



MEMORANDUM

February 6, 2023

To: Members and Staff, Subcommittee on Health and Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

From: Majority Committee Staff

Re: Hearing on “The Federal Response to COVID-19”

On Wednesday, February 8, 2023, at 10:00 a.m. (ET) in the John D. Dingell Room, 2123 of the Rayburn House Office Building, the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations and the Subcommittee on Health will hold a joint-hearing entitled “The Federal Response to COVID-19.”

I. WITNESSES

- **Dr. Lawrence A. Tabak, D.D.S., PhD.**, Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director, National Institutes of Health
- **Dr. Rochelle P. Walensky, M.D., M.P.H.**, Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- **The Honorable Robert Califf, M.D.**, Commissioner of Food and Drugs, U.S. Food and Drug Administration
- Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – *invited*¹

II. OVERVIEW

To date, the COVID-19 pandemic has killed more than one million Americans and is estimated to have cost the U.S economy more than \$15 trillion dollars.² Moreover, lockdowns and school closures implemented as a result of the pandemic have negatively impacted people’s mental

¹ The Honorable Dawn O’Connell, Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, was invited and scheduled to attend. However, she had to cancel due to a personal emergency.

² *COVID Data Tracker*, CDC, <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#datatracker-home> (last visited Jan. 26, 2023); see also Cutler DM, Summers LH. *The COVID-19 Pandemic and the \$16 Trillion Virus*. JAMA. 2020;324(15):1495–1496. doi:10.1001/jama.2020.19759.

health and caused severe learning loss in children.³ Americans will be living with the aftereffects of COVID-19 and the federal government's response to COVID-19 for decades.

This will be the first hearing with the heads of the agencies responsible for the federal response in the 118th Congress and the first time in almost two years these agency leaders are appearing before the Committee. The goal of this hearing is to ask questions surrounding the federal government's response to COVID-19.

III. BACKGROUND

The failures and shortcomings of the federal COVID-19 pandemic response has created widespread distrust of our public health agencies. A recent poll conducted by the Morning Consult found that nearly 40% of the American public do not trust public health agencies to handle the next public health emergency.⁴ Much of this distrust is attributable to these agencies' lack of transparency and candor with the American people and Congress.

In the wake of House Republicans introducing legislation to immediately end the COVID-19 public health emergency, the Biden Administration finally announced it will be allowed to expire on May 11, 2023. Understanding how the administration's public health agencies will manage the transition out of the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) is critical, as well as how they will better prevent, prepare for, respond to future public health security threats. The Biden Administration's track record on the COVID-19 response is not encouraging.

IV. DISCUSSION

The Biden Administration inherited multiple, effective vaccines and therapeutics as a result of Operation Warp Speed. However, by imposing vaccine, mask, and other mandates, censoring legitimate debate about the risks and benefits of vaccines for certain populations and the origins of COVID, and involving political actors in public health decisions, this administration has caused the public's confidence in our public health institutions to plummet. There has also been no plan from the Administration regarding how it intends to wind down the PHE, including transitioning treatments, and vaccines to commercial, routine distribution and continue to facilitate future innovation to keep up with any new variants. Congress has had to step in to begin responsibly winding down the PHE due to the lack of leadership from this administration.

³ David M. Cutler & Lawrence H. Summers, *The COVID-19 Pandemic and the \$16 Trillion Virus*, 324 (15) JAMA, 1495 (2020), available at <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/article-abstract/2771764>. See also Steven Roman et al., U.S. Census Bureau, *The Coronavirus Pandemic's Economic Impact* (2022), available at <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2022/econ/coronavirus-pandemics-economic-impact.html>.

⁴ Public Health Agencies Are Retooling as COVID-19 Response Winds Down. A Slim Majority of Adults Trusts Them to Manage Another Pandemic, January 19, 2023, <https://morningconsult.com/2023/01/19/end-of-covid-public-health-emergency-survey/>.

The agencies whose leaders are appearing before the Committee have each struggled to effectively respond to COVID-19 and maintain the public's trust. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the Administration for Preparedness and Response (ASPR), all either have undergone or are currently undergoing internal reorganizations in response to failures during the COVID-19 response. As with so many other aspects of the COVID-19 response under the Biden Administration, the agencies have not been transparent with stakeholders or Congress regarding these reorganizations. Whether these reorganizations significantly improve these agencies' response capacity remains to be seen.

V. ISSUES

The hearing will explore past, present, and any necessary future actions by each of the agencies as it relates to the response to COVID-19 pandemic and the transition out of the current public health emergency.

VI. STAFF CONTACTS

If you have any questions regarding the hearing, please contact Committee staff at (202) 225-3641.