan were staged and ready in 24 hours' notice, and a fourth mission for Japan was staged and ready within 6 hours' notice.

The Department successfully directed and executed a total of seven flights over four missions, with evacuees transported to five different locations within the United States equipped to safely receive, evaluate, and house persons exposed to the virus. This operation involved close coordination with our interagency partners, including the Federal Aviation Administration, Departments of Defense,

Health and Human Services, and Homeland Security. We also coordinated with international partners including the governments of People's Republic of China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Canada. I was the lead Medical Services officer overseeing these missions and led the second and third missions on the ground in Wuhan.

Some 29 countries and territories have reported cases of COVID-19 infection, placing the health of our employees and U.S. citizens in these countries and territories at risk. In these unprecedented times, the Department's medical professionals are committed to doing everything we can for the health and safety of U.S. citizens overseas.

In summary, I would like to thank each of you for your continued support as we keep pace with this international emergency. Please know that your support to the Department, and to the Bureau of Medical Services in particular, has made this all possible, and that your continued support will be critical in the months and years to come.