

Opening Statement
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Hearing on “On the Front Line: How Governors are Battling the COVID-19 Pandemic”
June 2, 2020

This virtual hearing will continue our work to confront COVID-19, and to hear from Governors about what more the federal government can and should be doing to help in our nation’s response.

It’s essential that we unite to combat this virus so that we can save lives, protect communities and safely reopen our economy.

The only way we can do this is through a coordinated national strategy – a strategy that increases testing, and dedicates sufficient resources to contact tracing, surveillance, and containment.

Unfortunately, President Trump continues to refuse to put in place a national strategy for moving forward. It is just the latest example of the President’s failures to properly recognize a crisis before us. At first, President Trump scoffed at those who were raising alarm about COVID-19 and insisted the virus would go away. Then, as the threat became undeniable, he refused any responsibility. For months he has failed to develop and implement a national testing program, with clear goals and plans for achieving them.

This failure of leadership at the national level has forced states to fend for themselves — oftentimes competing against each other on the open market for the critical tests, personal protective equipment, ventilators and other resources they need to fight this virus. States are essentially bidding against each other — driving up prices for the critical resources they will continue to need in the weeks and months ahead. This is not the way to combat a national public health crisis.

While the President continues to abdicate his responsibility, House Democrats once again took bold action last month by passing The Heroes Act. This legislation will provide critical health care resources that are needed, including up to \$75 billion in grants to support robust testing, contact tracing, surveillance, and containment activities.

This legislation will also finally require the Trump Administration to develop comprehensive and coordinated strategies for testing, contact tracing, and surveillance, and provide greater transparency, in real-time, around supplies, testing, and infection rates. The Heroes Act requires clear benchmarks and timelines and brings public accountability to this entire process.

We also shore up our public health infrastructure by replenishing much-needed medical supplies, modernizing how we use the Strategic National Stockpile, and installing a Medical Supplies Response czar. We also require the Administration provide clear accounting for the work being

done now in preparation for the manufacturing and distribution of a future vaccine and identify what more must be done to ensure that the vaccine can be swiftly available to all who need it.

The Heroes Act also puts in place clear guidelines for how an additional \$100 billion in resources for the Provider Relief Fund should be distributed, and ensures these resources are allocated to our hospitals and frontline health care providers in an equitable and efficient way.

The legislation supports states' Medicaid programs by increasing the Federal Matching Assistance Percentage, or FMAP, by 14 percentage points and increases federal payments for Medicaid services for patients in home and community-based care. This is critical to states that are facing dire financial situations as a result of the pandemic, and it will allow them to continue providing essential health care services.

Our legislation also ensures that all COVID-19 treatment is free, without cost sharing for all Americans so that nobody has to worry about the costs of getting treatment or vaccine for this virus.

The Senate should act on this legislation immediately. We simply cannot beat this virus without these efforts in place.

Let me welcome our three governors who have all faced challenges in responding to this public health threat. As the Committee conducts its oversight and considers further legislative action, it is important for us to hear from the governors on what's working, what isn't working, and what more they need – either from the federal government or Congress. I thank all of you for joining us today to share your views from the front line of this pandemic.

It is clear that we must collectively find solutions to stop the spread of this devastating virus so that we can safely and confidently reopen our communities and our economy.

I yield back.