

# **Health Subcommittee Chair Guthrie Opening Statement on the Federal Government's Response to COVID-19 As Prepared for Delivery**

**"A little over a week ago, President Biden said his administration would end the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency on May 11.**

**"I'm glad the President formally announced he would end the PHE and relinquish his emergency powers.**

"However, after over two years into the Biden presidency, Congress and the American people have had little-to-no visibility into, nor input on, the administration's pandemic response.

"That changes today."

## **IMPORTANT QUESTIONS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICIALS**

"Today is the first of many opportunities for both members of these subcommittees, and by extension our constituents, to ask important questions about decisions made by our nation's leading public health officials in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"My hope is that this work leads to reforms that make us better prepared for pandemics and other public health security threats in the future.

**"To start, public trust in our public health institutions is at an all-time low.**

**“This has been driven by the federal government’s misguided and inconsistent preparation for and response to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

**“This was heightened by the confusing, sometimes conflicting, communication and guidance coming from our public health agencies.**

“In the earliest days of the pandemic, the CDC stumbled rolling out testing kits, the Food and Drug Administration took too long to authorize diagnostics, and the Strategic National Stockpile was ill-equipped with deficient and expired equipment.

“Thankfully, Operation Warp Speed was able to cut through some of this red tape and bureaucracy to facilitate the rapid development of vaccines and therapies that help prevent serious illness and death from COVID-19 and put us on the road towards normalcy.

“The pandemic also exposed how our public health agencies failed at their core functions to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

“The National Institutes of Health (NIH) flouted HHS-wide rules on conducting proper oversight of potential pandemic pathogen research.”

## **WE MUST HAVE STRICT FEDERAL OVERSIGHT OF RISKY RESEARCH**

**“After living through COVID-19 – the origins of which still largely remain unknown – it is absolutely clear that we must require strict federal oversight of these risky research projects.**

**“Speaking of COVID-19 origins – NIH’s refusal to acknowledge any suggestion that the COVID-19 virus may have originated in a lab only continues to fuel the controversy and questions around it.**

“To discover the truth and instill confidence back in our federal research programs – why not engage in a robust, honest, and transparent dialogue and investigation? Instead, federal officials worked with social media companies to censor those who offered a differing viewpoint, further fueling public distrust in our public health institutions.

“Unfortunately, the Biden administration’s one-size-fits-all approach to the pandemic has only made our response even more challenging between inconsistent CDC COVID-19 guidance policies, testing challenges, and the FDA rationing of key therapeutics to name a few.”

## **ACCOUNTABILITY FROM PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCIES**

**“And these mistakes carry significant real-world consequences.**

**“Kids and parents were left with limited options for in-person instruction because the nation’s largest teachers union offered line by line edits on reopening guidance.**

**“This robbed our kids of the benefits of in-person instruction and has had devastating effects on kids struggling with anxiety and depression at unprecedented levels.**

**“As members of this Committee, we also cannot permit mission creep at our public health agencies – we must ensure our federal partners are focused on their core mission of preventing, preparing for, and responding to public health security threats.**

“Luckily, we have a chance to address many of the systemic issues that hindered our federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I look forward to working with my colleagues on this Subcommittee, as well as with the witnesses before us here today, to consider appropriate reforms as we work to reauthorize the Pandemics and All-Hazards Preparedness Act, or PAHPA, that will be led by our colleague, Mr. Hudson.

“Doing so could make a difference between life and death for millions of Americans.”