

Disclaimer: *The characters and US presidential setting is just a figment of our imagination.*

When: 2016 (Election year!!)

Where: The USA

Who: Mr. Bill Smith, Virginia Senator (Independent) and Presidential Candidate (Independent)

Slogan: **HELP ME. HELP YOU...TOWARDS A HEALTHIER TOMORROW FOR ALL.**

Personal statement from the candidate: *“Scientists and researchers work tirelessly, trying to find cures for diseases that are killing and/or debilitating people. For some of you, this is personal because you, or your family member, are dealing with one of these diseases. Now is the time, to shift our focus, and redirect our resources investing in companies focusing on research and development. In some cases, vaccines and cures are on the brink of being discovered, but the lack of financial resources directly dictates the amount allocated to disease recovery and treatment. And If elected, I will pass bills to aid in the research and development of diseases and to ensure our focus is on developing vaccines, cures, and treatments...”*

Along the campaign trail: While caravanning through various states, Mr. Smith, receives a call from his wife that the results were in, it has been confirmed...his 8 years old son has Lowe syndrome. Now, it was suspected that this was something that his son acquired while they were on a family vacation in a tropical region of SOMEWHERE. A tick bit his son while they were camping. His son visited many doctors and was finally enrolled in a trial for a cure. However, 12 months before Mr. Smith decided to run for president, the trial ended due to lack of funding. He and his family were devastated. And Mr. Smith knew he had to do something.

News ALERT: The US just confirmed several cases of Zika, transmitted from mosquitoes in Florida. Please note, these are not cases of travelers that have visited other countries but these are confirmed cases due to infected mosquitoes in the US. What does this mean for the state of Florida and other states? Will these mosquitoes spread? Are we all at risks? The experts say more research is needed to answer these questions. Stay tuned in!!

Back at the campaign office: Mr. Smith and his team were in the process of declaring his platform. Therefore, with the recent outbreaks of Zika in Brazil and the more recent cases confirmed in the US, Senator Smith knew that he could get people to rally behind the need to invest in research and development. That way, the money

needed would be resourced back to research facilities, like the one his son was a participant, and they could continue to work on finding a cure.

So, Senator Smith and his campaign managers began to devise a plan, and that's how his platform became one that focuses on a healthier tomorrow for all!!

Behind the scenes: Senator Smith had a friend that was doing research in vector-borne diseases for an environmental health company. Over dinner one evening, the friend shared his inside information about the advances that were being made to identify vector borne diseases. The friend shared how there was a device that could potentially be life changing because not only could it detect current vector-borne diseases but also it could potentially detect future diseases. This was the answer to Mr. Smith's question of how to get people to rally behind the push to do research and development, especially in light of the recent outbreak!

***About Mos(kit)o:** A French team developed this device and it has been implemented in countries as a pilot program until enough data is collected to validate its effectiveness for detecting viruses and its accuracy in predicting hot spots. The Mos(kit)o device and the data it provides was designed to help scientists map the evolution of vector-borne diseases.*

The plan in motion: Mr. Smith met with his friend and told him about his plan to invest in research and how he needed to get people to see this was a crucial topic. He needed people to vote for him. His friend knew the sorrow he was experiencing, and could hear the desperation in his voice so he said he would help him. After all, he thought what harm would it really cause (*but he didn't know to what extremes Mr. Smith would go to get what he wanted*).

During this meeting, the friend let Mr. Smith in on a secret...He told him that there were other states besides Florida that were under surveillance for infected mosquitoes and that Texas and New Mexico might have the next outbreaks.

Later that week, Senator Smith was granted access to data before it was released to the population. Pursuing the lead from his friend, his initial idea took on a new light... He focused on the data from Texas and New Mexico and saw that certain parts of states were under surveillance. He paid close attention to two very popular national parks that were closed, due to this investigation.

(Remember, this was information that was confidential and the public would not have access to this information. It was only for security cleared personnel.)

"It is not too big of a lie to tell people that their states are infected with arboviruses since it will likely be the case in a short time", he told his team.

So one of his friends who is a computer engineer decided to enter new data in the database so it would appear that Texas and New Mexico were highly infected areas with arboviruses.

The aftermath: A few days later, the information was everywhere...from newspapers to appearing as breaking news across television shows; not to mention, it was on every social media outlet that exists. Everyone was talking about the effects of the diseases and how two new states identified regions having infected mosquitoes. Naturally, people were wondering and questioning: What needed to be done to put a stop to the spread? How to protect themselves from getting the illness? What would happen or could be done if they contracted one of these horrific diseases?

During a press conference: Senator Smith took full advantage of this opportunity that *“fell into his lap”* and decided to make several appearances on TV stating, *“This is a concerning issue, which shows the importance of allocating a larger portion of federal resources to clinical research and development.”* He continues declaring that he wants to give more money to pharmaceutical laboratories and research institutions, obviously to fight diseases transmitted by mosquitoes, but he also stressed how this case shows the importance of being a step ahead in the fight against many other viruses and pathogenic bacteria plaguing our country. *“I want us to live in a country that is free of disease and illness...stand with me and HELP ME, HELP YOU fight TOWARDS A HEALTHIER TOMORROW FOR ALL...May God Bless America”*, he concludes.

What he didn't anticipate: During Senator Smith's press report, Mr. and Mrs. Walter, who were living in New Mexico, were following the news and paid close attention to the concern that was being expressed regarding the health of the residents in these states and that their state was likely to be the next place infected by arboviruses.

Mrs. Walter was pregnant and she was aware of the consequences Zika virus has on her unborn child. So, Mr. and Mrs. Walter made a life changing decision. Despite the fact that they were a young couple and did not have a lot of money, they decided to move to a state where arboviruses were not reported. They sold their house, packed their things, and moved to Wisconsin. In fact, they were not the only people that made that decision. But this decision wasn't easy for the Walter's, nor was it easy for other families. Older people and other families were in no position to leave due to finances and other restraints, so they were forced to stay and hope for the best. They were all in a panicked state of survival. Everything was changing around them. The economy was also impacted by this Zika scare. A number of suppliers refused to travel to these states, therefore, import/export of goods came to a screeching halt. Not to mention, no one was eager to visit states so tourism drastically declined. People were too afraid! The entire vibe of the states was rapidly declining...the BIG cowboy Texas spirit was over and the artists/hippies scenery in New Mexico was not attracting visitors.

Since Senator Smith leaked the news about the fabricated data, The Mos(kit)o company appeared to be at fault for developing a system incapable of accurately reporting data. The director of The Mos(kit)o company decided to send a team of experts to set more traps to determine what went wrong. There were traps everywhere. When the results arrived, there was no sign of any infected mosquitos, therefore, no vector-borne viruses in these states.

Six months after the initial scare: Senator Smith is now President of the United States and he had to share the news that this was an unwarranted scare...there had been no cases of infections due to vector-borne transmitted diseases in Texas or New Mexico. The few cases that were reported in Florida were all under control and no new cases had been reported. Basically, the country was safe. However, the worse part of what he had to report was a direct reflection of his actions. He had to announce that the country was safe when he knew that all along. He knew he was the cause of everything that happened.

Things to consider: The media warned people too early without double-checking the source and the facts. The population followed the media blindly and made decisions without seeking more knowledge to verify the findings. Did Mr. Smith's poor judgment create a society where people now distrust science and the media? Should the population be immediately informed of outbreaks? Is there a system that needs to be in place to confirm outbreaks before the population is informed? What can be added to the Mos(kit)o device, and others like it, to prevent this from happening? How best should data be stored so it doesn't get into the wrong hands (can this be avoided or not)? Did the media do their proper due diligence and double check the facts before releasing the report?

To trust or not to trust...that is the question!!!