

Opening Statement of The Honorable Brett Guthrie
Subcommittee on Health Hearing
“Road to Recovery: Ramping Up COVID-19 Vaccines, Testing, and Medical
Supply Chain”
February 3, 2021
As Prepared for Delivery

Thank you, Chair Eshoo, for holding this important hearing about the COVID-19 pandemic.

Four hundred and forty- three thousand people have died from the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States which is greater than the number of American servicemembers that we lost during World War II. I believe that all of us who serve on this Committee are committed to stopping this horrible virus.

Specifically, I think we must fully evaluate our country’s response efforts on what has worked and what lessons we have learned thus far during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our focus needs to be forward looking in order to make continuous improvements that will stop this virus. Each of us have a choice to make - we can stay in our camps and focus on ideological battles or we can sit at the negotiating table and get work done that the American people expect us to do during these challenging times.

We need to examine ways to further expand testing, use of therapeutics, and increase vaccine confidence. We also need to prioritize quickly and efficiently distributing vaccines. Let me be clear: we are not starting from scratch. Without Operation Warp Speed, we would not have two vaccines that are currently being administered to Americans, nor potentially additional vaccines that may be

authorized by the FDA in the near future. The Biden Administration is taking credit for the pathway to 100 million vaccines in 100 days. However, two weeks into Biden's presidency, there have been around fifty million vaccines distributed and thirty-two million vaccines administered, largely thanks to the previous administration's efforts. As we move forward with vaccine distribution, we will find ways to improve, and we should explore those. Let us not forget this is the fastest we have ever had a vaccine move through the development pipeline and come to market. We never cut any safety corners, despite the extraordinary speed, and that is a success that should be celebrated.

Additionally, I have heard from Kentucky and many other states that the lack of additional funding for states to distribute vaccines has been the biggest hiccup. However, let us not forget, Pelosi obstructed additional COVID funding for months. We had two vaccines authorized prior to latest funding package that was signed into law at the end of December.

From my background in manufacturing, I know it takes time, hard work, and detailed planning to get a manufacturing line up and going. Operation Warp Speed's tireless work on supply chains and simultaneous manufacturing during clinical trials meant safe and effective vaccines were being administered to our health care heroes and vulnerable populations within a matter of days rather than months after receiving FDA authorization.

Each state and some large jurisdictions have been given the opportunity to run their vaccine distribution as they believe is best for their residents. Is anyone here familiar with Utica? It's a rural community in my district that I'm proud to represent, and I think Frankfort and Daviess County can do a better job taking care

of Utica than a bureaucrat in Washington, D.C., who has probably never stepped foot there. While some states may need to reevaluate their strategy, there are many states that are doing quite well with vaccine distribution.

In addition, I think it is key to remember the work FDA has done to authorize 320 COVID-19 tests. According to the COVID Tracking Project, this week, we had more than 1.6 million new tests reported. At the end of March last year, we had less than 116,000 new tests reported. Over the past year we have seen the development and authorization of rapid point-of-care diagnostics to reduce instances of delayed results, tests using saliva samples to eliminate the need for swabs in short supply, and even a test that is sold over-the-counter. While challenges remain, we have demonstrated that these types of private industry partnerships and the innovative products that result are essential to successfully responding to this pandemic.

Lastly, as the former Republican Leader of the Oversight and Investigations subcommittee, I believe that oversight is a very important aspect of our response. We have passed around \$4Trillion in COVID-19 aid alone. I have supported much-needed relief for American families, workers, and small businesses. We must ensure it is being used effectively and wisely.

I look forward to the testimony from these esteemed witnesses and welcome them to this hearing. I hope my colleagues will join in me in helping find solutions and acknowledging how far we have come from just a year ago. I yield back.

