

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of**

Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Chair Diana DeGette

Hearing on “No Time to Lose: Solutions to Increase COVID-19 Vaccinations in the States”

February 2, 2021

Today, the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee holds the first hearing of the 117th Congress, on an issue that holds the promise to finally end this pandemic: the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination program.

This Committee has conducted relentless oversight of the COVID-19 pandemic response from the very start. Last year, we saw endless disfunction and chaos as our country was left adrift by the absence of strong, competent federal leadership.

As bad as it was last spring, this winter has brought an even more dangerous surge.

In recent weeks, cases and hospitalizations were soaring all over the country, and as many as 4,000 Americans were dying every day from this awful virus.

As the title of this hearing makes clear, we have no time to lose. We must act with a sense of urgency and use every resource available—at the federal, state, and local levels—to fight the spread of this virus, end the suffering and death, and return to a sense of normalcy.

The Biden Administration has its work cut out for it. Indeed, it faces the greatest and most immediate challenge of any presidential administration in modern memory. But we are already seeing signs of the ship turning around.

The Biden Administration recently announced a comprehensive national strategy for the COVID-19 pandemic, something this Committee has long called for. This plan advances urgently needed solutions to mount a successful vaccination program, restore trust with the American people, and mitigate the spread of the virus, while providing the emergency relief Americans desperately need.

We will continue to engage with the Administration on what the federal government needs from Congress to execute this plan and get America on track.

The key task we are faced with now is the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines.

The federal-private partnership to research and develop these vaccines, test them in clinical trials for safety and efficacy, and get them authorized for use was an enormous undertaking and a profound victory for the country.

But that was only the first step. If we do not ensure that every American is able to get vaccinated quickly, those efforts will have been in vain. Those charged with administering the COVID-19 vaccine program around the country—including our excellent witnesses today—have a tremendous opportunity and responsibility to ensure equitable and expeditious administration of these life-saving vaccines.

That is why we are convened today: to hear from state leaders on the front lines about how we can significantly ramp up vaccinations.

As we will hear today, states are mobilizing to expand who will be eligible to receive the vaccine next, with a special emphasis on ensuring equity for those most vulnerable to COVID-19 and historically marginalized communities.

For instance, my home state of Colorado recently announced plans to hold pop-up vaccination clinics in 50 high-density, low-income, communities of color.

Despite these efforts, we have also been seeing a lot of frustration and confusion. Since the rollout started in December, one consistent theme has been the lack of transparency about how many vaccines are coming and when. Compounding matters, surveys indicate that while the majority of Americans want to get the COVID-19 vaccine, some adults continue to have reservations.

Thankfully, the Biden Administration has committed to changes—such as transparent data for the states and the public—that will address some of those issues, so that we can build trust and work to get every available vaccine administered quickly and equitably.

Indeed, the biggest challenge I'm hearing from most states now is simply a lack of supply. After some initial challenges administering the vaccines, states and local communities are reporting that the demand for the vaccine far exceeds the supply. And they stand ready to vaccinate many more Americans, if they are given the doses they need.

We have an excellent panel today, representing five states aggressively working to end this pandemic.

I thank them for their efforts, and I'm grateful for the time they've committed to provide critical testimony on how to improve our fight against this pandemic. I look forward to a candid discussion with the panel about what is working and what is not working. I hope they will also elaborate on what more the federal government and Congress can do to improve the partnership in this fight.

The end of this nightmare is in sight. Now is the time to double-down on our efforts, and finally turn the corner on this pandemic.