

**Opening Statement of E&C Republican Leader Greg Walden  
“Oversight of the Trump Administration’s Response to the  
COVID-19 Pandemic”  
June 23, 2020**

I want to thank our distinguished witnesses who are still working around the clock to understand this deadly virus and to develop public health standards to confront it; medicines to treat it; and a vaccine to end it.

COVID-19 laid bare how vulnerable we are and how much more we need to do as a government. I commend the work of my colleagues, Anna Eshoo and Susan Brooks to modernize the Pandemic All Hazards Preparedness Act. And I acknowledge the incredible efforts of Fred Upton and Diana DeGette who wrote the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures legislation.

But even with all of that work, COVID-19 hit the world like a tsunami: quick and deadly, leaving unprecedented destruction and disruption.

Our distinguished speakers are like co-captains of America’s rescue plane –a plane we are building while we fly. Congress has supported those efforts with historic levels of funding, resources, and flexibility.

Early on, President Trump stopped flights from China and then Europe, tightened up our borders, established a presidential task force to coordinate efforts, and invoked executive authorities seldom used, except in times of war, including the Stafford Act and the Defense Production Act, and harnessed the power of American innovation through projects like Operation Warp Speed.

During this unprecedented response, the Administration had to operate with very limited, often conflicting, data. Even with CDC

guidance in hand, some governors chose to ignore guidance and forced sick nursing home patients back to the nursing home, committing the deadliest mistake of the pandemic.

Meanwhile backward-looking critics with the unfair advantage of 20-20 hindsight attack you and the men and women who work alongside you. I commend our witnesses today for keeping focused on the challenges at hand and for doing everything possible to beat this virus.

Six months ago, we'd barely heard of this virus. During our briefings, most thought that like SARS and MERS before it, we'd get past this beast –which didn't even have a name back then. We quickly went from knowing little about this virus to creating a test for it and testing more than 25 million samples, with recent averages of more than 500,000 tests a day.

Dr. Giroir (JER-WA), is a distinguished Admiral who became a self-proclaimed “swab guy” because that is what America needed. We discovered there were only two nasal swab manufacturers in the world: one in Maine and one in Italy. The President invoked the DPA ordering Puritan to make the swabs we needed and provided funds to dramatically increase production in a new facility.

Meanwhile, the President launched Project Air Bridge to fly military planes to Italy to pick up swabs, and to search the globe for other supplies that were in limited supply here. The State Department helped 101,386 Americans abroad get back home, often on government chartered planes after commercial transportation was shut down.

With a potential increase of illness in the fall when coupled with the flu season, I asked my team to research every aspect of this health crisis and provide recommendations to improve our preparedness. Mitigating a second wave of infections is critical given the impact this virus has had on not only public health, but also on peoples' livelihoods and the economy. We released the first recommendations on testing and

surveillance three weeks ago, and are preparing to release recommendations on therapeutics and vaccines very soon.

In less than six months, the United States has conducted millions of tests, manufactured medical equipment in car factories, used 3-D printers to make personal protective equipment, developed multiple vaccine candidates, authorized use of more than 100 medical devices and drugs for emergency use, weighing the known and potential benefits and risks at the time, all with unprecedented speed. These innovations have the ability to serve us well and far beyond this pandemic.

We have seen remarkable coordination, flexibility and cooperation between the executive branch, private sector, faith groups, volunteers, and lawmakers. America is strongest when we work together to achieve common goals.

We are constantly learning how to improve our preparedness. We must adjust our response based off the facts at hand and focus on how to best move forward. We must unite in a common fight against this virus.

Just as America mobilized in World War II to do whatever it took, today, our distinguished panelists have mobilized America's finest scientists, logisticians and entrepreneurs to beat this deadly, Microscopic Enemy. Thank you for your leadership, for your years of public service, and for your dedication to this life-saving mission.